

**Celebration of Learning: Staff Experiences
Implementing Teacher Professional Growth Plans**
**A Study of Implementation Challenges, Effective Supports, and
Influence on Teacher Development***

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Introduction and Overview

Teacher self-assessment through self-managed growth plans is a new policy initiative in Alberta (Alberta Learning, 1998) requiring all teachers to set goals annually for their own professional growth, to assess their practice in relation to these goals, to record and share the goals and assessment with a supervisor, and to plan professional development based on these reflections. Teacher Professional Growth Plans (TPGPs) are being implemented differently in different school jurisdictions, and garnering different responses from teachers and supervisors.

Little empirical research is yet available to assist Alberta district personnel, school-based supervisors and teachers in their implementation of TPGPs. Wescana School District¹ offers an ideal context for such research, as schools in this jurisdiction began implementation at least one year prior to mandatory provincial implementation. Some Wescana teachers and principals have by now been working with TPGPs for three years, and are able to shed light on the challenges of start-up, more and less effective responses to these challenges, and the benefits and concerns of the TPGP approach to instructional supervision.

¹ A pseudonym.

In this pilot project, three Wescana schools were selected for study: one elementary, one junior high and one senior high. Further details will be withheld to protect the identity of the study participants. Four administrators, nine teachers, and two educational assistants working full-time in these schools, all currently using the TPGPs, volunteered to be interviewed². The specific objectives of the pilot project were as follows:

- (1) To identify the individual and implementational issues that affect different professionals' approaches to and learning through goal-setting and self-assessment;
and
- (2) To identify significant social and cultural dimensions of a teaching/learning community that may be linked in some relationship to professionals' learning and self-assessment.

Additionally, the pilot project intended to explore the potential for further research into TPGP implementation in Alberta. Methods of the study, including a description of ethical guidelines, are described in Appendix A.

² The original study proposal was to collaboratively plan and conduct an action research project with two participating school districts, and to use interviews and focus groups with staff throughout the project to monitor the implementation of TPGPs. The proposal was designed to target districts just starting to use TPGPs. However, when the Wescana opportunity appeared, this proposal was modified to fit the district's more advanced stage of TPGP implementation.

Part A: Implementing Teacher Professional Growth Plans: Perceptions and Experiences of School-Based Administrators

This section presents findings from the interviews with four school-based administrators in Wescana schools. Administrator comments have been organized into three categories. First are the strategies used by each administrator to implement the teacher professional growth plans in their school, as well as their perceptions of the unfolding process of teacher adoption of TPGPs over the early years. Second are the benefits of TPGPs for teacher growth and their school's goals in general, as perceived and reported by administrators. Third are concerns or issues raised by different administrators. Administrators' observations regarding more and less effective strategies they adopted to support teachers and enhance the utility of the TPGPs are woven throughout all sections.

Process of TPGP Implementation

The three schools are all situated reasonably close together in a heavily populated suburb. Principals told us their staffs, like the community, tended to be rather stable and homogenous in characteristics of teaching experience, ethnicity, socio-economic situation, religion and values. Because all three schools were in at least the third year of implementing TPGPs, staffs were past the initial stages of making sense of the new initiative, and were actively refining and experimenting with the idea of professional growth plans in various ways.

Preparation and continuous assistance for staff in using TPGPs

Two administrators reported that there had been a long history of goal setting in Wescana school division prior to the implementation of the Quality Teaching document directive. They attributed a relative ease of TPGP implementation to this history. Workshops held in schools by the jurisdiction and Alberta Teachers' Association were positively described by all four administrators. All administrators had also held at least one informal workshop with their own staff to demonstrate alternate templates for a growth plan, build staff confidence and trust, explain 'what a goal is', describe their own role, and generally assist teachers to get started. All administrators also shared their own growth plans with their staffs.

Throughout the first two years administrators found individual staff members sometimes required special assistance. Some individuals had overly high expectations for themselves, some needed help clarifying specific manageable goals, some felt "overwhelmed" by the requirement to set personal goals, some needed frequent "reminders" to get the thing finished, and some apparently found it difficult to apply meaningful goal-setting to their work (particularly where this was repetitive or primarily technical in nature, in the case of certain non-teaching staff).

Administrators talked about "sitting down with" some individuals and coaching them through the process, sometimes extensively. Generally in the first year, noted administrators, many teachers were uncertain about the expectations of the process and the actual content of the plan. Some were cautious about extending trust. All administrators stressed the need for a supportive and flexible supervisory response in the first year: "I took just about anything, as long as they had it written down" explained one.

All administrators had developed deliberate scheduling strategies to manage the rather difficult time demands of reading each TPGP and meeting with its writer at the beginning and end of the year. Most blocked out significant chunks of time for the process. In two schools, principals and associate principals shared the load.

One school had also implemented mid-year conference opportunities for teachers to dialogue about their TPGPs, encouraging collaborative groups to form for this purpose. Teachers could invite whom they wished as their peer responders, and administrators found that staff reported the collaborative groups were at least as valuable as the administrator-teacher conferences.

In another school, the administrative team held June interviews with each staff member focusing on three questions: What was the goal? How did it affect your teaching? And, Where are you going with it next year?

Strong district office support

All administrators emphasized the importance of strong central office support in this district for the TPGP policy and its implementation. Plentiful information and group dialogue opportunities provided by the district for administrators were noted as being very helpful. Interviewees also noted the powerful influence of district office administrators modeling the use of growth plans, visiting schools staffs to share their plans and talk about the process. District initiatives to map themes emerging in the teachers' plans across the district and create corresponding professional development opportunities were also described positively as evidence of district commitment to support teachers' growth plans. Two administrators were enthusiastic about the Pacific Institute

personal development program³ becoming popular throughout the district, and felt that the core values and approaches of this program fit effectively with the principles of the TPGPs. Finally, administrators all emphasized a key dimension to success being the financial resources made available to each school to pay workshop fees and release time for development opportunities teachers chose to engage.

Building teacher trust and risk-taking over time

All four administrators explained they'd noticed positive changes in teachers' goal-setting over the three years. First, over time teachers seemed to be becoming more confident in writing goals, and were "personalizing" their goals more to specific dimensions of their own practice and teaching styles.

Second, more teachers were aligning their personal goals for growth with school and district initiatives, and one principal noted that a "common language" was beginning to appear among the growth plans of a particular staff. Another principal had observed a natural evolution in the types of staff goals, from a more personal focus at first to a more curricular, more systemic focus.

Third, most teachers seemed to have "come on board", and more were taking the TPGP written plan and action seriously. One administrator reported that initially there was a wide spectrum of teacher response to the TPGPs; everything from uncertainty and a small degree of cynicism to

³ Several participants in the study mentioned this program, with varying response. Not all were enthusiastic about it.

enthusiasm as many teachers welcomed this alternative to summative evaluation by a supervisor (being observed in the classroom).

Administrators often attributed these changes to their own restraint of any critique or judgment of teachers' first goals and plans. All administrators emphasized the need for flexibility in accepting all of the growth plans submitted with a fairly wide range of tolerance. Some administrators admitted to mixed feelings about how to receive and respond to more personal goals. Is "learning knitting" a reasonable professional goal? However, administrators all spoke about being sensitive and careful to provide encouragement and positive reinforcement to staff.

