REPORT of the Professional Learning and Development Advisory Group

Professional Development Advisory Group
AUGUST 2014
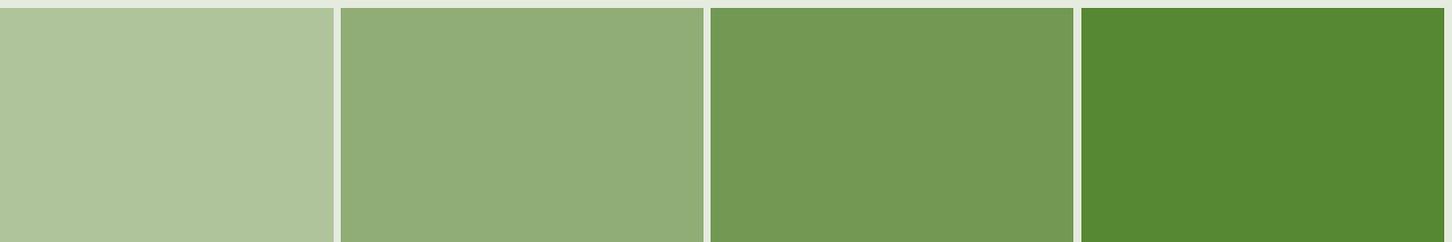
He pouako, he rangatira — he angitu, he ngaio
Teachers, leaders — outstanding and professional

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

1. We are pleased to provide this report which sets out our thinking to date about a new approach and principles for professional learning and development. We also discuss the strengths and weaknesses of the current approach which confirms for us the need for change.

2. In this report we:

   · set out an emerging approach for PLD to achieve a system-wide lift in student achievement

   · summarise the evidence available which informs the approach

   · set out the principles which underpin exemplary practice for PLD

   · report on the strengths and weaknesses of the current system, and

   · comment on the level to which the current provision and contracting model of PLD supports delivery of exemplary PLD.

Contents

Introduction

3. The role of the Advisory Group is to provide advice on the future design of professional learning and development (PLD) across the compulsory schooling and kura sector in Aotearoa New Zealand. The focus of our work is on how investment in PLD can be used effectively to promote the capabilities of all teachers and leaders, and therefore a PLD system that builds the skills of teachers and education leaders to enhance student achievement for all learners. PLD includes both the informal and formal activities of school and kura leaders and teachers, designed to improve their professional knowledge, skills, and practice. The review covers both the Māori and English medium parts of the compulsory school and kura sector.

4. PLD is an important tool for making system wide improvements. The evidence is clear that there is a link between effective PLD and improved student outcomes. The Best Evidence Synthesis (BES) on Professional Learning and Development report released in 2008, is one of many evidence sources that we can draw on. The evidence base continues to grow. For example Te Piko o te Māhuri identifies the key attributes of success for students in Kura Kaupapa Māori. The evidence informs the approach we discuss in this report.

5. PLD should advance and support the intent of the national curriculum documents: The New Zealand Curriculum, and Te Marautanga o Aotearoa. These documents, together with the principles of inclusion and cultural responsiveness, provide directions for learning and guidance for effective pedagogy. For Kura Kaupapa Māori, PLD should also advance and support Te Aho Matua, the founding document that describes a Māori world view (Royal, 2008) about education, teaching and learning.

6. The New Zealand Curriculum and Te Marautanga o Aotearoa have shifted thinking about the skills and knowledge needed by young people to become confident, connected, actively involved, lifelong learners. There is extensive evidence about the kinds of teaching approaches that consistently have a positive impact on student learning. PLD involves not only learning about new ways of doing things, but also impacts on how teachers think of themselves as professional educators.

7. New Zealand schools and kura have students with diverse learning needs. We need to ensure that teachers and leaders continue to grow their skills and knowledge throughout their careers to be adaptive experts who are culturally responsive and able to meet the needs of all learners. A vision of teachers and leaders as adaptive experts[1] therefore underpins our thinking on the future of PLD.

8. We acknowledge that our work on PLD is being developed alongside other changes, for example, Investing in Educational Success, changes in Initial Teacher Education, and changes to the professional body for teachers and leaders.

