Professional Planning and Preparation

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Abstract

The Charlotte Danielson Framework is an excellent approach for any organization to build a praxis for new and well-seasoned teachers. In Canada, the Canadian Constitution’s Section 93, gives each region jurisdiction over their own education system which has brought inconsistencies in regards to teacher evaluations and professional development mechanisms. Unlike the No Child Left Behind policy implemented in the United States, each province across Canada have developed their own legislation to accommodate teacher standards and assessments. Added to that political complexity, First Nations schools across the country fall under federal jurisdictions which has no current federal legislation to unify educational endeavors. However, the Danielson Framework could facilitate positive change for improving student outcomes across all jurisdictions.

**Introduction**

First Nations people in Canada can relate to the medicine wheel concept that contain four quadrants illustrating various meanings that look at the four seasons, the four cardinal directions and four spiritual beliefs. In comparison, to balance one’s life using the medicine wheel concept is to balance the physical, mental, emotional and spiritual well-being. The framework for teaching presented by Charlotte Danielson, demonstrates the balance of the four quadrants to be an effective teacher- Planning and Preparing, The Classroom Environment, Instruction and Professional Development.

This paper will present a professional development model reflective of the first domain called planning and preparation. Danielson (2007) adds that;

“Teachers who excel in domain one design instruction that reflects an understanding of the disciplines they teach-the important concepts and principles within that content, and how the different elements relate to one another to those in other disciplines. They understand their students-their backgrounds, interests, and skills. Their design is coherent in its approach to topics, include sound assessments methods, and is appropriate to the range of students in the class,” (p. 27).

Domain one also has six components; demonstrating knowledge of content and pedagogy, demonstrate knowledge of students, setting instructional outcomes, designing coherent instruction, demonstrate knowledge of resources and designing student assessments. This paper will present a professional development model on the first domain of Danielson’s Framework by examining the design and delivery, timelines, format, sequence and provide two tangible evidence samples for planning and preparation.

**Design and Delivery**

In today’s educational landscape, there is a lot of pressure to prepare students for the global economy as jobs and industry demand well-educated and independent thinkers. As Danielson (2007) states, “Teachers are under enormous external pressure, as never before, to prepare their students for productive lives in the knowledge economy and success in externally mandated assessments,” (p. 5). As a consequence, developing a professional development model is responding to the social, and economic and political pressures that may hinder student academic outcomes. For that reason, domain one is a key element to any professional development model and should be strategic in the implementation phase. Since the first phase of the domain is about planning and preparation, teachers must reflect their planning to accommodate 21st-century learning that centers on prior student experiences and understandings.

Since the framework for teaching reflects a constructivist approach to learning, the design of a professional development model must reflect this. As Danielson (2007) writes;

“…educators must be selective; they must determine which topics and concepts and the curriculum are critical for students to understand, which ones warrant the time needed to develop understanding. But although the time required for instruction in an inquiry manner is longer than in a formal lecture, student learning tends to be more permanent,” (p. 17).

This understanding of constructivist learning must be balanced with rote memorization as they both have validity in learning key understandings which should be emphasized with new teachers.

Despite political pressure to transform educational institutions, domain one remains consistent for all teachers across any jurisdiction. Danielson (2007) reflects, “…a deep knowledge of the content itself and designing instruction that is appropriate to the diverse learners in one’s charge,” (p. 43), is a main emphasis for the demonstration of content and pedagogy component. Danielson (2009) adds, “Teachers who understand their subjects know which questions sit on the fringes of what is known and which are likely to interest students, yield greater understanding, or represent conceptual dead ends,” (p. 44). As a consequence, the professional development model must remain receptive to growing trends and pedagogical practices.

