



Implementation: The second dimension of professional learning

Atruism in education is that professional learning is a process, not an event. Nevertheless, many educators continue to experience learning as an isolated activity. The thinking, talking, and planning of school system and school leaders may focus primarily on professional learning as a workshop, skill development session, college course, or a conference. Leaders' expectations may center on how many educators participate in such an event and, perhaps, what they learn from it. While leaders may hope that educators will use their new learning to improve their practice, often they don't ensure there is the time or support necessary to produce that result. This stunts professional learning and limits its impact and benefits.

School system and school leaders should think of professional learning as having two dimensions. The first concerns conceiving, developing, organizing, managing, and producing, or contracting for, activities that engage educators in new learning. This has traditionally been the focus of professional development, and it continues to consume enormous resources and effort.

The second dimension of profes-

sional learning is what happens *after* learning experiences: in the context of their daily work, educators apply, practice, and refine their new learning, and document and assess the results. Most school system and school leaders have devoted much less attention and many fewer resources to this dimension of professional learning. The result is that in many communities, professional development has been, and continues to be, a half-a-loaf enterprise. It's better than nothing, but neither educators nor their students realize the full potential of effective professional learning.

This is why one of the seven professional learning standards addresses the importance of implementation. This standard recognizes that unless education leaders invest in implementation, professional learning will not increase educators' performance levels. Equally important, the standard implies that without serious attention to implementation, professional learning will risk a loss of support among both educators and the public.

As the standard makes clear, one aspect of implementation is helping educators understand that the purpose of professional learning is to change their practice. But educators are no different from other people. They may resist change, especially when their experience is that it means more work and apprehension, as well as the possibility of failure. Too often educators have been the subjects of high expectations, but only a smattering of professional development, followed by

little or no workplace support. This is why school system leaders and front-line educators must understand that the implementation of professional learning is a change process. It takes time. It requires clarity about purpose and intended outcomes, realigning the daily demands on educators, and practical, adaptive on-the-ground assistance. Understanding and applying the findings of change research to implementation will increase the chances that educators will be partners, not just participants, in effective professional learning.

As is true across all the standards, successful implementation depends on each of the other six standards. Thinking leaders are essential. Adequate resources, appropriately and equitably deployed, are necessary. Judicious use of data is foundational. Learning designs that positively impact educators' practice are indispensable. The standards only "work" if they work together.

To date, implementation has been the weak link in the chain of decisions and actions that constitute professional learning. It is so much more than developing and conducting a learning activity. Professional learning can only be effective if school system and school leaders understand it as a comprehensive, complex system and focus greater effort and resources on implementation that educators value.

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