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1. Adaptive experts are focused on the moral imperative of promoting the engagement, learning and well-being of all students. To achieve this outcome they are aware of the assumptions underpinning their practice, including their cultural positioning, and know when these assumptions are helpful for their students and when to question them, and if necessary, to let them go. They actively seek deep knowledge about both the content of what is taught and how to teach it effectively for their students in particular contexts.

A new approach

9. Our vision is one where every student in every school and kura has leaders and teachers who are actively engaged in professional learning and development that supports and challenges them to accelerate valued student outcomes.

10. This section summarises our emerging view of a new approach for PLD. This view is based on the best evidence available about the approaches to PLD, including successful PLD programmes in other countries, that have positive outcomes for all students, with inbuilt systems for improvement so that it evolves over time as the evidence base advances. In summary the key features of a new PLD approach are:

   - Coherent investment framed within a focused number of priorities for PLD. These priorities would be shaped and influenced by schools and kura and communities of schools and kura, and the collection and analysis of evidence of student engagement, achievement and well-being.

   - Leaders capable and confident to design, lead and collaborate on PLD in their schools and kura and community of schools and kura in ways that develop adaptive expertise.

   - Internal and external expertise being mobilised across the system to support professional learning and development to occur, including drawing on expertise external to the school and kura.

   - Teachers and leaders developing adaptive expertise, which in essence means continually assessing if their professional work is resulting in better outcomes for students, and seeking to develop the deep knowledge and relevant skills to enhance those outcomes.

   - PLD as systematic, ongoing, evidence-informed inquiry.

   - Independent national evaluation of the impact that centrally funded PLD has on student outcomes.

   - Clear accountabilities for roles and expectations within the system (i.e. among the Ministry, Education Review Office (ERO), boards of trustees, schools and kura, leaders, teachers and providers) focused on student outcomes.

   - Equity of access for all schools and kura regardless of size, type or location.

   - Research and evaluation effectively contributes to the evidence base that enables ongoing improvement. ■

The evidence

11. The approach is informed by the evidence about what makes PLD most effective in impacting on valued student outcomes. The New Zealand context for PLD is richly informed by the BES and the ongoing work arising from them both nationally and internationally. In recent years, the development of a more extensive evidence base about how to teach students more effectively; and the critical role of leaders working with teachers to identify their individual and collective learning needs, and participating as learners alongside those teachers, has emerged to inform the future directions of PLD.

12. The evidence about how to learn effectively identifies that leaders create organisations in which learning is the core business, and where teachers become adaptive experts, differentiating their learning each time they approach a new challenge. The key processes for teacher and student learning, the presence of prior knowledge, integrating factual knowledge into current frameworks and understanding the learning process, are similar regardless of the age of the learner.

13. Learning is at the heart of PLD. A critical function of effective PLD is to challenge teachers' and leaders' prevailing conceptions about learning and students. Teachers and leaders changing their teaching and learning practices through evidence-informed inquiry are central to PLD impacting on student outcomes. When teachers engage collaboratively in the teaching as inquiry cycle they are continually checking whether what they are doing is achieving the learning they intended for students. The evidence they gain from the process allows them to effectively engage in new learning and change their practices to best meet the needs of every learner.

14. Education has a long history of inquiry and reflection that have typically held more interest for the professionals involved rather than being focused on improving valued students' outcomes. What the Advisory Group is proposing is different. The evidence provides direction about what should be different. The evidence suggests that PLD improves valued student outcomes when:

    · it is prioritised through school and kura review and strategic planning processes

    · leaders and teachers have the capability to gather and analyse evidence about student achievement to identify PLD priorities for schools and kura

- leadership facilitates the conditions for teachers to engage in intensive collaborative inquiry in their work and leaders participate in this process with them
- leaders lead learning – designing the PLD plan and having deep knowledge about the inquiry processes in their school and kura
- teachers carry out evidence-informed inquiry using robust evidence about students' learning needs including identifying and investigating prior knowledge
- leaders and teachers collaborate with colleagues (internal or external to the school and kura) to monitor and check progress. ◼

The principles

15. The Advisory Group recommends six principles to frame the new approach:

- ***A coherent learning system focused on priority goals*** – Professional learning is supported and embedded in a coherent learning system at both school and kura and system levels with the active involvement of leaders, teachers, students, boards of trustees and family/whānau in partnership around a shared focus on priority goals.