The design and delivery of a professional development model for The Danielson Framework responds to educational organizations that are in a state of limbo. Education practitioners who lead in the design of the professional development model take into account the current academic needs of the students. As Hall and Hord (2011) write, “…if you always do what you have always done, you will continue to get what you always have gotten,” (p. 10). As a response to that, new and veteran teachers can benefit from a domain one-oriented professional development model as an opportunity to respond with the adoption of current practice and technological approaches in planning and preparing. For instance, keeping current with the first domain’s component demonstrating knowledge of resources, Danielson (2007) explains;

“Content must be presented so that it respects the nuances of a discipline. When engaging students in a discussion, teachers should demonstrate that they understand the complexities and patterns of the content to be learned and must be able to challenge students to recognize the relationships between what the y know and important questions yet to be explored. Knowledgeable teachers know which concepts are central to a discipline and which are peripheral,” (p. 44).

There is an old adage that a Native Studies professor once shared with his class, “The way you think of the environment, depends upon the environment in which you do your thinking.” Professional development models must prompt teachers to accommodate to the local context. For instance, according to Hall and Hord’s (2011) function six; “One is the physical, or non-organic, aspects of an organization: schedules, it’s building facilities, policies, and the like. The second component is the people element: the beliefs and values held by the members and the norms that guide their behavior, attitudes, and so one,” (p. 151). In other words, the implementers for change in the professional development model processes must be aware that if a school is large then the likely of teachers working in isolation are higher. However, if the school is small then as Hall and Hord (2011) explain;

“will find it much easier to come together to interact and build trust then would’ve much larger faculty spread over multiple buildings. A supportive context decreases the isolation of the stuff, provides for the continuing increase of its capabilities, nurtures positive relationships among all the staff, students, and parents and community members, and urges the unceasing quest for increased effectiveness so that students benefit,” (p. 151).

New teachers will need to contextualize their pedagogical approaches to the environment where they will be instructing, but be cognizant of the various ethical standards that may not be codified.

Professional development models must be responsive to new inductees and veteran teachers in the orchestration of their planning and preparation domains. As Danielson (2007) elaborates;

“A knowledgeable teacher recognizes that many students make mistakes in regrouping, and the teacher knows how to anticipate or correct the situation…Teachers must keep appraised of developments in the field and in the accepted best methods of engaging students with it. And if teachers’ responsibilities for instruction change, they have an even greater need to become thoroughly acquainted with their new field or subfield,” (45).

Teachers who contextualize their planning and preparation by adapting the various components of the Danielson framework to teaching will allow for improved understandings of key concepts in the content.

**Timelines**

In Canada, educational systems have been tasked to ‘indigenize’ education practices, institutions and resources. Most recently, a document called the Truth and Reconciliation was a book containing 94 recommendations for the federal government to improve its relationship with First Nations peoples. For example, The Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) have made 94 recommendations for the federal government as a response to the legacy of the Indian Residential Schools. The TRC (2015) explains;

“(i) Improving education attainment levels and success rates, (ii) Developing culturally appropriate curricula, (iii) Protecting the right to Aboriginal languages, (iv) including the teaching of Aboriginal languages as credit courses, (v) Enabling parental and community responsibility, control, and accountability, similar to what parents enjoy in public school systems. (vi) Enabling parents to fully participate in the education of their children,”(p. 5).

Therefore, the timing of motivation for any new professional development programs reflective of indigenous communities, languages and school improvement planning could not be any better.

To begin a professional development model, it would be timely to have the First Nations Education Organization (FNEO) host with a one-week orientation during the summer at a designated cultural site. This one-week orientation would allow for new recruits to gather information on student retention results, school culture and community norms to be shared by current senior staff members, tribal council education specialists, parent-committee members and Elders representing each community. Through the one-week orientation, data sharing will be reviewed using the different assessments (i.e.-demographic information, formative, summative, etc). The emphasis of the program will be locally developed and driven to assist new staff in preparation for understanding the students, exposure to school-wide academic goals, resources and instructional successes.

This cultural connection to the local customs and ethical standards in northern and remote communities of Saskatchewan will facilitate for improved teacher preparedness. As Hall and Hord (2007) explains, “many change efforts fail because the participants do not share mental images or pictures of what classroom and or school practice will look like when an identify change is implemented to a high-quality,” (p. 148). This orientation will provide for First Nations communities and beginning teachers to better plan and prepare in all aspects of domain one of the Danielson Framework.

