

Effective Teacher Professional Learning

Sabbatical Report

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New Zealand

Botany Downs Secondary College
Forest View High School
Hastings Girls High School
Massey High School
Onehunga College
Otahuhu College
Otumoetai College
Pakuranga College
Rosehill College
Rotorua Girls High School
Rotorua Lakes High School
Te Awamutu College
Western Heights High School
William Colenso College

Queensland

All Hallows College
Forest Lake College
Mountain Creek State High School
Technical College of North Brisbane
The Gap State High School

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Finally I wish to thank the Ministry of Education for providing me with the opportunity to undertake this study.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Teacher professional learning holds the key to raising student achievement levels and closing achievement gaps. For it to be successful principals and other leaders need to be mindful of the current culture operating in their school and try to create, as Stoll (2000) describes, a ‘moving’ school. Ultimately the establishment of professional learning communities in each school holds the greatest promise for sustained teacher growth and improved student achievement.

Planning professional learning is a strategic process and must centre around data analysis to determine the achievement gaps, research into appropriate learning strategies to address the needs (performance goals), application of professional learning with cognizance given to the principle of effective adult learning, and multi level evaluation systems.

“Staff development that has as its goal high levels of learning for all students, teachers, and administrators requires a form of professional learning that is quite different from the workshop-driven approach. The most powerful forms of staff development occur in ongoing teams that meet on a regular basis, preferably several times a week, for the purposes of learning, joint lesson planning, and problem solving. These teams, often called learning communities or communities of practice, operate with a commitment to the norms of continuous improvement and experimentation and engage their members in improving their daily work to advance the achievement of school district and school goals for student learning”. (Guskey, 2006)

However, teacher time and money is wasted on ineffectual professional development. The one day off-site course with no real follow-up will, according to Joyce and Showers (2002), result in up to only 20% transfer into class practice. Unless teachers are provided with the time, support and pressure to practice, receive feedback and on-site coaching then little will be gained. The concept of coaching requires close examination and training.

“Coaching is not about fixing someone. No one is broken, and no one needs fixing. It’s not about giving advice, providing “constructive criticism”, making judgements, or providing an opinion.

Coaching is a relationship between two equals, one of whom is committed to making personal and professional improvements. These improvements may come in the form of wanting to learn new strategies, to get unblocked or unstuck, to re-evaluate beliefs affecting professional outlook. It could be to look at habits or change strategies. Whatever it is, the person being coached – the coachee – takes ownership of his or her own improvement. Therein lies its power.” (Joyce and Showers, 2002)

Helen Timperley (2003b) uses the term the ‘New Professionalism’ to describe the evidence-based enquiry approach:

- “• *emphasises the need for schools to become strong professional learning communities*
- *requires teachers to collaborate, that is, to “open their doors” to other teachers for observation, discuss the progress of their students, discuss ways to improve student achievement, and accept direction from their leaders in changing their methods where the evidence shows they need to change in order to “move a student along”*
- *requires teachers to believe in their ability to make a difference to student learning and achievement.”*

Principal leadership is clearly an essential component in the development of a PLC but its sustainability probably lies in the fostering of distributed leadership within schools.

Schools need time, time for senior management teams (including Principals) to focus on professional learning and time for teachers to actively participate in the learning data analysis action research, observations and coaching. Schools can potentially provide some of this time but I believe that if the Ministry of Education is serious about school improvement then time (staffing formulas) with professional learning accountabilities (Annual Reports, ERO) is required.

PURPOSE

I have undertaken to investigate teacher professional learning in particular to answer the following three questions:

1. What makes teacher professional learning effective?
2. What does it look like from a practical point of view?
3. What part do Principals play in this?

RATIONALE AND BACKGROUND

I prefer to use the term ‘professional learning’ rather than ‘professional development’ as it more correctly places the emphasis on the continual learning teachers need to be involved in. Sometimes it is developing ideas and strategies but it will also be about reflecting, researching and learning new ways of looking at teaching and learning. However, a number of my references use the word ‘development’ and therefore for the sake of this report they can be accepted as interchangeable.

Teacher professional learning must have the goal of raising student achievement, unless a tangible link to this can be made, serious questions should be asked as to why staff are involved in it.

Raising student achievement levels and making school a more fulfilling experience is our ultimate goal. To do this our teachers need to be provided with the opportunities to develop or learn new knowledge, develop and practice new skills that will ultimately make them more effective in the classroom.

Knowledge of effective pedagogy has changed significantly since most teachers were trained and is continuing to develop. Can this be given a more positive spin? e.g. teachers need structured opportunities to learn if they are going to be able to teach in a knowledge age environment. Every teacher has the desire to provide quality learning opportunities for their students but without support many will struggle to keep pace with their changing needs of them.

