

CORRECTED VERSION

EDUCATION AND TRAINING COMMITTEE

Inquiry into effective strategies for teacher professional learning

Melbourne — 12 September 2007

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Mr B. Burgess, president, Victorian Association of State Secondary Principals.

The CHAIR — I declare open the hearing into effective strategies for teacher professional learning. Brian Burgess is from the Victorian Association of State Secondary Principals. We saw you during our last inquiry.

Mr BURGESS — Yes, this is a far more interesting topic, I have to say.

The CHAIR — It is a bit more pithy, we would agree. In regard to issues, as you understand, we are recording the evidence that you share with us. You would be aware, Brian, that things that you share with us are covered by parliamentary privilege as part of the committee.

Mr BURGESS — Yes.

The CHAIR — Welcome, Brian. We are interested to hear the viewpoint of the Victorian principals.

Mr BURGESS — Thank you, and thank you for the opportunity. I suppose when you talk about professional learning you are really talking about change management, because there is not much point in having professional learning if you are not actually influencing somebody's change of behaviour; otherwise why bother? In talking about change management — and I will talk a little bit about that in a while — I think there are probably two aspects to it. One element is what is being delivered, but the other element of it is how it is being delivered. Both of those things are quite crucial to effective professional learning. Often we focus on the what but we forget about the how. The how is really the essential issue in terms of embedding change in professional learning, or embedding change in practice as a result of professional learning. If you wish to motivate teachers, or motivate anybody, to take on a change to a process, then the how is really important. Just presenting them with a document and saying, 'This is lovely' will really not influence anything. There is more to it than that to try to effect change. So I would argue that professional learning therefore needs to be very relevant to someone, it needs to be targeted, and it needs to be ongoing for sustained change in behaviour to occur.

In terms of schools, we would argue again that for sustained change to occur it really needs to be focused on site predominantly. It needs to be classroom focused, and there needs to be resources and time provided for the professional learning and the change to actually happen. I suppose there are two aspects to change management. There are the structures of the change, and then there are the people — similar to the how and the what. I am reminded of a story that was related to me recently. This person was talking about change management, talking about the structures on the one hand and the people on the other, and he illustrated it by an anecdote. He said, 'If a farmer is out there and doing some work on the chook shed and wants to redesign it a bit' — and I imagine that is the structure — 'A farmer is out there and he is bashing away and altering this and doing whatever he is doing to the chook shed, and there is plenty of activity inside. The chooks are all flying around and everybody looks as though they are doing things. There is motion and there is activity, but once he finishes the structure and things go quiet again the chooks predominantly will go back and sit exactly where they were'. If you think about the chooks as the people, you realise the chooks are the things that are the productive things for the farmer. It is not the chook shed, it is actually the chooks producing the eggs. So in terms of change management and professional learning, it is not the structures that we put in place that are actually the crucial thing. It is the implementation of the structures. It is the teachers in the classroom changing their behaviour. That is what is crucial.

We can go around and put VELs (Victorian Essential Learning Standards) in place, we can put a blueprint in place, we can do this, and we can do that, but unless we get the teachers to actually change their behaviour, it is a complete waste of time. It has to be both; it cannot be just one. As I said, too often we focus on the one. We come up with the beautiful programs and we implement those things, but we do not actually give the teachers, the people, the time to absorb the change and to change their behaviour.

Changing behaviour is a really difficult thing to do; it is not easy. If you think of any bad habits you have, to try to change that bad habit is a very difficult thing to do. It is the same with teaching. A lot of teachers have been taught in a particular way and they come to schools — and I have been in exactly this situation myself — where they are under a bit of pressure. What I have done is revert to how I was taught. That is very common. It is not just teachers, but anybody: you revert to how you have been modelled. To change that really requires effort, it requires a focus on the people and it requires giving them the time and the space to absorb, reflect and actually move ahead and change. Unless we do that with our planning we are not really doing very much, I think.

In doing this, I think teachers need to be immersed in their environment, and they need to absorb innovation over a period of time. I can give you two examples from my own experience. The first was when I was a teacher at Altona North Technical School. We had a year 7 group and we were working in that group as a combined curriculum

thing. I was teaching English, social studies, maths, graphics and science — I was trained as a humanities teacher. There was a team of us and we had a science teacher, a maths teacher — the team made up all the different areas — and we would share the course and then go away and try things.

We had some outside experts coming in and working with us. It was the best teaching practice change I have had. It ran over a year and the key to it was that every few weeks the people would come back and there would be expectations of my teaching behaviour, 'We're going to try this, and when we come back we'll hear what you think about it'. So it was not just a one-off, 'Here's something; go away and do it'; it was actually, 'Here's something. We talk about it, we absorb what the thing is about — the theory — we go away and we try it, and we come back and reflect on it'. That actually changed my teaching behaviour. Nothing else had, without that consistent, sustained process that was embedded in my classroom practice and was embedded in how I was interacting with the kids. That was very powerful for me as a teacher, and it taught me a lot about change management and about changing behaviour.

The second example I give is when I was principal at Eumemmerring College. I was concerned, after four or five years in the job. I felt that some of the change management processes we were using were not effective. I felt that we were not bringing people along with us as much as we should have been. So I got some outside people to come in and work with us. They worked with us over a period of 18 months. They worked with the leadership teams, with the teachers and with me. It was exactly the same type of process: they would come back on a consistent basis and they would say, 'Yes, these are the sorts of things, the behaviours, that we want to see exhibited'. There were 360-degree feedback mechanisms and surveys and all those sorts of things, to see whether the change was actually happening.

It made a huge difference over a period of time to the way the college operated — even down to simple things like meeting procedures, to try to involve people more in what was happening and really focus on the people in the meeting rather than just the content of the meeting. The whole design was quite different, a very people-focused design. Once again, that made the difference. The difference was it was immersed in my practice, it was ongoing and sustained, and I had continual feedback on what I was doing. It motivated me, to commit me to change my behaviour as a principal and the way I structured the school. So they are the sorts of things that I think are really important to this. The one-off presentations are useful — as one of the quotes in my submission says — to gain some sparks but they do not light the fire. If you want to light the fire of professional learning, then you really do need to do a lot more than I think we are currently doing in terms of resourcing people to be able to make those changes.

Finally, going through the recommendations, our first recommendation is really to do with allowing people time. I talk about the school timetables there. The sorts of things I am talking about are that it is very difficult to get people to absorb change if you are doing it at the end of their working day. You are going there for an hour and a half's spiel, or something on something, and they have been working all day with groups of kids. They are exhausted. It is not a good way to get people to absorb professional learning. There has to be a better way. Some of the things I have done in the past, for example, include starting the school later so we do a session in the morning when people are fresh — things like that. We need some flexibility built in to allow schools to be able to do those things. My doing that was basically illegal in terms of the department's policy. They would not like me to do things like that but I felt it was important for professional learning for my staff, so we did it. We did not do it a lot but we did it sometimes.

There are only four pupil-free days in Victoria. Two of them are used at the beginning of the year and at the end of the year, so there are only two other official days that we can actually have for people to do professional learning. That is not enough. That has to change. If you compare the amount of days that are taught in the government system compared with the private system, we teach a lot more days over the course of the year, and I think there is scope there perhaps for some change. People argue that professional learning could happen during the school holidays. There is an argument around that but I would argue too that the vast majority of teachers actually do work during those holidays. I always used to work at least half of them and the rest of the time, I mean — —

Some of you have been teachers and I think you know what it is like. The classroom is such an exhausting process. It is quite important to give people a bit of time to recover.

The second recommendation is around embedding it in the classroom practice. There is no point in having professional learning that is off the scale somewhere and does not really relate to what people are doing in the classrooms.

The third recommendation is about it being targeted, ongoing and focused, and the focus is on change in professional behaviour for the sorts of reasons that I have outlined. It also needs to be linked to personal, professional and school goals so people are not just wandering off into the wilderness doing something that might just simply interest them but which is not related to where the organisation wants to go. All of that has to be coordinated, put together and packaged and that really leads to the next recommendation, which is that it has to be embedded in the school's professional development culture so there is a school-wide approach.

The sixth recommendation is around costs associated with professional learning. It is extremely expensive to get some of these people in. For example, a number of schools now would use people like university academics to come in and be a sort of mentor/critical friend for the school over a period of time. It is a fantastic idea, and it can be wonderful for the sorts of reasons I outlined before. It can also be very expensive to do those things.

The final one is particularly associated with rural areas. They have a lot of difficulty in getting to professional learning, not just because of distance but also because of the lack of replacement teachers being available for them. It is quite a critical issue for rural areas in terms of access to some of these things. They are the sorts of things from my perspective and from the association's perspective that I think we need to consider in professional learning. We need to really think about the what and the how, and we need to invest in people to make it really happen.

The CHAIR — Thanks, Brian. Yes, you did seem a bit more passionate about this issue than the uniforms issue.

Mr BURGESS — Yes, obviously.

Mr FINN — Brian, it has become obvious to me for a very long time now that the pressures on teachers are not strictly academically related. The pressures now on teachers to be almost de facto parents in many ways are growing almost on a daily basis. How does that fit in with the ability to cope with the burden of building up the professional teaching side of things as well?

Mr BURGESS — It does impinge on it, Bernie. You are talking about a total workload here and so issues like that can impinge on how well you cope with professional learning. Much of that comes back to resourcing, though. If you are a well-resourced school, and you have good support mechanisms within the school, a lot of those things can be alleviated. In the school where I was principal we ended up having quite a large resource base with budget changes and those sorts of issues, and so we were able to actually support staff in those things by hiring extra guidance officers, psychologists and people like that — youth workers. If those sorts of things are in place in those structures then it does release teachers to do professional learning but you have to have those things there. If the teacher's time, energy and effort is simply taken up with the more — — social is not the right word but the environment they are in in terms of the students and those sorts of things, and they do not have time to actually reflect on their learning, then it is obviously going to impinge on this. Part of it is an overall issue, and it is not just individual teachers that are affected by this but schools are affected by this too in total, and leadership in schools, by the sorts of things that you need to cope with.

Mr FINN — What can be done at a state level to alleviate that particular problem?

Mr BURGESS — I know that people like me will sit here and say 'resources, resources, resources', and I am sorry but that is really it. The resources are the things that support the people and they can support structures as well. Often we have the resources to develop the structures, but what we do not put the resources in to is support for the people. Education is a people business and it is not just the people in the classrooms, it is the teachers as well. I think from a state level it really is a recognition that people matter, that to support change, to support people in change you actually have to have the resources there for them to focus on that and not be distracted by the other things.

Mr HALL — Thanks, Brian, for your very well-considered submission. I thought it was good and very sensible, some of the things you said. Can I ask you: how important is professional development to teachers? One could perhaps argue that as a professional you are developing, growing, learning and refining your techniques by

way of experience as you progress. How important is it for people to actually engage in formal professional development?

Mr BURGESS — I think it is crucial, actually. We know more now. In the last 10 years we have had an explosion really in knowledge about how people learn — probably the last 15 years — an explosion too in leadership and what effective leadership means. People do not get this simply by their own practice, their own experience. So I think it is important. Your own experience is a crucial aspect of this, but to have the outside intervention at times is really quite critical. The two examples I gave you of my own experience were watersheds. One was a watershed in my teaching career and the other was a bit of a watershed in my principalship in the sense that I saw other opportunities and other ways of doing things that I had not considered before. You only know what you know. I will not go through the Rumsfeld thing — ‘You know what you don’t know’, or something like that — ‘but you only know what you know’. In some cases you can be quite sincere thinking that you are a good teacher and you are doing things well. But sometimes you will meet somebody else and they will give you a little click and a spark and you think that is another way of doing it. A light goes on and it takes you off in a completely different direction. So I think structured professional learning is actually quite critical.

Mr HALL — I will tell you a little story from my experience and I think it agrees with your philosophy. When I went out football coaching for the first time as a young lad of 22 years of age fresh from AFL football at that stage, I stood in the middle of the ground and blew the whistle and blasted the players and told them what I expected of them. I was very frustrated because they were not delivering, until one night a couple of weeks into my coaching career a young kid pulled me aside and said, ‘Rather than tell us what to do, why don’t you join in and show us what to do?’. That was something that clicked in my mind. What you are saying about professional development is exactly the same. We need models; we need to work with people to give us that spark and idea. So actually how do you do that in a practical sense? Do you give teachers perhaps time release to go and observe in other schools and work with other teachers? Is that a more practical way of delivering what you see as a key part of professional development?

Mr BURGESS — There are whole range of things. I think that is a good one. I think people actually observing people within their own school, going and having a look at somebody else in their classroom and seeing what they do is a really important thing. Having people work in teams is critical. Schools that have gone down the track of the professional learning teams have often done very well because they are able to share that expertise. It is just observing other people. Teaching can be very isolated. People get in their classroom and you are in your own kingdom in a way. So breaking that down is part of the process here and getting people to share and look. Going to other schools is important. Having experts come in is important. All of those things where you are getting people out and about and looking at different ways of practising their craft is an important aspect of this. Some of it is not hugely expensive. The most expensive thing we have really is time. It is giving people the time. We can structure our schools and allow schools the opportunity to be able to make this happen and that can make a big difference. Observing, sometimes the critical friend, mentoring, coaching. I have a coach at the moment, for example, in my current job. I try to encourage principals to go down that path because it can be quite an energising way of again changing your professional practice. I like the coaching. I really encourage people to do that because it is there to take you from point A to point B. It is not there to be a nice person and say, ‘You are lovely and what you are doing is wonderful’.

Mr HALL — Several things like observation and having leadership — will that be recognised by VIT, acknowledged as official professional development?

Mr BURGESS — I believe it will, but I am not absolutely sure about that. But I believe things like that will be part of the number of hours.

Mr HERBERT — Thanks for your submission and your presentation; it is good. I guess one of the things that disturbs me in all the talk about professional development, as previously a teacher and now a friend of teachers, is there seems to be a hell of a lot go in but there never seems to be any kind of measurement of its aim. Just looking through your work and reflecting on that and the comments you have made about resources, I guess that whilst we talk about professional development of teachers presumably the aim is to get outcomes into the schools. What do you do? If you put in the resources and you have well-structured professional development but you do not get any outcomes or improvements, how do you put a kind of measuring stick? How do you sharpen the edge a little bit around professional development so that we can genuinely put in efforts to check outcomes, what type of approach works, and ensure we are hitting targets for student achievement?

Mr BURGESS — It can be quite difficult in some ways. Student outcomes is the key. If you are not measuring student outcomes in this process, then forget it. There are plenty of examples in schools where data is used quite effectively in terms of professional learning. Things like teachers having students actually fill out the surveys about their performance on a regular basis can become part of the teachers' professional development plans. As they do their assessments each year of their PD plan, part of the assessment is what students think about their learning. That can be very powerful tool. You can actually look at student results on a per-class basis and see whether a teacher is performing well. If you had a situation where you were a bit concerned about a particular teacher in a subject area, you may well put in some of these structures and monitor that teacher and provide some professional development. You need to improve these sorts of skills, so we do that on an ongoing basis. Then you come back and actually use that data to assess how the individual teacher has gone. You can do that very well on a school basis now. We have got a lot of data now.

