

# WORKPLACE LEARNING AND THE USE OF CURRICULUM STATEMENTS AND PROFILES BY TEACHERS OF EDUCATIONALLY DISADVANTAGED STUDENTS.

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The development of Australian National Curriculum Statements and Profiles has significant implications for teacher professional development at the present time. In March 1994, the Commonwealth Department of Employment, Education and Training (D.E.E.T.) initiated the National Professional Development Program (NPDP) with an element for teachers of educationally disadvantaged students. In this element submissions were sought to implement the National Curriculum Statements and use student Profiles as a means of improving learning outcomes of students effected by some form of educational disadvantage. This issue has particular significance for rural schools because one of their main concerns is accessing relevant and meaningful professional development which is cost effective in terms of travel and time out of school.

In this context, the Centre for Professional Development in Education at Charles Sturt University (CSU) was awarded an NPDP grant to trial a particular approach to professional development with schools in the Riverina region of the New South Wales Department of School Education and the Canberra-Goulburn Archdiocese Catholic Education Office. The approach known as 'workplace learning' was thought to have benefits for rural schools in addressing the problems of travel and cost of teacher release.

## PURPOSE OF THE PROJECT

The purpose was to trial the 'workplace learning' model of professional development to facilitate use of Curriculum Statements and Profiles by teachers operating within the New South Wales syllabus guidelines with educationally disadvantaged students. The project focused on improving learning outcomes of such students in the middle years of schooling (Years 5-8) with particular emphasis on those who were experiencing educational disadvantage relating to rural isolation, low socio-economic status or aboriginality.

The professional development program:

- was based on the research and development project conducted in 1993 "Workplace Learning in the Professional Development of Teachers" (NBEET, 1994) which identified the key features of best practice to be followed in this project;
- provided teachers with strategies for programming, teaching, assessing and reporting using an outcome-based framework;
- facilitated the use of Curriculum Statements and Profiles through purpose written modules in each of the five curriculum areas by up to 120 teachers;
- raised issues about teaching students who are experiencing educational disadvantage;
- assisted teachers in schools to move towards a culture of change in support of students experiencing educational disadvantage;
- was delivered by a combination of workshop and distance education; and

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- incorporated a 2 day workshop for in-school collegial group leaders who then supported the workplace learning of teachers.

## METHODOLOGY

The methodology used here sought to draw together recent research in teacher professional development and outcome-based education. In relation to professional development it was based on the model of 'Workplace Learning' (NBEET, 1994:25) that takes account of both individual and contextual factors in teacher learning.

In the workplace learning model (see Appendix 1), the following factors have been identified as significant for teacher learning:

**The Context:** In this case the context for new teacher learning in the workplace is the national imperative for improving learning outcomes for all students, particularly for educationally disadvantaged students.

**The Innovation:** Curriculum Statements and Profiles and the issue of 'ownership' of this innovation - teachers need to develop a sense of ownership rather than be coerced.

**The Teacher:** Individual teachers react differently depending on age, career stage, previous experience with the innovation etc. Teachers in this project were mostly experienced teachers but with little prior experience of outcome-based education.

**Situations of Teaching:** The project focused on the middle school years (Years 5-8) in order to encompass the needs of students in the transition years from primary to secondary where many learning difficulties arise.

**Learning Resources and Support:** Reality-based learning resources, developed from case study research, and specially written implementation modules in each curriculum area were provided to teachers. Teachers were given ongoing support as they reconstructed their teaching practices from in-school collegial group leaders and from CSU lecturers<sup>1</sup> involved in this project.

**System Recognition and Reward:** The program was recognised at the system level by appropriate acknowledgment from the Regional Assistant Director General. Teachers who successfully completed the program and who wished to receive credit in a university award course were asked to complete an additional assignment for such accreditation.

**Culture of the School:** A collaborative culture in the sharing of ideas and strategies with colleagues was encouraged through in-school collegial groups. Collaborative leadership from executives and consultants also enhanced teacher learning in the workplace.

This approach to professional development focused attention on the learning that teachers undergo as they change their classroom practice. The model argued (NBEET, 1994):

"... teachers' workplace learning is viewed as an essential component of the overall professional development of teachers. It occurs largely in school settings and involves the transformation of knowledge, values and beliefs into classroom practice. It includes both informal and planned learning, often involves input from others such as academics or consultants and has the intention of improving the quality of teaching" (p.viii)

Ten schools from the Riverina Region and ten schools from the Canberra-Goulburn Archdiocese were selected and invited to participate in the project based on these criteria:

- mix of primary and secondary (to ensure coverage of Years 5-8);
- at least 4 geographically isolated schools;
- at least 4 schools with students drawn from lower SES communities;
- at least 4 schools with significant aboriginal student population; and
- inclusion of teachers of all curriculum areas relevant to the project.

