

BEYOND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

**BREAKING BOUNDARIES
AND LIBERATING
A LEARNING PROFESSION**

By Bruce Joyce and Emily Calhoun

Almost every day, we wonder how to make career-long inquiry a centerpiece of the work life of educators. The challenges of implementing the Common Core State Standards and Science Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM) provide momentum for facilitating teacher learning far beyond the capacity of current formal and informal professional development in most school districts.

Joining the demands of Common Core and STEM are the needs to eliminate inequities not only in inner cities

but also the struggling neighborhoods in small towns and rural areas and socioeconomic, ethnic, and racial differences everywhere.

In addition, gender differences are growing. In United States colleges and universities, three-fifths of undergraduate students are women. Hispanic, black, and white students have large gender differences, again favoring women, in high school graduation rates and entrance into higher education, although some differences are narrowing. Among high school graduates, as many Hispanics as whites enroll in higher education (Fry & Taylor, 2013).

Gender joins socioeconomic status, ethnicity, and race as areas where differences in learning are substantial and serious, begin early, widen, and are not compensated for in

later years. Education is creating differences among people that are resulting in changes in society.

Implementing better curriculum and instruction is now an imperative. Schools simply have to generate higher and more equitable learning and strive to be healthier social systems. Students, society, and the economic system will benefit simultaneously.

Common Core and STEM provide direction and, judging from research on similar models of curriculum and teaching (Joyce, Weil, & Calhoun, 2015), will increase learning for all, but variance will lessen and reduce the gender and demographic differences that plague us now.

Which brings us to the focus of this essay. The implementation of the curriculums that substantially increase the learning capacity and achievement of all our children — or the more powerful curriculums that will succeed them — require a solid continuing education for educators. Some teachers can manage on their own, but most of us need help from colleagues who are knowledgeable in the content and processes that are new to us.

The really good news is that there is a storehouse of good models of professional learning that, taken together, can generate a fine range of professional learning opportunities (for a summary, see Joyce & Calhoun, 2010). In some settings, one or more of those models are doing well. But in general, professional development lives under constraints of time that do not enable it to thrive. We are fortunate to have emerging powerful curriculums and the tools for supporting educators coinciding with urgency to address some very serious problems.

Therefore we can envision some marvelous possibilities if we can free these to flourish by removing some constraints. *In particular, the traditions that govern educator workdays and year have not included the time needed for solid*

continuing education. Professional development of all types is currently squeezed into little windows of time that are simply inadequate to address the needs we refer to above on an ad hoc basis. The recognition that teaching is a learning profession where the study of educators is a prominent feature of the work is long overdue.

The keys to releasing the energy to build strong, sustained support are remarkably simple, although they will make some people nervous. Removing or at least bending some barriers is the secret door that lies hidden in plain sight.

The largest currently implemented components of professional learning in districts are the residual menus of workshops, the organization of professional learning communities within school faculties, and the creation of instructional coaching positions.

All these can work well, but all have serious limitations in their present forms because they have to live within impossibly difficult time constraints — boundaries that were created very long ago. Actually, they began to appear in the 1830s, when the common school was being created in America.

Let's look at those boundaries — then how professional learning evolved, how decentralization made its contribution, and, last, how to break those boundaries and allow strong continuing education to emerge.

THE COMING OF THE COMMON SCHOOL: REASONABLE PARAMETERS THAT TURNED INTO CONSTRAINTS

Although the early leaders envisioned an educated citizenry, and Franklin and Jefferson and others imagined the development of universities that would extend the sciences and the learning professions, the Constitution did not mention education. The 10th Amendment says that

powers not explicitly provided to the federal government are the domain of the states or the people.

Many communities in the Colonies had developed schools and, as the population migrated westward, communities continued to do so. Boards of trustees were formed to tend them and, gradually, states organized departments of education to develop and tend schools. The Morrill Act of 1862 gave states land to establish and support colleges, leading to the development of land grant colleges throughout the nation.

Gradually, the “school year” developed and naturally followed farming cycles, for when the common school was being developed, about 90% of the population was engaged in some kind of agriculture (most of the rest had gardens). The school year developed around the fallow months (think September to May) with students and teachers freed during the summers to participate in the enterprise. The custom became to have school years of 180 days.

