

10 GOOD WAYS *to* ENSURE BAD PROFESSIONAL LEARNING

By **Laura R. Thomas**

School change is my work. I started as a teacher with an interest in adult learning, and now I try to change the world as an external school coach and faculty member at Antioch University New England. My primary work usually happens through the professional development channels of schools and districts, so I spend a lot of time thinking about good professional learning vs. typical professional development. Based on my 20-plus years of experience, as well as a bit of inspiration from Reuben Duncan, assistant superintendent in School Administrative Unit 29 in Keene, N.H., let me share with you the best possible ways to waste your professional development time and money.

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1

Worry more about the time than outcomes.

Start all professional learning conversations with questions like “how many days do we have?” rather than “what learning outcomes are we trying to achieve?”



2

Bring in a bevy of consultants.

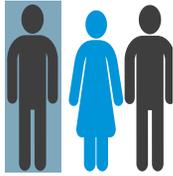
Don't tell them about each other, assign each a specific project, and under no circumstances ask them to collaborate or coordinate. Require every teacher to work with each consultant separately, regardless of role, need, or timing.



3

Start something new every year without considering progress on or commitment to the previous years' goals.

Your teachers will find all that innovation energizing, not exhausting. They'll love the constant surprise of discovering which goal matters on any given day.



4

Assume the professional learning specialists you hire are out to get you.

Offer as little information as possible regarding the situation in your school, gloss over the real issues at play, and never share candidly.



5

Judge quality by the price tag.

Go with this simple rule of thumb: If it's expensive and comes advertised in a full-color glossy brochure, it must be better quality. So anything locally developed, free, in-house, or offered at a discounted rate must be suspect.



6

Never listen to your teachers when they tell you what they need.

Collect survey data about their goals, but ignore the results. They don't know what they need. Either make all the decisions yourself or make none until the last possible second. Laissez-faire is a great approach to planning professional learning.



7

Don't participate in the activities you require teachers to attend.

Wander through once or twice, but always excuse yourself for something "more important" so teachers get the clear message that you don't need to understand what you're expecting them to implement.



9

Take an all-or-nothing approach to conferences and workshops.

They're either universally good (and should be the sole focus of our time, energy, and budget) or bad (and no one should ever be allowed to attend any of them).



10

Keep an eye open for the next big thing.

Jump on every next big thing you read about in a journal, see at a conference, and hear about from a colleague. If it worked anywhere else, it should work in your school, too.



8

Get the most for your money and time.

Herd the whole faculty into the gym for a three-hour presentation by a speaker with no costly follow-up, coaching, or small-group discussion over time. Teachers will be inspired by the expert's high-quality slide presentation. Assume that teachers will be able to implement new strategies and methods based on a single, expert-driven learning experience.