Mr HERBERT — So do you think that should be part of a professional development package in a school?

Mr BURGESS — Yes, absolutely.

Mr HERBERT — A compulsory part of it where you report outcomes back? You have to get outcomes out of this. There is no point in just being all warm and fuzzy about it. This is targeted. It is a bit like the coaching I am talking about. Coaching is a very targeted thing. You are going from point A to point B. If you do not get to point B, you are told you do not get to point B. I reckon that is exactly the same thing.

The CHAIR — Can I just cut in on that, though? In terms of reporting back, it is not how the teacher might seem to be a month later; it is almost how the teacher should be a year later and two years later.

Mr HERBERT — Or the school.

Mr BURGESS — Absolutely, Geoff. It is not just a one-off thing. Looking at it from a management view, you are looking at change management over a period of time, you are looking at behaviour management over a period of time. Student outcomes will take time to come through. Having measurements, having data and using all those sorts of thing are very powerful tools — that is the feedback loop. Without that feedback, how do you know whether anything has actually happened?

Mr HERBERT — It probably means you can scrap unsuccessful PE instead of repeating the mistakes of the past. I have one other quick question. I see from our brief that you have funded staff that go out to schools and talk about this. What are the areas? Your submission of course covers subject areas, and presumably your staff are out and get a good cross-section around secondary schools. What would you think would be the subject areas — areas of learning — that need most professional development? Have you got any idea on this — as opposed to the generic professional development?

Mr BURGESS — In a secondary school context, I am not sure that I would put it in terms of picking a subject area where I think there is underperformance, because I do not think, generally speaking — —

Mr HERBERT — It might not be underperforming; it might be the need for change management.

Mr BURGESS — Having been retrained — I started as a humanities teacher, English and SOSE, and then retrained as a maths teacher — I was fairly disappointed with the quality of mathematics teaching. I am talking 10 years — or longer than that now — but this is people saying, 'We will do the left hand side of the page', and this sort of thing. Without disparaging them too much, some maths curriculum can be a bit dry. There is plenty of stuff out there that can make it interesting and exciting. The caveat on that is that I really would not have the knowledge, I do not think, to sit down and say, 'This particular subject area is behind others in terms of that' — I really would not put it that way.

My concern is more the teaching and learning process — how teachers are engaging their students in whatever the curriculum is. Whether it is maths or it is SOSE or it is LOTE, it is the engagement with the kids and their development in that process that is more crucial I think than picking out a specific subject areas and saying, 'This one is a bit lower in profession learning development and these ones are too high'. I think it is a bit more generic in the sense that you really want teachers to develop in whatever curriculum it is and develop their expertise in engaging students in the process of learning. I suppose I would put it more like that than the specific subject areas.

The CHAIR — Can I ask a bit of a practical question. You were talking about the flexibility schools might have in terms of how they do their professional development and saying you even tried starting school later. How did you physically do that? The concern obviously would be that parents like to drop their kids off ahead of 9 o'clock or put them on the bus, or however they get to school. Did the students come into school, or were you able to keep the students away from school?

Mr BURGESS — No, we just said we were having a professional development morning and for them to come in later. You can do that a lot more easily in secondary schools. I acknowledge it is a lot harder in a primary school context, but that is exactly what we did. Sometimes on occasions we would finish a bit earlier; we would finish an hour or two earlier and use an afternoon but a bit earlier in the day to try and do some structures. As I said, there are only the two official pupil-free days. I think that limits the amount of time that you can actually provide people to learn and reflect. I think there is an issue there for government. We have been pushing this for a long time and had a lot of resistance to it, but I really do believe that it is something that government needs to get a grip on and needs to understand if it wants these changes to happen. There is some fantastic 'what' — I really agree with a lot of the blueprint stuff and where we are heading — but it is the 'how' that concerns me.

Mr FINN — I was very glad, Brian, to hear you talk about the importance of outcomes, because that clearly is what we are all about here. I have to ask this question: what sort of professional learning is necessary to prevent some students getting through 13 years of formal education and coming out at the end as semi-literate?

Mr BURGESS — A lot of that is socioeconomic, to be quite honest with you. It is the amount of equity resources we put into low socioeconomic areas. If you look at the data in terms of student outcomes — and Richard Teese's work that Melbourne Uni and all of those things — it indicates very clearly that in low socioeconomic areas, we get low educational outcomes. You have the odd exception to that, but generally speaking, that is how it happens. If you want to change that, you have to put more resources into it. The OECD talks about equity tail. The equity tail is the best-funded compared to the least-funded kid. In Victoria we are one of the worst in the OECD in terms of the equity tail, because we have a structure in Victoria where with a combination of state and federal government funding and private funding, you would have some students who would have allocated to them in excess of \$25 000 a head, and you would have others who get less than \$10 000. In an equity argument, it is no wonder the outcomes are different.

The professional learning is around engaging people from low socioeconomic areas in education. I heard a very interesting speaker from Tasmania 18 months or two years ago. She said we often talk about different cultures in terms of ethnic groups; what we do not often talk about is different cultures in terms of socioeconomic status. The low socioeconomic areas, the view of education and what education can actually give to the community is often quite different to a middle-class background. A kid from a middle-class background will come to the school with not just a wealthier financial situation but a wealthier family background in terms of education and the whole notion that education — reading, the number of words they know are significantly different to the number of words from a low socioeconomic background when they come to school. It is those sorts of things that I think are really quite crucial to all of this. That is not just about professional learning. That is about a community response to a whole cohort of people who quite obviously do not succeed in education as well as others. All the data is there; we all know it is there.

Mr FINN — Given that this inquiry is about professional learning, what improvements in professional learning would be necessary to get those kids up to scratch and to give them the sort of education that they need to provide for the rest of their lives?

Mr BURGESS — It comes back down to the engagement stuff, I suppose, in terms of professional learning. How do you engage people from different backgrounds? The sorts of things that this lady, Nan Walker, talked about, for instance, even in terms of a principal interviewing a middle-class family where there is an issue with the kid. The family might come in and you will get to the issue straight away and you will work your way through and work out whatever the solution is. Sometimes with a low-socioeconomic family they do not see it in the same way, and they will want to have a much more general conversation first and feel comfortable with you before you actually get to the issue, because they see — I do not want to get this wrong — their child as much more important — —

Look, I will not try to characterise that. Giving teachers, predominantly middle-class teachers, the ability to be able to connect with people from those backgrounds would be good professional learning, and that would help.

The CHAIR — That is interesting.

Mr HALL — Brian, just for the committee's information, are schools required to outline a professional development plan available to their individual staff at the school? Or do you think there would be value in a school documenting what professional development opportunities would be or could be available to their staff?

Mr BURGESS — Most schools would do that. If you are going for the professional development culture accreditation, that is part of that, so there is a whole matrix of things around professional learning and how that occurs. I could not think of many schools that actually would not do that. In terms of the annual report — I do not think there is specific talk about a PD plan, but every school has got to do a strategic plan and then an annual plan, and part of that would be professional learning.

The CHAIR — Thank you, Brian.

Mr BURGESS — Thank you. When will your report be out?

The CHAIR — It is due in March next year.

Mr BURGESS — Thanks very much for your time.

Witness withdrew.

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Witnesses

Dr G. Williams, and

Dr J. Anderson, Mathematics Education Research Group of Australasia.

The CHAIR — Welcome to the Education and Training Committee and its inquiry into teachers' professional learning. As you may have heard earlier, and as you can certainly see, we are recording the evidence you share with us for our report. I also can advise that anything that you say in here is covered by parliamentary privilege, which would not of course be the case outside. Thank you to you both for coming in as representatives of the Mathematics Education Research Group of Australasia.

Dr WILLIAMS — I am going to introduce myself and Judy Anderson, and then hand over to Judy for the majority of the presentation. I am from Deakin University, lecturer in maths education, and I am also the vice-president, teacher development, of the Mathematics Education Group of Australasia, which is called MERGA for short. I am introducing Dr Judy Anderson as our speaker for today because of her wealth of knowledge in this area. She is senior lecturer at the University of Sydney and has published and worked with teachers and done a whole lot of research in this area over many years. At present she is writing a chapter for our next research review on research in maths education in Australasia. The chapter that she is working on is on professional learning, so this is exactly what you need to hear about. Judy at present is president-elect for the Australian Association of Mathematics Teachers, which shows the value of her work to teachers.

Dr ANDERSON — Thank you, Gaye. I am Dr Judy Anderson, senior lecturer in mathematics education at the University of Sydney, but of course I am here representing MERGA today.

Our focus in the submission was on part (d) — that is, 'determining how best practice in ongoing professional learning for teachers can be delivered into schools and learning communities'. What we are going to share with you does clearly span the other focus areas as well. As you would be aware, teaching is complex — every classroom is different and students have different learning needs. Developing a knowledge base to support the flexibility required by teachers in mathematics classrooms requires time and effort as well as a commitment to ongoing learning. As there is a shortage of qualified teachers of mathematics, there is an even greater need to support teachers in all schools and learning communities. Professional learning serves three functions — extension, renewal and growth — and is usually initiated through two drivers, which are systemic and personal. Teachers should experience professional learning in their school, and they should also have opportunities to make personal choices about developing their knowledge and skills in other ways.

I would like to add on to each of these separately: firstly, systemic professional learning. In the words of Michael Fullan:

The greatest problem faced by school districts and schools is not resistance to innovation but the fragmentation, overload and incoherence resulting from the uncritical acceptance of too many different innovations.

It is important that professional learning opportunities in schools are focused, manageable and coherent. Further, Dennis Sparks describes high quality, professional learning as:

... focused on deepening teachers' content knowledge and pedagogical skills, as including opportunities for practice, research and reflection, as embedded in teachers' work, and takes place during the school day as sustained over time and as founded in a sense of collegiality and collaboration among teachers and between teachers and principals in solving important problems related to teaching and learning ...

This approach described by both Fullan and Sparks can be initiated by schools, or initiated by systems as larger-scale projects across schools or regions.

In the school context: school-initiated professional learning is most successful when it involves focused, collaborative inquiry into the teaching and learning of particular content areas of mathematics, is informed by student data, and there are ongoing meetings and discussions between groups of teachers. It requires quality leadership by a knowledgeable facilitator who supports teachers as they evaluate, plan, implement, reflect and evaluate again. The facilitator may be a member of staff or external to the school, but cycles of learning need to be accompanied by the collection of evidence of student learning with teachers exploring student work samples, identifying student misconceptions and difficulties, followed by planning for ongoing support for their children.

This model that I am describing, of course, has been successfully adopted by schools involved in federally funded AGQTP and ASISTM projects, with academic partners frequently acting as facilitators. Important components of successful professional learning in this approach are ongoing reflection on practice accompanied by opportunities for knowledge building, including mathematical content knowledge, pedagogical content knowledge and knowledge of learners, as described by Schulman.

Pedagogical content knowledge is the special knowledge teachers need which includes aspects of the content students can learn at particular developmental stages, how to represent this knowledge to the students, and how to lead them to different conceptual understandings.

A well-known example of this process is the Japanese lesson-study model, where teachers plan lessons together with a master teacher, implement and evaluate throughout the year. Further models include the use of action-learning cycles which might include teaching and observation of peers, as well as mentoring less experienced staff members. Another example where this inquiry model has been successful involves the clusters of up to 10 schools, meeting regularly as in the Victorian Innovation and Excellence Clusters, where they plan and implement professional learning. Academic partners frequently work with a steering group of school representatives to identify target areas of professional learning needs.

If we go beyond the school to larger-scale projects, another approach to support teachers' professional learning is to initiate a system-wide focus on a particular area of need. Examples include, from New Zealand, Numeracy Development Project; from New South Wales, the Count Me In Too project; and from Victoria, the Early Numeracy Research project. All of these larger-scale projects used research-based frameworks of children's thinking in early number. They implemented an individual assessment interview between the teacher and the children, and were supported by an intensive whole-school focused professional development program.

If we look at a review of successful mathematics and numeracy professional learning programs, they reveal key ingredients for success; time and space within the school week where this can take place; leadership; support from school administration is critical as well as coordination frequently by a team member; collaboration, working with colleagues; a focus on mathematics content and pedagogy; and in primary schools it is important that there is a whole-school approach.

We now go to a second driver of professional learning, the personal professional learning process. Teachers also gain knowledge about the teaching and learning of mathematics in other contexts, and these opportunities are also very important. There is a place for courses and workshops offered by professional associations and in postgraduate study at university level. Reflective teachers are able to evaluate their needs and plan accordingly. Teachers choose particular forms of professional learning to support knowledge development. In addition, such teachers frequently become leaders and facilitators within the school community as they share new knowledge with colleagues. If teachers are located in the school where they feel that there is less support they will seek that support elsewhere.

Finally, the knowledge needed to be a quality teacher of mathematics is informed by ongoing research by researchers, as well as by teachers, as they research their practice. Important partnerships have been forged between researchers and teachers in schools. This critical link between research and practice in mathematics education needs to be retained if new knowledge is to make a difference in our classrooms.

The CHAIR — Thank you, Judy. Now is an opportunity for some questions.

Mr HERBERT — Thank you for your presentation. Mathematics and science are often grouped together, and we did do an inquiry on them a while ago. Is there much difference? In terms of professional development, do you think they should be separated in secondary schools in particular and to a certain extent in primaries?

Dr ANDERSON — Would you like to answer that?

Dr WILLIAMS — I think I can answer that. I was working in a unit recently which had maths, science and technology, so I had an opportunity to think carefully about what the science researchers were finding and the way they were teaching. Both maths and science do look at what misunderstandings students have, but for their science they take those and build them into something that is an understanding, whereas for maths — and correct me, Judy, if you do not agree with me, because I am just answering this as I think about it — it is more about trying to teach in a way that those misunderstandings do not happen, because once they have happened it is very difficult to get rid of them. It is actually a different type of thing. One is taking something and moulding it into something, and the other is trying to prevent the wrong thing from developing in the first place so that there is a rich, deep understanding that can be used flexibly.

The CHAIR — Can I just follow on from that, too? I have a degree in agriculture and was a secondary teacher. Initially I taught agriculture-science and then someone said, 'Of course you can teach maths'. I guess it was the case for me and a lot of my colleagues that we never had any maths training as such; you learnt it as you

went. Mostly I found maths remarkably straightforward to teach, because it was textbook based, the students could learn at their own pace and it was a matter of ensuring that they learnt via the textbook and were provided with additional guidance so that they could go at their own pace, whereas with science you are always trying more to keep the class together but also rack your brains about how to explain topics that are a whole lot more varied.

