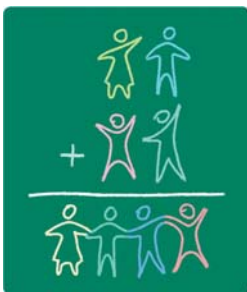


A YEAR OF PROFESSIONAL SUPPORT FOR EARLY CAREER TEACHERS

2008/09 Program Evaluation

Preliminary Report (final report due May 15th)

This report provides preliminary information about the activities and outcomes in 2008/09 for the purposes of evaluating the pilot program, “Year of Professional Support” for early career teachers. This program is being piloted by the Provincial Intermediate Teachers Association (PITA) through funding made available by the BCTF and the Ministry of Education.



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1.0 Program Description

Why YPS?

The Year of Professional Support Program (YPS) was initiated by Ray Myrtle, current president of the Provincial Intermediate Teacher's Association (PITA). Myrtle began to formulate ideas for the YPS program after witnessing the exhaustion and deflation of several competent, beginning teachers at his school. While working to aid these beginning teachers, he identified workload as a primary source of their stress and anxiety. As middle school teachers must prepare and teach several different subject areas, the task of planning for one's first teaching assignment can be daunting. Myrtle began to wonder why beginning teachers were working from scratch and developing their own best practices through difficult trial-and-error practices when experienced teachers have lessons, units, and teaching techniques that have been tested and refined over a number of years. In addition to the resources of experienced teachers, there are also a number of beginning teachers teaching in the same subject areas across the province. Myrtle posited that a greater degree of resource sharing between and among these groups would not only alleviate some of the pressure placed upon beginning teachers, but would also reduce the amount of trial-and-error time spent in developing resources and teaching strategies on the part of beginning teachers.

Related Research

Teacher effectiveness has long been recognized as one of the most significant predictors of student success (Brewster & Railsback, 2001; Brill & McCartney, 2008; Darling-Hammond, 2000). However, beginning teachers are often denied the kinds of support required to enable them to survive the profession or grow into competent professional educators. Research has shown that 'sink-or-swim' models of teacher induction are a significant cause of teacher attrition, a phenomenon that places many burdens on the education system (Anhorn, 2008; Darling-Hammond, 2003). The costs of teacher attrition include a disconnect between research and practice (McLeskey & Billingsley, 2008); a strained working environment and school community (Brill & McCartney, 2008); and high monetary costs to schools and school districts (Hahs-Vaughn & Scherff, 2008). 'Sink-or-swim' induction may also reduce the capacity beginning teachers have for growth, causing them to cling to methods of teaching that allow them to survive the profession but do not represent best practice (Feiman-Nemser, 2001 & 2003; Ingersoll, 2002). Beginning teachers need opportunities to learn expected outcomes for their grade level and they need resources that will meet those outcomes (Feiman-Nemser, 2001). The opportunity to collaborate with veteran teachers to explore some of these issues is a strong contributing factor to the successful induction of beginning teachers (Andrews, Gilbert, & Martin, 2006; Smith & Ingersoll, 2004; Cherian, 2007).

Goals of Program and Target Audience

The YPS program's immediate goal is to provide targeted curriculum support for beginning teachers. YPS workshops focus on single subject areas to ensure that beginning teachers obtain support specific to their current teaching assignment. Workshops are held throughout the year to provide beginning teachers with the right support at the time it is needed. Intermediate and long-term goals of the YPS program include the facilitation of in-person/online communities that will connect teachers with similar teaching assignments from across the province. Veteran teachers participating in the YPS program currently make themselves available for email queries and participate in an online wiki community. Program organizers are also hoping to reach out to more remote areas by webcasting their workshops. The target audience of this program is teachers within their first four years of a temporary or continuous contract. However, the program has generated interest among teacher candidates, teachers on call, and more experienced teachers as well.

Program Timeline

The 2008/2009 school year is the pilot year of the YPS program. Workshops for beginning teachers and the online wiki community have been piloted this year. During the 2009/2010 school year, program organizers hope to develop the online community further and to include more school districts in their workshops through the use of webcasts. Additional workshops aimed at beginning teachers in their second year will also be offered. Over the next four years, program organizers hope to have developed workshops capable of supporting beginning teachers through their first four years of teaching and to provide teachers across the province with access to the online community.

