



Helping Teachers Become World-Class Educators

The Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario (ETFO) empowers elementary teachers with accessible online learning for professional development

Additional qualifications enable teachers to refine their classroom and career skills, but not everybody can commit the time or funds required to attend face-to-face training, especially if they work full time or have children to support. That's why ETFO worked with D2L to develop online professional learning options to best suit their needs and provide accessible professional learning at an accessible cost.

Company

The Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario (ETFO) is the professional and protective organization representing more than 83,000 teachers, occasional teachers, and education workers employed in the public elementary schools of Ontario. The organization strives to enhance the lives of its members and foster a climate of social equity and justice across Ontario and beyond.



AT A GLANCE

Client: The Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario

Employees: 70

Learners: >65,000 + (over 10 years)

Industry: Education association

CHALLENGE

- Increase the accessibility of member directed professional learning courses for teachers in Ontario
- Create affordable, high-quality courses that are written and facilitated "for teachers, by teachers" to compete with universities and colleges
- Provide teachers with relevant training that is applicable to their daily classroom practice

SOLUTION

- D2L platform
- Capture
- Daylight
- Bongo
- D2L's Learning and Creative Services

RESULT

- In the first year, enrollment was three times higher (1,500 vs. 500) than ETFO's targets
- Steady increases in enrollment for nine consecutive years
- Recognized by the Ontario College of Teachers (OCT) for superior course development



The Challenge

MAKING PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT ACCESSIBLE FOR ONTARIO TEACHERS

ETFO believes that no matter what you teach and where you teach in Ontario, you should always be learning. However, many teachers lack the time and resources to attend traditional, face-to-face professional development courses, and this can be a barrier to career progression and ongoing, educator directed professional learning.

Krista Walford, executive staff member at the ETFO, explains, “When we first launched our additional qualification (AQ) programs in Ontario, we only provided courses in specific locations at fixed times. Offering classes in this way was massively beneficial for those who could attend, but many others simply couldn’t make it to class.”

For example, many Ontario elementary teachers live more than 50 kilometers from a training center. Traveling long distances to attend classes isn’t practical—especially for those who are trying to combine a full-time teaching job with other responsibilities, such as child care.

“We wanted to help more teachers take additional qualifications, but didn’t have the resources to open more

training centers,” says Walford. “To stay competitive with other course providers, we knew we had to find a new way to deliver accessible, high-quality courses at an affordable price.”

INFUSING SOCIAL JUSTICE AND EQUITY INTO TEACHER DIRECTED PROFESSIONAL LEARNING

Also, to make its courses more compelling, ETFO knew that it was vital not to take a purely academic approach; it needed to ensure that teachers would be able to apply everything they learned in the classroom. For example, one of ETFO’s key focus areas is social justice and equity, which has become an increasingly important aspect of education in Canada.

Jordan Appelberg, additional qualifying manager at the ETFO, says, “A traditional approach might be to ask our learners to write an essay about social justice issues. Instead, we wanted our courses to have an explicit social justice and equity component built into all of our AQ courses. This empowers educators to use their professional judgement as experts to provide responsive and ‘just in time’ learning for students.”

As an organization committed to inspiring positive change throughout society, the ETFO set out to develop high-quality training courses that help teachers develop their careers and promote acceptance, respect, diversity, inclusion, and empathy inside and outside the classroom.

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The Solution

A PLATFORM FOR KNOWLEDGE

The ETFO saw huge potential in harnessing tech-enabled modern learning tools to help broaden the accessibility of its courses and promote its vision of a just society.

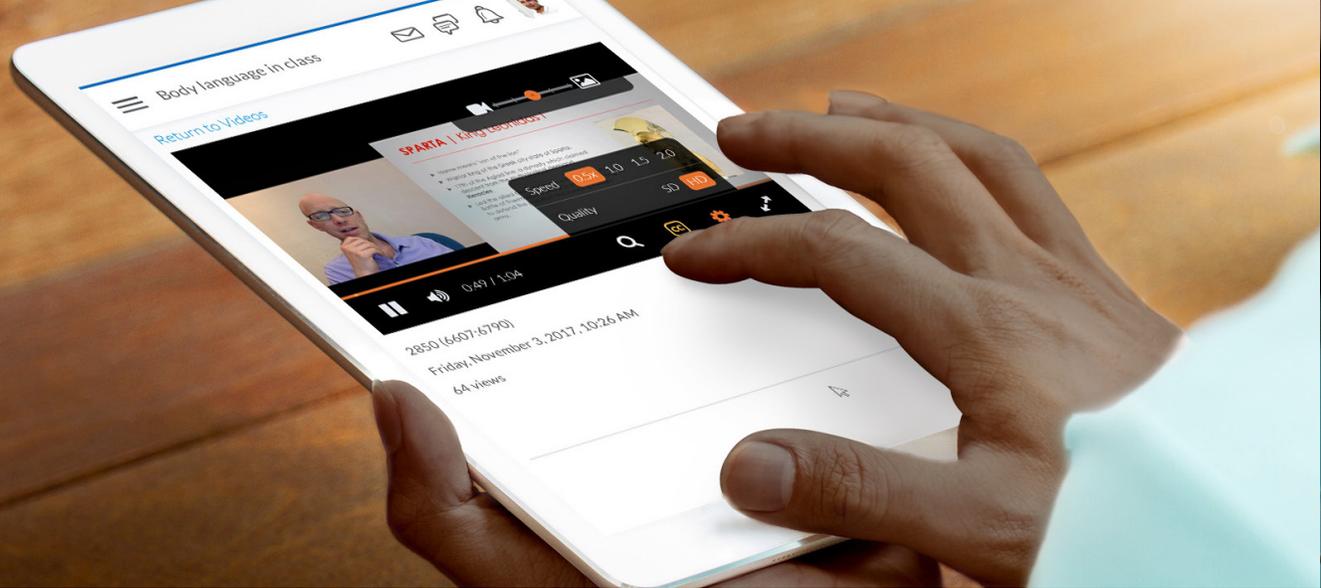
Walford says, “Digital technology provides new, exciting ways to improve access to knowledge. We teamed up with D2L to develop our own online learning resources designed to help elementary teachers improve the impact of their lessons.” Using the D2L platform, developers at the ETFO worked with experienced teachers to build engaging online learning resources that teachers can access at any time, from anywhere.

