C O R R E C T E D V E R S I O N

EDUCATION AND TRAINING COMMITTEE

Inquiry into effective strategies for teacher professional learning

Melbourne — 28 March 2008

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Mr D. Hornsby, consultant, and
Ms K. Murdoch, consultant.

The CHAIR — I declare this hearing of the Education and Training Committee open. As you would be aware, the committee is hearing evidence on its inquiry into effective strategies for teaching professional learning. I want to welcome you here as the first people who are going to share your years of experience in this area with us this morning and let you know that the evidence that you provide us with, including any submissions you might like to make, are subject to parliamentary privilege, so you are free to say whatever you like when you speak to our inquiry. We are pleased to hear what you have to say, first of all — your submission — and then we will ask questions of you as we go through. It is over to you.

Mr HORNSBY — Firstly, we want to say thank you for being asked to speak to the inquiry. That is a privilege, to start with. We also want to be totally honest about the fact that we had about 20 minutes to prepare for this. In one sense, though, I guess our preparation is our whole career, but we have had very limited time together to talk about this, with another 10 minutes on the train this morning. We are very happy to start by making some comments, but we would love to have questions as well.

Ms MURDOCH — I guess the other thing to say is that we are coming to the committee with experience and expertise as professional development providers. When we were talking about it we thought the best thing for us to do, really, is share from our experience, so we are here, in this particular capacity, not as researchers in the field but as people who are actually doing it every day. We might just run through a few of the things that we have talked about together, and then, as David said, we would prefer to operate by being asked questions.

One of the things that we want to begin by saying is that there is plenty of evidence already of what works in terms of teacher learning. We know a lot about what constitutes effective practice in professional development: things like having adequate time to do the work required of professional learning; when it is more site based rather than off site we know it works better; when it is ongoing and connected to teachers' actual everyday practice we know that it works better; when it is practical; when it is collaborative; and most importantly when it is very much driven by an intention for student learning to be positively affected and when that is up front. The list is a mile long. It is actually one of those areas where there is a huge amount of agreement, I think, amongst researchers as to what works.

That is not the hard part. Knowing what works is not hard; what is hard is dealing with the obstacles that get in the way of those things being able to happen. We actually, in our conversations in preparing for this, reflected on this: if we know these things to be true in terms of the conditions that make it possible for teachers really to engage in their own learning and development, what are the things that we see as problematic or that get in the way in terms of our work. So we might go to that, and we can come back to, if you wish, more conversation around understood factors that support teacher learning. Do you want to take turns with the obstacles?

Mr HORNSBY — You have made a great start. Keep going.

Ms MURDOCH — All right. I just looked at the first one and thought that it is really your thing.

Mr HALL — Just consider this an exercise in professional development for us.

Ms MURDOCH — Quick, where's my PowerPoint?

Mr HORNSBY — My involvement in teacher learning has been as a consultant for the education department over several years but also in pre-service training. I have worked a little bit, part-time, at Melbourne University and RMIT but mostly recently at La Trobe University — all part time, some days at La Trobe University and some days just in schools — and this year I am just in schools.

We know that if we want to improve kids' learning — and that has to be the aim — we have to improve teaching. If we want to improve teaching, we have to invest in teachers, and teacher learning, as far as I am concerned, is the no. 1 priority. Quite often their pre-service education has let them down. There are lots of reasons for that, and I know that is probably not part of this inquiry, but it is the start of teacher learning. There is so little time now to have teachers adequately prepared before they even go into the profession to start. For example, for English method four or five years ago I would have had 80 hours to teach English method, which was simply not enough. It was reduced every year, and last year I had 36 hours — it was reduced from 80 hours to 36. Those students are getting 36 hours of training to teach reading, writing, grammar, spelling — you name it. They are not entering the profession with adequate professional knowledge. When they get into the profession there are even fewer opportunities for learning now. They are involved in the daily survival of getting by. If the inquiry is looking into

teacher learning I am assuming it is looking right from the start of their learning — pre-service and going right through. I find it difficult to just follow notes when we did these so quickly, and I would rather just talk from here. Certainly there is this report that I have put onto my little thumb driver, if anybody wants a copy of it, *How the World's Best-performing School Systems Come Out on Top*. We would like to refer you also to *In Teachers' Hands — Effective Literacy Teaching Practices in the Early Years of Schooling*, our Australian government review. What they are all agreeing on is that the quality of an education system simply cannot exceed the quality of its teachers. The quality of its teachers starts right with their pre-service training, and then goes through the opportunities for professional learning as they continue.

Ms MURDOCH — I suppose in terms of that notion of what are the things that get in the way of what we know to be effective practice, insufficient pre-service education would be one of those things. David and I are working with teachers in the school system every day. Certainly with many of the younger teachers that we are working with it is obvious that their readiness to engage in and continue professional learning — and even their disposition in many ways, to see themselves as having responsibility, I suppose, to engage in the intellectual pursuit of understanding their craft — is minimal. It is a kind of obstacle that is in the way before we even get to the school. I guess the other thing that we were talking about, just while we are at big-picture level here, is that the best knowledge in the world about what constitutes quality professional learning for teachers — and we can both deliver it and have all the conditions working for us in terms of delivery and models — is it is highly dependent on the quality of the school culture and the organisation of that school itself.

Here is the man you want to talk to.

The CHAIR — He is next.

Ms MURDOCH — I am sure Neville would agree with this — that is, that the school itself and the quality of its leadership, its vision, its organisation, the relationships between people, what makes the school work, has a direct effect on any attempt by any professional development providers on the quality of the outcome there. School effectiveness and teacher professional learning are two very connected areas, and you really cannot look at one without the other. We have both been in many situations, I think, where the potential for the quality of the program that we might be offering or offering in partnership with others really cannot be reached because of some of the inherent problems within the school itself. Those things have to be addressed together. I guess they are two big-picture things: what is it that our teachers are coming in with from their pre-service training; and then, in the context of individual schools: what is it about the nature of the schools that affect whether or not any efforts to support teachers in their learning are going to work? I guess what we would like to address next then is: given those as background issues, what are some of the things that we think can work and can ensure that with the teacher learning approach, given that the context is right, we are going to have some success?

Mr HORNSBY — I think it would be appropriate for Kath to continue on that line for a minute, because then I would like to come in and say something about the principal's role. I was also principal of a school myself for several years, so I am talking about it from both sides of the fence. The principal has such a huge effect on the culture in the school that that can tie back to what you have just said. Do you want to say anything?

Ms MURDOCH — Just briefly, one of the issues I know that you are exploring in this inquiry is that question about methodology: what approaches work best, and what do we know about what approaches work best to support teachers in their learning and result — which is what we want — in improved learning outcomes for students? Certainly in the work that I have done over many years the things that present themselves time and time again as being more effective in that regard are when professional learning is not delivered as a top-down program — you know, 'Here is the package, and here is what you need to know; know it, and go away and do it'. Rather it is a more collaborative — and I will use the words inquiry-based — way of working with teachers, so teachers are actually positioned to investigate aspects of their own practice, and certainly even more acutely to identify the things in their students that they want to see improve and then go about the business of almost researching how they can best do that within the context of their own classrooms.

I would describe it as a kind of inquiry-based, almost investigative, approach to professional learning, not a training model in that sense. Not somebody like David and me or Neville coming in and saying, 'Right, here is how to do it', but rather with guidance — I am not saying that they puddle around in their own ignorance — being able to investigate and grow their understanding of what good practice means by embedding that very thing in their practice. It is almost like an action research model, I guess. If we look at the essential learning curriculum in

Victoria for students, philosophically and pedagogically it aligns with the way that we want teachers to work with their students. So we bring teachers' voices in and give them strong ownership over what it is that they are learning to do and be. I can embellish, if I need to, later on that.

The only other thing I would add to that, and I guess this is very important to me at the moment in the work that I do in schools, is that ensuring that any work that we do with teachers on improving their practice must connect quickly and deeply at classroom level. I am going to put it bluntly: it must be about what it means to do good teaching. You can read about it, you can sit around a table and talk about it, you can plan a sophisticated curriculum, but in the end what matters most is for teachers to understand the nuances and the practicalities, of what it means to actually engage in good teaching. That, I think, is behind some of the coaching models that we are seeing being developed around the traps at the moment, which is a good movement — teachers having more opportunities to see good teaching in action. Ironically it is quite a solitary profession in the sense that in most cases you have one teacher in one classroom — we work mainly in primary schools — and teachers can go for weeks without seeing colleagues in action.

Mr HORNSBY — Months!

Ms MURDOCH — Years! There is this idea of the nuts and bolts of what it means because in the end that is what makes the difference to kids — does that make sense? — and really trying to position the teacher learning work we do around the classroom. Anyone who puts themselves out as a professional learning provider needs to have that knowledge and to understand what it means to do good teaching. It was certainly the strength of the report that David held up before, *In Teachers' Hands — Effective Literacy Teaching Practices in the Early Years of Schooling*. It was about what the most effective teachers actually do and then making that knowledge available in very practical ways to teachers. Anything that we do in advancing teacher learning has to be very strongly connected to their everyday real work with kids.

Mr HORNSBY — There is a huge difference between professional learning and professional brainwashing. Professional learning empowers teachers to make decisions in the workplace, the classroom. It gives them knowledge and know-how so that they can make the decisions.

There is some evidence that, when it is considered that standards are too low and there is too much disparity between schools, having some sort of state-mandated approach, like we had in the early years, can have some gains to start with but it very quickly reaches a plateau. That is exactly what happened in England as well with the national literacy strategy. There are initial gains, but it quickly reaches a plateau and goes nowhere. The early years professional learning was not early years professional learning. It was early years professional brainwashing, where all teachers were told, 'This is how you will do it: from 9 until 9.10 you will; from 9.10 until 9.25 you will; and then you will have rotational groups; and so on'. Yes, certainly, it picked up some of our weaker schools, because it made them consider their literacy program and got them into at least some practice, but it was based on routine, a 'follow this' model, as if that same routine and that same model can work for every single kid in Australia whether they are an indigenous child in the middle of the north-east or west or an urban kid living in Carlton.

I want to make that distinction between professional learning, which empowers teachers through knowledge, and professional brainwashing. The experience in England with the national literacy strategy and the experience here with the early years has shown us that just providing a one-model-fits-all program does not work. It has very limited short-term success, and we need to go way beyond that.

Ms MURDOCH — Certainly the best examples of professional learning we have seen are where there is a really good fit between the needs of the community and the staff — it is almost custom built — with some broader principles in mind. The idea of some sort of blanket one-size-fits-all approach is problematic, as it is in most professions.

Mr HORNSBY — I have a printout here from the government of Australia, its own national benchmarks. I was very proud to be a Victorian teacher. In fact, I have been in education for 42 years — yes, I should retire. In Australia, for 30 years of my career, Victoria and South Australia were the two leading states. I was proud to be a teacher in Victoria, because we were one of the leading states for many decades. The latest benchmark figures published just recently show that we have fallen to being the very bottom state. Victoria is now the bottom state, according to the government's own benchmarks. There is a good reason for that: teachers have had professional brainwashing; they have not had professional learning. There is a huge difference between the two and it is

something that really has to be considered very carefully. It is not good enough to have a state-mandated thing dropped on us, with people saying, 'This is the way you will do it'. Clearly it has not worked. Even the Auditor-General agreed. The Auditor-General questioned the whole early years program. It was reported in the *Age* three years ago. I believe that Deakin University did a bit of a study on the program for the education department, and some of the results were not good. We do not want any more of that sort of approach to professional learning. We want that learning to be real learning based on professional knowledge so that teachers are empowered to make decisions themselves.

The CHAIR — Can I ask then what you would ideally do if invited into a school to help their teachers learn and develop?

Ms MURDOCH — That is what we do.

The CHAIR — That is right.

Mr HORNSBY — One of the first things we are going to need is time. It is not great for professional learning when teachers have just made it to 4 o'clock. It might have been a miracle for some of them to have even made it to 4.00 p.m., and then when you start doing a 2 or 3-hour session with them from 4.00 p.m. until 7.00 p.m., that is not the best condition for learning. We used to have many more curriculum days where teachers were free for professional learning. I think sadly they were sometimes not used well or wisely. Somehow there has to be more time for teachers. Significant learning requires significant time. I am working with a cluster of three schools now in the Northcote–Preston area that have received special funding to help them buy a bit more time, but we still struggle. One of the difficulties is that once they walk into that classroom they have demands placed on them by 26, 28 or 30 kids — bang. There is very little time for teachers during the day to even reflect. You cannot reflect on what you just did because here comes the next thing or the next child throwing up. Classrooms are so busy and so frantic that the opportunity to be reflective there is minimal.

Ms MURDOCH — It is certainly one thing that we try and set up. A great deal depends on the support and quality of the leadership team in a school for good professional development programs. The first thing I do when I am given the scope to do it is to say, 'Let's make sure there's a team — not just one principal but a leadership team — that is going to be responsible for ensuring that the conditions are as right as they possibly can be for good learning to happen through the time I am involved with the school'.

When you ask that question I think, 'Okay, in the situations I have been in where I think we have really made progress, what have we done?'. We have had a strong leadership team with teacher representation on the team. The teachers are given time within the context of a school week to meet out of the classroom for what David was talking about — reflective conversations about the nuts and bolts of what they do. We know that makes a difference. We also know that when teachers are given time within the context of a school week, they are actually more likely to top it up in their own time beyond that. If you use the psychology of saying, 'Here is a bit of time in the school day; we value your learning', they are more likely to then put in their own time. We do ensure in the most effective situations that teachers are working in teams. It is not individuals going off to courses and coming back to share their experience with the others. The gains for that are very short term and very individual; it is not contributing to the school as a whole. We set up what are often called professional learning teams.

The other thing that I think works well is to make sure— if it is an outsider providing or assisting with the development of a professional learning program, as is the case with David and I — that there is always at least one person in that school who is given the responsibility for being, if you like, the one who keeps the pot boiling in our absence. We make sure, again, that someone is given time to do that and to continue to support the teachers in between. It has to be regular and ongoing. It is better to have someone to come in and work with the teachers for even a couple of hours every week than a two-day extravaganza at the beginning and then again at the end of the year. There needs to be a constant coming in and saying, 'Okay, so what happened this week? How are you going? What did you notice? Let's have a look at what the kids are doing here. Now, where to next?'. I would set something up that was regular, classroom based, collaborative and reflective, but very well supported by the leadership.

