



# AUSTRALIAN PRINCIPALS CENTRE Monograph Number 11

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he presented over  
the two days.

## THE APC SUMMER INSTITUTE, 2003: A TWO-DAY WORKSHOP WITH PROFESSOR PAUL BREDESON

### INTRODUCTION

A shift is taking place, away from the idea of “professional development” and towards a concept of “professional learning”. This paper has been prepared in that context, looking at the intersection between professional learning and work, and taking into account the capacity of participants to engage with the acquisition of knowledge both for personal growth and to meet the needs of their institutions. It addresses a number of themes, including:

- professional development as part of leadership;
- learning, leadership and work; and
- the exploration of professional learning using the metaphor of architecture.

The paper encourages professional educators to use the lens of their own experience to explore a range of mechanisms, messages and meanings. Finally it addresses the idea of an ethical architecture for professional learning, exploring the possible links in practice between learning, leadership and professional ethics.

### A NEW ARCHITECTURE FOR PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPEMNT

The role of the leader, in a school or other organisation, in terms of professional learning/professional development, is multi-dimensional. Some of the dimensions include the following:

#### Leader as learner

That leaders should set an example as learners comes as no surprise, but they need to take care to adapt to change, and not allow their ways of thinking to become reified monuments.

Metaphorically, they need to tell their staff “*Watch what I do, not what I say*”. An institution dedicated to learning must have a leader who models what that means — including the taking of risks along the way.

#### Leader as architect/designer

Architecture and design are about the definition and creation of space. Who creates educational spaces? I cannot remember an occasion when somebody asked me, in my capacity as a teacher, “*What do you do in that space or role?*”

Yet it is the role of the educational leader to create spaces for learning — deciding what they will look like. And not just in physical terms. To do that they need to be more than managers of resources, and accordingly they will need to develop their skills in a range of related areas.

#### Leader as evaluator

Part of the leader’s role is to check what goes on in professional learning and evaluate its effectiveness in terms of achieving desired outcomes. This relates to various levels of accountability; in the USA, \$19 billion a year is spent on professional development — and that is the overt cost of programs. It is hard to estimate the indirect costs on top of that. It is even harder to evaluate the outcomes for the participants; even more so for the students who should benefit from improved teaching and learning.

#### Exploring the nature of professional development

Professional development has a dynamic quality. To help “hold it still” and examine it, I suggest using the language of architecture as a framework. This will help peel away some of the meanings, create a conceptual whole from all the educational vocabulary that is used, and allow for some useful comparisons.

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First, let's define professional development as an anchoring point:

*Professional development refers to learning opportunities that engage educators' creative and reflective capacities in ways that strengthen their practice.*

Now, let's explore it a little further using the architectural metaphor.

## The metaphor of architecture

Frank Lloyd Wright was a student at Wisconsin University, where I work, and has had a profound impact in the area. Lloyd Wright's own house, Taliesin, was seen as a dynamic entity.



Wright was always redesigning it. Because of the continual changes that he anticipated from the first, the architect never put down permanent footings. He said of a house designed to be unchanging that it *"lies about everything"*.

We can learn from this. Education and professional development are "houses" that cannot remain unchanged in changing times, where the occupants have changing needs. We must reconceptualise and transform them. In that context, professional development must not be seen as an "add-on" or an annexe to the work of education; as a design theme, we need to embed it in the very notion of professionalism and distinguish it from credentialism.

We need to evaluate how well the professional development "house" meets the needs of its "occupants". Professional development, after all, is about people — not programs — their minds, hearts and souls.

At the APC Summer Institute I asked participants to break into groups and, using architecture as a vehicle, select a physical piece of architecture to represent the learning space in one of their organisations. They would then be asked to report back on why they had chosen that building, what it symbolised or highlighted for them, and what were its limitations — what was there and what was not there, but needed to be.

**Group 1** chose the Leaning Tower of Pisa as a metaphor for the Education Department. They commented that:

- it's hard to get to the top;
- there are ethical considerations in getting there;
- the structure is circular, with people moving around inside the structure;
- there is an upward and downward spiral of messages — and it is often hard to hit the intended target with a given message.

They argued that a less vertical structure would have an effect on the way that the organisation operates.

**Group 2** chose Stonehenge as a metaphor for a positive school:

- its circularity has connotations of safety and collaboration;
- it is made of solid stones that have stood the test of time;
- it is a meeting place and forum for discussion;
- it has deep meanings, to do with beliefs and values, for those associated with it; and
- although it may sometimes appear shaky after all this time, it is enduring and still holds things up.

**Group 3** chose a Bangkok renewal program they had encountered, where a bridge was planned and built, starting from both sides of a river. When they reached the middle, the two sections did not meet. The group saw this as a metaphor for a school where good ideas and intentions did not always come together to achieve the anticipated outcomes.

**Group 4** thought about what sort of building might be a suitable metaphor for a Catholic Education Regional Office. They suggested that such a building would be: circular, inclusive, with intersecting areas; a bit like the Melbourne Cricket Ground, where light towers stand above the area and cut into the circle, illuminating the central area of action; decorated with flags to illustrate the vision and beliefs that the organisation stands for; surrounded by parks and trees, representing the schools for which the organisation provides services.