Darling-Hammond (2000) stated: *“The effect of poor quality teaching on student outcomes is debilitating and cumulative. The effects of quality teaching on educational outcomes are greater than those that arise from student’s backgrounds”*.

In the past, and unfortunately it is still evident today, too much focus has been paid to difficulties young people face, their family circumstances, their community and the rapidly changing world. The deficit thinking that arises from this is debilitating and cyclical. Changing that thinking, and raising teacher expectations is a critical step in effective teaching. Hattie (2003) in his meta-analysis emphasised that quality teaching is the major source of variance in student’s achievement when compared to students, their homes, school, principals and peer effects. Teachers account for around 30% of the variance and therefore much focus needs to be placed on improving the quality of teaching.

Russell Bishop and his research team have embarked on truly ground breaking teacher professional learning with the Te Kotahitanga project. This work is clearly paying dividends already for not only Maori students but the whole student body in those schools fortunate enough to be involved (not Wainuiomata High School unfortunately). Much can be learned from reading the research and methodology and visiting the schools involved.

Wainuiomata High School (Decile 4, 940 students, Pakeha 46%, Maori 39%, PI 8%, Asian 4%, Other 3%), since its inception in 2002 following the merger of Parkway College and Wainuiomata College, has had a huge focus on professional learning. It has been necessary in the new school to actively develop a school culture that emphasised achievement, caring for the individual and raising expectations of the students, parents, community and staff.

Strategic professional learning was implemented and has now become a central feature of our school improvement. Achievement levels have dramatically improved from 11% of Year 11 achieving NCEA Level 1 in 2002 to 55% in 2006.

Teachers have, in my opinion, made the difference by more effective pedagogy and raising expectations. Much work is still to be done in raising achievement, especially at NCEA Levels 2 and 3 but also at Level 1, and closing achievement gaps for Maori and for boys.

Wainuiomata High School is starting to develop an effective Professional Learning community (PLC). My sabbatical gave me the opportunity to reflect and critique the work we are doing and seek ways we can strengthen our PLC.

METHODOLOGY

In the time available I have attempted to undertake a literature review on effective professional learning. It is a little unfortunate that the timing of my sabbatical was not a little later so I could take advantage of the latest Ministry of Education Best Evidence Synthesis documents Helen Timperley has been writing on Professional Development and on Leadership. I look forward to reading these with considerable interest.

I also had the opportunity to have discussions with staff at Victoria University and Queensland University of Technology and to visit 14 schools in the North Island and five in Queensland. Five of these schools are involved in the Te Kotahitanga project.

FINDINGS

a) An Introduction

Gradually New Zealand is moving away from the isolated one day off-site course which generally has very limited benefit for teaching and learning. As Timperley (2003) states in her review of professional development for the SEMO project:

“there is a growing body of research that shows that much professional development does not lead to long term changes in teaching that improve student achievement”.

She goes on to say

“... the focus for professional development should shift from using external courses and workshops to developing strong professional learning communities within schools, as professional learning is built into teachers’ everyday working responsibilities. In particular, schools, as professional learning communities, need to analyse how particular teaching methods impact on student learning”.

Joyce and Showers (2002) have researched this transfer of teacher learning into effective practice in the classroom in what they call The Training Model.

PD Approach	Effect on practice in classroom
Include Theory	10% transfer
And, add a Demonstration	10% transfer
And, provide Practice	10% transfer
And, give specific Feedback	15% transfer
And, require On-site Coaching	80% transfer

Most one day courses include some theory and hopefully some examples or demonstrations to back them up will have little impact and so will our carefully planned teacher only days, even with an external speaker.

Without staff being given the opportunity and/or requirement to practice the new skill or strategy, receive feedback on this and then on-going coaching, then little effective change will take place.

Fullan and others have also pointed out that there is a huge variation that

“...classroom-to-classroom differences in effectiveness within schools is greater than school-to-school variation. Professional learning communities internal to a school should reduce the variation across classrooms with more and more teachers gravitating toward the best practices”.

If one-off external or internal courses (perhaps some curriculum updates are the exception) produce such limited results for teachers and waste huge amounts of money, what is the answer? The creation of an effective Professional Learning Community (PLC) must be the goal of every school. Before I comment further on this I believe it is important to look at school culture from a professional learning perspective, the importance of effective data/evidence to inform the professional learning focus, and all linked to strategic planning.

b) The Importance of Culture

Much has been written about the role a school's culture has on its ability to be continually improving but too often its importance in the day-to-day life of school is undervalued. The work of Hargreaves, Fullan and Stoll and Fink are worth revisiting. Louise Stoll in her NZCER SET 3, 2000 article on School Culture has a useful summary.

“School culture is one of the most complex and important concepts in education. In relation to school improvement, it has also been one of the most neglected. Schein considers the basic essence of an organisation's culture to be “the deeper level of basic assumptions and beliefs that are shared by members of an organisation, that operate unconsciously, and that define in a basic ‘taken-for-granted’ fashion an organisation's view of itself and its environment”.

