PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

We know in schools that achieving better outcomes for students depends more than anything else on the quality of teaching and the culture of learning that flows from this. This edition of *CSM Ideas* is a compendium of articles from recent editions of *CSM* that seeks to improve how teachers might more profitably develop themselves as learners in the contemporary educational space.
Dr Philip SA Cummins, Managing Director CIRCLE

PLANNING TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE WITH YOUR SCHOOL'S PROFESSIONAL LEARNING

As schools turn their attention to the way in which they plan for and use their allocation of professional development resourcing, a number of questions should be asked:

- How well was professional learning (PL) done this year?
- What evidence do we have of our successes and areas for development?
- Has PL helped to improve outcomes for students?
- Have staff developed their practice and lifted their performance?
- Or are we just doing the same old things for little real benefit?

As we talk to schools and their staff, a number of commonly experienced frustrations are becoming evident. These significant barriers to successful PL can be overcome by adopting a range of solutions that require planning and execution that is focussed more on helping staff to learn and less on imposing controls.

From Group Lectures To Personalised Learning Experiences For Staff

Schools acknowledge that placing staff in a room as a single large group for a prolonged period of time achieves little of lasting value. Some whole group time is needed to align staff to vision, share meaningfully in mission related activity and celebrate success but this needs to be done selectively and orchestrated well. Learning that is related to tracked evidence about staff goals, learning profiles and professional growth plans needs to be the norm.

From Procedural Briefing To Meaningful Learning Activity

Information dumps masquerading as PL significantly erode your staff's good will. Our managerial desire to tell people what we think they need to know usually works contrary to our intentions, as they feel that this can be achieved differently. Just-in-time packaging of information is far more likely to be of benefit in this instance. Careful consideration of material is also important; if we only have them together for a short time, we need to make it as meaningful as possible.

From Topping And Tailing To Embedded Learning

PL that is placed at a time when the attention of staff is directed more towards organising themselves either to start or finish off a period of work (i.e. at the beginning and end of terms) has little chance of changing culture for the better or improving performance. We know that most staff returning from their non-term time breaks mainly want the opportunity to organise their routines and programs. Significant PL is much more likely to occur at other times and should be planned accordingly.

From Annual Fads To Long-Term Planning

The research on staff PL shows that what makes the most difference is the capacity of staff to engage themselves in long-term projects of at least three years duration, usually based around an action research inquiry methodology. This contrasts the typical practice of picking up a different fad each year and pursuing it in a superficial manner over a handful of whole staff PL days without allowing sufficient time for it to become embedded in practice. It would be much better instead to allow staff to choose one thing that is aligned with the school's strategic intent and then let them do it really, really well.

In the end, a school-wide professional growth plan should be characterised by a genuine intention to help staff to continue their own learning in the most meaningful and effective fashion possible. We need to see more solutions such as these:

1. A suitable blend of targeted shared cultural exchange and a norm of personalised learning experience incorporating blended learning tools such as cluster learning groups and online technology.
2. A clear differentiation between corporate information sharing and professional learning.
3. Professional learning situated at times when staff can genuinely connect to the need to learn and the actions required to support this.
4. A three to six year plan for staff professional learning that is both aligned to strategic intent and allows for staff choice.

Dr Philip SA Cummins
Managing Director, CIRCLE
phil@circle.org.au

POWERING TO PEAK PERFORMANCE

There has been much rhetoric and development of a nationally consistent approach to teacher and Principal performance and development. While the debate and discussion ensues, those in education get on with leading learning, leading the organisation and focussing on peak performance of the school by valuing the importance of leadership which focusses on teaching and learning as the core business of an effective school. By **Maria Woods**

Leaders should clearly articulate what constitutes best teaching and learning. Leading learning of the organisation is about:

- A clear focus on excellent teaching and learning – reflective practice and continual review of improvement.

- Encouraging and supporting staff to build their capabilities across all areas of the school as everyone in a school both directly and indirectly contributes to student outcomes.

- Communicating a narrative of a culture where high expectations are the benchmarks and students experience success.

- Values of relationships, care, and celebration are central in partnering with families.

- Profile the development of the profession and for all staff to model professional behaviours and attitudes both internally and externally.

Leading learning in the school enhances confidence and capabilities when staff are supported to build to peak performance. Building strong professional learning communities enhances student achievement and enhances the professional capabilities of educators. Experienced educators have a responsibility to engage in professional learning throughout their careers. They must be engaged in ongoing professional conversations with experienced colleagues to challenge current thinking and practices and contribute to national agendas. All educators must model lifelong learning to maximise learning in the classroom and therefore expand their knowledge of student learning.