The other thing that works best is when a good principal ties whatever it is the teachers are working on in their professional learning to their performance plan and their performance reviews. Ideally you have got strong congruence between system-level expectation, school-level expectation, the teachers' own expectations of

themselves and what it is the professional development provider might offer. If I have got, as I have out in the northern suburbs, a group of teachers working really hard at the moment on how they can improve the quality of kids' thinking within the context of their literacy programming, the principal needs to know that that is what the teachers are working on. That needs to be tied into their performance plans, and again there needs to be that nice congruent line-up to system-level expectation. If it is haphazard, if it is people going off to different things, if it is not connected to a whole-school vision or plan, it is much less likely to work well. When you ask that question, that is what I try and set up — some congruent, reflective, collaborative and ongoing program, not a one-day conference.

Mr ELASMAR — Kath, is it normal that a school principal works with teachers and they work like a team?

Ms MURDOCH — That is a good question. It varies enormously, but one thing we do know is that when a principal sees themself as — to use the American term — an instructional leader and as having a strong role in the curriculum development and learning of the teachers, it works better. When a principal sees themself as an administrator and as being removed from that — a typical event for us might be going into a school to run a kick-off workshop, and the principal comes in, introduces us and says, 'I'll be in the office; I'll see you at the end of the day' — you know straight away you have a problem.

Mr HORNSBY — I have had the experience, too, recently where teachers can actually hide behind that, and they can say to you directly, 'We don't know if the principal will let us do that'. Often it is not the principal who is blocking it at all, but if the principal is not there, you cannot tackle that.

Ms MURDOCH — It does make a huge difference. So in answer to your question, it varies from school to school. I would say there are schools where the principal may not be the one who has that role but they are very deliberate in ensuring that their deputy has a strong curriculum teaching-learning focus, so they become that person.

Mr HORNSBY — Someone senior.

Ms MURDOCH — It is very necessary that the relationship between quality leadership and quality teacher learning is very strong. It all falls down without it. You can hold it up for a little while.

Mr HORNSBY — Queensland and Tasmania seem to be tackling that, from my work in those two states. In fact in Queensland a lot of the professional development money provided to schools is provided on the condition that the principal attends. I was asked to take part in a three-day professional development program for just principals in Brisbane at the end of last year. The education department stopped short of apologising to the principals, but it basically said, 'It has been wrong for us to view you as administrators. You are curriculum leaders, and you cannot administer what you do not understand'. Sure, they might be administrators, but they are administering curriculum, and you cannot administer curriculum if you do not understand curriculum. The principal must be a curriculum person, not an administrator.

It is happening in Tasmania. In fact next week I am working in Tasmania for three days with just principals, because there is a recognition there, too, that unless they get the principals in there as curriculum leaders, it does not matter how many good staff you have, if they do not have the backing from the person who is at the top, it can fall flat. I think there is also a huge need to tackle the notion of principals as curriculum leaders and to support principals now, because for years now in Victoria they have not spoken about curriculum. As a principal myself attending principals meetings every fortnight, the number of times we talked about curriculum you could count on one hand. It was all about program budget; it was all about WorkCare; and it was all about asking, 'Do we put our car on hire purchase?'. It was all about administration, administration, administration.

Ms MURDOCH — How to get balls off the roof safely.

Mr HORNSBY — Yes, and all about work safety and that sort of thing. Principals have been forced away from curriculum by the huge amount of administration they have to do. A colleague and friend of mine who is the principal of a private school, who learned everything in the government system — and she is an outstanding educator — will not go back to the government system because, as a principal in a private school, she has a fully qualified accountant doing her budget. She only has to oversee it; she does not actually have to do it. She has a full-time secretary and personal assistant. She said, 'If I went back into a government school as a principal, I would

not be able to do curriculum anymore'. This is a principal who is running Saturday workshops. We run Saturday workshops for teachers, and as Kath said before, they are prepared to give their own time, because we have to cut off registrations. We are getting 150 to 200 teachers every Saturday who are prepared to give up their own time at weekends and to pay for being there. You see, they will give. They do want this professional knowledge because they know it is going to make their job easier. That is the bottom line.

The CHAIR — We will go to some other questions.

Mr HALL — I have got two questions. I have got a lot of questions, but two might be all we have time for. First of all, I would appreciate what your view is on VIT's mandatory requirement now for 100 hours of professional development over a five-year period. Is that a good idea?

Ms MURDOCH — Yes.

Mr HORNSBY — Yes, it is.

Ms MURDOCH — Of course what we are going to say is: if it is good-quality professional development.

Mr HORNSBY — At least having that requirement there puts it on the agenda and makes principals talk about it. Yes, I think it is a good thing, but there is professional development and there is professional development, and just having 100 hours is not the magic answer.

Ms MURDOCH — But it certainly goes some way to ensuring it. I do not want to teacher bash, but we have both worked in many schools where there are teachers who really have done very little continued professional development since beginning their career. They do not read. You can, if you are in the right — or the wrong — setting, certainly get away with doing very little. I often say to teachers, 'You would not take your children to a doctor who had not upgraded their professional knowledge for the last 20 years. You would be walking out of the door — like that!'.

Mr HORNSBY — In fact we would not do to doctors what we do to teachers in this sense.

Ms MURDOCH — No. I think certainly having some compunction, yes, is a good thing.

Mr HALL — I suppose in regard to that — and this is not my second question, but it is a follow-up to that — how do you therefore identify teachers' needs? Do you, as consultants, go in and provide a diagnostic service to schools and to teachers — that is, meet with them, talk to them and then evaluate what their needs are?

Ms MURDOCH — Sometimes.

Mr HALL — Or do they come to you and say, 'We want professional development in this particular area', and then leave you to work it out?

Mr HORNSBY — Both.

Ms MURDOCH — Yes, both ways happen.

Mr HALL — This one you might need to take on notice. There was an article in the education section of the *Age* of 13 August last year headed, 'Teaching is not rocket science'.

Ms MURDOCH — Yes.

Mr HORNSBY — Yes.

Mr HALL — It was an article written by Christopher Bantick, and it said:

> Being in the classroom is about connecting with students.
>
> …
>
> Experts who no longer teach — if they ever did — now find there is standing room only on the PD gravy train.

Ms MURDOCH — That was my first point. I did not raise it, but, yes.

Mr HALL — I would be interested in your response. Maybe we have not got time today, but we would be happy to send you a copy of the article if you have not already got it.

Ms MURDOCH — I know the article, yes.

Mr HALL — I would be interested in your response as PD consultants.

Ms MURDOCH — I am going to give a quick one: that if you put yourself up as somebody who offers professional learning support to teachers in schools, you need to be somebody who regularly engages in actual teaching. I am fortunate in the way that I work — because I am passionate about how you do the teaching, whether it is rocket science or not — that a lot of my work is literally situated in the classroom, and I need to be prepared to teach. Some of the work that I do is actually about saying, 'I'll do the teaching; you watch. We'll swap around, and we'll talk about it'. I could not hold my head up in a professional development context if I was not continuing to do the job that I espouse to know something about with teachers. I think there are some people now that are operating as professional development providers that actually do not have the runs on the board, and I think it is problematic. I do not think there is much quality control around that. There are people who have not published, researched, taught, for years. I am not sure what you do about that, but I do think that is an issue and that we need to be careful about simply being able to establish a business name and say, 'I offer professional development services to schools'. Schools employ them. Schools need to be equally mindful of that. I think it is a reasonable point.

The CHAIR — Is that not the sort of thing that principals, for example, in their discussions might say, 'We have had this crew in, or this person in'?

Ms MURDOCH — Yes.

The CHAIR — 'What did you think of them?', and they would say they were lousy or the teachers did not seem to think they had their feet on the ground or we thought this person was really good. Is that not the sort of thing that would normally happen?

Ms MURDOCH — That is pretty much how it works. It is word of mouth.

Mr HORNSBY — It is word of mouth.

Ms MURDOCH — But it depends on what is used to measure the effectiveness of the professional development. So if it is, 'The teachers loved them, they were great, we had a great day and the lunch was good', then yes, that person continues to get employed. However, if it is measured on the basis of has there been improvement in student learning — —

Mr HORNSBY — Teaching.

Ms MURDOCH — Student learning as a result of that, that is what one wants to know.

Mr HALL — Do you want to say anything more in response to that article? Do you want to jot down a few of your thoughts and perhaps ponder how you can address the issue you identified? We would appreciate that at some time.

Mr KOTSIRAS — In terms of teacher development or PD, I get the impression that you feel it is best for the teacher to go away for two or three days, maybe not consecutive days, rather than do a one-off PD day? Do you feel it is more important to do a follow-up as well?

Mr HORNSBY — Schools should be required to draw up a professional learning policy and program. It has to be developmental over time. It has to include full days, but it also has to include small group discussions. It has to include visiting other schools. It has to include us coming in and working with them and in their classrooms. But it has to be a program that is developmental over time. No one-off thing will be effective. In fact it is basically a waste of time.

Mr KOTSIRAS — So what advice would you give to teachers who are time poor? Most of the teachers just want to survive the day, especially with the year 9s and 10s just after lunchtime. The last thing they want is for you two to come in and tell them how to teach their class when they have not got the time and the schools have not

got the resources. While it would be fantastic for schools to allow staff to go away for three days, you know that is not going to happen.

Ms MURDOCH — We also would not be recommending that actually — not going away but working on site regularly. And do you know what? If you have the right kind of environment, an outsider working with you is not necessary. It comes back to the quality of the leadership. If a school sets up good quality professional learning teams that can examine and work on their own practice and are expected to do that as part of the job, then there is much more gain, I think, from what we would call site-based, embedded PD than going off and doing stuff. Whether it is one day or three days is far less — —

Mr HORNSBY — It can be a part.

Ms MURDOCH — It can be a part of it.

Mr HORNSBY — It can be part of a whole program.

Ms MURDOCH — But that is all it is. It is often a huge amount of money — —

Mr HORNSBY — Yes.

Ms MURDOCH — For very little long-term, sustainable gain. It is about building a culture of professional learning practice in the school as part of 'This is how we do things around here'.

Mr HORNSBY — In fact if we — —

Ms MURDOCH — We do our job and we reflect on our job and we have responsibility for our own professional learning and we pull in outside resources when we need them. My job is actually to make myself redundant in a school. I want them then — —

Mr HORNSBY — To take over.

Ms MURDOCH — To have a professional learning culture and if that does not happen I do not think I have been effective.

Mr KOTSIRAS — Do you think it would make sense if schools made available over the term holidays, if you wish to call them holidays, professional development for teachers to take part in, because I know a lot of private schools do it. Do you think teachers will attend? Do you think they will gain from attending?

Ms MURDOCH — If it is part of a systematic, whole-school plan, yes. If it is a one-off, no.

Mr HORNSBY — It would not even be a bad idea to require schools to submit a professional learning policy and program before they even get their PD money. All schools get their PD money regardless of whether they use it wisely or not. Schools need to have a PD program over time. It is less common now but it still happens that sometimes a school will ring me and say, 'We have a pupil-free day on 10 August. What can do you do for us?'. I think, 'What can I do for you? I can — —'. That is rare now, I must admit, because there are so few pupil-free days that most schools know they have to use them wisely but you see they only make a comment like that because they have not got a focus for what they want to achieve this year, and they have not got a plan to bring it about. So it has to be a professional learning policy, but not just a policy, a program stating how we intend to do it. Now the program should not be a straitjacket. It should be flexible and changeable but it still has to be thought through. It is not what can we achieve this year but what can we achieve over the next three years, five years.

The CHAIR — Good. You have started us very well today. I think it is probably about time to move on and to hear from Neville. Thanks, Kath and David, for your contribution.

Ms MURDOCH — Our pleasure.

The CHAIR — We are going to have an interesting morning following through on some of these issues.

Mr HORNSBY — Thank you for making the time available.

Witnesses withdrew.

C O R R E C T E D V E R S I O N

EDUCATION AND TRAINING COMMITTEE

Inquiry into effective strategies for teacher professional learning

Melbourne — 28 March 2008

Members

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Dr N. Johnson, consultant.

The CHAIR — Thank you for coming along, Neville.

Dr JOHNSON — My pleasure.

The CHAIR — It is good that you were able to hear some of what David and Kath had to say, so you can follow on from that.

Dr JOHNSON — Could I say you have had the opportunity to get input from two of the most effective educational consultants that there are around. Those two are very effective workers in the field.

The CHAIR — Very good. In starting I should advise you, or you are probably aware,— that when you address the inquiry and present submissions parliamentary privilege covers what you have to say, so you are allowed to be fully open in terms of what is said within our inquiry. We look forward to hearing what you have to say. Then, as in the last case, we look forward to following up with some questions.

Dr JOHNSON — I think I made available to you the key points that I wanted to make in a written submission. I think you all have that, do you?

The CHAIR — Yes.

Dr JOHNSON — First of all in introduction, I was so pleased to find that we have an inquiry that is focused on teacher learning. Too often there has been a stop at what I call a halfway house. The halfway house is where we talk about professional development and in-service training and development, when really what we are on about is staff learning. I think to have an inquiry that has acknowledged that is an excellent starting point. It stops us getting into a lot of dead-ends in relation to talking about this field. It is obviously a complex area. For people like Kath, myself and others who have had this as part of our work and part of the building of our knowledge base for many years, it is an exciting area, and it is absolutely pivotal to anything that we want to do that makes learning for our students much more effective. I have chosen to highlight just a few major points, and then we can sort of link in around that.

The first point I make there, I suppose, is just to reiterate that any sorts of resources dedicated to improving staff learning have been shown to really impact first of all on the arrangements that those people make in their work, whatever that may be. They may be making arrangements to work with teams of teachers, they may be making arrangements — of course with teachers — to work with groups of students. Those arrangements are critical and of course if those arrangements are made in such a way that they are congruent with powerful learning for those learners, then you get learning impact on the children or young adults, so the connection is there. The interaction between staff learning, quality teaching — and that word 'quality' really worries me, in the sense that you have got to unpack it and say what you mean by it — and effective student learning has been demonstrated again and again and again, most recently for myself in a major study of the federal-funded Australian government quality teacher program, where again and again we have found that connection occurring.