**Group 5** chose two architectural examples to illustrate changes over time for a rural secondary college — moving from being a museum towards something more like the Melbourne docklands redevelopment. The museum metaphor speaks for itself. In the redevelopment mode, the school is working on



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*While everybody likes the potential of change, few if any like the disruption that comes with it.*

new teaching and learning styles, with professional development geared to that direction. There is sharing of strategies and ideas — particularly in Science and Maths — both face-to-face and more widely via the internet. While the new approaches are represented by the metaphor of the docklands, the museum still survives to some degree, particularly in the entrenched attitudes to change of some staff.

## The value of the metaphor

Design is purposeful. In professional development, the aim is to engage people and help them to strengthen their practice. That practice has been developed over time. It does not suddenly disappear. It provides foundations upon which further building can take place.

Similarly, Frank Lloyd Wright built upon the foundations of his experience. At Taliesin, now a museum devoted to his work, there are building blocks that he was given at the age of four. He drew upon a lifetime of experience as he continually refined his practice, through the exploration of enduring and shifting themes.

As Lloyd Wright realised, structure needs to be appropriate to time, place, people and purpose — but who or what determines that?

In education, we have often defined and structured learning in terms of timetables — leading to deeply embedded patterns of behaviour, reinforced by repetition. Where the need for change has been identified, educators have frequently opted for a “dynamic sameness”. While everybody likes the potential of change, few if any like the disruption that comes with it. The tendency has therefore been to create change that is symbolic and superficial, rather than actually explore the underpinning concepts and practice.

Frank Lloyd Wright tried a lot of different things. Not all worked well. Not all lasted. Some were too early for the technology that would make them work — for example butting glass to glass, which in Wright’s time led to water leaks, but nowadays has become an accepted form of construction — but the ideas were there.

As educators we need to go with our ideas as Lloyd Wright did. Like him, we cannot always wait for the technology to catch up. That is an argument for indefinite maintenance of the status quo. The key is to work out where we want to go, and then work out how to get there.

We have no choice but to work in a blend of past, present and future. Melbourne Central, with its mixture of original, new and futuristic buildings and spaces, provides an architectural metaphor for this. In deciding directions, we need to take into account:

- what we honour;
- what is working; and
- what we need to aim for.

While striving for change, it is often important to keep familiar symbolic forms and structures in front of people so they can find their appearance reassuring and continue to attach to them. For example, despite all the advances made with computers, and our desire to use them more and more quickly, we cling to keyboards — which remain as a hangover from typewriters. In fact, in the early days of typewriters, keyboards were designed to slow down the user so that the keys did not jam. Now that is forgotten, they are seen as tools with an efficiency that we rarely question, and their familiarity is one of their greatest strengths.

We need both to retain and challenge familiar forms — seeking an efficient balance between comfort and change. In education, we do not need to beat out of people all the ingrained images that they have of schools and schooling. We need to link them in meaningful ways as we reflect on the relationships between past, present and future.

## Reflection

We require an enhanced capacity to look simultaneously at what is happening now, what used to happen and what we want to happen. Only if we can do that well — in a process of **contemporaneous reflection** — will we be able to make the best possible judgements and adapt on our feet to cope with rapid change.

We also need to engage in **anticipatory reflection**, rehearsing what might possibly happen. A variation on this process is one of **“creative pessimism”** — imagining what might go wrong, raising issues and considering what we would do. This can be a valuable approach in organisations, where it can be used to develop a range of alternative strategies by engaging the usually inaccessible creative energies of habitually pessimistic staff members.

Negatives should not necessarily be feared in an organisation; they should be used to identify ways of making things work better.

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All organisations have “resisters”. They are a valuable resource, since they have the aptitude and attitude that equip them to identify the downsides of situations and plans, then help face and deal with them. See them as “alarm bells” or “Alert” signals — they are good at it. The worst thing that could have happened for my career would have been never to encounter negative feedback. Sure, people who query and resist can be irritating, but remember that it takes a piece of sand to irritate an oyster into producing a pearl!

## THE ESSENCE OF DESIGN

The architect Vitruvius, in ancient times, said that design and architecture have three essential elements: Function, which serves the interests of clients; Structure and Beauty. Those elements are as pertinent now as they were two thousand years ago.

### Function

A fundamental function is to meet the needs of the clients. Who are the clients, in professional learning, whose interests need to be served? To a greater or lesser degree they will include:

- teachers;
- students;
- principals;
- systems; and
- the broader school community.

We need to think more inclusively — not just in terms of the participants directly involved in particular activities. That is a very narrow band. Who benefits directly or indirectly from a particular activity or program, and how? Who doesn't benefit ... and should they?

In that context, what sort of professional development is being offered at present? In the USA considerable resources are going into activities related to state/policy mandates. They are about teacher/administrator compliance with regulations. In this case, often what happens in the name of development is alienation rather than motivation. What strategies can we think of to improve the situation?

- Should we provide remuneration for attendance? Might that backfire to a point where people would only participate if they were paid?

- How might we expand apparently finite resources?
- How can we provide motivation that is both internal and external to the organisation?

Certainly we should be prepared to negotiate ways for participants to perceive personal as well as professional benefits; that is different from encouraging a “what's in it for me?” mentality. We should ask our target audience what it would take for them to change their thinking and/or attitudes, but beyond that we need to engage them in the moral purpose and values of the organisation and the profession. Once engaged, they will go way beyond what we are asking of them. As Joyce and Showers have commented: “They will take executive control”.<sup>1</sup>

### Structure

What factors do we need to take into account in terms of structure? Systems, processes, design, organisation, communication and resourcing — all of these are integral sub-elements and need to be reviewed if we are to achieve a sense of wholeness and unity in our reform efforts.