Walford continues, “The D2L platform is an incredible tool for enhancing learning. We were particularly impressed by the versatility of the solution, as it enables us to incorporate technologies that are already being used by teachers in their daily practice—tools like Blogster, Google Docs, YouTube, and many others.”

In addition, executive staff member Rita Cohen discussed the importance of leveraging social media, in particular Twitter. “Through its seamless integration

into D2L, Twitter allows us to communicate, engage and value the voices of our learners.” Cohen says, “using the Twitter widget available through D2L allows us to invite learners into the ETFO-AQ community.”

The ETFO is also using the D2L platform’s Intelligent Agents—an automated notification system that course administrators can configure to send emails to instructors, learners, or both. For example, it could be used to detect when a learner has not logged into their course recently, and prompt their instructor to check that everything is OK. This boosts engagement, motivates learners and provides a personalized learning experience. “The elearning platform provides a host of tools to boost the interactivity of our courses—Intelligent Agents, discussion boards, and quizzes, in particular,” says Appelberg. “For instance, we have included quizzes at the beginning of each module to help propel and accelerate learning. These quizzes work by allowing teachers to assess their knowledge before and after they have completed a module so they can easily track their progress and reflect on their success”



ADDING A HUMAN TOUCH TO ONLINE LEARNING

With D2L Capture connecting learners and course leaders, the ETFO can bring the benefits of one-to-one instruction to the comfort of learners' homes—all at the touch of a button.

“D2L Capture helps course leaders provide detailed, personalized feedback on an individual learner’s work in a friendly and dynamic way,” explains Walford. “Instant messaging, split-screen presentation casting, and video conferencing capabilities allow learners to talk through their work with course leaders. Instead of just asking learners to plough through pages of text, we’re entering a new era of instant communication.”

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT BUILT FOR THE FUTURE

The ETFO is also using Daylight, the D2L platform’s native user interface, to facilitate learning across a variety of devices.

“With more people preferring to use smartphones and tablets for almost everything they do, it was very important for us to build an elearning solution that works well on all platforms that our educators have confidence in,” says Appelberg. “Thanks to the responsive design of Daylight, we can build course content that learners can view and interact with on any device.”

Walford says, “We’re not only impressed with the capabilities of the D2L platform, but also the excellent support that we received from D2L throughout the course development process.”

For example, the D2L Learning and Creative services team helped the ETFO build a custom widget to give learners a visual indication of their progress throughout their course.

“The widget gives learners a lot of peace of mind because they can see exactly what they’ve done and what they’ve still got to do. This helps them manage their time as professionals,” says Walford. “There’s no uncertainty about whether they’ve understood their tasks or whether they might accidentally miss a deadline.”

She adds, “The team at D2L Learning and Creative services was excellent. They took the time to understand our vision and explained how we could overcome complex technical challenges in terms that made sense to us. The ability to communicate a new idea and have the Creative team translate it into reality sets D2L apart from less versatile platforms.”



The Results

DRIVING EDUCATIONAL EXCELLENCE

The ETFO has built 80 courses on the platform, and plans to develop even more. Already, the organization has been able to increase access to additional qualifications and stride ahead of its competitors.

“So far, developing online additional qualification courses for elementary teachers has proven to be a great success; the enrollment numbers speak for themselves,” says Walford. “In the first summer that we offered our courses, we expected around 500 people to enroll. By the first week of June, more than 1,500 people had signed up.”

“Enrollment numbers have continued to grow year over year, which just goes to show how much our learners value courses designed by teachers, for teachers. The D2L platform communicates that content in a flexible, intuitive and interactive way, with quizzes, surveys, discussion boards and other tools to keep learning engaging,” says Appelberg.

The ETFO’s online courses have also been recognized by other educational institutions across Ontario for their excellent quality, and members of the ETFO team are regularly invited to present at industry conferences and workshops on best practices for elearning.

MAKING COURSES MORE ACCESSIBLE

By delivering high-quality, additional qualifications online with the D2L platform, the ETFO is helping teachers across Ontario develop their skills and promote positive social values in the classroom. Appelberg says, “We are really pleased when teachers tell us that they have been able to take something they have learned in one of our courses and apply it in their classroom the next day. Ultimately, by delivering higher-quality and more accessible additional qualifications with D2L, we can help teachers improve their lives and the lives of their learners.”