I have in the first part of my submission tried to show how that links, where this whole notion of the quality work of a teacher actually fits in. I argue that if you actually want learners to learn well — students to learn well — then certain conditions for their learning actually have to be in place. Certain arrangements have to be made. Those arrangements will not be made unless you have teachers who can make those arrangements. You will not have teachers who can make those arrangements if they are not teachers who in fact are constantly supported and committed to becoming more knowledgeable and more skilful and are constantly readdressing their attitudes to their work. That will not occur, as Kath was saying, unless the workplace actually is a learning place, a learning community, where those teachers are supported in ways like Kath was talking about, ways that work in their complex and demanding work, so they can grow and learn and constantly address the issues they are facing for learning with their particular learners. That of course requires also the support of whatever is the governance or system they work within. It all links together. You cannot just look at this business of teacher learning without seeing it in that sort of context. I think probably the same thing was being said when you were listening to Kath, that it related to that.

I wanted to link in there first of all, because the connection is critical, and the student learning one is what we are actually on about, but student learning and staff learning cannot be considered as separate entities. Student learning and staff learning are like that. For example, it is trendy at the moment to talk about deeper thinking, that students move to a point of deeper understanding of whatever it is that they are looking at, their social world or their

mathematical world or whatever the aspect is. If you want that, you have to have teachers who can make the arrangements where it is more likely to happen. You have to be able to have teachers who can offer the learning scaffolds to students, who can create an environment where in fact moving into that higher-level thinking is both valued and supported. They have to be teachers who, if you like, set assessment tasks where it is required, where they are given a chance to demonstrate the deeper thinking, not assessment tasks where they are just asked to regurgitate information. The whole thing actually links in together, staff learning and student learning. In fact when I work with them I basically get them to work that way. Their own learning agendas come out of the learning challenges that they have identified for their students. The two fit in together. They work on the two together, never staff learning over here, student learning over there. The two are always considered together, and parents as learning partners are part of that as well, as they do it. I wanted in that first point to support that you cannot look at teacher learning in isolation. It must be looked at as part of the total picture in relation to it.

I think the second point I made there from the bottom of page 1 on to page 2 is the interconnection between three critical components. Again, as I was listening to the first submission, I was saying, 'Yes' to the notion, if you like, of the connection between the interdependence of cultures, structures and relationships. If you actually want powerful teacher learning, if you like, it has to be in a place which sees it as important, but it actually has to see it as a place where staff learning is important. There is the whole notion, if you like, of what you espouse: this is a place where staff learning is really supported, it is valued, it is seen as critical. That is critical, but you then must have the structures in place where that can become tangible. Many places you work in will espouse, 'Yes, staff are really important in this place; their growth and their development is absolutely critical'. Then you actually find that the only chance those teachers ever get to talk together is as they are passing each other in the corridor, that there are no structures, procedures, processes or protocols in place which make it more likely, if you like, to enact a place where staff learning is valued because it is so critical for student learning and so important for the community itself.

As well, you must always check that whatever structures you put in place for teacher learning build the sorts of relationships that are good for learning. We have had over the last decade or so a real focus on staff appraisal, for example. It is really important that staff get feedback on their work, and a chance to reflect on and be critical about their work and to develop and do better work and make plans for how they can do that more effectively. Whatever structures you put in place have to set up the conditions whereby they can do that. If you put in place an appraisal system which puts teachers at each other's throats, for example — in competition with one another — you are not going to get one of the most critical things in a learning culture, which is an oral learning culture. It is a teacher culture. You are not going to get the relationships that will encourage good learning, because you have just set up a structure which is anti-collaborative and anti-reflective and being honest about your work. You are playing games. You see it in other enterprises that I work in as well — other workplaces, not teaching. You see where the game playing occurs in relation to that.

These three elements come in together, so when Kath was talking about the arrangements to be made for professional development she was talking about structures. She was talking about systematic, deliberate arrangements made by a workplace — made by a department of education — for supporting the learning of staff, students and parents as learning partners. You must always check out that those structures you are putting in place and those arrangements you are making do that. I suppose that is the point I wanted to make there, that those sorts of things are absolutely interconnected. Because it is all about learning, the arrangements you make and the structures you put in place — this is my third point — have to be powerful for learning. Teachers are adults, and they are no. 1 learners. They are learners who are adults. What we know about learning and the conditions for learning are exactly the same sorts of conditions you put in place for staff, for teachers, and their learning.

Again, I think as you were listening to Kath and David, in places they work in they put in a learning cycle for teachers. They do not just come in and dump information on teachers. They actually come in and work in alongside teachers, taking teachers through a learning process. First of all, whatever they are working on, they make sure that staff are available. Just like a young learner, if an adult learner is not available to learn, they will not learn well. Therefore, as you hear with Kath and David talking, you connect it to teacher work. It is critical that they say, 'I might be tired, but this is worth learning. I can see how this could impact on my work, on my wellbeing, on my self-esteem and on the effectiveness of the learning for my students. It might help address some of these issues I have with particular learners that I am actually working with'. They must be available. Of course they are learning that information, but they must be given time to sort that information out. They must be able to make sense of it and they must be able to transfer that then into their particular workplaces for their particular learners. They must be able to apply it. They must be able to problem solve around it. That is a learning process, and you do not do that by having a curriculum day or having people flying in for a one-off session with people, particularly one that is not

in the context of what they are doing. It just does not work. It takes time, it is an ongoing process and teachers have to be very involved in it themselves, so it is a learning process.

The other thing from the bottom of page 2 and over on to page 3 was therefore it should be guided by some principles. Kath and David were taking about a school having a learning and teaching policy, a policy for staff learning. Any policy, to me, is about the principles that are going to guide our practice in this place. Why would we get in David and Kath to work us? Because it will be congruent with the principles we have to do with staff learning. Staff learning should be an active process. Staff learning should address the needs of that particular school community in the context of the system within which it works. What I want to do is identify an example of the sorts of principles that, if it has them, a school is more likely to make arrangements that are going to be powerful for staff learning and student learning and for the reputation and effectiveness of that particular school or learning community. The notion, as I said, that you are seeing this as a staff learning process is critical. As Kath was saying, there is the whole notion of the principal. To me principals are leader learners, they are not just about administrating. They must administer well and make arrangements for that to happen, but they are basically on about demonstrating to the staff, 'I am a learner who is dedicated to the learning of all the people in this learning community and supporting it and helping make the arrangements where that will occur'. It is a whole notion of learning being absolutely central, and avoiding stopping at all of these halfway houses.

I work with teachers all the time and when I ask them, 'What are you doing?', they say, 'We are doing VELS'. I say, 'You are doing what?'. You are never doing VELS! VELS is a mandated thing. You are exploring the usefulness of VELS to promote powerful learning and even alert you to some of the aspects of learning that you are not attending to, to help you provide better arrangements for learning, and to implement those. You are never doing VELS, you are never doing multiple intelligence, or whatever the latest trend out there is in education. You are exploring its usefulness for powerful learning for our learners. Otherwise you are stopping at these halfway houses. I work in places all over Australia where the staff CPD is doing these damned things, whether they are bandaided by the system or they are some trendy thing out there. I ask, 'How are you going?'. 'It is pretty tough you know, but we work here so we had better do it. We hope next year it is something that is going to be more effective'. They are doing things.

If you look at the approach that Kath, David and I take, we are on about supporting them as learners to put in place arrangements for powerful learning for their learners — not the learners there to learn but their learners. Learners and learning are central. That is what it comes down to all the time. You are not doing a program in whatever it is, you are exploring its power. You are never doing it. This slavish mentality! I heard David say that he is concerned about teachers being brainwashed and how some of the strategies of the past decade have been brainwashing in some ways. I, too, am concerned about that. What you want is a thinking teacher. You are not saying that the system should not have initiatives — of course it should — but you want a teacher who is looking at an initiative for its learning power and whether it is alerting them to some issues in learning that have gone past them and will help them to address those issues. That is what you want.

Mr HALL — Do you think the teachers are willing learners?

Dr JOHNSON — Teachers are good learners, but they are not super learners. That is why they need in place conditions to help them learn. They need to know why it is they need to learn this. They need to have the chance to have it modelled and demonstrated. They need to have the chance to practise it. They need to have the chance to get feedback on how it is going, and that feedback has to be ongoing; it cannot be one-day stuff. It has to be through systems built into the school whereby they can get support as they implement, as they try, as they investigate, as they inquire, as they test it out. That is the sort of support they have to have.

Mr HALL — Could I also ask then, from your experience across Victorian schools, do you think staff learning is getting to where it should be? I suppose in regard to that I am saying that the staff or schools that desperately need that staff learning, are they the schools that are requesting it, are they the schools that are proactive in their staff learning?

Dr JOHNSON — There is nothing wrong with there being expectations from the outside, whether that be from a system or from a leadership team within the school. In fact, that is good. It provides a climate which basically says, 'We are expecting you to be ongoing learners'. Mandating so many days or mandating certain arrangements is necessary but not sufficient. You then, of course, have to have what Kath and David were talking about; you have to have in place the ongoing structures, procedures, processes and resourcing coming from the

school itself to then support that. And you have to have it at a high quality, whatever that means — powerful for learning, student learning in effect. Teachers are very, very busy people. You will notice the next point I make there is that the learning cannot just be staff learning; it has got to be learning for improvement, it has got to make it even better.

Mr HALL — How do you measure improvement?

Dr JOHNSON — You look at the learning impact. Whenever I work with teachers, and Kath does too, I say, 'What are the learning challenges? What issues do you have with the student learning?'. They will say, 'I have got students who such and such, and the issue is unique'. I will say, 'What is your learning issue in relation to that therefore?'. If there is a student learning issue, if the students just seem to be barking at the print and they are not getting the higher level of understanding and comprehension of what they are reading, then that is your issue. What are the learning issues now for staff? Staff have to have a thorough and deep understanding of what higher level comprehension is and entails. They have to have in their repertoire ways of structuring and helping the student to do that. How do you measure it? Did it work? Did whatever it is you did and tried actually have more students moving into a higher level of understanding, making inferences about what they read, making judgements about what they read? Did it actually occur? Did you see in the classroom the teacher setting up those structures? Do you have teachers who now have a broader repertoire of things they can offer to the student to help them do that?

Mr HALL — So is that a subjective assessment or is it treating student results?

Dr JOHNSON — You look for evidence of those things. Otherwise you have no evaluative criteria. Whatever your learning challenges are are your evaluative criteria. I work with teachers, and so does Kath and many other group consultants and many people in schools who work well make it very clear what learning we are wanting here, and now what is the evidence that that learning is occurring?

Mr HALL — You put in that evaluation criteria as part of what you deliver as a consultant?

Dr JOHNSON — All the time. People say to you, 'We have done habits of mind' — it is a powerful package about the way learners approach their learning, their habits of mind. It is a very powerful program, but when a teacher says to me they have done habits of mind, I will say 'Did it work?'. They say 'Oh', and then they have to start thinking, 'The reason I was interested in that program was because I have issues with students who are easily distracted or do not persevere when the going gets tough or do not really understand themselves as learning'. I say, 'Did that work? Okay, you have done the workshops and you have bought the materials, but did it actually impact on those aspects of student behaviour that you wanted them to impact on?'. They say, 'Oh, right'. We get them looking there. Then we say, 'What about yourself? Are you now more confident and more knowledgeable and more skilful? Do you have at your fingertips some of the strategies you can make available to students? Do you have more of those now? Are you more able to chose which strategies or combination of strategies are for particular learners?'. They say 'Oh, right'. You look for evidence of that. When you have that you are looking really at evidence of learning, staff learning and student learning. That is the criteria against which you evaluate any professional learning occasion.

Mr HALL — Sure. I ask the question because evaluation is important.

Dr JOHNSON — Critical.

Mr HALL — You are investing so much time and resource into a program, then it needs to be evaluated for effectiveness.

Dr JOHNSON — Totally. You do not want teachers saying, 'I've done that', or 'We've done those workshops' or 'We've done that'. You need to say, 'The reason you were interested in doing it, I hope, is because you thought it could have some power for helping you to identify the issues you face. Now, did it work?'. Many teachers think that way, but many do not, and many principals and other key leaders in schools think that way and help teachers to think that way, and many do not. You will notice that one of my recommendations is to put a lot of effort into building the confidence and knowledge and skill of your formal leaders. Get them to rethink what professional development is all about and where it fits in. Get them to become knowledgeable about the sorts of arrangements in their school that are going to be more likely to give teachers the support they need in order to be able to do that. If you do not have that, you will have principals who say, 'Oh, yes, I am into professional learning of my staff. I have a checklist where the teachers write down everything they have done, and if they have got more

than 10 things, they are doing well this year'. To me that is absolute garbage! No. 1, they are denying the most critical learning experience that a teacher can have, and that is while they are working. They are denying that. They are events and occasions. Whether it is somebody flying into the school or you going out to somebody else: here are these events and occasions. That is not what PD is about.

Staff learning is about learning opportunities. Sure, some of those should be made available outside. You should have a chance to drink at some wells and you should have a chance to get challenged. You should have people coming in and doing that, but you should also have arrangements made within the school itself where you are in an ongoing way supported in your learning, so that you learn on the job, if you like. Those are the sorts of arrangements that I think you would see Kath and David making**.** They do it all the time; they work alongside teachers. Did you hear the term 'learning teams'? Structural professional learning teams is something that I and many colleagues have been investigating now for a decade, and I make a point of it in my submission. There are certain arrangements that you make for learning.

We know how to structure good outsider provider stuff, but the transfer of outside providers, even if they are really well-run occasions, even if they are ongoing and work over a long period of time, has a really bad record, an abysmal record, in the transfer into classrooms. Outside provider, on its own, does not work. It needs to be balanced by work-embedded arrangements — where staff get the support to learn, to work together and inquire together on an ongoing basis — being built into the very culture and into the work of their place. That is what is critical. Therefore the interests of myself and people like professional learning teams, which by the way at times is taken by administrators to just be 'We'll call our curriculum teams professional learning teams' — they change the name.

