EVERY EDUCATOR ENGAGES IN EFFECTIVE PROFESSIONAL LEARNING EVERY DAY SO EVERY STUDENT ACHIEVES

THE NEW CATALOG
An evolution of professional development

By Anthony Armstrong

Learning Forward's definition of professional development raises questions about the role traditional professional development catalogs will play in school-based, collaborative professional learning. According to the definition, continuous improvement is a recursive process in which educators start by examining data. They then extrapolate the learning needs of the students and, subsequently, the faculty, to determine the focus or content for the professional learning. Finally, they implement and evaluate efforts to meet those learning needs.

Some educators have suggested that the traditional catalog has no place when a system's professional development relies on true professional learning communities; they suggest catalogs should be discontinued to make room for progress. Has the field seen the end of the traditional professional development catalog, or is there a more practical future possible as catalogs evolve to meet the changing needs of professional learners? Learning Forward's definition of professional development helps explain the contribution catalogs can play as a resource for seeking expertise beyond a group's collaborative learning capacity (see definition sidebar on p. 6), and many districts are finding a critical role for catalogs in a system that also stresses school-based collaborative learning.

WHAT IS A CATALOG?

Catalogs list opportunities for educator learning provided by districts or other external assistance providers. Ideally, these opportunities relate to the district's identified student achievement needs or goals that reach beyond the scope of school- or team-based professional learning. Catalog offerings assist educators to meet individual professional development goals related to performance standards and their individual professional development plans, or identify opportunities for singleton teachers across schools to par-

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Develop a clear and unified vision of professional learning's purpose

A fundamental challenge confronting school system leaders is developing an operational understanding of professional development's purpose. Professional learning is such an accepted, if underresourced, part of school systems' operations that it is rarely the subject of consideration and dialog about its purpose.

Of course, many school board members and administrators now agree that professional learning should enhance the knowledge and skills of teachers and administrators. But this view is not universal. Some leaders cite "professional growth" as the reason for engaging educators in learning. Because this term is imprecise, it is also convenient; it can justify many different types of activities, not all of them worthwhile. Still other administrators consider professional development to be an employee benefit, a non-wage compensation educators can use to build their resumes, or satisfy educational requirements for certification renewal or higher salaries. Leaders of some school systems are even redefining the purpose of professional development to be a remedial component of teacher evaluation.

The purpose should be clear: To raise the performance of educators *and* students.

These divergent concepts of professional development's purpose are seriously compromising school systems' and states' efforts to increase student achievement. There is broad consensus among voters, government and business leaders, and researchers that the economic security of current and future generations depends on what they know and can do in a global context. Therefore, significantly raising levels of student performance must be *the* priority for every school system. For that to occur, current educators must also dramatically raise their performance levels.

Professional development is the only practical tool school systems have to engage educators in the learning necessary for them to increase the effectiveness of their instruction and classroom management. There are no shortcuts—not nifty curricula, not gee-whiz technology, not human resource logic models, not elegant compensation plans. The deliberate, grinding work of improving educators' performance requires their sustained learning. The ultimate test of that learning is whether it enables teachers to more effectively address gaps in what their students know and can do. But teachers' professional development, responsive to their students' learning challenges, is only the first step. It will make no difference if educators do not incorporate what they learn into their daily practice. And even that is not sufficient. Teachers must then practice and hone the application of their new learning, and continuously engage in and master additional learning to improve their performance week-by-week, month-by-month, and year-by-year.

The purpose of professional development should be clear. It is to raise the performance levels of both educators *and* their students. To achieve these results, school systems must: (1) clearly and consistently articulate to educators and the community at large the purpose of professional learning; (2) hold educators accountable for organizing and engaging in professional development that causes teachers to become more effective; (3) support educators' application and refinement of their new learning; and (4) collect and report data that document the extent to which professional development is raising the performance levels of teachers and their students.

School systems that use professional development for other purposes shortchange their educators and their students. Without effective professional learning, new teachers cannot compensate for the inadequacies of their preservice education. Veteran educators need to constantly build their knowledge and skills. Without high-quality support, teachers are unable to adapt to new research findings, demographic and cultural changes, or higher standards of performance.

There should be no misunderstanding or confusion about the purpose of professional learning. School systems should critically review their conception and use of professional development, and ensure that in operation its purpose is to increase the achievement of educators and their students.

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Model connects professional learning to student achievement

Making Sense of the Links: Professional Development, Teacher Practices, and Student Achievement

Marjorie R. Wallace. Teachers College Record, 111(2), February 2009, pp. 573-596.

