

Leading sustainable change

Developing strategic, purposeful and targeted professional learning



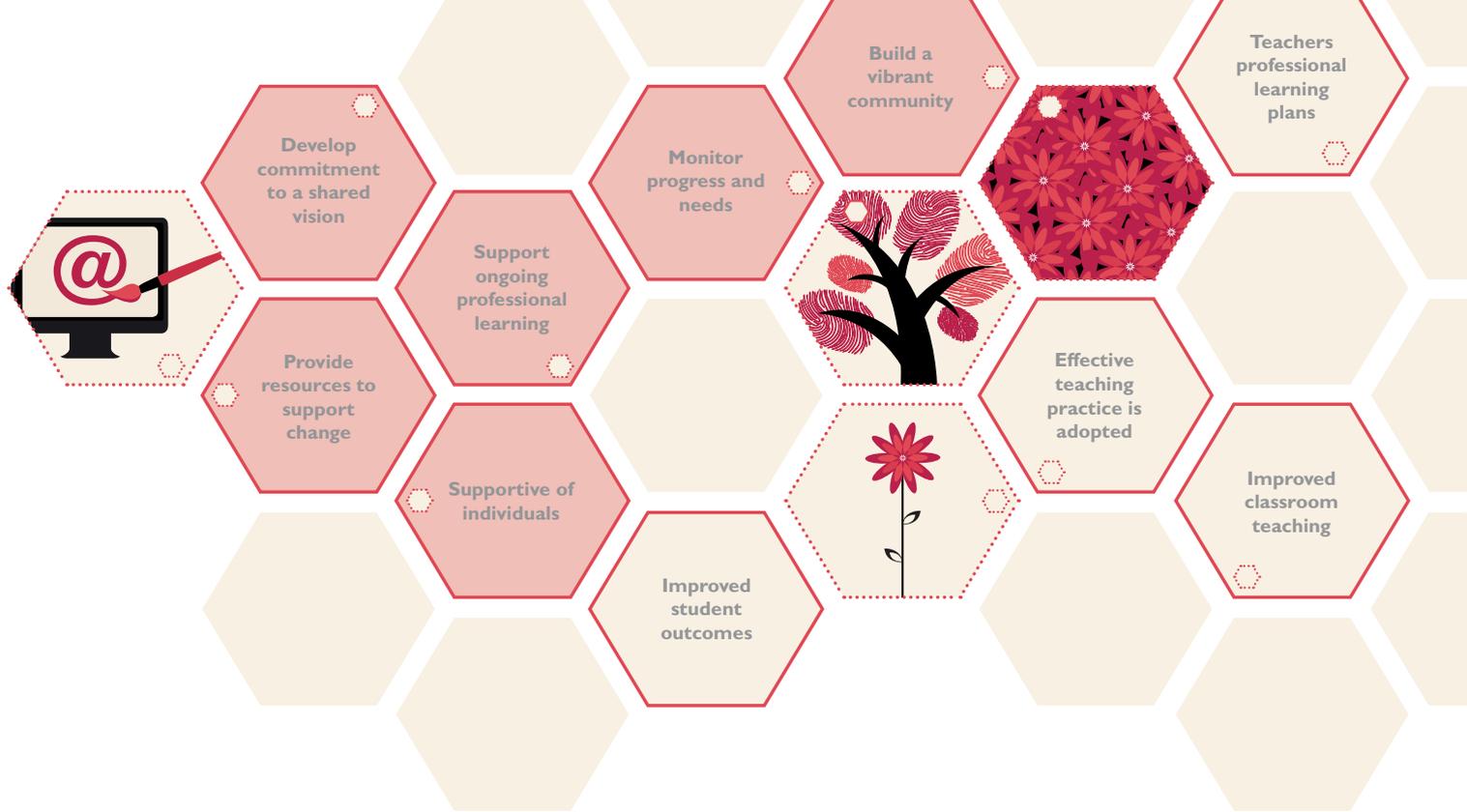
What makes professional learning successful? How does a school choose professional learning that helps the school succeed their goals, but also is specific enough to meet the needs of individuals?

