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Equal Access for All

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Abstract

Providing equal access to high quality professional learning for all school leaders throughout NSW public education requires innovative uses of technology. Whether in Moree, Bourke, Yanko or Sydney every head teacher and assistant principal needs to be able to access the same learning opportunities. A new package of five self-paced modules has been created by the Professional Learning and Leadership Development Directorate at Ryde as part of a larger leadership development program. With these modules, everyone can see the same speakers, hear the same narration and access the same input. Engagement in the learning is done through: flash animations, video clips, mp3 files, animated quizzes, readings and school based tasks. In this workshop you will see samples of the modules demonstrating how the e-learning tools have been combined with practical learning tasks to create a high quality learning experience that will enhance leadership capabilities.

Before starting to explore equal access for all, I want to discuss what I mean by professional learning. It is a sustained learning opportunity that enhances understanding, capability and/or skills leading to improved student learning outcomes. The characteristics of professional learning can be simplified into these six categories.

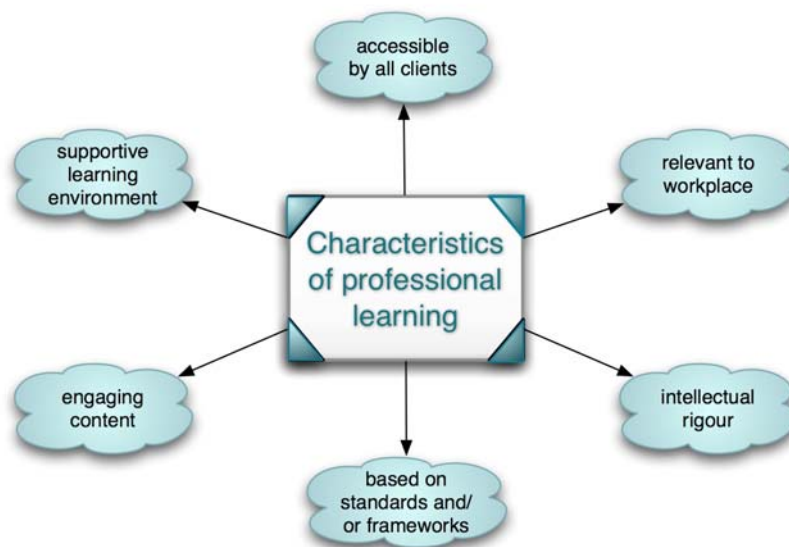
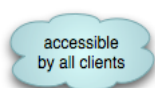


Figure 1: characteristics of professional learning

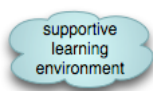


accessible by all clients

One of the more challenging aspects of providing professional learning for school leaders in NSW is ensuring that everyone, no matter where they are situated, can access it. There are large geographical distances and isolation. Information communication technology provides a wide range of tools that can be used to enable equal access. With each new innovation or improvement to the tools and the infrastructure supporting these technologies, such as bandwidth, more possibilities are created for a high quality learning experience. Using these tools you can provide content experts or guest speakers to everyone.

They are available for everyone to see by using video clips or for everyone to hear by using audio as mp3 files. We used both of these tools in the self-paced modules bringing the experts into the local setting.

However, for true accessibility the technology must be seamless, intuitive and meet WC3 standards for accessibility. The new tools can provide all this. To complete the professional learning program, the participants should have no requirement for technology skills or tools they are not already using. They can gain greater understanding of the tools and use present skills to approach the use of new tools. Their technical confidence should be reinforced not threatened. With the self-paced modules this is the goal that we strived to achieve.



supportive learning environment

A key factor in all professional learning is to provide a supportive learning environment. This is even more important to consider when the learners are not physically present. There are many different ways of creating and providing support for professional learning. With the self-paced modules, this supportive learning environment was provided initially by the simple clean design. Next came the two school leaders - their colleagues. They appeared as photographs and audio files throughout the modules. They 'spoke' to the learners at the introduction to every new topic providing an overview of what would be required. Their purpose was to create an interesting and non-threatening environment. In some modules they provided a commentary to animated content that provided a foundation of knowledge on which to build the new concepts.

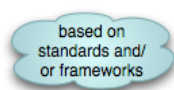
Support was also provided by their regional program coordinator, the peers in the program and their in-school supervisor/principal.



engaging content

In the past, there has been a tendency to put text on the web and call it online learning. We will probably never come to a time when there will be no text required to explain ideas. However, we have come to a time when there are many different ways that we can communicate concepts on the web: for example, video clips, simulations, animations, applets, audio clips, podcasts, photographs, virtual tours, charts, diagrams and illustrations. There are also many tools available for interacting with the concepts; for example, surveys, forms, games, self-paced tests, word based activities such as crosswords and flash based interactivities.

In the self-paced modules we used most of these.



based on standards and/or frameworks

To ensure that the learning contained in a professional learning program is consistent with a greater whole, they need to be based on standards and/or frameworks. Standards can also lead to other forms of credentialing. The self-paced modules were based on the NSW *School Leadership Capability Framework*. This framework is based on the results of a large research study of effective principals in NSW conducted by Professor Geoff Scott and published in 2003.



intellectual rigour

When all is said and done, professional learning for school leaders is being provided to experienced teachers with both undergraduate and graduate degrees. They are expecting to find it challenging and a worthwhile expenditure of their time. In these modules, the content was based on research published in the last few years. The readings associated with the topics were both relevant and recent. Quotes from

