Creating and Sustaining a Professional Learning Culture for Teachers

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What we will cover in this session

- Consider why professional learning is more effective in some schools than others
- Consider what the literature says
- Understand your own experiences
- Consider what the evidence said
- Review recommendations
Introduction

- In-service professional learning is more effective in some schools than others. Why?
Rationale

Cambridge Professional Development Qualifications

Cambridge Schools Conference, Orlando, 23-24 June 2023
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Think back on the professional learning opportunities you have had throughout your career.

Mind map them and place a plus or a minus next to times in your learning journey when you have felt supported in your learning and times when you have felt that it was a struggle …

…how much of that was linked to the culture that you were working / studying in?
Professional learning is vital for teachers to ‘broaden and deepen their knowledge, keep up with new research, tools and practices and respond to their students’ changing needs.’ (Boeskens et al. 2020:6)

Activities around teacher learning that are ‘intensive, sustained, collaborative, and focused on materials and problems of practice’ (Opfer, 2016:7) are identified as having the most impact on teachers’ knowledge, their classroom practice and, ultimately, student achievement.

Making professional learning available to all of those in the school community can help in ‘building collaborative school cultures and supporting the collective improvement of the teaching profession.’ (Boeskens et al. 2020:6)

Skills for 21st Century living have been identified as:
- ways of thinking
- ways of working
- tools for working
- skills for living in the world (Schleicher 2012:34)

So, professional learning for teachers needs to be:
- available
- intensive, sustained, collaborative and focused on practice
- sited within a collaborative school culture
- suitable to equip teachers to meet the needs of 21st Century learners.
Supporting and developing teacher efficacy is achieved through collaboration and collegiality, practices which: take teacher development beyond personal, idiosyncratic reflection or dependence on outside experts, to a point where teachers can learn from each other, sharing and developing their expertise together (Hargreaves 1994: 186).

Stoll et al (2006b) suggest that, ‘whole school communities need to work and learn together to take charge of change’

Continuous professional growth can be found in professional learning communities which typically demonstrate:

- Shared values and vision
- Collective responsibility for pupils’ learning
- Reflective professional enquiry
- Collaboration focused on learning
- Group as well as individual professional learning
- Openness, networks and partnerships
- Inclusive membership
- Mutual trust, respect and support

(Stoll et al. 2006:4)

So, effective cultures for professional learning should be:

- Inclusive
- Collaborative
- Supportive
- Collegiate
- Trust-based
- Formed by whole school communities working together
Leaders are key in helping to spread good practice. Fielding et al. identify that, ‘spreading good practice from one school to another is important in improving the quality of teaching and learning across the school system’ (2005:2).

Leaders require a 21st Century understanding of pedagogy which ‘is cultivated by the quest for understanding the being of the learners (the ecology of their community), the experiences of the learners and their community and the meaning making and problem solving required in that context for creating effective educational interactions and relationships.’ (Male and Palaiologou 2015: 220).

‘One of the primary tasks of school principals is to create and maintain positive, and healthy teaching and learning environments for everyone in the school, including the professional staff.’ (Bredeson 2000: 386)

So, leadership is vital for:

- building cultures for professional learning
- understanding, and helping others to understand, that the nature of pedagogy is changing
- helping to spread best practice in and between schools
Returning to the question…

- In-service professional learning is more effective in some schools than others. Why?
Activity – Forcefield Analysis (5 mins)

- Look back at your first drawing and focus on the times that you felt your professional learning was hindered. Try to represent this as a forcefield analysis.

- How many of these elements are within your control or your school’s control?

Elements that supported good professional learning:
- Supportive line manager
- Lighter timetable

Elements that hindered good professional learning:
- Lack of budget for PL
- Pandemic
The issues

- Internal Factors:
  - Staff retention and turn over
  - Availability of resources
  - Budgets

- External Factors:
  - Accountability measures
  - The local ‘market’
  - Environmental factors, e.g. COVID19
Research Methodology

- Drawing workshops
- Focus groups
- Interviews
# Summary of Benefits and Challenges

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Benefits</th>
<th>Challenges</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>School A</strong></td>
<td><strong>School B</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Collaborative culture</td>
<td>Collaborative culture</td>
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<tr>
<td>Coaching</td>
<td>Mentoring</td>
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<td>Peer observation supports development of practice</td>
<td>Teacher-led learning</td>
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<td>Teachers have developed a ‘reflective approach’</td>
<td>Regular review helps to build the learning offer</td>
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<td>Teachers are ‘empowered’</td>
<td>The culture raises teachers’ ‘self-esteem’</td>
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<td>Teachers can ask for help</td>
<td>The pandemic has created the impetus to upskill</td>
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<td>The pandemic has created a focus on ‘how’ learning happens</td>
<td>Resistance to change is ‘low’</td>
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<td>Leaders make space and time for professional learning</td>
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Recommendations

Leadership should:

- Manage the challenges that can be influenced:
  - Practice ‘skilled pedagogical leadership’ (Male and Palaiologou, 2015)
  - Create a clear vision and goals for professional learning
  - Understand exactly what teachers need
  - Encourage collaboration
  - Encourage participation in professional learning at all levels
  - Manage external factors as best you can

Devise a professional learning offer to support the school’s needs whilst developing the culture to support it.
Plenary

- Reflect – what have you heard / considered in this presentation that has made you think differently about yours / others professional learning?
- Extend – how could you use this information to make some changes when you are back in your day to day role?
- Challenge – how could you use what you have heard today to challenge / change professional learning for you or for your colleagues?
References


Thank you
Any questions?
Your feedback

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