Program Scope

The YPS program is organized provincially and is implemented at the district level. The program has focused on planning and curriculum support because program organizers felt that this kind of support would be effective from the district/provincial level. Schools across British Columbia follow the same curriculum and if these teachers are connected through an online community they can effectively offer curriculum support to each other. Program organizers recognize that this is only one part of an effective beginning teacher support program, and also recognize that some types of support are more effective if offered from the school or district levels.

Program Locations & Leaders

During the 2008/2009 YPS pilot year, workshops were offered in Abbotsford, Burnaby, Kelowna, and Richmond. During the 2009/2010 school year workshop locations will be expanded to include Abbotsford, Burnaby, Kamloops, Kelowna, Maple Ridge, Surrey,

and Prince George via webcasts. It is possible that workshops will be webcast in more areas as information about the YPS program travels. Currently there are more than twelve veteran teachers facilitating these workshops across the province, many of whom are PITA members.

1.1 Program Activities

Start-Up Your Classroom Successfully

YPS offers two kinds of *Start-Up* workshops; the *Start-Up Your Class Successfully* and the *Start-Up Your Program Successfully*. The *Start-Up Your Class Successfully* workshop is a full-day workshop that provides beginning teachers with the tools they need to prepare for a successful first week of school. The workshop provides its attendees with a booklet created by Ray Myrtle in collaboration with other veteran teachers and with the feedback of beginning teachers. The booklet includes a first week start-up plan that is complete with checklists, resources, and blackline masters. Both the book and the workshops impress upon new teachers the idea that they do not have to create their lessons from scratch, nor do they have to start-up every subject in the first week. The lesson plans provided highlight the need to create and teach the routines of the classroom, for informal assessment of student levels and needs, and highlight the importance of creating a learning community. YPS offers the *Start-Up Your Class Successfully* workshops in August, during the week prior to the beginning of the school year.

The *Start-Up Your Program Successfully* workshops are half-day workshops that provide beginning teachers with resources and support they can use to start-up individual subject programs in their classrooms. Offered in August and early September, the goal of these workshops is to support beginning teachers in planning that will enable them to teach a single subject area until the Professional Development day in October. These workshops will cover the following subject areas in the 2009/2010 school year: Language Arts, Reading, Socials, Science, Physical Education, French, and Fine Arts.

Build-Up Your Program Successfully

The *Build-Up Your Program Successfully* workshops are half-day sessions that focus on supporting teachers in their planning of single-subject areas. During the 2009/2010 school year, YPS will offer Build-Up workshops in the following subject areas: Language Arts, Reading, Writing, Socials, Science, Math, Physical Education, French, and Fine Arts. As in the *Start-Up* workshops, beginning teachers will be offered the resources and support required to plan for their current classes. The goal of the *Build-Up* workshops is to offer beginning teachers enough material to implement a 4-8 week unit plan in a given subject area. The *Build-Up* workshops are offered in August, September, October, November, January, February, March, and April. When possible, the workshops coincide with district or provincial Professional Development days, otherwise they are held on Saturdays.

Online Community

The YPS online community is comprised of two elements: direct email support and a wiki community. Currently, veteran teachers facilitating YPS workshops make themselves available to workshop attendees for continued support via email. Many of these veteran teachers have also submitted resources to the YPS wiki, which is currently hosted on the wikispaces website at <<http://pita-earlycareer.wikispaces.com/>>. Program organizers hope that the wiki will encourage those with similar teaching loads to form online communities, communities in which members can ask each other questions, and share and co-develop resources.

2.0 2008/09 YPS Pilot Project Evaluation

Evaluation Objectives

The results of the “Year of Professional Support” (YPS) evaluation, conducted over the latter part of the pilot year, will guide discussion on the future directions of this multifaceted professional support program. The overall goal of this evaluation is to examine the activities and outcomes of the YPS program, identify its successes, and to identify areas for growth in order to strengthen the services offered and the methods of their delivery.

The focus of the YPS evaluation has three primary objectives:

- evaluation and monitoring of the workshop-related activities and outcomes;
- evaluation and monitoring of the nature of the professional supports and partnerships, networks, follow-ups and outcomes; and
- evaluation of the impact of the dissemination processes and outcomes.

Evaluation and monitoring of the workshop-related activities and outcomes includes participant reactions to the workshop sessions, perceived changes in confidence and abilities as a result of participating in these workshops, and feedback to inform future programming.

In order to evaluate and monitor the nature of the professional supports, partnerships and networks, we have developed a follow-up telephone interview guide, which will provide updates on the activities and outcomes of the workshops and the contribution of these supports to the overall YPS program.