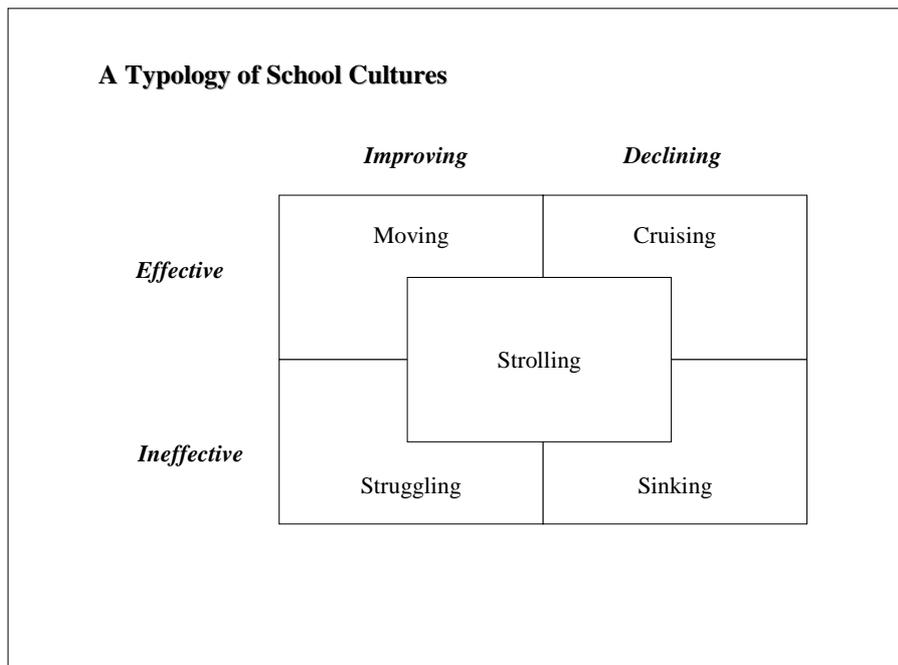
We have all used the term ‘that's the way we do it around here’ to induct new staff and remind our colleagues as to the beliefs and practices unique to our school. These beliefs and practices are critical but do they encourage critical reflection, support innovation and allow a school to be continually improving? Too often these can be barriers which without sustained and conscious endeavours will be massive barriers to change.

Stoll and Fink (1996) identified what they consider to be 10 cultural norms that influence school improvement as summarised below with catch phrases.

- | | |
|-------------------------------|---|
| 1. Shared goals | “we know where we are going” |
| 2. Responsibility for success | “we are all responsible, we must succeed” |
| 3. Collegiality | “we're working on this together” |
| 4. Continuous improvement | “we can get better” |

- | | |
|-----------------------------|--|
| 5. Lifelong learning | “learning is for everyone” |
| 6. Risk taking | “we learn by trying something new” |
| 7. Support | “there’s always someone there to help” |
| 8. Mutual respect | “everyone has something to offer” |
| 9. Openness | “we can discuss our differences” |
| 10. Celebrations and humour | “we feel good about ourselves” |

We are all well aware that just as individual classrooms have a unique culture so do departments and schools. Some classrooms promote effective teaching and learning and others really struggle daily or are sinking. Teachers sometimes place the blame on the students for their poor behaviour, lack of commitment and fundamental skills. Stoll and Fink (1996) have analysed effective versus ineffective and improving versus declining school cultures to come up with five general school cultures. They argue *“that the rapidly accelerating pace of change makes standing still impossible and therefore schools are either getting better or getting worse”*.



- Moving**
- *boosting pupils’ progress and development*
 - *working together to respond to changing context*
 - *know where they’re going and having the will and skill to get there*
 - *possess norms of improving school*

- Cruising**
- *appear to be effective*
 - *usually in more affluent areas*
 - *pupils achieve in spite of teaching quality*
 - *not preparing students for changing world*
 - *possess powerful norms that inhibit change*

Strolling - *neither particularly effective nor ineffective*
- *moving at inadequate rate to cope with pace of change*
- *meandering into future to pupils' detriment*
- *ill-defined and sometimes conflicting aims inhibit improvement*

Struggling - *ineffective and they know it*
- *expend considerable energy to improve*
- *unproductive 'thrashing about'*
- *will ultimately succeed because have the will, if not the skill*
- *often identified as 'failing', which is demotivational*

Sinking - *ineffective: norms of isolation, blame, self reliance, and loss of faith powerfully inhibit improvement*
- *staff unable to change*
- *often in deprived areas where they blame parenting or unprepared children*
- *need dramatic action and significant support*

Stoll and Fink acknowledge that within a school sub-cultures will exist and different groups or individuals are likely to exemplify several, if not all, of the culture types.