Effective leaders are committed, motivated and engaged in their school community. We must be passionate about what we do, why we do it and how we do it. We need to be connected to the school, its mission, vision and objectives. This connectedness, sense of belonging and alignment to what the school values is central to student achievement and outcomes.

Powering to peak performance is about a commitment to life-long learning and seeking to actively lead the learning in the organisation. Leaders have a responsibility to contribute to a learning community that strives to support, nurture and celebrate student success in an environment that is people-centred and community-based.

Optimal conditions in a school can be created when all educators work from the same premise and understandings about what constitutes excellent practice. Key questions that support a culture that seeks peak performance by all, including the leaders of the organisation, include:

- Do all teachers in your school have a shared understanding of successful teaching and learning for your school? Are they all committed to this? Where is the evidence in teaching and learning that there is a shared understanding and more importantly a commitment to this?

- Do teachers have an agreed understanding of what excellence in teaching looks like? What are the accountabilities in place to review and reflect on performance?

- Are the students and families we serve at the very core of what it is we aim to achieve?

- As an educational leader, do I model the values that underpin the purpose of my work? Does the leadership team in my organisation also model the values in daily practice?

It is indeed a great privilege to be entrusted with the task of nurturing, supporting and appropriately challenging young people to achieve individual success and excellence in the goals they set for themselves. As educational leaders we work collaboratively with colleagues and the community to ensure students have multiple opportunities and pathways to strive for their goals and become compassionate, caring and capable local, national and global citizens with a strong sense of social justice, genuinely concerned about the world and their part in contributing to a positive future.

Michael Fullan and Andy Hargeaves (2012) assert policy makers will continue to miss lessons from other countries unless there is a strong and relentless focus on 'professional capital'. Leaders who are leading learning in their organisation are committed to developing all staff, encompassing the profession as a whole and building that culture in a school where students consistently encounter great teaching every day, year after year.

"High performing countries use professional capital in their approach. They don't pick on, praise, or punish a few individuals. Instead, they get better and better by using a strategy that develops and retains all of their high quality teachers and moves them all forward together." (Michael Fullan, 2012)

Research time and time again argues that in developing great cultures and organisations, leaders focus firstly on the whole of the organisation and then deal with the purpose. Collins (2011) in his publication *Good to Great* asserts that in developing the purpose of where to drive the bus, the leader(s) must ensure the right people are on the bus – this is what powers performance – people who are there because they want to be there, not because there are great extrinsic rewards. No one would disagree that great performers shouldn't be acknowledged, but if an organisation wants to drive forward an agenda of ensuring all students are getting great teaching and learning consistently lesson after lesson, day after day, then the organisation must focus on building the professional capital collectively.

"What sets apart high-performance teams, is the degree of commitment, particularly how deeply committed the members are to one another" (Jon R. Katzenbach & Douglas K. Smith).

Key Considerations

1. Consider how your school's performance connects with your school's mission, vision and objectives.
2. Consider what constitutes excellent practice in your school as a means of then measuring successful performance.
3. Consider ways to build professional capital collectively in your school.

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TEACHING PROFESSIONALS AS ROLE MODELS FOR LEARNING

An important goal for schools is to instill in students values that benefit both them and the world in which they serve. One of those values is lifelong learning, which they catch from adults, especially those in their school who model lifelong learning. Educators live to learn and teach; it is our passion and delight. This article will briefly focus on three groups of professionals who are committed to learning: leaders who govern, leaders who manage schools, and teachers who have face-to-face interaction with students as fellow learners. By **Dr Stephen Hinks**

Leaders Who Govern

A school is a learning organisation; not because its business is education but because like any other business it needs to learn and adapt to survive and thrive. The engine room for the learning organisation is the Boardroom. Best practice in governance requires the Board to constantly be open to improving how it operates. Here are some principles for professional learning for Boards:

- The Board should ensure Board development issues are regular at meetings (every six months) and are not deferred. There are several sources of development for non-profit Boards and Chairpersons.
- The Board relies on truthful, accurate and relevant information in order to govern well, and dealing with this information requires the development of authentic relationships. Members come from different professional contexts; they need to adopt an agreed culture of governance for your school.
- Board Members need to learn how to exchange views and discuss challenges in a healthy way – this requires emotional awareness and intelligence on behalf of Members and especially the Chairperson and Principal. Creativity is needed with Members who are a little more 'set in their ways.'
- Meeting dynamics and Board discipline in processing matters are constant targets for improvement.
- Use of outsourced expertise is often beneficial to up-skill your Board in business management, but this requires honest self-appraisal of weaknesses.
- In evaluating their own performance annually, Boards need to intentionally attend to strategies for improvement.