They also noted the collective "peer pressure", modeling and information sharing that developed among staffs over the three years of implementation, which tended to "nudge along" those who seemed less committed at first to TPGPs. One principal mentioned using "subliminal" ways of "talking up" the importance and relevance of certain school goals and system initiatives to teachers' own growth plans. Another had teachers examine the Teaching Quality Standards as well as the school and district goals during the TPGP goal-planning process in September. Then at the end of the year this administrator asked staff to demonstrate how their professional growth was related to these standards and goals.

One very positive movement described by administrators was staff members choosing to work in groups to prepare these plans, usually according to grades or subject area. This was more pronounced at the elementary level, and became established gradually among interested staff members - not imposed through administrative directive, but enhanced by administrative encouragement.

Benefits of Teacher Professional Growth Plans (TPGPs)

All four administrators expressed unequivocal enthusiasm about the value of the TPGPs, and their potential for future possibilities. Common benefits cited were (1) greater authenticity and teacher commitment to their own professional development; (2) increased teacher focus and accountability for their own development; (3) increased collegiality; and (4) teachers' self-affirmation.

Authenticity and teacher commitment to development

After a few “glitches” and uncertainties in the TPGP start-up process, administrators described a growing authenticity of the plans, ownership of teachers for professional growth and increasing level of empowerment and professionalism. Several told stories about particular teachers “blossoming” as they set and found themselves actually achieving learning goals.

The “old” system of teacher evaluation (observation and conferencing) was described as “a bit artificial” by all four administrators. One explained that the teacher growth plans helped support a strong divisional commitment to a “culture” of professional development, described as “push, support and assist”. One administrator explained she still supervises by walking around, observing closely student and teacher activity in classrooms and throughout the school. Another explained that the TPGP process allows her to be more selective with her supervisory time; especially to assist teachers in need.

Although administrators varied in the amount of direction they gave to teachers for TPGPs (i.e. one asking teachers to write a personal goal, a school goal and a district goal), all emphasized their support for staff risk-taking and creativity in designing personally meaningful TPGPs.

A key dimension in all three schools appeared to be an existing growth-oriented culture. All principals mentioned extensive resources, both time and finances, dedicated in their schools to support professional development activities. All described staff relationships which were largely collegial, mutually supportive and in some schools, unusually close and collaborative. All gave evidence of values enacted in the culture of their schools focused on continuous learning, caring, children's well-being, and a positive work environment. The only real change brought by TPGPs to these schools was often to formalize and recognize a system already in place of teachers identifying areas for growth and pursuing development activities on an ongoing basis.

Focus and accountability

One referred to staff plans now allowing greater insight into the struggles of teachers' practice, "what areas of curriculum they are getting bogged down in" -- and therefore greater opportunity to assist. The requirement to write goals at the beginning of the year met with varying response, although all four supported the requirement for teachers to create a focus for their practice. One stressed the personal accountability that goal-setting creates: "When it's written down, you begin to relate everything that happens to that goal". Teachers now take more responsibility for their own professional development, the administrator explained; they do much more "conscious planning" for their growth, and more thinking around questions such as, "How will I know when

I get there? What will it look like?” Another mentioned the value of personal ‘targets’: “I don’t think goals should be rigid, but I don’t like things loosey-goosey”.

Collegiality

All four described some collaboration happening among some teachers in preparing their goals (“but some teachers you have to nudge a bit”), in ways that indicated their desire for greater staff collaboration. However, as one noted, “The TPGP process as it stands doesn’t encourage collaboration -- you’d have to modify it”. At the high school level some teachers in same-subject areas met to compare TPGP in the planning process. Beyond that, many teachers chose, as professional development activities, coaching their colleagues (for example, to integrate technology into their classes).

In one school the administrative team had decided to formally incorporate teacher collaboration in preparing and reviewing the plans. Staff were invited to meet in small groups for the ‘supervision’ part of the TPGPs - reviewing the growth plan and the teacher’s progress during the school year. Most teachers chose this option and said they found it a rare opportunity for concentrated dialogue about professional practice (“deep talk”, the assistant principal called it), a rewarding and creative learning experience. The principals believed that staff had gradually become committed to a process of ongoing development with its stops, starts, sudden breakthroughs, back and forth rhythms, and continual clarification, which was the most important outcome of the TPGP initiative.

Teachers' self-affirmation

All administrators, as well as many teachers, referred positively to the fact the teacher professional growth plans stress competence and growth rather than deficits and judgment. As one teacher put it, “Here’s how I am skilled and getting more skilled”. The TPGP process is structured so that end-of-year discussions with teachers about their growth plans tend to highlight their accomplishments, positive changes, and affirming incidents throughout the year that otherwise might be forgotten.

Administrators all described ways they enhanced the self-affirmatory nature of TPGPs. . One explained a strategy of encouraging staff to write goals as an affirmation: “I am...” Another principal found that TPGPs stimulated, for some teachers, such deep reflection that she was considering introducing to her staff an option to create a portfolio. Three administrators discussed an overarching system objective of increasing teacher wellness and the balance of work and personal life. TPGPs, they felt, supported this objective by their inherent self-affirming potential.

Administrators' Continuing Concerns and Issues

The issues or concerns expressed by principals centered on two dimensions of teacher professional growth plans. First was the potential rigidity, and linearity of the planning process. Some suggested that pre-determined goals and measurable outcomes were not consistent with the fluidity of teaching practice and teacher growth. Second was a concern that teachers need to become comfortable and confident in developing and sharing their goals.

Linearity of TPGP process

Two administrators referred to their own discomfort with the linear planning process, explaining their belief that important knowledge related to practice is often emergent, and very difficult to articulate early in the year. One said, “We administrators are not good at living with ‘messy’ for awhile; we want closure and solutions, we want to clean up the mess.” Another explained that goals are more fluid and on-going than the one-year TPGP process of plan-action-measure allows. This administrator explained that the “somewhat linear” nature of TPGPs created certain stress for those staff concerned about meeting their goals each year.

A third pointed out that “Some goals just aren’t set-able in September” and mentioned discomfort with the focus on observable indicators and formal educational strategies for growth (most teachers tended to indicate intents to attend workshops, conferences, and read resources to fulfill their growth goals). This administrator planned to offer a portfolio option (“it’s more a living document”) for teachers who preferred this to a TPGP. Portfolios, this person felt, would encourage more reflective writing, more affirmation, and more focus on the process of growth rather than fixed goals and concrete outcomes.

What counts as a goal?

All administrators referred to teachers’ initial and varying degrees of discomfort both in writing and sharing their goals. Principals found themselves meeting with teachers to help them work through questions such as these: What’s a goal, and what’s an action strategy? What’s a

manageable, realistic goal for one year? What's an acceptable goal, to the administrator, for professional growth? What if I don't achieve it?