- ***Disciplined inquiry*** – Professional learning builds motivation and collective responsibility through systematic evidence-informed inquiry. This is based on an analysis of student profiles of engagement, achievement and well-being, focused on improving these outcomes and is responsive to the diversity of leader and teacher learning needs.

- ***Deep knowledge and skills*** – The inquiry process develops adaptive experts who are culturally responsive and who have the knowledge and skills in learning, assessment and pedagogy which have been established as effective in improving learner outcomes, along with developing deep content knowledge underpinning the national curriculum, and using a range of expertise both internal and external.

- ***Multiple opportunities to learn*** – Multiple opportunities to learn and practise in real contexts with support occur over an extended period of time with constant checking to ensure the opportunities are making a difference to learners.

- ***Sustained improvement*** – Sustained improvement in learner outcomes requires leaders and teachers to have sound theoretical knowledge and to be confident and competent about creating, developing and sustaining a culture of ongoing improvement.

- ***System learning through research and development*** – Sustained improvement at the system level requires disciplined innovation with embedded research and development, with the information used to develop a coherent system infrastructure and the strategic uses of resources.

Current state of PLD

16. PLD undertaken by teachers and leaders is supported in six main ways:

    - targeted centrally funded PLD contracts, including those which are not allocated regionally, for example the National Aspiring Principals Programme and Teacher Refresher Course Committee (TRCC)

    - through school and kura operations grants and locally raised funds

    - the collective agreements for teachers which contain provision for PLD – for example study awards and sabbaticals, and the awards outside of the collective agreements

    - Resource Teachers of Literacy, Resource Teachers Māori, Resource Teachers of Learning and Behaviour, and other Special Education services

    - teachers' personal funding of courses and conferences

    - tertiary education subsidies to support individuals to undertake study.

17. The remainder of this section is focused on centrally funded PLD. The current system is a reflection of multiple decisions made over a number of years and many of the current allocations are based on historical decisions. The centrally targeted PLD is intended to support leaders and teachers in continuing to develop expertise to improve outcomes for all students, with an emphasis on priority students.

…there are strengths and weaknesses…

18. We have developed a summary of strengths and weaknesses of the current centrally funded system, including using the New Zealand Principals' Federation and New Zealand Post Primary Teachers' Association (PPTA) surveys, and reviewing an analysis of a sample of PLD contracts and milestone reports. We found that the strengths in the system are:

    - the growing evidence base of what works in PLD, linked to learner outcomes

    - the value placed on the contribution of effective PLD to valued student outcomes, as evidenced by the Government's investment in PLD

    - the Ministry's role in lifting system capability through supporting schools and kura, setting standards, identifying priority learners and curriculum areas, and brokering support for a wide range of schools and kura and teachers

    - some school and kura leaders and boards taking an active leadership role in lifting capability for both the whole school and individual teachers

- the Ministry's PLD approach being underpinned by a school and kura review framework designed to lift school and kura capability in evidence-informed teacher and school inquiry.

19. We have also identified a number of weaknesses in the system, including:

- the variety and allocation of PLD – some schools and kura receive multiple allocations and others are not able to access any of the central resource

- the application and procurement processes are complex and result in some schools and kura receiving PLD in areas they have not applied for, or not bothering to apply in the first place

- some teachers and leaders and schools and kura see centrally funded PLD as the only resource, and may not take the initiative to access external expertise, or develop school and kura based systems and processes for professional learning that are in line with the BES.

- some provision is inconsistent with an inquiry approach as stated in both the national curriculum documents, and the research evidence about effective PLD

- there are multiple school and kura review processes

- there can be limited knowledge in schools and kura about how to best design and implement effective PLD so that it leads to improved student outcomes in schools and kura

- information about the current PLD spend and impact is difficult to gather and analyse

- organisation of resources for online professional learning could be improved

- other resources (such as release time) required to ensure effective and sustainable implementation can be lacking.

