

Effective Professional Development: What Do We Know?



**PREPARED BY PUBLIC IMPACT
FOR
RICHLAND COUNTY SCHOOL DISTRICT ONE**

Objectives of Session



Participants in this session will:

1. Reflect on their own knowledge about effective professional development
2. Review the research on the characteristics of effective professional development
3. Review the research on effective professional development activities

How do consumers evaluate professional development?



➤ Your experience:

1. What was the most effective professional development activity you have ever experienced?
2. What made it effective?
3. What did you do differently as a result of this experience?
4. How did you decide on your PD activities when you did your planning for '08 – '09?

How do researchers evaluate PD?



- How do researchers know what works?
 1. Is there research that supports the new practice?
 2. Does professional development change participant behavior?
 3. Does implementation of the new practice improve student learning/outcomes?

What do we know?



Research on PD has provided us with information about the characteristics of effective professional development.

Structure

- Type of activity
- Duration
- Audience

Content

- Focused on subject matter content
- Opportunities for active learning
- Aligned with goals/standards

What works?



Type of activity

Are some pd activities more effective than others?

- Type of activity is important - there is a stronger research base for some activities than for others, but
- Many different types of activities can be effective if they incorporate other important elements (e.g., focused on teacher practice, take place over time, includes active learning).

What works: First year K-5 teachers have one day of release time a month to attend a balanced literacy workshop. In between sessions, school level literacy coaches work one-on-one with teachers to demonstrate and implement guided reading groups.

What works?



Duration

How many hours do participants spend and over what span of time does the activity take place?

- Clearly, one training in a new practice is not enough to ensure that teachers begin using it.
- Teachers need repeated exposure before they implement something new. (More than 14 hours)
- However, duration alone is not enough to ensure success.

What works: Every third grade teacher meets once a week to discuss how to use student work to diagnose problems in math understanding. Teachers follow up these meetings by observing each other's math instruction.

What works?



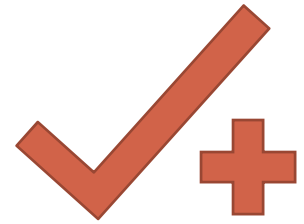
Audience

Who attends the professional development activity?

- Professional development targeted towards groups within a school is more effective than professional development targeted towards individual teachers.
- In general, professional development should enable teachers to jointly plan and implement curriculum and instruction to ensure actual student learning, or “professional communities.”

What works: Middle school social studies teachers from one school meet for three days before school starts to plan how they will use state standards to develop units and lessons. Sessions focus on collaborative problem solving and teachers continue to meet throughout the year in follow up sessions.

What works?



Focused on subject matter content

To what degree does the activity focus on improving and deepening participants' content knowledge?

- Very important for professional development to focus on subject matter content and how students will learn it.
- Research finds both teacher implementation **and** student learning.
- Connecting content with instruction has the greatest chance of changing teacher practice.

What works: Middle school Algebra teachers meet once a month to share and refine techniques for teaching specific topics identified from the End-of-Course item analysis.

What works?

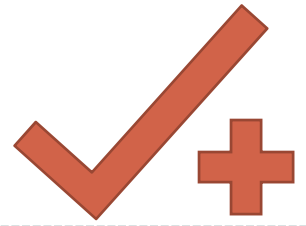


Opportunities for active learning How interactive and engaging are pd activities?

- Activities that elicit the most active engagement from participants have a better chance of altering participant behavior.
- Participants should be as involved as possible with their own learning – select topics that are relevant, collaborate with colleagues, observe each other's teaching.

What works: High school science teachers collaborate to conduct a close study of student work to identify strengths and weaknesses, then jointly engage in curriculum planning. Finally, they observe a colleague deliver a new lesson.

What works?



Aligned with goals/standards

Is the content closely aligned with state and district standards and assessments?

- Professional development should always be directly connected to state and local standards.
- All activities should be aligned with school improvement efforts that are tied to real student needs .

What works: Middle school language arts teachers meet several times a year with their elementary school colleagues to discuss curriculum alignment. Participants share curriculum, sample lessons, and examples of student work and discuss how to align their instruction and assessments with state proficiency standards.

Brainstorming



Activity:

At your tables, please take a few minutes to brainstorm a list of different types of PD activities.

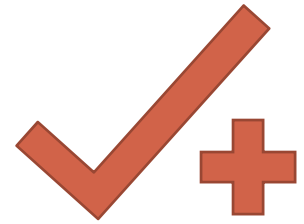
Activities to consider



Research on PD has provided us with information about the effectiveness of different types professional development.