Whilst this typology is very generalised it is a useful starting point. Certainly my staff recognised four years ago that they were 'struggling' and we have worked hard with the goal of becoming a 'moving' school. This movement has been a deliberate act of re-culturing the school.

Richard Elmore in the foreword of Breakthrough by Fullan, Hill and Crevola (2006) commented that:

"The best ideas of reformers have, as yet, proven no match for the inertia of a powerful resident culture. I am increasingly convinced that the work of reform is not about changing the institutions and practices of schools but about deliberately displacing one culture with another..."

Timperley (2003) summarised Stoll and Fink's (1996) view on the challenge and importance of a school culture:

"... successful schools were able to link their re-structuring and re-culturing efforts so as to bring about changes effectively, for example, they adapted timetables, created new policies, amended roles and responsibilities, developed clear lines of authority and responsibility, provided time for people to meet, hired new staff to 'fit' and help steer the changing direction of the school, and facilitated coordination of the process".

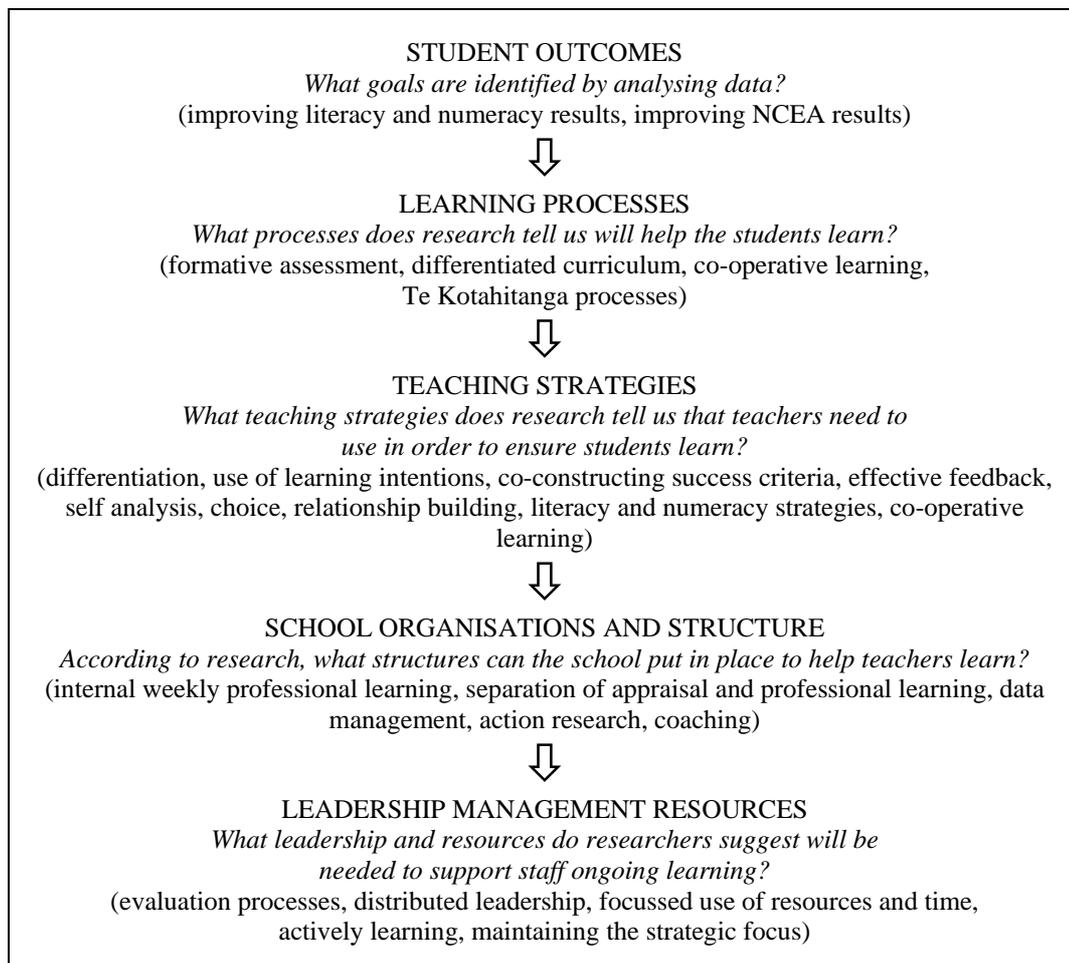
c) Strategic Professional Learning

If you accept the essence, as I do, of Showers and Joyce's Training Model with Theory, Demonstration, Practice, Feedback and Coaching then teacher professional learning takes a considerable period of time (2-4 years) for significant imbedding of new practice to take effect. Practice, Feedback and Coaching takes time, pressure and support. Principals need to be very conscious of this and resist the temptation of the latest initiative promoted by the Ministry of Education or a provider. I have been as guilty of this 'pepper-potting' of professional development as many others have. Hopefully I am getting better at working strategically otherwise staff become overwhelmed and/or cynical.

