

Response of the

**Ontario Teachers' Federation/  
Fédération des enseignantes et  
des enseignants de l'Ontario**

to the

**College of Teachers' Consultation  
on Prior Learning Assessment  
and Recognition (PLAR)**

April 14, 2008

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The Ontario Teachers' Federation welcomes this opportunity to provide input to the Ontario College of Teachers (OCT) regarding the College's proposal to develop a framework for a Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition (PLAR) policy.

OTF acknowledges that a great deal of pressure currently exists provincially, nationally and internationally for the teaching profession in Ontario to institute improved ways of recognizing professional qualifications held by teachers who come from other jurisdictions. On the provincial level, we know that teaching, like other professions, must have in place a Mutual Recognition Agreement (MRA) by 2009. Nationally and internationally, there is also pressure to fast track labour mobility agreements, as Canada prepares to ratify the Lisbon Convention.

The Ontario Teachers' Federation has a long and proud history of advocating for the rights of internationally educated teachers (IETs), and we have worked over the years to ensure that the processes required for having their credentials recognized in Ontario are fair, transparent, objective and impartial. OTF has served as a partner with the College, LASI World Skills, Skills for Change and Windsor Women Working With Immigrant Women in the Teach in Ontario project for IETs since the inception of this important initiative. We have also encouraged and witnessed first-hand the many significant improvements that have been made by the College in recent years to the practice of credentialing immigrant teachers, and we would like, once again, to commend the College highly for its exemplary work in this area.

The above notwithstanding, OTF views with significant trepidation the current path pursued by OCT to implement a PLAR framework and policy. Our position centres on the following main concerns:

1. Undermining of formal learning as the route to qualifications in teaching - In Ontario, unlike in several U.S. and other jurisdictions, qualification as a teacher, principal, or supervisory officer relies first and foremost on following and completing a path of formal learning. For teachers, this formal learning must be offered by a recognized university, at a faculty or school of education that has been accredited by the College of Teachers. For administrators, this formal learning must be offered by an accredited institution or organization. One cannot simply claim on-the-job experience in lieu of formal study. While we do accept prior professional experience as being an appropriate prerequisite for teachers of technological studies, we nevertheless require these candidates to pursue formal pedagogical preparation in order to bestow on them the credential of qualified teacher.

As evidenced in the definition of PLAR included in OCT's PLAR Participants' Notes booklet, PLAR is traditionally used to assess both the prior formal learning and the prior professional experience of an individual. While we recognize that prior experience can and should be considered for assessing equivalence for a practicum requirement (as is currently done by OCT when assessing IETs whose program of professional study may not have included

a supervised practicum), the Federation believes that a move towards accepting prior experience as being equivalent to formal learning serves to undermine our current system of credentialing teachers and education administrators in Ontario.

It is, of course, possible to measure formal learning credentials obtained in other jurisdictions and to determine that these are equivalent to the credentials required for certification/qualification in Ontario. This is what the College currently does when reviewing the qualifications held by those who have trained as teachers outside of Ontario. We would encourage the College to continue with this practice and to seek ways of implementing similar processes for establishing equivalence for administrators from other jurisdictions. In all cases, however, the assessment of equivalence should be on the basis of credentials obtained through formal learning (academic study).

2. Inequity – The Federation is concerned that the application of a PLAR policy that would exempt individuals from other jurisdictions from following a prescribed course of formal study, while still requiring it of those who live in Ontario, places Ontario educators at a disadvantage and is, in essence, inequitable.

Should the College conclude that a particular program of formal learning (e.g. the Principal's Qualification Program (PQP) or the Supervisory Officer's Qualification Program (SOQP)) is not required by administrators from other jurisdictions, how could it reasonably continue to require these programs of those in Ontario? The Federation does not subscribe to the argument that if a particular program of study is available here and not elsewhere, one can require it locally but not for those from other jurisdictions. As we move increasingly towards technology-based modes of course delivery, the notion of lack of access to courses as the basis for discriminating between one group who must take a particular course and another who need not, will present itself as even more illogical.

In Scenario 4, used by the College in the PLAR consultation, the fictional Jean-Guy Papineau holds both a Manitoba principal's course qualification and a doctoral degree in educational administration. The Federation agrees that either or both of these qualifications may be assessed as being equivalent to all or part of the PQP, and should be recognised as such. However, we would equally assert that an Ontario educator, holding a similar doctoral degree in educational administration, should also be entitled to have his or her qualifications assessed for equivalency to the PQP. Similarly, we cannot see how logically, equitably, sensibly and perhaps even legally the College could implement a PLAR framework that would recognize the prior professional experience of those from elsewhere, but not recognize prior experience of Ontario educators.