Professional learning teams are not curriculum administration and management teams. Professional learning teams are teams of teachers who get together to work on certain issues of learning. They are prepared to inquire about something, try something in the classroom, move into action, come back, talk about it, work on it, do some more learning if they need it, and go again. You say to them, 'Have you got a professional learning team?'. They say, 'Yes, we have got one. All the grade 1 teachers get together, all the year 9 teachers get together'. That is not a learning team. That is an administration and management team. Although you have to administer and manage, the less time you can spend doing it, the more time you have available to address the real learning issues in relation to your particular job. We call that professional learning. These are teams of people who get together to work on learning issues for their learners. That is the difference. In many places you go to now they will say, 'We have PLTs — we have professional learning teams'. They have not. They have just adopted the name because it is trendy.

Mr ELASMAR — We should be calling for professional principals before we call for professional learning teaching; is that right?

Dr JOHNSON — I would say that a principal does not have just a team of formal leaders who work with them administering the school. At times they take off that hat and say 'Now we are a learning team'. They get a team with the deputy principal and people in the key learning areas — the heads, the year-level coordinators — and they talk about the learning issues and the learning projects they have going in their school, how they are being resourced, what support they need and what advocacy they need to give them, so that they operate at times as a learning team as well. Remember I said that the principal should be a leader-learner. When schools work that way the impact is enormous. The staff, the teachers, get the support that they need to do their real learning. They do not have to hide; they do not have to pretend that they know all about it. They have got issues, and they have got a climate now where they can talk about those issues.

The CHAIR — Neville, some schools do it reasonably well.

Dr JOHNSON — Very well.

The CHAIR — Other schools do not. If you were on the Education and Training Committee or if you were in charge of education, what are the things that you would want to put in place to try to see that all schools could do their professional learning well?

Dr JOHNSON — In this, in expressing some of my thoughts about policy implications, I state that it is obviously about targeting money to that. We know we have had some major projects — we have had the federal Australian government Quality Teacher program, and we have had other programs at the state level, like Schools

for Innovations and Excellence and others — where a major component of those has been staff learning, if you like. That is good; that must be continued. It is absolutely critical that there are always systemic initiatives focused on staff learning and on seeing it in tandem, so that even if they have got a major student-learning initiative, it should always have a staff-learning component built into it and built into the funding of it. I also say in expressing my thoughts about policy implications that those key people in schools are critical. If you have got a principal in a school who thinks that professional development is about going to things or having people in, you have got a problem. You want a principal who thinks, in fact, about staff learning and supporting staff learning. You want them to think that way, and you want them to be constantly thinking about making arrangements where that will occur.

To answer your question, a lot of the focus has got to be put onto those formal leaders in our schools who still do not have the understanding of the importance of staff learning and what professional development really is and what it is about. More than that, they are not knowledgeable about improvement processes. Much of my work is working with people — teams of people, whole schools, clusters of schools — putting in place a learning improvement process. Why do I have to do that? Because quite often it is not part of the knowledge base of our formal leaders. They will talk change; they do not talk improvement. To me, you talk improvement and then you manage the change that is needed to get that improvement happening. I put into my submission there some of the key notions of an improvement process. We have old models in place in schools which do not work. One of the most critical things is that many of the arrangements made for so-called improvement in schools further intensify the workplace and are not effective. For example, they do not put in place things that are workable. You cannot just keep dumping extra projects on people. Staff have to be encouraged to build the improvement into their normal work, otherwise they will meet for a whole year in a special project committee on boys and learning. It is the greatest waste of time you have ever known. You have got to have work-based projects occurring alongside that. They have got to be, while they are working, trying things out in their classrooms. They have to be reaffirming the things that are now already working. That is called 'sustain and build'. They focus on programs, not learning. They talk about certainties — 'If you do this, you are certainly improving'. That is crap. You should be talking about possibilities, never about certainties. You should say, 'Let's explore the power of this. Let's see if it delivers in relation to our need'.

The old models of improvement that many senior leaders in schools are driven by do not work, so therefore part of their knowledge base has to be improvement — the processes of improvement, more like it — and then how you manage the change that in fact is required from that. So, yes, a lot of work has been put in. We have some great formal leaders out there and some terrific leadership teams in schools, but we do not have enough of them. Many teachers just beat their head against a brick wall. Many teachers come up with some great projects. They fail then to get top-down support. You can only do that for so long before you run out of energy. A teacher will only beat their head against a brick wall for so long.

The CHAIR — Neville, I am conscious of time, and we have got our next speaker along, Doug Williams. I think you have covered the issue very well and very passionately indeed. Thank you for your contribution, and we will be following up this matter as we go through.

Dr JOHNSON — I wish you well in your deliberation. I hope good policy comes through it.

The CHAIR — Indeed; I hope so.

Witness withdrew.

C O R R E C T E D V E R S I O N

EDUCATION AND TRAINING COMMITTEE

Inquiry into effective strategies for teacher professional learning

Melbourne — 28 March 2008

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Mr D. Williams, Black Douglas Professional Education Services.

The CHAIR — Thank you for coming along and addressing the Education and Training Committee in their inquiry on teacher professional learning. I expect that you are aware that the submissions you make in here are subject to parliamentary privilege so that means you are fairly free to say whatever you like. We look forward to your contribution and then being able to ask questions of you, Doug, in regard to your contribution. We also have before us the submission that you have made.

Mr WILLIAMS — Thank you, Chair and members of the committee, for the invitation. The information that I had was to prepare some little introduction first but somebody already knows something of my background, so I will keep that brief. Basically I am a storyteller in maths education and I thank you for the opportunity to be able to present some evidence here. I hope that the matters I raise in this presentation, which are supported by that documentation, will in the short term contribute to improvement in the department of education's approach to teacher professional learning and, in the long term, to significant improvements in students learning. You will note already I am not reading from that document. I am reading from a presentation here and will refer to that one as we go through. Currently my career is 100 per cent professional development and its focus is collecting and retelling stories of success from mathematics classrooms at all levels from K to 12. I work wherever I am invited to work, so my contact with teachers is not confined to Victoria. I have worked in every state and territory and several overseas countries.

The background that brought me to this role is a degree and a Dip. Ed. from Monash, training as a secondary maths teacher. I spent eight years in this role, including four as head of department. Then I transferred to primary teaching and spent a further 14 years in primary classrooms, including five years as the school art teacher. During 1991–92 I spent a further year studying at the Institute of Education at the University of London courtesy of a Commonwealth Relations Trust Fellowship. Since returning to Australia the storyteller role has developed, initially through connections with Curriculum Corporation's Mathematics Task Centre project. I should add that although my career from that time became focused more and more on supporting teacher professional learning, I have been involved in and was soon leading professional development from the first year of my teaching. It is from this limited background that I choose to make comments firstly about the 'professional' in 'professional learning' and then about the 'learning'.

The subject of this inquiry is effective strategies for teacher professional learning. There is an assumption there that teachers are professional. They are. However, they are not treated as professionals. The core business of teachers is no longer teaching, especially in secondary schools. A succession of structural, administrative and curriculum impositions by governments of both persuasions over at least the last twenty years — changes driven from the top down and often strongly influenced by the philosophies and experiments of academic educators — have left most teachers feeling that classroom preparation and teaching is either last on their 'to do' list, or at best, done under stress, and therefore done less well, due to the burden of a raft of external demands which contribute little to student learning.

Messages, subtle and obvious, from the department make it clear to teachers that documentation is more important than curriculum, filling in forms is more important than teaching, and education is more about the budget than the quality of student learning. Generally teachers do not feel they are valued for their teaching, at least from the top down. Two current examples which send such messages are contract teaching and teachers' current pay claims. Contract teaching belies any talk of teaching as a career, because by its very nature it implies the teacher is disposable. The current stand-off over teachers' salaries is, on the government side, argued only in terms of budget, not in terms of recognition, worth, reward, or value. So I repeat: teachers are professional, but they are not treated as professional. I believe that if this committee is serious about effective strategies for teacher professional learning it must report on changes to teachers' working environment that would uplift teachers and teaching. My personal preference is to see teachers in the classroom as the apex of a pyramid. Everything else exists, in the base of the pyramid, to assist and support teachers. From this viewpoint, the expression 'from the top down', which I used just now, would have an entirely different meaning. In summary of this section, teachers' professional learning would be more effective if strategies were in place to encourage, develop and support teachers as professionals.

On thoughts about 'learning', in a more professional environment professional learning would be more effective. However, in the current environment, because of the dedication and professionalism of teachers, professional learning can still be effective. In the papers I have submitted you have two stories to illustrate this. My assumption is that effective strategies in teacher professional learning would be demonstrated by improved learning among the teachers' students. In those papers you will find the INISSS report. It shows such change in a large group of secondary students from many schools over a long time through research constructed in parallel with the

professional development program. The equally important personal reflection on one of our six-day programs — which is the other key article there — shows such change in a small group of primary students from one school over a much shorter time. These apparently different professional development programs have many common elements, and I invite you to read the papers, compare them and extract those elements that have led to changes in teaching practice, which in turn have led to advances in student learning. I must admit I assumed you had staff who would do that — read through, analyse, pull out and stick it in front of you.

The CHAIR — We have very good staff who are assisting us with that.

Mr WILLIAMS — I had spoken to Jennifer, so I assumed that would work. These are two of many examples which illustrate effective strategies in teacher professional learning. The particular programs were designed using principles that have been public knowledge in mathematics education for a very long time, and I have listed those and their source, I think, at the beginning of that supporting paper. Also in the supporting papers you will see that I made a small attempt to seek information from those most knowledgeable about teacher professional learning. An extensive list of teacher responses has been included. Examining these responses will confirm many of the principles mentioned at the beginning of the article and hopefully help plan pathways and programs for the future.

In conclusion, I was actually surprised to be asked to present to this committee. I hope that my limited background has been able to add something pertinent and positive to your deliberations. I very much want to leave you with the thought that teachers in classrooms, whoever they are and whatever they currently know about their craft, are the starting point for effective professional learning. That very much means responding to their invitations, listening to and discussing their needs, encouraging them to engage in challenges, resourcing them to feel confident to do so, and retelling stories of success from colleagues to inspire them to continue with the career-long journey of learning to teach. I invite your questions, and I have a copy of that little presentation as well.

Mr KOTSIRAS — You taught mathematics, you said, from year 7 to year 12?

Mr WILLIAMS — Yes.

Mr KOTSIRAS — Then you went into primary school and you taught art?

Mr WILLIAMS — No. I taught in primary school classrooms for 14 years, and for five of those I was the art specialist in the school.

Mr KOTSIRAS — Had you done art before, the subject?

Mr WILLIAMS — I almost failed year 10 art and — —

Mr KOTSIRAS — So my question to you, which is very important — —

Mr WILLIAMS — Hang on, let me finish that first. My success as an art teacher — and I was — was because of a two-week professional learning program that was run by a consultant, an education department person in our particular region, who understood about learning. I learnt as much about teaching mathematics from her as I did about teaching art, and I finished up publishing a book called *Teaching Mathematics through Children's Art*. There were two things that came in there. One was a principal who did not listen — he sort of did, but he did not listen the way I thought he might — when I said, 'I need a change from the classroom. I have a great deal of expertise in mathematics education, and I think I could assist some kids in this school who are having difficulty'. He heard the bit that said I needed a change from the classroom and recognised another need in his school, which was to find a new art teacher, so he offered me that challenge. But the same person had enough sense to say, 'But you need some training to do that', and let me out of the school for two weeks to do the opening-up program. Sorry, it was a rather extensive answer to the question.

Mr KOTSIRAS — It is a question that I have raised so many other times in relation to teachers who have not really got the content knowledge and yet — —

Mr WILLIAMS — That is most mathematics teachers.

Mr KOTSIRAS — They are required to teach maths, say. They might have been fantastic English teachers in the classroom, able to speak to the kids, pass on the knowledge to the kids, then they are put into a maths classroom, but they have not got the content knowledge. So my question to you is: are there any ways — —

Mr WILLIAMS — The error is in putting them in there. That is not treating them professionally. That is filling a gap from an administrative point of view.

Mr KOTSIRAS — Correct.

Mr WILLIAMS — It relates to a whole big picture that needs to be explored about servicing those at the top of the pyramid, who are the teachers in the classroom. They are the only ones who have any influence on the students that we think we are doing all these administrative things for. Having said that, many teachers, at all levels, feel they do not have sufficient mathematics background when it comes to teaching mathematics. That is a problem that can be overcome and it is overcome by a focus on learning, because all teachers understand that when they are involved in something it is going to make a change to their kids learning. So the doorway into their insecurity about mathematics is through their positive understanding of learning. Then they can learn some mathematics because they can see the value for their own kids. Did I make sense? No, obviously.

You are not going to address a deficiency in knowledge of a content area by focusing on the content area alone. That is not to say that you do not offer teachers the opportunity to go to courses specifically to improve their content. The thing that matters to a teacher, the thing that their heart is about, is the learning of their kids, so the doorway to come in to become a colleague in whom they trust to express their own deficiencies is through a learning experience where they can say, 'Hey, that is going to be good for my kids'. Then they try it and see that it is, and that puts them in a position of wanting to learn more. It is no different from a learner in a classroom — a kid at any level. It is the wanting to learn that puts you in a position to learn, and there are all sorts of strategies in the classroom that are used to invite kids into learning.

Mr HERBERT — Thank you for your presentation. Yesterday I was at the New Agenda for Prosperity conference held at Melbourne University through the Melbourne Institute of Applied Economic and Social Research. Geoff Masters was there, and he stated — quite bluntly, really, I thought — two things: firstly, that teachers, before they enter teachers college, should be tested for literacy and mathematical ability, on your point, as a precursor for entering the teacher-training courses; and, secondly, that only the top 30 per cent of academics in the scale should be allowed to go into teaching. It is subsidiary to this inquiry, but I guess it does come to this issue that Nick was raising about teacher knowledge. I just wonder what your opinion is of those two points that Geoff Masters proposed.

Mr KOTSIRAS — That is honest.

Mr WILLIAMS — Testing is one thing. What you do about it when you get a response is another.

Mr HERBERT — Presumably you would not be allowed to do teacher training.

