Constructing Capacities: Building Capabilities through Learning and Engagement

Part 2: Constructing Teachers', Students' and Workers' Capacities

Creating Capacities: Teachers' Perceptions of Professional Development and the Role of the University

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Teachers' views of professional development are increasingly problematised by two quite distinct and opposing perceptions. Although teachers recognise the value of continuing professional dialogue they are also disenchanted with what they see as irrelevant and ill-conceived efforts to bridge the divide between theory and their daily teacher practice in the classroom. A means of bridging this divide between the perceived 'ivory tower' (university) and the 'chalkface' (school) is to draw on the expertise of both in order to deliver mutually beneficial outcomes. The range of experience and expertise from educators in both the school and university sectors can be strategically utilised to provide targeted professional development opportunities. These can also be designed to maximise the logistical connection between teachers in training at university who undertake their practical experiences in schools during their program of study.

This chapter seeks to examine the potential for collaboration between the school and university sectors with a specific focus on the area of teacher expectations regarding professional development in order to enhance their capacities.

Introduction

The term 'professional development' has come under increasing focus in the Australian Education sector both at the university and school level. Professional development is well entrenched as an accepted activity within universities and schools, however, its effectiveness appears to vary due to an often mandated 'group' implementation in the school sector compared to an individual and tailored approach for academics in the university sector.

Professional development is often used to describe activities designed or contracted through an external person or administration of either a school or university to enhance skills, expertise and/or the experience of staff. Additionally professional development can be chosen on an individual basis by participants and is either self-funded, or funded, either in part of wholly by the institution, or the relevant State/Territory department as part of an initiative to enhance the quality of staff. These activities could include: conference/seminar/workshop participation/presentation; the obtaining of formalised accredited qualifications; and/or strategies such as peer mentoring/review.

An increasing emphasis on quality and accountability, driven by public demand, has had a direct impact on the way professional development is viewed in both the university and school sector. Professional development activities are often aligned with the strategic goals of the respective sector and participants who have individually chosen activities are expected to

demonstrate their relevance to their career. Creating capacity amongst participants through professional development also empowers a person to face change and uncertainty, which is an important goal of education (James, 2008). Relevant and authentic professional development enhances capacity through various aspects such as supportive networking, the acquisition of new knowledge and expertise, the opportunity to pursue an area of interest and the ability to design, implement and evaluate a project.

In the school sector the very universality of the majority of workplace driven professional development has traditionally been met with 'aversion' (Lieberman & McLaughlin, 1992). The perception that school professional development is of limited worth is often due to the universality of the experience in which an entire staff is grouped together to complete hours of passive learning which may not acknowledge their local context or expertise. This experience is often at odds with that experienced by university academics who have greater autonomy and incentives to attend professional development which enhances their expertise and allows them to network with colleagues and to foster potential collaborations.

This paper discusses the professional development experiences of teachers from an Australian government school and their perceptions of professional development. A case study approach has been used to provide important insights into the participants' experiences. The findings reveal that the participants believe that there is limited effective professional development and in particular cite the lack of balance between theoretical and practical foci. The participants saw the severing of links from the theoretical framework they had ready access to during their university teacher training program standing in stark contrast to the practice driven environment of the school site.

Policy Initiatives Context
There are a number of recent initiatives which have affected educational generally and particularly universities and schools in the context of this paper. In 2011 the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL) released *A background paper to inform the development of a national professional development framework for teachers and school leaders* (Timperley, 2011). The purpose of this paper was to provide a framework to guide the professional learning and development of school leaders and teachers throughout Australia. Timperley reveals the combined efforts of policymakers, school leaders, teachers and researchers has led to two inter-related developments within the field of professional development. These include how various professional development activities engaged in by the aforementioned stakeholders directly impact on the life chances of students. She goes further in her contention that "it is no longer acceptable for professionals in schools to do their individual best ... it is expected that they will engage collectively with what is known to be effective in improving outcomes for all students" (Timperley, 2011, p. 1). In relation to this chapter there is therefore an implied obligation for schools and universities to form closer alliances to effective prepare future teachers and to provide relevant professional development to ensure the currency of their practice and to build capacity between both sectors.