One tangible example is demonstrated by the Anishinabe of northern Ontario who have made a project to develop innovative approaches to meet the needs of First Nation, Métis and Inuit students living in large urban centre called the Special Assignment Teachers;

* “supporting professional development
* contacting parents and communicating regularly with school social workers, school guidance counselors and boarding home parents to discuss student achievement and social issues
* building public confidence and collaboration with First Nation educators to ease transitions for First Nation students
* encouraging students to attend classes daily and helping individual students with assignments
* linking students with social workers or guidance counselors,” (p. 1).

Although there are a multitude of activities that community members would be responsible for to help novice teachers contextualize their planning and preparation, the essential aspect of the one-week camp is to create that collegiality and open dialogue between staff, community and students.

**Format and Sequence**

The format and sequence of the Professional Development Model must begin at the very beginning of the engagement process. First example, the novice teachers will be able to understand the educational organization’s adherence to a structured framework through the interview and recruitment stage. Interview questions can be geared towards determining where teachers are at with the Danielson framework and to also project to future applicants that the organization is using with the framework domains. As Danielson (2009) expands, “The Framework for Teaching offers guidance for educators in examining candidates' practice. Interview questions can explore a teacher's skill in any of the 22 components…offers evidence of a teacher's skill in knowledge of content and pedagogy, a component in the planning and preparation domain,” (p. 1).

As mentioned earlier, the orientation camp will be the next phase of the professional development model. This will be the forum for local Elders, senior teachers, assessors, specialists to share information that will allow for better planning and preparation for the new teacher. Experienced teachers who possess coaching and assessor certificates approved by the school organization will provide opportunities to discuss mentorship and teacher evaluation mechanisms for the new teacher. The orientation process will also allow for new teachers to meet their teacher-mentor that possess the mentorship qualifications and prescribed by the board. The one-week orientation will allow for the sharing of best teaching practices, assessment results and school-wide goals to help the new recruits in preparing and developing around the Danielson Framework.

During the course of the year, the mentorship initiative will be the responsibility of the school to pair and monitor new teachers with the veteran coaches. Periodic professional learning communities will be focused on a weekly basis between general educators and high school disciplinary-oriented educators. Having a mentorship program within the school as Danielson (2009) explains;

“Mentors bring a nonjudgmental point of view to these discussions, and novice teachers are able to reflect honestly, without fear of reprisal. Under the guidance of the mentor, a beginning teacher can explore, for example, the thinking behind the myriad decisions he or she made in designing the lesson and consider what consequences might result from making different decisions,” (p. 1).

These ‘in-house’ experts will be pivotal in the orchestration of professional development models as they will guide beginning practitioners in developing the first domain for planning and preparation.

Furthermore, the format for the Danielson framework will be accommodated by the continuous professional growth plans that new and senior teachers must develop for administration at the beginning of each school year. For instance, the path to improved professional development self-assessment and growth plans according to Danielson (2009), “…reading a book or an article, attending a workshop, observing a teacher in the school who is experienced in cooperative learning, asking a colleague to observe and provide feedback on her efforts, and so on” (p. 1). These professional growth plans must reflect the school-wide goals and will be part of the evaluation process reflective of Domain 1 and 4 where professional responsibilities will accommodate growing and developing professionally component.

Finally, to ensure that novice teachers are teaching effectively, monthly assessment results will be reviewed between the administration, the mentor coach and the teacher. For instance, formative and diagnostic assessments agreed upon between the school and First Nations Education Organization will guide the new teacher. A data analysis team which are made up of in-house teachers, will facilitate the interpretation and co-development plan for the new teacher. In the meantime, principals will be responsible as Hall and Hord (2007) refer to as conducting ‘one-legged’ interventions and ten-minute in-class impromptu visits with other senior teachers throughout the year. The feedback of these short visits will be to offer support and determine if the teacher is needing support on any of the four domains.