Recent research into effective practices in professional learning¹ has focussed on the characteristics that make it sustained and successful; that which shows a positive correlation between teachers' professional learning and improvements in outcomes for students. In order for professional learning to be transferred, embedded and successful, there must be significant changes in teachers' attitudes and beliefs and leaders must be acutely aware that teachers will take interest in professional learning only after it improves student learning². After? Don't we want teachers to commit to the learning before? The expectation of after means that teachers must see evidence that the professional learning will impact positively on teacher practice and subsequently the learning outcomes of students.

So let's go back a step to the question of how leaders can provide sustained, strategic, purposeful and targeted professional learning. It may be easier to view professional learning as you would any change management process - a process for bringing about or enacting change in teacher practice.

For any change process to be successful, the community must have a commitment to a shared vision with common goals, that is, all stakeholders must be on the same page. It is the responsibility of leaders to provide the resources to support change, while also providing ongoing professional learning through effective and continuous monitoring of the progress and needs of teachers. This





encourages a vibrant and dynamic community of practice which is driven by a culture of professional learning where all teachers:

- have professional learning plans
- set goals and targets
- collect evidence to measure the impact it has on student learning.

Evidence is a key feature in ensuring any professional learning is successful and sustained. Collecting evidence may include a variety of modes, a plethora of learning snapshots which provide valuable data to show growth and impact. Evidence such as learning walkthroughs, lesson studies, self reflection, videos, conferencing, diagnostic data, critical friends, peer observations and attitudinal surveys are all worthy sources, but the list is not limited to these. Any evidence which demonstrates that teacher learning (or the professional learning goals) has transferred (or not transferred) to teacher practice and has impacted on student learning are suitable forms of evidence.

Highly effective professional learning is focused on student learning and embedded into practice. It has a strong research and evidence base which is data driven. It is collaborative in design and is ongoing and supported by all in the community. There is individual and collective responsibility for the learning and the transference to teacher practice. Transferring learning to teacher practice can be undertaken through a variety of contexts, and it is the strategic goal which dictates the context for success.

All educational providers have varying constraints, including time, money, resources or leadership, for example. Minimising the impact of professional learning is about being strategic in identifying these constraints to ensure the professional learning meets the exact needs of the school and its individuals in a personalised, convenient

and timely fashion. Professional learning should not be in addition to what already appears to be a demanding workload. Learning should be ubiquitous and embedded into practice: accessible, purposeful, meaningful and targeted; driven by a shared understanding of purpose and goal with a focus on improving outcomes for students. If these objectives are evident and the purpose and expected outcome is clear and shared, then successful implementation of professional learning will occur.

References

¹ Meiers, M. & Buckley, S. (2009) Successful professional learning. The Digest, NSWIT, 2009 (3).

¹ Timperley, H., Wilson, A., Barrar, H. & Fung, I. (2007). Teaching, professional learning and development: Best evidence synthesis iteration [BES]. Wellington, New Zealand: Ministry of Education. <http://www.educationcounts.govt.nz/publications/series/2515/15341> (retrieved December 11, 2009)

¹ Blank, R. K. S. & de las Alas, N. (2009). Effects of teacher professional development on gains in student achievement: How meta analysis provides scientific evidence useful to educational leaders. Washington, DC: Council of Chief State School officers.

<http://www.ccsso.org/content/pdfs/Final%20Meta%20Analysis%20Paper%20full.pdf> (retrieved December 11, 2009)

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<https://www.eduweb.vic.gov.au/edulibrary/public/teachlearn/teacher/ProfLearningInEffectiveSchools.pdf>

<https://www.eduweb.vic.gov.au/edulibrary/public/staffdev/sso/The-Seven-Principles-of-Highly-Effective-Learning-Guide.pdf>

² Gunksy 2002 Career Entry Development Profiles and the statutory induction arrangements in England: a model of effective practice for the professional development of newly qualified teachers?