I spent considerable time reviewing school improvement processes and kept coming back to Thomas Guskey's (1995) model which I have used for a number of years. We have done as Guskey (2006) suggested "*many educators are now finding how useful it can be to reverse these five levels in professional development planning' i.e. to start with desired Student Outcomes rather than Leadership Management Resources*".

In the revised diagram below I have inserted in brackets responses Wainuiomata High School has made to these key questions.

Professional Development Planning Process



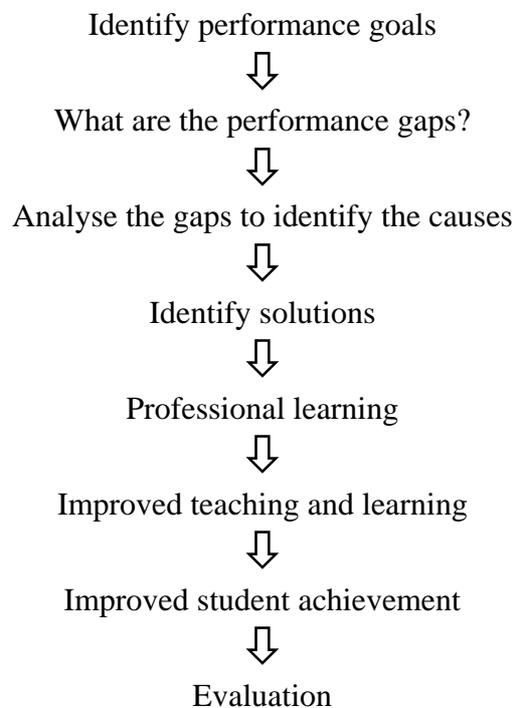
Schools are becoming increasingly good at collecting a whole range of data and other forms of evidence (student voices, staff surveys etc) about where they are at. The collection, aggregation, disaggregation and analysis of data by individuals and groups of teachers has become more important as we focus our professional learning more acutely on the needs of the students.

Oberman and Symonds (2005) in their American study of schools that were successfully closing the achievement gap identified the following six common data practices:

- 1) *Schools purposefully collected data and reported, analysed, and disaggregated the data regularly and quickly*
- 2) *The Principal's actively support the use of data*
- 3) *Teachers actively reviewed and used student achievement data to inform their teaching*
- 4) *Assessment occurred more frequently and teachers used the data to plan*
- 5) *Data use became an integral part of the Principal's and all teacher's jobs*
- 6) *Time was allocated for the collective and use of data.*

There are many researchers (Mei Lai, Earl and Katz, O'Day) who have described the processes in using data. To me following is a workable process:

A Professional Learning Process



In Timperley's (2003) words, "*schools should make data-based decisions about their intermediate and short-term goals, foster results-oriented actions and reflection, and shared responsibility for the results they want, so as to address challenges unique to their student's needs and performance*".

Researching appropriate learning strategies needed to address performance gaps is a critical step. Principal's and other school leaders must remain focussed on what is required and avoid distracting staff on easily available or flavour of the month professional learning. As Guskey (2006) states:

“... it is essential that staff development leaders and providers select learning strategies based on the intended outcomes and their diagnosis of participants' prior knowledge and experience. For instance, while awareness of new ideas may be achieved through large group presentations, that approach alone is unlikely to lead to changes in teaching practice. An extended summer institute with follow-up sessions throughout the school year will deepen teachers' content knowledge and is likely to have the desired effect. A two-hour after-school workshop will not achieve that goal. ... The most powerful forms of professional development often combine learning strategies. To promote the development of new instructional skills, training may be combined with coaching, study groups, and action research”.

On-going evaluation of professional learning is a critical component of an effective staff development programme. Staff just as students in any classroom, are at different places with their learning and skill enhancement so professional leaders need to be mindful that apart from introducing a 'new' concept or knowledge then generally the one size fits all scenario will be inappropriate. To gauge where people are at requires clear goals and outcomes, prior assessment and ongoing evaluation through the professional learning process. *“Just as assessing students in the classroom is important to gauge effective teaching, assessing professional development programmes can provide an insight into improving programs”* (Loucks-Horsley, Stills, and Hawson, 1996).

Evaluation systems can come in many forms, obviously the goal is improved student achievement but this may take 2-3 years before this becomes apparent. Staff questionnaires, focus groups, attendance rate changes, questioning of target students, class observations, feedback from coaches are just some of the evaluation systems that can help inform the learners (teachers) and help fine tune the leaders of learning.

d) What are the Key Characteristics of Effective Professional Learning?