Senior Leadership Teams

The Principal's leadership team(s) has an unarguable need for professional learning. The cost of them failing to learn and improve their effectiveness is stagnation and slow death for the school. They constantly face different challenges that need new approaches and new knowledge, and they are conscious that they model professional learning as a group and as individuals to both teaching and non-teaching staff. There are some essentials for a staff leadership team to learn in order to work together professionally, including:

- Learning how to have honest conversations that deal with reality.
- Developing how the team works as a team – professional respect, openness to differing opinions, freedom to constructively manage conflict, joint ownership, cabinet solidarity, mutual trust, etc.
- Learning how to avoid blame and to encourage and affirm others.
- Continuing to strengthen their ability to deal with the school's critical success factors such as staffing, finance, strategy, marketing, technology and shaping culture.

- Learning to be obsessive about developing healthy functional relationships across your staff in order to maintain high retention and effectiveness levels, and progress towards excellence.
- Improving communication skills to provide clarity. In addition to formal channels of communication, senior members of staff need to improve their informal messages relating to vision, values, strategy, operational matters, etc.
- Additionally, the Principal needs to develop the capacity of key leaders to think deeply and broadly about the important educational issues and challenges the school is facing, not just discuss and manage their own portfolio and routine challenges.

Professional Learning For All Staff

Some of the following learning needs relate to non- teaching staff, but they are all relevant to professional learning for teachers:

- You must allocate funds for the professional development of staff, invest in them, and ensure there is a fair system allowing access and use of the funds.
- The topics for ongoing professional development in dealing with people are endless; priorities depend on your strategic need to strengthen weaknesses rather than develop strengths – the classics include having hard or difficult conversations, conflict resolution and giving feedback to colleagues and students.
- Your Heads of Department should keep a register of educational topics and schedule them for PL sessions as priorities arise.
- Middle Managers also need structured leadership development sessions – bring them all together for workshops on topics such as strategic and operational planning, risk management, workplace safety, budgeting, leadership models and skills, writing and implementing policy, interviewing applicants for positions, etc.
- Classroom teachers should be aware that professional learning is a priority of the school and that funds are available. There are many sources for PL, but ensure they are experienced and up-to-date with their training content and methods.
- An ongoing system of staff partnering each other is also very useful. Pair up your teachers to participate in ongoing appraisal and goal-setting, an arrangement whereby peers act as a sounding board and provide some accountability for self-appraisal and development. Every teacher, not just new teachers, should have someone for whom they act as peer-mentor and someone who peer-mentors them.

At every level of responsibility in your school, as professionals we make an effort to network and have support and advice from colleagues in similar roles. This is especially the case in a social context such as ours at present. Discontinuous change means we must give ongoing professional learning the priority it requires, or our personal spirit, our practice and our schools will suffer greatly.

Key Considerations

1. In order for your Board to maintain best practice in its governance, consider ways to keep abreast of potential opportunities to improve how it operates.
2. Consider ways to implement the above outlined points regarding your senior staff leadership team continuing to work together professionally.
3. Consider ways to have colleagues in similar roles within your school mentor and offer advice to one another.

ENABLING LEARNING AND IMPROVING PRACTICE

Two well-attested assumptions underlie much of our approach to improving learning in schools. The first is that student learning, engagement and success are fundamentally dependent on highly effective classroom and school practices. The second is that professional learning is what leads to improved classroom practice. Ergo, if you want to improve teaching you have to engage in professional learning. By **Dr Julie Rimes**

However, I was interested to read a recent report by Dr Geoff O'Brien (2012) considering the results of a large survey of 1,687 Principals who were asked to reflect on professional learning experiences for their teachers.[1] In NSW public schools spend more than $60m annually on professional learning, yet when these Principals were asked to estimate the percentage of professional learning courses or programs that showed **no evidence of having an effect** on the knowledge, skills, beliefs, or attitudes of their staff, they responded that a staggering 84% of what was 'delivered' had no effect at all.

So what does it take for professional learning in my school to *really* improve teacher practice? We know what should work because there is agreement on the elements of professional learning that has the potential to impact on teacher practice and student achievement: focus, collaborative inquiry that challenges thinking and practice, and instructional leadership. But why isn't it always effective? I contend that it is because some of the very real barriers to changing behaviour are often overlooked. We have understood the processes that need to happen, but we have overlooked the human condition that prevents the learning.

