The Centre for Professional Development at the University of Auckland: towards creating networks of moral obligations

Reynold J.S. Macpherson
University of Auckland, Auckland, New Zealand

Addresses briefly five complex issues in higher education: professional development spanning all categories of staff; the role of a centre of professional development (CPD) in context; the philosophical framework and models within which a centre might operate; the role of a centre in strategic planning and policy formation, and the contribution that a CPD might make in assessing and enhancing quality. Develops four main arguments with regard to the CPD at the University of Auckland. The CPD should support continuous improvement, promote organizational learning, and provide policy and practical advice regarding the management of quality. It should conduct organizational research and development, primarily through international benchmarking. The CPD also needs to research the implications of information technology, especially in the reconstruction of teaching, research and organization. Above all it needs to understand its organizational role of helping to construct cultural networks of mutual moral obligations.

Introduction

The University of Auckland is New Zealand’s largest and one of its most prestigious universities. It has about 25,000 students and about 2,500 academic and general staff. The report of the committee established to review the Higher Education Research Office (HERO) (University of Auckland, 1995a) recommended that the HERO and the Staff Development Office be amalgamated. The report was accepted and implementation started. The selection of a new director at professorial level provided an opportunity to review strategic directions. I was appointed as from 1 April 1997. This paper reflects my preliminary analysis.

My experience and research supports at least three assumptions about professional development (PD): it can be very effective in certain conditions, it is a professional entitlement and it has strategic importance in knowledge-based organizations. On the other hand, the extent to which this set of assumptions is still warranted in New Zealand higher education (HE) appears to lack definitive, recent and detailed empirical support. Knowledge of the effects of PD in HE may also have become dated in a context of rapid change and intensifying competition. This implies that the credibility of the Centre of Professional Development (CPD) will be heavily dependent on its research and performance.

Institutional policies appear to cohere with my assumptions about PD. For example, the first goal in The University of Auckland 2001: Mission, Goals and Strategies (University of Auckland, 1995b) is concerned with the quality of teaching and learning. The first objective listed is to “create an environment throughout the University in which teaching of international quality, informed by research and, where appropriate, by professional practice, is accepted as a primary academic responsibility” (p. 14). With regard to human resource development (HRD), the goal is to “have an academic and general staff matching the best international standards” (p. 24). It appears that international benchmarking should therefore be a research and development (R&D) priority for the CPD.

A preliminary survey of international research findings and CPD web sites also suggests that knowledge of PD in HE is being advanced primarily by using adult learning and HRD research. Since PD is also being used increasingly to promote quality in budget groups, more evidence of recent leadership and organizational research might have been expected.

Hence, three tentative proposals act as themes in this paper. The CPD should promote continuous improvement, play a pivotal role in organizational learning, and contribute to policy for mulation and the improvement of practice in quality management. I would stress that these proposals offer strong support to the services currently being provided by the CPD at the University of Auckland while indicating the need for policy realignment and extension largely due to the impact of new information technology. A useful example of an apparently successful current strategy is generic PD.

Professional development for all categories of staff

Ingrid Moses (1987) showed that effective PD in HE should serve the generic needs of all members as it promotes the interests of the institution. This approach values the daily reality of co-operative work teams that are also responsive to the broader policy context. Conversely, it also implies that PD should help all staff make an optimal and personally rewarding contribution to the mission and operations of their university.

Newcomers, for example, need to be inducted carefully so that they feel valued and supported from the outset. A university has an obligation to explain “where it is going”, why, how it will know when it has got there, and then, how members can help set new targets. On the other hand, since change is now a constant in HE, knowledge itself is intrinsically contestable, and constant improvement is a condition of survival in the sector, all staff should feel obliged to participate in regular opportunities to be resocialized and to help set new targets. I will come back to the issue of reciprocal moral obligations.
Being valued is a basic condition of professionalism, a condition that must be intentionally sustained (Thomas, 1995). Sharing power appears to be one of the more effective strategies. It is long known that when colleagues solve problems in supportive groups, help set strategic options and priorities, and then negotiate the personal implications for their performance in a known policy context, their commitment to quality tends to rise (Moses, 1989).

Another useful strategy is to collect and reflect on evidence of best practices elsewhere (about tutoring, supervising, lecturing, researching, publishing). The Higher Education Research and Development Staff Association (HERDSA) Green Guides (Bruce, c1992; Cannon, 1992; Crooks, 1988; Kember and Kelly, c1992; Kember and Murphy, c1992; Lublin, 1987; Moses, 1989; McDonald, 1984; Sadler, c1984) are a useful early example of this approach.