### Beauty

Beauty is a concept that we can grasp easily in reference to buildings or architectural designs, but we are less accustomed to using the concept in relation to learning spaces.

What about the shared experience of learning between professor and students, or the medium and style of the work that we do? Can these not be beautiful? We tend not to think that way. We are so busy doing the job that we rarely stand back, look and appreciate the qualities in what we are doing.

Using an analogy, it is as though we are so engrossed in living out the contents and atmosphere of a complex and all-encompassing book, that we do not keep in mind what the executive summary would tell us about the essence of the book's meaning and purpose. It is very difficult for many people — however professionally competent and conscientious — to extract, remember, value and express that essence with regard to teaching and learning.

Furthermore, it may be difficult enough for teachers to find the right **words**, but ask them to represent such ideas in **visual terms** and many more will think they cannot do it. Yet beauty is



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often thought of in relation to pictures and images. Many of our students think and learn visually as much as they do through words. It is an interesting statement about current education systems that our teachers often feel uncomfortable working outside an environment dominated by verbal and written communication.

## Standards

In the USA, new national standards for leaders have been established in three categories:

- knowledge;
- dispositions; and
- performance capacities.

A licence based on these categories is becoming a pre-requisite to take on school leadership. Unfortunately, in practice, this tends to break down into “laundry lists”, to tick off.

Wisconsin adopted the standards, but it was difficult to know how to represent and express them. This gave us the “chance of a lifetime”, to determine what the standards really mean, how they manifest themselves and how they can be assessed. We have been working on that for two years at my university. One of the beauties of this process from our point of view has been that when the faculty went on retreat to discuss the issues, members refused to break into groups. They were determined not to let structure get in the way; they wanted to stay together and have a holistic dialogue.

## Applying some of the ideas

At the APC Summer Institute, as an activity related to the themes outlined above, I asked the participants to identify a major learning opportunity in an organisation that they knew. I asked them to look at this example, working in groups and using retrospective reflection. They were to focus their thinking on the elements of design that I outlined above:

- **Function**, particularly in terms of identifying clients who were or were not being served);
- **Structure**, particularly in terms of frameworks and infrastructures; and
- **Beauty**, as they perceived it.

**Group 1** looked at a program for female aspiring Principals. They determined that the client group, being very specific, was clearly identified and served by the program. The structure was on-site professional development provided by an external consultant, with support from a mentor program. Its beauties were varied. For example, the program:

- provided opportunities to look at multiple relationships;
- had effects that were akin to the spreading ripples from a pebble in a pond;
- attracted more applicants than there were places, on the basis of word-of-mouth endorsements by participants;
- was based on individual motivation, where participants chose to apply, rather than having the program imposed on them;
- was a transportable model; and
- “gave you a rosy glow”.

Some further interesting remarks and insights were offered.

One group member said that she had problems with the concept of “beauty”, which implies an ideal, classic model, still and unchanging. The same problem applies with the use of a term such as “best” practice, which assumes that an ideal can be achieved and sustained, rather than there being a dynamic process of striving for constant improvement as new possibilities, facets and nuances emerge.

Another spoke of how form can follow function, and commented on the importance of remembering the origins of current forms and practice. At Eton College, the elite educational institution in England, for example, there is now considerable emphasis on the use of modern techniques, facilities and electronic learning technologies, but the school also maintains one classroom as it was in days gone by. The point made from this observation was a strong one: Whatever the facilities and structures, the crucial factor in learning is the quality and relevance of the pedagogy.

**Group 2** commented on an in-school leadership program. This had reached its clients successfully because of its high degree of localised targeting. In addition to its on-site components, its structure included a retreat, with learning syndicates. In terms of beauty, it emerged that participants wanted to feel valued — having it recognised and acknowledged that they were making a genuine contribution while they were building their professional skills.



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**Group 3** concentrated on a joint program offered by the APC and VASSP, the clients being school leaders and aspiring school leaders from Victoria, interstate and overseas. An additional element of function that they identified was that the program included a special seminar geared to the identification of directions. This was intended to have broader implications in terms of providing advice to governments and educational authorities.

The structure was formal, centring on a crowded and intensive two-and-a-half-day forum. One participant commented that such a forum was more to do with event management rather than on-going professional development, but that such a one-off event can have considerable strategic impact.

While the event was “not too beautiful an exercise”, the interactions with the then-Secretary of State for Education from the UK, who attended as a presenter and participant, were invaluable. Other beauties lay in gaining a broader view of world perspectives on education, and the implications of the discussions for improved outcomes — for the participants, for the systems and organisations that they represented, and for the students in schools.

The group’s point about the value of one-off sessions for specific purposes is a strong one. Such sessions are not fashionable in professional development. We can beat ourselves up about structures, but they have their uses. For example, while the preference may be for sustained programs over time, one-off sessions can also be effective, especially for the efficient transfer of information, quickly, to large numbers of a target audience, with some degree of certainty that they have at least received the specified message.

We have to keep in mind what it is that we want to achieve and whether the structure is appropriate for reaching that outcome — while avoiding the danger of format distracting from content and/or learning.