Dealing With Difficulties In Professional Learning

In the last edition of *CSM learn* I touched briefly on the human barriers that thwart the achievement of strategic goals. I referenced the work of Steven Katz and Lisa Ain Dack (2013) who reminded me of two facts:

- Learning is about affecting a permanent change in behaviour
- Learning is hard work

They suggest that because learning is about thinking, knowing and understanding differently, our natural inclination is to shy away from change. Subconsciously we try not to learn new things that are going to upset our equilibrium, result in dissonance or make us uncomfortable. They describe a range of cognitive biases that work to impede new learning, barriers that our minds put up to obstruct us changing what we think, know and understand. Putting it simply we are programmed to accept and confirm all that we already know to be right.

Katz and Dack propose the idea that human beings take mental shortcuts to avoid thinking and they have applied this to professional learning situations. They assert that we need to 'intentionally interrupt' the status quo of how we think when we are in professional learning situations in order to enable authentic, new learning to take place – learning that leads to a permanent change in teacher behaviour.

They come to the same conclusion that O'Brien came to in his 2012 report: that there is too much ineffectual professional learning. If we as school decision makers are going to invest in professional learning then we ought also to know what stops us from meaningful learning. There is much rhetoric around the effectiveness of professional learning communities and how in

its most simple form 'working together' will be efficacious, but the research has not always supported this. This is because many professional learning communities fall prey to the same ailments that afflict other forms of professional learning and the outcome is not always a change in behaviour. The problem is that they become professional *activity* sessions instead of professional learning sessions.

Katz and Dack identify the following six mental barriers to learning:

- We don't think through all possibilities
- We focus on confirming our hypotheses and not challenging them
- We pay too much attention to things that are vivid
- We consider ourselves to be exceptions
- We hesitate to take action in a new direction, and
- We don't want others to see our vulnerabilities.

Consider the first concept, *we don't think through all the possibilities.* Katz and Dack say that what distinguishes an expert from the rest of us is their willingness to spend more time analysing the problems that confront them. Non-experts have a tendency to do a quick environmental scan and then tackle the part of the problem that seems to be the most obvious cause. Katz and Dack propose that if you are going to take action you should have a really good look at the problem and then take the time to consider what the evidence and the data are revealing.

Consider another concept, *we focus on confirming our hypotheses and not challenging them.* We affirm what we want to hear and we agree with opinions that validate us. Birds of a feather flock together. When you read an article do you highlight all the sections that appeal to you? I do. I make a note of things that resonate with me, or confirm my existing perceptions. That is a barrier to new learning. Why not use two highlighter pens, one colour for the areas that **confirm** your thinking and one for the concepts that **challenge** your thinking? You can go online and watch a series of vodcasts with Steven Katz where he explores all of the barriers in an engaging seminar he gave for teachers in Ontario.[2]

There are no two ways about it, student learning, engagement and success are fundamentally dependent on highly effective classroom and school practices, and the way to achieve this is through professional learning. What we have to ensure is that our professional learning for teachers is not embedded in a swamp of barriers but rather that our practices enable long-term learning and change.

2 Katz, S 2012, Leading With Evidence For Educational Improvement, Leading Student Achievement: Networks For Learning, Ontario, viewed 9 February 2014, <http:// resources.curriculum.org/LSA/october2012.shtml>

Key Considerations

1. Consider carrying out an audit of professional learning in your school to assess if it is contributing to effective change in staff knowledge, skills, beliefs and attitudes.
2. Consider how to integrate an awareness of Katz and Dack's six mental barriers to learning into your school's professional learning programs and communities.
3. When reading, consider intentionally identifying areas that not only confirm but also challenge your thinking.

1 O'Brien, G 2012, Towards a Common Language for Effective Teacher and School Leader Professional Learning – The TEACH model, viewed 9 February 2014, <https://www.det.nsw.edu.au/proflearn/docs/pdf/teach_model.pdf>

Imagine an environment where teacher learning was as much a part of the school culture as student learning. An environment where teachers set professional learning (PL) agendas; where action research initiated by individuals or groups of teachers led to school improvement; where sharing of practice was a natural part of each day/week; where critiquing each other's lessons was as common as assessing student learning; and where staff learning was enhanced through membership of Communities of Practice. Imagine a school culture where Curriculum Leaders were not responsible for ensuring staff met the 'mandated hours' for PL and 'organised' professional development days, but instead were responsible for developing and embedding practices which enabled PL to become an ingrained and integrated cultural norm.
By Trudi Edwards

Consider developing a plan for enhancing a culture of learning for teachers, moving the responsibility of PL from an external 'task to be done' to an internal aspect of 'professional life'. Contemplate embedding all or some of the following strategies.