The issue of staff members including personal goals in professional growth plans raised different concerns for different administrators. All felt that wellness was important, that staff not be overwhelmed by teaching demands and lose "the delicate balance between work and home life." Some felt that TPGPs should reflect this balance; one believed personal goals had a place but not on TPGPs. One administrator was thinking though a situation where one staff member had apparently written goals that did not pertain to her current position, but to creating a new career direction. Another was concerned about some teachers writing "unrealistic" TPGP goals that created additional pressure for themselves. Two administrators wondered, At what point does a supervisor question or criticize a goal?

However, all four administrators emphasized the importance of accepting all teacher goals: "We're giving lots of freedom here . . . I've had to really lower my standards, but if I start rejecting [the goals] if they're scrawly or I don't agree with them, it turns [the teachers] off." Teachers sometimes wrote what principals thought were large unmanageable goals, or "trivial" goals, or unmeasurable goals, or goals with what a principal might believe have questionable connection to teaching practice. Two administrators admitted feeling some personal dilemma about how to interpret their teachers' goals, what criteria to bring to this interpretation, and ultimately how to respond.

Threats to trust and risk-taking

Two principals stressed the importance of issues of trust and risk. One explained a belief that TPGPs do not promote risk-taking “because everything you put down has to be measured, so teachers stress out -- what if I don’t achieve it this year?” Believing that TPGPs may actually reinforce a deficit model of teaching, this administrator was more enthusiastic about the possibilities offered by portfolios.

Another noted the vulnerability involved in sharing one’s goals with a colleague or supervisor, and explained a personal story “as a confident administrator with twenty-five years’ experience.” When the supervisor was changed, this administrator apparently changed the personal TPGP goals, believing that the new supervisor would bring a particular bias to judging those goals. “Trust is key, and it’s a difficult balance even in a district that is so supportive”. This administrator went on to note that the kind of reflection people do is related to their age and career stage: an administrator needs to meet people “where they’re at”.

Time and resources

Most administrators described the time factor as an enormous challenge for everyone involved. One person said, “If done well, growth plans are more time consuming for everyone than summative evaluation”. Administrators’ own strategies to manage the time crunch are explained in an earlier section.

Other time concerns mentioned by administrators included teachers’ difficulty in finding the time to document and write down the things that happen over the year that are related to their growth

plans. As one principal noted, “Teachers don’t have time to give themselves credit for all that they are doing.” Sometimes the most important growth doesn’t get captured in writing. This is partly because not all teachers may have language to articulate their learning experiences in practice, and partly because for some teachers the “writing part” is simply the “what you have to do” part - the least important part of the professional learning and growing process.

Time allowed for noticeable changes in teaching practice in the long-term is also important. One principal explained, “You have these wonderful plans, but they need support . . . Implementing new ideas is difficult. You need time to practice, in a safe place . . . there’s a dip in what it looks like. And just the daily grind keeps you from doing new things. . . A teacher wants to incorporate new activities or technology -- well, she has to find all these new things, decide which works and which doesn’t. That takes all kinds of time.”

Part B: Implementing Teacher Professional Growth Plans: Perceptions and Experiences of Teachers and Educational Assistants

This section reports findings obtained from interviews with nine teachers and two educational assistants in three Wescana schools. The themes of these conversations have been organized into three categories. First is their experience of the implementation process, including the most significant initial challenges, and the administrative assistance, peer support and other resources that were most helpful. Second is the benefit or perceived value of TPGPs to their professional practice identified by staff. Third are continuing issues and concerns of implementing TPGPs expressed by these educators.

Process of TPGP Implementation

For the majority of participants, the teacher professional growth plan was an evolving document that provided positive direction for professional development. For most, the process took some getting used to. Staff needed time to learn to trust, become comfortable, and develop clear goals. Most emphasized the importance of administrative support. However for some, goal-setting was nothing new. One special education teacher, for example, explained that annual goal-setting for her teaching was a required part of her practice long before the TPGP policy was implemented. Other teachers referred to a personal habit of annual goal-setting, or pointed out that all good teachers must be goal-oriented to plan their units and lessons.

Learning to trust and become comfortable

Several staff agreed that the first year was a testing of the waters, and over time they learned to trust the process. One teacher described her fear at the beginning:

When we first started, it was really a risk. What if I write something down and it's not worded properly? Is somebody going to think that I'm not a very good writer? You have to be able to trust the people that are going to see that growth plan that they're not going to be making judgements on you. When I first started, I never would have said to somebody "Would you like to see my growth plan?"

A teacher who has become a promoter of TPGPs over time explained there was some staff uncertainty and resistance at first. She was new to the school, and her words demonstrate the importance of attending to individual teachers' stage of development:

I was still trying to get my own feet in the Special Education system and I think sometimes the goals in the beginning are just to survive. In time you know how to pick out what your priorities were and how to actually accomplish them. It did cause a lot of discussion, a lot of hemming and hawing at first. When we started there were big goals. I thought, just another piece of paper work. I've got too much to do now.

Staff often mentioned the patient support and understanding of their administrators. One explained that in her school, she found it helpful to have interviews with the supervisor both in January (small group or one-on-one to discuss ways of achieving goals) and at the end of the

year. One man described the importance of administrators understanding teacher change. In his own case, a significant influence on his teaching was a week-long conference:

It took me a year to begin implementing those things, and another year before we started to share those ideas. It's a long process. And I think the longer you teach, the longer it takes to shift ideas and look at things in a different way.

Goal clarity improves over time

Teachers often described how their goals became more clear and refined over time. In the first year of writing goals,

They were so general that it was almost difficult to tell whether they were really successful or not.

One explained that when she started, she had a long list of detailed goals. After a school-based workshop from the Alberta Teachers' Association, she combined and focused the list into broader goals, and attended more to the details of her action plan for fulfilling her development objectives. Another explained,

The first year I put in way too much of what I thought I would do and I ended up in the end doing things that I never planned to do. The first year was overwhelming.

Administrative support is key

Almost all staff interviewees commented positively about the psychological support they received from their supervisors, mostly in offering positive reinforcement.

He was supportive in that he thought they were really good, professional growth plans - that they were right on and he also would say "In other words, this is what you need..." and I'd say yes. And that really helped, that was very supportive. And I know that if I needed help I could go to our administrators and say "You know, this isn't working out and in fact it's worse than it was before, what can I do?" And they would offer strategies or something that I could add. If I had no reinforcement I might sometimes wonder if I'm in a vacuum and if this is the right thing.

In some cases (administrative personnel) leaders modeled their own growth plans for staff, or gave latitude in what was acceptable the first time through. Other examples of support described positively were staff meeting time provided for discussion, and supervisors giving positive comments about their plans. Some interviewees' comments indicated that supervisors need to be very open-minded and understanding of different approaches to TPGPs:

My principal knows me very well. From the first day she showed up here and we had our first locking of the horns, until today, she knows pretty well where I stand, what I feel, what my goals are, what my aims are. I showed her my growth plans and she just looked at me and I just smiled at her. She knew what I was thinking and I've told her what I thought about them - last year's. This year I'm very proud because there's a tremendous need there [to become involved in a particular development program], but I would have done it without the growth plans. She's the one who encouraged me to take [it]. She

thought, not that I needed it or anything, but to give me a better perspective on some of the things that I've done, how to handle things that I've done. I have a very open relationship with our principal so I'm lucky that way. When we sit down to discuss growth plans, she knows my goals are the kids.

