Chapter 2
The Theory and Practice Divide in Relation to Teacher Professional Development

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ABSTRACT

The 21ˢᵗ century is a time of rapid change and increasing accountability within education contexts and teacher professional development (TPD) is frequently perceived to be crucial in instituting reforms. This chapter explores the divide between theories of effective TPD and the realities of practice within educational contexts. Two case studies, one from Australia and the other from Canada are presented to illustrate the positives and negatives inherent within professional development approaches in these contexts. A number of key dimensions are identified, which when coalesced inform the establishment and sustainability of effective programmes. Online technologies present innovative ways to overcome the impediments to effective professional development. Online communities of practice utilising social networking technologies provide new opportunities for initiating "webs of enhanced practice' (Scott, 2009), where individuals around the globe can engage in collegial collaborations that enhance the passion of teaching.

INTRODUCTION

The 21ˢᵗ century has yielded a time of rapid-paced change – socio-political and technological - and this has resulted in even greater need for more effective teacher professional development (TPD) to ensure that our children, teachers and their leaders have access to the most productive learning environments.

Since the 1970s onwards, there has been considerable research undertaken about TPD, establishing a solid knowledge base about what TPD processes work in effecting change in teaching behaviours in the classroom with the view to positively influencing student outcomes (Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1995; Goodlad, 1994; Guskey, 1986; Guskey & Sparks, 1991; Joyce & Showers, 1980; 1995; Lieberman & Miller, 2000; Lieberman & Pointer Mace, 2008). Even so there are still poor

and fragmented TPD proliferated within school systems. It is clear, therefore, that there is still a divide between the theory of effective TPD and the 'reality' of practice within educational systems. This chapter explores these theories and uses two international examples, one from Western Australia and the other from Alberta, Canada to illustrate that this divide still exists. With the world shrinking due to globalisation and innovations in technology, challenges within education show striking similarities regardless of geographical location. The professional responsibilities for the range of roles, such as, teachers, leaders, policymakers and government are also discussed. A number of dimensions are presented which, acting in concert, can facilitate the establishment and sustainability of effective TPD initiatives, thereby bridging the gap between theory and practice. The final dimension discussed is that of innovations in TPD, particularly the potential inherent in online learning communities. Technology presents real advantages to supporting the development of communities of teachers, not only within their own school districts, but also across the globe. Scott's (2009) "webs of enhanced practice" offer teachers greater opportunities to reduce their isolation and expand their knowledge about good practice, share resources and gain global insights.

BACKGROUND

Theoretical Framework Underpinning Teacher Professional Development

School teachers, leaders, and support staff are all adults who have ongoing learning needs in order to keep abreast of the changes required by society, the profession, and their disciplines. These adults have different learning needs and motivations to those of their students (Knowles, Holton III, & Swanson, 2005). Merriam (2001) indicates adults must be self-determining in their choice of professional learning opportunities. They

have a wealth of life experience which influences their learning. Adults' motivations frequently relate to managing their changing life and professional roles, which makes them more receptive to problem-solving and relevant learning experiences. For example, teachers are most concerned with teaching- and student-related issues, while leaders are predominantly interested in administrative and people management-oriented learning opportunities (Scott, 2003; Scott & Webber, 2008). Even though not limited to adult learners, their motivation tends to be intrinsic rather than extrinsic, in that, they seek to find answers to their real-life questions and curiosity (Knowles, et al., 2005; Wlodkowski, 2004). Adults know what they want and generally how to get it. They are intolerant of professional development perceived to be a waste of time, irrelevant to their own or their students' needs, or which is delivered poorly by non-credible, 'expert' presenters (Long, 2004). Hence, adult learners frequently are perceived by teachers to be demanding, opinionated, and difficult, however, Newton presents a less negative perspective stating "[t]he adult as a learner is pictured as an autonomous, experience-laden, goal-seeking, 'now' oriented, problem-centered individual" (1977, cited in Clardy, 2005, p. 7). Therefore the principles of adult learning indicate that adults gravitate towards professional development which is contextually relevant, pragmatic, delivered by credible facilitators, career oriented, interesting and engaging, and is inclusive of their prior experiences (Knowles, et al., 2005).

Professional development is not a new concept as illustrated by Joyce and his associates early definition that it was "formal and informal provisions for the improvement of educators as people, educated persons, and professionals, as well as in terms of the competence to carry out their assigned roles" (1976, cited in Gall, Renchler, Haisley, Baker, & Perez, 1985, p. 6). Later Gall and his associates proffered a more specific definition being "efforts to improve teachers' capacity to function as effective professionals

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