Concerns have been raised about the current approach…

20. Between 1990 and 2010 a number of reviews were undertaken,[2] yet concerns have been expressed by some groups, such as PPTA and Te Rūnanga nui o ngā Kura Kaupapa Māori about the effectiveness of the current arrangements and impact of PLD.

21. In recent years both the Education Review Office (ERO) and the Office of the Controller and Auditor General, have identified a number of issues about PLD. These include: a lack of strategy and direction across PLD; a need to align all PLD initiatives with the evidence; a need for all providers to build teacher and leader capability to gather and analyse evidence about student achievement and link this to PLD needs; and a wide variation in the quality of PLD management in schools and kura.

22. Currently, centrally provided PLD is not well aligned with school and kura processes or learning needs (including school's and kura planning and reporting processes and timelines). It is important that we utilise our knowledge about what works, informed by our growing evidence base, to ensure alignment and coherence across the compulsory schooling system in both English and Māori medium.

23. Government investment is intended to continually build the capability of the profession and positively impact on student achievement outcomes. In the past, PLD was allocated to schools and kura to support particular areas of need, for example curriculum support, to enhance Government priorities, or to build teacher knowledge and capabilities in different learning areas. Some previous PLD priorities continue to be funded today, but the majority of centrally funded PLD is allocated regionally on the basis of need.

24. In our view, the weaknesses outweigh the strengths and there is a mismatch between the principles we have drawn from the evidence and the current state. It is important that concerns around the effectiveness of PLD and its impact on valued student outcomes are addressed. ◼

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2   The more recent reviews include: Sankar, M, & Chauvel, F. (2010) Provision of School Support Services — an evaluation, a report prepared for the Ministry of Education by Martin Jenkins; and Deloitte (2008) School Support Services Contract Review.

Context for the proposed approach

25. Our vision is one where every student in every school and kura has leaders and teachers who are actively engaged in professional learning and development that supports and challenges them to accelerate valued student outcomes. It is that which is encapsulated in the pepeha the Group has adopted:

He pouako, he rangatira — he angitu, he ngaio

Teachers, leaders — outstanding and professional

26. We want every school and kura to maintain a culture of disciplined inquiry that includes the development of specific and deep knowledge to sustain improvements in student learning. This requires all teachers and leaders having skills in assessment, pedagogical content knowledge, and cultural competence to undertake leadership of the inquiry processes within their schools and kura and across communities of schools and kura. We want every teacher and leader learning through participation in an evidence-informed inquiry, focused on improving the learning of all students.

27. We have identified four broad areas of PLD that interrelate and overlap:

    a. technical skills

    b. specialist knowledge

    c. knowledge and skills specific to leading learning in and across schools and kura

    d. knowledge and skills to establish and maintain a disciplined inquiry culture and practice within schools and kura.

28. We consider the areas can be met by accessing different resources and support. The first three broad areas, contribute to the fourth area.

29. Teachers and leaders need to continually acquire technical skills. These skills are fundamental to teaching and learning. Examples include how to undertake, analyse and use running records in primary schools and kura, and moderation of assessment in secondary schools and wharekura. Teachers also need to develop curriculum and subject knowledge and leader specialist knowledge in particular subject areas, including the need to keep up-to-date with what is emerging. We consider that teachers and leaders develop these essential technical skills and curriculum and subject knowledge in a variety of ways. These areas are familiar ongoing practices to teachers and leaders, and contribute to the outcomes we want.

30. The evidence is clear that to achieve our vision we need to improve leadership capacity in leading professional learning across schools and kura. This is where we need to focus.

31. Students and teachers benefit when leaders understand the professional learning needs of teachers, and promote and participate in teacher learning and development across the school and kura. This requires leaders of learning to have the skills to engage in learning discussions, analyse and solve complex problems, and facilitate collaboration for the purpose of deep inquiry in and across schools and kura. They need to be confident and capable of encouraging and motivating others, setting and monitoring the agenda, and sharing leadership. Teachers need to feel valued and supported in their professional learning requirements, which results in students who are confidently improving learning outcomes.