**Group 4** focused on a Principals and School Development program, commenting that the two elements go hand-in-hand. In terms of clients and function, the program was cross-sectoral and there was an expectation of improved outcomes for the participants’ students. School, region and system priorities were taken into account.

Structurally, the program was led by regional team leaders, was by invitation, was not linked to accreditation, and took place over the ten months of the school year. There was a two-day

residential session at the end of the program, with written reports from participants about what they had learned. The group argued that the beauty of the program lay in: the time and space that it provided for personnel to get away and learn from each other; the recreational activities that were built into the program, providing opportunities to get to know each other and build up informal and emotional support; and the fact that around 60 per cent of the regional teams continued to meet after the program finished.

## Reflecting on the framework

What dimensions does the framework of Function, Structure and Beauty help us to think about? Here are a few thoughts, based on previous experience of using the framework and on the tenor of the group responses in the APC Summer Institute session.

Can we achieve Beauty? Having the concept in mind helps us to remember the big picture — if our objective is completeness rather than a fragmented range of reform outcomes, we need to adopt a comprehensive approach, taking into account a range of issues and perspectives.

In devising a professional development program **about** professional development programs, how many of us would have concentrated on function, structure and process? How many would have built in the concept of beauty? How many of us would do so now, or would at least see the relevance of the idea? In terms of meeting client needs, we need to be more precise in our definitions and intentions — tagging not only those who are our core clients but also the range of other potential clients, as well as those who will be affected by what participants learn — and assessing how well our program will address the direct and indirect needs of those groups.

Some of the examples provided by the Summer Institute participants could be framed in terms of tensions between teacher as employee and teacher as professional, and the extent to which autonomy and choice are possible in selection of professional development. How do we, as school leaders, administrators or policy makers bring that issue up front and deal with it?

Each of the programs outlined by the participants was open to multiple perspectives and interpretations. This was particularly the case in terms of Beauty, reinforcing the idea that beauty is in the eye of the beholder, although there may be generalisable criteria to apply.



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## Some additional thoughts

Reform can mean “adding to”, or “adapting”, but it can also mean the abandonment of some practices, structures and roles. Although that can be a daunting prospect, and a painful process, a useful analogy is with the pruning of rose bushes or fruit trees. Cutting back to growth points, and re-shaping the plant, will strengthen the bush and increase its production of blooms or fruit. Our problem is that we may be skilled as individuals in pruning plants, but as professionals we are rarely good at pruning in an educational context.

At the same time, the nature of the school leader’s work is becoming increasingly **complex**. It is seen by many as increasingly **problematic**. In the USA this has led to a shortage of people wanting to become school leaders. A similar shortage has been reported from the UK. One participant at the APC Summer Institute reported on recent research that confirms the trend in an Australian context.<sup>2</sup> Another spoke of the impact of issues in job satisfaction, school governance, and the pressures of external decision making, combined with a trend towards early retirement.

More and more we are faced with finding ways to mediate between individual, institution and system. We deal daily, perhaps hourly or by the minute, with such issues. They are rarely simple, and the ways we deal with them are rarely clear-cut in practice.

For example, as noted earlier, we aspire to “best practice” — a superlative that suggests there is only one way of doing something — which has become part of the educational and organisational vernacular. We are encouraged to achieve best practice by our leaders and policy makers. In reality however, we know that we will at best approximate to achieving what is an inherently unrealistic goal. We are faced not so much with problems that have a complete and permanent resolution; more realistically we are faced with ambiguities and dilemmas. We have to find efficient and effective ways of dealing with them, nonetheless.

Often, the most effective working strategies in a school or other organisation can be developed through a consultative process involving the people who work there. There is much talk these days about professional “learning communities”, where such consultation and discussion would be part of the operational fabric.

What does that really mean, in practice? What would we want to build? And how do we go about laying the foundations?

I asked the Summer Institute participants to consider these questions. A range of valuable points were made in the ensuing discussion, including the following.

- As members of a learning community, or of what will become growing networks of multiple learning communities, the key factor is personal and group commitment — to building new knowledge, to enhancing our practice, and to improving the outcomes for our clients.
- If we are talking about Professional Learning Communities, we need to be much clearer about the nature of our professionalism. What knowledge and expertise do we have to support our claim? How do we expand or evaluate it? How do we use evidence to support our knowledge and inform our practice — and to defend that practice in a consistent way to the broader community?
- We need to find a balance between exclusivity and inclusivity in education, which will mean a critical exploration of our values. A useful concept to use might be what Ken Strike calls “thick” and “thin” values — “thick” being more concrete ones, categorising how the community sees itself, and what it sees as criteria for membership; “thin” ones being more abstract.<sup>3</sup>

This process should help us to clarify our relationship not only with the broader community, but also with those who issue the external mandates for which we have local responsibility.

In the USA there has been something of a breakdown in the sharing of knowledge and expertise between educational professionals, and an increasing emphasis on “bowling alone” in an increasingly competitive environment.

If we are to develop genuine “professional learning communities”, we need to explore issues such as those identified above (you can add to the list from your own perspectives) and aim more to develop what de Tocqueville called “shared capital”.<sup>4</sup>



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## LAYING FOUNDATIONS FOR PROFESSIONAL LEARNING

In seeking educational reform and improvement in the area of learning, we face the eternal conflict between rhetoric and reality. In addition, educators can be a fickle group, liking both to cling to and challenge the rhetoric.

