Realising the Power of Professional Learning

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Overview

• Brief sketch of New Zealand’s education system

• Basis of my research into professional learning

• Applications in policy and practice
New Zealand’s Education System

• Prior to 1989 highly bureaucratic

• In 1989 - policy-only Ministry and individual schools governed by school boards
  – Schools responsible for most operations
  – High level of autonomy
  – Growing Maori-medium education system
Regulation and Guidance

• Compliance with a set of fairly loose regulations including a national curriculum
  – Key competencies (e.g. thinking, managing self, relating to others)
  – Learning areas (e.g. English, mathematics)

• Compliance checked by an independent review authority;
Assessment System

• Guidelines take a formative approach

• Schools required to assess students to report to parents

• No national testing until Year 11

• Nationally standardised assessments available (voluntary)
  – Not aggregated beyond the school level
Professional Development

• Schools expected to provide for teachers’ PD
• Nationally funded PD in literacy, numeracy, formative assessment and ICT
  – Participation is voluntary
• National advisory service attached to universities (being disbanded)
• Increasing number of handbooks, progressions, websites
• No requirement to teach in particular ways
Reading Literacy
NZ’s High Mean and Large Variance

Variation expressed as percentage of average variation across the OECD

Source: OECD (2001) Knowledge and skills for life, Appendix B1, Table 2.3a, p.253, Table 2.4, p.257.
One Policy Strategy

The Iterative Best Evidence Synthesis (BES) Programme

What does and doesn’t work in education?

BES: A catalyst for collaborative knowledge building and use across policy, research and practice in education

Goal: Systemic improvement and sustainable change

Five syntheses completed
Overarching Research Question

What kinds of practice result in improvement in outcomes for students?
– Including students’ engagement, learning and well-being
– Using both qualitative and quantitative studies

• Five syntheses completed:
– Teaching for diverse students; Mathematics; Social sciences; School leadership; Professional learning and development
Focus on Valued Student Outcomes

Worthwhile content

Integration of knowledge and skills

Assessment for professional inquiry

Multiple opportunities to learn and apply

Approaches responsive to learning processes

Opportunities to process new learning with others

Knowledgeable expertise

Active leadership

Maintaining momentum

Teacher inquiry and knowledge-building cycle to promote valued student outcomes

What knowledge and skills do our students need?

What knowledge and skills do we need as teachers?

What has been the impact of our changed actions?

Engage students in new learning experiences

Deepen professional knowledge and refine skills
Theoretical Links

• Theory of professionalism
  – Teachers as adaptive experts (Hammerness et al, 2005)

• Theories of learning
  – “How people learn” (Bransford et al., 2000)
  – Engaging prior theories
  – Deep content knowledge
  – Meta-cognition
  – Formative assessment for teachers
  – Self-regulated learning
How the Cycle Can Work

THE EVIDENCE
Professional Learning and Development Best Evidence Synthesis iteration (2008)

THE PRACTICE
Literacy Professional Development Project in New Zealand
- 300 schools
- On average 2-3 times expected rate of progress
- Lowest 20% 3-4 times expected rate of progress
- Gains sustained with new cohorts
Finding Out About Students

- What is the current situation for students’ engagement, learning and well-being?

- What do the students need to learn and do and how do we want them to be?

- How do we build on the current situation to move things forward?
What knowledge and skills do our students need?

What has been the impact of our changed actions?

Engage students in new learning experiences

Deepen professional knowledge and refine skills

What knowledge and skills do we as teachers need?
Finding out about Own Knowledge and Practice

• How we have contributed to existing student outcomes?
• What do we already know that we can use to promote improved outcomes for students?
• What do we need to learn and do to promote these outcomes?
• What sources of evidence / knowledge can we utilise?
Teacher inquiry and knowledge-building cycle to promote valued student outcomes

What knowledge and skills do our students need?

What has been the impact of our changed actions?

Engage students in new learning experiences

Deepen professional knowledge and refine skills

What knowledge and skills do we as teachers need?
Deepen Professional Knowledge and Refine Skills

Important considerations:

• Consider research findings about different approaches
  – Integrate knowledge, skills and theory
    • Curriculum, assessment, pedagogy
    – Focus on the teaching / learning links;

• Discuss existing ideas about students, their learning and well-being, purposes of assessment, meaning of the curriculum and how to teach it
Three Fields of Knowledge (NCSL)

**What Is Known**
The knowledge from theory, research and best practice

**What We Know**
The knowledge of those involved. What practitioners know

**New Knowledge**
The new knowledge that we can create together through collaborative work
Promoting change in teachers’ beliefs and assumptions

Current assumptions challenged

Develop new knowledge and skills

Observe resulting improvements in student outcomes

Make small changes to practices
Teacher inquiry and knowledge-building cycle to promote valued student outcomes

- What knowledge and skills do our students need?
- What knowledge and skills do we as teachers need?
- What has been the impact of our changed actions?
- Engage students in new learning experiences
- Deepen professional knowledge and refine skills
Judging Impact

- What evidence is there that any changes made promote our students’ engagement, learning and well-being?
- What reasons lie behind improvement or lack of it?
  - Means the ongoing use of evidence on a daily, term by term and annual basis
  - Using a range of assessment approaches
Judging impact of professional learning CANNOT be a single event

• Pervades all aspects of the cycle
  – Identifying what students know and need to learn and be
  – Identifying what teachers know and need to learn
  – Deciding what might be most effective
  – Checking impact of changes to practice
School Leadership

• Teachers cannot do it alone
• To lead effectively, leaders must know enough themselves to:
  – Work through the inquiry and knowledge building cycles with teachers
  – Help teachers to interrogate and improve practice
If Leaders are to Lead Learning

Must know their “class” of teachers:

– What the teachers already know and do well and what they need to learn
– What the leaders need to learn and do to make a difference to teacher learning and student outcomes
– How to engage the teachers to build on what they already know and can do
– How to check impact
What knowledge and skills do our teachers need?

What knowledge and skills do we as leaders need?

What has been the impact of our changed actions?

Engage teachers in new learning experiences

Deepen professional knowledge and refine skills

Leaders’ inquiry and knowledge-building cycle to promote valued teaching practices and student outcomes
Policy Impact

• Ministry responsible for PD recognised their need to learn how to engage every layer of the system in cycles of inquiry and knowledge building (including themselves);

• BES principles are being used to redesign national professional development projects
Realising the Power of Professional Learning

• Underpinned by a defensible view of professionalism
• Requires a constant focus on students and their needs at all levels of the system
• What is learned is worth learning
• Teachers are able to take control of their own learning in disciplined and evidence-informed ways