Mr WILLIAMS — If it is used as a big stick, it is not very positive. There is absolutely an issue with the mathematical knowledge of those entering, and it is an awful cycle that relates to the teachers that they have had, and the way they have been taught through their own build-up to becoming a teacher trainee. I do not want to say yes or no to either of those things, but I would rather say that, if you are going to paint a big picture that takes a look at treating teachers more professionally, then it begins in their pre-service training as well. I have just finished working with the current intake of 300-odd students at La Trobe University, just as a brief introduction to an alternative view of mathematics. This can be quite a long discussion if you want to follow this path.

Mr HERBERT — I guess I could clarify that. I was being a bit provocative there, because I think Geoff Masters was trying to get a newspaper headline. I am sorry to say that — we are under privilege.

Mr WILLIAMS — I would absolutely want you to take note of the issue of pre-service teacher training and specifically in my field of mathematics education, absolutely. Whether his two propositions are something you take note of is a different matter.

Mr HERBERT — Just on that, then — because it is a central point and one that Nick was making — I would have thought that such a simplistic viewpoint would not have taken into account the diversity of teaching

and the needs in teaching. For instance, do you think that a teacher of prep to year 2 should have the same in-depth mathematical knowledge as a teacher of further mathematics in a secondary school? Is there a difference in terms of content knowledge and even different cycles of the education process?

Mr WILLIAMS — A teacher's primary focus needs to be built around what is known about how kids learn. They then make choices about which area of the learning continuum they put their talents into. Mathematics, in that sense, is no more or less important than anything else, because good learning, which comes from good teaching craft, is applicable to any of the subject areas at any particular level. There is a problem — has been for a long time and is becoming a bit less, I am pleased to say — in maths particularly with a particular view of mathematics education that is widely accepted publicly and within the education system, which is not constructive in terms of the outcomes for students. So there needs to be work, which is really what I am involved in, on collecting stories from classrooms that take a different view and presenting those to teachers who can just see their way into someone else's classroom. I think I have started to ramble. I am stopping.

The CHAIR — I presume you go into schools now as a consultant to assist teachers with professional learning?

Mr WILLIAMS — Yes.

The CHAIR — What is the ideal way you would like to do that in a school setting to ensure that teachers you are dealing with do gain and have ongoing learning that goes into practice?

Mr WILLIAMS — Invitation is the first thing, rather than imposition, and ongoing. I prefer not to do the one-off things.

The CHAIR — So if you were doing ongoing, then, what is your suggestion? Would you like to go for five weeks in blocks of 2 hours a week or something?

Mr WILLIAMS — Our experience is that minimum exposure, if you like, of, say, five or six practical, worthwhile experiences in whatever it is that is under investigation — 'exploration' I think the previous speaker said — spaced with time in between to do that exploration in the classroom is necessary. It is the five or six experiences that are necessary before you get an embedded change in the teacher practice. That is why I have presented you with the two papers, the INISSS and the report on the six-day program, as examples of those. There is a significant change there in teacher practice and outcomes for kids — well measured, unarguable and so on. The key things seem to be that in the pressures of what teachers do day to day you have to keep coming back and refreshing the new vision of where you are going, but refreshing it in a practical way so that they can then find time to apply it in the classroom and come back and report on it. Your question was about the ideal. There is no such thing, but invitation, experiences over time and classroom trialling in between the experiences would be three key elements. Not totally or the only elements, but three key elements.

Mr KOTSIRAS — It seems to me that there are so many consultants. Why do you think you are asked to go to La Trobe? What do you offer more than others? What type of programs do you offer which stand out?

Mr WILLIAMS — You would have to ask the people who asked me to go to La Trobe, wouldn't you?

Mr KOTSIRAS — Yes, but you should know how your program is different from others.

Mr WILLIAMS — Why was I asked to come here? I do not know how I finished up here. I do not know why I am here. I just do what I do. I have told you what I do: I tell stories in maths education; my role is to collect them and to retell them. Why is somebody invited to present at the comedy festival in Melbourne? It is not because of anything that they can identify, it is because of the response in the receiver.

The CHAIR — Word of mouth, you are saying?

Mr WILLIAMS — Somehow.

Mr KOTSIRAS — How do you measure the effectiveness of your programs, if you would like to call them that?

Mr WILLIAMS — The long-term answer and the answer that I try to publish as often as possible, either orally, in print or on websites and whatnot, is in terms of changes in kids and specifically examples where kids clearly show that they are feeling better about themselves as a result of their learning. Learning should be something that makes you feel like you are a better person, and maths education has a long history of doing exactly the opposite. The long-term answer is that I want to be able to say that here is a story from this kid who says, 'Look what I did, and I feel good about it!'. The short-term answer depends on the particular program. I went and taught at La Trobe. I got 300 students — three groups of 100 for 2 hours — and the function was quite specific. The university is a member of a particular learning resource called Maths300. My task was to invite the kids to come to understand what that was about. I can give you two levels of assessment of a value of that. One is that they have invited me back three times, but that might be because at least they do not have to face the kids then because I am doing it, but you would have to ask them — that was a bit facetious, sorry.

The other one is that I just got an email on Easter Monday from somebody, saying, 'I cannot get into that site. You showed us this wonderful thing and I cannot get in. What is going wrong?'. It happened to be one of those stupid technical issues where the server had disappeared. Within the email is 'I know many of my student friends want to get into this so that we can prepare our work for the next teaching practice we are doing' and that sort of stuff. It is a little story that says those 2 hours I spent were of value there, and I know then that when they get into that site they are going to have an altered view of what they are going to do in the classroom, and that is going to alter the view of the kids who they teach. It brings me back to the long-term thing: I want to be with teachers in the classroom, up here on the pyramid, and everything else in the education system is there to support that. I mean, what is the point otherwise? If it is not for kids to come out of school saying, 'I reckon I can think, I reckon I can feel, I reckon I can negotiate, I reckon I can —' instead of 'Oh, bloody school!', then what is the point? It is not about the administration. The administration is part of this platform that supports what goes on there.

The CHAIR — I think Steve has one further question.

Mr HERBERT — Very quickly, just following up on that point in terms of what you were saying about teachers being at the head or apex of the pyramid and everything else in the education system designed to support and assist them, it is an unusual view that has major ramifications for how you run a system.

Mr WILLIAMS — Yes, it does.

Mr HERBERT — A system where you do not have the clients or the students at the very apex.

Mr WILLIAMS — 'Clients'?

Mr HERBERT — Students, you know, the principal thing.

Mr WILLIAMS — May I pick up on that language, please?

Mr HERBERT — Let us move on.

Mr WILLIAMS — No, let us not for a minute. I will let you move on, but one of the problems comes from seeing education as a business.

Mr HERBERT — 'Clients' is not seeing it as a business; it is seeing it as the principal recipient of the services provided.

Mr WILLIAMS — Sure, but it comes from business language.

Mr HERBERT — No, it does not. I disagree with you entirely.

Mr WILLIAMS — Okay, move on.

Mr HERBERT — We can move on, but clearly it is seeing the students as principal recipients of the services provided in terms of education. Whether you take a socialist, capitalist or any view you like, that is what it is. I am just asking you: given that in your analysis you see the teachers as the apex and not the students, I am wondering why that is.

Mr WILLIAMS — Because they then make decisions that put the students at the top or apex of the next pyramid. There is no other way to influence students significantly and lastingly than through their teachers. The best resource we have in education is the teachers. It is not stuff, it is not administration, it is not policy, it is not documentation. It is the teachers. How else are you going to influence students? If you have teachers who have been influenced negatively, what is going to happen to their students? In terms of what you are asking me — —

Mr HERBERT — I think you have got two pyramids here.

Mr WILLIAMS — I have, certainly, but I was reserving it for one because of what I think the focus of this is. I have written a paper that relates to this; it is on my website. It was written to try to offer a vision for the next 1000 years because we are currently largely using an education system that was built in Dickensian times, and is not even of the quality that goes back to what the Greeks were doing, for example.

The CHAIR — Thank you, Doug.

Mr WILLIAMS — My pleasure, I think. I do not know whether you guys follow up after these things but for the next three weeks I am not in the country. Email will work but otherwise ring my office if you want to ask anything.

The CHAIR — Thanks.

Mr HERBERT — We will probably follow up with you later as we are pulling it all together.

Mr WILLIAMS — I do not know how you do it, honestly. How many weeks and months have you been collecting evidence?

The CHAIR — We started — —

Ms ELLINGFORD — March last year.

Mr WILLIAMS — So these wonderful people over here have got this much for you at the moment, and somehow you are going to try and come out of this with — —

The CHAIR — That is right.

Mr WILLIAMS — Good luck. I hope it was slightly useful anyway.

Witness withdrew.

C O R R E C T E D V E R S I O N

EDUCATION AND TRAINING COMMITTEE

Inquiry into effective strategies for teacher professional learning

Melbourne — 28 March 2008

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Mr P. Cole, Resources for Courses.

The CHAIR — We are pleased to have you address our inquiry on teacher learning. We have had four individuals speak to us in three sessions this morning to bring us along, on top of the earlier consultations we have had, but we are clearly looking for your input and an opportunity to then ask questions in regard to the submission you make to us. I remind you that evidence that you provide to us in the inquiry in this setting is covered by parliamentary privilege, so you are free to cover issues in a very open and honest way.

Mr COLE — Thank you, Chair. There is a paper there, so I thought I would just speak to the paper and you can quiz me on it later. I am probably addressing only the first four of your terms of reference, rather than the last two. In the relationship between ongoing professional learning and teacher expertise, I am really saying there is not much. In relation to which factors support high quality of professional learning for teachers, I will get into talking about that later. Regarding national and international trends, I will give you a bit of an indication about what is happening there. As to what best practice there might be, again, I am a bit pessimistic about that.

Let me give you a bit of background about where I came from. I am a former senior executive in the education department. I left about 15 years ago. Amongst many of the jobs I had at that time, one was the manager of training and development. My frustration was that I felt that most of the stuff that we did as the departmental practice was not professional development, it was really policy explanation or communication. My general view was that if you are talking about professional learning or professional development you would expect the outcome to be at least a change in classroom practice, and I know most of the things that the department did never delivered that. That is where I am coming from.

Let me get into it. The key propositions are that professional learning as provided typically as a one-off externally provided activity does nothing to improve teacher quality at all, nor does teachers being involved in higher education learning do anything to improve teacher quality at all. The reason for saying that is mainly that there is a disjunction between the theory. The theory says, 'I am now trained, I now know more, I now change my teaching, students improve'. What tends to happen with most professional development is — and we have got professional development junkies — is that folks go along to a professional development activity, they will get information stuck in their heads, they go back to school, and nothing changes. I am not surprised. There are a number of reasons for that and I have raised a number of reasons why that occurs. The research in my document supports the argument I am running.

When you think about it, typical professional development is either a two-day conference or a one-day or several-hours workshop. It is delivered by someone like myself — that is, the external 'expert'. You're staff in my workshop who have come from all different schools, and now I am going to give you something that is going to meet all your needs. I do not know what your needs are and generally if I am running a big workshop there may be 40 or 50 of you, so certainly I cannot get into hands-on activities. It is really me telling you the theory, the 'what is important' and the 'why' — why you should be changing. Rarely do I ever get down to showing you how you might make the change, because within a workshop or conference that never happens. It is me as a talking head, with my ego giving you my knowledge, and that is where it ends.

Invariably, schools will send teachers off to the national conference for maths or something else and they will rocket back into school and the most they usually have to do is present a report to the staff. They will present a report to the staff meeting about what happened in the professional development and that is where it ends. Personally you may find a few teachers making a few changes but generally not and I will give you a number of reasons why. One I have already mentioned and that is because the 'why' and 'what' to change is where most of the focus is, not on 'how'. There is very little about how to bring about change in the school. Most of the information, particularly by agencies, is about new policy directions. It is not about how to implement them; it is about what the new policy directions are. They will go through and talk about the new assessment or about VELS and what it is and how it is structured, the diagrams and the helix et cetera. It is then up to the school to work out how to implement them.

I am not surprised because again those venues limit what you can do and that is why you are stuck with that sort of mode. But also, back in the school, the leadership in the school generally does not expect that sending a couple of teachers out is going to actually change dramatically what happens in a school. I do a lot of school reviews. I go into a school and I say, 'There are some excellent pockets of practice in the school'; 'yes, it is terrific'; 'there is great stuff happening in grade 3'; or 'the year 7 teacher is terrific'. My follow-up question is, 'Is there a law in this school that prohibits this happening everywhere?'. No-one thinks it has to happen everywhere. There are little

pockets of stuff happening all around the place. No-one sees it, as the fact is that leadership in the school does not actually expect professional development to bring about substantial change in the school.

Secondly, even if they did, most of them do not consider that involvement in professional learning is obligatory. They will say, 'These old teachers are a bit tired and jaded, they do not want to be involved in PD. The youngies are enthusiastic so they can go and do it, but look, these folks are not going to do it'. There is no accountability for what you have done when you have gone to PD and you drop back into a school again. To my mind, millions and millions of dollars are absolutely wasted on most of the stuff that happens that is called professional development — absolutely wasted — and I contributed to wasting a lot of that.

Also, teachers tend to see professional development as a personal thing: I have now been out and learnt something; I will find out how to do something with it. They do not see it as part of their professional role to be responsible for assisting others to learn and to be contributing to the learning. My argument is that we have to move away from that sort of model, of an external big conference model which predominates, to making schools places for learning. This is trickier, partly because teachers get inside their classroom and it is privatised — that is, no one comes into the classroom. They say, 'I do what I do. I am a professional. It is not your affair'. More and more they are held accountable, but they are only held accountable second-hand — that is, 'I will present documents about how good I am, but no-one is going to come in and see how good I am'.

What tends to happen within schools is that the potential for learning is there, but you need to establish the climate. Leaders in their school have to establish a climate where there is trust and where folks are happy to go into classrooms and share information. Leaders also have to say, 'We have identified a need in this school. Let us commission three or four folk to go out and find stuff for it'. So you may go to the conference or you may go somewhere else, but when you come back there is a structure within the school so that whatever is learnt goes back to a committee. It is there; it has been commissioned. They then utilise that. They then use the professional learning budget to release teachers internally to work alongside other teachers to learn what is going on and, in a sense, turn the school into a professional learning culture.