The third key component of the evaluation involves the examination of the dissemination processes and outcomes of the YPS program. These include: a) the PITA website, b) advertising for workshops, c) online forum/wiki, and d) follow-up processes for early career teachers.

3.0 Preliminary Findings

Follow-up surveys were administered to participants involved in both types of workshop programs offered through the YPS. The preliminary results from the analyses are identified in this section.

The closed-ended survey responses were analysed using a software program, SPSS 14.0. The comments were also analysed by researchers for recurring themes and patterns in the group overall, and then according to the teaching status the participants currently held: teacher candidate, teacher on call, or classroom teacher. Researchers sought similarities and differences between these groups in order to reaffirm general trends in the whole group analysis.

To date there have been 124 collected surveys analysed from a variety of workshops offered to help early career teachers start-up their classrooms successfully and build-up their programs. The majority of participants identified themselves as teacher on call, in their second year, teaching Grades 4 to 7, working full-time, and female (see Table 1).

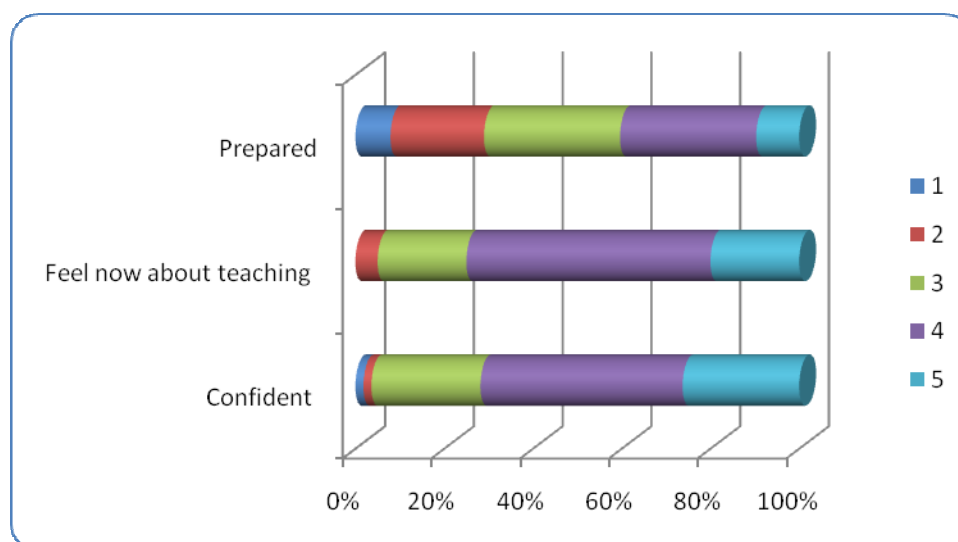
Table 1. Demographic Information

<u>Demographics</u>	<u>Frequency</u>	<u>Percentage</u>
Teacher Status		
Teacher On Call	42	33.87
Teacher Candidate	37	29.84
Classroom Teacher	31	25.00
Unidentified	14	11.29
Years of Teaching		
First Year	22	17.74
Second Year	47	37.90
3 Years or more	22	17.74
Unidentified	33	26.61
Grade		
Grades K-3	25	19.69
Grades 4-7	56	44.09
Grades 8-12	10	7.87
Elementary	3	2.36
Unidentified	33	25.98
Full-time/Part-time Status		
Full-time	13	19.7
Part-time	6	9.1
Unidentified	47	71.2
Gender		
Female	43	65.2
Male	2	3.0
Unidentified	21	31.8

All the *Build-Up* workshop participants were asked to rate their sessions on a scale from 1 to 5, where “1” was the lowest rating and “5” the highest. Overall, of the participants who responded to this question (n=54), the majority gave the workshops the highest rating of “5” (n=43 or 79.6%), and the remaining participants gave the second highest rating of “4” (n=11 or 20.4%).

Using the same scale from 1 to 5, participants were asked to identify how well prepared they felt about teaching their workshop topic prior to the workshop, and then how they felt about teaching the topic after the workshop, as well as how confident they felt about teaching the topic (see Figure 1 below). On average, most participants indicated that they would place themselves in the middle of the scale in terms of feeling prepared prior to the workshop (average 3.15), and after taking the workshop the average increased to 3.90 in terms of how they felt now about teaching, and an average of 3.93 in terms of their confidence level in teaching after taking the workshop.

