Implementing an Evolving Model of Professional Learning and Development

Introduction

The Professional Learning and Development (PLD) advisory group has developed a vision for the future of professional learning and development that:

> *Every student in every school and kura has leaders and teachers who are actively engaged in professional learning and development that supports and challenges them to accelerate valued student outcomes*

As providers of PLD we welcome a vision that affirms and enhances the effective practice we strive for in our current work, whilst also foreshadowing improvements at all levels of the system, including ours. This paper outlines how this vision might be translated into practice in ways which promote effective PLD, which place schools at the centre of their evaluative practice, which ensures equitable, sustainable and affordable provision of PLD grounded in current research and aligned with government priorities.

School, kura and teacher-led inquiry

Evaluative capability is the central tenet of whole-of system improvement. For clusters of schools and individual schools/kura:

- Evaluative practices are amplified across curriculum documents and various national assessment and a myriad of self-review tools within the system.
- Many clusters/school/kura (hereafter referred to as schools) have the capability to undertake robust self-review and define a clear focus for ongoing inquiry. The Education Review Office (2012) found that 58% of schools had processes in place that were highly or somewhat supportive of teaching as inquiry.
- There are schools that, for various reasons, are still developing evaluative capacity and may need ongoing external support.
- As identified in the *Teacher Professional Learning and Development: Best Evidence Synthesis Iteration,* it is important to view the development of such evaluative capacity as a 3 – 5 year process.

All schools can be better supported in their analysis of what is going on for learners, teachers, whānau and communities

- Key external influencers on learning and achievement for these groups include the Ministry of Education (Ministry), the Education Review Office (ERO), NZQA and external PLD providers which have developed a range of tools that schools can use to support self-review. Such tools would be more accessible if referenced from a single online resource. This space would describe what each tool is for and would support schools to select appropriate tools for their purpose. It could help schools to engage with their communities, including iwi education plans, as they complete high-level analysis and choose their focus.

- A stocktake of these tools would help ensure their coherence, sufficiency and efficacy. For schools which either self-identify or which have been identified as requiring support, this resource would be supplemented with specialised external support in self-review, change management and future focused, collaborative inquiry in order to achieve positive outcomes for student achievement, engagement and wellbeing. We expand on this below.

PLD needs to be Future Focused

- PLD needs to expose and challenge past perceptions, practices and assumptions of learners' needs and capabilities, to ensure that there is readiness for change at all levels.
- Future focused ways of working are well described by the New Zealand Council for Educational Research (2012).
- Ensure schools are leveraging the opportunities of new technologies to better meet the needs of all learners, and work in connected and networked ways.

PLD needs to be coherent not siloed

- PLD provision needs to support schools - individually and collectively - to determine their own description of effective or 'best' teaching and leadership practices to drive their ongoing improvement strategy and transformative agendas. Once this is in place, then PLD responses can be explicitly linked to these practices. In this way, PLD is cumulative in the school and what sustains are effective practices rather than a particular "project". The Best Evidence Synthesis Hei Kete Raukura Overview provides a set of practices that could be a useful platform for more coherent PLD provision.
- The siloing of existing PLD into 'projects' has been problematic for reasons outlined in our previous papers. The supply of 'projects' has often driven demand. Some schools apply for multiple 'projects' but this doesn't necessarily indicate their evaluative capability or a lack thereof.
- We support a move from a project model of PLD to one where each school determines an inquiry and outcomes based on deep analysis of their students' and staff's strengths and needs, which is connected to previous PLD and where there are clear outcomes for an inquiry.
- In such a model, internal and/or external expertise would support schools to determine the developmental outcomes based on the identified needs in, for example:
    - Evaluative/inquiry processes and capability
    - School-led professional learning and development processes and capability
    - Leader practice
    - Teacher practice
    - Student capability and outcomes.
- Schools – and any external provider - would measure and be measured on their developing evaluative capability in relation to their charter and school goals. For example, they might choose to be measured on:
    - their evaluative capabilities and ability to sustain inquiry over time

    - progress in relation to the *context* of the inquiry (e.g. student achievement in literacy, leadership capability etc.)
- Once the focus of the inquiry had been chosen, the school would determine a series of targets and indicators of success, sometimes in conjunction with an external provider and/or with their community, including whānau, hapū and iwi. These success criteria could be used as a basis of the school (and provider) reporting on impact.