Another tangible example would be when a new administrator, the new principal of one of the First Nations schools wanted to apply the SMART Goals in the K-12 school he was served.He began the process by creating school-wide goals with parents, elders and teachers. Afterwards, he sat with each division and helped orchestrate division-wide SMART goals to hone in on the specific goals and strategies. After each quarter, he had teachers assess and measure their division goals through diagnostic and formative assessment tools to measure growth and to adjust their strategies.

Unfortunately, the teachers who demonstrated marginal growth were resistant to the change process and showed little effort in their approach. It became evident when asked if they had tried any of the suggested new programs recommended at the beginning of the school year and some were simply not interested. That lack of commitment to the new initiative demonstrated to him as a new administrator that according to Hall and Hord (2011), those educators simply felt comfortable with the way things were done in their own classrooms. Furthermore, they could not see the new SMART-goal strategy as having any impact on student learning and consequently failed to cross the ‘implementation bridge’ where teachers fail to transition from what they know to see the possible outcome of a new program. Consequently, as time went on, some teachers began to evidence on the recommended strategies and inevitably got involved with the change process.

In retrospect, as an administrator implementing change to a First Nations school, he could improve areas he could have developed to improve the implementation bridge. For instance, understanding that some would see change as a very painful process in their teaching experience. He may know that the teacher mentorship through the implementation stage on an informal basis would have facilitated the process. For example, according to Hall and Hord (2011) the ‘one-legged’ intervention strategy would have benefited the implementation process by simply meeting staff in the hallway and while leaning against the wall, promoting conversations on the new change. This informal meeting would be no more than ten minutes and would have prompted an internal inquiry on each staff member’s professional development.

A template for education evaluation from the principal, such as the Danielson Framework would have provided better direction for the assessment of teachers. As Danielson (2011) explains;

“So I thought about what it would take to do teacher evaluation well. And I discovered that doing it well means respecting what we know about teacher learning, which has to do with self-assessment, reflection on practice, and professional conversation. And when you do those things, you have enormous growth…[because] people appreciate the opportunities to talk in-depth about the challenges of practice, and it becomes a vehicle for professional learning instead of just a ritual you go through,” (p. 1).

Although the principal was employing various aspects of the change process, he did not have a specific template to ‘piggy-back” off of to build capacity of teachers in the classroom. The Danielson Framework would have aligned all four domains connecting the SMART Goals developed at the beginning of the year.

Conclusion

Although the professional development model will be a response to the indigenization movement within First Nations education institutions, the emphasis of a well-developed professional development plan must be conducive to student improvement. There will need to be an understanding that this change to induction policies need time and resources to accommodate effective approaches to implementing the four domains of the Danielson framework. The fear is when administrators use draconian policies to get compliance. The professional growth plan would be compromised if any of the initiatives are seen as an event, and not a process. As Hall and Hord (2011) explain;

“In the implementation bridge scenario, “in order for change to be successful, and implementation bridge is necessary. Each member of the organization has to move across the implementation bridge. As they learn to change their practices, there can be changes in outcomes. Without an implementation Bridge, there is little reason to expect a positive change in outcomes. Instead, they’re likely to be casualties as attempts to make that giant leap fail. Individuals and whole organizations may fall into the chasm,” (p.10).

Therefore, the professional development model will most likely reflect a 2-3 year, process where strategies can be determined, measurement and repositioning the professional development model can occur.

In closing, the Danielson framework provides a medicine wheel concept for teachers that want to be effective teachers. Each domain within the model will have components that beginning and senior teachers can refer to whether they are just beginning or want to strengthen their craft. As Danielson, (2009) explains;

The framework may be used for many purposes, but its full value is realized as the foundation for professional conversations among practitioners as they seek to enhance their skill in the complex task of teaching. The Framework may be used as the foundation of a school or district’s mentoring, coaching, professional development, and teacher evaluation processes, thus linking all those activities together and helping teachers become more thoughtful practitioners,” (p. 1).

Although there will be variations to the model depending in which First Nations you go to, the key is for teachers to improve upon each quadrant of the Danielson Framework so that educators will be balanced in their approach to student improvement.

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