

## A NEW ERA OF PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT?

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There's an old saying, "There's nothing more certain than change", and this will certainly be true as educators in NZ prepare to return to work in 2016. Whether we're re-thinking what we teach, how we teach, where we teach and even who we teach, dealing with the demands of change is the biggest challenge facing schools, kura, and centres today.

Consider the following examples of change on the horizon in our education system in NZ in 2016...

- Establishment of [communities of schools/learning](#) and the new principal and teacher roles associated with that.
- Using [internal evaluation to lift student achievement](#).
- New forms of assessment — including [digital assessment at NCEA](#) level.
- Outcomes from the [review of the Education Act](#).

- Establishment of the Education Council and their emergent role in guiding [teacher appraisal](#) and educational [leadership development](#).
- Introduction of a [Digital Fluency](#) requirement in our curriculum.
- Changes in the way PD is provided as a result of the [PLD review](#).
- Aligning with the MoE's draft vision for 2025 of [Lifelong Learners in a Connected World](#).
- Application of the [school evaluation indicators](#) from ERO.
- Development of [Innovative Learning Environments](#) (ILEs) in many areas.
- [New health and safety requirements](#) for schools and centres.

These are just a selection of the drivers at a national level for 2016 — in addition, there will be all sorts of drivers at a regional and local level that may need to be considered.

Change confronts and challenges our ability to address the needs of our learners in a productive and relevant manner — at both a personal and system level. While many of these changes may not appear to be immediately relevant to the teaching and learning that occurs in individual learning environments, collectively they point to some significant changes for our schools, kura and centres, and for our system as a whole. As such, there will inevitably be an impact on the work of individual teachers and the work they do with their learners.

It is imperative that educational leaders understand how to engage their staff, and lead their school/kura/centre (or cluster), in collaborating around change. Don't be afraid to draw upon the advice and guidance of external expertise where this will help — engaging a critical friend at this stage can save a lot of angst as the year gets under way. When it comes to effectively managing change 'nobody's as smart as everybody' because schools/kura/centres/clusters must consistently identify and resolve critical change issues, innovate the way they work, and find new and different ways to grow.

This can only happen if time has been spent considering the following:

- Is our school/kura/centre/cluster aligned around its educative purpose? Does this clearly identify the learner at the centre?
- Are we guided by a clear vision for the organisation, for our students? Whose vision is it?
- Has this process involved genuine consultation with the community — including local iwi?
- Do we have a set of collaboratively developed and owned values that guide how we work?
- Have we clearly identified the challenges that we must address — and why?
- Are the responses to the questions above clearly articulated to the staff, BoT, and community in an action plan with well-defined goals and outcomes that can be measured?

If the questions above can be answered affirmatively, then your school/kura/centre/cluster is well positioned to move to the next stage of designing and implementing a change management programme.

Of course, managing change in any educational setting isn't as simple as implementing some seductively attractive turnkey change management model. This is because educational change isn't primarily about introducing new systems, facilities, or resources — it's about changing people. It's about changing hearts and minds, and about ensuring that everyone has the opportunity to participate in the change process, and not feel that it is being 'done' to them.

Professional development in collaborative groups is needed to understand and collectively build the trust, shared values and beliefs, shared purpose, shared goals, and shared responsibility. Along the way there will be provision for meeting individual needs, ensuring that individual staff are provided with the support and resources required to prepare them personally for the change. However, achieving whole-school/kura/centre change requires everyone to be committed to the same change goals. Ultimately, these change goals must reflect a concern for the learners, with every learner achieving to the very best of his or her ability.

An effective professional development programme must offer more than a sequence of 'one off' learning experiences for staff — in the form of isolated staff meetings or off-site workshops. The programme must be a part of the 'weave' of everyday activity in your school/kura/centre, with regular opportunity to identify and celebrate the successes along the way as the change goals are achieved.

If you are responsible for the design and development of professional development programmes in your school/centre, here are four research-based principles that should underpin your planning and decision-making.

#### 1. In depth

The change process will inevitably challenge existing beliefs and behaviours. The change won't occur by simply sharing what the 'new' beliefs and behaviours must be. There must be opportunity for engaging deeply with the background rationale and evidence, and for in-depth discussion and debate.

#### 2. Sustained over time

"Rome wasn't built in a day" (or so the saying goes), and effective, lasting educational change doesn't occur as a result of a single staff meeting or workshop. Sure, a single event may act as a catalyst for change, but for the change to be embedded and sustained the professional development must be sustained over a significant period of time to allow for iterations to occur and the new behaviours to 'bed in' and become the 'new normal'. An iterative approach that builds on action research or cycles of inquiry provides opportunities for the refinement and ideas and approaches that eventually establish the changed culture and patterns of behaviour.

### 3. Contextually relevant

Meaningful change cannot occur simply by borrowing ideas from elsewhere and assuming they'll work the same in your context. Your staff, your students, and your community are different. There will be different needs and different opportunities and resources for you to tap into. Sure, an idea from somewhere else may serve to stimulate your thinking, but you need to do what will work for the learners in your context.

### 4. Linked to practice

Finally, there's little point in any professional learning that isn't linked to practice. Stories abound from the days where teachers periodically went off-site to attend PD sessions, most of which were aimed at providing ideas and experiences that may be useful 'just in case' the need emerged when the teacher went back to school. Nowadays, the focus needs to be on PD approaches that provide access to these new ideas and approaches 'just in time' — so that they can be implemented, trialed, reflected on, and refined in the context of the teacher's own practice. Not only must the PD be linked to practice, but there must also then be evidence of the impact of this on that teacher's practice.

The approach outlined above places high expectations on the leadership in our schools/centres. The competing demands for the limited financial resources available in most schools/centres to support professional learning can create tensions that are difficult to resolve. Approaches that rely exclusively on externally designed and delivered PLD are no longer viable (or effective).

The [changes announced to PLD](#) by the MoE aim to grow leadership capability across the system and strengthen profession-led support for curriculum, teaching, and learning. The momentum must come from within our schools, kura, and centres — but doesn't exclude drawing on external expertise. Indeed, a further goal of the MoE changes to PLD is to mobilise quality assured internal and external expertise — drawing on the strategic wisdom and critical support of external providers where this is aligned with and adds value to the internally agreed goals and direction for the school, kura, or centre.

As you contemplate the changes that lie ahead in 2016 in your school/centre, now is the time to review your vision, values, and action planning, and to ensure that a well-designed programme of professional development is a key part of this planning.