Facing the Facts about professional learning for school leaders and teachers - Part One



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Facing the Facts told us that “WA teachers’ workload and workload complexity would be improved by free, WA based and high-quality shared curriculum resources and well-supported professional development.”

Dr Lawrence and her panel reported that teachers “are critical of the widespread use of costly commercial curriculum support materials” and found that “appropriate programs of professional learning about curriculum and pedagogy for teachers at all stages of their careers … should be made available by the WA Department of Education in face-to-face settings at a local level.”

These noble goals remain distant. Meanwhile, school leaders need to make the best decisions they can about dedicating scarce resources to much-needed professional learning and support in their context.

We need to face the facts about what sound and effective professional learning looks like.

The best professional learning is:

- Aligned with ethical purpose and vision.
- Focused on teaching and learning.
- Evidence-based, data-informed and measurable.
- Consistent with principles of effective adult learning.
- Sustainable and supported by leadership.

Ethical Purpose and Vision

Professional learning must strengthen the ability to act ethically, uphold professional standards and implement a shared vision for student success.

This starts with compliance with the Schools General Agreement 2023, including requirements that professional learning develops the capability of school leaders and teachers to deliver curriculum and pedagogy to suit the needs of students and that it includes an element of staff member choice.

Professional learning should address equity, cultural responsiveness and inclusion, advancing strategies to ensure fair, culturally responsive and trauma informed practices that close gaps for students and for staff.

Professional learning should be aligned to national standards, ensuring coherence with nationally agreed expectations for leadership and teaching practice and support teacher registration and career progression.

All professional learning must be consistent with the system-level objectives of public education as well as individual school improvement strategies, school plans and positive school culture.

Professional learning must, in turn, be supported by strategic change management, operations and culture.

Focus on Teaching and Learning

Professional learning should deepen understanding of curriculum, pedagogy and assessment, focused on the real instructional priorities of the school and classroom to improve student achievement and promote both excellence and equity.

All professional learning must be consistent with school improvement and improving student learning, engagement and wellbeing.

Evidence-Based, Data-Informed and Measurable

Professional learning must be consistent with the evidence-based strategies articulated in collaborative school improvement planning that is based on school and system data, self-assessment and review.

Professional learning should use research-based strategies and include mechanisms to measure impact on leadership, teaching and student outcomes.

Evaluation of implementation fidelity and impact on student outcomes must be built in and monitored from the start.

Facing the Facts

Professional learning is often devalued; sometimes much maligned. It is perfectly reasonable to critique professional

learning, but when it fails because it is poorly designed, capriciously selected, unfit for purpose, poorly delivered or implemented without fidelity, it is the human decisions behind design, selection and execution that have really failed.

Professional learning is too important to capability and wellbeing to be approached lightly.

It is too important to be thoughtlessly plucked from the shelf. It can drive real improvement.

We will explore this further in Part Two.

Authorised by Sally Dennis, General Secretary, The State School Teachers' Union of W.A.
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