As Judy was speaking, some issues occurred to me, including pedagogy. I would have liked some greater professional development in terms of the way students learn maths. It seems to me that there was a significant lack in that area. The other issue she raised was about content. I was reflecting on how content has changed significantly over the years, with the advent of calculators in particular and computer-based technology. I am interested to get your views about the importance of content and what it is about it that continues to be ongoing in importance level?

Dr ANDERSON — Getting back, firstly, to the maths-science issue, I actually have a science degree as well, but I see myself as a mathematics teacher and certainly spent many years in secondary classrooms teaching mathematics and a little bit of science. I see them as separate disciplines, and I do believe they have different knowledge and different pedagogy to support the children's learning. Personally I would rather see them as separate, even though they are often grouped together.

As far as the knowledge required to teach mathematics, it is not sufficient to have a deep knowledge of mathematics alone to be a good teacher of mathematics. Pedagogical content knowledge is absolutely critical to understanding the development of often very basic concepts — for example, learning to count. The three projects I mentioned earlier — from New Zealand, Victoria and New South Wales — were all looking at children's early number learning and understanding the importance of learning how to count, learning how to count well and to build that knowledge onto developing place value knowledge, et cetera. What often on the surface seems to be very simple and straightforward to those of us who picked it up quickly at school can be very challenging to teach children who do not seem to see those ideas as quickly and as readily as we did. I believe we need to work very hard to support teachers in both their mathematics content knowledge as well as pedagogical content knowledge. They both need to be a focus of professional learning.

Dr WILLIAMS — I can add a little to that. In some ways a lot of maths teachers might still be focusing only on procedures and rules and not even thinking about the fact that if all you know is a procedure or a rule and you do not know why that works, then you can only use it in times that somebody has taught you to use that. You cannot use it flexibly. There is the idea of school maths being of no value to anybody if they do not understand the maths and cannot apply it to other things. That is why we have such trouble with so many adults who have little or no mathematical literacy. If all they have are rules, then they cannot take the school maths and use it as something valuable to them in their lives. You have got to take a different approach.

Dr ANDERSON — Sadly that is reinforced by the textbook approach that you mentioned, Geoff. If we only ever teach from the maths textbook, the chapter tells us what sorts of rules and procedures we are going to use in this chapter. That is fine, as long as I know those rules and procedures I can do the textbook questions, but if you throw me something a little bit different, I am in trouble, because I am not sure where it fits. Children tend to learn in relation to those chapters. 'Are we still doing the algebra chapter today, Miss, or are we doing the next chapter on statistics?'. We know that that is not how mathematics is applied in the real world, as Gaye has suggested.

Dr WILLIAMS — That is right.

Dr ANDERSON — It compartmentalises knowledge, and we need to think bigger picture than that

Dr WILLIAMS — Teachers so often say, 'I want you to do these questions using this rule', so that students do not work out what to use and learn about where their maths applies.

The CHAIR — There is a follow-up question, especially at the secondary level. As you mentioned, Judy, there are some great numeracy programs that seem to be well directed to primary level, but at secondary level are we heading in the right direction with professional learning opportunities, or is there still a big way to go to ensure that those sorts of issues are impressed upon maths teachers?

Dr ANDERSON — It is a good question, and I will let Gaye answer it in relation to the Victorian context. Being from New South Wales, I am far more familiar with that context. But I can say that in New South Wales in secondary there is very much a focus, unfortunately, on the upper end, as in senior school mathematics and preparing the children for those exit exams, et cetera. I think our efforts certainly — and I think it is the case in

Victoria as well — need to be very much focused on the 7 to 10 group and supporting teachers to develop better pedagogical practices there. Would you agree?

Dr WILLIAMS — I would, and in fact there was a time in Victoria in the 1990s when because the assessment at year 12 involved those challenging problems and investigative projects that were set externally to the school, the only way that schools could get their students to achieve well at the higher level was to address problem-solving and projects at the 7 to 10 level. We had a great improvement over that time, but then we went back to school-assessed course work instead of those CATs, et cetera, and it all started to disappear out of that junior level. There is a very nice article by — I am not sure of the order — Barnes, Stephens and Clarke on how in that particular the assessment engine drove the good practice, and far more teachers were involved in professional development to do with problem-solving and project work because it was needed at the top level of the school. What is available? There is some very nice professional development available that does look at ways that students can actually work and think things out, but it tends to be the committed who go to it rather than everybody. So we in our schools have many, many, many teachers who are still just teaching rules and procedures in preparing for the next lot of people. Could I talk about the Japanese lesson study in here?

Dr ANDERSON — You could.

Dr WILLIAMS — The Japanese lesson study is a really nice model to think about for professional learning in secondary schools. It really does have the features that Judy was talking about. There is actually time in a school day, during the timetable day, that is allocated to groups of teachers at the same level to work on a lesson. There is a master teacher who really has a very good pedagogical knowledge and content knowledge and focuses that group. About every week — I might not be quite right on the time line — there is a lesson that starts a new topic, and they do this complex problem. The students think about a problem they have not come across before, and as a result of that they put forward ideas, and then out of that the teacher draws the knowledge that they want and puts it all together so they have got the concept that they were looking for, and then the students practise. Before that complex lesson they have this lesson study time with the master teacher where they look at the particular task and they think about what students might do. From that they work out what they will do to help to draw out what is happening. After that lesson they all get together again and talk about what happened; they do what they call ‘polish the lesson’ so that they make it better, and they use it again the next year. What they are really interested in is drawing out student thinking, because it is that thinking that students do individually that gives them the structure that they can flexibly use in thinking about the maths. That is actually where my PhD lies, in creative student thinking and how it can happen in classrooms, and the knowledge they develop is so much better.

Mr HALL — I need to confess first of all that I am a former secondary maths teacher, so I have some concurrence with the views that you have expressed in terms of maths teaching. I wish it were only as easy as you found it, Geoff.

Dr WILLIAMS — Were you smiling?

Mr HALL — I was indeed.

The CHAIR — It was nice and logical and straightforward.

Mr HALL — I agree, Judy, entirely with some of the principles that you outlined that need to be in a professional learning program for teachers — things like being embedded in teaching practice delivered at the school level, the use of peers, mentors and coaches et cetera to assist in that regard. Your comment before, Gaye, about only the best — there seems to be a tendency for the best teachers to participate in those programs. Maybe it is that we have to take those particular programs or those examples to the classroom itself or to the teachers themselves rather than encouraging them to do otherwise. My question, Judy, is: how do we actually at a practical level implement those principles which you rightly outlined as best practice in professional learning? How does the school actually do it at that school level?

Dr ANDERSON — We actually have to change the culture, unfortunately, in some of the schools that I have worked in. We need teachers to take on that responsibility of ongoing learning. Some do believe that. I know that as a head teacher of mathematics myself trying to get all teachers to participate in those collaborative exercises of sharing can be a real challenge. There are some teachers in our schools who feel a little bit threatened by that discussion. So I think it is not a simple process by any means. I think it is a challenge for a coordinator to implement, but it is something that good leaders do. I think they do take opportunities within their faculty meeting

time, et cetera, to begin those conversations about teaching particular areas of the curriculum, how we might do it, encouraging that sharing of resources and setting time aside to actually do that. Unfortunately in a lot of schools we get caught up in the administration, and often our faculty time gets used up in working out who is going to take responsibility for what is happening next week. That is why I am saying I think we have to change that thinking. The fact that as teachers we are all learners, we are all here to learn, and just because we have got the degree and the post-grad qualification that is not where our learning ends. It is really about changing teachers' thinking to ongoing learning; maybe even using those few teachers who do go off to these workshops and things and whom you know have a commitment to that and bringing them in to mentor some of the others. It is not simple. I have certainly tried to implement some of those processes myself, and it takes time.

Mr HALL — What about teacher exchanges between schools or giving time to teachers to go and visit schools and learn about how they deliver in other schools and the ideas and programs they have?

Dr ANDERSON — I think there are lots of things that you could do along those lines, absolutely, yes. There are lots of different things that have been tried, but what I have experienced, too, is that often when teachers go and visit other schools they come back with lots of great ideas and then they get caught up in the busyness of school in the next week and then two weeks down the track, 'Oh, gosh, we were going to sit and talk about that and we haven't had time'. There are a couple of challenges but one of the biggest challenges is to make that regular time within the school day that is precious and does not get chewed up by the administration or the principal suddenly wanting us to dash off to something else. It has to be time that there is sort of a boundary around.

Dr WILLIAMS — And it has that leader, either from inside the school or outside, who has that pedagogical and content knowledge and leadership skills.

Dr ANDERSON — That is right. That is true. I think that time within the school program is critical. We can send teachers off all we like and they can all come back with great ideas, but then it never translates into that collaborative exercise and inquiry model in the faculty.

Mr HALL — How much time is required? Can you define that? It is an hour a week or two hours a week for the faculty or groups to sit together and do that necessary planning?

Dr ANDERSON — It could be an hour, if it was really focused and there was a program and there was a process, but of course that is part of that planning and having that direction and everybody in the faculty having a shared understanding of what we are doing, why we are doing it and how we are going to get there, and everyone taking ownership. I think that is what takes time: building up and getting to that point where you can say: 'That's the hour a week when we're going to sit together, and this is what we're going to do'. It is not quite as simple, I guess, as it might appear on paper — as you probably realise.

Mr HALL — But in terms of embedding professional learning in the program, that is essential, that an hour a week, say, or whatever the time allocated, is actually put aside so that it is an ongoing thing, rather than a one day here and a one day there?

Dr WILLIAMS — Absolutely — and not at the end of the day when all the children have gone. That is not the time. It needs to be part of the actual program for the day.

Mr HALL — That really requires just resourcing in schools, does it not — extra staffing so that timetabling becomes possible?

Dr WILLIAMS — Yes, it does. And your expert, because many schools will not have somebody with those leadership skills for a start, although you will grow them. If you put in the time and the resources, you will grow those people.

Mr HERBERT — On something completely different, one of the things that people who have problems with mathematics at school say constantly is that for a variety of reasons — they might have gone overseas or been sick — they miss out on a certain section which impacts later on in their school life in terms of an understanding of more complex mathematical approaches. I know that there are some approaches whereby you have more diagnostic, so that kids who are not going well mathematics in at secondary school have more diagnostic testing and analysis to find out to what they need, to then have targeted programs to try to address that, so that they do not continually miss out as they go through the school. Is that an issue? Is there much professional development

happening in that, in terms of teachers being able to analyse the range of knowledge of mathematics that students have in working out programs? Is that an issue?

Dr ANDERSON — I think that is a huge issue, actually. That is a starting point, if when you walk into your classroom of 30 children you do not know where each of them is on that learning trajectory, and they are all over the place.

Dr WILLIAMS — Whether they have been away or not.

Dr ANDERSON — Yes. So that is a critical component of teaching. Certainly there has been, on assessment approaches and then planning to support children, but it is one of the things that teachers I think find most difficult — to be able to access the children, work out where they are, and then plan and then that ongoing assessment and planning for the range of needs. There is certainly a lot of research that says that in the typical year 7 and 8 classroom there can be as much as a seven-year gap between the top and the bottom, if you like, of their knowledge and understanding of deep mathematics. It is a huge problem.

Mr HERBERT — What about at 10, 11 and 12? There is a pretty hard curriculum that you have to teach. Is that addressed at that point, in that context, or is it too late at that point?

Dr WILLIAMS — Are you asking is it a problem that some of them are missing knowledge?

Mr HERBERT — Yes, absolutely.

Dr WILLIAMS — Yes, by the time you get to there you still have some students in year 12 who are back down at grade 4 or at a lesser level.

Mr HERBERT — In some parts of mathematics.

Dr WILLIAMS — In quite a lot of their mathematics, there will be some students there. Then there will be others, coming up from there. So they are very different in what they know. The more we go with trying to catch them up to date with little crash courses, with rules and procedures, the more they have to forget and still not know. I do not know exactly how but it has to be a different mindset, so that what they do learn they understand and can use. The only thing I can say about it is that if you start a topic with some sort of a task that allows access at the number level, at the logic level, at the algebra level and all sorts of things so that different students can learn a bit from where they are, then some understanding will develop. If you teach them rules and procedures when they are way behind, they will still be way behind.

Dr ANDERSON — It does not work.

Mr HERBERT — I understand that, but the truth is that there is probably not going to be a huge change in mathematics at VCE; you learn it right around the country. I am to trying to work out whether there is a professional development approach to actually do with this. I understand what you are saying, in terms of a pedagogical and philosophical outlook, but the reality is that when you look at VCE maths it probably is not going to change a huge amount, I would not have thought, in the short time frame and there is a national curriculum. Teachers have a huge amount of pressure on them in the senior years to actually get different results. I am just wondering whether there is scope or a need for more diagnostic intervention in those senior years, rather than how you get the best grades for an exam at the end.

Dr ANDERSON — Good teachers do do that. Absolutely. Good teachers do that and good teachers know how to do that. As far as professional development is concerned, I think people who run the sorts of courses that I am familiar with do address good assessment approaches, diagnostic approaches and how to support those children. Again, I think the reality at school with the 30 children in the classroom and the busyness of schools, the crowded curriculum, all of those things actually do not necessarily help teachers to get their heads around it, particularly new teachers. I think new teachers need a lot of support in our schools. They are the ones who particularly need to be supported by master teachers, the knowledgeable experts to help them to develop processes and strategies to do that. I know that a lot of parents use tutoring to try and help their kids of course. That is a burgeoning industry that probably needs to be addressed too.

Dr WILLIAMS — In fact the early years numeracy interview is probably something that might be a model that you could use there, but the amount of time in interviewing each of those students to find out where they

are, and then to design your program around it, again, it comes back to that time, and the professional development to go with it.

The CHAIR — Thank you for your time. It has been very interesting indeed.

Dr ANDERSON — Thank you for the opportunity.

Dr WILLIAMS — Thank you for inviting us to come and talk.

Witnesses withdrew.

CORRECTED VERSION

EDUCATION AND TRAINING COMMITTEE

Inquiry into effective strategies for teacher professional learning

Melbourne — 12 September 2007

Members

Mr M. Dixon (from 18 September 2007)	Dr A. Harkness
Mr N. Elasmarr	Mr S. Herbert
Mr B. Finn (1 March – 18 September 2007)	Mr G. Howard
Mr P. Hall	Mr N. Kotsiras

Chair: Mr G. Howard

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Committee Administrative Officer: Ms N. Tyler

Witnesses

Ms M. Peace, vice-president, and

Mr J. Graham, research officer, Australian Education Union.

The CHAIR — Can I welcome John and Meredith as representatives of the Australian Education Union. As you would be aware, the information you are sharing with us is being taped so we have a record of your contributions that can be incorporated in our report. I also need to advise you that the evidence you share with us is covered by parliamentary privilege. If you need to speak freely, you can feel confident you can do so. Of course that would not apply if you were speaking outside the room. Thanks for coming along to provide us with your views in regard to teachers' professional learning.

