AN INTERVIEW WITH RUTH DAWSON AND JANE BENNETT: PROJECT LEADERS FOR ETFO’S TEACHERS LEARNING TOGETHER

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Jane Bennett and Ruth Dawson are Staff Officers with the Elementary Teachers’ Federation of Ontario (ETFO). They both have worked on a team that developed and implemented numerous professional learning programs for elementary teachers, thanks to funding provided from the Government of Ontario. In 2007 they led an ETFO team that implemented a program of province-wide, teacher-based collaborative action research projects, identified collectively as Teachers Learning Together (TLT). During the 2007-2008 year, teachers worked in local teams to conduct action research on a topic of particular interest and relevance to the team. Teachers were given considerable latitude in their choice of topic. One of a number of university researcher teams was geographically assigned to clusters of teacher teams, to aid them in their research and with the content of the subject or topic chosen by each teacher team. Each university group also conducted case study research with some of the teacher teams to which they had been assigned. At the end of the year, each teacher and university team wrote a final report on their experience. In addition, they came together at the end in a day-long symposium of sharing.

During this first year a decision was made to continue TLT into 2008-2009, but with mathematics as the specific subject for team action research. Jane and Ruth continued as the ETFO project leaders. In the spring of 2008 a call for proposals for collaborative action research projects was again placed with elementary teachers, and more than 40 such projects, with mathematics as the focus, were selected from across the province. Five university teams also were invited to take part, with each assigned as support for several of the teacher groups. In August 2008 a two-day symposium was held in Mississauga involving ETFO staff and all teacher and university faculty team members, to introduce the details of the TLT-The Math Journey project, to have teachers begin to engage in thinking about action research and mathematics teaching and learning, and to have teachers and professors begin the process of getting to know each other. During the year, each team of local teachers conducted action research into their chosen mathematics education research question, with the university teams again supporting their action research and
mathematics teaching, as well as conducting case study research on a selection of the teams to which they had been assigned. The teacher and university teams again submitted final reports at the end of the year, and in November 2009 a closing symposium of sharing and celebration was held to wrap up the project.

This interview with Jane Bennett and Ruth Dawson was conducted over the telephone in February 2010. The main focus of the discussion was the 2008-2009, Teachers Learning Together-The Math Journey year, but discussion of the previous “open topic” year often served as an important context within which to understand the mathematics focus year. Although some teams continued with their projects into the spring of 2010, this is not discussed in the interview. The interview lasted approximately three hours, and covered a range of project-related topics, including choosing collaborative action research as the focus of their professional learning support, narrowing the subject of choice to mathematics in the second year, granting teachers wide decision-making powers, and considering the challenges of implementing and managing such a large-scale project, as well as the benefits they felt accrued to the teachers—and to ETFO—as a result of this experience.

The original interview was audio-recorded, transcribed, and reviewed for accuracy. It has been edited for length and readability, and has been organized, with headings, according to specific themes and topics discussed. It has not been peer-reviewed, but Jane Bennett and Ruth Dawson have twice reviewed it for content, to ensure that it continued to reflect accurately their experiences and their views on the nature of the TLT collaborative action research project.¹

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**GETTING THE PROJECT STARTED**

*Interviewer:* I think the ETFO began the series of teacher team collaborative action research projects in 2007/08. We know that ETFO is involved and has been involved with a number of professional development projects. So what led ETFO to feel that this was a particularly appropriate investment in Ontario elementary teacher professional development given all the time and the money that would be involved?

*Jane:* It took almost a year to put it together but we officially started with the first teams in 2008. One of the big pieces was that we wanted to honour what our teachers needed. What teachers had been saying over and over again was that they were very tired of being provided with top down professional development. They weren’t given any chance to actually have choice over what their professional learning was and we wanted to find a model, or we knew of a model that we wanted to use that would actually empower them and give them choice.