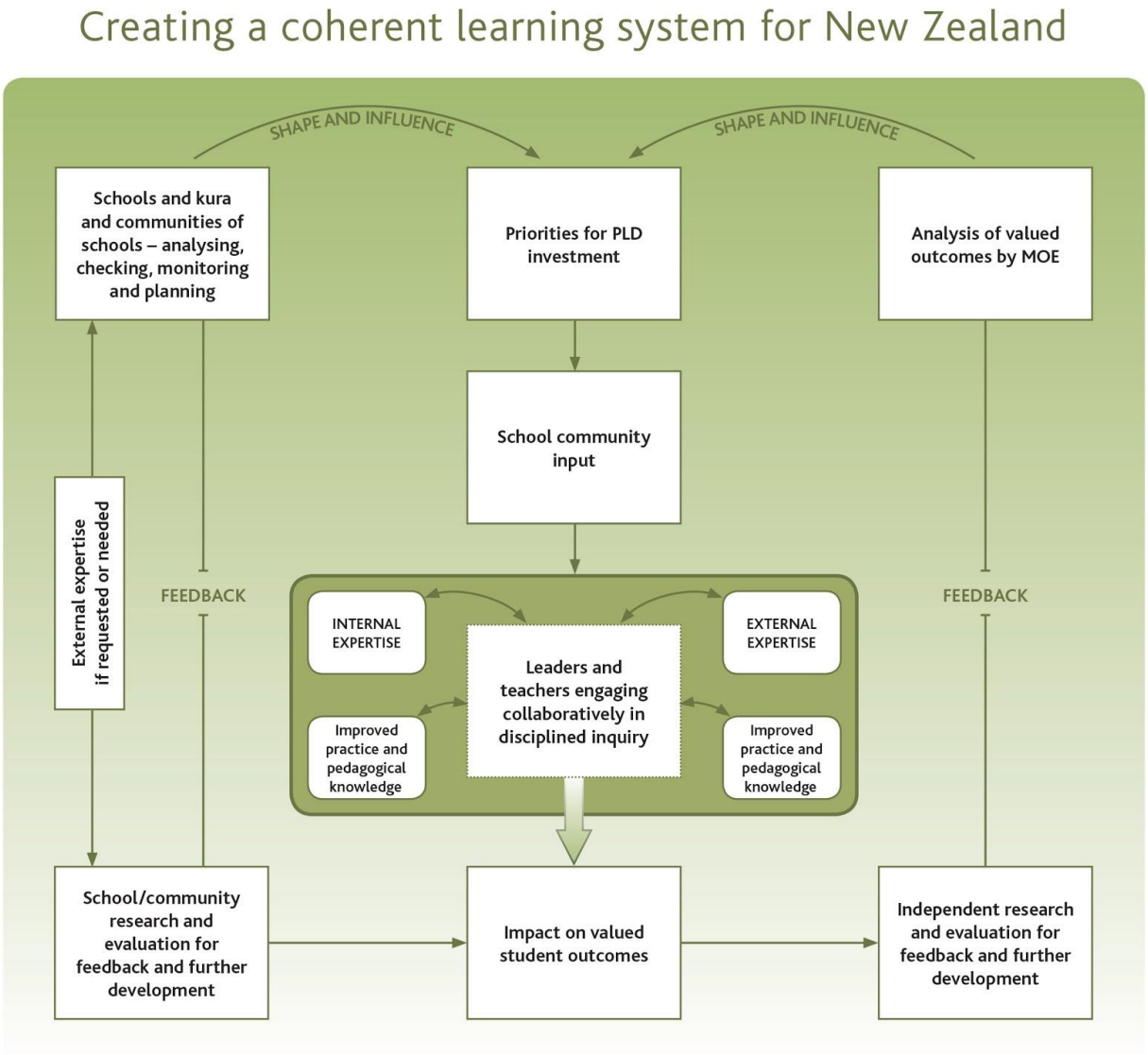
How this might look at school level

- A school might for example, identify through their inquiry that they wanted to focus on raising the achievement of Pasifika learners. They would then carry out a deeper analysis which may show a need to focus on writing in years 1 – 4 and mathematics in years 5 – 6. It may also identify that no gifted and talented Pasifika learners have been identified on the GATE register.
- Facilitators would support the school to evaluate needs, test assumptions, and dig into their data to form hypotheses about how they can change instructional practice and measure the impact on learners, as well as community engagement and wellbeing. Facilitators would guide schools to identify resources and expertise they need from within and between schools to undertake their inquiries. This might include accessing external maths support, or a facilitator to help them engage the community to better meet the needs of their Pasifika learners.
- Schools which have been identified as having robust self-review processes might independently undertake the self-review process and determine appropriate areas of foci for their PLD. They may engage external support and consult with their community to ensure robust analysis during the initial framing of the inquiry and they might subsequently engage expertise in specific areas.
- Schools which have been identified as having developing self-review processes might undertake the self-review with external support.
- Any evaluative framework should incorporate research and evaluation. This could also be undertaken with external support. Either way, school based research would raise interest in the inquiry process and feed into its next stage.