- [Involvement with curriculum](#)
- [Workshops, Institutes & Seminars](#)
- [Action Research](#)
- [Case Discussions](#)
- [Study Groups](#)
- [Examining Student Work](#)
- [Coaching & Mentoring](#)

Activities to consider



Involvement with curriculum

Give teachers a chance to plan, develop and implement curriculum.

- Typically aligned with broader goals, focused on content students need to know, and involves collaborative effort within school or district.
- Can be designed to be long-term and to involve active learning.

What works: Team of science teachers develop curriculum units on specific topics like the solar system. The teachers have an opportunity to do the activities themselves, talk with each other, and examine student work.

Activities to consider



Workshops/institutes/seminars

Too often take the form of “one-stop” workshops with little follow up.

- No evidence that these activities either change teacher practices or influence student achievement
- But, can be effective if....designed to be aligned with broader goals, focused on content students need to know, and involve a collaborative effort within school or district.
- Best to use when participants already have baseline knowledge about the content.

What works: Math and science teachers participate in six-week summer institute focused on using inquiry-based instructional methods. Over the course of the year, teachers meet regularly to share information about implementation challenges.

Activities to consider



Action research

Allow teachers to generate and investigate questions about their own practice.

- Designed to help teachers participate in their own professional growth.
- More research is needed to see if action research can have a long-term impact on teachers' instructional practice.

What works: Middle school mathematics teachers are struggling to keep high achieving youth engaged. After collecting and interpreting information on these students behaviors and performance, teachers conduct a review of relevant professional literature on high achieving youth and develop a research based plan. Teachers implement their plan and document the outcomes.



Case discussions

Participants review a story or videotape that captures a particular classroom experience and discuss observations with colleagues

- When they are well written and facilitated, case discussions encourage participants to look deeply into how instructional practice influences and interacts with student thinking.
- To be successful they require a leader who can encourage participants to discuss and learn from one another.

What works: Groups of six to twelve elementary and middle school teachers from the same school meet monthly for a few hours to view a series of video cases on differentiating instruction. Some cases focus on student learning, others on how teachers respond to a challenging situation.

Activities to consider



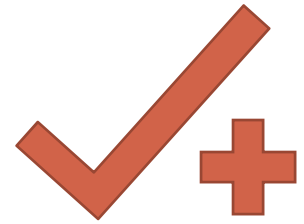
Study groups

Teachers from the same discipline, school, or district meeting regularly over a significant period of time to explore some topic of mutual interest related to teaching and learning.

- Don't have any effect if not tied to specific student learning needs.
- Can be effective if meetings are focused on topics that are important to student learning and if meetings follow a process.

What works: High school science teachers meet biweekly to discuss a new teaching technique designed to improve student's understanding of the inquiry process. They follow a set agenda so that teachers take turns presenting and another teacher facilitates the discussion.

Activities to consider



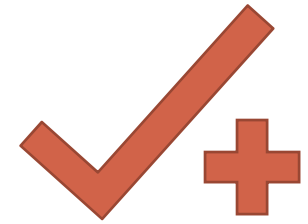
Examining student work

Give teachers the ability to closely examine student work in collaboration with their colleagues.

- Designed to develop teacher's understanding of their student's thinking.
- Helps teachers recognize the discrepancies between what they think they have taught and what students have learned.

What works: Groups of grade level teachers meet regularly to examine and discuss student work. They compare the level of difficulty of their assignments and discuss how students responded.

Activities to consider



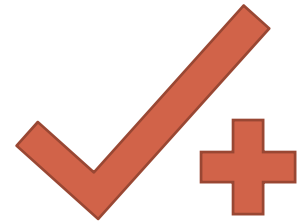
Coaching and mentoring

Help teachers focus on and improve their practice by discussing it with other individuals.

- Coaching– classroom observations by peers (or subject matter experts).
- Mentoring– observations and support by a more experienced adult to a less experienced one.

What works: An experienced English teacher with a strong record of improving student achievement works with a 1st year teacher in her department. The two meet before class to discuss a model lesson, and meet once more after they have observed each other delivering a portion of the lesson.

Activities to consider



Instructional coaching

The use of an instructional coach to improve student learning and teachers' instructional practice.

- **Consultant style**— coaches work at the behest of teachers to advance their own self-improvement efforts.
 - Can build teacher's capacity to become reflective practitioners
 - Encourages ongoing improvement
 - Can take longer to see changes in student learning

- **Confronting style** – coaches respond to performance problems by initiating conferences with teachers.
 - Can lead to quick results
 - Offer concrete advice and modeling to improve instruction
 - Can be difficult for teachers to accept

Additional Questions



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