

# Educational Leadership

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Redesigning Professional Development Pages 5-5

## Perspectives / Job One

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Derisive stories about the worst professional development encountered are easy to come by in education circles. The day everybody was made to do the macarena in between writing their school's mission statement or the afternoon spent coloring in a diagram of a brain to illustrate their personal characteristics are the kinds of silly activities that make teachers beg for less time mandated for "development" and more time for their "real" work of educating students.



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That traditional professional development has not always been meaningful is an understatement. At the same time, relevant professional development has never been more important.

Anthony Alvarado, Chancellor for Instruction in San Diego, California, makes the case for a new kind of professional development:

There are a million theories. . . . about what it takes to educate a kid. . . . When the theory is that the teacher and the child—that dyad—is where the rubber meets the road, all roads lead to professional development. . . . The standards movement is, first and foremost, a challenge to the adults because it is what they do that will determine the quality of the work the kids do. . . . Thinking about our work and improving what we do—these things are professional development. So is collegiality—teachers talking about their practice and how to make it better. (Alvarado, 1998, pp. 18, 23)

The kind of professional development that Alvarado and the authors in this issue of *Educational Leadership* are talking about opens up exciting possibilities:

*Good professional development sheds light on how students learn in the classroom.* James Stigler, coauthor of *The Teaching Gap*, speaks of accumulating a knowledge base of best practices that can be passed on to future generations of teachers. For the Third International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS), he and James Hiebert studied videotaped classroom instruction in Germany, Japan, and the United States. The nationally representative samples of math lessons gave them powerful evidence that teaching is a cultural activity in which teachers follow an almost unconscious way of structuring lessons and engaging students in certain kinds of thinking. Stigler (p. 6) proposes that studying many lessons and practices will help educators perfect strategies that work and enlarge their repertoires of effective practices beyond those they have experienced.

*Good professional development inspires collegiality.* Educators often spend the entire work week with their students and need interaction with colleagues to end their isolation. In a survey of teachers new to the profession, Susan Moore Johnson and Susan M. Kardow (p. 12) found that new teachers were more likely to stay in the profession when they taught in a school in which neither veterans nor newcomers dominated the faculty conversations. In schools where teamwork and camaraderie were encouraged, it was possible to both dissent and imitate, question and learn.

Experienced educators also enjoy working in a learning community. As long ago as 1945, in a survey by Henry Atwell, educators described what would improve the quality of their teaching. A professional library,

a supervisor who acts as a consultant, demonstration lessons, conferences to discuss common problems, visits to outstanding schools, participation in creating school policies, and inservice courses and workshops topped their wish list (Burney, 2001).

*Good professional development improves student achievement.* Although it is difficult to measure direct causality of student achievement, the accountability movement demands that educators' time result in tangible payoffs. Thomas Guskey (p. 45) shows how a systematic effort to investigate the worth of professional development can not only improve professional development, but also can have an impact on achievement. The bottom line, he tells us, is to plan desired student outcomes before thinking through the practices that will most effectively produce these outcomes. He writes,

A lot of good things are done in the name of professional development. But so are a lot of rotten things. What educators haven't done is provide evidence to document the difference between the two.

Anthony Alvarado (1998) reminds us:

It's a big mistake to think that teaching is what we do every day and professional development is an occasional seminar or workshop or institute. No! The job is professional development, and professional development is the job. When we learn that—really learn it—we'll be on our way. (p.23)

## References

Alvarado, A. (1998, Winter). Professional development is the job. *American Educator*, 22(4), 18–23.

Burney, D. (2001, November 14). Lessons from a fish market. *Education Week*, 21(11), 35–36. Available: [www.edweek.org/ew/newstory.cfm?slug=11burney.h21](http://www.edweek.org/ew/newstory.cfm?slug=11burney.h21)