¹ Note: Ruth and Jane speak from their considered view of typical approaches to professional development and, in particular, the state of mathematics education teacher in-service in Ontario in the period leading up to, and then during, the time of the project. Readers are invited to interpret these perspectives in light of their own present contexts, and possible changes since 2009.
Ruth: The other thing is that both Jane and I have taught AQ [Additional Qualification] courses with a component that was action research. It wasn't team action research it was individual action research. So we had some experience seeing teachers go through the action research project. Jane and I had worked together at a board office as well, prior to coming to ETFO, and we had always talked about what our dream project would be. Our dream project was to do something like this where teams of teachers got to pick what they wanted, to explore it, learn it in greater depth, have support, and move their schools and their teaching practice. We both knew we were never going to get money like this again and so we realised you've got to do something big. That's why for us it was worth every penny and yes, it's a very expensive model, but it's a model that has all the components that are necessary to help the teachers be as successful as possible. There's never been anything where we've asked teams of teachers to come together, and we have never done anything that supported schools, we had always supported individual teachers. So it was quite different from anything we'd ever done as an organization. This is unique to what has happened at ETFO.

UNIVERSITY TEAMS INVOLVEMENT

Interviewer: It seems as though, right from the start, you planned that there ought to be some academic support for the teacher teams. Was there some prior basis for deciding it would be a good idea to have university teams involved?

Ruth: Well, there are several reasons. One is that both Jane and I had enough experience working with teachers prior to this project that we realised you need to have somebody acting as a guide. A guide was needed for a variety of reasons and we develop some of those later in the interview. A little bit more for me is the accountability piece. We were taking a huge risk developing a project like this. It was a big risk for us as an organization to let teachers get money and develop their own plans. And we realised that there was only two of us. There was no way we could do this and monitor the teams at the same time because of all of the work that just went into the organizational side of this.

Jane: We knew from our initial research in developing the model that an outside guide/facilitator would lead the teachers through the process and provide them with the support they needed to look at exemplary practice, the impact of it on themselves and their students, and to also provide the support they needed to move through the action research process and actually complete a final report. The final report being the culmination of their research but also the accountability that we required as an organization to say, yes, they have completed this and here is the evidence of the process. Thinking about some of the discussions that would happen within a teacher team, you would want them to be positive and to be empowering teachers to use effective practice. Which, when you had a guide on the side – especially with the mathematics that was key – actually helped to move them forward. Another piece, too, was that we knew that the whole action research process, it's quite complex, and for many teachers they don't see themselves as researchers. So we knew we needed the expertise of people who did see themselves as researchers in order to provide that kind of information and help and support.
**Interviewer:** Right. So you were prepared to fund their activity for a whole year.

**Jane:** Yes. There was time that could be devoted to thoughtfully exploring the issue, thoughtfully creating their questions and then choosing data tools, and looking at how to analyze things. All of those pieces were layers or steps that they had to take that they needed support for at each level, and with just the two of us being at ETFO—although we had two other colleagues that did give some support along the way—we knew that it was beyond our scope of what we were able to do by ourselves to make sure that the project was as rich as we wanted it to be for our teachers.

**Ruth:** Another point was also important to us. One of our overarching goals when we received the money was about forging partnerships. So this was a way for us to forge partnerships with faculties of education. Something that as an organization we hadn’t had a lot of opportunity to do.

Another overarching goal was to forward the research agenda within Ontario and we knew we had to do impact analyses on projects of this scope because we had to prove to the Ministry that it was making a difference, and we needed to show them how it was making a difference. But we also felt an obligation to the educational community in Ontario to be able to add to the research base, to be able to say this is what really works for teachers, or these are some of the characteristics of what we know and can prove makes a difference for teachers. And the only way to do that was through partnering with professors from faculties of education.

**Collaborative Action Research as a PD Model**

**Interviewer:** Regarding the model, have you had any reaction in terms of the whole idea of collaborative action research?

**Ruth:** We actually are struggling with this issue because we are wondering if it is something that would only work with certain learning styles, let’s say, for lack of a better word. I think to me it’s an issue that we need to explore more, that we need to look at and really find out from the people participating. So that’s a fascinating question.