Today, I would argue, even more systematic research is needed to refine the benchmarks used to support learning and development in teaching and learning. Similarly, research needs to underpin leadership and management services, especially about how structures, personnel and resources are managed to lift productivity and to accelerate the growth of knowledge. This applies especially research about the comparative value of professional development aided by information technology.

In the interim, generic PD should continue to provide supportive socialization, raise coherence between effort and organizational values, and link the formative evaluation of performance with planning for improvement.

The role of the CPD within the university

In addition to generic PD, it is crucial that the CPD help improve the production and dissemination of refined knowledge. Sveiby (1992) demonstrated that primary production in a university does not comprise goods and services but complex problem solving. Schön (1987) showed that problem solving in universities is non-standardized, non-recurrent, creative and highly dependent on committed individuals. Encouraging such production through PD implies providing continuous improvement and organizational learning about problem solving.

Some definitions are warranted at this point. Continuous improvement, according to the European Lifelong Learning Initiative (1994), is best achieved by people at work learning together to lift their performance. This requires institutional investment, an ethos that values the growth in organizational knowledge, and educative leadership services (Duignan and Macpherson, 1992). It is also known that continuous improvement accelerates when learning, work and improvement are integrated and when new technology mobilizes talent and lets people learn continuously in their own preferred way (Houle, 1980).

A learning organization is an organization with a learning strategy that is regularly improved (Senge, 1990). Ideally, this learning strategy would encourage members to remain flexible, share their ideas, seek out and use feedback, support each other, watch for opportunities, learn from other organizations, and encourage self-development.

Whether leaders encourage colleagues to use the available degree structures, student evaluation data, training days, seminars or departmental workshops, the crucial aim is to sustain an educative culture (Wade et al., 1994). Such educative leadership needs to be ubiquitous and authentic to transform organizational culture. This approach should also be characteristic when any CPD discharged responsibilities in wider settings.

Role of a CPD in a wider context

The CPD at Auckland has at least two major challenges in the wider context. It must help enhance the status of its host university in broader communities and help colleagues respond proactively to the information age. I will come back to the issue of community.

The first challenge is that the CPD should help present the University of Auckland as a premier international repository of teaching, research and administrative best practices. A practical example is to have the shop front of the CPD, its Web site, introduce colleagues, clarify the Centre’s vision, mission and services, market spare capacity, facilitate links with other PD centres, and present the CPD as a national policy research centre with a strong international profile.
The second challenge is to help university staff exploit new information technology (IT), as it unfolds. This implies collaborative research into the implications of changes in social, economic, political and legal terms, and applying the epistemological, technological and educational advantages discovered. In applied research terms it will mean helping colleagues to use emergent IT to review and develop performance, globalize their marketing, teaching and research, and design new delivery systems. As Lundin (1993) argued, the race is on in HE to offer automated teaching and online contract research; to individuals, to niche markets and to mass cohorts.

Since PD will be central to the IT-driven transformation of HE, it needs a sound philosophical justification for the role it will play. It is often assumed, wrongly in my view, that technology itself is value free. Since PD is a social technology, its application with regard to IT requires moral choices, and therefore, philosophical justification. One approach is to consider the moral obligations involved.

**Moral obligations**

The corporate plan of the University of Auckland defines PD as a moral obligation: “to encourage and assist staff to reach their potential” (University of Auckland, 1996b, p. 24). Simultaneously, the university maintains accountability processes so that personnel can discharge the obligations entailed by employment and so that budget groups can account for and improve their use of precious resources. Accountability and PD are two sides of the same quality management coin.

This is to argue that a philosophical justification for PD must cohere with accountability policy and that they should be developed as reciprocal moral obligations. If PD and accountability are accepted as two sides of the same quality coin, they must both be intrinsically ethical and educative in order to remain respected and to generate improvement.

The moral obligations associated with the CPD can be justified by reference to consequences (Macpherson and Cusack, 1996). For example, the obligation to provide continuous learning may be justified by the way it helps all staff reach their potential. The obligation to promote organizational learning may be justified by the advantages of individuals and groups reviewing and reprofiling their services. The obligation to provide policy and practical advice on quality management may be justified by appeal to collective strategic futures.

