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Intentional mindfulness or mindless conformity?

There is a famous cartoon showing a long and complicated mathematical sequence scribbled on a chalkboard. In the middle of this string of symbols and numbers is written *then a miracle occurs*. The caption reads, "I think you should be more explicit here in step two."

District-based staff development also needs to become more explicit about how new information can be transformed into improved classroom practices. The strategy can't be to hope for a miracle; rather, leaders must intentionally build a set of concrete actions into program design to assist educators in transforming their practice. District office staff members **need to apply knowledge of the change process when planning and implementing district-based staff development** (Roy & Hord, 2003, p. 144).

In *The Six Secrets of Change*, (2008), Michael Fullan explores new ideas about the change process that can be helpful to central office staff. First, is professional learning conducted "in the specific context in which the work is being done" (p. 89) or superficially—disconnected from current work realities? Superficial learning is removed from the daily context of the classroom and requires individuals to translate new information into new practice *on their own*. The deepest learning is contextualized and done in collaboration with colleagues who share a common purpose—the essence of job-embedded collaborative professional learning.

Second, does the professional learning focus on a few "core" elements of practice or on "scripted repetition" of behaviors? "The critical aspects of any work equal about 15 to 20% of the total work" (Liker & Meier in Fullan, p. 80).

Marzano has recently commented on the mistake that many districts are making when they require teachers to use all of his nine research-based strategies in the classroom all the time. These strategies are only effective when used appropriately—when they fit the student learning needs (Marzano, 2009, p. 34). Core elements of practice focus on helping teachers

decide when to use new strategies rather than merely counting the frequency of use of new strategies. In other words, does our professional learning focus on "precision" versus "prescription"?

Third, does professional learning demonstrate a responsibility toward the learner versus blaming individuals when they don't make desired changes? Some organizations clearly illustrate

that leaders believe all teachers can learn when given appropriate support. Professional learning leaders demonstrate responsibility for the learner's success; if a staff member struggles, it is time to change the approach rather than blame the individual. This support includes one-on-one coaching, correcting errors, checking progress frequently, and gradually turning implementation responsibility over to the learner.

According to Fullan, when we focus on precision of practice, core aspects of the work, and a responsibility toward the learner, staff exhibits intentional mindfulness and commitment toward their work rather than mindless conformity and compliance. Intentional mindfulness leads to continuous improvement for students and the organization.

NSDC STANDARD

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

Learn more about NSDC's standards:
www.nsd.org/standards/index.cfm

REFERENCES

- Fullan, M. (2008).** The six secrets of change. San Francisco: John Wiley & Sons.
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