**Jane:** We know that the teachers who chose to do this project chose it – for some of the teams it was a team choice to do the project and to decide who was going to be on their team, so everyone on that team was really, really gung ho. Or maybe it was a person on the team who said “Hey, there’s this great project, would you join me?” And perhaps the person actually did get a lot out of it and enjoyed it, or perhaps they didn’t because in some teams there were team members that weren’t as engaged in the process, weren’t as open to the dialogue about their practice. So we’re talking about who is predisposed to being able to do a professional learning model like this because you’re working in a team and having to talk about why you are doing a certain strategy or what you discovered after teaching a certain lesson. If there isn’t a trust base in that group or the relationships aren’t as strong, it’s very hard to have those deeper conversations. There’s a part about all of that that
actually impacts who can do this model of professional learning. But having it as an option is important.

**Ruth:** I completely agree with Jane’s comment. When you talk to directors, what are they doing in almost every school in Ontario? PLCs. But what we hear from our members is they hate them, they aren’t connected to the topic, sometimes it’s something that they really don’t care about at all. You know, we all make assumptions, right? Right now I think in Ontario the directors and superintendents are making assumptions that PLCs work for everybody. I think that we all have to get out of the mindset that there’s one method that will fit everybody. Jane said it’s about the menu that you have available and right now there aren’t very many places that offer this as part of the menu. And it has to do with their fear of teachers having control. At the core I think that’s what it is. They see it as fuzzy and they can’t control it, or where it’s going to end because in action research you don’t always know.

**Providing Teachers with “Choice”: Empowerment and Challenge**

**Interviewer:** Speaking of team choice, is there anything more you want to add about “choice,” which was a key feature of the project for the teachers?

**Jane:** The “choice” piece was key because that’s one of our overarching themes, allowing teachers to have choice in their professional learning and to value them as professionals in making that choice. And so when we created the project it was up to them to choose their team members, it was up to them to identify the issue that they wanted to deal with and choose a question as a starting point for what it was they were going to explore. As far as release times we gave them choice because we recognized that everyone’s coming from a different context. For example, some teams were made up of teachers from different schools and they had to travel to meet at some middle ground. This all took time.

**Ruth:** The choice around release days was a survival strategy for us. We couldn’t have managed it. We couldn’t have said to them, “You all must be off on X day,” you know? So they had to come up with those dates.

**Jane:** But it was also to give the teachers the flexibility that they needed within their schedules – they were able to schedule around report card time or maybe they had some fieldtrip or something. So they were able to figure out how to best use the release time that way.

Another choice piece was that we initially said that we wanted this to be school-based, but we ended up accepting role-based teachers and it allowed them to have some support. For example, in one team there were five kindergarten teachers. Well, they were all an island unto themselves and their schools, they were from five different schools, but this gave them an opportunity to develop a network that they would not have been able to develop otherwise and the learning that they have received from this project has extended like a
hundred fold beyond the project itself. So that gave them another choice about who they could actually work with and why they wanted to work with other people.

**Interviewer:** Right. So it sounds as though there are no regrets about having granted teachers taking part in this project a significant degree of choice.

**Jane:** Not one regret at all because they all went above and beyond and they were so grateful for actually being given the power to make their own choices. Because many of them, from some of the feedback we received, have been made to feel that they don't know how to teach, they've been made to feel that their decisions aren't valued, and they've been made to feel that they don't understand what they need to do. They are being told how to do it through their professional development in literacy. So this gave them a way to actually feel valued, to feel empowered, to feel that they knew or could follow their own path.

**Ruth:** I do have a bit of a regret around the degree of choice. It's just a question that I ponder. I wonder whether, if I were to do this project again, if I would narrow the math topic down more so that the team still had choice but it wasn't as wide as all five strands and whatever topic you want to address in terms of the math. I think it may have helped us at the beginning, and it may have helped us with the opening symposium speaker, and the celebration speaker at the end. It may also have helped the university facilitators, and it may have allowed for some deeper content discussion across the teams. Those are just questions that I am pondering in my head.