OVERVIEW

This study describes a model that explains the relationships between professional development, certain teacher practices in mathematics and reading, and student achievement in those subjects. The study poses two research questions: "When teacher characteristics and teacher preparation program are controlled, what are the effects of teacher professional development on (1) teacher practices in mathematics and reading, and (2) subsequent student mathematics and reading achievement?" (p. 573).

STUDY APPROACH

The samples of students nested within teachers were drawn from six existing databases, two from the 2000 Beginning Teacher Preparation Survey (BTPS) conducted in Connecticut and Tennessee, and four from the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP Mathematics 1996, 2000, and NAEP Reading 1998, 2000). The research design, a hybrid structural equation model, was based on relationships indicated in the literature. Professional development was defined as a combination of mentoring experiences participating teachers received

and sessions they attended since completing formal teacher preparation.

SELECTED FINDINGS

Professional development effects can be linked to teacher practice and subsequent student mathematics and reading achievement. The model showed that relationships could be described in a single model, and that professional development had very small but occasionally significant effects on average student achievement in mathematics and reading when mediated by teacher practice. A one-standard-deviation increase in professional development was consistently related to very small increases to average mathematics gains and achievement status at state and national levels. Professional development effects on reading gains and achievement mediated by teacher practice were close to zero with the exception of Connecticut, where a one-standard-deviation increase in teacher professional development raised student achievement about 11% over the course of one year.

Most of the variance in teacher mathematics and reading practice was not accounted for by professional development. The researcher speculated that the unexplained variance presents unmeasured teacher factors affecting classroom practice.

Subject matter context makes a difference. For the variables explained by the model, the effects of professional development in mathematics consistently translated into increased

effects on teacher practice and student achievement. With the exception of Connecticut, the results for reading were inconsistent.

IMPLICATIONS FOR SYSTEM LEADERS

For states and systems to see predictive relationships among content standards, teacher preparation, and student achievement, they must invest time and resources in aligning professional development to support teacher practice and student learning.

The differences among subject areas examined in this study suggest that system leaders should ensure that professional learning is content-specific so that it aligns with the unique attributes and needs of each content and content-specific pedagogy.

Because variations in teacher practices not attributable to professional development were largely unexplained through this study, system leaders can carefully consider what other factors impact teacher practice and explore how to influence those factors to improve results for students.

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ticipate in learning together. Catalogs typically include low- or no-cost options for teachers to earn CEUs for relicensure or to meet specific expectations.

Unlike the catalogs offered a decade ago, today's catalogs are not the whole professional development program. Instead, they are a small part of a comprehensive plan within a school system.

CATALOG LIMITATIONS

Districts that fail to purposefully link their catalogs to their improvement goals may send the wrong message about professional development. The very name *catalog* connotes shopping for what suits an individual's preference or needs from an extensive array of options designed to please as many shoppers as possible. Most district professional development catalogs, because of their extensive offerings, communicate the message that educators (consumers) may freely select the course or program they want. Choices may be based on the time commitment or the schedule for the program rather than identified outcomes or needs, e.g. the teacher who always chooses courses offered on Tuesdays because that is the day she has after-school care for her children. The danger with this approach to professional development is that convenience, cost, and personal preference take precedent over purposeful learning to achieve professional and student-achievement goals.

"My first assignment as a district director of staff development was to create the catalog," said Stephanie Hirsh, Learning Forward's executive director. "I pulled together the first staff development advisory committee to assist with identifying courses to include. Every central office administrator and principal was invited to contribute ideas. We made sure it had learning opportunities for everyone in the district. The human resources department took the catalog on recruiting trips to demonstrate how our district was committed to our teachers and their professional growth. When I look back today, there is scant evidence that anything offered through the catalog made its way into classrooms or lasted for any significant period of time."

Catalogs tend to offer traditional courses in which there may be limited expectations or support for application of learning. In these courses, the trainer typically determines the course outcomes without prior knowledge about learner needs or experience. Follow-up or support is rarely offered, leaving it up to the individual to determine what is learned and how, or if, the learning is applied in practice.

Offering a wide array of learning opportunities in a

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Strategies for creating learning guides

When developing a new catalog for professional development, the following possibilities can turn traditional catalogs into guides that contribute to a comprehensive system of professional development.