That is slowly happening, but generally it is not, because there is a vested group that says, 'If the schools really start to become very rich places for learning, there is a whole business out there that is going to collapse'. The teacher associations are very conscious of this, and I have given them talks about how to make their presentation so they are actually useful for schools. Most of it is about spending at least half of your time on showing them how to do what you are talking about. I say, 'Break down your groups, get rid of your huge conferences — they are an absolute waste of time; a smorgasbord of talking heads — and get workshops that are very focused and actually give teachers skills'.

I have also argued that one of the best things that you could probably do would be to actually run a course with demonstration teachers and have demonstration teachers as the key leaders of what goes on — that is, they work next to someone else and they show them how to go about it. How might you change things at the school? Let us assume there is trust being developed and that has been established. One of the other things about the way professional learning in a school is structured is that teachers will have an individual professional learning plan. Each teacher will have a learning plan. It will come from the start of the year. They will say, 'I have sat down with my principal. I have said that, yes, I want to learn something about middle schools'. At the end of the year the principal will come back and say, 'How did you go with the professional learning plan?', and they will say, 'I just didn't have time to get into it'.

The problem with the current structure and the way accountability and professional learning are tied together is that it is seen as an annual event. It deals in generics and it does not deal in specifics. What needs to happen is for professional learning plans to take bite-size targets — for example, 'I want to know how to use a rubric within maths'; a little bite-size thing. Plans have to emanate from the question, 'What do you want to change in your classroom?', not 'What are your learning needs?' — wrong question. 'What do you want to change in your classroom?' has to open up the discussion. From that you then say, 'Okay, you want to introduce rubrics'; the second question is, 'Do you need assistance?'. Invariably I find most teachers do not need professional learning. They need the courage to try something new, and invariably they can learn whatever has to be done from a colleague. If they cannot, you can then certainly assist them with that. What you then have to say is, 'When will I see evidence that you have actually learnt something and, as a consequence, done something? Will it be 6 weeks, 8 weeks, 10 weeks?'. If you have small bite-size professional learning targets — little things you can bite off

shortly — what you have then is a living document that every six or eight weeks someone is going to check. 'Have you done it?'. 'Yes'. 'Good'. 'How do we follow it through?'.

At the school level you would also say, 'Across the school, are there three or four things that you think everybody in this school ought to be doing?'. Invariably they say, 'Yes. They all should know how to do something in IT; they should be using this sort of thing in assessment; they should be doing these things in literacy'. I would say, 'Let's make those three things the three things that everybody gets done, and let's make public what people are learning'. In the staffroom there are all the staff. I would ask, 'What are the bite-size things you are learning in your professional learning plan? Let's put them up there'. Someone might say, 'Five of us are doing rubrics. Let's get together. Let's work out how we're going to do it' or 'I see five are doing rubrics. I have some terrific stuff for you. Have a look at that, or come into my classroom. I'm using it'. You need to get the school much more focused on being a centre for professional learning.

In most of my presentations when I go out to talk to groups I say, 'I am the embodiment of what I do not believe in. I am coming here to talk to you, but what I will do is take you through how you can do a number of things in your classroom'. So it is about how you would set it up so that teachers feel comfortable having someone coming to observe them; how you would structure giving teachers feedback about their practice; and how you might run a walk-through, which is simply two or three teachers who go from class to class to class to see what the practice is and report back to the rest of the staff. There are a whole lot of techniques — and they are in my paper; I have a range of them in there — that a school can use to make it a very, very vibrant learning situation.

I am not saying you do not need external staff at some point — because new ideas have to come over the hill, and the department will always have them, or someone else will — but what I am arguing for is a shift from seeing professional development as going off to a workshop or a conference, external to the school, run by an expert, run by a subject association or run by the department, because for the past X years that has absolutely been a waste of time. The only time that the department has run things that have been good has been when they have been very expensive programs, like the early literacy program where they went through the theory, they went through structures in schools and they showed teachers how to actually change their practice, and, as a consequence, practice changed. However, you can only mount those sorts of programs every now and then. They cost millions and millions of dollars to engage all teachers. When you have a one-off event anywhere — at the showground or at a racecourse — it is puff. It is doing nothing, and it will change nothing. Invariably when I say to principals, 'Tell me how much you are getting for your PD dollar. Do you think you are really getting a big change in your school?', they say, 'No'. I say, 'Stop sending folks out. Change the culture internally. Get folks learning from each other'. If people do not know anything, how do they learn to know something? Give them a book. Have a really rich professional learning library so that if they want to know about something, you say, 'Your first task in your professional learning plan is to read this and talk about it to a teacher. Your second thing is to then try it in your classroom. The third thing is for someone to give you feedback about how well you are doing'. It is as simple as that. It is just changing that culture. It will mean teachers opening up their classroom doors, which they are very reluctant to do, and it will mean that there will need to be a lot of trust in the school. There is a start.

Mr HERBERT — Thank you very much, Peter, for your presentation. I think you are fairly harsh on the department, I must say in defence.

Mr COLE — I worked there a long time.

Mr HERBERT — I don't think it is quite is bleak as that. There are many examples that I have seen of some fantastic things in professional development. However, having said that, I would like to congratulate you on your presentation and your submission. It is very professional and also very practical, and I guess that is what I like about it. I found your section on professional learning at the school level to be particularly illuminating and absolute common sense, with some great measures. What I did like about it, and it is something I would like you to comment on, is what you say about mentoring and teachers acting as mentors. Everyone knows that in the Victorian education system we have a major problem with the many really highly trained and highly skilled experienced teachers getting to 54/11 and getting to the end of their professional life, or planning to. That will leave a great brain drain and a great lack of experience. I think that is one of the factors that comes into the equation of professional development, and that is why I thought your proposition that there be a lot more professional development in schools, with mentoring and shared lesson plans, interesting. I would not mind if you could just comment on whether that could be a systemic kind of outcome, in terms of addressing what will be a lot of really experienced, terrific teachers leaving the system.

Mr COLE — When people talk about professional development, most of the research in the area focuses on the primary school. The primary school is the easiest unit to actually think about for how to bring about change and get teachers cooperating. When you get to secondary school it is a different thing altogether. You have teachers who teach all over the school; no-one actually feels responsible for any particular kid: I'm responsible for my class, but not for my kids. So to try and get up mentoring and coaching programs or even classroom visits in the secondary school is generally defeated by the way schools structure themselves. That is, I am a young teacher and I now have my English classes and my history classes, but I am teaching year 9 and year 10 and I have a VCE class. I have discovered that in year 9 I have two kids who cannot read, so what am I going to do about it?

I can spend recess and lunchtime working with these kids, but I also have other classes, so it makes it pretty hard. I could talk to colleagues, but no-one else has these kids like I have these kids, so who do I talk to, because they have 14 teachers across the week? I could say to the principal, 'Why don't we give me some training, because I don't feel competent to do this? There is no training provided for me for this'. I have been into a school and said, 'I'm looking at year 9 data, and I see that a lot of year 9 kids can't read. What have you got for them?'. 'I've got a withdrawal program'. 'Is it working?'. 'Not really'. 'Okay. So if we really thought year 9 was the year we were going to make every kid literate, let's say we spend half the kids' time making them literate; could we do that?'. 'I don't know that we could'. 'Would it help them?'. 'It would'. 'Could we train some teachers into it?'. 'Some we could'. 'Could we then, if we trained them, give' — 'No, because other teachers would object, and the loads would be out of whack, and you would never be able to get it working'. So it seems to me we have a disjuncture and until people in secondary schools say teams of teachers are responsible for a particular team of kids and then have the flexibility within that to make changes, we will never get anything changed in the secondary area. I have always argued that one of the things missing — sorry, Steve, I am off the point here, but I am getting to it.

Mr HERBERT — No, I am thinking that that is a frightening thought, really.

Mr COLE — One of the fundamental flaws with secondary schooling is that as an individual teacher I am never held accountable for a particular group of kids. I am held accountable for my class, but no-one actually expects the kids total experience to be managed by anybody. If I have a problem with a group of kids, what I am really saying is, 'This period is over. Thank God I won't see the kids till Wednesday'. I will see them again next Wednesday, and then I am out of there again. Nothing ever gets resolved. Even if I had the best intent, after a while I am actually going to be exhausted, if I am trying to do catch-up with these kids at recess time, as I tried to when I first started teaching. I look back on a couple of kids I tried to teach. I found that six months had gone by and I had not improved their reading and writing. I am an economics teacher, so I was stepping out of my bounds, but also no-one could train me. When I then got into a group where there were eight of us responsible for year 9 we could say, 'This kid will spend most of their time in English class. We will then come in and do things. As a group we will organise activities. We can take kids out of school. We don't disrupt the rest of the school, because there is a team of us with our own area and we are totally flexible'. If you try to do that when teachers are teaching all over the place and say, 'Let's even run an excursion', 'Let's have some intensive time or change the program', they say 'I can't. I've got to take my VCE class'. No-one takes responsibility. Am I making sense?

One of the weaknesses and why secondary schools are having difficulty improving is that nobody is held accountable and, even if they were held accountable, the structures are such that they work against even the best teacher doing much about poor performance at the school level. I always wanted to mandate it — that teachers do not teach at more than two levels would be my mandate.

Mr HERBERT — The response to that is that increasingly schools are being structured around teams and a lot of capital that is going into new facilities is based on a more open team approach to non-specialist subjects.

Mr COLE — I think the new facilities are great — build a pod. What you tend to find, Steve, is that when they say, 'We've got a middle-year team', what they mean is, 'We've got a team called middle years', but they are not actually exclusively or pretty much working in the middle years. A professional learning team is another title. You think that is a great thing, that all the year 9 teachers are in it, but no, it is a group from all over the place that talks about a common issue. Do you know what I mean?

Mr HERBERT — I do. It is not like a primary school, where you are a group of prep teachers or first — —

Mr COLE — Absolutely. I agree with your structure. I think it will help a hell of a lot. One of the other things I talk about is getting a distinct area within the school where you have a group of teachers and a bunch of kids, and then you can actually modify your program dramatically and then learn from each other. That also helps to then build trust, because you are actually working with a common group of kids as a team, and then, 'Okay, Steve, I don't feel comfortable about doing X; can you show me how to do this?'. Normally I could not organise that because 'I'm sorry, Steve. I would like to see how you do this, but I'm actually going to teach my VCE class and then I've got my year 7 group'. Do you know I mean?

Mr HERBERT — Yes: 'My kids will go crazy if I leave the room'.

Mr COLE — Exactly, but when you are in a team with a particular group it is a different thing altogether.

Mr KOTSIRAS — Even with the year 8 teachers or the year 9 teachers, if you meet with them, they, too, have to teach other classes.

Mr COLE — They do.

Mr KOTSIRAS — How realistic is it that you actually sit down together?

Mr COLE — Very realistic. When you think of it, how many periods do you teach a week? It may be 18 or 19 periods a week you teach — it could be 20 periods a week. If you have got a VCE class, you have got 6. All the rest of that time could be in year 9, so you are in year 9 taking multiples. If I am an English teacher, I will take all the year 9 English and I will perhaps take a humanities. If I am a maths teacher, I will take all the maths and perhaps I will do some science. What you will probably end up with is your core teachers teaching multiple classes in probably two disciplines, which means they are there nearly all the time. What tends to happen is they then tend to throw open the disciplines and actually start to say, 'Let's run a maths-science unit' or 'Let's run an integrated unit of some sort'. It rarely happens in secondary schools because they have not got the time to plan, but if I am there all the time and we are working about our plan, that is how we will work.

Mr KOTSIRAS — Peter, if I were given all the year 9 science classes and all the year 10 science classes — —

Mr COLE — I know that.

Mr KOTSIRAS — I would lose all my hair.

Mr HERBERT — You would go into politics!

Mr COLE — You would.

Mr KOTSIRAS — Everybody used to avoid year 8 and year 9 classes.

Mr COLE — I agree; they do, and that is the problem we have got. It seems to me that either the school organises in the kids' benefit or it organises in the teachers' benefit. To my mind, it organises in the kids' benefit — that is, it is to the kids' benefit to have a limited number of teachers who teach them for a practical period of time and who have got the flexibility to respond to their needs, so for one year or two years you teach at year 9 a hell of a lot of the time. It is in the kids' interests that it happens.

The CHAIR — There is a fair challenge in there.

Mr COLE — I do not think it is a fair challenge.

Mr HERBERT — There are benefits in lesson preparation and the whole value of things also.

Mr COLE — A whole lot of things.

Mr HERBERT — I think most teachers would prefer to at least double up a year level.

Mr COLE — Yes. But also, when you look at the VELS and the new skills they are trying to teach in VELS, it does require you to say, 'When do we give kids these experiences to be leaders? When do we get kids to do that?'. If I am a maths teacher coming in to teach a maths class, I am not going to do it, nor is a history teacher

or someone else, because it is someone else's problem. It is only when you are there for a protracted period of time and have got control of your program that you can do what I would say are the soft skills and develop those in kids.

The CHAIR — That sort of thing is done in years 7 and 8 a whole lot more.

Mr COLE — Exactly.

The CHAIR — Particularly year 7.

Mr COLE — Exactly. In year 9 it is starting to be done. Many independent schools have been running year 9 separately for aeons. It is just hitting the government schools now.

The CHAIR — That is a point. All right. I think you have given us lots to work on there, Peter. Thank you very much. You have put it very succinctly and passionately, too.

Mr COLE — Thank you very much.

Witness withdrew.

C O R E C T E D V E R S I O N

EDUCATION AND TRAINING COMMITTEE

Inquiry into effective strategies for teacher professional learning

Melbourne — 28 March 2008

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Witness

Ms J. Parry, assistant principal, Ringwood Heights Primary School.

The CHAIR — The committee welcomes Jo Parry, the assistant principal at Ringwood Heights Primary School. You listened through Peter's commentary. We are interested to hear how it is working so differently in Ringwood Heights.

Ms PARRY — We are just excellent, you know. That is how it is.

Mr HERBERT — You need to make sure you are on the record to say that.

Ms PARRY — Sure, Steve. Because I am in a school, I did my pulling together of things yesterday, so you did not have the luxury of my presentation. But I have got a handout here for people, and I will refer to it. I have looked at the terms of reference, of course, and in particular I am going to talk about my particular personal experience and relate some of the discussion to the fact that I am doing what I do and have done what I have done. I have looked at the list of people that you have had here today, whom I know, but my situation is quite different, so let me tell you about how that is.