The current crop of educators is grounded in the baby boomer group. Many grew up in an era that explored the concept of alternative lifestyles and individualistic control of one's own life — to an extent that had rarely been the case in earlier generations. There has also been a time of significant upheavals and rapid change in many areas — societal, economic and technological being three examples.

In that context, again using the metaphor of building and design, if we seek to establish professional learning communities, we will need to build on foundations that are **deep** enough to cope with ongoing upheavals as well as the strongly held but varied beliefs, values, attitudes, expectations and commitment to learning of both the professionals and the broader community.

Various types of commitment will be needed. These include:

- having the resources to follow the rhetoric (which involves the commitment of others, external to the immediate community, as well as those in the particular workplace);
- embedding our values in the nature of our work;
- ensuring that learning is celebrated and modelled; and
- ensuring that learning (to use Neil Postman's words) is "connected to a moral purpose".<sup>5</sup>

In addition, the footings will need to be **wide** enough to take the load, spread the weight and provide stability. In the educational context this will mean: dealing with diverse learning needs at collective, team and individual levels; respecting differences that affect learning, and how different people learn differently; allowing for the impact on learning of prior knowledge and experience. It will mean helping people to understand what it is that they are expect to get better at — and achieving this through the use of rubrics and enhanced targeting.

We do not start with a blank slate. Members of a professional learning community are not novices; they bring with them expertise and experience. As experts, they can use their own knowledge to enhance their learning; novices don't know how to do that. To make full use of the available expertise, learning needs to be central to an organisation. Such centrality is often espoused, but often in practice it can be almost peripheral. Students need to see their teachers learning not just for modelling of the benefits, but also to see them overcoming some of the attendant frustrations and difficulties.

Building a professional learning community needs **durable materials**. As leaders we will have to deal with factors that weaken or undermine the organisation — including the organisational equivalent of termites. An educational institution, especially a learning community, needs to be sustainable over time — not ephemeral.

APC Summer Institute participants explored some of these ideas through a brief site survey that asked questions about degrees of commitment to professional learning in their own organisations, in terms of the following factors:

- resourcing;
- integration of professional learning into the daily work of teachers;
- autonomy in selection of professional development;
- the extent to which disincentives and obstacles to professional learning have been overcome or minimised;
- the capacity of staff members to deal with contradictions in professional work and learning;
- support for risk taking; and
- the modeling of learning by professionals — to their colleagues, students and the broader school community.

With each item scored on a four point scale, they were able to achieve a snapshot of commitment in their organisation, across a spectrum of key elements — one that they could discuss, compare and analyse with other participants. Readers might find that use of a similar simple diagnostic tool could provide a valuable vehicle for initiating dialogue in their own organisation.



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*As leaders we will have to deal with factors that weaken or undermine the organisation — including the organisational equivalent of termites.*

## Extending the metaphor of built environments in relation to professional development

Built environments are not necessarily about bricks and mortar, nor do they remain static. They change and develop. In the built environment of Professional Development, significant shifts are taking place. These include:

- conceptual shifts, through a re-thinking of professional learning;
- changes to structures; and
- a process of re-culturing

Figures 1, 2 and 3 (below) summarise the characteristics of these shifts, showing where we are moving **from** and **to**, in professional development and related organisations.

### Figure 1: Toward a New Architecture for Professional Development: Conceptual Shifts

#### *From Traditional Professional Development*

- Add-on, frill, educational step-child
- Individualised learning
- Activity centred
- Before, after, and outside of work
- Emphasis on outside ideas and expertise
- Focus on individual learning and change

#### *To New Architecture for Professional Development*

- Professional development as essential work
- Collaborative learning and growth
- Linked to practice and student learning
- Embedded in daily work
- Internal capacity for improvement
- Focus on collective expertise and practice



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### Figure 2: Toward a New Architecture for Professional Development: Structural Shifts

#### *From Traditional Professional Development*

- Fragmented, isolated activities
- Top-down, externally controlled
- Inadequate resources to support learning
- Focussed on narrow skills and behaviours
- Individual rewards and opportunities
- Contracts, time and calendars as chips in adversarial bargaining
- Limited opportunities for collective learning

#### *To New Architecture for Professional Development*

- Professional needs, school goals, and student learning are aligned
- Educators in charge of their own learning
- Optimal mix of materials, resources and personnel to support learning
- Centred in holistic personal and professional growth
- System rewards link individual, school and student needs
- Contracts, time and calendars as joint resources for improvement
- Flexible, open and invitational learning environment

### Figure 3: Toward a New Architecture for Professional Development: Cultural Shifts

#### *From Traditional Professional Development*

- Lone-ranger learners
- Powerful norms of privacy, surface conversations about practice
- Centred on individuals
- Episodic and fragmented activities
- Minimal attention to adult learners, few outward expressions that support professional learning
- Low personal and professional efficacy

#### *To New Architecture for Professional Development*

- Collegial interdependence
- Mutual trust, respect through dialogue
- Centred in learning community
- Learning opportunities are continuous
- Celebrations, symbols and traditions highlight professional learning
- “Can Do” attitude, high personal and professional efficacy.