**Jane:** You know, Ruth and I have had a conversation about this and one of the pieces is, is it using this model of learning to go more targeted and more focused?

**Ruth:** Just to build on that, we didn’t accept some of the proposals because some of the questions weren’t action research worthy. So if you were to try to generalize from this experience, if you leave it too open ended some of the questions might be somewhat challenging. You know, the research questions?

**Jane:** In some of the proposals the end result was just the product; the end result wasn’t the learning. One piece that Ruth just highlighted was we realised that the most important piece of all is the work that’s done on the initial question because that initial question and the work that’s done around it and the consensus building that happens can really support or derail the team.

**Interviewer:** That’s an interesting subject, thinking about that whole initial process and setting it up and vetting the questions, in considering both mathematics and action research. Is there anything more that you would care to provide in terms of either process or an understanding of action research?

**Jane:** We knew that we had to give the teachers an awful lot of support with the action research, which is of course why we had the university researchers along the way and why
we did an initial upfront piece about what it would look like, the whole journey, and why we actually created the guide that every teacher was given. But what we realised in the first year was that more work needed to be done initially on the question. Even before the question, more work had to be done on the actual issue because sometimes we discovered that not all the teachers believed in the question, so if they didn’t all believe in the question or the way it was written then it was hard to move forward. But when they actually all had the opportunity to talk about it, to really go into depth about it all so that they actually all owned the question, then it was a whole different story. That was important.

The other learning that we got from the first year was that data was scary—the whole question of, How do you collect it? What do you collect? And how do you analyze it? Our university teams had to spend a lot of time talking about that—because when many of our teachers think about research, they think about numbers: “Well, we have to create a survey and we’ve got to have numbers that we can make percentages with and that’s our research.” So, many of them wouldn’t look at alternate forms of collecting data, whether it was a journal or, I don’t know, other things. It was great for them to have the support regarding what other data looks like. So those were the steps, the question at the beginning and then the whole data piece were their two big challenges to overcome. These were important insights for us!

Interviewer: Do you think that what you learned from the first year and were able to put into place and support and encourage during the second year made a significant difference?

Ruth: Yes, the projects were more doable in the second year because of that. Because in the first year, there was a lot of kick-back from some of the teams around the need to change their question. So we were able to change the wording in all of our communications, and at the kick-off symposium, so that the message was, this is not going to be what your question ends up being at the starting point. So it did help a lot. We were much more flexible with the changes.

ON THE CHOICE OF MATHEMATICS

Interviewer: Continuing to speak of choice, could you comment on opting for extensive teacher subject choice for these projects initially, and then in the second year focusing on mathematics?

Ruth: We did let the teacher teams have “open season” in the first year. But we learned some lessons in that first year and one of the lessons was that it was a real challenge for our university partners. Some of the feedback we received from them was that it was a big challenge to address the breadth of topics and also at the same time provide the facilitation and support for the action research process. So that was one reason.

The real major reason was that the second year, the funding we received from the Ministry came specifically from the Literacy and Numeracy Secretariat (LNS) and it was funded through the Council of Directors of Education (CODE). It came with strings attached and the
money had to be spent on either literacy and numeracy initiatives, student assessment, or equity issues. We knew we had our poverty project going on and we were going to continue to fund it. We already had some initiatives around student assessment. We heard from members they were “literacy-ed” to death. We also knew that the LNS was hardly doing anything connected to math. It enabled us to fulfill our obligations in the contracts but it also allowed us to have a subject that we had an interest in.

Jane: The other thing, too, is that ETFO has many members who are consultants and coordinators [who] are still teachers. Ruth and I were also involved with the whole Ministry of Education early math and junior math initiatives. In our work there we realised that a lot of the consultants and coordinators didn’t have the support in their role to do the kind of learning that they knew would transform their teachers, to give them time to work on things that they were interested in. So we actually had many teams that had a consultant or coordinator who joined the team and worked with the teachers to go into further depth with their learning, which has been quite powerful for those teams.