Figure 1. How Participants Feel About Teaching the Topic



When asked what words would best describe how well prepared participants' thought or felt they were about teaching after taking the workshop, the top five words reported were, 1) excited, 2) confident, 3) nervous, 4) good ideas/resources, and 5) motivated/inspired.

Participants were also asked to comment on the degree to which they felt prepared for teaching in general. Comments from the three groups (teacher candidates, teachers on call, and classroom teachers), reflected similarities that varied by degree. The majority of the comments across all groups reflected simultaneous excitement and nervousness about teaching. For some of the teacher candidates, this nervousness was alleviated by the fact that their education program was not complete: “I still have one more year left of my practicum; therefore I feel I will gain more confidence and knowledge.” Many of the

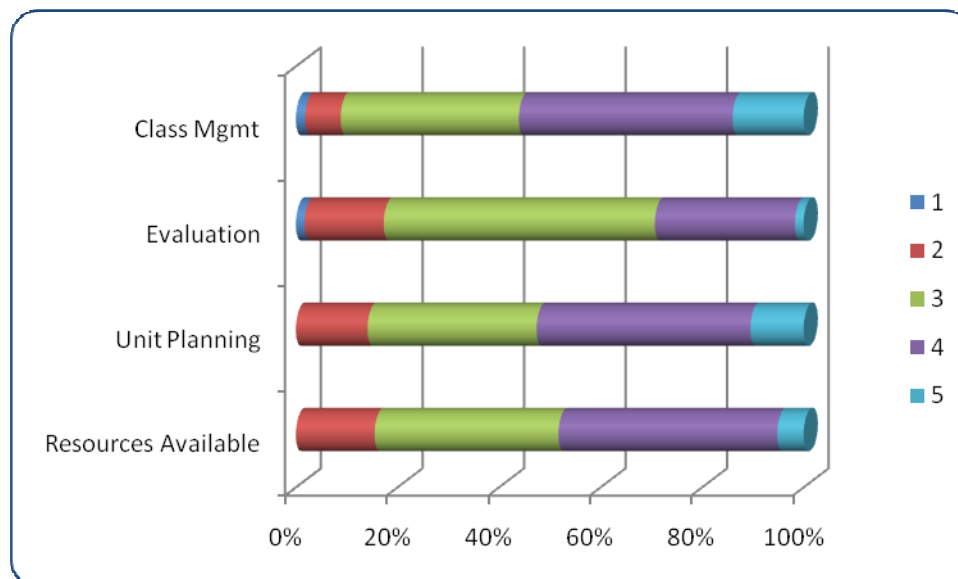
comments from the teachers on call and the classroom teachers highlight anxiety about resources and general preparedness: “We are asked to reinvent the wheel in teacher education, we need to know where to find the resources so we can focus on learning how to teach” (teacher candidate); “I am just trying to gather lots of resources so I am prepared” (teacher on call); “I would be more prepared if I had more resources available to me” (classroom teacher); “After teaching last year I am excited to return but feeling like I am only half prepared” (classroom teacher). The last statement is reflective of comments made from many classroom teachers that indicate the need for continued support in their second or third years. Feeling prepared in terms of resources is a source of confidence for participants: “I feel quite confident in my teaching ability; it really helps to be planned and prepared” (classroom teacher). Comments also reflected general anxiety about the first week of school: “I’m specifically afraid that my efforts will be in vain, of failure, and that my expectations won’t get across to the students and they won’t like the opening activities I choose” (teacher on call). All participants demonstrated an appreciation of the workshops in terms of provided resources: “I am leaving feeling confident and excited about the coming school year” (classroom teacher); “I feel as though I have good access to information and support” (teacher on call).

Participants were also asked to comment on priorities they would like to see the YPS program focus on. In these sections, the issue of resources was again a dominant theme. The next priority for all three groups was assessment: “I have trouble coming up with my own forms of evaluation” (teacher on call); “I don’t feel comfortable with assessment and evaluation yet, hopefully we will have more training in that” (teacher candidate). Many teachers also identified classroom management as a priority: “Classroom management, how to enforce and keep the class following them” (classroom teacher); “I am unsure about how I want to structure class management with what may be a more challenging class” (classroom teacher). The latter comment reflects an additional priority for the participants, that of differentiated instruction: “How do you teach a split class?” (classroom teacher); “Teaching special needs, individualized program plans, assessment, strategies” (teacher on call). General planning instruction, particularly unit planning, was also identified as a need for most participants. Many comments focused on all of the above: “Resources – units online – ready and in everything, time management, coaching, planning assessing, tracking, classroom management, behaviour” (classroom teacher).