The project included the design and delivery of a ten week professional development program to all Year 5-8 teachers and executives who agreed to participate. The program comprised:

- Distance education package mailed to all participants; the package focused on outcome-based approaches to teaching with a specific emphasis on meeting the needs of educationally disadvantaged students and included implementation modules in the 5 curriculum areas. These were English, Mathematics, Science, Technology and Physical education and Health. These materials were developed by staff from Charles Sturt University and/or the NSW Department of School Education.
- Two day workshop that introduced the implementation modules in English, Mathematics, Science, Technology and Health and PE. for the in-school collegial leaders.
- Following the workshop, these leaders formed all project teachers into collegial groups in their schools for support as they implemented modules on specific strategies in classrooms in the various curriculum areas.
- The trial of modules took place over one school term and included in-school sessions conducted by collegial group leaders and visits from curriculum specialist consultants from CSU.

## **PROJECT OBJECTIVES AND OUTCOMES**

There were four key objectives identified for the implementation trial. Each objective and the outcomes for it are reported here.

**Objective 1. Improve outcomes of students in the middle years of schooling with particular emphasis on those who are experiencing educational disadvantage through factors such as rural isolation, aboriginality and low socio-economic status.**

- Teachers were able to identify a small group (4-6) of educationally disadvantaged students and profile them before and after teaching the unit of work in one Key Learning Area from those available in the trial.
- The nature of educational disadvantage was made more explicit in the minds of both the collegial group leaders and the participating teachers. This was achieved through high quality information provided in the resources developed for this project.
- In addition to the middle years of schooling (Years 5-8), a number of Year 4 students. A number of Central Schools participated in the project. These schools span the middle years of schooling and provided an excellent opportunity to analyse both the implementation of the workplace learning model and the issues of educational disadvantage.

**Objective 2. Plan, deliver and evaluate a professional development program for teachers of these students which will introduce and facilitate the use of the English, Science, Mathematics, Technology and Health and Physical Education Curriculum Statements and Profiles.**

- Modules were written for each of the specified Key Learning Areas to assist teachers to use the National Curriculum Statements and Profiles to the extent possible within the NSW Department of School Education policy guidelines.
- 118 teachers and collegial group leaders completed the professional development program. The collegial group leaders attended an orientation workshop at the beginning of the program and then supported their teachers through the workplace learning approach.

**Objective 3. Extend the understandings and skills of teachers in outcome-based education in relation to programming, classroom teaching, assessment and reporting.**

- Teachers have been encouraged and guided to move towards planning, programming, assessing and reporting using outcomes in a manageable way by choosing a small number of children (4-6) to profile in their chosen Key Learning Area.
- The Key Learning Area specific modules which were used during this project introduced teachers to ideas about outcome-based education through practical opportunities to plan, program, teach, assess and report using profiles.

**Objective 4. Build a collaborative project involving the Riverina Region of the NSW Department of School Education, the Canberra-Goulburn Archdiocese Catholic Education Office and the Faculty of Education, Charles Sturt University, through the recently formed Centre for Professional Development in Education.**

- The model of 'workplace learning' was trialed in 24 schools in the Riverina Region of NSW and the Canberra-Goulburn Archdiocese. Two schools withdrew from the project and the reasons offered for their withdrawal were consistent with the need for the presence of a number of positive factors identified by the 'workplace learning' model of professional development.
- One Collegial Group Leaders was identified for each of the 24 schools. Initially they were visited in their schools and they then came together for a one and a half day workshop on workplace learning, national profiles and educational disadvantage. A high level of collaboration developed between the university and the collegial groups leaders through the workshop and then in the schools through the leadership of the group leaders.

#### **SPECIFIC EVALUATION ISSUES**

Through the implementation of this project, teachers, collegial leaders and personnel from Charles Sturt University collected information on both the process of implementation of profiles in the classroom and on the outcomes of using profile both from a teaching and reporting perspective. Below are some of the specific issues raised in the summative evaluation of this project.

### **1. General comments.**

The Charles Sturt University materials and the Curriculum Corporation materials were well set out, readable, provided lots of examples, and provided useful guidelines for classroom practice. There were clear objectives for the project and the readings contained good background material. The Charles Sturt University materials in English and Mathematics were particularly well received.

### **2. How did the 'workplace learning' model of professional development work for you ?**

Teachers recognised that this model of professional development is both predicated on their sense of professionalism and further engages the types of peer interaction which adds to their sense of collegiality. The positive results of such a way of learning include the capacity to see how students respond to changes in teaching, no travelling time away from school and the establishment of a network of informed practitioners.