32. Lastly, for success we need to ensure we have teachers and leaders in every school and kura confidently integrating disciplined inquiry and the development of specific and deep knowledge into practices to sustain improvements in student learning over time.

…An inquiry based approach…

33. There are many different ways to undertake professional inquiry within schools and kura. The key processes include:
    a. seeking evidence to develop an understanding about students' learning across the values, key competencies and learning areas of the national curriculum documents
    b. focusing on areas of high priority need for learners and in the process making professional learning demanding and manageable
    c. identifying possible hypotheses about why the situation has arisen for the learners
    d. learning how to address the priority needs in ways that address the hypotheses about what is happening by drawing on the relevant research and expertise
    e. taking action in ways that include learners, whānau, families, teachers and leaders
    f. checking that the learning and action have made a difference for the targeted groups and intended outcomes
    g. using feedback loops and ongoing analysis to identify what still needs to be addressed, or to form the next focus.
    h. take up opportunities to share new knowledge with researchers and colleagues.

Disciplined inquiry building whole school and kura capability*

Define your
focus

Analyse
what's going on for
your learners

Develop your thinking
about why this is
happening

Check
the difference you
have made

Learn more
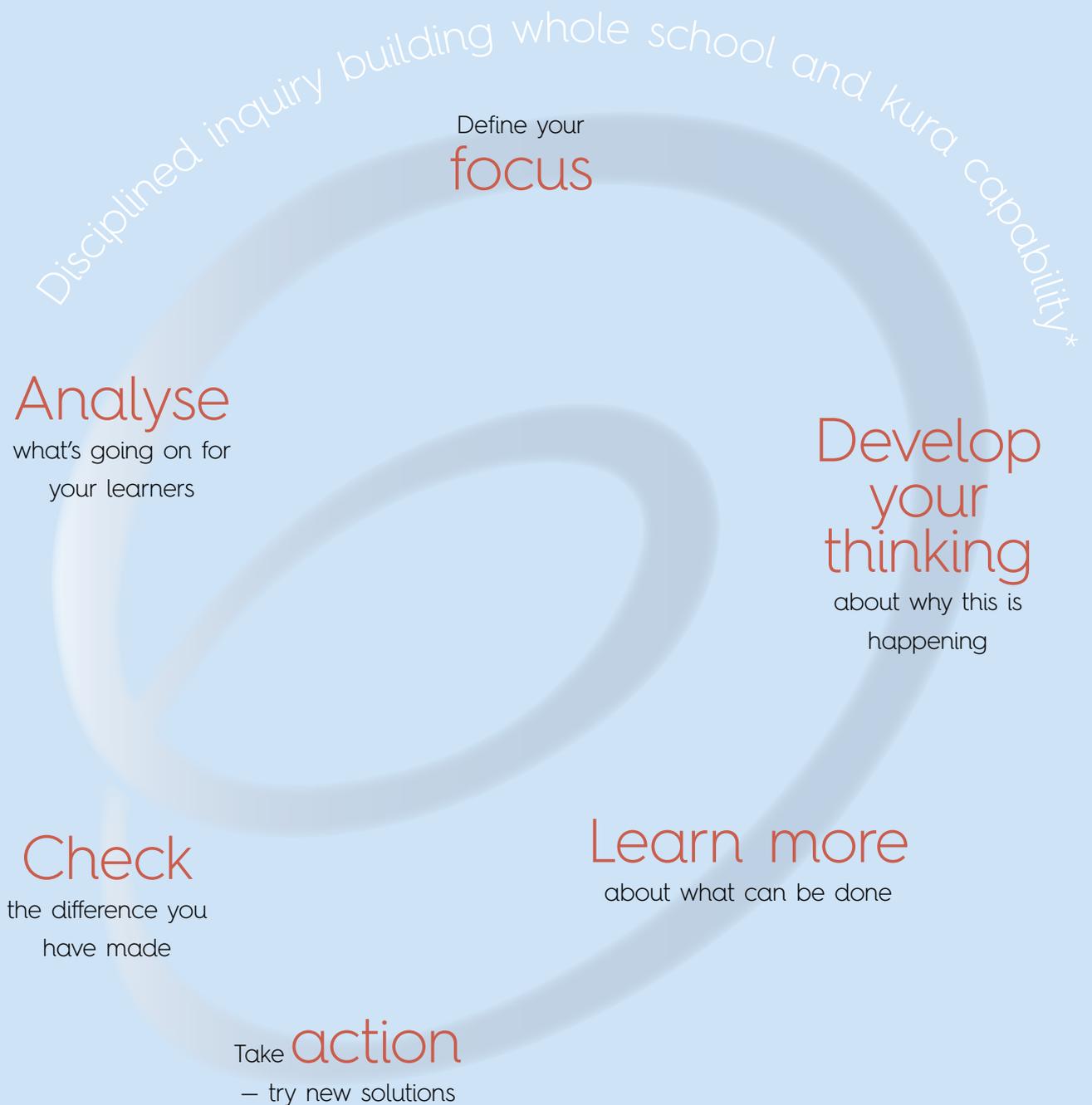about what can be done

Take **action**
— try new solutions

Figure 1. A spiral of inquiry, learning and action (Adapted from Timperley, Kaser and Halbert, 2014).

34. Most current 'delivery-type' PLD models apply predetermined areas of focus no matter what the presenting context. We know that this typically fails to improve learning.

35. Engaging in an evidence-informed inquiry process puts responsibility on the professionals to work collaboratively towards change and improvement in teaching practice. It also creates a sense of agency and locates inquiry in the everyday work of the school and kura. This creates a culture of sustained improvement. Once the learning focus is identified through school and kura review, more focused inquiries may be needed to unpack the area of focus in more detail.

...with coherence and depth...

36. The evidence supports focused and in-depth inquiry. Learning, whether for student learners or the professionals who work with them, must be demanding without creating overload (Dumont, Istance & Benavides, 2010). Teachers and leaders involved in the inquiry cycle are focusing on the development of strong, systematic processes and greater depth of knowledge and skills in a particular area. When done well, this is demanding of teachers.

37. We know that engaging in more than one area of professional learning at the same time results in poorer outcomes for students than engaging in a single sustained focus (Bryk, Sebring, Allensworth, Luppescu, & Easton, 2010; , Lai, McNaughton & Hsaio, 2010).