Also, gradually, teachers were employed on formal contracts that provided for the 180 days of instruction, plus a couple of days to open and close the school and a day or two of meetings spread through the year. And, importantly as it turns out, the contract for teachers provided that they arrive at school before the students and stay for a period of time at the end of the students’ day.

Although there was and is variance, the day normed around beginning about 8 a.m. and ending at about 4 p.m., about 40 hours a week. There are districts where the workday is longer and some where the times are in guidelines rather than the clock. Over time, the work year, week, and day became matters of negotiation between districts and teachers’ organizations. The boundaries now had serious legal status.

These are the boundaries that have shaped professional learning and school improvement initiatives. Districts create workshops to fit within contracted days. Schools must find time for professional learning communities to meet within the workweek.

Scheduling staff meetings to conduct action research or study the new curriculums is tricky. Coaches can visit teachers in their classrooms, but if they need additional time for discussion, where can that be found?

The ancient constraints are now binds — barriers to enrichment.

Let’s look at the evolution of professional learning to see if we can find some clues to overcoming those barriers.

WHERE DID THE CONCEPT OF PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT COME FROM?

HOW DID BOUNDARIES MIGRATE WITH IT?

Through the 19th and into the 20th centuries, teacher preparation was created. Normal schools were organized and licenses to teach were codified. And, reasonably enough, extending the certificate obliged additional study.

Most states required completing university courses, often two semester courses every five years. Courses were offered on evenings, Saturday mornings, and in summer schools. At that time, most higher education institutions worked on a semester schedule, and the typical offering required attendance for 12 to 15 two- to three-hour meetings and the acceptable completion of work assigned by the instructor(s).

As a practical matter, just about everyone was recertificated. Although most courses required an action project in the classroom, many teachers had a low opinion of the courses and believed that the instructors were impractical and probably had no experience in schools.

School districts complained that the courses did not address their needs, particularly for support of school improvement initiatives that addressed pressing problems. Literacy in urban schools was a commonly mentioned need, as was help for struggling readers. Some courses addressed field needs, but many did not.

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THE BIRTH OF STAFF DEVELOPMENT

In the 1970s, changes in the locus of recertification gave rise to professional development as a component of professional life.

Swayed by the criticisms of university courses, state departments of education and state legislators authorized school districts to offer professional development workshops where participation would result in the award of professional development “recertification units” that could be accumulated into the equivalent of the university courses.

Most districts decided to offer workshops — something similar to courses, but generally much shorter. Generally, certificates of attendance sufficed for credit.

That change resulted in the scheduling by districts of contracted staff development days, often two during the year — somewhat more in some districts — and menus of workshops were developed from several sources. State and district officials suggested topics. Teachers were surveyed to suggest topics they would like (a process usually called “needs assessment”), and the menus of those days were built from the combination.

As the federal government became more involved in making initiatives, the conference days contained sessions about regulations, beginning with Title I and Public Law 94-142 and later extending to No Child Left Behind. The professional development days also contained offerings suggested by consultants who used the sessions to advertise their wares.

Note that the professional development was scheduled

within the boundaries. Teachers were not asked to participate in summer or after-school events. There were no fees. They could implement the content or choose not to.

The staff development days received relatively good press. Teachers were relieved to escape the university course requirements to apply the content to their classrooms and to be graded on the courses. (In fact, they graded the providers!)

Districts could use the ability to deliver recertification units to organize events where the units could be used as incentives. Some school districts employed professional development to fuel school improvement efforts.

Through their continuing education units, some colleges developed ways that organizations could award credits. For example, some national organizations would offer credits through those colleges for attendance at their conferences and, often, the submission of a brief paper about content relevant to the conferences. There is no instructor in that equation.

LONG-TERM OPINION

ABOUT THE MENUS OF WORKSHOPS

Skip ahead a few years, and we find that the opinion of teachers and administrators has soured. The complaints paralleled those that had been lodged against the courses. Particularly, “expert” opinion turned against the workshops. The prominent voices in the field of staff development — including Linda Darling-Hammond, Ann Lieberman, Michael Fullan, and others — were particularly negative. National organizations followed suit.

Certainly the menus of workshops included some of good quality, but the condemnations were en bloc (Feistritzer, 2013). Oddly, the teachers who attended workshops on those professional development days gave the ones they chose high ratings on the questionnaires asking their opinions of the experiences (see National Center for Education Statistics, 2013). And organizers of those days took those opinions seriously when inviting providers.

