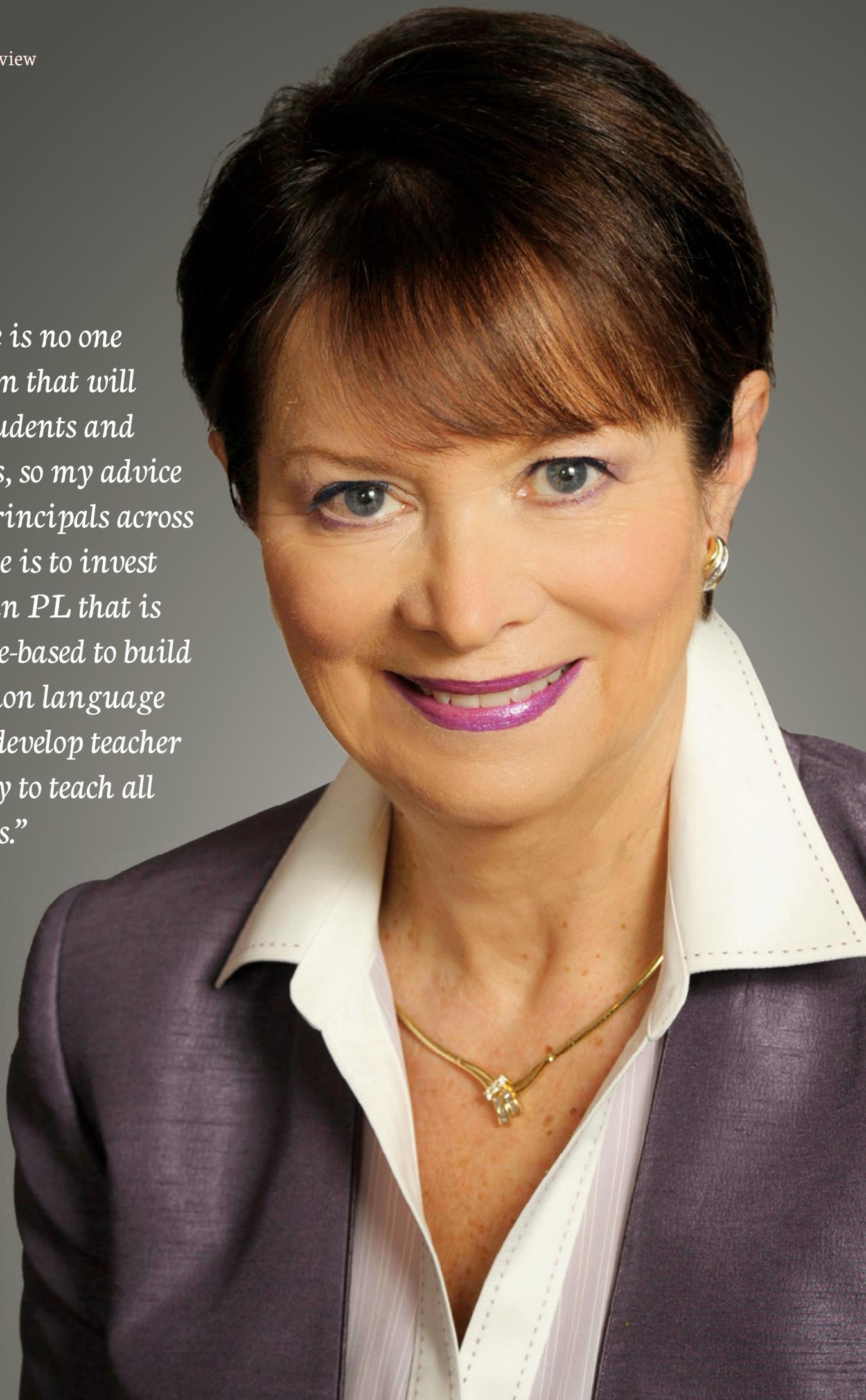


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Lyn Sharratt

AEL INTERVIEW

Dr Lyn Sharratt coordinates the doctoral internship program in the Leadership, Higher and Adult Education Department at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, University of Toronto, Canada. Lyn is a highly accomplished practitioner, researcher, author and presenter, and has presented at numerous workshops and conferences. She holds a Doctorate in Education from the University of Toronto.

Given the megatrends that we are facing in education, what is one thing that all educators could, and should, do now?

I think educators must develop and live a vision of what is possible - and that is, every student being empowered by systems that embrace a shared vision and a collaborative, problem-solving approach, and use data to ensure equity and excellence. When we know how to teach every FACE, we will have achieved clarity in our practice as well as growth and achievement for all.

How is your approach of putting FACES on the Data Walls important for schools to move from Good to Great to Innovate?

I believe that making data accessible, transparent and carefully interpreted must be done in a risk-free environment in which we all care about students' progress across classrooms, schools and systems. Only when we own *all* the FACES as consistent, persistent and insistent leaders will we recalculate the route of system and school improvement.