Interviewer: Thanks. Would you like to add anything more about why you’ve singled out mathematics?

Ruth: The one thing I’d add, we realised that the Literacy and Numeracy Secretariat really hadn’t done anything in support of math. It wasn’t just the school boards it was also the LNS itself. For us it was important to do something that had to do with that topic.

Jane: I think that nothing really, there has been no support for math, or minimal – because there was a very small project that the LNS had done – but there had been no support since that early junior math piece had happened in the board and so there was this gaping black hole that we recognized needed to get filled.

Interviewer: Now that one year has passed and you are now into a second year with the mathematics focused project, have you had comments, questions, interest from some of these bodies who apparently hadn’t done too much in the past? Have you noticed any difference in or increase in interest in what you’re doing in terms of mathematics?

Jane: We’ve had questions about the structure of the project. We’ve had questions about impact. We’ve had people talk about what they’ve heard about in boards, but it’s still an area that is a gaping black hole, maybe not as gaping because we’ve filled it a little bit, but the whole math piece is something, it’s a big challenge. In Ontario there are some extraordinary educators who are passionate about mathematics but they are not as numerous as the people who have a very strong literacy base and they don’t have the funding in their boards to do some of the good work that they would like to be able to do. We’re continually advocating to have more support for mathematics but we see that it’s still an uphill challenge. Being able to do a third year of the project and allowing some of our teams to continue on from last year has been wonderful and the teams that are continuing are very excited about being able to continue to do work in math and allow it to spill over. But realistically, some of our teams encounter challenges with principals, and
with superintendents in their boards, because they are not doing a literacy-focused professional development topic. And one of the interesting challenges we had last year was that we actually had two teams who had to drop out of the project because it was math focused and not literacy focused. One was told by the principal that they had to pull out of the project, that they were only allowed in their professional development to focus on literacy, and the other team was told by a superintendent the exact same thing. Which we found extremely shocking. So those are the challenges that we have come up against for math itself which we think is just wrong. So we will continue to advocate for what we’re doing. I think, one of the things that we’re trying to do is get our university researchers to begin to publish research from this project. We’re going to be putting work into the research forum that talks about the importance of mathematics and what we’ve discovered from last year, and trying to get our voice out there in order to actually advocate for not only just the model but the math piece itself.

**CHALLENGES OF A FOCUS ON MATHEMATICS**

*Interviewer:* Based on this past year, where the focus has been on mathematics, perhaps you might elaborate a little more specifically on particular challenges and perhaps the basis for these, and also perhaps how you felt you were able to deal with these. Any comments?

*Jane:* It was very interesting having a focus on mathematics and I think we were fortunate in that we had done a great deal of work with teachers leading up to this in the area of mathematics. As a result we were able to put some things in place to support them that we knew they would probably need and which would alleviate some of the problems that could have happened. One of the biggest items that we identified initially was the whole content piece about math and how many teachers don’t have the depth of content knowledge that they need to support their students in the way that their students need in order to move forward. And that’s a challenge because in this forum how do we actually support them? So we made sure that each one of our university teams had at least one math expert on it because we knew that if teachers had questions about content, questions about the processes, or whatever, they had to have somebody that they could go to. Another one was that we knew we wanted to get them excited about mathematics so at the kick-off symposium we had Craig Featherstone come and talk about misconceptions. A lot of difficulties teachers have are with student misconceptions and what to do about them, but in teaching it’s also teacher misconceptions. The action research process was going to help them to work through some of those misconceptions and hopefully get some new knowledge. So the content was one challenge we knew that we were going to have but we tried to put some things in place to support that.