SITE-BASED MANAGEMENT, THE DEVELOPMENT OF PROFESSIONAL LEARNING COMMUNITIES, AND THE CREATION OF THE POSITION OF COACHING

Beginning in the late 1980s, many districts moved toward site-based management that gave schools most of the responsibility for regulating and improving themselves. Site-based management shifted many day-to-day and professional development responsibilities to the principal and school staffs (see Hill, Bonan, & Warner, 1992).

Simultaneously, site-based management districts reduced central office support personnel, diminishing both districtwide initiatives and support for schools. In the 1990s, the movement to organize school staffs into study groups, soon called professional learning communities, fit nicely with the site-based management concept. The small number of scheduled profes-

sional development days continued, but parts of them were used for school staff and PLC meetings as workshops became fewer.

(Site-based management is sometimes confused with decentralization — where large districts were divided into sub-districts with local boards and offices. Hopefully, the smaller entity would be more manageable and increase community involvement. Sometimes the new units adopted site-based management.)

SOME SMALL STEPS TO ESTABLISH CONTINUING EDUCATION

We believe that the most likely avenue to establish continuing education is by capitalizing on current needs and building the conditions they need for success. If present needs can be addressed, future ones can be spoken to as they appear.

Currently:

- To make site-based management work, schools need to operate from an action research perspective.
- To implement Common Core and STEM requires educators to learn both new content and processes, including managing the change as instruction becomes a hybrid of campus teaching linked to Internet resources.
- PLCs need time to meet, and their leaders need professional development on the new curriculum and instruction.
- Coaches also need time to bring their colleagues together for discussions and problem solving. Many of the coaches themselves need help to master the new curriculums.

Creating paid time is critical for all of these by softening some barriers.

CHANGING THE NATURE OF THE BOUNDARIES

There won't be strong continuing education — including formal professional development, PLCs, coaching, and preparation for building schools operating on action research protocols — unless substantial amounts of time are found. Where should they be found? We suggest that:

- Teachers' work includes 10 paid days each summer for formal study, part on school initiatives and part on districtwide initiatives.
- During the school year, biweekly sessions of about two hours be scheduled to follow the student day, divided among whole-school action research, PLC action research, and work and discussions with the instructional coaches. The school principal, those coaches, and a member from each PLC would organize and conduct the sessions. Large schools should probably be organized into “families” for the purpose. In secondary schools, department heads would be members of the leadership team. An additional five days of paid contracted time would be needed.

HOW TO MAKE THESE ARRANGEMENTS

In the immediate future, hire teachers for 15 days more

than the current contracts, 10 days in the summer and the remainder to compensate them for the weekday sessions.

The cost of these would be manageable, even in today's climate, but involve some serious changes in thinking. Consider the following:

WHERE CAN WE FIND THE MONEY FOR THIS?

The price tag is surprisingly small compared to the overall budget, and many districts have funded larger amounts for various initiatives in recent years.

We have looked at a few district budgets to get some perspective on the task. Here's the example of an urban, largely inner-city district. It employs 100 coaches at an average salary per year of \$90,000, including pension, medical coverage, and other, smaller, fringes: \$9 million altogether.

The district employs 3,000 teachers at an average inclusive salary of \$55,000, or about \$300 per day. To employ all of them for an additional 10 days over their contract would cost about \$9 million — two-thirds of the additional cost of providing 15 days of consistent time for study.

This example should not be taken to mean that we are suggesting an end to the coaching initiative and using the money to add study time for the rest of the staff. Far from it. We are trying to improve the chances that coaches, PLCs, and schoolwide action research will be effective. And coaching is a small part of what districts have found the funds for.

Together, teachers, teaching assistants, counselors, and principals make up only about half of the salaried staff in our example district. The workforce includes 3,000 other employees, all for what are considered good and necessary purposes!

Were the continuing education of teachers to become popular, we suspect that the funds for those 15 days could be found. Surely they would be.

And, note, please, that we are not proposing exotic, unfamiliar modes of study, but simply amplifying the current components of professional development to the point where continuous learning by teachers is prominently and generously supported.

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within the building.

The amalgamation of new ideas through Beyond Our Own Walls and Within Our Own Walls is creating a strong and vibrant professional learning community, committed to positively impacting student outcomes.

In a time when so many individuals are asking for less, these teachers are asking for more. More time, more observations, more feedback, more rigor. So that is what is ahead.

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