Plan Your Role With A View To Developing A PL Culture

What you say, do, model, promote and provide will be pivotal, both in the short and longer term, in supporting staff to embrace PL as an intrinsic part of professional life. Have a 'Learning is Everything' mantra, for both staff and students. Put your hand up to have your lessons critiqued by a staff member; model your commitment to PL through providing articles to staff; create a 'Scoopit' page (www.scoopit.com), have staff join your page and add an article each day or week. Use social media to join PL communities. Subscribe to a number of journals and organise your staffroom's physical environment more like a library by gathering people around bookshelves and magazine racks to ensure the physical environment supports professional reading and dialogue. Promote the profile of the intellectual capita you have within your school through auditing each staff member's areas of expertise. Share this amongst staff and encourage them to access colleagues' expertise.

Model your annual PL plan which lists your own PL goals. Use a format which outlines the goals you seek to achieve and include the strategies you can leverage to develop an improved level of competency. Include professional readings, membership to professional associations, online web forums, following particular professionals on twitter, seeking a mentor or 'critical friend' on staff, visiting other classrooms, or collaborative planning. Compiling a list of strategies which utilise school resources strengthens everyone's understanding that PL is not something that you 'attend', but something that you, the individual teacher, actions in order to enhance professional competence. Continual outsourcing of PD diminishes the intellectual and professional authority you have within the school. For a set period of time, limit external PD and heighten the use of internal resources in order to change patterns of thinking about professional development as being outside of the control of everyday interactions and intentions.

Empower Your Staff

Implement structures which empower teachers to lead PL, which may include any of the following: action research, Communities of Practice, or removing staff meetings and replacing them with PL communities. Have faculties or year level teams set agendas for PL for a semester or year. Introduce a weekly Professional Learning Community (PLC) and collaborate with staff to develop the run sheet for each meeting. This could open with a ten minute sharing of best practice by a different staff member each week.

Provide staff with the school annual operation goals and have them create the PL agenda required in order to meet these goals. PL goals will be different for everyone – give staff choice on which area they want to focus on and establish a process whereby staff can work together on similar projects or action research which leads to school improvement. The role of a Curriculum Leader in this context is to mentor, source literature and provide effective action research strategies, resources and programs to support efficient action research. In doing so you can guide project based learning which is real and relevant for teachers.

Open Up Classrooms

Only when teachers are self-reflective, through seeking feedback on their practice, will a true learning culture be achieved. Start with baby steps and make it safe. There is no situation more threatening for teachers than to have their practice viewed, critiqued and 'judged' by another. Do your research and ensure you are proficient in modelling strategies which provide useful data for teachers to reflect on their own practice. Tools which focus on student engagement, attention and response can be incredibly useful in guiding teachers to reflect on their lessons. It also makes it safe. The use of surveys and classroom observation tools such as 'academic learning time', 'on task behaviours' and 'opportunity to respond' all provide incredibly rich data which can be the catalyst for effectively reviewing pedagogy. As a Curriculum Leader, collate and model a broad range of observation tools which focus on students in order to ensure a safe and supportive environment for data informed professional reflection to flourish.

Key Considerations

As a Curriculum Leader, consider developing a culture where PL is embraced as part of each teacher's professional life through:

1. Embracing strategies which focus on changing attitudes towards PL through what you say, do, model, promote and provide.
2. Developing supportive structures which utilise the intellectual capita in your school as the first port of call for PL.
3. Establishing and sharing a repertoire of classroom observation strategies which support reflective practice amongst staff.

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PROFESSIONAL LEARNING: CREATIVE RESPONSES TO PROFESSIONAL LEARNING REQUESTS

There are many ways in which staff become inspired and committed to undertaking professional learning and deciding what kind of learning will best enhance their professional expertise. By **Marcus Edwards**

Professional learning priorities may be: determined by school-wide commitments such as the introduction of a new pastoral care or reading program; stimulated by attendance at a conference, or through professional reading and associations; motivated by an awareness that has emerged within a staff member as they have engaged with colleagues and students that there is a learning area which they must attend to; or become apparent to a teacher, while they are reviewing their career, as being necessary for promotion.