The second development identified by Timperley is the substantial evidence base for how to teach all students more effectively resulting in the term 'adaptive experts' (Hatano & Oura, 2003, cited in Timperley, 2011), which is described as leaders and teachers identifying "how effective their practices are in creating learning opportunities for students, seeing the relevance of the evidence-base to inform changes to their practice, and evaluating whether these changes have the desired effect" (Timperley, 2011, p. 1). In addition, Timperley argues

that the set of principles proposed by the background paper need to be considered in relation to the local context and should be readily available for those with formal responsibility for learning and development, not just policy makers.

Earlier in 2011 AITSL also released the National Professional Standards for Teachers which "make explicit the elements of high-quality, effective teaching in 21st century schools and provides a framework that makes explicit the knowledge, practice and professional engagement required across teachers' careers" (Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership, 2011), echoing Dewey's (1963, p. 24) contention that "everything depends on the quality of the experience." The professional standards framework for teachers builds upon the Australian Government's implementation of a new standards-based quality assurance framework for higher education as part of the reforms for the sector in the 2009 – 2010 budget. Each university has been required to negotiate institutional targets known as 'compacts' to jointly achieve the Government's reform agenda and the individual institution's mission. The Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA), an independent body with powers to regulate university and non-university education providers, are currently monitoring quality and setting standards to ensure students receive a high quality education at any higher education provider. The *Developing a framework for teaching and learning standards in Australian higher education and the role of TEQSA* discussion paper was released in June, 2011 (http://www.deewr.gov.au/HigherEducation/Policy/teqsa/Documents/Teaching_Learning_Discussion_Paper.pdf).

The Teaching Standards Framework (TSF) project, involving nine Australian universities during the latter part of 2010, was created to develop teaching standards for the higher education sector in Australia (Sachs, Mansfield & Kosman, 2011), and was informed by initial work completed by Macquarie University in 2009. Dearn, Fraser and Ryan (2002) were commissioned by the Australian Government to investigate professional development for academics in Australian universities with a particular focus on key university stakeholders' views of the professionalization of the teaching role of academics. The researchers found that although the research role of academics was generally well supported, there was "no commensurate rigour in the preparation and ongoing support of the teaching role" (Dearn, Fraser & Ryan, 2002, p. iv). The report also revealed that "the provision of both preparation programs and ongoing support for academic staff for their teaching role is uneven and unsystematic" (p. iv), which was linked to broader institutional issues such as heavy workloads and inadequate resources. In 2000, the Australian College of Educators (ACE) released the *Standards of Professional Practice for Accomplished Teachers in Australian Classrooms*. In this document professional development is described as teachers "seeking to deepen their knowledge, sharpen their judgement, expand their teaching repertoire, and to adapt their teaching to educationally sound developments arising from authentic research and scholarship" (p. 11).

In response to these findings the Australian Government is currently providing $550 million over five years through the *Smarter Schools – Improving Teacher Quality National Partnership* (TQNP) agreement (Australian Government, u.d.). This program recognises that quality teaching is "the single greatest in-school influence on student engagement and achievement," and describes two broad areas of reform pertinent to this paper: improving the quality and consistency of teacher training in partnership with universities, and developing and enhancing the skills and knowledge of teachers and school leaders through improved performance management and professional learning.

The focus on quality in teaching in the Australian education sector has also contributed to discussions of performance pay for teachers who are considered to be performing at a high standard (Thompson, 2011). This development commodifies the role of teachers as schools move towards a business model approach to accountability. Interestingly performance based pay has a long history, both in Australia and around the world. Ingvarson, Kleinhenz and Wilkinson (2007) found evidence of performance pay for teachers in Australia, England and the United States dating back to 1862. Although Ingvarson, Kleinhenz and Wilksinon (2007) support the current idea of performance pay, the concept has been challenged on a number of levels. These include the disruption of differentiating teachers from one another in a profession that is strongly collegial and the simplification of the role of the teacher without considering the myriad factors that impact on student learning. The influence of the federal government in the implementation of performance pay is also problematic in a system which is supposedly based on critical and democratic principles. As Apple (2000, p. xii) contends: "… educational policy and practice are not simply technical issues, but are *inherently* political and valuative." In addition, as Castle (2012) reveals, teachers currently feel they no longer hold any professional status compared to the status teachers previously had in the community. The implications of performance pay may also undermine teachers' collective identity, which although partly assumed is also achieved by an individual teacher's location in the social space of the school (Couldron & Smith, 1999; Goodson, 2003). The issue of performance pay therefore may be seen to undermine a teacher's identity by assigning a value to how effectively they teach through an approach which challenges the philosophical underpinnings of the teaching profession.

