



All educators have a role to play in emphasizing impact

I recently looked in on a Facebook exchange among some teacher friends. It was the day before their students were to arrive for the new school year, and they were bantering about the opening day of schoolwide professional development sessions.

When one of them commented, dripping with sarcasm, that she wouldn't want to oversleep and miss something important, the others responded with knowing laughter, Facebook style.

These same teachers spent the previous week in collaboration, examining benchmarks and preparing for improved instruction, and I hope that they found that useful. However, as Dennis Sparks pointed out in a recent blog post,

hope isn't a strategy. "Hope must be supported by stretching goals, robust plans, professional learning, and strong teamwork," he writes (Sparks, 2013).

This issue of *JSD* emphasizes the importance of professional learning's impact. Impact doesn't happen through hope, or skillful facilitation, or great use of data, or the best learning designs supported by technology. All of those elements can help professional learning

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to have an impact, and many are essential to it. Yet on their own, many factors we'd consider critical to effective professional learning aren't enough to ensure it achieves its ultimate purpose — changing educator practice and improving student learning.

Impact isn't just about measuring results after professional learning. Impact must be a consideration from the very beginning, from the time that system leaders determine the resources available to the planning stages and through the implementation phase. This notion is the foundation of the Standards for Professional Learning (Learning Forward, 2011), which Learning Forward Executive Director Stephanie Hirsh explores in greater depth on p. 10.

Practitioners have varying degrees of power or responsibility in determining the big picture for professional learning, but regardless of where they sit, all educators have a role to play in emphasizing impact. Here are examples:

Teachers can ask for data in different ways that help them understand student needs; articulate what they need most; offer feedback on what is most — and least — useful to them; gather student data in informal ways to respond to new instruction.

Teams can review the goals they set together and determine progress; talk about data that puzzles them; share student assessment ideas and challenges; ask school leaders for more support where they need it.

Instructional coaches can offer feedback in new ways; review goals and progress often; help teachers and teams understand the Standards for Professional Learning more deeply; bring in new sources of information about learning that has an impact.

School leaders can tie individual and team goal setting to school and system goals; provide more time and resources for data analysis; monitor progress in a range of formal and informal ways; share progress publicly.

System leaders can ensure sufficient resources; hold high expectations for professional learning; provide standards-based learning for school leaders; offer evaluation support formally and informally; integrate professional learning systems with other systemwide school improvement efforts.

To achieve real impact, it isn't enough to move from one-size-fits-all opening days to team-based learning and planning. I hope that this issue of *JSD* helps you move in that direction. Or, rather, I planned that this issue would do so — and I'd like to hear from you about your progress.

REFERENCES

Learning Forward. (2011). *Standards for Professional Learning*. Oxford, OH: Author.

Sparks, D. (2013, September 3). 5 contradictions that reveal essential principles of teaching, learning, and relationships [Blog post]. Available at <http://bit.ly/1dM4lAj>. ■