Staff also overwhelmingly praised the school and district learning opportunities and financial support available to them to implement the growth activities they devised for themselves. Many positively noted the time in their schools that had been devoted to TPGPs. About half described the importance to them of their administrator showing active interest in what they were doing: “He’ll come in, he’ll take a look at my displays, he’ll ask me what I’m doing – he would find out what’s going on and what people are teaching regardless of what’s in their professional growth plans.” Individual consulting opportunity appeared to be plentiful. An educational assistant explained,

I was given consulting time with two other assistants that work with the same kinds of kids, opportunity to talk with each other. We were all given – not mentors as such - but somebody that we needed to share this with when it was done

However some teachers pointed out the need for staff members to be proactive by requesting assistance. Some felt more communication was needed to inform staff about available jurisdictional support.

Most important, Wescana staff all emphasized the importance of their administrators accepting what they had written, without critical judgment, and encouraging teachers to develop goals they chose for themselves. This positive support helped create the trust necessary for people to engage

seriously with the goal-setting process. One teacher who had conducted TPGP workshops in other schools (not part of this study) found that these key dimensions of mutual trust and administrative support were often lacking:

My main concern was that a lot of teachers felt they could not trust the people who were supposed to be looking at their growth plans to be fair. For teachers it's a big risk and there should be more support happening in terms of administration . . . The other thing was in some schools I found that administrators wanted growth plans to suit their way of thinking rather than saying to the teacher, "Here are all these different formats. You choose what you feel most comfortable with and then bring them to me and we'll talk about it."

Benefits of Teacher Professional Growth Plans (TPGPs)

All participants indicated that they saw value in the professional growth plans. Several commented that the TPGP process was less stressful and more useful than the summative format of teacher evaluation (classroom observation and conferences) used in the past. Others enjoyed the increased amount of feedback they felt they were receiving (from supervisors) on their accomplishments in learning and development. Nearly every staff participant in the study said that they now approached professional development differently than they had before having to write a plan.

Value of written goal-setting

Goal setting generally was considered to be an activity that increased insight into one's own teaching, and one's commitment towards professional development focused on a particular area. Teachers indicated that the TPGP process itself helped them define a personal vision for their practice, and a sense of clear direction. A few said that their own goal setting experiences with TPGPs led them to introduce the same activity with their students. However, as one enthusiastic teacher cautioned, not everyone is a natural goal-setter. Although goal-setting had always been a part of her working style, she noted that some other teachers seemed to prefer a more emergent, day-to-day approach.

One teacher explained that for her, goal-setting revitalized her teaching and reduced stress: "It's easy to get burned out in this profession." She also emphasized the importance of celebrating the achievement of each of her goals. Another looked forward to a quiet time she now gives herself every year to review the past year's activity and craft personal benchmarks for the coming year.

The writing down of goals seemed to be a rather powerful act for many educators, a way to "rethink your thoughts and clarify them". One teacher explained "because it's written down in black and white, it's something I can refer to and make further reflections." Some believed the writing of a plan increased its permanence. Several returned to their plans frequently throughout the year to review them. One teacher explained:

You look at it throughout the year every couple of months and keep it close at hand . . . if for example I had a really bad day with the assistants and I say gee, I'm not accomplishing much, I'll remember my goal [improve communication skills] - so then I

might open it up and say oh yeah, I'm supposed to do all these things . . . I haven't been doing them lately.

Focus

Many reported that they had experienced increased focus and commitment, with a clearer sense of direction in their teaching, professional reading, and conferences: “It helps you prioritize, focus on what’s most important for these kids.” A department head explained, “You’re building something and you have a sense of vision. Without that, you’re kind of wandering.” But whereas a school mission statement involves many person-hours and often ends up meaning relatively little for each individual, one’s own TPGP goals take only a few minutes and “gives meaning and a sense of purpose to what you’re doing.”

One described the TPGP as a continual barometer, showing how what was happening on a daily basis in their classroom was “on the right track.” Another explained that the plan acted like an anchor:

The more and more busy and more frazzled you get, you can go back and say, wait a minute now, let me check if all this stuff I'm doing related to the goals that I've set for myself. Maybe I need to leave [a project] for awhile and come back to the plan, look at where I'm supposed to be going.

A few teachers referred to the almost infinite number of areas in which one feels pressure to grow and develop skill as a teacher, and the hundreds of resources and activities available for growth. TPGP seem to help navigate these choices. One man explained that there was no longer

any type of “dabbling” in professional development for him – he found the TPGP process helped him be more specific and focused, both in engaging particular learning activities and applying them to his practice. Similarly, another teacher described how the TPGP helped her focus whenever she had choices:

It's nice to have a written down plan because then when you go to plan your PD activities, when I go to a convention, I want to choose some sessions that are going to help me to implement my growth plan or when I look at displays I'm going to be focusing and seeing what kind of materials and resources are out there that can help me achieve my growth plan.

Process and time are important for teachers to focus their goals. One described the evolution over two years of a goal she was particularly committed to and still working on:

This one is basically the same as last year and that's about delegating...being a more efficient administrator. I've never taken any administration or supervision courses and I just find some years very challenging working in such close quarters with so many assistants, and dealing with difficulties that might arise in working with them so closely, that I find I have to go to my administrator for advice or whatever. So this is how the goal reads: “I would like to delegate more effectively in order to become a more efficient administrator.” It deals with clear directions, expectations of duties of the assistants, resources required, how I'm going to do this. I've got these little things to remind myself I'm going to do it. I'm learning to use better communication techniques - I've gone to a friend for help, who is a real proponent of this ____ approach about praising and explaining and offering constructive criticism more effectively. I have a lot of difficulty

with that. So I find this is a really good goal and it's coming along nicely. It's more refined than it was last year, but it's basically the same and it's going better.

Her story shows the importance of flexibility in goal timelines, and the nature of the process of development: it is certainly not linear, and what begins as one particular goal can blossom or shift in different ways. One educational assistant had found that after she identified a focus for her TPGP (in visually impaired students, directly related to her educational work), she began to take courses in the area. Now she is pursuing entrance to a Master's program to further develop this focus.

Increased professional development activity

Several teachers mentioned that the amount of professional development they were doing had increased substantially since constructing their first growth plan. Others described their development activities to be more “proactive, intrinsic and exciting” since the introduction of TPGPs. One person said “It could be coincidental, but my desire has increased for professional development since there are so many more opportunities and reason to apply it”. In two schools, teachers commented upon a general increased level of professional development interest and informal activity among their peers. One explained:

I think there's more of an element of collegiality and people realize that everybody is working to improve. People are committed to growing. In this school, we do a lot of team work kind of things, so when I sit down with people who have similar goals, all of us are working on multiple intelligences. So if somebody brings a book in, it's “ You said you were on this so do you want to

look at this book?” Or “Gee, I was reading this and I thought you might enjoy it because I know you're working on the same kind of theme.” There's more collegiality, there's more team work and I believe there's more professionalism.