- **Share the district's philosophy and policies for professional development,** including standards, definition, requirements, expectations, and ways to meet those requirements.
- **Ensure that offerings and descriptions always include information describing** how the learning connects to the comprehensive system of professional development and the district standards for professional development.
- **Describe expectations for teachers serving specialized roles;** outline how the district prepares educators who are unique in their roles, particularly when they require specialized training, such as

coaches, reading specialists, assessment specialists, media specialists, physics teacher, etc.

- **Meet the needs of teachers who have individualized needs,** e.g. the teacher who needs more depth on assessment, but keep the focus on districtwide and school-based student learning and educator learning needs.
- **Determine how to tap into the expertise of those who participate** in catalog-based/district-based professional development to advance the learning needs of other educators within the school.
- **Launch new district initiatives so early adopters may get the initial training** and go back to their school to serve as school-based leaders of the initiative. For example, math specialists from each school can participate in a district course on the new curriculum, practice the strategies, and be ready to lead peers through the process.

catalog can also shift focus from team learning to individual learning, or from school-based, team learning to externally led learning. Joellen Killion, deputy executive director for Learning Forward, likens individual teachers' participation in self-selected courses offered through a traditional catalog to multiple tugboats that are pulling a barge, representing a school. With each tugboat going in its own direction, the barge makes no progress as it is roughly jerked back and forth. However, if each of the tugboat drivers agrees to move in the same direction through coordinated planning and effort, the barge will make good progress. Self-selection of courses from a catalog may similarly fragment efforts within a school. "Teachers may get better individually," said Killion, "but not the whole school. Too much focus on individual courses may interfere with building a culture for collaborative learning among fellow teachers. While a small percentage of individual enrichment courses can be good if the choices for teachers are driven by districtwide goals drawn from student learning needs, district initiatives, and educator performance standards, using the catalog as a district's entire professional development system will produce limited results for teachers and students."

BUILDING A NEW CATALOG

Two years ago, Jacqueline Kennedy and her team at Frisco (Texas) Independent School District set out to reinvent their professional development program. The previous program allowed individual teachers to select courses out of a catalog, and Kennedy wanted to develop a program with a stronger assurance of quality that aligned with district and school goals. She renamed the catalog the Professional Development Learning Guide to help reinforce their new perspective on professional learning processes and added instructions for developing individual professional development plans, including the necessary forms and visual diagrams outlining the development process.

Kennedy wanted to help teachers and teacher leaders remain focused on a higher quality learning process, so she added templates and step-by-step instructions for developing and implementing individual learning plans. "We included a professional development planning form that teachers use to determine goals for their professional development plan," said Kennedy. "These goals are based on data that reflect what's going on in their classroom, taken from a wide variety of sources, including teacher walk-throughs, classroom observations, and local and state assessments."

The principals and teachers in Frisco ISD were already holding summative conferences in May to review data and determine the best areas of learning for the teachers. In the old system, after the May meeting, teachers would go to a

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catalog and independently select courses. To improve this process, Kennedy decided to publish their learning guide in March with forms and instructions for individual learning plans. With the learning plan guides and courses in hand well in advance, teachers now begin to develop their personal learning plans before their May summative meetings.

"When the teachers meet with the principals in May, they have already reviewed early formative data, filled out their professional development plan with what they feel they need to work on, and selected courses they think will help achieve those goals," said Kennedy. "This gives the principals an opportunity to review the plan, make sure they are on the right track and sign off on the form with their approval before the teacher even registers for the course. We also included a section where the principal can make suggestions for additional or alternative courses if needed."

By providing framework for reviewing and documenting the classroom needs, the skills required to meet those needs, and which courses would help provide those skills, Kennedy's learning guide makes the connection between professional learning and student success, provides documentation that can be easily incorporated into the teacher's evaluation process, and becomes an integral part of the professional learning program.

In Lexington (Pa.) Public Schools, Superintendent Paul Ash understands the benefits of staff-based professional development. At the same time, he recognizes that schools are limited in capacity and will need to turn to occasional outside experts to help fill in the gaps when the knowledge or skills needed do not reside among a school staff. To maintain the focus generated by his schools' professional

learning communities, Ash works closely with an outside vendor to provide customized professional development courses that are based on clear and specific needs. "Once the teams determine which topics require outside assistance, we work with Teachers21, a nonprofit that offers high-quality professional development, to build custom courses for us. We work with them to design the classes and tailor to teachers' needs with custom content," said Ash. This approach allows the district and schools to bring in outside experts with focused content that directly addresses the specific needs of the schools or teams.

BOTTOM LINE

Catalog offerings are a part of comprehensive professional development, not the total program. They support achievement of district and school goals for student learning if they are designed based on student learning needs, educator performance standards, core content standards, and educator developmental needs.