Participants involved in the *Start-Up Your Classroom Successfully* sessions were asked to identify the subject areas they felt most and least prepared to teach. The majority of participants felt they were most prepared for teaching Math, Social Studies, Sciences and language arts. The most common subject areas participants felt least prepared to teach were French and Math.

These participants were also asked to rate on a scale of 1 (lowest) to 5 (highest) how prepared they thought they were for the different aspects of teaching such as classroom management, evaluation, unit planning and knowledge of available resources. Figure 2 indicates their ratings on each of these class aspects.

Figure 2. Evaluation on Aspects of Teaching

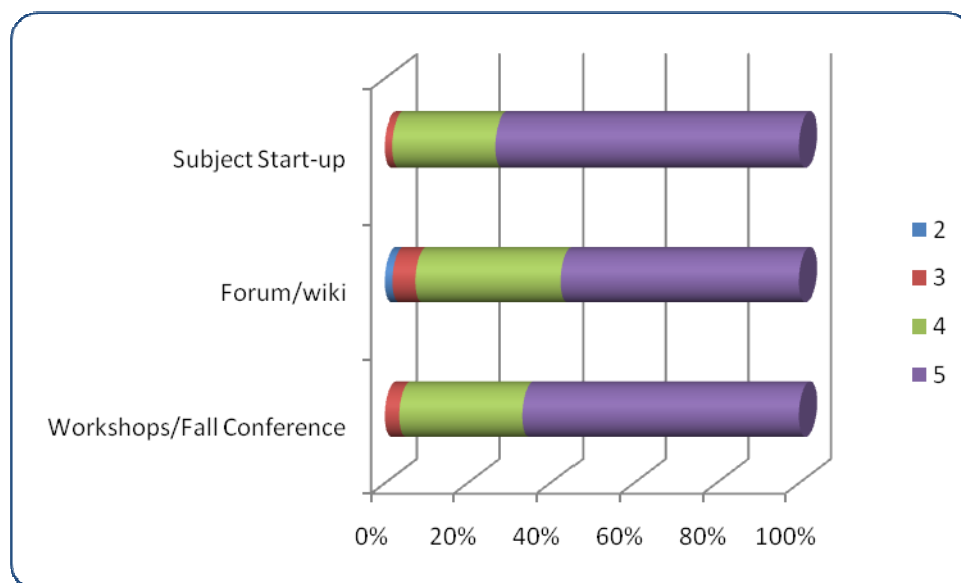


Participants involved in the *Build-Up Your Program Successfully* workshops were asked to evaluate components of the YPS program such as, the workshops/fall conference, forum/wiki, and subject start-up sessions. A large percentage of participants thought the YPS program would be very useful (63.6% of participants rated it a “5” and 25.8% rated it a “4”). When asked what words they would use to describe the YPS program, the most common words suggested were, 1) informative, 2) practical, 3) useful and 4) resourceful.

When asked to comment on the potential usefulness of the YPS program, many participants responded with comments related directly to the workshop they were attending. However, some preliminary insights can be gained from those participants who did comment directly on the potential of the YPS program. Most commonly, this type of support program was identified as a general and immediate need: “There isn't a ton of cohesive support for early career teachers other than this. Last year was crazy difficult and I think it could have been made easier with some of this support” (classroom teacher); “I think this is a wonderful program and we need more like it” (teacher in an unidentified position). Additionally, there were several comments on the practical nature of the program: “I am excited about this program because it gives you very practical support and ideas for your classroom” (classroom teacher); “These kinds of workshops could be very practical and useful for us student teachers” (teacher candidate).

These participants were also asked to rate the usefulness of various components of the YPS program, such as the workshops/fall conference, the forum/wiki, and the subject *Start-Up* workshops. Overall the majority of participants rated each component very positively (see Figure 3).

