

Changing Practice Through Professional Learning

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Four Components of Effective Professional Learning

The ultimate goal of professional learning is to better prepare educators to positively impact student learning. For this impact to occur, teachers' transfer of knowledge from training into deep implementation in the classroom is essential. The following table includes key components of professional learning that are essential in order to impact teacher pedagogy:

Components of Training	Explanation
Theoretical Understandings	Participants need a clear description of the strategy or practice accompanied by an understanding of the underlying theory and rationale for change in terms of student learning. In addition participants need to know when to use the new strategy or practice.
Demonstrations	Participants need to see modeling of the skill or practice. They need several demonstrations of the new strategy in different settings, content areas, and grade levels in order to develop a conceptual understanding.
Practice and Feedback	Participants need to <i>practice</i> the skill or strategy (8–10 weeks) accompanied by expert feedback in a safe and trusting environment.
On-the-Job Coaching	These practice sessions occur in the participants' classrooms. This component recognizes that each school is unique in the way strategies and practices will be viewed and utilized. It becomes the collaborative work of teachers at their school sites, as they plan and develop lessons and materials, to effectively implement the strategies and practices learned in the training.

Study on Four Components of Effective Professional Learning

Although educators develop a high level of understanding with each component of training, their skill attainment is markedly higher with practice, feedback, and on-the-job coaching. The most striking difference is seen in the application level. It is only through on-the-job coaching that the skillful implementation of a new strategy occurs. The following table is based on a Joyce and Showers (1995) study focused on these key components:

Components of Training	Understanding	Skill Attainment	Application/High Level Use
Theory Understanding	85%	15%	5-10%
Demonstration	85%	18%	5-10%
Practice and Feedback	85%	80%	10-15%
On-the Job Coaching	90%	90%	80-90%

Professional Learning Elements to Promote Student Learning:

Thomas Guskey (1997) suggests four common professional learning elements shared by successful initiatives that have demonstrable evidence of improved student learning. These four elements are supported by other scholars as well:

1. **Focus on learners and learning.** Don't stray – learning is the principle goal.
2. **Concentrate on organizational and individual change.** Structure opportunities for teachers to speak publicly about their work (Lieberman, 1995). Principals should host conversations about curricular and instructional issues, encourage participation, establish professional respect, and set an environment that promotes learning (Fullan, Bennett, & Rolheiser-Bennett, 1990)
3. **Stay directed by a grand vision when making small changes.** Keep the suggested change or improvement focused. The greatest success as the result of professional learning experiences is found when the change required calls for sustained effort but is not so all encompassing that the participant is overwhelmed and needs to implement coping strategies that can seriously distort the change (Crandall, Eiseman & Louis, 1986). By staying focused on the grand vision, all participants can “. . . view each step in terms of a single, unified goal” (Guskey, 1997, p. 39).

4. **Embed ongoing professional learning in daily practices and procedures.** Professional learning is a recurring process that permeates all activities, i.e., curriculum discussions, assessment decisions, instructional activities. It is a continuous process that involves everyone in the organization. When new programs are implemented well, they become embedded as a natural part of the professional’s practice and the organization’s structure” (Fullan & Miles, 1992; Miles & Louis, 1990; Guskey, 1997).

Guskey’s four elements share common themes with Joyce and Showers’ four components for professional learning to impact significant student learning: professional collaboration, a focus on learners and learning, and classroom implementation of new skills.

Evaluating Professional Learning – Five Levels:

Evaluations of professional learning must look at how to better understand the influence of the learning experiences on teachers and document their impact on student learning. Guskey (2000, 2002) presents a protocol for evaluating professional learning offerings that aligns with the National Staff Development Council’s standards. His model is based on five levels for gathering information arranged hierarchically from simple to complex:

1. Participants’ reactions: satisfaction with the experience
2. Participants’ learning: new knowledge and skills
3. Organization support and change: advocacy, support, accommodation, facilitation, and recognition
4. Participants’ use of new knowledge and skills: degree and quality of implementation
5. Student learning outcomes: cognitive, affective, and psychomotor

The following table further itemizes these five principles for evaluating professional learning:

Evaluation Level	What is Measured or Assessed?	Components
1. Participants’ Reactions	Initial satisfaction with the experience	Three categories: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Content Questions: Relevance, utility, timeliness of the topics ▪ Process Questions: Organization of the professional development

		<p>experience</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Context Questions: The environment where the experience takes place
2. Participants' Learning	New knowledge and skills of participants	<p>Focus on accomplishing learning goals:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Cognitive goals: Knowledge and understanding ▪ Psychomotor goals: Skills and behaviors ▪ Affective goals: Attitudes and beliefs
3. Organization Support & Change	The organization's advocacy, support, accommodation, facilitation, and recognition	<p>Aspects of organization support and change:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Organization policies ▪ Resources ▪ Protection from intrusions and alleviation of fears ▪ Collegial support ▪ Principal's leadership and support ▪ District level support ▪ Recognition of success ▪ Provision of time
4. Participants' Use of New Knowledge and Skills	Degree and quality of implementation	<p>Three major aspects of use:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Stages of concern: awareness, informational, personal, management, consequence, collaboration, refocusing ▪ Levels of use: Nonuse, orientation, preparation, mechanical, routine, refinement, integration, renewal ▪ Differences in practice: New information, impact of professional learning
5. Student Learning Outcomes	Impact of professional learning program or activity on student learning	<p>Student learning outcomes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Cognitive: Performance & achievement ▪ Affective: Attitudes & dispositions ▪ Psychomotor: Skills & behaviors

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