You have said that, "no intervention program can compensate for quality teaching". What are the observable elements of quality teaching, and what matters most in learning and teaching?

Quality teaching begins with teachers' and leaders' deep understanding of assessment literacy process. Nothing else matters in teaching and learning as much as quality assessment, that is, data that inform and differentiate instruction for each learner in a never-ending cycle of inquiry to discover what works best. This is the power of Parameter #3: get right what happens in large blocks of instructional time, and improvement accelerates within the school and across schools. This assessment literacy paves the way for every teacher becoming an intervention teacher who knows how to teach every student. There is a flow of assessment components that inform instruction. Each component builds on the other and has a cascade effect. An important part of this process is having Knowledgeable Others in every school who work alongside classroom teachers to make this happen.



Has your worldview and educational focus changed since your seminal book Putting FACES on the Data in 2012?

I think that I have not changed my mind about the importance of knowing every learner by putting FACES on the data to have cognitive insights about, and emotional connections to, every student, but I do realise that I need to be much clearer about the intentionality of the work and the commitment to specificity and precision in quality classroom practice. This work does not make a difference unless teachers have time to work alongside leaders and Knowledgeable Others to refine their craft.

While Superintendent of Curriculum and Instruction Services in the York Region District School Board in Canada, you analysed assessment data and developed a 14 Parameter tool that resulted in increased achievement for students. Can you explain how use of this tool has transformed learning and teaching in schools?

Our research began in York Region District School Board and established that when these 14 Parameters or areas were present at high levels, in our system and schools where leaders focussed on them, system leaders, school leaders, and teachers increased students' growth and achievement. This was outlined in my book with Michael Fullan in 2012. Now I realise through further research, that if none or only some are found, or system and school leaders do not intentionally focus on them, there is very little or no improvement in student outcomes. The evidence is clear in my most recent book, *Clarity*, that incorporating all 14 Parameters at high levels is achievable in every system and school when leaders and teachers are focussed on, and committed to, understanding how all 14 areas interconnect to support each other.

In most jurisdictions around the world we find pockets of exceptional practice and innovation. How do we move these "pockets" into widespread system innovation?

I think we should never underestimate the critical role of leaders, at every level, who are adaptable and have an "open to learning", inquiry stance. Leaders and teachers working and learning together move their "aha" moments from pockets to widespread excellence through knowledge-mobilising structures, such as: Case Management Meetings, Learning Walks and Talks, and Learning Fairs – always modelling their learning, knowledge and building capacity by listening and learning from others.

In Australia, principals have a great deal of autonomy when deciding on Professional Learning for staff. Compared to other countries you visit, do you think this autonomy affects achieving school improvement?

I just need to say that there is no one program that will "fix" students and teachers, so my advice to all principals across the globe is to invest wisely in Professional Learning that is evidence-based to build a common language and to develop teacher capacity to teach all students. When autonomy is seen as an opportunity to collaborate with other leaders, it works. The downside is when autonomy is considered to be competition with other schools and leaders – then everyone, especially the kids, loses.

Why did you go into education as a career?

I have always wanted to be a teacher. I was enthralled by my Grade Three teacher and had my dad make me a blackboard and a pointer - just like hers. I used to line up my dolls on the bed and teach them just the way Miss Porter did. It has been a lifelong passion and I still teach students at the University of Toronto - now they are just a bit older. I really believe, and try to model, that teaching is both an art and a science - and a passion of mine!

Who has influenced your professional work and direction most, and what about them inspired you?

I often think about Dr Avis Glaze who worked alongside me when I was a new Superintendent in Ontario. She taught me very valuable lessons by modelling her belief in equity and excellence. Avis was an excellent listener, and when I needed a guide to help me work through issues she offered me different perspectives and solutions. Avis stood beside me in believing in the importance of all students learning, all teachers teaching to high standards, always having high expectations, and caring deeply about early and ongoing interventions for every student. We both believed, and still do, that "every student matters".

From your work at the University of Toronto, what do you see as the highlights and challenges of working with emerging educational leaders?

Emerging educational leaders often bring fresh perspectives and renewed energy to the role that can be contagious for other staff. It is to be saluted, encouraged and nourished. The challenge for me would be the harsh, cold reality that changing a culture to focus on learning takes more than one leader. The Knowledgeable Other, Parameter #2, is a very important resource to embed in every school to support leaders and teachers, so they never feel alone in teaching all students. Thus, finding partnerships with other leaders to do the work together is critical, and that can be challenging and/or rewarding ... it is what you make it.

Top: Husband James Coutts and Lyn visiting Dr Avis Glaze at English Bay Bluffs, Vancouver

Bottom: Lyn presenting at the 2018 ACEL National Educational Leadership Conference in Melbourne