Mr GRAHAM — I am John Graham, a research officer at the Australian Education Union. I will start the presentation. We did provide a fairly extensive written submission and I will just highlight some of the points which were made in it. We welcome the opportunity to look at this area as we regard it as particularly important in terms of the way in which education can be improved. Our submission, as you would be aware, was a combination of policy positions, some of the research, and I think very central to it was a survey we carried out with our professional development and curriculum coordinator members. These are the people who are basically responsible for professional learning in schools. I will also say that our submission includes early childhood and TAFE as we believe the same issues in relation to professional learning also apply in the early childhood area and TAFE area. There is an overlap between some of the issues in both and sometimes we have things which are very distinctive to these sectors.

I will also say that the commitment of the AEU to professional learning has been longstanding. We have not only been strong supporters of the importance of professional learning for teachers in general, but we also have provided programs for a long time in these areas. I outline in the submission the types of programs we provide. We have our own dedicated professional learning arms which are incorporated associations. They are the Teacher Learning Network, with which we work with the Victorian Independent Education Union, AEU Education Services Inc. and the Victorian Educational Leadership Consortium. We also offer programs in conjunction with universities and the department of education. We believe the nature of teaching means that when you are talking about professional learning you are talking about a very wide variety of activities. These range from university award study, which a number of our members say is very important but there are some cost problems which attach to that. There are things like mentoring and coaching, which are becoming more and more important; release to industry; curriculum course development; network participation; workshops; conferences; and participation at various committees and associations, all of which come within this notion of teacher professional learning.

In our submission we make a number of recommendations about how improvements can be made to enhance the opportunities for quality professional learning for teachers. These recommendations were largely derived at this stage from our survey, where we asked questions which are very relevant to this inquiry about what is effective professional learning for teachers, what are the problems with the existing provision and how can that provision be improved?

The major issue in terms of the obstacles to professional learning is pretty common to schools, early childhood and TAFE. The fact is that there is a lack of resources to actually provide the sort of effective learning programs which people know actually improve learning. We believe some of those real costs need to be addressed in the school sector through additional funds to the student resource package, or the global budget, as it is called, specific program funding and also student-free days. When we are talking about these things, the examples would be when you have professional development external to the school on a whole range of areas, you basically need a team to go from the school. Having one person go and then come back and try to convince their colleagues that they have found out something important is very difficult to do. You need a team to go, and immediately when you have a team to go, of course you create some big cost issues for the school.

In terms of internal professional development, again when you have a major change in the department's curriculum, such as VELS or the reporting system, then you do basically require additional student-free days, because the whole school, the whole staff, needs to sit down together to develop programs which are consistent across the school. They are not just isolated in one part of the school. So we have people trying to get bits and pieces of time during spare periods or after school.

There is also an importance in relation to this matter of cost and time to allow things like coaching and mentoring to occur. I think there are some real really good, innovative things happening in these areas, where schools are developing more and more that notion of expertise within the school which can be utilised to improve the teaching of all teachers. Again, there is the idea of visiting other classrooms, visiting other schools. It is very clear, not only

from our survey but from the research, et cetera, that that is one really important way of helping to spread good practice.

I would also mention rural teachers. I am sure you must have had some other people talking about those, but the disadvantage in relation to professional learning in general is multiplied 10 times for rural teachers because of all those cost problems linked to distance. The fact is that there is very little official professional development taking place in rural areas compared to the city.

The other point I would make, just to finish off with the school sector, would be about the sheer number of initiatives. Just recently over the last few years we have had a lot of very important initiatives coming into schools through the blueprint and all of its spin-offs. However, what that means for schools is that there is a whole range of initiatives coming in, all of which have to be implemented. So you can have some very good policies which you have spent a lot of time and money on developing, but you also have to spend, we would say, at least the same amount of time and money, or even more, on the other end of that, which is the implementation in schools, so that every teacher fully understands what you are trying to do. I think that has been a problem, particularly when you have got a large number of initiatives which are basically using up all the professional learning time of a lot of teachers as their own particular subject and skill needs also need to be met as well as that. One of the examples at present of course is the new report system and the new VELs curriculum, and that is brought up whenever you go into a school — the fact that they have got these two things at the same time. I will leave that for the school sector.

I would just like to mention early childhood. Early childhood funding for professional learning is far more difficult than for schools because of the nature of that sector. We have got a situation where the budgets are totally insufficient in relation to the needs of teachers in early childhood. These raise participation barriers. A lot of early childhood professional learning does occur on weekends, evenings, et cetera. In rural and regional areas early childhood professional learning again is more difficult than schools because there are only one or two people in each of those centres, so basically if they have a professional learning program, then the centre closes, and of course that creates real problems in the community.

The other issue of disadvantage in early childhood is the fact that because centres are so small it means that collegial learning — which is central to the school sector and which can often occur during school time — for early childhood teachers is very difficult to work. They tend to be isolated so you need other systems to help to promote that, and also to promote learning between early childhood and early years of primary. One of the very positive moves which the government has made is to include the early childhood area within the department of education. I think that that is something that we have certainly been supporting for a very long time. I think that you now have some real opportunities to help to address those problems.

Finally, in terms of TAFE — as with the other sectors, professional learning at TAFE is very important. TAFE teachers do need to be up to scratch with what is happening — in terms of the technology, in terms of the economy, industry — and their professional knowledge and expertise needs to be brought up to par. There are a whole lot of issues in terms of the changing modes of delivery, changing demographics, as I say, changing technologies, et cetera. The recommendations we have got in relation to TAFE are certainly that the TAFE Development Centre, which was set up a few years ago, should be given ongoing support — we see that as a really important development for TAFE teachers — and that the funding issue should be resolved in relation to that. One of the other issues for TAFE teachers is qualifications. We believe that the qualification levels need to be lifted. The certificate IV levels need to be lifted so that TAFE teachers do have a proper grounding in pedagogy et cetera.

I suppose finally the one issue which is again very central to TAFE is release to industry, which does occur and is seen as an absolutely essential part of professional learning, but it needs to be far more organised, and it needs to be more accessible to all teachers. We would also say that we support a teacher industry program for schools which was in existence for a number of years and was seen as a very valid program, but which disappeared a few years ago. I will leave it at that.

The CHAIR — We will move to questions.

Mr HERBERT — I have one very quick one. Thank you for that. I apologise for having to leave now; I have a meeting with the Minister for Early Childhood Development. I am not particularly familiar with the early childhood sector. In teaching, you have private agencies that contract emergency teachers to schools. What is the

situation in early childhood — is there a pool of relieving early childhood teachers; are their organisations that provide them; what is the actual infrastructure for that support — —

Mr GRAHAM — Again, neither of us is a total expert on that but my understanding is that there are the equivalent of casual relief teachers in the early childhood area but that they are very difficult to come by and that their salaries are certainly lower than the casual relief teachers for schools. How to increase the number of casual relief teachers even for schools is a problem but it is certainly a problem for early childhood, and I am not sure how you do that.

Ms PEACE — Most early childhood teachers would have a dual qualification, and would be qualified to teach in primary schools where you can access greater amounts of money as a CRT, and where there is also plenty of work. People are more likely to do that. Many of our members will say to us that in terms of trying to access professional development, replacement is a key issue for early childhood particularly. It is also an issue for country schools, but particularly for early childhood across the state. They simply cannot get replacements and that either means you get agreement to shut the centre down for a day or they cannot be released.

Mr HERBERT — Just following up on that — I would imagine a lot of things change in a primary school, and as you say, you do your teacher training, early childhood. I would imagine those relief teachers who are dual qualified and go around are probably as good a source of professional development as anyone in terms of early childhood, because they are in the primary schools and they can actually see what is happening and what changes are occurring.

Ms PEACE — Absolutely. In fact I was in a primary school last week where they had a graduate teacher who is doing her final rounds. She had been working in an early childhood centre for 15 years and has decided to make the cross. The school just could not talk about her strongly enough in terms of the skills she was going to bring into their school in the early childhood sector. I think you make a good point that they certainly do offer a huge amount in terms of early childhood education and development for schools.

Mr GRAHAM — I suppose what we are hoping for, with the bringing of early childhood into the department, is that those notions of professional learning which already occur in various places — there are programs which link early childhood teachers and primary teachers together — but hopefully the department will be able to facilitate that more.

Mr HALL — Do you get a lot of shifting, though, between the two sectors, between the early childhood and the primary sectors, for those dual qualified teachers?

Ms PEACE — Our information would suggest that most of them go into the primary sector when they have dual qualifications because of the greater levels of pay and certainly early childhood centres have greater difficulty in attracting staff. The teacher shortage issue hits them very strongly, even though it is an issue across the board.

Mr HALL — Moreover, one of the issues that I have recently come across was that a person with dual qualifications may be teaching in the early childhood sector or kindergarten for five or six years and then move back to the primary system. Their years of service were not recognised in the early childhood sector and so they lost that component, which did not encourage interchange between the early childhood and the school sector.

Ms PEACE — We have that problem at the other end too with TAFE. Even in a TAFE setting where a teacher could be teaching school-aged students, because they are not actually teaching in a school and their qualification may not be a school-based qualification, they get no recognition for that service in TAFE. That has been a real issue, particularly in that VET area where we are getting increasing crossover between schools and TAFE. People are reluctant to move into the school sector because although they may have behind them large numbers of years they get no recognition and end up teaching on a graduate salary when they were paid much more highly in the TAFE sector.

Mr HALL — In your discussions with the minister, Steve, could you address that issue?

Mr HERBERT — I might leave that to the AEU in their EBA.

Ms PEACE — Do not worry, we have raised it on many occasions.

Mr FINN — I see that you have in your written submission that teachers are faced with more complex medical and social issues, and they have to spend more time gaining greater knowledge to meet the additional needs of their students and the relevant regulations. In my discussions with teachers and principals in my area, it seems to me that this is already a significant issue and is a growing issue. What can be done to overcome that? Should we include this sort of ‘social work’ as a part of professional development training? Is that the direction in which we should be going?

Ms PEACE — Mr Graham can perhaps add to what I might say. I would be loath to suggest that we should move in that direction completely because I think it then shifts the focus directly on to schools being responsible for all those things. I do not think there is any harm in schools being aware of those issues, and it can often enhance the teaching and learning, if you are aware, for example, we have many students who suffer from Asperger’s and it is valuable to understand those conditions when you are teaching those kids in terms of how it can affect how they learn. But equally, for the whole range of issues, medical and other issues that you can confront, there needs to be greater levels of support from outside to support schools, because I think it is too much to suggest that we then take on that role as well. We are trained as teachers, not health experts. Whilst it is good to have a basic level of knowledge, I do not think it is appropriate to have to have those qualifications to deal with those sorts of issues. It should be done in tandem with professionals who work outside the schools.

Mr FINN — I am probably referring more to the social issues: the high rate of marriage breakdown and a whole range of issues that affect children very directly and sometimes, quite often, very drastically. Teachers are telling me that they are spending more and more time dealing with these issues when in fact it occurs to me that they could be putting greater emphasis on professional learning and probably a whole range of other areas as well.

Ms PEACE — Welfare issues certainly have increased enormously. Schools are required, really, to deal with that pretty much within the immediate school. There is some outside support, but that is limited and I do not think it is enough. When you are confronting kids, either in your classroom, perhaps as a year-level coordinator or a school welfare coordinator, you have got to try to deal with those issues as best you can. But I think there is a much greater need for additional support for schools in dealing with that because it detracts from the core part of our business, if you like, and that is teaching and learning. You do not want people who are professional teachers to be detracted from that work by dealing with those other issues.

Mr FINN — That is the point that I make: that we do not want them to be detracted from their core business, as it were, but at the same time the day-to-day reality is that it is occurring and we have to face up to it. How best can we handle that and provide teachers with the sort of support that they need to deal with these sorts of issues?

Ms PEACE — Traditionally in secondary schools we have had, and still have, student welfare coordinators, many of whom are trained and have done postgraduate qualifications. We have recently seen the introduction of the primary welfare program in a significant number of primary schools, which has been received enormously well by primary schools in terms of providing that additional time and resource to deal with many of those issues. In the day-to-day stuff that you have to deal with there needs to be resources within the school to assist teachers, and sometimes that resource is somewhat specialised in the form of a welfare coordinator. That needs to happen, because you need that support. If you are, say, a full-time classroom teacher you might deal with some of it, but you need a layer of support within the school to be able to deal with those issues. The reality is that whilst that support is there — and we have received very positively the primary welfare initiative — the support needs to be greater.

Mr GRAHAM — It certainly needs to be addressed, because the way in which those social issues interfere with the learning of students becomes crucial in relation to certain students, so you must have some support process whereby their opportunities are increased. There is a lot of evidence about the links between student background in terms of poverty, et cetera, and the outcomes from schooling.

The CHAIR — I thought your presentation was very useful indeed, especially the survey part. It seemed to line up with what we were hearing from others about effective professional development being school based and taking place with an ongoing and collegiate approach. You also raised the issue of problems in schools in rural areas. Could you tease out what you see as some of solutions? Obviously, as mentioned earlier, CRTs are a problem, but what are some of the other solutions in terms of providing effective professional learning opportunities for teachers in country areas?

Ms PEACE — The CRT issue is a huge one — just trying to get teachers to replace people when they go off. The other big issue is that the majority of PD is done in major centres, the majority in Melbourne. If you are a teacher in north-western or western Victoria it is very difficult not only to get to Melbourne but also to pay the costs. If you backtrack and look at the budgets that schools get, all schools are funded pretty much in the same way. You have a bucket of money that you have to allocate to a variety of things. For example, country schools and city schools are effectively dealing with the same amount of money, yet the cost for a country school — if it can get CRTs — is often greater, because they then have to factor in travel costs and sometimes accommodation costs.

One of the common complaints from many of our country people is that distance-wise you may not be that far from Melbourne — I think we gave the example in the paper about someone from Bendigo coming to Melbourne — but you can get caught up in traffic and no accommodation costs are factored in, so the teacher ends up attending for a full day's PD. They get up at half-past five in the morning to get down here to try and miss traffic, and then have to travel home at the end of the day, because there are no in-built accommodation costs and they try to save the school money. The issue of resources for country schools needs to be addressed so that we do not see a divide between the sort of professional learning that teachers in country areas have access to versus those in the city. It worries me that we are creating a bit of that divide, because those schools are under greater budget pressure to provide that kind of professional learning, simply because that learning is provided geographically a long way away.

The CHAIR — Are you aware of any programs that are targeted to supporting teachers from rural schools in gaining professional development? I remember that in my early teacher days in the country there were a couple of programs that I was able to link into then, but I do not know what is running now.