38. Figure 2 illustrates how focused and deep learning, beginning with an analysis of student outcomes, can contribute to the development of knowledge and skills beyond the learning focus itself. The initial focus impacts on all of the work that goes on in schools and kura. When systematic transfer of learning to other areas is addressed, broader knowledge and skills are developed. In the case of teachers, the transfer might be to other curriculum areas or to all students. This is supported by evidence from Te Kōtahitanga (Bishop, Berryman, Wearmouth & Peter, 2012) and the Literacy Professional Development Project (Timperley, Parr & Meissel, 2010) which identified that learning about effective teaching for targeted groups of students benefited all students.
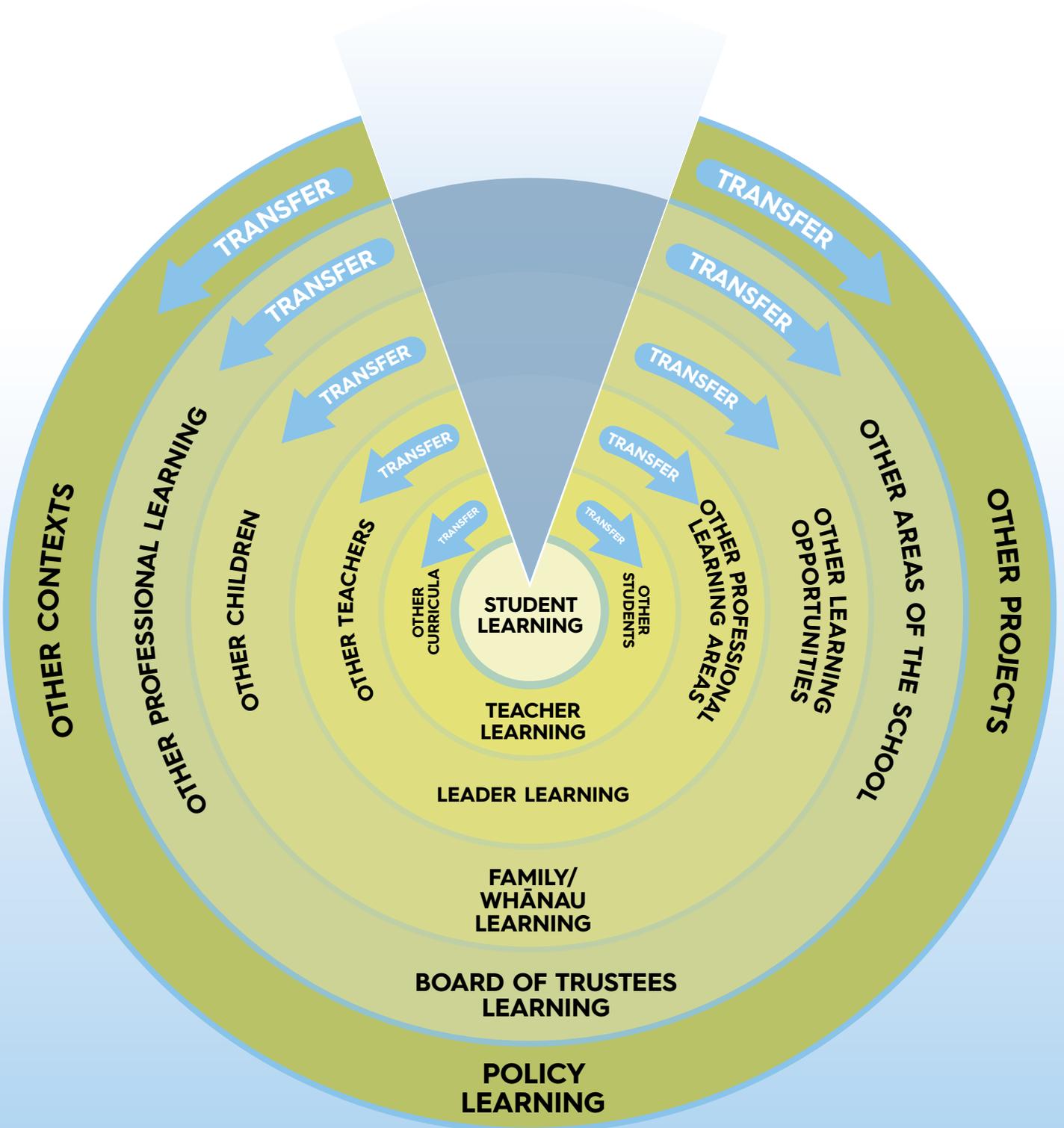
Figure 2. Professional learning: Focused and deep then transfer to other situations

. . . where internal and external expertise are used across the system . . .

39. The evidence about PLD points to the importance of teachers and leaders having access to both internal and external expertise. Internal and external expertise need to work together. We expect that expertise within the school and kura would be accessed first. For some leaders accessing expertise will be new, and some leaders may not have the required assessment, pedagogical content and curriculum expertise needed in their school and kura. In any given situation the ways in which the different forms of expertise are combined and balanced will be different. In all situations, however, school and kura leaders play a pivotal role.

40. Schools and kura and community of schools and kura that have not previously engaged in systematic evidence-informed inquiry are likely to require more support from external experts. In schools and kura that have a culture of sustained improvement, and have developed collective responsibility for maintaining it, the balance of internal and external expertise may change. In the second case management of accessing external expertise would rest primarily with the schools and kura (Timperley, McNaughton, Lai, Hōhepa, Parr & Dingle, 2010). The system aim is for all schools and kura to reach this latter situation.

