Thinking outside the square

Speech by Glen Seidel, Secretary of the SA Independent Education Union at the TRB 2015 Conference

The new PL requirements for teacher registration have had a positive effect, not only on people’s awareness of the need to undertake professional learning, but also on what constitutes valid professional learning. The change of language is also instructive as we now no longer talk of “training” or “professional development” but “learning”.

It has been cynically said that teaching is the process whereby the middle-class perpetuates itself, but I prefer to think the role of teacher involves being subversive – to challenge conventional thinking. To operate professionally a teacher needs power – the power to empower their charges.

Teachers need to take control of their practices and processes. They need to be proactive and not just reactive. They need to have a spring in their step and make frequent eye contact. To not be on the front foot means there is some way to go, and professional learning contributes to this empowerment.

If the work of the teacher is a “profession” (however defined), then anything to do with that work is logically professional in nature. To present industrial and professional issues as being mutually exclusive is too convenient and frequently just a sop to middle-class niceness.

To paint industrial matters as being base and beneath the dignity of professional matters ignores the fact that the two concepts are intertwined and inseparable. Better industrial conditions allow people the space and encouragement to be better professionally. Professional demands placed on teachers (eg workload, differentiation, documentation and changing curriculum) all have industrial implications.

So I would encourage you to think outside the square when you are scratching to come up with 20 hours PL per year. Subject and pedagogy based PL are an obvious fit, but the IEU has expanded its member professional learning to a broader scope.

IEU members who are worksite Reps or executive members are demonstrating Lead level Standard 7.2 (Legislative & organisational requirements) and 7.4 (Engaging with networks).

Reading our quarterly journal EdU or attending Union Reps’ training, the Reps’ conference, the AGM or participating in enterprise agreement negotiations or supporting a member with disciplinary meetings is all Leadership level Standard 7. Our Reps training which traditionally covers matters like recruiting, dispute resolution and industrial processes is being adapted for online delivery to assist non-metropolitan members. It will be fully rolled out when trials have finished.
Standard 4.3 (Manage challenging behaviour) has been the focus of two sessions – one about students and the other about parents. Standard 2.4 (Indigenous reconciliation) was addressed in a series of three sessions on indigenous perspectives. Standard 1.3 (Diverse cultural backgrounds) was the focus of three sessions of Understanding Islam run by the Muslim Women’s Association which also covered Standard 7.3 (Engage with parents and carers) and 7.4 (Engage with broader communities).

Personal wellbeing – bullying, drugs, depression, grief, sleep have all been covered. When people are fit and healthy they are better able to meet Standard 7.1 (Meet professional ethics and responsibilities) and Standard 7.2 (Comply with legislative requirements) namely OHSW.

We target sessions for TRTs, retired teachers and casuals who have difficulty connecting with school based PL. Our TRT day in July was fully booked very early.

We run sessions for graduates and final year students with school tours and “meet the principal” sessions out of which some have obtained employment. We are also running a mandatory reporting full day for this cohort.