An educational assistant described gaining more confidence to attend workshops, and a sense of purpose and integration in what she was learning:

I think I'm not as apprehensive about going to workshops and I found over time that this [TPGP] confirms what I do on a daily basis. The confirmation is important to me.

One teacher who was actively creating new units integrating social studies, political science, global education, art, and literature, seemed to have discovered a new energy in her teaching:

Professional development used to mean, for me, going to the teacher conferences. And now I'm just...I'm involved in my own professional growth and I'm finding that invigorating and exciting and I'm glad that someone pushed me in that direction!

She described how her practice seemed to have become transformed, as she discovered new resources, made contacts with new organizations, and worked from the students' energy as they became excited about global issues: “Once you start getting involved that way and opening your eyes and seeing what's out there and what the possibilities are, of course you get more excited about it. I'm doing more in terms of professional growth and in terms of creating very diverse and different lesson plans than I ever was before.”

Self-affirming

All but one participant described the TPGP as an affirming process. One teacher described how growth plans had expanded her sense of the possibilities for her own growth. Another “felt good” that she had experienced lots of support and was given lots of space for risk-taking. Some mentioned it was positive for them to see their colleagues grow in confidence and professionalism. Most referred negatively to the “old way of teacher evaluation, kind of one shot once in awhile”. In contrast, the TPGPs allow one to “be treated as a professional”, creating one’s own goals and choosing when to seek help and for what. A major source of affirmation and confidence-building for many was the written evidence of accomplishment. As one secondary teacher explained:

*I think you can get lost in your everyday stuff and not realize how much you do accomplish in a yearEspecially with the special education students, success is often very small and it takes an extreme length of time before you see a real change. To be able to sit back in June and just kind of reflect on your year. Knowing that because the program was there you're able to pick out five kids that you suspect wouldn't have made it through, are now being successful. Looking at the program now being refunded for a second year, knowing it **is** a program that there's a need for, and that it's been established gives a sense of accomplishment. It gives you some concrete examples of what you have completed.*

A few teachers mentioned the need to move beyond the goal-writing into action. One man described how a teacher may need help to create opportunities to apply new learning in practice.

His example was a goal to integrate technology, which fell flat until he had the resources and curriculum to actually use the new learning:

Now I can actually see that I can use it, my enthusiasm and my desire to do it has increased. That's better in the sense that I'm actually applying this. If I had learned all this stuff before and didn't have access to apply it - my skills at it would be rustier, it would take me twice as long and maybe the frustration builds.

Another man who described himself as “neutral” about TPGPs felt that while growth plans offered good guidelines, portfolios offered a more thoughtful and accurate way to demonstrate commitment and growth

Collaboration

The benefit of collaboration opened by the TPGP process was generally viewed as positive, but with some conditions. Most felt it was useful to share and receive feedback from others. They even felt that the plans provided a foundation for discussion and affirmed them as individuals. Collaboration was described as desirable if everyone was demonstrating a personal level of commitment to their own growth. However, time constraints apparently often prevented the level of collaboration some educators would have liked.

Trust was considered essential, but a delicate balance. Some preferred to choose their dialogue partners. Some felt collaboration was only worthwhile with colleagues in similar teaching positions to their own (grade and/or subject area).

Individual work style affected attitudes towards collaboration. While one teacher stated “Collaboration is essential, because we work as a team for the students”, another said, “Collaboration isn’t necessary for me, but it might be fun”. There was a marked difference in attitudes to collaboration between divisions. The most frequent and in-depth dialogue about teaching practice was reported at the elementary level, and less in-depth collaboration at the senior high school level.

Seeing one’s practice as part of the larger system was described by three participants. One, an educational assistant, explained that the TPGP process helps one realize . . .

. . . that you're sort of not working in a vacuum here, that there is a big picture and you're part of that. It's important not to come to work everyday and put one foot ahead of the other. I think you really have to look at the big picture, that direction.

Accountability for self and colleagues

About three-quarters of the respondents felt that the expectation to prepare a professional growth plan was a natural responsibility. TPGPs were considered just “part of being a professional”. Staff said they “found it meaningful” and “made it into a choice”. Some felt that TPGPs made their colleagues more accountable: “It gives those that need it, a little push.” Other comments indicated that TPGPs simply gave form and accountability to what should be an ongoing process for all educators:

I'd question what was wrong if someone didn't want to make and fulfill a growth plan. Can you be the same person you were twenty years ago and be a professional in the classroom, would you not feel out of place?

I know there's a professional obligation [to do TPGPs] but teachers who care about their students and are honest teachers, don't need a growth plan.

Some however, like this person, found that the written goals enhanced her own sense of responsibility and self-motivation to continue working on an area:

I have this growth plan, I know it's written down, so it really is a commitment. I mean, nobody is going to come to me and say "My gosh, you didn't finish that growth plan, do you feel you're as good a teacher as you should be?" But . . . I pull out that growth plan and I look and it helps me to say ok, I've kind of not been focusing on this area for awhile. I need to go back in my planning and maybe do some more of these activities or go back to check that I'm on the right path.

Overall, many believed that they were more committed, involved and aware of their own professional development because of constructing a professional growth plan. Most reported that their goals had become more specific and realistic since the completion of their first growth plan. Writing the plan down, most said, helped them focus and commit to developing a clearly defined area of their teaching. Some compared TPGPs to traditional supervision relying on periodic classroom observation, which was disliked for several reasons including a perception that it emphasized minimum performance. All but one teacher who discussed this comparison considered TPGPs superior:

I think this is a much better way. It gets us out there, it keeps us developing, changing so that we're not just sort of getting into a rut.

However, a few teachers still desired the continuation of some kind of supervision through classroom observation format, perhaps modified from the formal approach of clinical supervision: “a little more informal kind of pop-ins for 10 or 20 minutes, that’s good too.”

Educators’ Continuing Issues and Concerns with TPGPs

Educators voiced some strong individual issues with teacher professional growth plans, and suggestions for how to make the process better fit their own needs and situation. These have been organized into four sections below: time concerns, restrictions of a linear TPGP process, unclear links between professional development and practice, and some concerns about goal completion.

Time concerns

As with most educational initiatives, time was a concern for almost all of the participants. As one junior high teacher explained, “Very, very busy days. By 3:00 we're all exhausted.”

A few respondents said they found it hard not to think of the plan as “one more thing to do”. Some put personal time aside to complete the TPGP because they said they needed a reflective space: one explained it was impossible to create meaningful goals amidst the “hot action” of other school responsibilities. Several expressed a wish for time to revisit the plan throughout the school year, or at least at the midpoint. One person felt restricted by timelines. He said he

understood the need for them, but said “sometimes great ideas hit you after you’ve handed it in, then I must decide whether to stick with it or alter it.”

Only two people said that time was of no concern to them in relation to any part of the professional growth plans. As one explained, time is a matter of attitude:

It's not a time consuming process, it's ongoing. It's a way of being as opposed to being time consumptive. Sitting down and doing your goals takes an hour or two, summing them up and the end of the year takes an hour or two, and you live through them through the year.

