

## Gonski Institute for Education

# Perspective Paper: How do we support and value the profession? Responses to Gonski 2.0 from research, policy and practice

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This briefing paper was written by the authors in preparation for the [Gonski Institute of Education's public lecture on Teacher Professional Learning](#) to be held at UNSW on September 18, 2018. The paper was constructed as a response to the Gonski 2.0 recommendations on teacher professional learning and is organised according to the 4Cs (Connection, Challenge, Concept, Changes) visible thinking routine (Ritchart, Church, & Morrison, 2011).

## Recommendation 10 of the Gonski 2.0 report

“Accelerate the development of contemporary pedagogy through the use of collaboration, mentoring, observation and feedback, including from colleagues and students, by incorporating these practices into the core role of teachers and creating the conditions to enable teachers to engage in them” (Australian Department of Education and Training, 2018, p.xiii)

The report expands on this recommendation further on in the text:

“Teacher collaboration occurs in many forms, however not all types are equally effective. Active collaboration—such as peer observation and feedback, coaching, mentoring, team teaching and joint research projects—allows teachers to learn from each other and typically has a positive impact on students. In contrast, collaboration that concentrates on simply sharing resources, planning activities or administrative issues has little or no positive effect on student achievement”(Australian Department of Education and Training, 2018, p.59)

## What connections did we make with the Gonski 2.0 recommendations on Teacher Professional Learning?

The report is right to focus on collaboration given that teachers' sense of collective efficacy is the second most important school-based influence on student outcomes. It has an effect size of 1.57 on student achievement according to Hattie's synthesis of meta-analyses (Hattie, 2015). Collective efficacy is "the extent to which people believe they can work together effectively to accomplish their shared goals" (Maddux & Gosselin, 2012, p.214)

## Which parts of the text provoked challenges from us?

### A Fragmented System

Devolution policies across education systems in Australia has resulted in the fragmentation of professional learning and has therefore compromised the ability of systems to to deliver large scale reform. The result has been a loss of institutional knowledge, memory and experience and a loss of vital communication to schools and between schools. In relation to curriculum delivery and related professional learning this devolution agenda has resulted in the horizontal connections between schools breaking down and seen the vertical connections to the system disappear.

There are research-based recommendations we can take from the professional learning successes of the Alberta Initiative for School Improvement (AISI) – "a shining star in the sky of global large-scale school improvement" according to Pasi Sahlberg (Hargreaves et al., 2009, p. xi). AISI was collectively designed by all Alberta's major educational authorities and resulted in over 1800 teacher-led action research professional learning projects that were collaborative, embedded, localised, and supported by the government with time allocations and money. The 3-year cycle-driven projects of AISI were funded for 14 years and aimed to improve student learning at a local level. Successes included increased student achievement, teachers' improved understanding of pedagogy, a move towards collective peer learning through the development of curricular resources, an overall improvement of teachers' morale and skills, and increased teacher professionalism (Osmond-Johnson, Zeichner, & Campbell, 2017). Six recommendations set out by the AISI research team can help formulate our response to Gonski 2.0: 1) plan for preservation, 2) identify the purpose and focus on innovation and renewal as well as improvement, 3) measure impact as a system, 4) engage the local culture and community by widening the scope of local project partners, 5) invest in long-term structures and prioritise flexible funding, and 6) make teacher leadership development a priority (Hargreaves et al., 2009).

### Connections to Initial Teacher Education

Valuing and supporting the profession as a larger community of practice can help strengthen the relationship between collaborative professional learning and increased collective efficacy. Since teachers' motivational beliefs (e.g., collective efficacy) influence student outcomes, it is critical that ITE programs develop collaborative skills from day one. However, it is not enough to focus on the

how and when of collaboration as “not all types are equally effective” (Australian Department of Education and Training, 2018, p. 59). There needs to be intentional and explicit opportunities for our preservice and practicing teachers to understand *who they are* within the profession and *what they can offer and gain* through collaboration.

Therefore, we need to be promoting and developing a collaborative culture early in initial teacher education (ITE) programs – beginning with an understanding of the key ‘soft skills’ (non-academic attributes; Durksen & Klassen, 2018) required for effective teacher collaboration. By identifying and developing personal attributes deemed necessary for the teaching profession such as empathy and adaptability, we can better prepare preservice teachers for a range of collaborative learning opportunities that extend beyond the traditional professional experience/practicum model.

## **What key concepts about TPL would we pass onto someone who has not read [Gonski 2.0](#)?**

Firstly, the report calls for a focus on high-impact teaching and professional learning practices. This could be understood as a combination of both evidence-based practice and practice-based evidence that takes the local context as a starting point for the design of professional learning programs.

Secondly, there is a need to promote a growth-based learning environment by providing embedded professional collaboration. This requires a culture of trust that encourages honest feedback and evaluation as well as risk-taking. The establishment of this professional learning culture will require a rethink of time use and work practices in order to boost opportunities for collaborative professional learning. This shift has already occurred in the world’s best performing school systems (OECD, 2013).

## **What changes in attitudes, thinking or action towards TPL were suggested by [Gonski 2.0](#)?**

Teacher professional learning must be contextualised, embedded in authentic teaching and learning experiences and sustained over a period of time. This Gonski 2.0 recommendation validates practices that schools have been engaging in for a number of years but also empowers schools and systems to start looking at teacher learning and development differently.

In recent years for example, there has been a growth in initiatives that have looked to strategically build collaborative practices within and between schools. The Learning Frontiers project from AITSL and the NSW System Leadership grant are two examples of ways in which additional support enabled effective collaboration. Involvement in these projects shifted practice in schools in significant and sustained ways and it changed teachers’ perceptions of themselves from consumers of learning to being experts, researchers and leaders.

## Case Study:

Daceyville PS teachers are trialling different approaches, gathering evidence, using evaluative tools and practices and developing shared practices that are becoming embedded across the school. The outcomes so far include: increased collaboration across the school, increased take up of new approaches (such as, K-2 synthetic phonics program, assessment and feedback strategies, and Project-Based Learning), increased evaluation of practice and adjustment of practice in response to evidence. The Daceyville PS case focuses attention on the critical importance of having a careful policy of implementation for the introduction of innovative programs and practices in a school.

## Other Observations:

[The NESA review into the NSW curriculum](#) has cited the Gonski 2.0 report as one text, among others, that it will consider as part of the review. If NESA chose to adopt or adapt some of the Gonski 2.0 recommendations such as developmental progressions for both curriculum and capabilities, then there would be serious implications for the design of professional learning programs in NSW. Bureaucracies do policy well, in the main, but implementation is sometimes regarded as a costly and worrisome adjunct to the smooth flow of policy. The best education systems place equal focus on good policy as well as disciplined implementation of the policy measures. NESA will succeed or fail in its objectives if the issue of implementation is not taken seriously.

Implementation science in education “involves careful policy choices, the rigorous and relentless embedding of those policies and the ability to continually evaluate, refine, and change” (Harris, Jones, Adams, Perera, & Sharma, 2014, p.886). This capacity to rigorously evaluate educational innovation has been identified with Hong Kong and Singapore that have two of the world’s top performing education systems (Harris et al., 2014). NESA will need to learn from these models if they choose to recommend some of the ambitious recommendations of Gonski 2.0 with regards to curriculum reform.

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## Further Reading

- [Australian Educational Union. \(2017\). Submission to the Review to Achieve Educational Excellence in Australian Schools.](#)