Ms PEACE — John would probably know this better than me. A mixture of programs are provided in regional centres, but, again, if you are in the Loddon-Mallee region, if PD is offered it is likely to be in Bendigo. That is not much use to you if you teach in Mildura. The geographic distance is still there, but there is some provision. I will give you an example of ours. We run professional development for our members at different times. We have struggled in remote areas to run that professional development. It is not because people do not want to do it. It is because we cannot get teams of people released from schools, because there are simply no CRTs to backfill them. The same goes for departmental professional development. It is very difficult for people simply to be replaced, let alone the added costs of attending that sort of professional development.

Mr GRAHAM — I think there is some cluster professional development which occurs where you have student-free days. This is where student-free days become extraordinarily important, because at that stage you can actually have a group of primary schools and secondary schools having various activities in various schools. A few years ago Gippsland used to be really good in relation to professional development as a region, which used to be called Gourmet Professional Learning. It was run by various people in the regional office there, but I think it petered out. I am not quite sure why. One of the things which is often brought up when we are talking about rural and regional as a solution is the online type of professional learning. The only problem with that is that it is not particularly valued by teachers, or they do not particularly like it. Some of the research that I have seen in terms of that is that it is good for some things but not for other things. You are certainly not going to solve everything by that, but there is a place for it if it is well organised and well structured for specific areas.

Mr HALL — I will comment on the regional aspect. I was aware of the gourmet PD in my electorate in Gippsland. That did work well for a while, John. Basically it was like a smorgasbord of professional development programs that teachers could select from — it was almost like a menu, which was great. Surely when you have the problems with CRT, distance and delivery of professional development in country regions you should do what teachers are telling you in your survey and what some of the experts are saying — that is, embed the professional development on a weekly daily basis within the school program. That would require an additional permanent resource to a school to facilitate that ongoing and regular professional learning within the school base so that you are potentially reducing actual classroom hours so that they can be made up with the planning meetings. Even if it is only two or three teachers at the Buchan Primary School, they could get together and work out their literacy or numeracy programs or whatever. Surely that is the way to overcome some of the professional development difficulties we have in rural schools.

Mr GRAHAM — There are in Melbourne some larger private schools which can afford to have a person like, say, Bill Rogers from Melbourne uni or another expert in a particular area working in their school for a couple of days a week in a sort of mentoring/coaching role. Certainly if there were resources for that, it would be very helpful. The other thing is the department's program, Teacher Professional Leave, has been a good first step. What

that provides is funding for teachers to be released from class for up to — I think it is — 12 weeks. It might be like a couple of days a week where they work together on some sort of a professional development project. That is a good first step. That could be extended, as you said, in terms of having a resource at the school.

Ms PEACE — That notion of a cluster where you are working with a group of schools or even within your school is a real positive, I think. There is an enormous amount to learn from your colleagues within the school. But again, as John has said, one of the things that many of the city schools — and there are government schools doing the sort of work that he has just outlined — it does help often to have a consultant or a professional person come in and work with that school. Again the geography does make that a bit more difficult on a regular basis. A lot of those arrangements have also revolved around mentoring and coaching. There is some training required around that. You can set up models within your school which are extremely effective, but I still think there will always be some need for that external assistance that does play an important role. The other really important thing is that — I would hate to see a situation where our country teachers are isolated in learning from each other, which can be very effective, but not because of their geography necessarily have contact with their city colleagues. I think that mix across the profession is also very, very important, and we should not lose that.

Mr HALL — I agree. John, you mentioned that Teacher Professional Leave program in your submission, and you just mentioned it then. I am not aware of that program. To what extent does that program operate in Victoria, and how many schools or how many teachers can take advantage of it?

Ms PEACE — I should know the answer, but I do not.

Mr GRAHAM — I cannot tell you the exact answer, but it was one of the blueprint initiatives that was launched a few years ago. It came in as a sort of a substitute for the teacher release-to-industry program. The teacher release industry program disappeared at the same time as the teacher professional leave program came in. The teacher professional leave program is designed for shorter periods of time. We have had a number of discussions with the department about the program. My understanding is that it is — there is a figure in the back of mind that I cannot think of — —

Mr HALL — Karen has just pointed out there was a question we asked of the minister, and we have an answer here.

Ms PEACE — It has been extraordinarily popular and very effective.

Mr GRAHAM — It has been really good.

Ms PEACE — We have had people travel overseas to look at other education systems. Having teams is the other really important bit. There are teams of people being released and replaced so they can go and look at other schools and see what they are doing.

Mr HALL — The other question I was going to ask you: in terms of your recommendations there, in the schools sector you should said that the student resource package should contain resourcing for at least two additional student-free days. Given that the nature of professional learning may not be in day blocks or whatever — as some have said, it is embedded in a small amount on a weekly basis in the school program — are you strict on saying there should be two additional days for teachers to be involved in professional development, or could there be funding to the equivalent of that so that schools have the flexibility to introduce whatever they believe are more appropriate professional learning structures?

Ms PEACE — We have sought two additional days. I do not disagree with what you are saying about smaller teams within the school, but I think the other really important thing to remember in terms of achieving systemic change or school-wide change in your local community is that it is really important to have the opportunity to have your whole staff together with good leadership and talking about the sort of change you might want to institute in your particular community and everyone having a very clear idea and having an opportunity to talk about the work that you are doing collectively as a large group. It gives you the opportunity then for groups of particular subject area teachers or grade teachers to go away and do further work. But I do not think we should underestimate the importance of that whole-of-school change and working collectively around achieving the same sorts of things across the whole school. We have seen that as a real problem with some of the big initiatives that have come in, particularly with the Victorian Essential Learning Standards and the new report cards, as schools try to get that cohesive understanding across the whole school.

Schools have reported to us that it was very difficult because they had limited opportunity to actually get together for a block of time so that everyone was clear about what the various domains in the Victorian Essential Learning Standards were and what the progression points actually meant so that when you sat down to do your reports everyone within your faculty and within your school had a very clear and consistent understanding of what those things meant. I think the implementation of that has suffered to some degree because of that lack of time. I think both things are important, but the whole school work is very important in terms of getting systemic and school-wide change.

Mr FINN — I would just be interested to know from your point of view what would be needed in terms of professional learning and development to prevent a situation where a child could go through 13 years of formal education and come out semi-literate or semi-numerate — as we found out from the previous witness — at the end of that.

Ms PEACE — What kind of professional learning is needed?

Mr FINN — Yes. How can we prevent kids going through 13 years of school and coming out not being able to read and write?

Ms PEACE — I think you have to make sure that you have a teaching workforce whose members have a capacity to be able, for a start, when you have a classroom full of kids, to deal with the differences that you have in front of you with a class of at least 25. You will have an enormous amount of variation, so our teachers need to have the skills to actually understand that variation and learn how to deal with it. That could be diagnostic work with the students, to give you an understanding of where each student is at.

From our perspective, that comes down to issues around class sizes and time and resources, because that is a big ask, when you have 25 different kids in front of you at any given time — and for a secondary teacher, you are dealing with 100 to 125 kids in a week, who could all be quite different from each other. So it goes to the level of teacher training, I suppose, and the sort of basic skills that you would want your graduates to have, around being aware of those issues, and then having systems in place with the school around mentoring, not for just your graduate teachers but for all teachers, for teachers to be provided with professional learning about what differences may exist and what sorts of programs they might need to institute within their classes to actually deal with some of those issues. I am talking generally here because you would have such a vast variety of differences, and then professional development to deal with those instances, whether it is around classroom management or about literacy and numeracy.

Mr GRAHAM — It is really a program issue. The key years in terms of literacy and numeracy are the very early years. All the research shows that. You need to identify the problems at that point and you need to address the problems at that point. Things like reading recovery and some of the early numeracy programs are designed to do that. Reading recovery gives you this one-to-one relationship. Unfortunately they tend to finish at a certain point. Reading recovery ends at the end of year 1 and then for years 2, 3, 4, 5 and 6 the kids go back into the classroom again.

Mr FINN — So if at the end of year 1 they are not up to scratch they are just thrown in with the sharks?

Mr GRAHAM — I do not know whether I would put it in your terms, but there is a reading recovery resource which goes into this intensive work at that point, which is a really important point. Then the reading recovery resource does not continue through the rest of primary school, so the teacher then has within their classroom a range of students in terms of some of them having major literacy problems. We have recommended a number of times that that resource needs to continue on because some kids still do not achieve the standard. There is a standard set out which they should be achieving at that point and a number of kids do not achieve it. So you do need — whether you want to call it a tutorial approach — something whereby you are able to work with a very small number of children to improve their skills, so it is resource intensive. But what tends to happen is that if you do not address those issues at that point then the kids start to miss out on more and more of the curriculum, because even in terms of maths there is a literacy component, let alone all the rest of the curriculum. By the time they have reached secondary school, of course, it becomes really very, very difficult.

Mr FINN — It is too late.

Mr GRAHAM — It becomes really difficult, yes.

Ms PEACE — If you look at the money around literacy that is coming from the federal government, which has been to provide people basically external to the school, I think the view of our members would be that that has been a pretty ineffective use of considerable resources. Teachers in schools, where you have these kids in front of you on a day-to-day basis, you know your kids. If they had had that resource within their classrooms or within their schools, the teachers would have been able to target and more effectively use what amounts to millions of dollars to improve the literacy standards of those kids who are being shown to be falling behind. John is right, that targeted intervention, if you like, has been really important. I think in that particular example a lot of money has been used outside the school for external people, who have not had one-on-one contact with the kids, to try to bring those kids up to speed. The message we are getting back is that our members do not believe that that has been very effective in terms of assisting those kids and that it could have been far better targeted if it had been able to be utilised by the schools and the classroom teachers themselves.

Mr FINN — John, you mentioned that this is a problem that should be recognised very early on and addressed very early on. Why isn't it?

Mr GRAHAM — I think it is a resource issue.

Mr FINN — What I am saying is: how can a teacher recognise it as a problem and just let it go?

Mr GRAHAM — Because the teacher recognises it, the teacher has 25 kids in the class, and there are X number of minutes in a week. Unless they are willing to do private tutoring out of hours, et cetera, then it is very, very difficult to address, when you have a class where you might have half the kids with major literacy problems, unless you have additional resources. You probably would have come across this, too: a number of middle-class parents use private tutors. The private tutors are in addition to what is happening in the school, whereas what I think Meredith was saying and what I would argue is that that facility should be made available in the school, beyond the year 1 reading recovery, so that you can actually be confident that that student is meeting the standard which they are required to meet at that point. We know that they keep on slipping behind. The point I was making about the middle class doing that is that coming from a poor background means that you cannot afford external private tutors, therefore that sort of disadvantage is increased. So it is really important that government schools should have those resources.

The CHAIR — Time prevents us from hearing more from you at the moment. Thank you very much. There were some very interesting issues covered in your contribution again.

Mr HALL — The answer to that question was 769.

The CHAIR — Around 750 go through in a year, and the program has been going for three years.

Witnesses withdrew.

CORRECTED VERSION

EDUCATION AND TRAINING COMMITTEE

Inquiry into effective strategies for teacher professional learning

Melbourne — 12 September 2007

Members

Mr M. Dixon (from 18 September 2007)	Dr A. Harkness
Mr N. Elasmarr	Mr S. Herbert
Mr B. Finn (1 March – 18 September 2007)	Mr G. Howard
Mr P. Hall	Mr N. Kotsiras

Chair: Mr G. Howard

Deputy Chair: Mr N. Kotsiras

Staff

Executive Officer: Ms K. Ellingford

Research Officer: Ms J. Hope

Committee Administrative Officer: Ms N. Tyler

Witness

Mr D. Kelly, chief executive officer, Quality Associates International.

The CHAIR — I should advise you, Dave, as I do not know whether you heard the introduction to the last session. We welcome you and look forward to your contribution to our inquiry into teacher professional learning. Everything you say is being recorded and can be used in our report. You do have the opportunity to use parliamentary privilege when you are speaking before the inquiry if you need to, although we have not had people who have gone that far yet but the opportunity is there. We see you have forwarded us a fairly detailed submission but we are looking forward to your oral contribution.

Mr KELLY — I tried to cut down the submission as much as I possibly could so it was a bit easier to read and get through. There is a lot in it. I am chief executive officer of Quality Associates International (South-East Asia), to use the full title of the company. My background is I am actually a maths teacher like one or two people I have noticed throughout the day, in a former life, and started the Quality Associates business in association with a group out of the US as well as dealing with a lot of multinational and national companies across a lot of industries. Obviously from my education background I have dealt with the integration of technology in schools, delivering professional development to teachers in the past as well.

The company has a bit of a vested interest in teacher professional development online from a business perspective and also from an educational point of view as well. We are looking for the best model, which we were working on independently prior to our knowledge of the committee existing and also prior to the Victorian Institute of Teaching statement of professional development hours for teachers over a five-year period. We were well down the track looking at these sorts of issues prior to the committee coming along.

We believe all the terms of reference incorporate the ability to deliver a best practice delivery system for teacher professional learning. All across the board the points of reference are looking at delivering a professional development system to teachers. One of the things I have noticed, even this morning, on the basis of the issues of development of professional learning for teachers in rural areas as well as the delivery and accessibility for teachers, would be key areas that we would look at. For instance, just to take a rural example — to go off track for a second — we would see that something of an online nature would be the quickest and easiest deliverable method to get information to those areas. However, we would take it a step further and look at a blended solution. For instance, with the training and assessment management system that we would look at we would survey and collect data on each of the teachers who would pursue professional development in different areas. We would locate geographic centrepoints of those teachers who have done those courses to enable an economic delivery to those rural areas based on the numbers of interest within the courses.

Let us take Western Victoria, for instance. If we had a geographical centrepoint of 100 or 200 people who were looking at a particular course, we would then look at taking that beyond the point of the online solution to work with the developers of the content, to say, 'You have a body, a population who are extremely interested in your work and the materials you have done and we suggest that you follow that up with a delivery face-to-face with the interested teachers'. Along those sorts of lines then you are taking out all the cost requirements for those teachers, you are actually taking the mountain to Mohammed rather than the other way around. We will give the opportunity to deliver those types of requirements for each of those areas without having that travel problem, the cost problem, the CRT problem that is there. For instance, the other obvious point for me, being an ex-teacher and having that lifestyle, is that you often wonder why you walked away from without the amount of holidays that go with it — why is Saturday sacrosanct in that sort of delivery? Can we set up those sorts of professional development opportunities for those types of places on a Saturday?

The CHAIR — The unions, I expect.

Mr FINN — I was just going to say something similar.

Mr KELLY — That is obviously coming from someone not involved in a union background and for me the bottom line is about delivery of a professional development system that enables a high level of quality for the industry to move forward with. That is on the rural setting.

We are all about delivery and making sure that professional development can be delivered across the board geographically to the whole education population. Beyond that, to improve the quality, we firmly believe — and that is in the submission — that if you cannot, will not or do not measure it, you cannot improve it. There is no way to possibly say, without facts, that you have improved the system or that you have a high level of quality.