Context

This chapter will provide a snapshot of the perceptions of professional development from a group of teachers currently working in an Australian Government secondary school. These teachers have already experienced university through the obtaining of formal teaching qualifications followed by certification through a teacher registration body. The two main pathways to the classroom for an Australian secondary teacher is through a three-year Degree program, such as a Bachelor of Arts or Bachelor of Science, followed by a year's Graduate Diploma in Teaching, or through a four year Bachelor of Education majoring in two discipline areas. The quality of their previous tertiary experiences will invariably affect their perception of professional development experiences as they build upon a foundation which encouraged interrogation and reflection on both theory and practice.

The participants are employed full-time at a recently established government secondary school. Six participants completed the survey (P1 – P6) and five of these participants were interviewed in a focus group with the exception of P6, whose integral role in the delivery of a professional development session for teachers conflicted with the focus group interview. An overview of the participants' school teaching experiences is included in Table 1 below:

	P1	**P2**	**P3**	**P4**	**P5**	**P6**
Gender	Female	Female	Male	Female	Female	Male
School Experience	23 years	6 years	1 year	25 years	9 years	20 years
Previous	Teacher;	Teacher	Teach	Teacher/Case	Teacher/Year	Teacher/Head

Role/s	Sports Coordinator/Head of Department/Acting Deputy Principal		er: Science; Maths	Manager/Head of Department/Deputy Principal	Level Coordinator	of Department/Deputy Principal/Principal
Current Role/s	Teacher: Health and Physical Education; Studies of Society and Environment	Teacher: English; Study of Society and Environment/House Coordinator	Teacher: Science; Maths	Deputy Principal	Head of Department: English/Humanities/ LOTE	Principal
Qualifications	Degree/Graduate Diploma	Degree	Degree	Degree	Degree	Degree

Table 1: Participants' School Teaching Experiences

Research Design

Educational research tends to operate with a qualitative, naturalistic and ethnographic paradigm which includes approaches such as case study. This research has utilised case study methodology to investigate the perceptions of teachers towards professional development in a single school site which is part of a bounded system. Case study is a way of "organising social data for the purpose of viewing social reality" (Best & Kahn, 2006, p. 259). Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2007, p. 253) contend that case study provides "a unique example of real people in real situations, enabling readers to understand ideas more clearly than simply by presenting them with abstract theories or principles." In addition, Hitchcock and Hughes (1995) reveal the case study approach is particularly valuable when the researcher has little control over the events taking place. This chapter reports on a single site case study in order to seek to understand the perceptions of a group of people (Hitchcock & Hughes, 1995). There are limitations to such an approach; however the researchers felt the school site would provide important data in relation to this study. Case study is also preferred when examining contemporary events and therefore it an appropriate choice to investigate the complexities underlying teacher professional development.

Case study's unique strength is being able to deal with a variety of evidence, such as surveys, interview data and observations. In this study the researchers have utilised a survey and focus group interview as part of their initial data collection. Permission was sought from the Principal of a Queensland government school to conduct the study and he invited teachers to participate in both the survey and the subsequent focus group interview.

After receiving ethical approval, the survey was initially trialled with a small pilot group and subsequent modifications were made to ensure clarity of the questions. The survey was then distributed online and the focus group interview occurred shortly afterwards. The survey consisted of both closed and open ended questions and the focus group interview utilised a semi-structured interview schedule to encourage scope for more input from the participants.

