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Educator learning keeps evolving

Professional learning expands educators' capacity to serve students, colleagues, and communities. When we explore professional learning, the question arises: What is learning?

This question has been answered differently through the decades, especially when viewed through the lens of practice in the field.

• **1950s, 1960s:** Early on in the field of teacher development, the term *inservice* was used to describe this practice. Such opportunities were designed to inform educators about current trends or introduce new ideas. Inservice usually took place on a day when students were not in school and teachers were. Typically teachers gathered at central office or in school cafeterias or libraries to hear a speaker who made a presentation, frequently in lecture form.

The assumption guiding much inservice education was this: *If experts tell teachers what they need to know, teachers will be able to put the knowledge into practice.*

• **1970s:** During the 1970s, the name *staff development* became more prevalent than *inservice*. Staff development usually took the form of courses or workshops for teachers offered after school with occasional student-free days built into the school-year calendar. Central office staff or principals determined the content for these courses and day-long sessions.

The assumption guiding staff development was this: *If teachers learn what administrators believe they should know, they will be more effective educators.*

• **1980s:** During the 1980s, districts offered catalogs of opportunities for teachers on everything from content-specific instruction and general instruction, to classroom management and wellness. Districts and teachers viewed staff development as a benefit, primarily because district staff

NSDC STANDARD

Learning: Staff development that improves the learning of all students applies knowledge about human learning and change.

development offered teachers convenient and inexpensive ways to earn the credits needed for recertification. Staff development for individual improvement proliferated. Teachers chose staff development based on their personal areas of interest and availability or convenience of the programs. Districts held little or no expectation that teachers would implement their learning. Staff development was largely voluntary.

The assumption guiding staff development during the 1980s was this: *If teachers choose what they want to learn, they will value the opportunity to learn and engage in more learning.*

• **1990s:** The 1990s were the standards decade. States developed content standards for students and teacher performance standards for licensure or certification. Districts integrated these latter standards into teacher performance systems. To respond to the increased need for staff development about standards-based education, districts tailored courses, workshops, and daylong sessions to the

For more information about NSDC's Standards for Staff Development, see www.nsdc.org/ standards/ index.cfm

5 levels of learning

As leaders of learning, coaches and teacher leaders plan how to facilitate learning that will change not only what teachers know and can do, but also what they believe, aspire to, and practice consistently and accurately. Learning occurs at multiple levels; not all levels will produce the same degree of impact on practice and student results.

Levels of learning	Definition	Example
1 KNOWLEDGE	• Information • Facts • Theories • Principles	• Theories of reading development
2 ATTITUDE	• Beliefs • Values	• Belief that all students can learn to read • Professional efficacy
3 SKILL	• Capabilities • What one knows how to do	• Diagnose student reading needs • Design instruction to meet those needs • Assess student reading performance
4 ASPIRATION	• Desires • Motivation • Drive	• Persistence in practice • Eagerness to find strategies and methods that work with all learners, even those who are underperforming
5 BEHAVIOR	• Actions • What one does on a regular basis with accuracy	• Creates a print-rich environment in the classroom • Designs a 90-minute literacy block that incorporates the core areas of reading and follows the guidelines established by the adopted reading program with fidelity • Assesses regularly and uses data to design instruction

Adapted from: *Assessing impact: Evaluating staff development,* by Joellen Killion. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press, 2002.

standards movement, focusing on implementing standards-based instruction and assessment. More staff development, now sometimes called professional development, concentrated on certificated or licensed staff because of the significant changes required in a standards-based education. Technology, gifted education, diversity, and cooperative learning were other frequent topics of professional development in the 1990s. Most professional development focused on standards-based education, however, because this movement required significant changes in teaching practice.

The assumption guiding staff or professional development in the 1990s was this: *If teachers learn how standards-based classrooms differ from non-standards-based classrooms and gain some specific strategies, they will transform their classrooms into standards-based learning environments and students will be more successful.*

• **2000s:** As the first decade of the new century dawned, staff development gave way to professional development. Educators began to understand the connection between teacher learning, teacher practice, and student learning. It became clearer to district and school administrators that professional learning could no longer be voluntary and individually driven if the goal was to improve an entire school or district. Teachers' choices in professional development became more narrow, and resources for professional development began

to focus more on what students needed. The language shifted from professional development to professional learning to emphasize the importance of moving from knowledge and skill acquisition to transformation in practice and attitudes. The change in terminology emphasizes the outcome of the development process and changes in both teaching practice and student learning.

The assumption guiding professional learning is this: *Professional learning results in changes in teacher practice and student learning.*

Integrating five levels of learning

When planning professional learning, it is crucial that coaches and teacher leaders are clear about the level of learning outcome desired and select the most appropriate learning designs to accomplish the desired results. Appropriateness of a learning design is assessed by its alignment with the learning outcome, the conditions for learning, including time and resources, the degree of change required, and the learning needs and preferences of learners. NSDC's standards stress the importance of considering student achievement as the result of professional learning.

Knowing about effective reading instruction or knowing how to design effective reading instruction, for example, has little value unless a teacher actually uses the knowledge and skill in classroom practice; desires to refine the practices so that they are effective; and believes that he or she makes a difference in how well students learn.

Professional learning that improves the learning of all students integrates all five levels of learning (see chart on p. 7). Learning that improves student achievement goes beyond knowing about or knowing how to.

- Informational learning, changing what one knows, is unlikely to change what one does.
- Procedural learning, what one can do, is more likely to change one's behavior, yet it does not guarantee that teachers will choose to implement the new skills.
- Transformational learning changes knowledge, attitude, skill, aspiration, and behavior and has a greater likelihood of producing results for students than either informational or procedural learning.

Informational and procedural learning are more common in formal professional learning such as workshops or courses. Transformational learning can occur in formal professional learning when it is sustained over time and carefully planned and facilitated using appropriate learning designs. Transformational learning occurs more naturally in collaborative teams in which teachers acquire information, share skills and strategies, and examine the effects of their practices by reflecting on their own work and student results.

This examination occurs in dialogue with their peers, where they can tap the expertise within the community and transfer what they know to practice. Team dialogue gives members opportunities to analyze their assumptions and beliefs and how they influence behaviors.

Professional learning that improves schools and student learning is transformational, moving well beyond informational and procedural learning. Transformational learning strengthens practice and consistent and accurate practice of new evidence-based professional learning increases student results. Targeting other levels of learning outcomes alone will diminish the impact on teaching practices and student learning. ◆

> Professional learning that improves schools and student learning is **transformational**, moving well beyond **informational** and **procedural** learning.

LEARNING DESIGNS

To explore a wide range of professional learning designs appropriate for different learning levels, investigate *Powerful Designs for Professional Learning*, 2nd ed., edited by Lois Brown Easton. *Powerful Designs* explores more than 20 professional learning strategies in depth and explains for what purposes and contexts the designs are most appropriate. Learn about case discussions, mentoring, journaling, classroom walk-throughs, curriculum design, and data analysis, to name just a few of the designs.

Available at www.nsdcstore, org, item #B380, $64 (member price)**, $80** (nonmember price)**.**