

What an interesting opening of the October 23, 2015 EdWeek online commentary *"It's time to Restructure Teacher Professional Development"*

... Despite being an \$18 billion industry, with costs for services of up to \$18,000 per year, per teacher, professional development doesn't appear to have much effect on teaching quality. How could PD have an effect on teaching quality if the PD is not tied to standards, research, teacher practices, and student needs? How effective can we expect the professional development if there is no time for teachers to learn together, practice together, give and get feedback, and reflect together? We want to "give" teachers best practices so they can parrot what they've learned but do we really give teachers an opportunity in their day to think about what they are learning and how to "make it their own"?

First of all, we should share effective practices and not "best" practices because that implies the practice doesn't need any other improvement. If we want to go from "good to great" we do so by continuing to refine our practices. PD should not be "once and done" and neither should the support to the teachers be reduced to a "drop-in" kind of information dump on teachers. Teachers need time to internalize what they learn, revisit the learning to deepen it, apply what they have learned, and then reflect on how they can provide their students with opportunities to learn in ways that meets their needs.

*"Mastery born of repeated practice and ongoing guidance must become the new goal of professional development."* Although I understand the definition of mastery, I'm not sure that applies in teaching. Yes, every student should be in a classroom with highly effective and skilled teachers. But do we want teachers to "master" their content in such a way that they don't consider themselves members in a community of ongoing learning and practice? Understanding content is just part of the equation; knowing how to implement effective instructional practices to meet the needs of students is the other part. Teachers must know how to deliver the content in ways that support student learning while expanding their own learning at the same time.

Yes, we should limit the flow of the PD in schools and the "flavor of the day" philosophy which can be accomplished if the needs drive the professional development offerings and the practice becomes professional learning for the teachers and administrators. This happens when instructional coaches collaborate with their teaching colleagues and ensure that learning takes place every day for both teachers and students. We can't honor teachers' voices, choices, and expertise if they are forced to participate in PD that is not timely, appropriate to their students' needs, and does not result in their own learning.

An instructional coach is perfectly poised to work with teachers to build capacity and to help them recognize the different ways to engage students. They help teachers apply what they learned in professional development sessions and to think about which instructional strategies are effective and which need to be strengthened. Coaches are not “compliance” agents; they are “change agents” and help teachers identify which practices are strong and which need to be strengthened thus resulting in a change in classroom practices, individual practices, and team wide practices. They help keep students “at the center” as the beneficiaries of effective instructional practices every day from each of their teachers.

Your role as a coach is to encourage reflective thinking and practice. Help teachers think about their practices and how professional development leads to professional learning. That’s where you and your teaching colleagues will make a difference.

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