The simplest measurements would be at the completion level. For instance, the legal fraternity use a model with continuing legal education that they have to use a certain amount of hours within a prescribed period of time to update their learning from a legal perspective. The one problem that they have is they set it at 20 hours, and all you have to do is complete it. They have made the call that it is a completion exercise rather than a competency exercise or a methodology based on excellence. What they are doing is saying 'okay you can complete that' but they have now developed a mentality that is a bit of a checkbox area. You turn up for the lecture, there are my hours, where are my points, so I can move on. It is not really adding to the quality of the system that much. It is getting accessibility and it is getting the message out there but there is no message beyond completing the exercise.

Depending on what model you choose, whether you go for completion, competency or excellence, that will have a direct correlation to the quality of the system. No one of those three areas is incorrect to choose, I believe. In some cases a completion exercise is just an awareness level — it gets the awareness level in the population body up to a certain extent. They will directly correlate with the level of quality in the professional development system over time. There are certain things that you look at, for instance the issue that was brought up earlier along the lines of medical and social needs. Let us take the need for anaphylaxis for instance. How many teachers within the state would actually know what to do if a student in their class suffering from anaphylaxis had an attack? The number of them I would not be able to give you off the top of my head but the issue there is that it is never a problem until it is a problem. If you are looking at that as a completion exercise for those types of courses, if you have a child who suffers from anaphylaxis in your class, you go off and complete this course so you understand it. If I was a parent with my child in that class, I would really want to know that that teacher knows what to do with an EpiPen at the time that that occurs and what the procedure is.

For something along those regulatory lines that teachers need to understand, there is a different level of quality we would be looking for because it has a high-severity outcome. Things like mandatory reporting and all those other issues that all teachers need to know about, which then looks at a deliverable system that we deliver it to them by has to be measured in terms of return on investment, accessibility, availability, whether it is recognisable across the board as a qualification or certification, whether it is scalable — for instance if it starts off in a small microcosm of learning and can then be scaled out to the entire state — those sort of issues and the whole management system needs to incorporate this and lead into some sort of return on investment.

The difficulty with return on investment or ROI for education is that it is not measured at a monetary level. In business or industry return on investment is generally based on the dollar return at the end of it — what do I get? In education it is based more on regulation and quality — what level can we deliver it at, what quality can we deliver it at and is there a requirement for us to do this? With quality, the high level of quality that we can get into schools based on the professional development we give teachers will improve the delivery to students. The delivery to students, the numbers of programs that can be delivered and the body of knowledge of the teacher organisation will improve. Hence the reputation of the schools will improve based on where parents and parent bodies want to send their students — to give it the old acronym will get bums on seats.

The attractiveness of the school will be lifted on the basis of quality of the teachers and the knowledge within the organisation. That is, the return on investment factor for a school can be driven down to the number of students that can be attracted to the school as well as the body of knowledge of teachers within the school, the level of programs and the uptake of those programs. We believe the training management system for the professional development of teachers needs to follow some sort of formal model along those sort of lines. So the delivery behind all that system needs to be accessible, affordable, to take in the unique situation schools are in. When they send their work body or teachers off on a professional development exercise there is actually nearly a triple cost for them basically as against industry. In order to be able to deliver something along those sort of lines industry wide across all learning areas, taking in every possible issue that is around, we need to have a process available that we can start small, scale it out, bring it up and deliver it to even the remotest areas of the state.

The final point is the methodology behind this, which is a funding exercise. This is not broadly known but it is loosely based on the notes there as we ready for release in that from a budgetary perspective we will remunerate the teachers who create the materials for the professional development or the educational institutions or the people who are developing the materials. We will also put the schools in as a stakeholder or the corporate body as a stakeholder so that it encourages the teachers to develop a methodology for other teachers to learn from because that is where most of the materials come from — from other teachers or professionals who develop work in the area.

If they as well as their institutions that they work for could be encouraged to deliver that, we could have a central repository of all these fantastic ideas that work in one particular area. The issue we see along those lines is that a really great idea in one school does not automatically permeate straight across the state to every other school. It takes some time and effort. Some of the greatest ideas do not actually get out of schools because it is the individual teacher who understands the program and it is the person who will be the driver behind the development moving forward.

We see all those people, the teachers, the schools, the educational institutions, the professionals — you need psychologists, doctors, medical people — who can contribute to the whole development system as being the key stakeholders in the delivery of a professional development and learning system, and they can allow it to be scalable from the point that delivery to everybody can occur on an online basis. Then we can, through analysis of what courses and classes the teachers are taking, deliver from a face-to-face perspective. That is not to say that the online solution is the be-all and end-all. It is not a ‘build it and they will come’ methodology. In the instance of practical learning and working with industry, industry programs and industry exchanges, again it is not the be-all and end-all. It is a methodology to allow the initial stages of learning to occur, and it is a methodology that will allow us to measure it as well.

Mr HALL — Dave, has your company been contracted by the department here or school clusters or anything like that in Victoria to do any work?

Mr KELLY — Yes, we have subcontracted for a company called Computelec, which in the past has had arrangements or contracts with the department of education to deliver training into schools from a technology perspective. We have begun this project independently of any organisation, based on my learnings over a period of time — having dealt in business and having travelled to the states, to the UK and to Europe and having worked in organisations and places there, and also having exposure to learning methodologies and the set up of corporate universities in different places like that. There has been no formal approach by us or by government or by an institution at this stage. We have been in the planning phase. Our next step would be to talk to the Victorian Institute of Teaching to work out what their methodology behind delivering a professional development system to teachers would be. At this stage there has not been any, no.

Mr HALL — From a practical sense, the development of such a programs would not be done by a school; they would not have the resources to contract company like yours to do something?

Mr KELLY — No, the model we are looking at is that the school would not actually contract us. We see the body of knowledge coming from the teachers within the school environment. For instance, if a teacher has a great program, or even, to a lesser extent, a really good lesson plan that works with one particular unit of work or one particular topic, that can then be placed online, and we would work with them getting that up and running.

Mr HALL — But you do that in conjunction with either VIT or the department of education or a university or something like that?

Mr KELLY — It would be in conjunction with VIT and the guidelines that they would want for that to occur. As to what the process for that would be, I could not give you that right now. But to loosely give that to you, a teacher would come to us with an idea for a program that would go online. We would say, ‘Yes, that is fine. We can develop that. Here is your kit. Go away and develop. Come back when you have got all that together so that we can create all the online materials for you’. We are yet to think whether we would charge the teacher or the individual concerned a development fee. It would be minimal at this point, if that were the case. But then we would give them a percentage of throughput. For instance, if their course was the bee’s knees once we have developed it. If you have 1000 teachers go through and study that course online, then we would give a percentage of roundabout 10 per cent of the charge to them. Effectively, they are not having to come up with a great deal of cash. We have got the facility to be able to develop it, so there is bit of risk involved from our perspective. They are creating a content for this system to occur, and it is allowing it to be delivered across a large geographical model. Beyond that, let us say those 1000, if we get microcosms of 200 or 300 people in one particular area after we have had a bit of a look at throughput and where they are geographically, we would make the suggestion to the person to say, ‘Let us set up something,’ and we would remunerate them for that. That is why I bring up the Saturday thing. It is an investment in the whole system that allows those who have inputs to the system and those who are going to take out of the system will actually get remunerated from it at the same time.

Mr HALL — Would I be right in thinking a lot of the online program for professional learning would basically cater for more factual information rather than practical technique?

Mr KELLY — Correct. We actually follow a blended learning solution. That is the ‘build it and they will come’ issue of online learning. It is not the panacea of learning that people see that it is. You are correct — if it is factual base, it blends itself to it very well. We are in the throes of developing video-based learning as well, to a certain extent, to take that to that next practical level and work out ways. But there are limitations beyond — for instance, if you are looking at whether somebody can disassemble a motor vehicle and assemble it, as a competency, then you would actually need to have somebody out there to go and look at that. Again, it is a bit like, how do you develop a camp? How do you assess a school camp? If you are sending an assessor to see how well this person puts the camp together and how well it runs, you are not going to be able to do that online. You are going to need some sort of practical application. So it is a percentage of the whole model rather than the whole thing.

Mr FINN — I just have a quick question. You probably would have heard this question as you were sitting in on the last group of witnesses. I would be very interested to hear your answer, because you are one step away but still have a vested interest, obviously. What sort of professional learning would you provide for teachers to prevent the sort of incidents occurring as I have described before, of kids going through 13 years of school and coming out not being able to read, write or count?

Mr KELLY — I would go back to searching for the root cause first. That would be my response. To a certain extent, with any problem like that, which is a complex problem, there is going to be more than one root cause to the endgame of that problem. It might be teaching standards, it might be demographics, it might be economics; it might be any or all of those issues. The bottom line is the child is still coming through the system and cannot read and write. Are we ever going to be able to avoid that? The answer to that is I do not know. But the development of programs that address each of the root causes would be the way that I would follow that through. I would be measuring that and I would be looking at all the best programs and the best results for that. A change like that is not going to occur in a 1-2 year period. When you look at organisations, like large financial organisations, which have a population of 24 000, you are looking at a 5-6 year period for a cultural change to occur. What we are talking about is a percentage of students going through the system who are not literate and are not numerate and we are looking at changing the culture in the system to be able to identify those students and to be able to assist them as they go through. So the cultural change is going to require a distinct period of time. Probably the first thing that you attach to that is the social stigma of someone actually stepping up and saying, ‘I am having real difficulty with this so where do I need to go and what do I want to do?’. I would start opening some doors to give them the availability of services to be able to do that. I am working in an organisation at the moment — —

Mr FINN — Would you expect an eight or nine-year-old to do that?

Mr KELLY — I would expect their teachers to be able to see that they are having difficulty based on the assessment criteria that they are putting in place. If a teacher has a concern with a student, then it needs to be escalated to some sort of group within the school. ‘Okay, we have got a problem with this child, based on their numeracy and literacy skills. I think we need to get the parents in and we need to just have a quiet chat to them and we need to start putting programs in place for this particular student’. And it goes back to individual differences and mixed ability classes as well, and being able to identify who is at risk, at the end of that period, of not being able to communicate when they get out into the community. I see that as the biggest problem — that they have a lack of communicative ability. If you give somebody — back when I was teaching it was a dollar, but now it is probably two — dollars and you tell them to get the paper, do they know how much change they have got to get?

Mr FINN — And why would they bother getting it if they cannot read it anyway?

Mr KELLY — Well that is exactly right. That is the measure of the lowest common denominator — will they be able to read the paper? Will they be able to understand and interpret the headlines appropriately to a certain level? That is the low end of the scale. So that is one concern, and the other concern is the other end of the scale, where you have got students who are really outstripping the curriculum itself. They are university level at grade six. So how do you help those kids? My quickest way is: get the kid who is at university level to help the kid who is not — as a simple practical response to that.

I would be identifying all the different root causes there. How that then pertains to a professional development delivery program is that you give teachers the ability to set up processes that can identify the issues, you give schools the ability to identify groups that can deal with them, and you make accessible the programs for those particular types of schools and for those particular types of kids to be able to access what they need to.

The CHAIR — Okay. Thank you for your contribution.

Witness withdrew.

CORRECTED VERSION

EDUCATION AND TRAINING COMMITTEE

Inquiry into effective strategies for teacher professional learning

Melbourne — 12 September 2007

Members

Mr M. Dixon (from 18 September 2007)	Dr A. Harkness
Mr N. Elasmarr	Mr S. Herbert
Mr B. Finn (1 March – 18 September 2007)	Mr G. Howard
Mr P. Hall	Mr N. Kotsiras

Chair: Mr G. Howard

Deputy Chair: Mr N. Kotsiras

Staff

Executive Officer: Ms K. Ellingford

Research Officer: Ms J. Hope

Committee Administrative Officer: Ms N. Tyler

Witness

Mr P. Martin, Victorian Association for the Teaching of English.

**Necessary corrections to be notified to
executive officer of committee**

The CHAIR — We welcome you, Paul, as the representative of the Victorian Association for the Teaching of English, to our inquiry into teachers' professional learning. You will note that we record your contribution so that we can incorporate that in our report, or any parts of it that we choose to, and your contribution is covered within the committee's status by parliamentary privilege, if that is required, but of course that would not be the case outside. We welcome your contribution, Paul, we are very interested. We have heard from the maths teachers group and others today, so something on the other side will be nice.

Mr HALL — Something on the other side — something language oriented, perhaps!

Mr MARTIN — Thank you very much for the opportunity, first of all, to come and speak to you. I am going to make a few remarks, if that is okay, in the context that I know we have put in a submission to you, so I will not address that to any great extent because it has already been given to you. But I will speak to that a little bit, and also I will speak to the criteria that I understand you are interested in. From our point of view, we think that all schools want to have staff who are enthusiastic, want to teach and want to engage students, particularly through their learning. Teachers and schools need to feel encouraged, in our view, and supported when it comes to professional development and professional learning. That is on the record as far as VATE is concerned.

We think government, to the extent that it is involved in this whole area, should act more as an advocate for teachers' professionalism here, providing atmosphere, climate and culture that professionally encourages teachers to do better and to be better. I mean nothing by this, it is just about perceptions, but compulsion says to them basically that it is them and us. What I mean by compulsion really is that a model of professional learning that says, 'You will do' at a certain time, you will do.

We, as an organisation, want to suggest that the idea of collaboration of anything that you are involved in that will encourage teachers to become involved in professional learning would be the way to go. Facilitation, support and advocacy says that we are all working together — government, to the extent that it has responsibility for schools and for supporting teachers, working together to ensure a strong committed profession. The AMA does this for the medical association, the legal profession has its advocates and both those organisations have responsibilities for standards as well. I think that the whole notion of the kind of atmosphere that perhaps you discuss later on when you put together the various submissions put before you, is most important.

What you are asking us about, is about change, and about systems and approaches as, kind of, change agents. What you want from teachers, is to critically engage with change. That might be a statement of the obvious, but it is not from my perspective, both as president of VATE and also as a practising teacher, that is not a straightforward thing; that there are resistances, that there is lack of motivation in the day-to-day basis of what happens to teachers when they are faced with professional learning and so on. To recognise that we are on about change and that what you are investigating is the means of encouraging that, and what we are hoping is that the people you are encouraging, embrace that and do something with it, and want to do something with it; is why I headed up this introduction, around the idea of encouragement rather than compulsion.

Concerning your criteria, we believe we have addressed them in our submission, but I will speak a little bit directly to a number of them. You asked about the relationship between ongoing professional learning for teachers and teacher expertise. For us that is clearly unquestioned. We believe there is value in a mix of models, targeting, for example, what is ongoing in the context of schools' needs. Schools have clear mission statements and strategic targets et cetera, and we feel professional learning in part should be conceived with this in mind.