How this might look at system level

To reflect the thinking contained in this paper, we have modified the diagram *Creating a coherent learning system for New Zealand* from the *Report of the Professional Learning and Development Advisory Group Report* (p.21). We have modified by :

- Adding a box allowing for external input on the left hand side to reflect the potential need of schools and their communities for external expertise as they begin their inquiry
- Including potential support of external expertise in school or cluster based research.
- Reflecting the importance of both internal and external expertise within disciplined inquiry.



PLD should include specialist support

As the PLD review group have noted, teachers and leaders need to continually acquire new technical skills and develop curriculum, assessment and subject knowledge. The following may be helpful in achieving this.

Curriculum Support

- Currently there are gaps in the system, for example in the primary sector this is mainly in terms of supporting the broad curriculum. In the secondary sector there are gaps in specialist support, particularly in terms of assessment and NCEA. Across the whole system there are gaps in how schools determine success as Māori and how stakeholders such as whānau, hapū and iwi can have dual roles and shared responsibility. A similar gap exists for Pasifika learners. Addressing

such gaps requires a demand driven model but one that is evidence-based and linked to evaluative capability processes.

- In both sectors there is significant need for specialist support to develop modern learning practices and collaborative inquiry and assist teachers to meet the complex and emerging needs of learners in a networked learning world.
- We propose building on current curriculum support to utilise expertise in English and Māori-medium in the values and key competencies, all learning areas and effective pedagogy (e.g., developing authentic contexts, rich questions, student engagement, assessment for learning - see appendix 1).
- Provision of such services needs to be systematic with no duplication of effort while still harnessing expertise which resides across the sector, for example, from subject associations, NZQA moderators, teachers and PLD providers.
- Support would be delivered through a range of blended or online methods, including social media, and would support teachers as part of their individual inquiries.
- We provide a short case study of how this might work as appendix 2

Learning communities

- There are a number of existing learning communities, both virtual and face -to-face. The VLN provides a platform used for many virtual learning communities, that have developed into an integral part of many PLD programmes. The well attended primary mathematics leadership clusters have for 10 years provided opportunities for leaders to engage with the latest developments in mathematics and to consider key government priorities. Another significant national example is the large number of secondary curriculum middle leaders who have engaged with the workshop programmes in each learning area.
- These communities fulfill an important function in supporting the development of networks, the growth of professional knowledge and keeping the sector up-to-date.
- There is significant value in retaining these and also addressing gaps in provision.

Sector learning days

- We need to maintain and build on opportunities to keep school leaders and lead teachers up-to-date in a range of areas, for example NZQA Best Practice Workshops have been helpful in a time of significant change, such as with the standards alignment to the NZC..
- One approach could be to run sector learning events for principals to inform them of key developments (to supplement Curriculum Updates). In 2014 for example this might have included areas such as financial literacy, science capabilities, moderating teacher judgments and vocational pathways. Such events could be face-to-face or online.
- Once collective knowledge has been built, further professional learning might be supported by curriculum support and/or the learning communities.

Career development

- One of the key functions of PLD is to ensure a robust workforce. In order to do this, a new model needs to provide for individuals' learning needs at key points in their career development. In terms of PLD support these key stages are currently identified as
    - Starting work in the New Zealand education system (PRTs/OTTs)
    - Aspiring principals
    - First time principals
- There is a need to enhance existing programmes to support the above groups but also support:
    - Middle leaders (who may or may not be aspiring to principalship)
    - Experienced principals

