

Professional development and implementation for a new Health and Physical Education Curriculum

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Introduction

The content, delivery and reception of a professional development programme is influenced by many factors. I will refer to these factors as agendas; the political agenda, the agenda of the school’s management, usually reflected in the expectations of the Principal, each teacher’s agenda, and the agenda of those delivering the professional development.

These agendas are often conflicting and serve as obstacles to achieving any desired result. The dilemma is how to satisfy all participants (stakeholders) in this process. It is an ethical issue about providing a professional development programme that is reflective of both school management and teacher needs and expectations, as well as one that meets the expected outcomes.

During this paper I will touch on each agenda, discussing more fully identified tensions and conflicts that can result for both the teacher participants and the providers of the professional development programme. I will then discuss ways in which the conflicts and tensions have, and might be addressed so that professional development programmes are able to address curriculum requirements, as well as validate the importance of recipient needs and desires.

The Political Agenda

A curriculum statement is to some degree reflective of the political agenda at the time in which it is written. According to Thornley (1998), in New Zealand curriculum

statements are dictated by political, social and economic circumstances. Thornley (1998), argues that irrespective of who designs the curriculum only teachers have the opportunity to implement it in their classrooms. For this reason she suggests that interventions, in the form of professional development, are provided as a means of attempting to control what teachers may do in their classrooms to implement curriculum. Therefore it could be said that the political agenda is further re-enforced through government funded professional development. In New Zealand when a new curriculum document is being introduced professional development opportunities for teachers and schools are provided, and partly funded by the Ministry of Education. The Ministry of Education contracts providers to deliver professional development to teachers and schools. As the contracted providers in the Waikato region we are expected to provide professional development that will assist teachers to implement the curriculum statement Health and Physical Education in the New Zealand Curriculum (Ministry of Education, 1999).

School Management Agenda

According to Hargreaves and Fullan (1992), leadership affects the success of teacher development efforts. The principal, as educational leader of the school, is in a position to provide a supportive context for teacher development efforts (Hargreaves & Fullan, 1992).



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In contrast, the principal can also have a detrimental effect on the success of teacher development efforts.

Many of the teachers involved in the professional development programme expressed concerns about the expectations of their principals. Not only are teachers being expected to develop policies and implementation plans immediately, there is also the expectation that they will deliver staff meetings to inform other teachers in their schools, and lead community consultation.

[I'm] "...expected to take over and organise class programmes. I'm seen as the 'expert' solutions for all" (Teacher involved in the professional development programme, 1999).

[I'm] "...expected to put together the full health and physical education programme – including developing units of work, leading in-service, documentation, leading consultation process with community" (Teacher involved in the professional development programme, 1999).

It is my belief that these perceived pressures actually prevent teachers from embracing the opportunity to explore and experiment with new ideas, and reflecting on their practice.

The Teacher's Agenda

Fullan (1991) suggests teachers are the key to educational change, that what they think and what they do will affect the success or failure of any proposed change. In-class observations and discussions with teachers have indicated a range of teacher commitment, degree of willingness and level of readiness to explore and experiment with ways of implementing this curriculum.

Many teachers demonstrated a willingness to experiment with ways in which they might develop their existing teaching and learning programmes to reflect the philosophy and intent of this curriculum while others indicated that they, 'did not have time', or were, 'already doing this, so nothing is new'. Some teachers were only

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concerned about receiving examples of unit plans and assessments, 'tell us what to do, and how to assess it.'

In many cases it appeared that the expectations of the teacher participants might have been influenced by their perception of what others required of them. 'Others' being the school principal and teaching colleagues.

These are some of the comments made by the teachers involved in the programme.

"They think I have all the answers now!"

"There is an expectation that I am now the font of all knowledge!"

"They expect me to come to the workshops and get the recipe and pass it on so we can be seen to be doing it!"

"There is an expectation that the implementation of the new document should be well on its way in our school."

Another explanation for teachers' preference for 'the recipe', is the issue of accountability. According to Thornley (1998), the New Zealand curriculum statements tend to emphasise the importance of student achievement over learning and teaching. This could explain why some teachers prefer to be provided with paper examples rather than seeing the programme as an opportunity to collaboratively explore effective approaches to teaching and learning in health and physical education.

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Or perhaps as Fullan (1993) suggests, it is not about resistance to change, but too many innovations being forced on teachers at once. This is supported by Thornley (1998), who, after talking to New Zealand teachers about their recent professional development experiences, reported that they were expressing dissatisfaction with the speed in which the new curriculum statements have been introduced since 1992. It is hardly surprising then that teachers come to the professional development programme expecting to be given 'the recipe'.

The Facilitation Team Agenda

The debate for the facilitation team, when planning and delivering the content of the professional development programme offered to the teachers, is influenced by several factors. What we do is influenced by the requirements of the contractual obligations. As a result the facilitation team will to some extent be attempting to influence participants to adopt the new philosophy, and to experiment with different teaching approaches and strategies, which will be necessary, if the philosophy and intent is to be implemented in teaching and learning programmes. For some of the teachers involved this has been in conflict with their impatience to be provided with the tools which will enable them to plan and assess in health and physical education. Although accepting of the need to develop an understanding of the philosophy and intent of the curriculum some teachers were reluctant to devote time to exploring and experimenting with ways in which they might implement this into current programmes, or to reflect on current practice.

