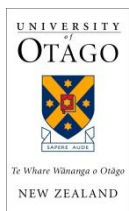


The Future of Professional Learning and Development



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Introduction

Ongoing professional learning is the hallmark of any profession. It is the responsibility of individuals, their employers and national bodies to ensure that effective, appropriate, professional learning occurs across the system. Professional learning occurs in many different contexts and can take many forms.

This is the final paper of three, focussing on government funded professional learning and development for teachers and school leaders. It draws on the first paper in the series which positioned PLD in the wider policy and research context and the second paper which focused on the strengths and weaknesses of the current model of PLD delivery.

The recommendations in this paper are based on our experiences in delivering PLD over many years. In it we recommend improvements to the current system as well as raising some longer term considerations which might shape future PLD. Our recommendations are not intended to cover all aspects of the policy, design and operation of PLD, just the most salient. Current models of provision are more developmental and growth oriented than those they replaced and we do not recommend any return to a mythical golden age of educational PLD. The overarching aim of PLD policy and implementation should be to embed an ecology of professional growth in all parts of the system and we believe we are on the right pathway to achieving this.

Improving the Current Model

As indicated in the second paper in this series, there are a number of strengths to build on in the current provision of PLD. Current provision does add value to the knowledge and skills of teachers and school leaders. Effective facilitators do impact on what teachers and school leaders know and do in ways that impact on student outcomes.

Fundamental to facilitating improvements is, we believe, re-conceptualising the relationship between the Ministry of Education and providers from one of “supplier” of services to one of true partnership in which the experience and knowledge of all parties are used to inform system development. The introduction of the Investing in Educational Success Initiative (IES), the advent of a new professional body for teachers and leaders (Educanz) and the appointment of 10 regional Ministry of Education directors will influence the delivery of PLD. These will require stronger professional relationships between the Ministry and providers as well as between providers. However, we believe there is some way to go before this relationship could be viewed as the sort of true partnership which will be needed to:

- Provide for better identification of the problems PLD is trying to solve. This might include, for example, more robust information on a school’s history of government-funded PLD, understanding the wider picture of a school, the community it serves and the needs of all its staff. Such needs identification also needs to be predicated on a more sophisticated understanding of the nature and needs of priority learners and the fact that such learners are not necessarily located in lower decile schools, nor are they necessarily defined by ethnicity and culture. It also needs to acknowledge that improvement should be a system-wide goal.

- Explore system wide issues such as how well aligned the focus of PLD is with measures of our educational success as a country (eg PISA and the National Monitoring Project) and how well aligned we wish it to be.
- Co-construct more sophisticated and manageable measures of success at both school and system level. These need to acknowledge on the one hand that some valued outcomes of education are not easily measured through standardised means but on the other hand, the power of metrics to focus developmental conversations and set targets. Longitudinal, rigorous data collection could provide greater levels of knowledge about the influence of different programmes and initiatives and the interaction effects. Rather than only evaluating from the perspective of a relatively simple causal model - we did this and this happened - a system wide evaluation framework is needed that considers PLD within the wider professional learning support context.
- As well as acknowledging the power and efficacy of ‘teachers teaching teachers’ and ‘leaders leading leaders’, also acknowledge the strong research basis for an external perspective in the analysis of the practice of the teachers and the culture of schools
- Encourage stronger, more structured collaboration between all the players involved, including providers of different PLD services working in the same schools and regions.
- Enable providers of PLD to attract, retain and invest in a highly skilled work-force in which there is some promise of job security and career development by moving toward a more secure and long term procurement model.
- Develop professional standards for providers of PLD that adequately describes the beliefs, understandings, knowledge and skills needed.
- Develop a more coherent and sustainable infrastructure which addresses issues such as:
 - The degree of choice schools have of providers
 - Streamlined mechanisms for aligning school needs with the external expertise they require
 - A clear definition of school entitlement to “free” PLD
 - A clearer national picture of provision which depicts the nature of demand in each region and also the quality and availability of supply.

We do not look to the Ministry to provide or facilitate all of the above, although clearly, some things cannot happen without its support and collaboration. We believe that we, as providers of PLD, need to take responsibility ourselves in several of these areas and it is our intention to do so through forming an association of PLD providers which could work with the Ministry in areas such as developing standards for – and perhaps accreditation of – PLD providers.

Thinking Ahead

As with student learning, professional learning needs to be flexible, adaptive and responsive to need and context. One size does not fit all; one model is not the solution for all problems. Professional learning needs to both improve and enrich, it needs to support changes to practice and promote innovation. It also needs to occur across the education system, and include Ministry officials, facilitators, educational researchers and evaluators, school leaders, teachers and their communities.

PLD provision needs to be able to inform educational innovation, not simply reflect it. The advent of EDUCANZ, the IES initiative and the reorganisation of regional ministries will require engagement with providers of PLD to be successful. We believe that the formation of an association of PLD providers, together with the development of standards guiding their work, could provide a workable vehicle for such engagement.

There is a compelling moral and economic imperative for better collaboration and use of resources designed to improve the capacity and capability of school leaders and teachers. We need to explore with all stake-holders what a less competitive model of PLD provision might look like and what levers might need to be in place to encourage regional Ministry teams, IES and PLD providers and researchers toward achieving collaborative impact in networks of schools.

PLD provision needs to be part of an explicit strategy designed to achieve a system shift in student outcomes. Whilst needing to be able to respond to a changing policy environment, government policy needs to reflect that we now know a good deal about effective PLD provision and there is considerable agreement about the principles which should underpin it. How those principles are translated into practice needs to be adaptable to reflect change, delivery needs to be regularly evaluated but investment in PLD needs to be predicated on more than simply 3 yearly contractual cycles.

Finally

We have made considerable progress in recent years to provide schools with more effective, accountable and targeted models of PLD> this progress needs to be viewed as part of a longer process of maturation in which PLD design and implementation should increasingly be seen as a partnership between the Ministry, schools and providers. Informing that design and implementation needs to be the overriding question – “Is this a growth and development model for all stake-holders”? Where the answer to that is, “No”, then we clearly all have work to do.