

An Overview of Professional Development

Corcoran (1995) identified three key needs of teachers as they develop new skills and strategies. First, teachers need to strengthen their own knowledge of the subject matter they teach and to build and expand their knowledge of effective instructional methods. According to the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) legislation, teachers need to be fully certified, have a bachelor's degree, and demonstrate competence in subject matter and teaching skill to be "highly qualified" by the end of the 2005–06 school year (U.S. Department of Education, 2002, p. 57). Second, teachers need additional time to converse and connect with other educators about meeting these new requirements (Corcoran, 1995). Finally, they need frameworks that will allow them to create and master new methods of teaching students (Corcoran, 1995). In addition to directly addressing teacher content knowledge, NCLB also encourages collaboration and partnership efforts among the community learners while emphasizing the use of research-based strategies.

To create a lasting impact, professional development must be based on sound theories of how adults learn and not just mimic methods used to teach children. According to Peredo (2000), adult learning theory is based on four basic principles, and each can have a direct impact on the success of professional development. These principles of adult learning are as follows:

- Adults learn in situations where they guide their own learning.
- Adult prior experiences are key to learning.
- Adults learn best when the learning is focused on solving a problem or issue.
- Adults are at various stages that must be considered.

Each principle has a direct correlation to the use of the booklet accompanying the video, *Enhancing Academic Success Through Technology for Limited-English-Proficient Students*. Teachers must take the responsibility to guide their own efforts and learning for improving their schools. If they do not take ownership, the impact, if any, will be minimal and short lived. Also, as the study group is formed, it is important to bring together a wide variety of individuals with various experiences. If teachers with experience in educating LEP students—as well as teachers with proficiency in using technology as a learning tool—come together, they will have a strong experiential base from which to draw. As the study group is developed and goals are identified, it is critical that the problem(s) they are trying to solve are clearly defined. Having a clear focus will be essential for the group's success. Finally, the study group should comprise educators at various professional stages and with different foundational knowledge. A study group built on the strengths of a variety of teachers will be more successful than a group that is more homogeneous in its membership (Peredo, 2000).

Professional development facilitators need to check continually the professional development impact on teachers' practice and to determine whether or not professional development experiences are well structured and sustained. Providing long-term professional development opportunities for teachers is a necessity. According to Clair

(2000), “short-term professional development experiences are inadequate: Teaching and learning are complex, and teachers need time to learn and experiment with new concepts in the classroom, just as their students do” (p. 2). With a growing pluralistic student body in schools, teachers need time to reflect on educating culturally and linguistically diverse students. The increasing demands of effective educational technology implementation also add to the stress.

Administrators and teachers need to be aware of some of the challenges to creating a truly well-rounded learning community. One of the challenges for teachers of culturally and linguistically diverse students is building their knowledge of what Fillmore and Snow (2000) call “educational linguistics.” As teachers of LEP students—and all teachers in general—learn more about the role of language in teaching and learning, they might face the following challenges, according to Clair (2000):

- Knowledge and understanding of effective professional development are changing faster than practice itself.
- Pressures and priorities set on preparing students to take tests may prevent teachers from seeking understanding of how knowledge about language can help their students succeed.
- Finding qualified professional developers who can provide effective training on educational linguistics for teachers of LEP students is complicated.

Besides the challenges due to language, there are also a number of other difficulties to overcome. For example, as a school or district attempts to integrate technology into its instructional program for its LEP students, it will be essential to identify possible or actual barriers, which may include:

- District desires for “quick fixes.”
- Lack of adequate support or resources.
- Insufficient district support.
- Teacher turnover.
- Competing efforts.
- Lack of “expert” technical support. (Peredo, 2000)

These barriers may require administrators and teachers to clearly define their school’s needs, change their perspective on training, and utilize resources in nontraditional ways. But even though many of the barriers that schools face are not easy to solve, they are “worth confronting, because high-quality education demands a well-educated teaching force” (Clair, 2000, p. 3).

References

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