My policy research over the last five years (Macpherson, 1997) has shown that PD philosophies in large organizations and systems need to extend the use of hyper-individualistic models (e.g. extraction PD and skill-focused instruction) with humanist collegial models (e.g. team-based learning) to build a shared sense of professionalism and to achieve cultural change.

Similarly, these two models need to be supplemented with epistemically critical forms of PD (e.g. stakeholder-sensitive programme evaluation) that promote communitarian perspectives. These models are explained in the next section.

**Philosophical framework for CPD operations**

Three PD philosophies can be contrasted in terms of main purposes, appropriate strategies, source of evaluation criteria, appropriate accountability processes, strengths, weaknesses, appropriate forms of professional development, and the dominant systems of knowledge each use (see Table 1).

An important implication of a communitarian philosophy of PD is that it would mean the CPD helping colleagues to reconstruct their theories of professionalism in a supportive peer group, and then in a wider community context, through educative and formative processes rather than summative and punitive forms of accountability. What does it mean by community?

Depending on the task, community in HE can be interpreted as the university, programme stake holders, wider peer or client audiences, the Pacific Rim or Universities 21. Determining the nature of a work group’s community is an important developmental exercise in itself for the way it reiterates obligations and prior commitments. This is a crucial issue in New Zealand, given the Treaty of Waitangi and equal employment opportunities policies. Involving Maori philosophers and equity policy researchers in the work of a CPD would appear to be essential. It has been my experience that most international universities are yet to display such respect for such indigenous perspectives.

I noted earlier that PD and accountability are two sides of the same quality management coin. Seeing them as mutually contingent tightens reciprocal moral obligations between the person and the collective. One result of moving towards communitarian PD is that the legitimacy of practice will be more securely anchored in three constituencies: professional self, peers and community. Another is that colleagues are systematically exposed to forms of data and critique that
generate an even more sophisticated knowledge of their service.

An immediate implication for the CPD is that educative forms of leadership are needed to help colleagues move from the sometimes feral norms of uncontestable hyper-individualism towards more collegial norms, and then to move from the often closed peer cultures of collegialism towards communitarian action. The CPD will need to take an even more proactive role in improving leadership services across its host university.

In sum, identifying and discharging reciprocal obligations requires PD that builds a critical awareness of the nature of assumptions, values and knowledge embedded in aims and objectives. Of hyper-individualist, collegial and communitarian philosophies, it is only the communitarian perspective that extends PD from skill development into deeper reflection on the consequences of actions, and then to the gaining of wisdom about services in stakeholder groups.

Three models will now be introduced briefly to illustrate how this communitarian philosophy for PD can be operationalized in HE.

### Career and action research models

I share Candy's (1995) view that baseline PD in HE should help all colleagues to stay flexible and responsive by providing careful induction, feedback on performance and regularly refreshing expectations. And as people move through the seasons of their careers, and reprofile their service, they also need regular access to changing organizational values and priorities. This access is very important in large successful organizations given their proneness to a hardening of the arteries, to smugness and to hubris. Candy’s CAREER model is summarized in Table I.

To explain, anticipatory learning can help colleagues actively construct smart futures. For example, associates of the CPD in budget groups might try to embed such anticipatory learning during planning. The point is that it has to be embedded into the taken-for-granted stock of knowledge of that culture for it to have lasting effect. When knowledge of best practice is created in a supportive professional group, it has a genetic effect. In my experience, annual team programme budgeting gradually deepens understandings and creates forms of financial discipline that are unimaginable at, and quite unenforceable from, corporate levels.

Old money programmes, for instance, will have to be evaluated each year just as rigorously as new money proposals. Similarly, in the collective interest, efficiency gains will be needed to help create institutional risk capital and subsidize innovation. And to ensure that each budget group or programme is staying with or ahead of the best, policies and outcomes need to be compared against specialist international benchmarks.

This form of rigour needs to be a feature of the moral economy of the university. To reassure staff, and guarantee preferred and preferable collective futures, this moral

---

**Table I**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Philharmonic frameworks for CPD operations in higher education</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Model</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purpose</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appropriate strategies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evaluate criteria</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appropriate processes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strengths Weaknesses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Epistemology Appropriate PD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

---
Table II

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Principals</th>
<th>Characteristics</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Comprehensive</td>
<td>All aspects of academic and general staff work integrates career and organizational reprofiling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anticipatory</td>
<td>Strategic, responsive and cultural impacts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research based</td>
<td>Data driven and rigorous builds theory from consequences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exemplary</td>
<td>Research-based international benchmarks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Embedded</td>
<td>Ubiquitous and devolved in context</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reflective</td>
<td>Lifelong, personal development praxis revises the moral economy</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Quality audit and development cycle

The third model consistent with communitarian PD responds to a major challenge in quality management; how to reconcile the annual process of melding external pressures and corporate priorities with developing each budget group's change management capacities. Centralization can provide decisions more quickly but retard such capacity building and the growth of commitment.