Figure 3. Evaluation of Components of the YPS Program



All participants were also provided an opportunity to offer comments or suggestions that would help guide the future of the program. Positive comments were again made in reference to the practical and resource-based nature of the workshops. The majority of suggestions in this section were focused on advertising, workshop scheduling, and the online community. A few participants commented on the fact that the workshops had not been advertised to them directly: “Advertise through flyers because I wouldn't have known about this if it wasn't for my friend” (classroom teacher). The comments on workshop scheduling were mainly in support of the Saturday sessions: “I personally like that the workshops are on the weekend, otherwise I would not be able to attend” (classroom teacher). The comments on the online community were mixed. Having access to resources was viewed positively: “it would be great to have all the workshops on the wiki” (classroom teacher); “I really believe that the wiki would be useful and could aid many early career teachers” (teacher on call); “If the wiki is used by many it will be very useful” (teacher candidate). However, participants had some reservations about the online community as well: “I think the forum could potentially be a valuable source but I worry that the format may result in a convoluted and repetitive source of information. Some serious thought will have to be placed in the organization” (teacher on call); “The website is awkward – not set up to invite exploration and spend time on/in it” (classroom teacher).

Participants were also asked to comment on the ways in which they would be willing to participate in the online community. Teacher candidates demonstrated a great deal of enthusiasm about both posting resources and searching for resources on the wiki. The teacher on call group showed a more modest interest in participating, and the classroom teacher group did not respond at all to this question.

Four main barriers to participation in the YPS program were identified by participants: time, scheduling, distance, and adversing. Time was by far the most pressing concern: “So much to do already! Teachers are feeling overwhelmed with the new expectations! Not sure how to overcome these barriers!” (teacher on call). Comments on scheduling reinforced the preference of participants to have weekend workshops. Many participants who mentioned distance as a barrier also mentioned that it was difficult to travel to Kelowna for the PITA conference this year where many of the YPS sessions were held, and some mentioned that “webcasts would be helpful” (classroom teacher). The final concern was that of staying informed about YPS workshops: “I didn’t get access to the info until a few days ago” (teacher candidate); “We really have no idea when to look for information on workshops” (teacher candidate).

At the end of the survey, participants involved in the *Build-Up Your Program Successfully* workshops were asked overall how confident they felt about teaching. Most participants identified their confidence level at a “4” (n=26 or 48.1%), while the remaining large minority of participants were split between a “5” or “3” (24.1% and 22.2%, respectively). Their results were analysed by teacher status (classroom teacher, teacher candidate or teacher on call). On average, the teacher candidates indicated the least amount of confidence (average rating of 3.52), followed by the teachers on call (average rating of 4.07), while the classroom teachers indicated the most amount of confidence (average rating of 4.20 SD .632).

4.0 Evaluation – Next Steps

This report presents preliminary information on activities and outcomes from survey findings collected to evaluate the YPS program. Overall, the results of the surveys are very positive, and indicate broad interest in this multifaceted professional support program. There is evidence that the YPS program is reaching its intended audience of beginning teachers, and there is also much demand from teachers on call and teacher candidates.

These preliminary results also indicate several areas where further inquiry is warranted. Preliminary surveys did not elicit information regarding whether or not participants who attended a YPS workshop continued to participate in the YPS program. The continued participation of workshop participants would imply that the program is meeting the needs of beginning teachers. If participants did not continue to participate in the program,

investigation into reasons why (poor advertising, undesirable location, etc.) would give the YPS program clear areas for growth. Further investigation is also needed into the efficacy of the online community. There is currently no information regarding whether or not any participants made use of the email assistance offered by YPS workshop leaders, nor is there any direct evidence to support whether or not this is an effective support strategy. Preliminary findings also indicate a great degree of interest on the part of teacher candidates in participating in the wiki community, but no interest from the classroom teachers. Does this represent a shift in the perceived benefits of an online community or does it perhaps represent a shift in time constraints? Again, more investigation is needed.

Our goal in the next phase of the evaluation of the YPS program is to identify further, through qualitative and quantitative means, the degree of the program's success by:

- analysing additional participant feedback on workshop-related activities;
- analysing feedback from beginning teachers on their reactions to the YPS program plan for the 2009/2010 year;
- reviewing feedback from participants to gauge satisfaction with the impact of the dissemination processes and outcomes; and
- conducting one-on-one interviews with workshop participants to evaluate the nature of professional supports, partnerships, and workshop follow-ups.

The one-on-one follow up interviews will also allow for some analysis of the enduring efficacy of the program's support strategies.

Additional research goals also include identifying the impact of network activities and partnerships on program effectiveness, the motivating factors for program participation, the role of a sense of community in the program's operation and initial success, and the expandability of the YPS program to provide support to early career teachers in their first four years of teaching.

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