The problem is an ethical one. Firstly, it concerns the lack of commitment by some teachers to meeting the expectations of the professional development programme. Secondly, it is about the way in which the professional development programme is

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delivered by the facilitation team in order to meet the intended outcomes. Personal beliefs do affect what is delivered in a professional development programme. The knowledge and past experiences of the person(s) planning and delivering the professional development programme will influence the content and delivery of a programme. My personal beliefs are influenced by the literature about good practice in teacher development for curriculum change, and my past and on-going experiences as a teacher educator.

Addressing the Conflicts of Interest

If, as Fullan (1991) suggests, teachers are the key to educational change, that what they think and what they do will affect the success or failure of any proposed change, then it would be futile and unethical, not to address teacher needs and expectations. Thornley (1998) also reminds us that it is teachers who translate the theoretical curriculum into practice, only they have the

opportunity to implement it in their classrooms.

Throughout the professional development programme there has been an emphasis on fostering a collaborative culture. This has been encouraged by providing participants with on-going opportunities to identify their needs in relation to the content of the programme offered, and by modelling the acceptance of

opinions, questions, discussion and critique. Expectations expressed, and issues raised by the participating teachers did inform the on-going planning and development of the workshop programme and what has been covered during the in-school visits.

During school visits each teacher involved in the programme has the



opportunity to work with a facilitator. Facilitators are able to provide each teacher with feedback as they explore and experiment with ways to implement this new curriculum in their classrooms. Perhaps the most valuable aspect of these in-school visits has been the opportunity to address the specific needs of each teacher participating in the programme.

Stoll & Fink (1996) suggest that

leadership be about inviting others to participate. It is more than fostering a collaborative culture, "invitational leadership" (p109) requires the leader to demonstrate a sense of optimism, by advocating high expectations for others. Such leadership also values the importance of respecting others as individuals, and trusting them as, "...able, worthwhile and responsible" (p109). Invitational leaders support, care and encourage.

Starratt (1994) proposes a similar perspective, that is, an ethic of care. An ethic of care acknowledges that people have the right to be who they are in the context of the uniqueness of their individuality. An ethic of care would be demonstrated in an environment where participant involvement in the planning is a feature of the professional development programme. This style empowers others to decide what is important for them. It demonstrates a commitment to shared decision making. This reflects a constructivist approach to learning, an

approach which empowers the learner in the control of his or her learning process (Tasker, 1998). The same author suggests that to be consistent with this kind of approach there must be flexibility within the programme to ensure relevancy for the learners. It is about 'walking the talk'. As facilitators of this professional development programme we have attempted to implement a consultative,

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collaborative approach to leadership. We have facilitated opportunities for participants to take a lead role in the process.

An ethic of critique is also important. It encourages reflection and suggests critical thinking about issues and positions. Penados (1998) discusses the three levels of reflection presented by several authors including Carr and Kemmis (1986) and Van-Mannen (1987). The three levels of reflection according to these authors are: technical, practical and critical. Penados (1998) suggests that teachers do engage in reflective practice at the technical and practical levels, however reflection on the theories that underpin practice is not common. If this is true then it is essential that professional development programmes endeavour to facilitate the opportunity for teachers to engage in reflection at a critical level. This should encourage participants to question not only the philosophy of this curriculum, but the professional development programme itself. According to Starratt (1994) to question why something is advocated, where a particular idea may have come from, who played an instrumental part in developing the curriculum, and why something may be advocated at the expense of something else is a feature of an ethic of critique.

The professional development programme does endeavour to facilitate the opportunity for teachers to engage in reflection at a critical level. It encourages participants to question not only the philosophy of this curriculum, but also welcomes questions related to the professional development

programme offered. Validating an ethic of critique helps prevent participants feeling they are being persuaded to conform solely to expectations of the facilitation team or that which is advocated within the philosophy and intent of this curriculum. It helps ensure participant ownership of the professional development programme and as a result, the implementation of this curriculum in classrooms and school wide.

Starratt (1994) suggests that an ethic of critique stops short of any necessary action. In my opinion this is where leadership becomes important. Initially perhaps by encouraging the participants, through the facilitation process, to go beyond the critique stage. Decision-making and action must follow the critique or the process of critical thinking. Critical thinking and taking critical action are essential strategies that students must learn if they are to be able to make health enhancing decisions that will contribute in a positive way to their own, and others hauora/well-being.

It is my belief that conflicts of interest and resulting tensions will always be a present during times of curriculum change. I also believe this is healthy, as it promotes opportunities for critique. It is about ownership, and through ownership, commitment. Ownership is more likely to happen in a process that values and reflects critique and action. An ethic of care acknowledges, and thus validates, that which is important to individuals, is valued and important. In my opinion this strengthens feelings of empowerment as people see that what they think and believe is important.

In conclusion I would suggest that the process of teacher professional development must be a shared experience. All the stakeholders need to be actively involved in the decision making about what is important. Changes to teaching and learning practices to ensure more effective learning in health and physical education will only be successful if this is

acknowledged and there is a genuine commitment by all concerned to participate collaboratively.



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