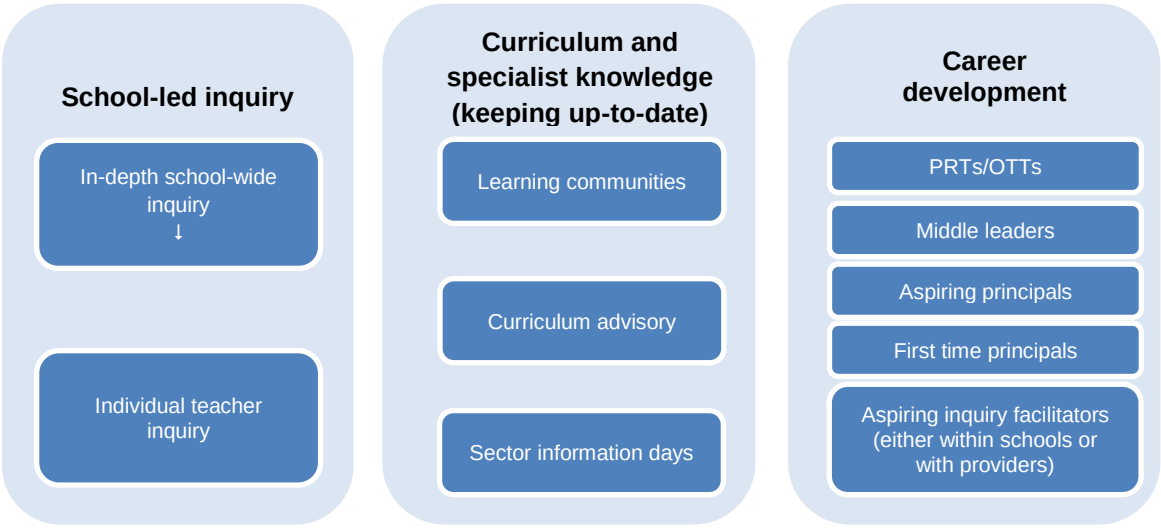
2.0 The Role of PLD Providers

PLD is a critical part of the sector and will be in the future

The principles and vision developed by the PLD Advisory Group situate PLD as an integral and valued part of the education sector. Whether internally or externally provided, PLD facilitation should be seen as a potential career path, or one step in a varied career path for highly skilled educators. In order for the profession to grow, develop and impact positively on valued outcomes, educators involved in PLD facilitation need access to:

- ongoing continuous inquiry, professional learning and development
- connection to wider developments in education
- connection to professional networks, locally and internationally
- engagement in and dissemination of the results of research

In the following table we summarise the various facets of current and potential PLD provision for schools.



3.0 Provision and Procurement

There are a number of ways that external expertise could be provided and procured.

External Provision

- Evaluative capability does not start with a solution. It involves inquiry into how well students, teachers, leaders and organisation are learning. Whether internally or externally facilitated, such an inquiry needs to begin at whole school or cluster level and, as previously noted, requires evaluative capacity and knowledge of change management. Where external support is required, the purchaser of that support needs to be confident that the provider has expertise in inquiry, facilitation, leadership and change management. These high level foci must precede and inform specific interventions
- This model of external support provides a strong basis for greater collaboration between providers with different sets of expertise.
- Any such model would need to be informed by considerations about how best to balance the need for national and domain coherence against recognition of local contexts.

Procurement

Any procurement model needs to support system coherence, be able to drive and support both national and local priorities, recognise that effective PLD requires highly skilled facilitation and be affordable. Balancing such priorities will not be easy and as significant current providers of PLD, we would welcome the opportunity to work with key stakeholders, including the Ministry, in further developing the following ideas:

- The Ministry could purchase services from approved providers who might, for example, comprise an accredited panel, similar to the current curriculum resource panel. Schools could then be given access to these providers based on their negotiated level of need. Providers would need to be guaranteed a minimum service level to allow them to employ salaried staff and be able to realise the benefits summarised below.
- PLD will need to become increasingly blended between face-to-face and online provision.
- This model would ensure that schools were not disadvantaged by geographic location and would reflect their evaluative developmental needs.
- Guaranteeing external providers a solid core of work would enable them to provide services direct to schools, in addition to those contracted by the Ministry. If provision is casualised then schools (especially those in more remote areas) will find it difficult to access such support.
- If procurement of services was fully devolved to schools, a school would be able to choose the provider which meets the specific needs of their school. However, it will also increase transactional costs and undermine coherence as contracts will be negotiated school by school. Providers would need to engage staff on a more flexible, contract basis and charge contract (rather than salaried) rates. A bulk model provides for efficiency through distribution of workload across a group of people employed on a yearly basis. It minimises transactional costs and provides the best price for the required work.