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First, we need to make some **conceptual shifts** (see Figure 1, previous page). Professional development is not something “other than”; it is central to the intellectual, powerful and complex work that we perform as educators. Traditionally in the USA, however, professional development has been seen as an individual responsibility. While teachers have been empowered by the professional development that they undertake, this has been in terms of an individual investment, leading to enhancement of personal status or income. Increasingly, there are moves towards a more systemic style of professional learning and collective capacity building.

At the systemic, local and personal levels there is much we can do. A shift in thinking requires a shift in the conversation. We can change **what** we talk about, and **how** we talk about it.

We need to talk about what **we** need to improve. We can work to link our personal goals to our school’s/organisation’s goals, through the negotiation and implementation of mutually acceptable individual professional development plans. We also need to ensure that the requisite resources are placed behind the rhetoric that we and the school espouse.

Many of the answers we seek are within us if we reflect thoughtfully. On the other hand we need to beware of idiosyncratic development if we work too much in isolation from external ideas and knowledge.

The **structural** elements of professional development (see Figure 2) have tended to be fragmented – achieving some good results, but lacking overall coherence and connection. In addressing this issue, we need to ask a few questions, such as the following.

- Are structural shifts, because of their nature, necessarily going to involve top-down decision making?
- Who gets to make the choices and allocate the resources?
- Does our capacity match the intentions and plans that we have for re-structuring?
- How can we centre our intended re-structuring in the organisation’s larger plan of growth — taking the whole budget into account and cross-referencing between priorities.

In the USA, funding for professional development became one of the “bargaining chips” in School District operations, in a context where teacher salaries had been held down for several years while other areas received additional funds.

Shifts in **cultures** are perhaps the most difficult to achieve. The culture of an organisation runs deep. How do we get below the surface in our conversations as part of that organisation to change the topics — and the way we talk about them? What types of strategy might we use to build an ethos based on positive criticism; a culture geared to improved learning for teachers and students? What would work for the teachers?

Participants at the APC Summer Institute suggested the following:

- increased opportunities to share and celebrate learning and achievement;
- retreats, to encourage a collaborative and reflective approach;
- scholarships and year fellowships, which have already proved successful in some non-government schools;
- presentation to whole staff meetings of the results from learning team endeavours; and
- research and reports associated with action learning projects.

To these suggestions I would add the provision of opportunities for us as educators to share the stories of risks we have taken, and of the failures from which we have learned — often more than we have from our successes.

Sharing is about trust. When I talk to young, aspiring teachers, I want them to know what I don’t know as well as what I do; and the strategies and processes that I use to overcome that lack of knowledge.

As a very simple example, it is important for them to know that I use a dictionary if I am not sure of a word’s meaning or its spelling — let alone the fact that there are words I don’t know at all!

As teachers and educational leaders we are not omnipotent, nor should we expect to be. We need to recognise some of our weaknesses, try to anticipate things that might go wrong and have strategies ready for when difficulties arise ... as they will.



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## Identifying issues

What could go wrong with the shifts — conceptual, structural and cultural — that I outlined above? What sorts of issue might need to be dealt with? The range of responses would vary according to the experience of those who are asked the questions, but the participants at the APC Summer Institute came up with some suggestions that may echo with the reader and trigger thoughts about issues in different school environments.

In discussing **conceptual shifts** participants commented that:

- in reality, people have to make choices about the allocation of resources. Often the choices are not easy or comfortable. These are not problems with neat solutions; they present dilemmas, where a degree of compromise will be needed and a range of outcomes will be affected;
- although teachers might long for increased levels of interaction and collaboration, classrooms and schools are fundamentally isolated environments;
- often the capacity to encourage interaction and debate among staff is limited, especially where there are part-time staff. In some schools, part-timers may constitute 10-20% of total numbers, there are real difficulties in getting the whole staff together at all. The challenge here is a basic one: to help the part-timers feel they are integral members of the school community. This impacts on the capacity to achieve whole school conceptual shifts, and to achieve a broader cultural congruence.

Examples of factors that might affect **structural** shifts were identified as:

- the self esteem and confidence of those involved;
- the level of trust between them;
- the protection of empires and bunkers; and
- the need to think in terms of a complex set of shifts rather than just one.

Issues to face in achieving **cultural** shifts included:

- the need to account for “lone rangers”, working to include them in whole school developments while meeting their needs as individuals. This could be a highly complex challenge, since not all lone rangers are withdrawn, insecure or isolated in the school community — often a person with high levels of confidence is also highly individualistic and secure in his/her own ways of working. Such a person, for example, may know and acknowledge the school goals, but not subscribe to team approaches.
- the need to develop a common language and understandings, to help reduce the sense of threat which may come with proposed changes; the need to monitor the silences that occur in discourse — to identify those things that we choose **not** talk about;
- the need to achieve congruence in our symbolic language — with both discourse and silences;
- the need to acknowledge that “the water is cold, and it’s hard to get out” ... especially where it may look colder on the beach before you get to the towel. Those involved will need to be reassured about the anticipated benefits of the shifts they will be making.

These are only a few of the examples raised by participants. You might find it useful to note down some of the ideas they have triggered while you were reading, and reflect on how you would overcome such issues in your own context.

## Socialisation and change

Socialisation is an important factor in dealing with change. While you are making major shifts you do this in a social context, but you also have to make that shift your own.