Ordinarily, in order for a potential and desirable professional learning opportunity to be progressed it must be approved by the school and the relevant resources for attendance and participation granted. It is not always possible for a school to support these requests, for a variety of reasons. This article explores how, in situations where support for a particular professional learning initiative is not possible, a creative response may be found to respond to the request in a way that contributes to the staff member's development and the organisation's educational capacity and competence.

Where There Is A 'No' To Professional Learning Because There Is Not A Budget To Enable The Request

If a teacher has a really good idea for professional learning which will improve their ability and increase the professional capacity of the school, but for which there is no budget, a school has no option but to say that it does not have the financial resources for the initiative.

However, the request does offer the possibility for the appropriate member of the school's leadership team to have a conversation with the staff member concerned along the following lines: *"What did you most hope to gain from this professional learning opportunity and what difference would this initiative make to the educational culture of the school?"*

If the line manager is convinced that this idea, expressed clearly and succinctly, has merit and rigor, the following question is prompted: *"How else could we achieve these outcomes within our budgetary constraints?"* There are many ways in which professional learning can be progressed and attended to with minimal economic cost, for example: collegial discussion groups and professional learning communities; a request to other staff within the school community who have the skills which are being sought and who can convey these to those who are seeking them; links to Twitter feeds and other social media sites which link people with a common interest; and inter-school visits to those who have already adopted the professional practice sought. These are all ways in which skills can be developed, networks of practice enriched, and professional reflection stimulated, all for very little monetary cost.

To summarise, when a professional learning request cannot be granted because it would exceed budgetary constraints, the staff member who oversees professional learning can get definition as to what outcomes are sought and find creative low cost means to achieve them. Saying 'no' to a professional learning request in this context can mean saying 'yes' to creative collaboration and community building.

Where There Is A 'No' To Professional Learning Because The Request Is Not A Priority Development Area For The Staff Member Concerned

Professional learning contributes to the excellence of staff practice and to the excellence of the school as a rich, vital and creative learning environment. In order for the professional learning provision of an organisation to be perceived as operating with integrity, the allocation of resources must be seen as being equitably distributed and awarded to projects that have clear and unambiguous benefits to the learning community as a whole and which to contribute in an appropriate and transparent way to an individual staff member's development. If professional learning opportunities are perceived to lack real applicability to the classroom or organisation, if they reward poorly performing staff, or if they are not aligned to strategic priority areas, this will damage staff confidence in those who have made and overseen these decisions.

When a staff member is considering or requesting professional learning opportunities that do not meet these kinds of integrity tests, an opportunity is presenting itself for a conversation with them regarding organisational ethos, alignment and priorities. This conversation must articulate an understanding of professional learning that appreciates the linkage between personal learning and organisational capacity, productivity and development. This conversation is in itself a professional learning event.

The intention of this conversation is to develop, with the staff member, a trajectory for their increased alignment with, and contribution to, the learning culture of the school.

There may be some defined exceptions to this linkage of professional learning and direct organisational benefit, for example a school may have a policy to contribute to the training of some types of school teachers and leaders for the good of the profession as a whole.

To summarise, when a professional learning request cannot be granted because it would not directly benefit the school, it is out of alignment with strategy, or it is incongruous given the contribution or alignment of the staff member concerned, use this opportunity to discuss with the staff member the school ethos and priorities and the ways in which they can develop and contribute to these. Saying 'no' to a professional learning request in this context can mean saying 'yes' to opportunities to help staff become aligned with organisational values and expectations.

Key Considerations

1. Consider innovative ways of achieving professional learning outcomes to suit your budget.
2. In situations of budget constraint, consider ways of ascertaining the benefits of the training to both the individual and the school.
3. When assessing the validity of staff professional learning requests consider how such a request will potentially benefit the learning community as a whole.

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UTILISING THE PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT RESOURCES WITHIN YOUR SCHOOL

The beginning of a new school year is often marked with professional development activities, usually a part of the pupil free days which bookend the year. These are designed to contribute to teacher professional development within the particular learning community. Within this context, I had occasion to discuss professional development activities with a young enthusiastic Faculty Head to gain some insights into what happened in her school. This young professional was relating the disappointment she felt in the room during and after a recent session designed to enable and inspire her and her colleagues. The presenter, previously unknown to them all, had been flown in from interstate at considerable expense and on this occasion failed to hit the mark as the assembled group of educators quickly reached the conclusion that they could have addressed this topic themselves with greater relevance. By **Bruce Hodges**

This made me reflect on my own similar experiences in many different locations where sadly the professional development section of these days failed to deliver what it set out to do, and many staff knew that there were other staff members sitting in the same room who could have handled the content in a far more contextually relevant and meaningful way.