- This model would enable organisations to employ staff for a fixed period (eg 3-5 years) which benefits the Ministry and wider education sector in the following ways:
- The quality of staff would be higher because the employing organisation is able to appeal to a wider pool of professionals who are attracted by stability of work and income.
- It provides another genuine career pathway for teachers.
- The employing organisation is able to invest in their staff (for example, through providing professional development, access to emerging technologies)
- Employees are able to draw on wider connections across a professional organisation.
- Contracts can be constructed so that any down-time in terms of engagement with schools could be diverted to alternate deliverables, for example contributing to curriculum support.

PLD provision is an important lever to assist in system-wide improvement. As outlined in our previous paper on the future of PLD, its provision needs to be part of an explicit strategy designed to achieve a system shift in student outcomes. Achieving system shifts cannot happen when that system is atomized, incoherent and unpredictable.

Appendix 1: Support for changes in pedagogical approaches

A middle school conducts an inquiry focused on the current engagement of priority students. The inquiry shows a number of the students do not find the current contexts for learning relevant to their lives.

- As an action resulting from the inquiry the school decides to trial changing from total reliance on compartmentalised subject teaching to implementing an interdisciplinary programme based on in depth study of an authentic "wicked problem"[2] (a serious challenge facing the 21 st century world) that is relevant to the students and their community.
- The syndicate contacts a facilitator skilled in coaching inquiry to support the leaders and teachers to frame both their inquiry into the changed practice, and a joint teacher/student inquiry into the use of an interdisciplinary approach.
- The facilitator also links the school to an online community with similar interests and to relevant information and research available.
- The school's leaders and teachers receive support in the changes in pedagogy required, the resources needed for the change to succeed, and in identifying robust indicators of success.

Appendix 2: PLD in practice

Assuming in the first instance that the school/kura was working with a leadership inquiry facilitator/coach the model of PLD might look as follows:

- The lead inquiry facilitator/coach supports the school/kura leadership team to identify the different areas that the school/kura needed to work on in relation to their chosen foci – in this case years 1-4 literacy, year 5-6 mathematics, identification of Pasifika GATE students and engaging with the community.
- The inquiry facilitator/coach works within their organisation to identify supplementary inquiry facilitators/coaches to meet these needs. The senior leadership team then works with this inquiry support team to determine an appropriate professional learning and development plan with the school/kura. This involves all teachers in the school/kura engaging in in-depth inquiry around Pasifika learners with their identified area of focus.
- In this model, each of the strands of the PLD do not become their own 'project'. The principal and lead inquiry facilitator/coaches work together to ensure cohesion. For example, the facilitators/coaches could identify common content areas such as differentiation, feedback, or student discourse, and consider these as a whole staff, with follow-up support provided in the specific learning areas as required.
- The principal and lead inquiry facilitator/coaches plan the inquiry cycle to ensure transfer of learning across the school/kura and the community of school/kura. They also work within their community/local iwi to identify existing expertise.
- It would not be the role of the inquiry support team to own the PLD – this would sit firmly with the school.
- The lead inquiry facilitator focuses on continuing to raise the evaluative capability of the school leaders and to support them to ensure PLD coherence across the school/kura (so that they sustain and grow this model over time).

- To ensure the full benefit of the investment in the school/kura, this facilitator/coach ideally stays connected with this school/kura over the 3-5 year period, but aims to provide lighter touch support as the leaders' capability grows over time.
- Within this model, facilitators'/coaches' engagement with school leaders is their core business, and not considered an optional extra. The expectation would be that all facilitators/coaches be leadership facilitators/coaches. Even if facilitators/coaches have particular domain expertise such as or modern learning practice, they would be expert facilitators/coaches of school/kura-wide inquiry, school leadership and change management at the system and classroom level.

Appendix 3 Curriculum Support in Action

- A small secondary school in a rural location employs a new art teacher from South Africa. Because the art department has only one teaching position, this teacher becomes the head of department. She has little knowledge of the New Zealand Curriculum, NCEA or the range of resources available to support art teachers within New Zealand.
- She can either call or Skype an art facilitator who can give the teacher advice on where to start, introduce her to the Arts Online community and help her make connections with other arts teachers and HODs. The facilitator can also point her in the direction of key resources on TKI and NZQA to get started.
- This teacher would be supported on-site and through the use of technology such as Skype and Google Hangout, the facilitator and teacher could work together at more frequent intervals or as needs arise.
- The support would be framed within an inquiry focus.