WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN PROFESSIONAL LEARNING AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT?

The terms ‘professional learning’ and ‘professional development’ are often used interchangeably. For the purpose of this discussion paper, these terms are differentiated as follows:

Professional learning refers to growth of teacher expertise that leads to improved student learning. Changing and evolving educational, social and cultural contexts require continuing professional learning so that teachers can keep abreast of new developments in curriculum and pedagogy.

Professional development refers to growth of the learning capacities of individual teachers, the support of a professional learning community, and the development of policies and practices which reflect the needs of the Catholic school community.

The CEO, Sydney is an Endorsed Provider of professional development. School Staff Professional Development Days that address the NSW Institute of Teachers Professional Teaching Standards can be endorsed as Institute Registered Continuing Professional Development by the CEO.

RATIONAL

This discussion paper serves to inform and focus a whole-school approach to professional learning, and to the development of policies and practices which reflect the needs of the Catholic school community.

It draws on current research, theory and practitioner understandings about professional learning and its critical role in the learning process of teachers.


CONTEXT

Research has shown that teachers are the single most important influence on student learning. This research affirms the value that is placed on the ministry of teaching within the Church and its Catholic schools. At the heart of the ministry of teaching, and at the heart of a successful teacher, is a passion for learning.

Sustaining this passion requires not only the energy, skill and intellectual curiosity of the individual teacher, but also the support of a professional learning community.

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ARE THERE EXTERNAL REQUIREMENTS REGARDING PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT?

The NSW Institute of Teachers Act, 2004 requires that teachers, once accredited, must participate in 100 hours of continuing professional development over every five-year period to support the achievement and maintenance of accreditation. This comprises a minimum of 50 hours of Teacher Identified professional development and a minimum of 50 hours of Teacher Identified continuing professional development.

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The Teacher as Learner

Shares Responsibility for Professional Learning

Each staff member has a personal responsibility:

- to develop and deepen her or his understanding of the person and teachings of Jesus Christ as portrayed in the Gospel;
- for her or his ongoing professional learning;
- for learning community?
- • workplace?

- The CEO, Sydney, in collaboration with schools and teachers, has shared responsibility for:

- planning and evaluating a range of high-quality professional development courses and programs to enhance school and system strategic plans.
- design, implement, evaluate, and track staff professional development;
-  • teacher as learner;
-  • professional development;
-  • learning opportunities.

- MODES OF PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

- Professional reading:
  - classroom observation by teacher colleagues;
  - online courses, resources, articles, and peer/colleague feedback.

- Practicum:
  - peer observation;
  - role-based professional practice.

- Reflective practice:
  - self-reflection and goal-setting.

- Coaching:
  - external coaching by a specialist or academic to support learning.

- Critical friends:
  - a team of educators who support each other in developing critical thinking and learning.

- The Teacher as Learner accesses a wide variety of learning opportunities

Professional development can involve an individual or group; can include face-to-face or distance learning; be structured or unstructured; can be offered at school or off-site; and may involve working with peers or an expert. Effective professional development usually incorporates a combination of these modes, some of which are outlined in the diagram below.

- The Teacher as Learner

Contributes to Building a Professional Learning Community

It is evident from research that, where a school community encourages enquiry and collaboration, teachers within that community are better able to impact on the learning outcomes of their students. A school such as this is referred to as a professional learning community. It is characterised by:

1. shared values, vision and mission
2. a commitment to life-long learning
3. supportive and distributive leadership
4. collaborative teams learning and working inter-dependently
5. collective enquiry processes
6. professional learning community?

- • workplace?

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