Far from dismissing the usefulness of the external 'expert' – perish the thought – I wish to highlight the incredible professional development resource that is sitting in every school, often completely untapped, which is of course our teachers. Every school in the country will be aware of the importance of teacher professional learning, not only to meet mandated registration requirements but also to drive better student achievement. Every school will have teacher professional development as part of their strategic intent. In this article I wish to highlight some initiatives that I have come across which are accomplishing this strategic goal via the direct involvement of teachers. When teachers speak or write about what they do, their words are powerful and have many uses. Apart from highlighting the excellent work that a teacher is doing, such reflections can be used as the basis of workshop presentations, shared with others and used to initiate professional conversations which have the potential to contribute much more to the PD process than the poorly positioned guest speaker.

Using Publications To Highlight Outstanding Teacher Practice

There are many examples in schools across the country where publications herald the outstanding work of students. Many books, journals and e-portfolios are specially dedicated to chronicling outstanding pieces of writing, poetry and artwork. We are good at doing this. But what of publications that highlight the outstanding practice of teachers?

Recently I had the pleasure of reading a publication called *Clippings* which is published regularly by Abbotsleigh School for Girls. At this school, it is their endeavour to pursue academic excellence in teaching and to promote a reflective culture for the teachers where research and practice are constantly under review. Easy to say but here is also a tangible translation of their strategic intent to foster this excellence in teaching and learning. A recent offering of *Clippings* has 'Making Learning Visible' as its theme and contains contributions from a range of staff: the Headmistress directly addresses visible learning; a range of specialist teachers write about visible learning in Music, English, Art, Mathematics and Geography; the Early Learning Coordinator writes about Cognitive Process Dimensions; and the

Christian studies teacher writes an article entitled 'Promoting Biblical Literacy'. The thirty-four contributions all detail practice focussed on the current theme and tell the stories of the current professional journeys of the writers.

At St Lucy's School teachers and staff have contributed to an inspirational book, *St Lucy's School: The Image Of The Child*, which reveals the elements that make this wonderful school an example of excellence in education for children with disabilities. The professionals of St Lucy's share their practice in the social rather than medical model they have adopted which constructs disability as a range of different abilities which students can deal with and achieve within. Chapters deal with the importance of listening and observing and with the creation of close, nurturing relationships which ultimately help students to develop skills and the confidence to lead meaningful lives within the community. The creativity, humour, perseverance and naturalness of the children at the school is highlighted throughout in the words of the staff.

Plumpton House School was established as one of the NSW Government's initiatives to address violence in schools. The emphasis at this school is on transition of its students into the next environment (e.g. mainstream school, TAFE, employment, etc). The school itself sees that it provides a therapeutic environment that caters for the emotional, social, physical and academic needs of students from Years 5 to 11 with identified behaviour problems. Students are sent there when mainstream schools can no longer cater for them. To say that this is a challenging place to teach is an understatement. In *Freedom To Choose: Every Day Is A New Day At Plumpton House School*, staff reflect on their work and provide fascinating and uplifting insights into their ability to provide opportunities to change the mindset of children let down by or on the outside of conventional education. Staff take the view that the ability to choose is what makes us different from all other living things and, while this does not make us perfect, it leaves us responsible. The stories told here are raw, empathetic and real and provide educators from across the spectrum with a range of useful and innovative ideas that they can translate into their own context. This book also enabled the Principal of the school to lead a workshop at the 2013 National Special Education Conference.

In *Brave Hearts, Bold Minds: Growing Fine Young Men*, we encounter a different aspect of education. Teachers from The Scots College write about their approaches in answering the two questions:

- What shapes a boy into the man he will become?
- How can we nurture a boy so he grows into his best self?

These stories capture the collective knowledge of the teaching professionals at the college, providing their take on what motivates boys to challenge themselves and their insights into the essential elements which serve to equip boys to become fine men of character. Chapters with headings such as 'Boys are Spiritual', 'Boys Have Feelings', 'Boys need to be Engaged' and 'Boys Need to feel Safe' give a sense of the wide range of topics that the teachers at Scots address. Contributors are drawn from those teaching the very young to those engaged with senior boys and the end product is a text that offers much to other professionals engaged in boys' education around the world.