Learning opportunities add value when the learning moves into the classroom with school- and classroom-based support, often through coaching and collaborative teamwork. Those responsible for catalog development are encouraged to develop and/or select catalog offerings with input from educators, based on individual and team professional learning goals, with principals recommending courses to teachers and principal supervisors recommending courses to principals.

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How can catalogs act as a resource to support high-quality professional learning?

Section A of Learning Forward's definition outlines the cycle of continuous improvement, and specifies how the resources highlighted in catalogs play a role:

The continuous cycle of improvement achieves educator learning goals by "implementing coherent, sustained, and evidenced-based learning strategies, such as lesson study and the development of formative assessments, that improve instructional effectiveness and student achievement;"

Section B covers many types of learning beyond school-based approaches.

The continuous improvement cycle work of school-based teams "may be supported by activities such as courses,

workshops, institutes, networks, and conferences that:

(1) must address the learning goals and objectives established for professional development by educators at the school level;

(2) advance the ongoing school-based professional development; and

(3) are provided by for-profit and nonprofit entities outside the school such as universities, education service agencies, technical assistance providers, networks of content-area specialists, and other education organizations and associations."

See the full definition online (www.learningforward. org/standfor/definition.cfm).

Professional development planning process for district initiatives

Use this diagram to help map your process for planning professional learning initiatives that align with district goals.

STAGE 1 *10-11 months* *before initiative*	**Step 1: Identify needs.** • Driven by data collection (observations, feedback, and/or needs assessments. **Step 2: Prioritize the needs.** • Driven by 1-3 core instructional focus areas. **Step 3: Develop measurement topics (categories defining the essential elements of information and skills to be learned, e.g. cooperative learning, collaborative planning, academic vocabulary, etc.).** • Driven by the priority list. • Identify the measurement topics. • Book guest/keynote speakers. • Set up vendors. **Step 4: Select the course planners.** • Create a list of potential course planners from all levels/positions. • Send an invitation to the course planners with information about the measurement topics.
STAGE 2 *8-9 months* *before initiative*	**Step 5: Develop professional development.** • Driven by measurement topics. • Identify the courses needed to reach the measurement topic. • Involve course planners in an in-depth training to prepare learning targets. • Develop learning targets for each measurement topic. • For example, "The learner will identify, demonstrate, and utilize cooperative learning strategies to enhance the effectiveness of instruction in a hands-on demonstration and discussion format." • Develop instructional plan for each session using the learning targets. **Step 6: Determine logistics.** • Driven by the number of participants. • Identify the amount of participants. • Calculate the minimum number of sessions to be created. • Enter course request into your professional development project management software.
STAGE 3 *6-7 months* *before initiative*	**Step 7: Review courses created by course planners committee.** • Driven by learning targets and logistics. • Present session materials (PowerPoint, guide, activities, and agenda). • Identify potential challenges or concerns. • Identify course facilitators. • Edit, revise, and adjust session materials. • Determine timeline and responsibilities.
STAGE 4 *0-5 months* *before initiative*	**Step 8: Set up.** • Driven by session materials. • Discuss plan with maintenance, technology, building personnel, catering, and facilitators. • Gather and create any supplies needed for each session. • Conduct training for course facilitators. • Conduct a walk-through for each room that will be used to determine any changes/issues.

PLANNING

ORGANIZATION

SETUP

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JUST RELEASED

Teacher Professional Learning in the United States: Case Studies of State Policies and Strategies

In Phase III of our multiyear research study, the research team from the Stanford Center for Opportunity Policy in Education examined the policy frameworks supporting high levels of professional development activity in four states identified as "professionally active." The states – Colorado, Missouri, New Jersey, and Vermont – were selected based on evidence of high levels of teacher participation in professional development; a reputation in the literature for enacting reforms that are consistent with the research based on "effective" professional development; and improvements in student achievement as measured in the 2009 NAEP.

The report, funded by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, provides informative snapshots from each state, key findings, and policy implications.
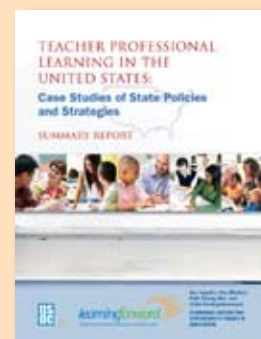
▶ Download *Teacher Professional Learning in the United States: Case Studies of State Policies and Strategies* as a free PDF at **www.learningforward.org/news/2010Phase3Report.pdf**.

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