Restrictions of a linear TPGP process

Time challenges include the TPGP schedule itself. Some educators disliked the one-year structure of TPGPs: formulating goals in September and completing “actions” by June. One who felt “boxed in” by the TPGPs talked about the ongoing fluid nature of learning in teaching. Another teacher explained that there were too many unknowns and sudden changes in his daily activity to write “goals” at the beginning of the year: “I can’t sit down and say, well, this is what I’m going to work on: I would much rather see a growth plan after you do it – this is what I have done, not what I think I’m going to do.”

To write up a growth plan ahead of time in September, you're anxious about getting back to school, you're anxious to see what class you have, how you're going to do this....you're not going to do a growth plan, you don't care about growth plans.

Some participants stressed that their plan must be fluid and able to be a work in progress, not written in stone and inflexible. Several had experienced how unforeseen circumstances influenced the “success” of their plan. One, while endorsing the importance of goal-setting, wondered whether so much time spent crafting written goals for the TPGP actually fixed them, and inhibited “the spontaneity” of following opportunities as they arise: “some of the best stuff comes out of that.”

One person described the TPGP as a “catch-22” situation for him. He felt that there was “an inherent judgement process going on for what you did and did not write and for what may or may not have been accomplished in relation to the plan.” Another declared that writing a plan at the beginning of the year was too restrictive for her: an approach emphasizing reflection at the end of the year about what emerged, such as a through a journal or portfolio, would be her preference. One participant stressed a need for more honesty in the process, so teachers might write what they want rather than what (this teacher felt) administrators want to hear.

Some teachers struggled with whether to set clear goals and boundaries to govern their professional development, or follow opportunities as they emerged: “There are so many nifty things to do, how do you keep it under control so that you're not pushing yourself too much?” One explained that a superintendent had suggested the former approach, for the sake of teacher wellness. However, this teacher wondered whether teaching life was so fluid and opportunities so difficult to anticipate that written goals somehow did not do justice to the actual process of evolving growth.

Unclear links between professional development and practice

A few people raised concerns about the meaning and purpose of the TPGP focus on the teacher's learning. Several stressed the need for honesty and indicated that a plan must be meaningful to its writer. One, for example, wondered about the point of focusing on goals that tended to lean towards professional development in formal education settings:

I can go and take a Masters degree, how's that going to help my students? I could go today and take a _____ (particular) course. It's not going to help those kids one bit. All it's going to do is probably end up having me leave my students. That's not what I'm there for. I'm there for the kids.

He emphasized the greater importance to his practice of other, professionally-related projects and activities he was involved in – but the TPGP process encouraged commitment to concrete courses and skill development workshops that, in his experience, did not transfer well to classroom practice

....you can take behavior modification, you can take all this...that's great. But the harsh reality is, when you're in front of the kids, you've got to make a split second decision, to help them learn those skills.

Concern about goal completion

Many staff expressed concern about fulfillment of goals. Although three participants were not particularly worried about goal completion, most others commented about trying their best to fulfill their planned growth activities by June. In fact for some, the experience of having written

down and shared a goal, then finding oneself unable to achieve it at the end of the school year, was somewhat distressing: “You feel unsuccessful.”

Participants posed some interesting questions in this area: Did I really fail if my goal wasn't completed? What is a deadline really for if I don't strive to meet it? Is a goal ever completely finished? A few people suggested that celebration of overall progress, or movement in the direction of progress, would be helpful - rather than waiting for completion of particular goals. One person who was very serious about goal completion said he found it to motivating when others recognized his accomplishments. Others, however, remarked that giving verbal reports at staff meetings made them feel uncomfortable or that the uneasiness initially was attributed to not understanding the process.

Several commented that unforeseen circumstances arise and things don't always go the way a teacher plans. One teacher found it helpful when her administrator directed her “not to overload myself” and to “give something up”. Another had experienced growth activities that were not on his original growth plan, and wondered how these figured into the planning process. An educational assistant explained that the unpredictable, dynamic nature of the work teaching children militated against a cut-and-dried goal-planning process:

It's not one of those things that you can wake up one day and say, "I'm there" just because the kids are all at different levels emotionally. So yeah, it's something that we're always working on.

Some teachers suggested that more dialogue about factors preventing a teacher from finishing a goal would be helpful. One found that the in-depth reflection she worked through, analyzing why she had not achieved a particular goal, was a useful growth experience itself.

Summary: Staff Observations and Suggestions for Implementing Teacher

Professional Growth Plans

It is evident that perceptions of teachers, administrators, and educational assistants regarding TPGPs are remarkably similar. Comments about challenges in implementation and effective responses to these, benefits of TPGPs and issues of concern echo the same themes.

To conclude this report we have chosen to present lists of observations and suggestions offered by the Wescana teachers, educational assistants and administrators interviewed for this study. Most of the themes developed throughout this report are embedded in these lists. These comments sometimes represent individual suggestions and sometimes a theme echoed by several individuals. The items on these lists do not necessarily represent a consensus of opinion among staff.

Characteristics of the TPGP Process

According to certain Wescana staff, the process supporting the Teacher Professional Growth Plan at the school level should acknowledge that:

- The growth plan process, for many teachers, is self-affirming and builds confidence;
- Many staff appreciate supervisors that celebrate their successes in taking steps towards or achieving goals;
- Many staff appreciate the TPGP opportunity to *focus* their professional development;

- Many staff appreciate a formal midpoint revisiting of goals;
- Some teachers become overwhelmed with large goals: some need encouragement to prioritize or break large goals into smaller bench marks;
- Genuine growth experiences are sometimes hard to identify and track: they are fleeting classroom moments, or activities occurring outside the classroom;
- Some staff are anxious about “what counts as a goal”, and afraid to put down something in September against which they will be “measured” in June;
- Staff trust varies with the individuals and supervisors involved, and influences how much vulnerability a staff member is willing to reveal in the TPGP process;
- A growth plan is often enacted very differently than anticipated;
- Sharing goals with colleagues seems to encourage staff motivation and commitment in the TPGP process;
- Goals are evolutionary: no goal can be accurately envisioned and no goal is ever completely finished;
- Teachers’ priorities, pressures and work activity shift in unpredictable ways, affecting their growth and progress towards planned goals;
- Teachers’ career stage influences the kind of goals they want to pursue and their general priority on professional development; and

- The TPGP process can increase both confidence about one's teaching accomplishments, and guilt that one isn't accomplishing enough.

Suggestions for TPGP Use

According to certain Wescana staff, a Teacher Professional Growth Plan should:

- strike a balance between personal goals, personal professional growth areas, and school vision;
- include genuinely honest reflections;
- be considered a priority in staff activity in the school;
- be very specific and focused on one or two teaching areas;
- be revisited throughout the school year;
- be linked to what goes on in the classroom: "The plan is living and breathing through the students"; and
- include a running record of growth plan accomplishments from year to year.