41. Identifying, matching and resourcing internal and external expertise to what schools and kura want and need is a system challenge. We need to ensure that the new approach provides ways to do this.

. . . with independent monitoring, evaluation and feedback loops . . .

42. At the heart of the inquiry process is the question, "Has the intervention made sufficient difference?" This evaluative question shapes the ongoing learning process. System and school and kura learning requires formal and collective processes and monitoring and evaluation occurring at multiple levels.

43. Growing the knowledge base about improving student outcomes is ongoing at all levels of the system. New Zealand has a history of innovation and assessing its impact through research, development and evaluation. Researchers and evaluators have a critical role in contributing to the evidence base in ways that improve the impact of PLD. For this to be effective, those with responsibility for PLD across the system need to ensure that the developing evidence base is effectively integrated into system improvements in an ongoing way.

44. A complementary role for the research and evaluation community is to provide targeted systematic and focused feedback to individual schools and kura and to school and kura collaborations. The process would provide information about what is working (feedback) and where to next (feed-forward) so everyone in the system is learning. Locally, researchers working with practitioners in a research capacity can be a powerful influence in providing this kind of feedback. At a regional level, the collaborations could come together to develop evaluations that would tell them how well their professional inquiry and learning efforts are benefiting student learners. What is learned could then feed into the national evidence base.

45. An improving system also checks to ensure that those involved have the conditions to engage and are making a difference to priority goals. ERO could fulfil this function by reporting specifically on the opportunities being created, ensuring every teacher has access to effective PLD and is engaging actively and collaboratively in high quality inquiry processes that systematically develops their expertise, resulting in better outcomes for students.

46. More immediate accountability and monitoring systems are also desirable because cycles of school and kura review by ERO are too infrequent to ensure that the inquiry, learning, action and improvement process is making a difference to priority goals for learners. Accountabilities at this level would need to include how well school and kura leaders create the conditions for teachers to learn in deep and systematic ways about improving outcome profiles for their learners; and that teachers take these opportunities in ways that improve these outcomes.

Bringing it all together…

47. Figure 3 below provides an outline of how a new approach for PLD could come together by integrating national, collaborative and school and kura based expertise. An overarching framework of priorities would provide coherence for PLD provision. It would be informed by research and evaluation of PLD activities and through feedback loops about whether PLD is achieving its aims.

48. School and kura level inquiry with its deep and focused learning would be supported by external resources, which would provide support for both the inquiry process and the specific knowledge and skills needed to make improvements. This external resource and support would be complemented with internal resourcing and expertise either from individual schools and kura or communities of schools and kura. Together this expertise would provide leadership support to engage in high quality school and kura review that links to strategic and annual planning within a culture of inquiry and improvement. Improvements would be able to be embedded and sustained.

49. External monitoring and accountability would be provided through reviews by ERO which would provide feedback both to schools and kura and contribute to the feedback loops. More immediate accountabilities at the school and kura and community level would need to be established to ensure the learning and improvement resulted in substantial changes to valued student outcomes. ◼

Creating a coherent learning system for New Zealand

Figure 3. The proposed PLD approach

Next steps

50. We consider there is merit in sharing our thinking to date with teachers and leaders. We would value the opportunity to have conversations with a wide range of teachers, leaders and experts to test and inform our thinking through the following questions:

    - How well does the vision statement capture the essence of PLD?

    - To what extent will the proposed approach for professional learning and development achieve the vision we are proposing for PLD?

    - How well do the proposed principles align with the intent of the proposed approach?

    - Are the key features of the proposed approach likely to build the skills and knowledge of teachers and leaders to impact on student achievement?

51. We will confirm the questions when we meet on 1 July, as part of considering an engagement plan more fully.

52. Alongside this we would like to continue to work on:

    - developing our advice on the design of PLD structures and processes and how changes could be implemented (including the consideration of the impact on other education policy and initiatives) to achieve the maximum impact from expenditure on PLD; and

    - identifying how the impact of PLD on teaching quality and student outcomes can most effectively be evaluated; both in terms of progress and improvement and summative results. ■

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Notes

PLD