In the context of individual needs of a teacher, I have a wonderful collection of first-year teachers in my faculty back at school. They are really enthusiastic. As a more mature member of the profession — that is a nice way of saying 'older' — I often look at them and think, 'Am I going to have you for long?'. They came into the profession at a different time to me, and with different sorts of assumptions about what it is to work, for example. I see real talent and enthusiasm there, and I have learnt a lot from one in particular with whom I am working on a subject that we are jointly teaching. Targeting professional learning to cater for those teachers, who are mostly young women, is important. ITC is another particular need that is important, as is teaching particular texts as English teachers. There is also the issue of how to improve curriculum development skills. It is important to focus professional learning models to tackle particular individual needs.

The last thing I would get you to do — and I do not know how a committee like your own will take it on board — is to take into consideration the immeasurable: the things that happen in professional learning events that you do

not plan for. Lunch, for example! Lunch is a marvellous place for professional learning. From our organisation's point of view, sometimes we get feedback saying, 'The kinds of things that you were running were important, but the opportunity to get together with teachers over lunch produced an incredible contact that allowed me to follow through'. That could be seen as almost trivial, but I do not see it as such, and nor do our members. Factoring in the unplanned-for is what I am talking about: the results of networking arrangements or a particular experience or event.

It is our experience as an organisation that this criterion — the first one that I am addressing at the moment — is best achieved when the professional learning is grounded in teachers' own knowledge, experience skills and values, and I would not be surprised if maths and science have said the same sorts of things. The other thing about these is that in important respects they are discipline specific. From that point of view teachers' professional learning is grounded in teachers' own knowledge and experience, skills and values and, of course, our expertise, and our major area of expertise is within our disciplines.

You also asked which factors will support high-quality professional learning for teachers, and you go on to explain that in your criteria. In our view no one single approach is best, but we would submit that our experience bears out a few ideas that have been effective. Overwhelmingly the sort of professional learning that is most effective is well conceived, well led and collaborative and collegiate in its approach. Quite simply, time has to be made available. No-one wants to hear this — especially when time is equated with money and various other sorts of things, but it is a central thing to what I have to say to you this afternoon. It has to be made available for this to work, because this sort of professional learning is investigative, is based on collaborative problem solving and is dialogic — that is, it involves conversations in its approach. It is also designed to produce a variety of outcomes — from raising awareness at the nebulous end of the spectrum, through to very specific things, like how to deliver new-found skills and knowledge to children. In our view, a professional learning strategy that is effectively top down is not well thought out and essentially should not be encouraged.

A range of delivery is possible. Subject associations, like ours, run events — keynotes, workshops, forums and information-giving sessions. In our view all of these need to be encouraged and facilitated, and some of them may contradict what I have just said — for example, keynotes by their very definition involve some degree of top down. But the point about this idea of factors that would support high-quality professional learning is that no one way of delivering professional learning is simple. I had the pleasure of introducing our keynote speaker recently at the VATE state conference. Yes, it was a traditional lecture — something that we have experienced at various sorts of conferences. My point is that people went away, took it apart, networked and spoke about its relevance or lack of relevance. They spoke about its usefulness and whether that person could actually come and speak at their particular school. They reflected on it, and to that extent it was not a top-down experience.

Schools also need to understand that much of what teachers need regarding in professional learning is in-house. Schools need time to organise and deliver and, most importantly, for teachers to reflect on, build on and follow up on what they learn. In our view that is what is important for your committee to support. So, that is the term of reference (b).

Briefly, I will give a few bits and pieces on the final criterion. In relation to some of your other criteria we do not have quite the same sort of expertise. Concerning national and international trends regarding ongoing professional learning, our submission as far as English is concerned reflects our experience from a Victorian and Australian perspective, because we are part of the Australian Association for the Teaching of English experience as far as English is concerned, and we are also very familiar through international conferences. Melbourne hosted the International Federation of Teachers of English Conference in 2003, I think it was, for places like England, Canada and New Zealand. So we have some expertise in those areas. Blair's government, as you would be aware, certainly invested heavily in various programs — specialist schools, trusts, iNet, pairing less successful schools with more successful schools and looking at models of leadership and how all that works. Much of the focus that I would draw from that is on what is actually going on in the classroom. On Saturday I got the opportunity to go to England. My school was fortunate enough to be able to send me with seven colleagues, and we got to visit seven different schools that are part of the Specialist Schools and Academies Trust. All of them have specialised areas. Our particular interest is in teaching and learning. We know a little bit about these schools from having read their Ofsted reports beforehand. Overwhelmingly the message that we get — and they all have different sorts of things to offer, from sport to a whole range of things — the focus is on what is actually going on in the classroom and how pedagogy delivers curriculum. On your third criteria I would simply say on behalf of our association that professional learning needs to address this and that good practice internationally speaking — I will not call on

America too much there, but certainly in England — suggests to look at your classroom, look at what teachers should be doing in the classroom, look at any problems that you perceive to be having with children in terms of what you do in the classroom as your starting spot.

You asked too about determining how best practice and ongoing professional learning for teachers can be delivered into schools and learning communities. Again, I would refer back to the roles in three areas, particularly in relation to subject associations in schools. I will not repeat myself; I mentioned that in relation to criteria (b). Just briefly about the government's role here, from the point of view of delivery of professional learning and professional development that can be problematic. It can be perceived as being top down. Organisations like VCAA or other organisations perhaps in our area provide professional development mainly because, although they have got important roles within the schools, they are outside of the school experience. Our association says that government has a role to advocate professional learning as a way of supporting teachers to facilitate particularly the above and to do what we outline in our submission.

Time is important. Models of organisation and delivery are important, as are encouraging teachers and systems that motivate students and breaking down resistance to change. People who are not as enthusiastic — you have probably picked up I am pretty enthusiastic about this — about embracing professional learning and perhaps come to work to do their shift in a sense, to do their job, are competent in the classroom, but are not necessarily all that clued up in terms of how their job is actually changing. I think government has an important role there in terms of encouraging that should change with teachers, and particularly the models of organising time within schools are important there.

A few final miscellaneous factors, if I may, which kind of cut across your criteria: e-learning and teacher professional development is becoming something more and more important. We are not as experienced in this as we might be, but it is something that is moving into our organisation. The extent to which professional learning and ICT are integrated is crucially important. I took the liberty — this is a read; it is a little cheeky, but in some respects I think it is really important. This is by the author Marc Prensky and was written in 2001. He goes out on a limb — it hit home again because of my maturity and age! — in a number of ways in saying how kids learn differently to how the gentlemen in this committee and I actually went about learning; what we probably think about, not just in school but when we actually have to go about learning something and some of the assumptions that we make. He postulates the whole idea that kids brains are quite likely significantly physically different to our own. He makes the point that because of their facility with ICT many of the assumptions about traditional approaches towards learning that certainly people of my generation would have made actively work against the modern generation of kids coming through today learning because they learn so differently. I will not go into details, but when you have the opportunity you might like to read this. You will possibly see that some of things that he says are a little extreme, but I think you will be provoked by the kinds of notions about the way kids learn. My point about is that if he is even half decently correct in this, then certainly people of my generation and considerably younger ones coming through teacher training and going into professional learning as professionals need very much to embrace the sorts of things that are going on in that paper. That is clearly a wake-up call for a lot of teachers in that particular context.

Other sorts of things, too: professional learning and the opportunity to use data to improve outcomes, that is becoming more and more something that we have been asked to do certainly back in schools — I am sure that industry does this all the time — data that comes from examinations, data that comes from things like AIM, data that comes from a variety of different sources, as a means to improving professional practice. It is one of the questions that we have been asked to ask at the schools that we are visiting in the UK next week. It is something that I would suggest to you is perhaps relatively new for teachers to address. Teachers would rely significantly on their training in their discipline as a starting spot, as opposed to using tools such as independent data from what kids actually do. That should be something that the kinds of things that you are investigating ought to take on board.

Just to finish off, because this is longer than 10 minutes — I knew that would happen — the trick is really to try to spread productive pedagogies across the school culture. I think professional learning ought to be the sort of thing that does that.

Mr HALL — Paul, first of all, I was interested in your comment that a teacher of your experience was inspired by a young, first-year-out teacher. Do experienced and young teachers alike require professional learning opportunities?

Mr MARTIN — I think the answer to that is both yes and no. You are not going to meet the young woman I am thinking about, called Kasha. Kasha and I should go to a professional learning event as equals. I will contextualise that comment. We are both teaching VCE English language — which is one of the English subjects that is offered — for the first time, I obviously as a more mature teacher and she as a first-year-out teacher. We both have the common experience that neither of us has actually delivered this. There are lots of things that she and I at that particular event or in the sort of situation that I will describe in a moment can learn together. She and I have regular meetings to put curriculum together. There was a situation the other day when she asked about the last thing that we have to do this year. It is an outcome, an area of the course. I said, ‘Why don’t we make this an investigative approach?’. She said, ‘What do you mean?’. It is about global English. We sat down and I said, ‘Why don’t we conceive this in terms of the test that migrants are supposed to have that is currently in the news? We will set up a whole sort of situation about our test and then what we’ll do is get our kids to investigate whether in fact what they have learned fits into this particular test’. I started to scribble down the scenario. Kasha looked over my shoulder and said, ‘How do you do that?’. What she was reflecting on was that I can belt out a scenario really quickly. That is no. 1. But no. 2, when it comes to pedagogies, different ways of delivering, ITC, basic things like documents electronically — —

Mr HALL — She can teach you.

Mr MARTIN — Yes, can she ever, and that is the other side of the coin. There are situations where someone like Kasha should go away and maybe get different kinds of knowledge from the sort of knowledge that I already have simply because I have been around longer, but there are times when we should work together, because we complement one another and listen to one another. We also have our roles kind of worked out. As a coordinator I know that at the moment for the most part I am doing most of this work because I want to let her learn to be a teacher, just learn to get her feet under the table, and she realises that. But she also has certain things where she will come in and say, ‘Well, I want to make a contribution, too. What can I do?’.

Mr HALL — That is a good example you are giving us of individualised professional learning.

Mr MARTIN — Individualised professional learning and also how it can develop. The Paul and Kasha in this situation can both go to the VATE state conference — and I actually sent her to this conference, too — but we might go to different workshops were different sorts of things.

The CHAIR — Can I just follow up on one thing you said, which links back to that statement, too, that young teachers can be very refreshing in the education scene and help to provide a good balance. A number of us who have been in the education scene also identify some of those mature-age-type teachers that you talk about who, when they are being challenged by new ideas and so on, might say, ‘We remember. We’ve been through all of that. We don’t need to get ourselves too involved in the excitement of being challenged again, because the wheel always goes around, and so we’re just going to keep doing what we do’. You are also saying that we should not be making professional learning sort of compulsory in that sense, you want to try to encourage people to do it. How do you deal with those that teachers who are looking to retirement 10 years down the track or whatever and want to live life comfortably in a sense and are satisfied with what they are doing?

Mr MARTIN — It is a very practical and very real question. The first thing that I would say about it is that if that view is ingrained in the sort of teacher that you are describing, then compulsoriness will do relatively little, except that that person is sitting on the chair because he or she has been told — usually he, or no, I think there are quite a few ‘shes’ in that category as well. There is not an easy answer in this except that what is happening in education in many areas is new, it is not reinventing the wheel, is moving on. If I can give an example. When I first started teaching, a lot of community schools were under way and I was part of one, too — it is now a community school but it started off as an extension of the Mitcham high school.

We set up a small community school. I will not bore you with the details but it amounted to a small integrated studies unit of about 34 students, out the back of my high school. The notion of integration in the past two to three years has become an important factor that schools have been using through VELS and also as a way of helping students move from primary school to secondary school, in that transition thing. Such a teacher can say, ‘I can remember back in the 1970s when I was involved in that’, but actually they were not because in many of the sorts of things that we are talking about, these programs have moved on. The thinking has moved on. I mentioned before the trick here is that schools are facilitated and supported in setting up a culture, because it is really only a culture that will get to the kind of person that you are talking about. Such people will be invited to be persuaded, ‘This is

the better idea. This will work. You do not have to be an ICT genius in order to do this but you can, for example, have a go at an interactive whiteboard. It is not that hard. Have a go at it'. That sort of thing — using small things — would be important to the type of teacher that you are actually talking about to move him or her on.

I guess what I would like for that sort of teacher is for them just to have experienced the something new, the change I talk about in my submission: just to have had a go at the whiteboard; just perhaps to have had a play with the idea of group work within the classroom; had a bit of an experiment with a Venn diagram approach towards conceptualising a certain concept as opposed to just telling kids because that is what they have already done. If you can get someone to experiment and in a sense move forward, okay you are getting somewhere and I think ultimately you either never move such a person that you are talking about or you will get them by encouraging them, by giving them something or by providing them with something that they can identify with, are not ultimately threatened by but will move forward with. I can see that it is a difficult question.

The CHAIR — Any questions? You have covered the ground very well. Thanks, Paul. You have given us lots of new things to think about too. Well done.

Mr MARTIN — Thank you very much indeed. Thanks for your time.

Mr HALL — I am sure I will end up being a digital immigrant too.

Mr MARTIN — I am very much. You will notice that the notes are handwritten. But it is about knowing where one's interests actually lie. Ladies and gentlemen, I did bring one other document along which I will simply leave with you. It has to do with what I refer to as the notion of networks and it is a Queensland experience but it does illustrate some of the things that I was talking about quite well. Thank you very much.

Witness withdrew.

CORRECTED VERSION

EDUCATION AND TRAINING COMMITTEE

Inquiry into effective strategies for teacher professional learning

Melbourne — 12 September 2007

Members

Mr M. Dixon (from 18 September 2007)	Dr A. Harkness
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Mr B. Finn (1 March – 18 September 2007)	Mr G. Howard
Mr P. Hall	Mr N. Korsiras

Chair: Mr G. Howard

Deputy Chair: Mr N. Kotsiras

Staff

Executive Officer: Ms K. Ellingford

Research Officer: Ms J. Hope

Committee Administrative Officer: Ms N. Tyler

Witnesses

Mr M. Spurr, executive director, and

Mr R. Knight, president, History Teachers Association of Victoria.

The CHAIR — Welcome to the hearings of the Education and Training Committee. As you know, we are looking at professional learning for teachers, and today has been interesting. We have dealt with a lot of the subject areas. We have had English, we have had people dealing especially with maths and now I suppose it is appropriate that we have some history.

Mr SPURR — It is kind of topical at this point in time.

The CHAIR — I should just point out that as you can see we are recording everything you say. You will get a copy of the Hansard transcript later so you can make further comment on that. Everything that is said within the committee is covered by parliamentary privilege if that is relevant to you, which would not be the case for things that you say outside of course. We are very interested to gain your input into this significant area. Who is starting?