Suggestions for Supervisory Facilitation of the TPGP Process

According to certain Wescana staff, administrators can support and enable the Teacher Professional Growth Plan process by:

- trusting teachers to formulate the goals that are most meaningful and appropriate for them at their particular stage of development;
- giving wide latitude to teachers to design creative and personally meaningful goals;
- helping staff formulate goals that reflect their biggest concerns about their teaching practice;
- helping staff view these goals as fluid, tentative, starting points – not prescriptive ‘bottom lines’ fixed in stone;
- sharing the administrator’s own growth plan and talking about its uncertainties and process;
- providing time at staff meetings at the year’s beginning and mid point for staff to dialogue about their goals, their growth challenges, and their meanings of success;
- placing more emphasis on the “doing” and interpretation of the “doing”, than on the “writing” of the plan;
- encouraging staff to keep their own professional goals close at hand and revisit them frequently;

- helping teachers talk through why something doesn't get done (i.e. time demands, shifting priorities, etc.);
- working through common TPGP issues and questions with staff (see 'Dilemmas' below); and
- helping teachers see the growth plan as a living document that develops over the long term.

Dilemmas in the TPGP Process

For certain Wescana staff, questions and issues related to implementing Teacher Professional Growth Plans continue at teacher and school-based administrator levels. These have not been generally voiced as perplexing or debilitating, just questions that some staff are working through. Jurisdictional guidance may be helpful in some of these issues:

- Do TPGPs have to integrate both school and district goals? (The 1998 provincial policy doesn't suggest this).
- Should the TPGP clearly impact students?
- Are personal goals not directly related to one's classroom practice, such as learning knitting or Tai Chi, valid for a professional growth plan? (Where should the line be drawn defining 'unacceptable' goals?)
- Are goals that capture what is already one's professional obligation (i.e. implementing a new curriculum) valid for a professional growth plan?

- How many goals should “carry over”, and for how many years?
- How does one account for accomplishments in the TPGP? (What are ‘valid’ indicators?)
- How does one capture, in a growth plan, those small but important incidents occurring through the year?
- How can the TPGP process become more collaborative, and less individualized?
- What about forming group goals in which each individual takes a part?
- How can we avoid the TPGP tendency to focus on professional development as “doing” something (i.e. attending workshops)?

Conclusion: Importance of Culture

An important overarching theme that struck us throughout this research was the remarkable level of support available to teachers for professional growth in all three schools we studied in the Wescana district. Financial support for development activities was plentiful. Emotional and psychological support for teachers to adjust to the TPGPs was evident in all schools. School time dedicated to reflective dialogue and workshops, and peer support for a positive and growth-oriented school community was also evident in schools. Administrators’ sensitivity and response to individual teacher needs was reported by all staff members interviewed. Active administrative initiative to encourage more teacher collaboration and deeper levels of reflective practice was noted by all. It was apparent that at all district levels, administrative commitment to teachers’ learning and well-being was unconditional.

Patience was evident in many administrators' stories, even those of frustration related to TPGPs. Also evident was a general understanding that teacher knowledge does not develop in a linear, controllable process, but is unpredictable, individual, sometimes difficult and emotionally messy. Finally, administrators generally demonstrated trust in their staff to "find their way" in creating growth plans that are professional, thoughtful, and genuinely supportive of improved practice.

We believe that what appears to be a resulting *culture of continuous learning*, above all, has been key to successful implementation of teacher professional growth plans in this district.

Appendix A – Methods of the Study

Study approvals and overview of methods

The study proposal was funded in January, 2000 by the University of Alberta Research Grants Office⁴, then approved by the Faculty of Education Associate Dean of Research. Following approval by Wescana Associate Superintendent Mr. Doug Sime, administrators at the three schools suggested by Mr. Sime were contacted by letter (see Appendix B) and telephone. When permission was received from the four individual school-based administrators, staff volunteers for the study at each school were contacted (often via email) to arrange interviews at a time and place selected by each participant. The researcher Dr. Tara Fenwick and a graduate research assistant, Anne Smulders, both of the Department of Educational Policy Studies, conducted one-on-one open-ended semi-structured interviews with each study participant, including four administrators, nine teachers and two educational assistants. Ethical guidelines for educational research regulated by the University of Alberta were followed strictly, as described in a later section. All schools participating in the study were provided with verbal and written material describing the purpose and nature of the study, all Wescana staff participants provided their written consent permitting use of their comments in this study, and all were provided telephone and email contact information for both researchers.

⁴ CRF-SSHRC Research Grant ##G124110086, University of Alberta Research Grants Office.

Interviews and analysis

Administrators were interviewed first, and asked to describe the process of implementing Teacher Professional Growth Plans in their school. These included administrators working in high school, junior high school, and elementary school levels. Administrators were asked to explain their process of implementing TPGPS, comment on challenges of implementation and more or less effective responses to these challenges, the benefits of TPGPs (compared to conventional supervision methods) and any concerns they had about TPGPs. Administrators also provided demographic information about the school, as well as a description of the school's culture, staff, and their leadership approach as these dimensions related to the implementation of TPGPs.

Staff participants for the study were recruited at the school level. Administrators agreed to provide information about this study to their staff who were using TPGPs, and invite interested staff members to volunteer to be interviewed. Volunteer school staff members submitted their names to their administrator, who shared these names with the researchers. In all, three high school teachers, three junior high teachers, three elementary teachers and two educational assistants (one at the elementary level and one at the junior high level) volunteered to be interviewed. The group included seven women and two men.

The researchers contacted these people via email or telephone to arrange an interview time and place convenient to each participant. Teachers and teacher assistants were interviewed in personal reflective conversations that lasted approximately 30-45 minutes. These interviews were tape-recorded and transcribed by a specially trained research

transcriptionist. Teachers and teacher assistants were asked the following questions (wording varied given the open-ended and emergent nature of the conversational interviews):

1. Describe the way teacher professional growth plans (TPGPs) were introduced to you in this school.
2. What were your first experiences using the TPGPs? (critical incidents)
3. What have been your most recent experiences using the TPGPs? (critical incidents)
4. What challenges, if any, have you experienced in implementing the TPGPs?
5. What benefits have you realized personally and professionally from working with the TPGPs?
6. What forms of support, assistance, and resources have been most helpful to you in the TPGP process?

Transcripts were analysed using interpretive techniques of qualitative data content analysis following Ely (1991). All real names and identifying characteristics were removed to protect participants' identity. Categories were coded and themes within these categories sought from the data. The researchers worked separately to identify themes, then analysed their findings comparatively. These themes were shared with research participants in the form of a draft report of thematic findings sent to each participant,

allowing them opportunity to add, modify or delete any information related to their involvement in the study, for any reason. Participants were asked to validate the ‘truth’ of the themes, according to their own perceptions and experiences of implementing TPGPs.

The report was duly revised following the suggestions of participating school staff members.

Ethical considerations

This study was governed by the ethical guidelines for educational research stipulated by the University of Alberta. All participants gave written informed consent for their interviews to be tape recorded, transcribed, and excerpts included in a report (see Appendix C). Strict confidentiality of participants’ identity has been maintained as much as possible, through the removal of real names and identifying characteristics from the final report. No deception was used and the researchers have endeavored to ensure that no harm has come to the participants as a result of their involvement in this project. All raw data (tapes, transcripts and notes) connected with this project are kept secure throughout its duration and will be destroyed after a period of five years unless participants give permission for their further use. Participants were given the right to withdraw from the study at any time for any purpose. No one chose to exercise this option.