Hawley and Valli (1999), following an extensive synthesis of professional learning programmes, came up with eight characteristics which they believe are more likely to see changes in teachers' knowledge, skills and behaviours, resulting in improved student achievement:

- 1) *Professional learning is driven by analyses of the differences between goals and current performance*
- 2) *Teachers identify the learning needs necessary to close the achievement gap and be involved in planning the learning opportunity/processes to be used*
- 3) *Is primarily school-based*

- 4) *Provides learning opportunities that relate to individual needs but are, for the most part, organised around collaborative problem solving*
- 5) *The learning needs to be continuous and on-going, involving follow up and support for further learning – including support from outside ‘experts’*
- 6) *Uses evaluation systems from multiple sources including outcomes for students and processes that are involved in implementing the lessons learnt through professional development*
- 7) *Provides opportunities to learn and discuss the theoretical understanding of the knowledge and skills to be learned*
- 8) *Is part of a comprehensive change process that deals with the full range of impediments to the teaching and learning process.*

Alongside these eight characteristics I would place a number of others which would enhance the learning potential. Some of these are centred around principles of adult learning including: acknowledging and using the experience that exists within the staff; teachers (and students) learn best when it is ‘just in time’ i.e. is relevant to where they are at; are given some choice; allow for different learning styles; is problem oriented; leading with volunteers initially; share and model good practice; welcome feedback; be prepared to adjust the focus; include staff in planning; understand that practice and more practice is required to achieve a sustained change and a ‘safe’ environment (separated from appraisal systems) is essential to encourage staff to try and sometimes initially fail at new strategies.

The following quotes from Guskey (2006) are a very useful summary:

“... it is important that the learning methods used in professional development mirror as closely as possible the methods teachers are expected to use with their students”.

“To improve student achievement, adult learning under most circumstances must promote deep understanding of a topic and provide many opportunities for teachers and administrators to practice new skills with feedback on their performance until these skills become automatic and habitual”.

“... wherever possible, have choices among learning activities”

“Even under the best of circumstances, pressure for change, no matter what its source, may produce feelings of anxiety, fear and anger. Such feelings are most effectively addressed through skilful listening and problem solving within a respectful and trusting school culture ... such feelings are a natural and inevitable part of the change process”.

e) Professional Learning Communities

Research is increasingly showing that the most effective and sustainable strategy to meet the ever-changing needs of students and to be continually improving is

that each school needs to develop their own professional learning community and ideally a networked professional learning community. The ministry's goal of networked school improvement projects and Extending High Standards Across Schools (EHSAS) projects have this as a basic principle.

“A professional learning community is one in which teachers update their professional knowledge and skills within the context of an organised school-wide system of improving teaching practices. Teachers' efforts, both individually and collectively, are focussed on the goal of improving student learning and achievement”. (Timperley 2003b)

Louise Stoll during her long term study of PLCs and the recent experimentation of PLCs in England (2002-2004) funded by the Department of Education and Skills, National College for School Leadership and the General Teaching Council for England found that while PLCs don't look the same in all schools, they do display eight characteristics to a greater or lesser degree (Stoll et al 2006):

- 1) Shared values and vision
 - shared focus on pupil learning and improvement
 - jointly developed value statements and policies
 - staff have high expectations of pupils
- 2) Collective responsibility for pupils learning
 - staff share a collective responsibility for the learning of all pupils
 - there is peer pressure on those who don't do their fair share and seek continual improvement
- 3) Reflective professional enquiry
 - data is systematically collected, analysed and used for reflection and improvement
 - conducting action research and other research projects within the school
 - collaborating with staff in other schools
 - setting and monitoring learning targets for individual pupils
 - asking pupils' opinion, for example about what made a good lesson
 - classroom observation seen as a powerful learning tool
- 4) Collaboration focussed on learning
 - team planning and team work are evident
 - team teaching is valued
 - collaboration occurs across roles (i.e. teachers and support staff), not just within the role
- 5) Group as well as individual professional learning
 - professional learning is valued
 - a range of professional learning takes place e.g. peer coaching, demonstration lessons, Teacher Only Days, workshops, research and development projects, moderating assessments
 - people learning individually and collectively

- 6) Openness, networks and partnerships
 - external initiatives are used to analyse what is going on internally
 - people are open to change
 - learning networks develop with other schools, universities etc
 - risk-taking, creativity and innovative thinking are encouraged
- 7) Inclusive membership
 - support staff and Board of Trustees are valued and contributing members
 - the community is aware of and supports the professional learning
- 8) Mutual trust, respect and support
 - working relationships are professional and positive
 - there is mutual trust and respect
 - teachers and support staff's best efforts are valued.