**MAJOR EVENTS DURING THE SECOND YEAR OF THE PROJECT**

*Interviewer:* In this next question I’ve singled out some of the larger events, the August 2008 event, the last November 2009 event and then those in between, the meetings where potentially several lead teachers would get together. Do you feel they generally served the purposes for which they were intended?
Ruth: I'll talk about the pre-symposium and then the post-symposium. To me they did exactly what we wanted them to do. We had the pre-symposium where we wanted to build a sense of, “You are a part of a larger community, you're part of a really exciting, big project that’s going to make a difference across Ontario,” and we wanted to get them excited and engaged and beginning their journey. And our feedback from them was it did exactly what we wanted it to do. The final symposium that we had in November, again, hit the nail on the head. We made some significant changes from the previous year around the number of groups they spent time with as a large group. They rotated and we had fewer presentations that they went to in smaller breakout rooms and it seemed to go really well. It’s what they wanted to hear and what they wanted to see. Again it would have been great if we had had more time. We've been having an impact analysis done by a Queens University team on the overall impact of all of these projects and they've just finished their draft report for us. One of their recommendations is that we continue the celebrations at the end. They were actually surprised by the number of teachers who commented on the importance of the celebration at the end. I was surprised by it, too. I knew it was significant but I didn’t realise how much, and what the teachers have said is that the opportunity to come back as a large group and to learn from others with like minds and to share with others who have similar interests, similar passions, makes a huge difference in their sense of teaching and learning and professional learning as a large community. That was really fascinating, so for me it made a big difference.

Jane: I’ll just talk a little bit about the team lead. You know, we put in the role of team lead and that was for a couple of reasons. One of them was to give some of our teachers a leadership opportunity, but the other piece was really about communication because what we discovered was we needed to find somebody that we could actually have as the direct line to the team. We decided to have the option for every university team to have two team lead meetings. Now, being able to attend the team lead meetings, every single one I went to I left just walking on cloud nine. I was there in an observation role really, just listening to the teachers and seeing the kinds of discussions that we had intended this project to create. So hearing teachers say, “Well we tried this, it didn’t work, has anybody else had that issue? Any ideas?” “Oh yes, we do that or we do this in our board, what do you do in your board?” And the exchange of ideas, the exchange of information and the empowerment that was created in the room was astounding. Then you have our university faculty and being able to see them interact and work with our teachers was really great. They had a lot of wisdom and guidance and I heard back from many of them about how powerful those opportunities were for them and how it allowed them to be much more connected to classrooms and schools and how it informed what they were doing with their pre-service students, which I think is amazing.

Interviewer: Anything else you want to add?

Jane: I think one of the challenges was just all timing, right? And I think what we learned for the team leads was that a meeting has to happen early on in the year, potentially in October when the question has come out and they’re starting to gather data. There has to be a team lead meeting there because that’s when they’re dealing with a lot of issues. And
then the other time that there needs to be a team lead meeting is later on in the year just before they begin the whole data analysis piece. Those are the two crucial times. And being able to bring the team leads together and allow them in their forum to brainstorm, talk, share and then bring that back to their groups was really helpful.

**PROJECT SUCCESSES**

*Interviewer:* Undoubtedly, as you have already indicated, there were positives and successes. Perhaps you might itemize or identify some of those particularly noteworthy outcomes, and if possible, you might think about what it took for that kind of success or positive outcome to be achieved. Anybody want to start that?

*Jane:* I would say one of the biggest successes of the project was the transformational practice of our teachers. In reading the feedback from the Celebrations Symposium, in reading the final teacher team reports, and also the university final reports, teachers over and over again talked about how their practice has been transformed, and how their vision of themselves as a teacher has been transformed. They not only see themselves as a teacher but they see themselves as a researcher and I can’t tell you how gratifying it is to hear them say that. And they will reflect, because of the transformation in them, on how that has impacted their students and how that has impacted their student achievement within the classroom. This was a HUGE finding!

*Ruth:* Because of the partnership our relationships with faculties of education have changed—because of success we've brought five faculties together to work on a collaborative project. We heard through the first year how unique that was and how what an amazing opportunity it was for some of them.