Mr SPURR — I am Michael Spurr. I am executive director of the History Teachers Association of Victoria. Prior to that I managed the professional development program within the association as well.

Mr KNIGHT — I am currently the president of the History Teachers Association. I am on the management team of Caulfield Grammar School. I am in charge of professional learning there for 300-odd staff and I also run a professional learning program state-wide which is based at the Australian Institute of Management. Those are the areas that may indeed inform our discussion today. Incidentally I am a Ballarat boy, Geoff. I grew up in Ballarat East and used to barrack for Ballarat East football club and went to Ballarat East High School.

The CHAIR — It is East Point now, you will be sorry to hear, and Golden Point. The two rivals are now the one club.

Mr SPURR — I have a preliminary statement. Part of that is about the HTAV but elements of that are already included within the submission that was made. I cannot repeat myself on that. But I think in summary of the paper that was put to the committee I suppose an obvious element for consideration is what does the HTAV identify as the importance of professional learning for teachers.

As an association we view professional learning as an integral element of high quality teacher and student learning outcomes. High quality professional learning is multifaceted and continuing and should actually incorporate a number of elements including general pedagogy, discipline specific pedagogy, discipline specific knowledge that incorporates developments in academic research within the relevant fields, curriculum and assessment elements and, finally, the enhancement and support of teachers' and students' capacities and the meeting of those various needs.

The delivery of high-quality professional teacher learning is also multifaceted and should also be viewed as a continuing process as well. This recognises that best practice teacher professional learning occurs both within and outside schools, it meets adult learning requirements and is active and reflective in character. Finally, it has sustainability through systems of feedback and the embedding of initiatives. In delivering such programs across the education system as a whole there is a range of concerns I think that need to be noted and meeting these concerns would ensure support of high-quality teacher learning. Amongst those considerations would be adequate funding for both internal and external professional learning programs for teachers — programs that accommodate the differing needs of teachers at the various stages of their professional life. It also should accommodate the differing modes of teacher appointment — part time, full time, CRT and so forth — and balance between school requirements, education policy requirements and staff and student needs. I think in a nutshell that would boil down to a summary of what was the submission.

The CHAIR — Have you got anything to add at this stage, Rodney?

Mr KNIGHT — No.

Mr ELASMAR — Thank you for coming, Michael. Just thinking about the professional teachers — when they go to schools and Paul has said before in a classroom, what do you believe should be the main issues for those professional teachers before they come to the classroom?

Mr SPURR — The issues in advance of going into class?

Mr ELASMAR — Yes.

Mr SPURR — Obviously a knowledge of their students, the content associated with whatever it is they are expected to be teaching, general pedagogy and a basic plan for the activities they are going to undertake within class. It is one of those things that is not fixed. You need to be assessing and evaluating those things in relation to each class group.

Mr KNIGHT — And an understanding of how children learn in a theoretical sense and different modes of learning.

The CHAIR — Just then following on from that, do you think that teachers starting off — although we are looking at them after they have started off — do they start off with a good sense of those general areas in the history area I suppose in particular?

Mr KNIGHT — Arguably teachers are better prepared now in many respects than they certainly were. We have seen an increase in ENTER scores for entry into teaching; certainly into Dip. Ed. is much more competitive. Certainly ENTER scores have increased and entry requirements into Dip. Ed courses have increased. Just anecdotally talking to people in universities involved in schools, I would have thought that teachers are pretty well prepared. It is difficult, isn't it? You can be very well prepared in a theoretical sense and have a whole range of understandings but being confronted with a classroom of 24 or 30 students, the realities and nuances of that are really quite different from what has gone on in your course.

Mr HALL — To Rodney first of all: in your role as professional learning manager — I think you said — at your school, what is involved in that role?

Mr KNIGHT — That role is essentially a culture-changing role in terms of moving the organisation forward and the focus is very clearly on student learning outcomes and professional development of staff, professional learning directed towards enhancing improved student learning outcomes. So when I went there some 14 years ago it was a school that was not going far very quickly, I think it is fair to say. The brief of the new principal who arrived 12 months before I did was to really crank the school up and realise its potential.

Certainly there was not much happening in terms of professional learning. It is a journey; it is not about the destination. It has taken some 14 years to get to the point we are at the moment. I think the culture has changed. I do not think that is necessarily an age issue because you can have young teachers who are just as resistant to this sort of thing as older teachers. I think there is nothing much more satisfying than seeing an older teacher who has reinvented themselves through professional learning. That can be extremely rewarding. But part of what we have done is introduce a credit points system where staff are required to accrue 30 credit points in terms of professional learning each year. They have to keep a professional journal. They have to have an annual professional development plan which is signed off and audited at the end of the year. They undertake an appraisal program every second year. I would say by and large that after this period of time you would expect some change but I think there is a much greater receptiveness towards the importance of professional learning than certainly there was when I arrived. I would point to that as probably the singular most significant development in the teaching profession in my 30 years involvement in teaching — the role of professional learning broadly speaking.

The CHAIR — Can I follow on? In terms of developing that role you have got teachers all developing their own professional development plans but I guess you have other things happening down through the levels whereby I presume you are working at some things at a school level?

Mr KNIGHT — Absolutely.

The CHAIR — I am interested just to get you to follow through some at a faculty level and some across different school levels, I suppose.

Mr KNIGHT — Thank you. I omitted to say that. I work with the principal on whole-school goals and professional development emphases. We generate professional development emphases annually. At the start of term four, we have a whole-school staff day and we are really keen on congruence, on having whole-school emphases, goals and so forth. They then filter down to the campuses, the learning areas and individual staff. Staff build their professional development plans and learning around those whole-school goals and that congruence is really important. Otherwise, as you implied I guess, it is all over the place, isn't it?

The CHAIR — Yes. I presumed it was but it was a matter of how it made its way down.

Mr KNIGHT — That is really critical from an organisational point of view in terms of where you are going and what you value and so forth. The other side of that is also if you value something, you talk it up, you walk the talk and senior management is seen to be involved and participating. Professional learning is not just for classroom teachers; professional learning is for learning area leaders, heads of campuses and principals. It is about modelling. It is about modelling in the classroom with kids. It is about modelling with colleagues and so forth.

We have 3 hours set aside every Monday afternoon. Classes finish for the students at 2 o'clock Monday afternoon, and staff then engage in 3 hours of collegial learning together across the school. That learning is shaped by the whole school goals, and learning area leaders have to submit learning area project proposals for them to work on which are congruent with those goals. I think gradually over a number of years this starts to rub off and people pick it up and run with it. Not everyone does. I think if you wait for the last horse in the stable you are never going to get terribly far, but by and large I think there has been a huge cultural shift. I think generally speaking in the profession there has been a significant cultural shift. The VIT's role in this is critical too, I think, in terms of establishing minimum requirement for professional learning.

The CHAIR — Can you perhaps share some examples of some very effective types of professional development programs that you think have worked well?

Mr SPURR — Through what we have done within the HTAV we offer quite a range of different programs informed by different sorts of needs and concerns of teachers. I think there is a form that is quite common to a range of teaching associations, which is very much focused on discipline-specific content elements. That would be the conference type format of an hour session that provides various approaches or highlights forms of resource that are useful to a teacher in terms of their classroom practice.

Another model that I think is a particularly useful model that we are involved with through the Commonwealth History Project was a type of shadowing mentor project. That particular project involved coupling a teacher of relatively limited experience with a teacher at a different school with considerably more experience, and working with that teacher, following them around for, I think, a week within that particular program. It was an opportunity for that sort of experience with a more experienced teacher to rub off and be a point of reference and mentorship. There was a similar program within that project about shadowing within cultural organisations with education officers and classroom practitioners as well.

We also conducted a professional learning circle type program, again under the auspices of the Commonwealth History Project. That particular project was drawing in a group of teachers who shared a common sort of area and interest — be it a particular VCE history subject. It functioned almost as a reading circle that met four or five times. It was a continuing process focused on enhancing their own understandings of content and approaches to the particular discipline or particular topic area. I think each of those offers quite different forms of professional learning for teachers.

Mr HALL — I have a couple more questions. Again, if I go back to that issue, Rodney, about provision of professional learning for staff, are you able in your school to measure any relationship between the amount of professional learning for staff compared to the student outcomes?

Mr KNIGHT — That is the issue, isn't it — the transfer between professional learning and changed classroom practice and student learning outcomes. That is the real issue. There is no singular measure for that. We are working at it. We ask staff to evaluate their learning projects annually. Student feedback is a part of that, as it is with the appraisal process. We have students commenting on staff performance, and colleagues commenting as well. If there is a singular measure it would be a whole lot easier, wouldn't it? But it is not a production line. Having worked in industry, it is a whole lot easier to clock in and clock out and to have a quantitative measure of what you have produced in a day, but there are so many variables in a classroom with kids. I think there is a general acceptance that professional learning makes a significant difference. I think we are at a point where we are able to identify high performing teachers, and it is just a matter of trying to make the links more explicitly between the professional learning they undertake and the performance of the students. That is the trickiest issue.

Mr HALL — There is no simple answer. I throw the question at a number of people.

Mr KNIGHT — There is no simple answer, but it is the issue that we really need to have at the forefront of our minds. I think one of the other issues is that the most effective form of professional learning — and increasingly the research would say is working better — is stuff that is undertaken in the workplace with

colleagues. So you can have 'outside in' component where you need the research base and the experts from outside working with staff, but the one-off professional learning activities are not deemed to be terribly productive in terms of the take-up and transfer. It just does not happen. They seem like a good idea at the time, people come back enthused and it dissipates.

Mr HALL — The other question I had was that obviously your members would come from both the public and private sector schools.

Mr SPURR — And the Catholic sector as well.

Mr HALL — I was just interested to know whether you have noted any significant difference in the professional learning opportunities afforded by each sector to their employees. I was interested whether the private school or the public school sector is better, or whether one is better than the other? I must say I was particularly impressed with the 3 hours that you indicated, Rodney, that your school is able to put aside each week for that collegiate conference and collegiate learning. I think that is something many people who have given evidence to this inquiry have suggested is desperately needed — time to reflect, time to work through, time to workshop different things at the school level. Private and public sectors — are there any significant differences?

Mr SPURR — I think there are elements within the independent sector that certainly share a common sort of pattern, as in the case that Rodney has discussed, but the independent sector is actually quite diversified as well, so there are independent schools where there does not seem to be the same kind of support for teacher professional learning as there is in other schools within the sector as a whole. It is a bit more complex than state, independent and Catholic sectors because of the diversity within each group. I would think generally — and I think what you are after is whether there is a general difference — we would probably have a higher proportion of participation from independent schools in our programs as a percentage of the independent sector than say of the government school sector. The Catholic school system operates slightly differently because they conduct a lot of professional development within their own education office as well.

While government schools do not have in all cases 3 hours in an afternoon, the cluster system is envisaged as providing a sort of critical mass of the development of close-quarters collaboration between groups of schools within a geographic administrative area. That sort of professional learning does tend to focus on whole-school planning, integration — those sorts of things — rather than discipline-specific type learning. So the types of professional learning undertaken differs again as well. I think what I have succeeded in saying is it is a complex thing, but in terms of relative rates of participation at HTA events I think there would be a high representation of independent schools.

Mr HALL — What sort of events do you run?

Mr SPURR — We run conferences — large, 300-odd teachers in a day type conferences; we run small seminars and workshop-type programs, evening twilight sessions as well, so quite a mixed bag — —

Mr HALL — The majority out of school hours?

Mr SPURR — The majority are within school hours. That may have a bearing, but we have found generally speaking that professional development opportunities outside school hours or on school holidays are not necessarily as well attended, or as heavily subscribed.

The CHAIR — Are you able to run events in the regions or are they nearly all in Melbourne?

Mr SPURR — The majority of our events are within Melbourne, though we do a series of collaborative programs with other teaching associations in regional centres and we endeavour to do a number of other on-our-own type events in regional centres through the course of the year as well.

Mr KNIGHT — That is interesting because the program I run, at the Australian Institute of Management, has about 2000 teachers through each year, across the sectors. If I took the government school sector out, that program would be decimated. So they are a significant client. Numerically they are the largest, but also they are certainly pretty active in particular forms of professional learning. I would have thought also the Catholic Education Office, as Michael said, is quite proactive, and has a lot of really good programs running for the Catholic sector. In terms of the government schools — I certainly would not underestimate them. I do not know what the

critical variable is there, but when you look at some of those schools — Glen Waverley Secondary College, McKinnon High School — I am just conscious of where we sit geographically — —

I think back a few years ago I took a group of staff up to Bendigo Senior Secondary College, where they had a lot of stuff going on. I think the principal is a key variable in terms of professional learning in schools and the climate of schools and the whole issue of moving schools forward, value-adding. If you have got a principal who is dynamic, who has got a vision, who can move staff along and demonstrate that he values this sort of stuff, then it makes a significant difference. There is a fellow called Knight — no relation of mine — down at Parkdale Secondary College. That school is an interesting school as well. I think leadership in schools is a really significant issue in terms of setting the professional learning culture.

Mr SPURR — I think in Rodney's case too the types of programs are not necessarily discipline specific; they are things that lend themselves to whole-school programs, so the discipline and the relationship to the whole-school planning does create some differences as well.

Mr HALL — Would teacher participation in the Australian Institute of Management programs that you run, Rodney, be mainly those at the leadership level in schools or would they be classroom teachers?

Mr KNIGHT — No, classroom teachers. One of the really interesting things about that program is that we are very fortunate in Victoria to have a terrific stable of professional leaders — people who are very gifted in their understanding of education and operate throughout Australia and Asia. I have got five or six people in my stable of presenters, who I have to book two to three years ahead because they are working throughout Europe and Asia. We are very fortunate in that regard, although there is the issue of the ageing of the profession there — most of those people are getting on a bit.

Most of those programs are not leadership, they are what I would call maintenance programs. When you are managing a program of this nature it is good to have that combination of change and continuity, in terms of faces and also programs, but what I have found over the years — and I have been doing this for about 14 years now — is if you have got really cutting-edge stuff, it does not sell. What sells is the maintenance stuff — managing classroom discipline, catering to students with learning difficulties. I could run those programs twice a term every term and have a full house for both. I think that is something we underestimate — the maintenance nature of professional learning, the needs staff have dealing with kiddies in classrooms. As class sizes increase and the structures which were traditionally there to support kids have eroded, increasingly we are finding staff at the chalkface having to deal with these issues. A lot of the support they need is just fundamentally directed towards relationships with students in classrooms.

Mr HALL — Yes, that is interesting.

Mr KNIGHT — Does that make sense?

Mr HALL — Yes, it does.

The CHAIR — All right. Any other questions?

Thank you for your contribution.

Mr SPURR — Thank you for inviting us along.

The CHAIR — That was very helpful. It has been a very interesting day for us. We have been covering a lot of areas and there are a number of similar themes coming out.

Committee adjourned.