The researchers independently analysed both the open group survey responses and the transcript of the focus group interview through an inductive process. The focus group interview was transcribed verbatim thereby separating the process of data preparation and analysis and lessening the risk of researcher bias. Due to the nature of the focus group interview it was difficult to individually identify each person because of the rapid pace of the discussion that took place; therefore we have presented the participants' statements in italics

without individual identification. As Lodico, Spaulding and Voegtle (2006, p. 309) reveal, "qualitative researchers seek out and use their participants' own words to more accurately represent their views and experiences." One of the researchers conducted the focus group interview on the school site during the professional development days at the beginning of the school year.

The transcript of the interview was independently analysed by the researchers with a number of codes being identified. The researchers separated different segments of the data and labelled these through categories which underwent continual refinement and abstraction so they could identify themes in the coded data. Extracts of the interview have been narratively presented and include interpretations by the researchers, one of whom is currently teaching in a school and the other at the university. This dual perspective from the school-university link provided important insights and as Lincoln and Guba (1995, p.359) contend provided an opportunity to build on the tacit knowledge that the writer (and the reader) bring to the final report. The focus group interview was based on the following questions:

1.   How do you hear about professional development opportunities in your school?
2.   What professional development opportunities are currently being offered in your school?
3.   What are the mandatory requirements for professional development in your school for staff to remain current with their practice?
4.   How do you believe professional development is viewed by your school – general staff, teachers, administration?
5.   How many professional development opportunities (on average) are offered by your school each year?
6.   Do you see professional development opportunities as being directly linked to promotional opportunities at your school?
7.   What is your opinion in relation to professional development?
8.   What role, if any, do you think the university has in relation to professional development and schools?
9.   What role, if any, do you think the school has in relation to professional development and universities?

After comparison and discussion the researchers combined several codes to derive two major themes as being the most prominent emerging from the data: *Professional development is worthwhile*; and *Effective professional development contains a substantial practical element*. These themes are discussed further in the following section.

Discussion of the Identified Themes
The five participants are teachers at a state school in its second year of operation, although their experience in schools ranges across a broad spectrum, with the most experienced completing 25 years' teaching experience and the most junior commencing his first year of teaching. All but one has held positions of added responsibility, including deputy principal and various academic and pastoral roles. Given the youth of the school, much of their experience with professional development has been in other settings, while their shared experience has been dominated by the minutia of school organisational procedures, or in the words of the participants, the *monotonous stuff* such as *code of conduct, student protection* which *we're going to need to get started*. A possible constraint on the responses is the nascent relationships between the foundation staff and the possible employment criteria

which may naturally have valued enthusiasm and initiative as important qualities for foundation staff members.

As Lodico, Spaulding and Voegtle (2006, p. 313) reveal interpretation of qualitative data may involve "personal reflections by the researcher because the researcher has typically invested considerable time and emotional energy in collecting and analysing the data." The narrative accounts of the themes include personal insights by the researchers who are both committed to strengthening links between schools and universities. However, they are also cognisant of the tensions involved in any discussion of school-university partnerships such as those identified by Bartholomew and Sandholtz (2009) as time, rewards and funding and challenges related to institutional differences. Goodson (2003, p. 18) argues that "the university provides a major legitimating base for professional status", however Castle (2012) found that because teachers professional development is controlled by schools through their interpretation of national initiatives, these often conflicted with the aspirations of individual teachers who are suspicious of the dominant discourse.

The two themes that emerged from the survey and focus group interview were:

Theme 1: Professional Development is worthwhile
The participants believed that professional development is worthwhile in spite of their mixed experience with it in terms of relevance and cost effectiveness. There was a view that internal professional development was more relevant and external experiences were always influenced by issues of cost, timing, relevance and awareness.

Theme 2: Effective Professional development contains a substantial practical element
The worth of a professional development experience is measured by the extent to which participants are provided with information or skills which are immediately transferable to their classroom setting.

The general enthusiasm for professional development articulated by the teachers during the focus group was tempered by the recognition that at least some of it had been ill conceived and of doubtful relevance. There was a clear tendency to view staff based development as more valuable than those sourced externally, given that it is *more relaxed at school if you do it in your own workplace* and that *people taking the sessions will know what exactly you need.* This positive view of internal professional development may be exacerbated by the participants' established relationship with P6 who had presented a professional development session based on leadership.