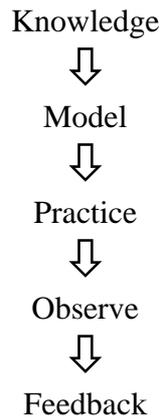
The development of inquiry-based learning by teachers is central to any PLC, this often takes the form of mini action research cycles taken individually or collectively. *“Like students, teachers acquire new knowledge best by constructing and investigating for themselves as opposed to ‘memorising facts’”* (Loucks-Horsley, et al 1996)

Teachers are great problem solvers and given the opportunity and time to discuss with their colleagues along with relevant research then solutions can usually be found. Hargreaves and Fullan (1998) encourages consideration be given a cross curricular group or pairing. *“You learn more from people who are different from you, than ones who are the same”*.

The Te Kotahitanga projects are assisting in developing PLCs including coaching in the schools involved. The 4 June 2007 Education Gazette, reporting on its development at Massey High School said:

“Shirley says a strength of Te Kotahitanga professional development is that it is school-based, and ongoing ‘you can’t get any better than that. In this project the professional development team is made up of our teachers and that means that there is nothing to stop other teachers approaching them during lunch break or interval for advice. They’re available and they’re hands-on’.”

Joyce and Showers (2002), following on from the Training Model discussed earlier, believe that PLCs need to be quite deliberate and transparent about how staff learn new knowledge, theory, curricula or skills. Often this can fit within the action research/inquiry based learning framework.



Joyce and Showers (2002) strongly support the use of coaching to support the imbedding of new skills in the classroom. *“Research shows that teachers’ skill development markedly increases when opportunities for practice and feedback are provided. To be maximally useful, such feedback must be both specific and descriptive. The addition of coaching to teachers’ staff development greatly enhances their implementation of skills in the class.”*

Stoll, et al (2006) were interested to understand how PLCs were created in the English example. *“Our evidence showed that this isn’t easy but takes hard, sustained work over a number of years. Progress isn’t smooth and a crisis of some sort or changes in school personnel can mean that the PLCs development is halted or indeed even reversed.”* They suggest that four general processes assist in the creating and development of PLCs as summarised below:

- 1) Optimising resources and structures to promote the PLC
 - time and money are critical. Staff having time to meet, plan, discuss and critically reflect is essential. Funding is needed to buy in expertise as required and to free up staff for meetings
 - space for large and small group meetings
- 2) Promoting professional learning
 - professional learning should be planned strategically and informed by data
 - teacher only days
 - encouraging the transfer of learning (e.g. observation with feedback and coaching)
- 3) Evaluating and sustaining the PLC over time
 - ideally all staff are aware of the PLC and its deliberate development, at the very least senior staff promote it
 - making strategic staff appointments
 - coaching and mentoring
 - evaluating the effectiveness of the PLC (i.e. staff learning and raised student achievement) to make improvements
- 4) Leading and managing to promote PLC development
 - a major strategic and leadership task
 - facilitating positive working relationships, engendering respect where staff are valued

- clear vision and values
- distributed leadership, actively providing leadership opportunities, shared decision making.

Evaluation processes must be put in place to help ensure the effectiveness of a PLC, Stoll et al (2006) suggest three criteria should be used:

- *the impact on pupil learning and social development. Are the achievement goals being met?*
- *the impact on staff practice and morale*
- *the extent to which the PLC is able to develop the PLC characteristics and processes and sustain these over time.*

Eaker, Du Four and Karhanek (2004) offer a very useful self assessment tool to measure where staff feel their PLC is at. They describe PLCs as going through four stages of development: *Pre-initiation, initiation, developing and sustaining.*

Pre-initiation describes the characteristics that are likely to exist before any systematic professional learning occurs. The *initiation* stage illustrates some of the first characteristics that are likely to appear as a PLC starts to develop. A *developing* PLC shows a growing level of understanding about continuous self improvement for the entire institution. The final *sustaining* phase represents a mature state whereby a school can successfully adapt to continual change, staff are responsive to the needs of their students and achievement levels exceed what would normally be expected, staff are fully united behind a common vision and take responsibility for achieving this. In this sustaining stage leadership is widely distributed and the loss of key personnel can be managed.

It is important to note that progress through the ten key elements will vary.

Descriptors for each of the four stages are provided for what they consider to be the ten key elements of a PLC:

- 1) *Shared Values: How must we behave to advance our vision?*
- 2) *Mission: Is it evident that learning for all is our core purpose?*
- 3) *Shared Vision: Do we know what we are trying to create?*
- 4) *Goals: What are our priorities?*
- 5) *Collaborative Culture: Teachers working together*
- 6) *Collaborative Culture: Management Team/Teacher relations*
- 7) *Parent Partnerships*
- 8) *Action Research*
- 9) *Continuous Improvement*
- 10) *Focus on Results*

f) The Role of Leadership

Principal's and other school leaders clearly have a crucial role to play in developing, focussing, resourcing, evaluating and prioritising professional learning amongst their staff. Unless there is a real understanding and commitment to professional learning short term gains may be achieved but little improvement will be sustained.