*"Good peer interaction. The weekly meetings kept us on track and facilitated sharing. We discussed both insights and problems. "*

### **3. On what basis did your teachers select the students for profiling ?**

Geographic isolation was the most frequent basis for selection of the students for profiling. The next most frequent indicator of educational disadvantage was low socio-economic status, followed closely by aboriginality. Teachers also suggested that criteria for selection included such factors as attendance rates, behaviour problems, family support and multicultural or ESL background.

### **4. How did your group make use of the information gathered about the students from profiling in the preparation, teaching and assessment of the units of work ?**

- a. The unit taught during the period of the project was usually part of the current program.
- b. The strands and strand organisers used in profiling were selected on the basis of closest fit to the unit. Some new pointers were developed.
- c. Progress was detailed in terms of the relevant outcomes identified from the profiles and the needs of the disadvantaged students. Awareness of need to cater for individual differences was enhanced.
- d. Some teachers changed their teaching strategies a great deal but most did not apart from making it clear to students what outcomes were expected. Closer observation of target students and greater awareness of difference in achievement level were reported by all teachers.
- e. The clearer focus in (d) meant that assessment was more tightly related to outcomes. Often more feedback was given to students and students knew what was expected of them. Teachers knew more about which individual students were finding learning difficult and their rate of progress. Assessment was generally more detailed and specific.

### **5. Is there evidence of improved learning outcomes as a result of teaching the unit using information from the profiles?**

Changes in outcomes were difficult to detect as the length of the unit was only 4 to 5 weeks. This limitation was seen as more important in secondary schools.

- a. Some growth in specific knowledge outcomes was noted in primary schools with some of these schools noting significant improvements in some other outcomes such as attitude and commitment. In secondary schools student attendance improved.
- b. Some general development of skills in primary schools. More specific skills showed greater improvement.
- c. There was a marked improvement in attitude, motivation and confidence in over half the schools possibly as a result of greater individual attention and feedback and clear focus on particular aspects of achievement. The students recognised that they had got 'somewhere' and made progress.

**6. What effect has this project had in your school ?**

Teachers were asked for an overall reaction to the impact of this project within their school. Their summation was:

Positive	75%
Neutral	19%
Negative	6% (This represents 1 school only)

Teachers were generally very impressed with the effects of the project in their schools. They commented on their greater inclination to talk to one another in a professionally collegial way and the increasing confidence which they brought to the innovation of profiles and outcomes and the opportunities which were created for them to try things for themselves.

*"We recognised that workplace learning is effective and can be fun. It is a legitimate alternative approach to professional development".*

**7. How useful was the workshop (11-12 Aug) in preparing you for your role as collegial group leader?**

All comments except one were positive, with the second day being thought of as the most practical and most beneficial. Teachers commented that they drew on workshop materials during the school phase of the project. Some felt that it provided a clear overview of the project but others would have liked more time to spend on the practical implications of all the materials presented.

**8. What were the most rewarding and the most difficult aspects of your role as collegial leader ?**

There were many more 'rewarding' comments than 'difficult'. The 'Difficult' comments included:

- Finding times for weekly meetings.*
- No involvement in Society and Environment area.*
- Time!*
- Tough for hardworking teachers to spend so much time on this project.*
- Aligning pointers with strands.*
- Difficult to relate to some staff who did not want to change teaching habits.*

The 'Rewarding' comments included:

- Real professional sharing.*
- Positive, detailed reporting on individual children.*
- Gave me an opportunity to try a new role as a non-threatening mentor.*

*Professionalism of the team.*  
*Became conversant with new research findings.*  
*Seeing improvement in the children.*  
*Becoming informed about profiles and outcomes.*  
*Rewarding professional development.*  
*Trying new teaching strategies that work.*  
*Leading a project where all concerned felt that the outcomes were excellent.*  
*Building a collegial atmosphere.*  
*Some teachers asking when they could do more work on the unit.*  
*Really enjoyed the planning and teaching of units of work.*  
*Learning from other group members.*

### **Unanticipated Outcomes of the Project**

- A number of schools have indicated that they will use this model for all professional development in 1995.
- Effective workplace learning requires a high level of support from the executive within any school and the role of the principal proved crucial in this project.
- Definitions of disadvantage were expanded and teachers moved towards a much longer term view of the implications of disadvantage on the educational achievement of their students.
- The factors which mitigated against the continuation of two schools in the project and a number of individual teachers scattered across the regions provided insight into the problems confronting schools implementing change.
- There was a need to convince decision makers to allocate time and resources to professional development activities which are based on the 'workplace learning' model and located within the school.
- It emerged that it was necessary to provide follow up support in the form of visits by members of the CSU consultative group.