Given that two of the participants have over twenty years' experience in schools and a third is beginning her tenth, it is surprising that even given the shared awareness that professional development was at times irrelevant and costly, there was a general acceptance, even humour at this state of affairs. The question of cost, which was identified as a major barrier to attendance at external development sessions, was discussed in a dispassionate manner underpinned by the awareness that a school cannot source sufficient funds for a *seven hundred dollar gig for a day.* The researchers have found in their own experience that there is certainly evidence to support Lieberman and McLaughlin's (1992) view that teachers react with aversion to professional development, but just as much to argue that teachers' are passive participants who, though often critical, make no concerted demand for improvement (Baguley & Kerby, 2012). One participant recalled a situation in which teachers reacted proactively to an issue of relevance. She recalled that the failure of a professional development session to present an issue of significance to the government sector led to an *ad hoc* organisation of a rival session in an adjoining room. In keeping with the general

enthusiasm of the group, this participant then added that *for people who weren't with [organisation] it would have been a really good PD for them.*

This passive view of professional development is borne out in the participants' ready acknowledgement that they *rack up* most of the required thirty hours of professional development in the first three days of the academic year. The lack of a coherent structure for the internal advertisement of professional development opportunities and apparent vagueness in the discussion of the process of applying for opportunities is a further consequence of this passivity.

> *Well when you get the opportunity to do something that is worthwhile you will get told about it…So the ones that are important you get told about.*

In addition to this passivity is the sense that the 'real' work of the teacher will continue in absentia:

> *Well there's always the idea that it's a lot of work to go outside of the school situation. Because there's some courses that are two days and you're not going to probably get the chance to do it because of restraints with supply teachers or your workload. Sometimes I honestly think I'd love to go on that PD but it's on my full day and it's more work to go than to stay.*

In an open acknowledgement that teachers believe that their core task is in the classroom with students, one participant revealed that *you kind of feel guilty.*

The second major theme which emerged from the focus group is the shared belief that the worth of any professional development is directly linked to the extent to which it provides information or skills which are immediately transferable to a classroom setting. Not one of the participants displayed the aversion to professional development observed by Castle (2012) and Arthur, Harland, Pill and Rea (2006), but each demanded a development underpinned by pragmatic, short term considerations. When asked to nominate an effective professional development experience, one participant noted *any session where you walk out with three practical strategies to assist your teaching, leadership or well-being.* Unsurprisingly, when asked to nominate the least successful experience, the same participant was equally broad in their response – *any session where you are talked at using power point (it is read to you). It is only theoretical and offers no real strategies.* So ingrained is the valuing of practical suggestions that the very word 'theoretical' assumes negative connotations. It appears however, there are parameters relating to the pragmatic aspects of professional development. One of the participants identified a fire extinguisher training session as unsuccessful, not because it was unnecessary but because *it could be years before I may need to use it.* This view is also supported by Robinson and Darling Hammond (1994, cited in Bartholomew & Sandholtz, 2009, p. 156) who contend that school-based practitioners "have been socialized to adopt a pragmatic approach while university faculty members are socialised to take a more theoretical approach to new situations and problems."

The emotional and intellectual distance between the practicing teacher and their earlier incarnation as university students is evident in the shared understanding of the benefits of good professional development. Confronted by the demands of classroom responsibilities the participants saw these benefits as an extension of their current lived experience rather than the extension of their university study. It was not a deep knowledge that they demanded, but one which would 'update' or 'extend' their knowledge, help them *try new things*, become a *bit more specialised* so that they could share their knowledge now that they had become

experts to a degree. The opportunity to report back to the staff was *how you get your money's worth*, by recognising that there is an *expectation that they then share*. In addition, the practical worth, or value, can be quite personal.

> *[Name] said earlier people will often choose a PD because they've got a skill set and they want to extend on that. And sometimes that gives them an opportunity in the school to lead to something, to demonstrate and develop leadership capacity…They use that then and sometimes it's the capacity that they've demonstrated in that is what gets them the job.*

The participants valued an aspiring leaders' course offered by their principal because he *gave people hints and tips and what he'd do and what he's seen work and what he's seen not work.* Thus it was valued because it was seen as a practical guide involving skills such as writing applications, as opposed to a study of leadership principles.