Michael Fullan and Andy Hargreaves have written extensively about leadership in schools over a number of decades and are recognised as world authorities. A few interesting quotes:

“The principal is the gatekeeper of change. There is not an improving school without a leader who is good at leading transformational improvement. Successful principals share leadership, they reach out to parents and community and work hard to expand the professional ‘capacity’ of the teachers to develop a coherent professional community. ... able to develop a clear collegial value framework and individual accountability. ...develop a commitment to a mutual purpose and a shared belief in ongoing common actions by doing this they develop school capacity which in turn affects the quality of teaching within the school.” (Fullan 2001)

“My own view is that it was largely a matter of luck or serendipity that these schools developed a high capacity. The right principal came along, certain leaders gravitated to this principal, the chemistry was great, and the group experienced cohesion and success. When this happens, it is wonderful; - as long as it lasts. So if the infrastructure is not systematically working on capacity-building in the school, professional learning communities will occur in only a minority number of cases and will not last beyond the tenure of the right leader of the group.” (Fullan 2006)

“Sustainable improvement depends on successful leadership. But making leadership sustainable is difficult, too. ... Better quality education and leadership that will benefit all students and last over time require that we address their basic sustainability. If the first challenge of change is to ensure that its’ desirable and the second challenge is to make it do-able, then the biggest challenge of all is to make it durable and sustainable.” (Hargreaves and Fink 2006)

In recent times there has been a renewed interest in the central role of Principal Leadership in Professional Learning. A PLC will not grow old and mature let alone be sustainable without Principal's having an in-depth understanding of the potential that a PLC has for a school and the strategic vision to foster it.

I have had a continual focus on this goal since Wainuiomata High School started in 2002. We went through the initiation phase in 2003-2005 and are starting to pass through the developing phase now with a few aspects of the sustaining stage emerging.

Central to sustainability is fostering more in-depth leadership throughout the school. This is not just in the traditional Senior Management, HOF and Dean levels but acknowledging the central role that “teacher leaders” have. “Teacher leaders” lead the way with effective pedagogy, continually seeking ways to improve their practice, are passionate about their job and have a contagious level of enthusiasm that spreads to their colleagues and fosters their development. These key staff need support and encouragement to lead and to show the rest of us paths forward.

I am fortunate here in Wainuiomata that my primary colleagues have been travelling a similar path to me and a networked PLC is developing. Key staff are directly involved in the networked PLC, a very important component in my sustainability planning.

I would like to think that in the future my role will move further from being an instructional leader to more of a facilitative leader, one who encourages and supports and asks probing questions.

IMPLICATIONS

The research, discussions and school visits have affirmed the focus on continuing to develop a PLC at Wainuiomata High School. Through this we can continue to advance academic goals, close gaps and create a better learning culture for students and staff.

Over the past two years we have been developing a coaching model (staff choose a coach from amongst 35 trained staff coaches) linked to teachers individual action research. This needs continued evaluation and investigation of the peer coaching model.

We need to make the development of our PLC more explicit to staff and investigate processes to evaluate its status. I particularly like the Eaker, Du Four and Karhanek continuum model.

Wainuiomata High School has been working with a network of other schools (6 primary, 1 intermediate and the High School) in our community to promote effective literacy pedagogy and lift literacy levels to national means (all but achieved). In a sense, a networked PLC has evolved with shared vision, pedagogy, assessment and accountability. Recently the Wainuiomata network has been granted Extending High Standards Across Schools (EHSAS) funding to focus on strengthening the PLC and fostering sustainability by developing distributed leadership capacity in all the schools and across the network. My research strongly affirms that plan.

CONCLUSION

As John Hattie (2003) and others have made it explicitly clear, the quality of teaching is the largest single factor that will impact on student achievement and yet many schools are still focussed on the ineffectual one day off-site courses. Gradually this is changing and as agencies such as ERO increasingly require data driven professional development, and research from Hattie, Bishop (Te Kotahitanga), Fullan, Hargreaves, Guskey, Stoll and the like become better known then effective professional learning will become more common place.

Ultimately the research shows that the fostering of professional learning communities with staff involved in their own action research assisted by a peer coach seems to hold the greatest promise.

Schools, I believe, need greater assistance in achieving and sustaining a PLC. Principals are often overwhelmed by the enormity of the day-to-day tasks and principalship. The development of a PLC requires long-term commitment beyond the available time for many.

Time for this leadership must be found either by taking away (delegating) some of the tasks Principals are expected to do or being given time for a dedicated Deputy Principal to work with the Principal to foster a PLC. Either way time in the form of staffing from the Ministry of Education is needed.

Time also needs to be found both internally and externally (Ministry of Education staffing formulas) for staff to meet, analyse data, have the professional discussions, participate in action research and coaching.

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