Universities also need to sustain reasonable coherence between internal policies and external constituencies, provide supportive

Table III

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phase</th>
<th>Purpose</th>
<th>Key issues</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Define professional development together</td>
<td>Collective map of the situation</td>
<td>Stakeholder interests and values</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Describe PD in context</td>
<td>Jointly specify key aspects</td>
<td>Antecedents, causes, effects, terms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Review wider knowledge of policies and practices</td>
<td>Research teams commissioned and report</td>
<td>Alternative ideas, policies, trials and findings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gather and evaluate consequences of options</td>
<td>Co-operative evaluation of the relative merits of options</td>
<td>Competing explanations and solutions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deciding PD policies and planning practices</td>
<td>Select strategies and joint planning</td>
<td>Feasible? Beneficial? Plausible? Educational?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evaluate outcomes</td>
<td>Collective review and report</td>
<td>History of ideas, intended and unintended effects</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Redefine the problem together...</td>
<td>Joint formative evaluation and remap the situation</td>
<td>Newly revealed challenges, views, interests and values</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
and conditional privileges to under-performing groups, collect reliable quality assurance data for comparisons against international benchmarks, sustain incentive regimes and make strategic and investment decisions. A major difficulty is that these intersecting decision cycles often work at different speeds and to different values.

In my own systemic policy research (Macpherson, 1997), a new audit and development cycle was designed to accommodate a similarly complex array of conditions. In the Year 1, 1997, the first cohort of budget centres (in this case a system of public schools, not unlike increasingly self-managing faculties) will be asked to realign their vision and plans with systemic aims and priorities and to negotiate charters, long-term goals, short-term objectives and school improvement plans. They will be expected to use various types of data, and then have their plans and performance indicators approved and funded.

The implementation of each school’s improvement plan will follow in Year 2, 1998, and be followed up with action research evaluation to solve problems and boost self-management capacities. These processes would be repeated in Year 3, 1998. In Year 4, 1999, the cycle begins again for the first cohort with externally assisted self-review. The model is presented in Table IV.

I am not suggesting that this model would be appropriate for the budget activity groups at the University of Auckland. What I am suggesting is that such a model can be designed to be sensitive to internal and external stakeholder perspectives. It would, for example, build on current academic and general staff performance review processes, acknowledge budget group cultures and leadership capacities, cohere with the national Quality Audit cycle, and so on. At the same time it would add an educative dimension by proposing advances in programme evaluation, resource planning and change management.

The key implication of such strategic modelling is that the services of a CPD need to be embedded in, and to inform the evolution of, institutional quality management policy and practices. It is to this matter I now turn.

The CPD in strategic planning and policy formulation

In addition to the three models just introduced, recent leadership theories stress the connections between affiliation, meaning, purposes, structures, action and morality (Hodgkinson, 1996). They highlight how shared vision building and co-operative planning binds leaders and followers into covenants that legitimate the culture of the organization. Whatever else it is, I come back to the view that institutional organization is sustained by a network of covenants expressing reciprocal moral obligations.

This implies the CPD offering leadership support services intended to improve operations and operational norms, while also promoting educative forms of planning and policy formulation. Associates of the CPD would, it follows, be those offering educative leadership services at both the operational and policy-making levels. Ideally, the CPD should work directly with those responsible for team performance, departmental performance, faculty performance and university performance. The practical reality is more