### **SUMMATION**

This project has:

- Encouraged over 100 teachers to look at the National Curriculum Statements and Profiles.
- Assisted teachers to undertake their own learning in their own workplaces bolstered by high quality support.
- Exposed teachers to concepts of educational disadvantage within the framework of an outcome-based approach to teaching and learning.
- Encouraged teachers to profile, plan, program, teach and evaluate units of work based on the national profiles in a manner consistent with the policy directions of the NSW Department of School Education and the NSW Board of Studies.
- Assisted teachers to negotiate their way through the Curriculum Corporation publication "Using the Profiles" in their selected Key Learning Area.

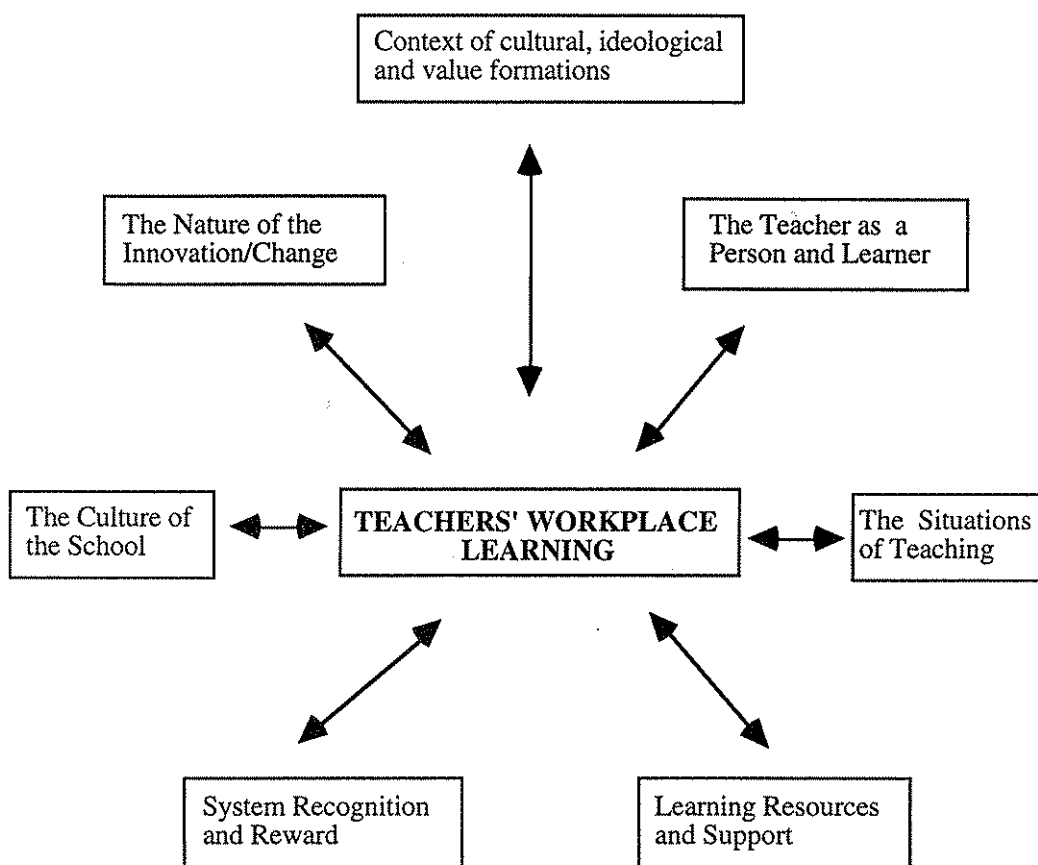
- Supported teachers to undertake their professional development in their workplace in an atmosphere of collegiality and collaboration.
- Offered teachers the opportunity to have their participation in this project accredited by Charles Sturt University.
- Contributed to enhanced learning opportunities for students experiencing educational disadvantage.
- Generated information about how teachers learn and cope with educational change in their workplace.

## **CONCLUSION**

The trial of the 'workplace learning' model proved a success in most schools involved. In contrast with traditional approaches where teachers leave the school for 'inservice courses', the 'workplace learning' model reduces costs but, at the same time, encourages a great deal of professional learning.



**Appendix 1**  
**Contextual Model of Teachers' Workplace Learning**



**Note**

1. CSU Staff involved in the Project were: Dr. J. Retallick, Dr. R. Murphy, Dr. R. Francis, Dr. D. Hill, Dr. C. Boylan, Mrs S. Clancey, Mrs R. Brennan. The contribution of staff from both education systems involved in the project is gratefully acknowledged.

**References**

NBEET (1994) Workplace Learning in the Professional Development of Teachers, Report from Centre for Professional Development in Education, Charles Sturt University, AGPS, Jan.