Distribution of the report

Following receipt of the approval of this report by the Wescana school district, and their permission to circulate the report, the report will be made available to the general public, placed in the H.T. Coutts library at the Faculty of Education, and placed in the Barnett House library of the Alberta Teachers' Association.

Appendix B – Sample Letters Sent to Wescana Staff

Letter sent to district superintendent after telephone contact

Department of Educational Policy Studies

[Date]

[Name]

[School District]

[Address]

Dear _____:

I am writing to follow up our telephone conversation today discussing the possibility of my conducting research in _____ School in your district. This letter provides some information about the nature of the research project and the procedures.

The study is a pilot project entitled: “TEACHERS’ PROFESSIONAL GROWTH PLANS: RELATIONS BETWEEN SELF-ASSESSMENT, SOCIAL-CULTURAL COMMUNITY, and PROFESSIONALS’ LEARNING”.

The project explores, through staff dialogue in small groups and individual interviews, the knowledge in a professional community that is generated through the implementation of Teacher Professional Growth Plans (TPGP). The research objectives are as follows:

- (1) To identify the individual and implementational issues that affect different professionals’ approaches to and learning through goal setting and self-assessment;
- (2) To identify significant social and cultural dimensions of a teaching/learning community that may be linked in some relationship to professionals’ learning and self-assessment;
- (3) To develop and test a method of inquiry that will allow examination of the relations among these dimensions;
- (4) To determine the feasibility of using this method over an extended period in K-12 schools.

The findings of the research will be restricted to use in scholarly articles and presentations. A report will be made available to the staff.

Myself and a graduate student research assistant, working with the school principal or administrative designate and representative staff, hope to plan and deliver a workshop in the school designed to assist staff to complete the Teacher

Professional Growth Plan process for the school year 1999-2000. Part of the workshop will include small group discussion around issues and strategies of self-assessment related to the Teacher Professional Growth Plans. A follow-up discussion to the workshop will be held for interested teachers, and one 60-minute personal interview held with each teacher willing to be interviewed.

Participation of each individual staff member in this project is voluntary, and any participant will have the right to withdraw from the research at any time. All staff participants will be advised of the nature, purposes, and uses of the research. All interviews and small group discussions will be tape-recorded and transcribed. All data will be kept confidential and participants' names will be protected through the use of pseudonyms. All tapes and notes will be destroyed at the conclusion of the research.

If these terms are acceptable to you, please sign below, return one copy in the enclosed stamped envelope, and keep a copy for your records.

I understand the terms of this research project and find them acceptable.

Signed

Date

Thank you for your consideration of this request.

Sincerely,

Tara J. Fenwick
Principal Researcher

Letter sent to school principal after telephone contact

Department of Educational Policy Studies

[Date]

[Name]

[School District]

[Address]

Dear _____:

I am writing to follow up our telephone conversation today discussing the possibility of my conducting research in your school. This letter provides some information about the nature of the research project and the procedures.

The study is a pilot project entitled: "TEACHERS' PROFESSIONAL GROWTH PLANS: RELATIONS BETWEEN SELF-ASSESSMENT, SOCIAL-CULTURAL COMMUNITY, and PROFESSIONALS' LEARNING".

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- (1) To identify the individual and implementational issues that affect different professionals' approaches to and learning through goal setting and self-assessment;
- (2) To identify significant social and cultural dimensions of a teaching/learning community that may be linked in some relationship to professionals' learning and self-assessment;
- (3) To develop and test a method of inquiry that will allow examination of the relations among these dimensions;
- (4) To determine the feasibility of using this method over an extended period in K-12 schools.

Myself and a graduate student research assistant, working with the school principal or administrative designate and representative staff, propose to plan and deliver a workshop in the school designed to assist staff to complete the Teacher Professional Growth Plan process for the school year 1999-2000. This workshop will be planned with staff so that it addresses your school's development interests and goals as much as possible. Part of the workshop will include small group discussion around issues and strategies of self-assessment related to the Teacher Professional Growth Plans. A follow-up discussion to the workshop will be held

for interested teachers, and one 60-minute personal interview held with each teacher willing to be interviewed. We also hope to interview you or an administrative designate about your responses to the new Teacher Supervision policy, and your experiences with its implementation.

Participation of each individual staff member in this project is voluntary, and any participant will be have the right to withdraw from the research at any time. All staff participants will be advised of the nature, purposes, and uses of the research. All interviews and small group discussions will be tape-recorded and transcribed. All data will be kept confidential and participants' names will be protected through the use of pseudonyms. All tapes and notes will be destroyed at the conclusion of the research h.

The findings of the research will be restricted to use in scholarly articles and presentations. A report will be made available to the staff.

If these terms are acceptable to you, please sign below, return one copy in the enclosed stamped envelope, and keep a copy for your records.

I understand the terms of this research project and find them acceptable.

Signed

Date

Thank you for your consideration of this request.

Sincerely,

Tara J. Fenwick
Principal Researcher

Letter sent to school principal after interview

Department of Educational Policy Studies

[Date]

[Name]

[School District]

[Address]

Dear _____:

Thank you so much for meeting with Anne Smulders and I to discuss Teacher Professional Growth Plans. We appreciated the time you gave us to describe in detail the process of implementation in your school, the benefits and issues you've encountered, and the role and tasks of the administrative team in this process. We found that your comments shed a good deal of insight for us, and we certainly went away feeling very positive about the growth potential of teacher dialogue centered on these plans.

We will be contacting you later by telephone to set up individual meetings with the staff members you recommend as potential interviewees for our further study. If you like we can send a message by e-mail for you to forward to these staff members – whatever is most convenient for you.

Thank you again for all the rich information, and for allowing us access to your staff for this exploratory research.

Sincerely,

Tara Fenwick
Assistant Professor,
Department of Educational Policy Studies

Appendix C – Ethics Consent Form for Participants

I, _____, agree to participate in a research project exploring my experiences in the implementation of teacher professional growth plans.

I agree to be interviewed by Dr. Tara Fenwick and/or Anne Smulders, M.Ed. under the following conditions:

1. I have the right to withdraw from the project at any time for any reason. If I choose to do so, the information I provide will be returned to me and not used in the project.
2. I agree to a single interview of approximately 30- 45 minutes, that will be tape-recorded.
3. I understand that the interview will be transcribed and analyzed.
4. My identity will be kept confidential and a pseudonym used in the final research report. All identifying characteristics will be removed that link me to the report.
5. The researchers will endeavor to ensure that no harm will come to me through my participation in this project.

I agree to these conditions:

Signed _____

Date _____

Researcher

Signed _____

Date _____

For further information regarding the purpose and methods of this project, feel free to contact either of the following:

Dr. Tara J. Fenwick, University of Alberta or Anne Smulders, University of Alberta
 Telephone (780) 492-4879
 Email tara.fenwick@ualberta.ca

Appendix D – Bibliography of Resources Related to Teacher Supervision

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