In keeping with the enthusiasm demonstrated in the discussion of professional development, it is not surprising that the participants were as equally enthused by the possibility of University/School links. Their understanding of the possibilities offered by such collaborative opportunities was underpinned by the same pragmatism evident in their view of professional development. One participant noted that universities are *usually up to date with all the technology so they can keep teachers up to date with PDs*. Another saw accelerated learning pathways for students as a specific benefit, as well as the more general advertisement for the school community of the benefits of a university education. It was, however, not just the university as a storehouse of knowledge which appealed to the participants. University facilities were particularly attractive as a means of augmenting what was available to staff and students at a school in only its second year of operation.

Recommendations
During the analysis of the data it was evident that the perceptions of professional school and the role of the university was not merely physical or philosophical, but also of time. Not one of the participants had a strong link with a university, with each left with their own memories of university life as experienced as a student to inform their view of potential university/ school links. Indicative of this gulf was the participant who felt that she was *sort of thinking… now about what it was that the university offered me back then that I'd find useful and that's where I grapple.* As for the university lecturers' knowledge of the classroom, one participant noted that *a lecturer who's not been teaching for a while wouldn't even kind of realise that that's [focus on literacy] even out there and it's just so at the forefront of everybody's [thinking].* It is not surprising given this paucity of professional links with universities that the participants' responses were grounded in the pragmatic paradigm of *how will this help me tomorrow in the classroom.*

Though not one of the participants articulated the view that theory and practice are mutually incompatible, there was a pattern of viewing the university as theoretically bound and schools as institutions driven by practical demands.

> *They [could] give us the technology and the help but I think at the same time we almost need to give them the support and the help because you get teachers straight out of uni that have…the theory, they have that stuff…So I think building that relationship where teachers come in and they do stuff with those prac students that…yes it's theory but it's also practical stuff as well. So that they're a bit more equipped and they've got more tools in their toolkit is a way of putting it when they come out.*

A demarcation issue that would also need to be addressed is the view that pedagogy is a practical issue, with the implication that it can be taught divorced from theory. *It's not that we'd say to unis stop teaching curriculum because you're wasting your time…But I think pedagogy's going to become the big thing.* James (2008) contends that the persistence of the theory-practice divide is based on the assumption that "knowledge can simply be learned (memorised) and this action will then be sufficient to enable one to transfer the knowledge and successfully apply it to practice" (p. 39). This separation of pedagogy and theory also emerged in a discussion between two of the participants about their involvement in ranking pre-service teachers for interviews in the government sector. The interview subject responses were too theoretical and as a consequence *were terrib*le which appeared to indicate that *they don't have a clue*. During these interviews they recalled emphasising that *you are the teacher in the classroom. How would you deal with this and they couldn't really answer.* The other test of a teacher's competency – behaviour management – was likewise found wanting in the response that in the vent of behavioural issues the default response from a number of the graduate teachers to be interviewed was *I'll go to the HOD*.

Conclusion

This paper has provided insights into teachers' perceptions of professional development and the role of the university. The data reveals that the university is viewed in a mostly positive way, however it is evident that more could be done to further strengthen links and utilise the expertise and capacity of both school and academic staff in this endeavour. Similarly to the art/craft debate the work of the mind (theoretical/university) and the work of the hand (practical/school) create some level of tension, however the issue is not as clearly defined as this. Teachers are confronted daily with the very real and practical tasks of teaching utilising methods and techniques informed by research. Quality teachers are reflective practitioners who are aware of current developments in their field. Utilising universities to assist in providing information and professional development about current trends in Education, and welcoming the skills and expertise of teachers into the university context results in mutually beneficial outcomes and the subsequent valuing of both school and university educators. However, due to the current focus on quality teachers and the closer alignment of schools and universities with a business model, there is suspicion regarding the role of the university in providing professional development for teachers. Due to the different mandates for both institutions this is problematic although well worth pursuing to provide teachers with targeted professional development to help them enhance their capacity and personal satisfaction in a challenging but also rewarding career.

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