In “leaving the old” we have to be sure that we have got the “role exit” right, from our own points of view. There is a substantial empirical database to show the importance of feeling a sense of power over exits and transitions from one situation to another. Much of the available data in this area relates to emotional, spiritual and



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physical suffering in moving out of significant relationships — for example, spouses extracting themselves from marriage breakdowns, nuns leaving their orders, or individuals undergoing sex-change operations. While these may seem somewhat extreme examples, we can learn from the results of research about them. Consistently, the best transition results come about where those involved are able to prepare and achieve a state of personal readiness. Where they are not able to prepare, or where they are unwilling to rely on external advice, people may well rely on established styles of behaviour or ingrained work habits. Others may be able to see this happening but be able to do little about it.

Karl Weick<sup>6</sup> gives a tragic example of firefighters who were in danger of being trapped by flames in a remote wooded area. Observers in a plane, with the benefits of an aerial view, told the firefighters on the ground to drop their heavy equipment and run, since otherwise the tools would weigh them down and prevent them reaching safety. The firefighters relied on their tools — but what would normally keep them safe in this case made them vulnerable. Many disobeyed the order, which went against the normal rules that had been drilled into them throughout their training and working lives, and perished in the flames.

In our context as educators, what might hold us back or bring us down in a similar way? What tools, policies or practice do we cling to that prevent our completing the shifts we might wish to make? At the Summer Institute, I asked the participants to think of this in terms of a garage sale. Taking examples of current tools, policies and practice that need to be reviewed in terms of their on-going relevance, what should be done with them? I suggested that they ascribe one of four destinations to each of their selected items:

- the museum;
- the toxic waste bin, where care needs to be taken not to sustain damage in handling the transition;
- recycling, for further but adapted use of the item; or
- the rubbish bin.

The group responses, as written or drawn, were as shown in Figures 4-7, opposite. Again, it would be worth the reader making a personal list and going through the same process. If you are still using tools that you would prefer to ascribe to toxic waste, or working in ways that should be consigned to the museum of teaching practice, why are you doing that? And what can you do to rectify the situation?

## REVIEWING PARADIGMS VIA PARADOX

We strive to achieve paradigms in our practice, consciously or sub-consciously. To do that requires a degree of commitment and attachment, but we need to remember that no paradigm is a timeless panacea for all contexts. Paradigms need to change with changing circumstances, and so do our practices.

How do we decide what to change, when and how? The literature of professional development is littered with paradigms, and stories about their promises and problems, disappointments and benefits. The complexities and paradoxes emerging from this may reflect fundamental tensions, but they also generate an energy that can be used as a catalyst for critiquing and re-designing the paradigms.

The exploration of paradoxes forms a valuable part of some Principals' Learning courses in the USA. The courses are designed to demonstrate how few major decisions are genuinely simple and clear-cut. Most contain elements of paradox, which we tend to avoid if we can, often by not making a decision, or by delaying the process.

In the courses, Principals examine paradoxes using descriptive, heuristic, analytic and practical techniques. They learn to mitigate the negatives of paradoxes and deal with them, gaining confidence in their own professional competence as they do so. Many have commented that they feel the process has made them feel more prepared to take on the challenge of changing practices, taking into account the conflicting arguments and demands that they will encounter.

The more you know, the more you know you don't know ... and the more you know you need to learn. While change is constant, in practice not everything can be dealt with in its full ever-changing complexity all the time. To get things done, we have to routinise some things. Routines help us survive from day to day; they also provide opportunities for us to reflect and think at things anew ... if we remember to. The balancing trick is to ensure that these routines do not become mindless rituals that we cling to for their own sake — with a notional value of their own — and that they do not impede change when it is necessary. Routines are invaluable in our working lives, but they can become a substitute for thinking leadership and professional practice.



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Response from workshop groups: "Butchers Paper" examples — some text-based lists, others using graphic representation and alternative types of layout

Figure 4: For the Museum

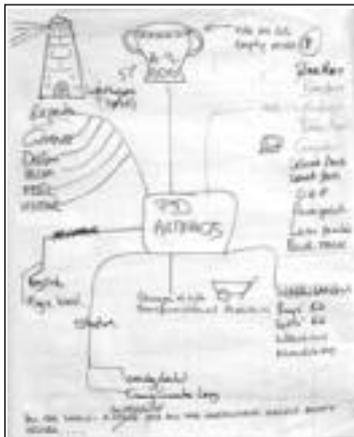


Figure 5: Toxic Waste

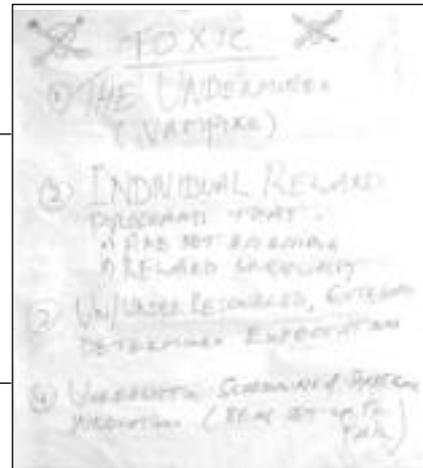


Figure 6: Recycling

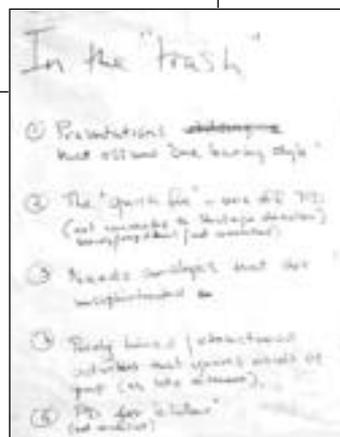


Figure 7: In the Trash

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## Paradoxes in Professional Autonomy and Accountability

There is a tendency for professional development to become more prescriptive, at the behest of decisionmakers, who are often external to the participants' workplaces. While such policymakers may wish to ensure that specific learning takes place, this may reduce the actual or perceived autonomy of the participants.