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Processes, data and criteria</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Assisted school review</td>
<td>Empirical best practice indicators data on teaching and learning, leadership and management and professional and staff development Perceptions: evaluate feedback from parents, students and staff Empirical data; examination results, DART scores, key intended numeracy and literacy outcomes data, retention rates and student outcomes Recommendations for action embedded in the School Improvement Plan which is to be approved by the district superintendent Under-performing schools may be subjected to next-year audit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Implement school improvement plan</td>
<td>Provide school charter, a statement of vision and intent, long-term plan of priorities, activities and schedules, short-term plan of programmes and objectives and an annual report to the district office and school council, parents and friends or other representative body Action research evaluation Define evaluation together, define evaluation in context, review wider knowledge, evaluate consequences of options, select policies and strategies, action, evaluation of outcomes, redefine evaluation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Repeat Year 2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Repeat Year 1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
likely to focus on supporting faculty leadership, planning and performance management. Two methods could be immediately useful. First, budget activity group executives might review their planning processes and map their decision systems, main participants and key issues. It is not unusual for executives participating in such a review to rethink their planning methods, restructure their information and decision systems, and to develop a more strategic perspective. The second method is to use surveys to identify role-specific challenges that can then be followed-up and addressed by role-set PD. In both cases the focus of PD is not on an individual skill but on group capacities and the consequences of team actions in difficult broader contexts.

A number of practical implications follow. First, the CPD itself will need to review its priorities and practices. A retreat was held in early June. The proposed extensions to CPD services will entail additional funding and extra appointments or a realignment of priorities. The CPD will also need to reconstruct its relationships with key constituencies. To illustrate, given the potential impact of IT on the quality and competitiveness of teaching and learning, the CPD will need to broker new alliances between content experts, instructional designers, software specialists and those well versed in intellectual property rights, all as part of its new R&D programme. The additional appointments recommended by the HERO Review appear to be warranted.

The contribution the CPD can make in assessing and enhancing quality in the university

Given the degree to which I have already emphasized the importance of the quality agenda, the three themes offered at the outset can now act as a summary.

The proposed roles for the CPD are that it supports continuous improvement in teaching, research and administration, promotes organizational learning through educative leadership and communitarian PD in budget groups, and provides policy and practical advice on the management of quality.

These proposals would both affirm the value of, and extend the services currently provided by the CPD. Opportunities have also been found to advance the quality of services. For example, the Student Evaluation of Courses and Teaching (SECAT) process has been found to be methodologically challenged and will be replaced by a more sophisticated set of policies and practices. There are likely to be a number of student evaluation methods used that are more automated, and then extended into the formative evaluation of curriculum, support services, programme management and leadership. The priority given to such proposals will, of course, depend on the quality of the policy proposals and on the development of the broader institutional policy context.

Commensurate funding would imply new performance indicators being developed for the CPD itself. For example, evidence of continuous improvement should be available in the formative evaluation of services, increasingly sophisticated use of the forms of student evaluation data, the research and application of international benchmarks, and rising CPD research productivity.

The promotion of organizational learning should be seen in the development of a network of associates and by empirical evidence of action research and budget group audits and developmental planning.

Providing policy and practical advice would be evident in deeper consultations with other corporate service units, involvement in quality management policy reviews, and on the development of the broader institutional policy context.

The CPD will need to broker new alliances between content experts, instructional designers, software specialists and those well versed in intellectual property rights, all as part of its new R&D programme. The additional appointments recommended by the HERO Review appear to be warranted.

Concluding note

This preliminary analysis culminates in a vision of an international R&D centre that:

- models best practice in the PD of general and academic staff;
- justifies its services using a philosophy of communitarian professionalism;
- enhances the standing of the university in Universitas 21; and
- helps boost the productivity of teachers, researchers and organizational leaders.

It proposes three roles for the CPD in the University of Auckland:

1. enhancing the continuous improvement of teaching and learning;
2. promoting organizational learning; and
3. providing policy and practical advice on the management of quality.

References

Bruce, B. (c1992), Developing Students’ Library Research Skills, HERDSA, Campbelltown, NSW.
Cannon, R. (1992), Lecturing, (2nd ed.), HERDSA, Campbelltown, NSW.
Crooks, T.J. (1988), Assessing Student Performance, HERDSA, Kensington, NSW.
Kember, D. and Kelly, M.E. (c1992), Improving Teaching through Action Research, HERDSA, Campbelltown, NSW.
Kember, D. and Murphy, D. (c1992), Tutoring: Distance Education and Open Learning Courses, HERDSA, Kensington, NSW.
Lublin, J. (1987), Conducting Tutorials, HERDSA, Kensington, NSW.
McDonald, R. (1984), Reviewing Departments, HERDSA, Kensington, NSW.
Moses, I. (1989), Heading a Department: A Guide for Heads and Chairs of Departments and Schools, HERDSA, Kensington, NSW.
Sadler, D.R. (c1984), Up the Publication Road: A Guide to Publishing in Scholarly Journals for Academics, Researchers, and Graduate Students in Education and the Social Sciences, HERDSA, Kensington, NSW.