Each of the collections of teaching practice outlined in this article were generated in very different contexts but they all indicate the wealth of knowledge that resides in our schools, just waiting to be shared with others. These four publications, providing reflections on educating young boys and girls, those with disability and those presenting behavioural challenges, are just the tip of the iceberg when considering the world of teaching practice.

Can you imagine the amount of professional knowledge residing in your school that could form part of your well planned learning community, along with the input of an outside expert as appropriate? Often the most challenging part is to convince teachers that they have something of value to say. It is not uncommon to get a response such as, "No one is going to be interested in what I have to say". It often takes considerable expertise to tease out a contribution, but it is worth persevering. Schools do not necessarily need to commission special book projects to collect this wisdom; they simply need to have someone who will take the time to commission and collect the material. Once you have it, the opportunities to use it are endless.

Key Considerations

1. Consider inviting a member of staff to share reflections from their own teaching practice at a PD session.
2. Consider reading a publication containing professional reflections from a learning community which shares an educational context similar to your own.
3. Consider collating the professional knowledge of your staff into an appropriate publication for circulation within your school community.

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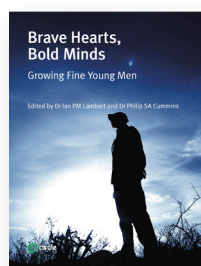
Brave Hearts, Bold Minds: Growing Fine Young Men

Educators from The Scots College share their insights into the essential elements which serve to equip boys to become fine men of great character.

Freedom To Choose: Every Day is a New Day at Plumpton House School

Staff from Plumpton House School reflect on their work, providing fascinating and uplifting insights into their ability to provide opportunities to change the mindsets of children let down or outsidered by conventional education.

St Lucy's School: The Image of the Child

The personal experiences and unique insights of dedicated teachers, staff and parents are brought together to reveal the elements that make St Lucy's an extraordinary example of excellence in education for children with disabilities.

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CONTRIBUTORS

Philip SA Cummins BA LLB PhD MACE MACEL AIMM RAA
Phil is Managing Director of CIRCLE. He is an author, speaker and teacher with a distinguished record in effective values based leadership, and was recently appointed as Adjunct Associate Professor in Education by the University of Tasmania. Phil has a passion for educational leadership that delivers the best possible outcomes for more learners in more schools.
phil@circle.org.au

Maria Woods MEd BEd Dip T Cert Residential Care MAICD MACEL MACE AIMM
Maria Woods is the Principal of Sunshine Coast Grammar School. Maria began her tenure in July 2012. She is an experienced educator with over twenty years in schools from both the state and independent sectors. Maria is also a Director of Grammar Early Learning Limited trading as New Leaf Early Learning Centre, an initiative of the Sunshine Coast Grammar School.
mwoods@scgs.qld.edu.au

Stephen Hinks BA DipEd ThL BD(Hons) DipRE DMin C4TAA
Stephen has over forty years' experience as an educator and a leader. His range of skills to train, review, mentor and write come from a diverse background of leadership in organisational, school and tertiary education. As a former Principal and now a Consultant he brings a maturity and applied wisdom to serve others.
shinks@integrityleadership.com.au

Dr Julie Rimes FACE FACEL FAICD
Julie is the Director of the Collegiate Institute in Hobart. The Collegiate Institute for Professional Learning, Research and Innovation is a centre of excellence for the professional development of teachers, applied educational research and the promotion of innovative learning practices.
julie.rimes@collegiate.tas.edu.au

Trudi Edwards MEd BEd Dip T
Trudi has spent the best part of her teaching career leading curriculum and pedagogy development in independent schools. She is deeply committed to evidence based and data informed school improvement in order to assist educators to intentionally and responsively improve each and every student's learning. As a strong advocate that teachers make the greatest impact on student achievement and development, Trudi believes that schools should be as much a place for teacher learning as they are for student learning.
trudi.edwards@saintkentigern.com

Marcus Edwards BE(civil) BTh
Marcus is Head of Education at CIRCLE. He has served in independent schools in Australia and New Zealand and has extensive experience working in strategic leadership teams and was also a member of the governing body of Anglican Schools Commission in Western Australia. He has a particular interest in helping communities of education express their foundational commitments, values and beliefs through their culture and in their endeavour.
marcus@circle.org.au

Bruce Hodges Dip T BEd MEd
Bruce is Head of Consultancy at CIRCLE and brings over 37 years of experience in teaching and leading in state and independent secondary schools to this role. Bruce is passionate about teaching and achieving better outcomes for more learners in more schools.
bruce@circle.org.au

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