The differing viewpoints of policymakers and participants may be exacerbated by their uses of language. Meaning varies by context. What a statewide policymaker means by "policy" — and its anticipated outcome — is often very different from what a Principal means, or a teacher in the classroom.

What happens if teachers are not sure about how they are supposed to implement a particular policy? Or if they are not even really sure whether the policy makers expect the policy to be implemented at all? What if there is a policy that mandates increased time for a particular part of the curriculum, or an additional element to add to the already crowded offerings? How does the school leader decide on an appropriate balance — between external accountability factors and the autonomy that allows a decision at the local level— about where mandates fit with existing priorities? Dealing with paradoxes is a necessary skill indeed.

Powerful professional development for Principals will help them to face such dilemmas — to realise that these challenges are not annoying extras that get in the way of doing the job; they are integral to the job. Such professional development requires increased opportunities for learning; appropriate time, resources and materials; support personnel; and appropriate learner capacity. While all of those elements sound like common sense, they are not always present in current professional development provision.

In addition, however, I would argue that powerful professional development should be seen first as **work**, not something separate from it. It might take place at, in, outside or beyond the actual workplace, but a direct relationship to the realities of the working situation and role should be at its core. The teaching and learning of specific skills should be designed to ensure ease of transferability into real workplace applications. This requires careful planning, not least in auditing the needs of those who will be attending, and in determining the appropriate time or stage for the particular learning to occur.

## FINAL COMMENTS

We started by considering education in the context of built environments, which are about more than bricks and mortar. Parliament means more to Australians than its physical form. The physical form carries other connotations. So it is with education and professional development.

The physical form of many professional development activities tells us a lot more than an agenda on a page. The spaces that are allocated for teaching and learning tell us about relationships, expectations and understandings. A program dominated by "talking heads", in a didactic model, does not happen accidentally — any more than one dominated by interactive workshops does. If participants are placed with their seats facing the front, or in a circle, that is not a random decision on the part of the presenter. Participants read the physical signs of whether the session is to be about a leader and followers, or about more collaborative learning.

Perhaps as a sign of the times, in the USA, convenience has emerged as the number one issue for teachers training to be leaders. They are busy people, with full workloads, and they want their professional development activities to be "drive-through", with minimal fuss and effort, cheap, easily available and accessible — reflecting a philosophy of "have need/will deliver" — with predictable product and outcomes. The result has been the development of what is described as McLeadership programs.

There is a very positive side to this: the teachers' claims are legitimate. They have a right to be able to concentrate on what they are learning, without having to worry about the hassles of how to access that learning. On the other hand, they and their courses are part of the university. The courses must match the needs and circumstances of the participants and they must also be consistently rigorous, to meet the necessary university standards for accreditation.

At Madison, we have rethought both content and its delivery. We now provide options for using distance education, weekend "resort" courses and evening classes. We ensure that there are opportunities for collaborative work as members of Action Research/Action Learning teams. We try to model the learning behaviour and methodology that we espouse. It is possible to have both convenience and quality. They are not mutually exclusive.



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*What would this model look like in practice for professional development? What would we need to change, to work in terms of such a code?*



*Professional development is part and parcel of leadership and is essential to efficient, effective and dynamic change management.*

## Ethical considerations

There is a strong ethical dimension to what I have been discussing.

What are the codes and sanctions? Carrying through the metaphor of architecture and the built environment, I looked at the model developed by the American Institute of Architects. In terms of learning architecture I suggest that the following ethical guidelines should be applied in what we do:

- **Do no harm.** Apart from the obvious examples of avoiding physical damage, this might mean not setting up changes where adverse side effects can be anticipated, or not implementing change in the knowledge that there will not be enough resources to make it work.
- Acknowledge a general **obligation to the public**, and act accordingly.
- Acknowledge an **obligation to the clients**, and act accordingly.
- Acknowledge an **obligation to the profession**, and act according to professional standards of practice and judgement.
- Acknowledge an **obligation to one's colleagues**, and act accordingly — respecting and caring for them, honouring their knowledge and contribution; striving to support them, not undermine them, and avoiding traps such as selling a line to them to achieve a desired outcome.

What would this model look like in practice for professional development? What would we need to change to work in terms of such a code?

The relevant epistemology and ontology may remain contested territory, but it is important that we explore the conceptual, physical and ethical shifts discussed in this paper. Professional development is part and parcel of leadership and is essential to efficient, effective and dynamic change management.

We need to learn from our current practice, re-evaluate what we are doing through a range of lenses, and work for continuous improvement in our own professional learning and that of our fellow educators.

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Readers who wish to explore Paul Bredeson's ideas in more detail are referred to his recent book, *Designs for Learning: A New Architecture for Professional Development in Schools*, published by Corwin Press, Thousand Oaks, California, in 2003.

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*We need to learn  
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