I am an assistant principal at Ringwood Heights Primary School. I have also been acting principal there, on and off, over a period of 12 years. I have, in the last four years, been a middle-years innovations and excellence cluster educator as a result of an initiative by the state government. Even that role has been quite unusual in that I job-shared that with a leading teacher at my school, so we actually job-shared both the leadership position at my school and then the coordination of the work in seven schools. That was not a common scenario in the way that the middle-years educators were appointed or indeed took up positions. That is an interesting aspect. Prior to that I had also been a statewide trainer for early years education, so I had been a teacher trainer when the Early Years program was implemented, and prior to that I was a lecturer at Melbourne uni for eight years. I am a rare beast in that I have jumped in and out of systems and I have chosen to keep going back to schools, because they are not bad places to work and good things do happen. That is my history in a nutshell. I did do some consulting work in northern and western region as a young teacher, and I have reflected about some of the things that impacted on me and made me pursue the sorts of things that I have pursued in my 35 years of being a teacher of some sort or another.

Some of the personal questions that I had listed are probably worthwhile pursuing. One in particular has to do with the relationship, which is the first point of reference, between professional learning for teachers and teaching expertise. As an experienced person in a school now I see that as being an area of hiatus, if you like, in terms of succession planning and longevity. Steve mentioned this with what Peter said about the critical mass of experienced teachers who will not be there soon, and I am probably one of them. In our school more than half our teaching staff are first or second-year graduates, so that is work in progress — isn't it? — and the way we work with those young people to become the next leaders is critical. We have terrific young people in schools doing terrific things, and they are excited about their profession. Mature-aged people who have come into the profession have added another layer of richness to the sorts of work we do. But we also have long, deep wisdom that is about to leave, and that is an issue for us as a profession and certainly as a government system. One of the reasons that I am happy to be back in a school in my current work is to work on developing this mentoring role, this idea of being part of a team and so on. I will talk a little bit about that as we go through.

My background is a bit different to some of the other folk I think you have heard today. I should probably throw in there, 'Has it been deliberate?' in terms of what I have chosen to do and what sorts of career paths we may choose as teacher educators or as practising teachers. I teach four days a week still, and I think that gives me a lot of cred. Some of the things that we are able to move, in terms of what really happens in classroom situations, are able to happen when you have someone who is doing it with our young teachers — someone who is working alongside and being part of the work that schools are doing, whatever that may be. That is an aspect worth considering. The sorts of programs that I deliver are shown in what I have just handed out. The one that I have been most recently involved in, as I said, is the innovations and excellence work. I heard Peter mentioning that to the previous person and talking about small, action research, school-based, identifiable need, achievable goal. That is certainly the calibre of the sort of work that I have been involved with in the last four years. Would it be worthwhile running through that model and explaining that a little bit more?

The CHAIR — Yes.

Ms PARRY — It was a four-year project, as I suggested, and each year the focus changed slightly. I think that is probably a secret to successful professional development. That teachers own the work that they are willing to

undertake and indeed read about, have someone come and observe, involve their learners in it, has got a lot to do with the fact that they feel in control. It is a very subtle thing to set up structures where you are pushing professional development but have individual teachers own and control how that professional development takes place. What we tried to identify in the work that we did over the last four years, if you look at each of the diagrams, was an attempt to graphically represent what changed from year to year. In the first year, in 2004, the shared focus for our seven schools was understanding about inquiry learning. It was actually inquiry for teachers: if I am a good teacher learner, what are the sorts of things that I pursue, what are the behaviours that I exhibit, and how do I go about identifying whether I am making a difference or making any change? That was a shared focus in that first year. Each individual school had its own focus.

In the second year of the project we kept the focus again on inquiry but moved it to students. We looked at student learning and inquiry, we looked at the quality of the curriculum that teachers were working with. Each school still had its own project under way, but we employed a series of outside experts to run what we call twilight sessions. We had some shared input to elaborate on what were the possibilities of inquiry, so you have got this trying to get a balance of what is happening in individual schools but some external input pushing the boundaries, if you like, for what could be possible to help teachers look beyond what was under their nose or in their own school. Some of those people were here this morning. Neville Johnson worked with us, Kath Murdoch worked with us and various people assisted in 2005.

By 2006 we had built relationships between the schools, so in 2006 we looked at the teams of teachers working across schools. For the first two years we had had teachers working in their own schools with their own school-based teams. Then in 2006 we thought that the relationships between the schools were clear enough and we could start to move beyond that. In 2006 we had across-school teams. Not all schools were represented in each team. Some teams were as small as three, but no team was larger than six. I think there is something to do with that size as well that is important in making a difference, that you are accountable to the team and that you are sharing the information you are gathering; you are talking about real kids and you are adding to the collective mass of knowledge at the same time as changing your own practice. Each of those across-school teams had a mentor. It was interesting hearing the time frames that Peter mentioned too. Six to eight weeks is an interesting time, I reckon. Each of these groups had a mentor that met with them about every six to eight weeks.

The CHAIR — An outside person?

Ms PARRY — An outside person, and we aligned the mentor. As the educators for these seven schools we brokered who the mentors would be — we matched the outside expert, if you like, with the group of people — because we were on the ground knowing what it was that they were doing.

The CHAIR — How many people in a group?

Ms PARRY — The smallest group was 3 and the largest group was 6, so in total about 49 teachers across seven schools. These people were the lead players, if you like, in their schools. We worked with that core group of teachers, but of course in their schools they have got other people working with them, so you have got this layering approach happening.

In the last year of the project, which was the 2007 one, realising that the project was likely to end, the funding was going to finish, in essence what we were saying was, 'If this has been good, what makes it sustainable? What is worth hanging on to? What is worth doing again or worth revisiting?' We went back to the individual school model, but our core focus now became leading learning. We developed a learning leaders team — one key person in the school working closely with the principals. We had two teams going, and I think that is an important factor as well. It means you have got the leadership or administration at the school being very closely in touch with what is happening with your professional development that is being driven by your key leaders in the school. That was the 2007 project — strengthening what we have called school-based action and learning teams, which is really the school owning its own learning and linking up to the sorts of agendas that the school is wanting to drive.

Who chooses those agendas? Ideally all the stakeholders, but in essence it is how the principal organises the processes by which the professional development happens in the school and the process by which curriculum leadership is driven in the school. Again, as an assistant principal I see myself as a key player in that. The schools who were able to move more quickly than others had very good structures in place where the leadership team supported and knew about the sort of work the teachers were trying to pursue, trying to make better and trying to

impact on student learning. Those sorts of factors are key, I think. I will pause and draw breath for a minute, or so you can ask questions about those models.

The CHAIR — You have got 49 lead teachers who are involved in these circle diagrams.

Ms PARRY — Yes.

The CHAIR — What is then happening with the other schools and teachers within the schools over this period?

Ms PARRY — There are actually only seven lead teachers, one from each school, and I think that is critical. That was a team in itself. Each of those teachers has a team of about — —

The CHAIR — Six.

Ms PARRY — Yes, six or seven, depending on the size of the school. That is key. It was a middle years project, so that was the focus. Generally teachers use years 5 to 9. I think that is not a bad thing. I think you do not have to have all of your staff on board at the same time. In fact it is probably unrealistic to expect it, and it is also not necessarily the most effective or productive way to go because you need to have teachers looking at each other as well. The early years model was similar because you had your P-4 people working then. Depending on how that was implemented in schools, depending on the leadership in the school, principals or assistant principals could put up a framework where we shared the information that was happening but the action was actually happening in a definite number of classrooms. We moved that action cycle around our school.

The model that we implemented here was a model that Kath Murdoch and I worked on, and Kath has implemented in Tasmania. It is the idea of this small team-based stuff working. We trialled it at our school at Ringwood Heights through the '90s. It is a small team of teachers saying, 'Yes, we are up for it', other teachers having conversations with them, the work being public, sharing what they were doing, videoing their kids, being proud of what their kids do, saying, 'You wouldn't believe who taught this kid two years ago; look what is happening now' — the sort of public, to use an overused word, celebration of successes, and problem-solving of the challenges because it is not all smooth. If you are doing the inquiry-based work in schools, there are hiccoughs — what will it look like in the end? Sometimes we are not sure, so you have to go in there and say, 'I am thinking this is what I want to get better at. I do not necessarily know what the end looks like but I think that these things will be evident'.

Some of those key markers I think we can identify. One is to do with teacher satisfaction, so some of the tools that we already use in schools — teacher surveys, student survey data, parent opinion surveys — are all helpful for us in saying, 'These are measurable, identifiable things that we can see', and there are some very simple ones to do with the level of student engagement like asking kids, 'Why did you love that? What made that work?'

Mr KOTSIRAS — How many students do you have at Ringwood Heights Primary School?

Ms PARRY — There are 300.

Mr KOTSIRAS — And staff?

Ms PARRY — Staff? Twelve classrooms; all up about 22 with part-time specialists and so on.

Mr KOTSIRAS — You are there now — how many years have you been at Ringwood?

Ms PARRY — I have been there 12 years. This is my 13th year.

Mr KOTSIRAS — So yours should be one of the schools that we should perhaps go out and look at in terms of teachers, classrooms et cetera.

Ms PARRY — We are a good school, yes.

Mr KOTSIRAS — Do you get other schools coming in to have a look at Ringwood?

Ms PARRY — We do; we get people coming from New Zealand and from Tasmania and the United States.

That is probably another point that would help something come out of this inquiry. Some schools put their hands up to be great collaborators; I think we are one of those schools. We have published documents in the past and sold them to other schools. We think they were fairly polished but they probably could have been better. Nonetheless we make the effort to say, 'Let us share this around'. Increasingly in a school our size that is a tough gig to do. I teach four days so I am the person who normally greets our visitors, along with the principal. We try and share that around too, so if I am in your classroom, Nick, and you have done a great thing I will say to one of our visitors, 'I will release Nick so that he can actually talk with you about his work'. We try and get this flattening of who holds the knowledge, and we try and bring on our teachers who are doing good things.

Mr KOTSIRAS — Have you had any feedback from the secondary schools about your students going into year 7 and students from other primary schools going into year 7?

Ms PARRY — Yes.

Mr KOTSIRAS — Are your students different?

Ms PARRY — Time to brag!

Mr HALL — It is a Dorothy Dixer he has asked you, I think.

Ms PARRY — Our main local high school is the school that we get a lot of feedback from, which is good. Given the size of school we are, our students take up leadership positions. They box beyond their weight in that sense. They take up leadership positions and they pursue the small scholarship program that that schools runs. Yes, the feedback is good and the connection keeps coming back to us and saying that the secondary school is interested in the sort of work that we have done.

Mr HALL — Is the key to all this the ability to link student outcomes or achievements with your professional learning model?

Ms PARRY — I think you are absolutely right — that is absolutely the key. I think the other thing that goes with that is acknowledging that teachers have never finished their work and you never get it right. It is a weird thing to say but I really believe that. It is the thing that has kept me in teaching for as long as it has. There is that balance between saying to young teachers, though, 'You are doing a good job but there are things that we could even do in a different way or do better', or 'We have heard about something', or 'Look at this cohort of kids'. Yes, but it does absolutely hinge on the relationship stuff with the kids and the improved learning for kids.

Mr HALL — Do you get enough resources in your school to do what you would like to with respect to staff learning?

Ms PARRY — Absolutely not! I will tell you truthfully: we do a good job with what we have, but I think that my observation about what is harder currently compared to what was perhaps not so hard, say 20 years ago, is to do with allocating or even identifying budgets. Even in identifying what is a professional learning budget or a professional development budget in a school, there is no such thing. Again it is up to principals. According to your staffing profile, that will determine the amount of dollars you have to spend on professional development. If you have an experienced staff, you have very little dollars to spend on professional development, so that is the critical thing, I think. If we take on young teachers and we do the job well in looking after those young teachers, while they cost less dollars, you actually should release those young teachers more, to observe other practitioners. That is a double-edged sword, I think. The professional development dollar is very skinny in government schools.

Mr HALL — Do you think it should be identified in terms of budget funding in the schools?

Ms PARRY — I think — she says with the administrator hat on now — as a principal where I can see a line item and we can see how much we have to top up the budget, that is a better way of saying, 'We have spent that much on our teacher learning', and if we generate some income because we have visitors in our school or because we sell some publications, we can identify where that goes, again in terms of our staff owning that.

Mr HALL — Do you have a view on what sort of percentage of your total budget should be dedicated to professional learning?

Ms PARRY — I can tell you what our budget is. For a staff of about 20-odd teachers we have a budget of about $20 000, so it is about $1000 per teacher. If you think about the cost of about $240 for one CRT day to replace a teacher, the cost of the attendance at an outside gig is about $400, so you would get one external visit per teacher, which is nothing, is it?

Mr HALL — No. Out of even a very modest $50 000 salary $1000 is 2 per cent, is it not?

Ms PARRY — Yes, so it probably should be at least around 5 per cent at the very least, but schools do not have the money to do that, I do not think.

Mr HERBERT — It would be an interesting concept, though, to check that schools that amass quite large bank balances, in the millions — —

Mr KOTSIRAS — It is a mean government.

Mr HERBERT — It would be interesting to see how much they have in fact spent out of their basic global budget on professional development because your point is very relevant, that if you are saving money out of your staffing costs because you have a younger staff and they cost less, how much are you in fact putting into the professional development of those staff.

Ms PARRY — It is, and we certainly looked at our budget over, say, three-year periods. The other thing that schools need to do, rather than look at a one-year hit, is look at the sorts of things that you want to change over, say, the period of a strategic plan, which is about four years.

Mr HALL — Do you think the target that VIT has set in terms of its mandatory 100 hours over five years is an appropriate target or would you exceed that with your staff?

Ms PARRY — We would exceed that, I think. Again this is the internal structuring of how our principal and the leadership team set up their delivery of professional development. We have deliberately targeted our staff meeting time, the after-hour meeting time, as professional development time when teachers look at and share their practice. Our teams rotate through that. Yes, I think it is good and we would exceed it.

Mr HERBERT — It is an excellent program, that Schools for Innovation and Excellence program.