I think another success is the building – we promoted positive relationships—within schools that fostered collaboration. So we helped teachers bring down the wall between their classrooms and brought their practice into the public domain where they were able to talk more openly about it.

*Jane:* Another piece that was when Ruth and I had the vision of all of this, we wanted teachers to see themselves as leaders in different ways. Many of our teachers talk about how they want leadership opportunities but they might not be ready to become a vice-principal and go into administration yet, so they’re trying to seek out other ways to be a leader. That happened kind of naturally in the first year of the project but in the second year we created the team lead role and for a lot of the team leads it was a leadership opportunity for them; they developed as a leader. Now they actually see themselves as leaders in research because they’ve done it and they've gone through the process. Some who have not continued on in the project this year have continued on in different ways. So that was another piece that we think is successful in the whole leadership part. This was also unique to the project.
**Interviewer:** Do you think that the action research element of this project and in particular the collaborative action research project was a particular success?

**Ruth:** Yes, I think in short, YES--capitals on all three letters! In all of the reports from all five of the faculties, collaboration was a theme that came out about the growth in the teachers, about their change in perspective about working together. About some of the struggles they went through in working together but how they came out at the end learning from it and realising how important it was. To me you can’t compare this project with a project where people would have been working on their own. That was an essential component of it that forced teachers to work together, to learn together, and to share in the celebrations, to share in the pain, and to really think about their kids as someone else.

**Jane:** This is very unique to action research which is usually done independently!

**Interviewer:** Do you have a sense that there would have been a substantial growth in having built capacity in terms of mathematics teaching, understanding mathematics, understanding or looking at mathematics in different ways as a result of having been through this experience?

**Jane:** I think that based on reading the teacher reports, the university reports and even the survey report we just received from Cathy Bruce and John Ross, in all of it teachers have grown. We had teachers in this project, everyone from someone who was, as I said earlier, a coordinator or a consultant, extremely comfortable with the math, extremely comfortable with teaching math and very passionate about it, to people who were terrified to teach math in their classroom. What I found so inspirational in the feedback about our teacher growth was that they are now passionate about math, they are excited about it because they actually saw their kids doing things they didn’t think they could do. They actually have prejudged what they thought their kids could do and as a result they didn’t teach them to the level that they could have, and they also prejudged their abilities as a teacher. So when they were doing this action research process, all of a sudden they were pushed outside of their limits, outside of their box, and they started to understand what they should be teaching, understanding how it was they could be teaching it so that their kids could actually learn it. They were having deep conversations about why a student was not understanding a certain concept that they would not have been having last year, before this project began. They were talking about how it was that they could teach a concept better in order for their kids to understand it. They wouldn’t have had that conversation before, they just would have maybe given them a different piece of paper to fill out. So they were looking at different resources, they were going beyond their textbooks, they were asking better questions of their kids and of themselves and I think that is absolutely extraordinary and so gratifying to actually know has happened. Can I just say one more thing though? The other thing that comes through over and over again is that they say, “I’ve only just begun. There is so much more I want to learn, there is so much more now that I know I need to learn.” And I think on one hand I find that really, really exciting because they want to do more. On the other hand that also worries me because, where is the support for them
in order to do that? Because they need it. This is the essence of the impact of the project, and it is so important!

**Interviewer:** Right. So, in other words, success has raised the question of how to keep succeeding.

**Jane:** You know, it’s the whole sustainability issue and how do you replicate something like this? How could this happen in a different way? And those are questions that we’ll be wrestling with.

**Interviewer:** Thanks for a very interesting conversation, Jane and Ruth.

**Biographical note:**

Dr. Douglas Franks is an Associate Professor in the Schulich School of Education where he teaches in the Pre-service Teacher and Graduate Education programs. His research interests broadly focus on issues related to teaching and learning in mathematics education, including the implications of technology, attitudes and beliefs toward mathematics, and quantitative literacy for citizenship.