In attempting to unravel this potential for inequity, it may be necessary for us here in Ontario to revisit the qualifications or prerequisites we currently have in place. We cannot claim, for example, that qualification in all three divisions is a reasonable prerequisite for Ontario

educators wishing to become principals, but not so for those from elsewhere.

3. Instability of disposition to teach inventories and prior learning assessments currently used in other jurisdictions – Much of the research points to questionable reliability and validity of PLAR tools and approaches used elsewhere. Creating a flawless, impartial, and equitable process for use in Ontario will be near impossible, not to mention costly. The Federation's opposition to the introduction of PLAR for the above reasons was articulated in the May 2005 response paper submitted by OTF as part of OCT's Teacher Qualification Review.
4. The advantage of amending current policies and practices versus adopting a PLAR framework – When we reviewed the scenarios presented in the PLAR consultation document, it became apparent to us that many of them could be resolved by means other than adoption of a PLAR framework; most commonly by making adjustments to policies or discretionary practices under the direct control of the College. The College has the authority to amend these policies and practices, and it should do so. For example, teachers from other Canadian jurisdictions who have not been explicitly trained in two divisions (P/J, J/I, or I/S), but have received pedagogical training across both elementary and secondary panels could easily be considered as having fulfilled equivalent training. Currently, the College tends to process these teachers as having been trained in just one division and requires them to take an additional basic qualification in a second. While the mapping onto Ontario's qualification structure may not be exact, in many cases it may make more sense to consider such teachers as having obtained qualification across two (and in some instances perhaps even all three) divisions. This would certainly be the case for the fictional teacher from New Brunswick, Claire LeBlanc, depicted in Scenario 2.

We believe that implementing a PLAR policy in Ontario for teachers and education administrators will be fraught with challenges, many of which will be insurmountable, as the College struggles to ensure a fair, transparent and equitable process for all. Even if the College manages to achieve this goal, it will require a tremendous financial investment in personnel and enormous time commitment, all to achieve an end result that could more effectively be attained by modifying some of the College's existing policies and practices.

## Conclusion

The Federation is concerned that the move by OCT towards implementing a PLAR framework and policy will be tantamount to opening a huge can of worms, the implications and negative repercussions of which will be with us for many years to come.

As a general rule, OTF maintains that the assessment of prior learning should be restricted to assessing and determining the equivalency of alternative formal learning, and should not include prior professional experience. Equivalence for credentials such as the PQP, SOQP, and AOs should only be granted if an equivalent program or programs of study have been followed. We continue to support consideration of prior experience to fulfil practicum requirements for internationally educated teachers whose program of professional study may not have included a supervised practicum. We similarly support the logic of the current practice of accepting prior

experience as a prerequisite for candidates who pursue careers as teachers of technological education. In both these cases, this prior experience is already acknowledged by the College, so there is no need to change practice by introducing a PLAR policy.

OTF does not believe that expertise gained via experience in a particular area automatically qualifies an individual to teach that area. NHL players and Olympic gymnasts cannot be deemed to be qualified to teach Physical Education to elementary and secondary school students, any more than those holding a PhD in Mathematics can be deemed automatically qualified to teach Math. The Federation also does not support the notion of non-academic routes to teacher qualification and certification. Programs such as Teach for America and other alternative, experience-based routes to gaining teaching qualifications that may be commonly found in several U.S. jurisdictions are not, in our view, equivalent to a program of formal teacher preparation, delivered by an accredited academic institution. Experience as a teacher or education administrator in lieu of a program of formal study is no more acceptable than experience as a doctor or dentist would be in the absence of academic training.

Finally, the Federation insists that any policy adopted by the College must treat individuals from home and away equitably. While we do not support the notion of recognizing prior experience as being equivalent to formal learning, we will always advocate for the same standards to be applied to teachers from within Ontario as to those who come from elsewhere.

The Ontario Teachers' Federation is the advocate for the teaching profession in Ontario and for its 155,000 teachers. OTF members are full-time, part-time and occasional teachers in all the publicly funded schools in the province—elementary, secondary, public, Catholic and francophone.