Ms PARRY — It was terrific.

Mr HERBERT — I had a little bit to do with the submission of that to the ERC. It does remind us that in fact that was about a $240 million program. We hear a lot about the lack of resource, but that was a $240 million program that was basically premised on the fact that schools work in clusters to develop what they need in terms of improving outcomes through providing better flexibility for the staff and for working out how they can structure their own professional development or their own learning needs or their own curriculum development — whatever you want to call it — in a far less structured way than the traditional way. I was interested to hear that you seem to be saying that it worked exceptionally well in your cluster and I was just wondering, as it was a lot of money and was just recently done, do you think that is the model ahead, that local flexible approach to professional development? Do you have any other anecdotal, quantitative or qualitative analysis of where it has worked in other clusters too?

Ms PARRY — Sure, that is a great question. While there has been not an extension of innovations and excellence work, there has been a variation.

Mr HERBERT — In the maths and science area?

Ms PARRY — Yes, for the coaching staff, that is going on now. A great idea but the time frame is too short, I think. The current investment in that coaching program I hope will work, but I do not think it will. I would say that the two years it took us to get the relationship stuff going before you coach is crucial.

Mr HERBERT — Were you one of the first years off?

Ms PARRY — We were the second, phase 2, and even that is interesting because we did not play the geographic game; we actually went with like-minded schools. I think that is another key thing, that if you give

schools some autonomy in who they work with, you can do great things more quickly. Then, when you do great things, we said we could have probably split our seven schools as a cluster into two smaller clusters and then probably taken on some underperforming schools. You invite schools into what has been a successful program. I think it has to be fluid. I think that is one suggestion that could possibly work. We need a mixture of things. Some of my colleagues would say centralised, systemised, documented-program teacher PD does not work. I think it does. There is a place for that but it is not a one-size-fits-all model. If you think of some of the growth corridor schools in both southern and north-western region, where we have young staff, we do need to have documentation of best practice. The early years is a good model of that. We need a combination of both.

The other thing I think we need to consider is that not every school needs to be in the same model at the same time. I think that we do not need to spend all the dollars Here is the problem of the politics of education, is it not, and the funding that goes with it? I do not think that every school needs to be in because some schools are not ready. If we are looking at the current trend in coaching as a good model for teacher professional development, who is ready to be coached? I think we are a great school. We have young staff. We have four staff who need to be mentored — quite different from coaching — and probably three or four of us are ready to be coached. I think it is that sort of thing that also needs to happen.

On the clustering and making decisions about resources, I think we could actually do some things where we left our cluster. It was the equivalent of one full-time leading teacher on an assistant principal's salary and I think it does require that experience to do the job well. I reckon we could do a good job now on, say, 0.2 or 0.4 of a salary. As a good school it could be someone like me or it could be someone else in another school who moves outside their own school. That model would also be worth looking at rather than a full-time consultant per se.

The CHAIR — Thank you, Jo.

Ms PARRY — Pleasure, Geoff.

The CHAIR — You have provided us with a great insight and some great information and again have been very passionate about the way you have shared that with us.

Ms PARRY — Good on you.

The CHAIR — Thank you very much.

Witness withdrew.

C O R R E C T E D V E R S I O N

EDUCATION AND TRAINING COMMITTEE

Inquiry into effective strategies for teacher professional learning

Melbourne — 28 March 2008

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Ms E.Kinns, project manager, Gould Group.

The CHAIR — You come from a slightly different area than the previous speakers today, who have all been very much in broad area professional learning in schools. You are more defined. We are certainly interested in what you have to say and then we will ask questions. Thank you for coming to address our inquiry on professional teacher learning.

Ms KINNS — I will start by giving you a brief overview of my background and the context of the Gould Group. I am one of the project managers at the Gould Group, which is a not-for-profit organisation. We provide environmental sustainability education and training through a range of professional learning opportunities for teachers, including facilitated face-to-face workshops.

The CHAIR — Can I just stop you to check whether the Gould Group is a flow-on from the old Gould League?

Mr HERBERT — Is it the same thing?

Ms KINNS — Yes.

The CHAIR — You have your headquarters in an old school somewhere down St Kilda way?

Ms KINNS — Yes, in Moorabbin. That is right.

The CHAIR — I just wanted to make sure I was not off on a tangent.

Ms KINNS — No, not at all. We have been around for about 100 years but about probably two years ago we became more corporate and we are doing more training.

Mr HERBERT — And you do the big Federation Square environment stuff with schools?

Ms KINNS — Yes, that is right, Gould Green Christmas. In terms of our professional learning opportunities for teachers, we do the face-to-face workshops, we provide online mentored support for teachers and also online do-it-yourself training. In 2006 and 2007 I was managing the delivery of the Waste Wise schools program on behalf of the Gould Group, which involved delivering professional development workshops and coordinating those and also providing follow-up support. My prior experience is in primary school teaching and also as a regional education officer for waste management groups across Victoria. They provide support to schools and then also community groups and businesses. The Gould Group's submission was developed with input from Anita Kosterlitz and Helen Widdop Quinton, a couple of my colleagues. Anita and Helen both have extensive experience in the classroom as well as in professional development for teachers and research in the education field.

Now teachers time outside the classroom I think is really precious and professional learning must be valuable and relevant for teachers. The key elements of successful professional learning from our perspective include providing a combination of theory, practice and reflection; actively involving teacher participants so that they can acquire skills and attitudes to resolve questions and issues while still constructing new knowledge; providing a network of support consisting of experienced teachers and other educators; and allowing for peer sharing and mentoring, so giving teachers the opportunities to network in their groups and to support each other in those groups.

In response to term of reference (a), we feel there is a close relationship between ongoing professional learning for teachers and teaching expertise. Career pathways for teachers are limited and professional learning provides opportunities for teachers to develop new and enhanced existing teaching skills. Professional learning can also enable teachers to take on additional roles within schools, such as leadership roles, project management and research roles. Teachers are then in a position to transfer those skills that they develop to the students and into the classrooms. It is vital, we feel, in professional development to engage teachers as learners and not just provide information sessions that are stand-alones that have no application in the classroom.

At the Gould Group teacher professional learning experiences have a 'walk the journey together' learning journey approach. Professional and experienced facilitators present new information and then support and mentor teachers as they apply the new approaches in their own situations to enrich, problem solve and plan for changes. In Waste Wise Schools professional development, for example, you have an initial full-day workshop, and in the mornings of those workshops teachers are given new information and tools. Then in the afternoons they are supported to actually apply these tools in their classrooms and in their own school situations. Ongoing support is provided to schools in the form of an email and phone advisory service.

At the Gould Group we equip teachers with the skills to change culture in their school by actions including enlisting support constructively, developing a diverse team with a range of attitudes, embedding change in school culture, developing project management and leadership skills, and involving students and parents in decision making. This ensures that the professional learning experience continues to provide relevance and value long term in the school environment. Gould Group does not provide programs that tell teachers what to do, nor give teachers a set program to follow. We guide them to plan, design and implement programs for themselves, using the tools provided and offering examples, case studies and expert guidance. This leads to authentic, real-life learning programs that lead to tangible outcomes — things like reducing paper usage and greenhouse gas emissions — and also less tangible outcomes such as improved student confidence and reduced absenteeism for both staff and students. We have had independent evaluations of schools that have been involved in our programs which have demonstrated this.

In response to term of reference (b), Gould Group has identified a range of factors that support high-quality professional learning from teachers. One key factor in our professional learning programs is that teachers are supported beyond the initial professional learning experience. Support is provided a number of ways, including resources, online tutorials, advisory services and follow-up workshops. For example, the Waste Wise Schools professional development workshop participants were supported with a phone and email advisory service, a regular e-newsletter and a follow-up half-day workshop. Gould Group professional learning programs focus on empowering students with a different set of skills to refocus and reinvigorate their classroom practice. While there is an environmental sustainability focus to the programs that we run, the educational approaches, skills and strategies that are used are relevant for broader use in teaching practice.

Other aspects of effective professional learning include delivering a combination of theory, practice and reflection, using the inquiry-based model where learners are involved and acquire skills and attitudes to resolve questions and issues while constructing new knowledge, providing an action-based approach to teaching and learning, and again networking, peer support and mentoring are really important. One other thing that is vital is having practical-based content that has direct links to application at the school on an operational level as well as in the classroom.

In response to term of reference (c), online professional learning is a growing trend in Victoria and worldwide. The Gould Group's Schoolgrounds for Learning program blends face to face and online with an initial workshop, followed by six months of weekly online tutorials and activities. Examples and templates are provided electronically, and there is assistance to start to implement a school grounds enhancement project. Most schools end up with a three to five-year master plan for their schools.

Sustainability Wiz is a new Gould Group program that provides a guided virtual learning journey for sustainability education. There are moderated online global forums for teachers, students and principals; international sustainability case studies; and whole-school programs. Virtual learning is an effective and flexible way to make use of the limited time teachers have for professional development. It is also a valuable opportunity for remote schools to participate in professional learning that they would otherwise be unable to access. Online professional learning opens the door to collaboration between schools from a wide range of cultures, which in itself enriches the learning process. From our experience and also from the experience of our IT partners, Etech, Australian schools have been slower to take up the online learning options. We feel that that is because there is a lack of confidence and competence by a lot of teachers out there, and also because IT facilities can be really limited in a lot of schools. Because of that, private schools seem to take it up more readily, because they tend to have more resources available.

Term of reference (d) asks how best practice in ongoing professional learning for teachers can be delivered into schools and learning communities. Gould Group incorporates a number of elements to support the delivery of professional learning. We provide time release to attend professional learning sessions, and with almost all of our programs, teachers and schools are paid to attend those workshops, which we think is really important because of the limited funding that is available for professional development. We also acknowledge that there is a real equity of access issue for regional schools, and we make sure that we provide workshops regionally as well as providing online and phone support for schools.

We try to encourage and assist experienced teachers and schools to provide support to new schools and new teachers which are taking up our programs, and we try to make links from a range of sources for participating schools. For example, with Waste Wise Schools schools in the network are supported by a network of regional education officers from waste management groups across Victoria, as well as by local government education

officers and other education officers. In many instances local government will provide special services for Waste Wise Schools, such as free recycling services. Gould Group utilises both internal and independent external evaluation to inform reviews and continuously improve our professional learning programs. We ensure that our programs have long-term benefits and that these are monitored. This includes benchmark data collection. Through implementing our programs, schools have reported significant reductions in costs, greenhouse gas emissions and carbon footprints, water and waste.

In response to term of reference (e), Gould Group develops partnerships to provide additional support for teachers and schools participating in our professional learning programs, as I outlined with the Waste Wise schools program. Where appropriate our programs involve activities in conjunction with complementary organisations, such as local businesses and tertiary students. By working with these program partner groups teachers are provided with active professional learning opportunities while undertaking practical, student-focused programs.

Finally, in response to term of reference (f), there is a high proportion of females in the teaching profession, so it follows that a high proportion of females come to our professional development sessions. The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development has found that women are generally less confident with ICT and need more support to start using these virtual learning environments, and Gould Group has also identified this, and we try to make sure that the professional learning journey starts with either a face-to-face workshop or a guided online professional development session that demonstrates the virtual learning environment.

In closing I would like to highlight the key elements that I feel are important for effective professional development. These include: actively involving teachers in professional learning experiences and providing more than just information sessions; having practical content with direct links to school environment and to classroom practice; providing some form of follow-up support, whether that be online or providing access to a network of other education providers, or it could even just be providing an avenue for all those workshop participants to stay in touch after the workshop; and providing time release for the professional development and then also time release back in the school to actually be able to implement what has been learnt at professional development.

The CHAIR — Thanks, Emily.

Mr HALL — Thank you for your contribution. It was very interesting. Do the programs you deliver have any form of accreditation that you have to seek before you deliver them?

Ms KINNS — Does the Gould Group need to have accreditation?

Mr HALL — Was your Waste Wise program audited, accredited or officially recognised by anybody?

Ms KINNS — It was actually managed by Sustainability Victoria, so it was something that we delivered and managed the delivery of. We also worked closely with the department of education on our programs. In terms of getting a set plan that goes to the department for approval, that was not something that happened. There are instances where teachers who are involved with our programs become accredited with a university course certificate or something like that but, in terms of the actual programs, they are individually externally evaluated and they are generally attached to some state government or state government agency. There is no official accreditation process.

Mr HALL — In terms of the delivery of your program, do you encourage single or a number of participants from a school to go back and broadcast that further within their own school group?

Ms KINNS — It can be hard with the level of demand that we have for the workshops and from schools but, where possible, we like to try to get at least two teachers to come from one school to a workshop so that they actually form a mini-team in themselves before they go back and try to recruit others.

Mr HALL — To implement it broadly across the school?

Ms KINNS — That is right.

Mr HALL — In terms of the cost of your programs, do you generally find that schools will meet the cost of their staff participation or do individual teachers pay for that themselves?

Ms KINNS — I do not know of a case where individual teachers pay for their own professional development. Most of the time we have funding provided by state government or by another program partner to meet the costs of people attending those workshops.

Mr HALL — So generally there is no contribution from schools or individual participants?

Ms KINNS — Generally speaking there could be costs associated with being involved in the whole program. For example, with Schoolgrounds for Learning there is a cost to schools to be involved in the whole six-month process, but money is usually provided for the actual workshop, so teachers do not need have to pay for it.

Mr KOTSIRAS — How do teachers or schools find out about your programs?

Ms KINNS — Through a range of different ways. We have newsletters and emails that we send out to all schools in Victoria, but also often there will be promotion. For example, if it is through Sustainability Victoria, then it is through Sustainability Victoria. Sometimes they are advertised and promoted through the department of education, and we will have advertisements go into the *Education Times*. They are the main ways.

The CHAIR — Good. Thank you, Emily. That outlines the program very well.

Mr HERBERT — It is terrific to see that the Gould League that many of us belonged to as young people is thriving today in education.

Mr KOTSIRAS — Steve, was it around in your time?

The CHAIR — Absolutely!

Ms KINNS — It is 100 years old!

Mr HERBERT — Before my time.

Mr HALL — It was called the bird lovers club or something.

The CHAIR — I still have some of my old Gould League of Bird Lovers books.

Ms KINNS — Thank you for your time.

Committee adjourned.