



RESEARCH SPOTLIGHT: RESEARCH PARTNERSHIP FOR PROFESSIONAL LEARNING

By Elizabeth Foster

Learning Forward recently became an affiliate of the Research Partnership for Professional Learning, which brings together professional learning organizations and researchers who are studying how features of professional learning address teacher learning and student experiences, well-being, and academic growth. As an affiliate, we will share with and learn from more than 60 organizations about professional learning research methods, tools, and findings.

Research Partnership for Professional Learning will convene its partners and affiliates in person for the first time at the Learning Forward Annual Conference in December 2023, where several ongoing research projects will be

highlighted in thought leader and concurrent sessions.

In addition, Learning Forward is exploring additional opportunities for collaboration, including ways in which Standards for Professional Learning can benefit Research Partnership for Professional Learning’s work and projects and inform the research field at large.

Researchers from the partnership shared the following overview of their first research review on the effectiveness of professional learning.

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WHAT LEARNING DESIGNS ARE MORE EFFECTIVE? RESEARCH OFFERS INSIGHTS

By John Papay and Heather C. Hill

The evidence base on teacher professional learning has advanced significantly over the past decade. Robust research efforts and recent literature reviews offer new insights into how — and how not — to design professional learning in ways that maximize its potential for improving teacher practice and student experiences. However, many professional learning design features are not yet standard across the field.

Our interpretation of the recent literature (Hill & Papay, 2022) suggests that several design features characterize professional learning that effectively improves instructional practice and student outcomes across classrooms and contexts. Some focus on how professional learning is implemented (formats) and others on what gets covered (foci).

While any given professional learning experience for teachers reflects a combination of these features, understanding the specific formats and foci that boost teacher and student outcomes across studies is instructive.

For the *how* of instructional

delivery, research suggests the following professional learning formats can be particularly effective at producing changes in instructional effectiveness:

- Built-in time for teacher-to-teacher collaboration on instructional improvement;
- One-to-one coaching, where coaches observe and offer feedback on teachers’ practice; and
- Follow-up meetings to address teachers’ questions and fine-tune implementation.

For the *what*, there is growing evidence that professional learning may be more productive when it focuses on:

- Building subject-specific instructional practices rather than building content knowledge alone;
- Supporting teachers’ instruction with concrete instructional materials such as curricula or formative assessment items rather than focusing only on general principles; and
- Explicitly attending to teachers’ relationships with students.

These six key design features from recent evidence suggest they are likely to improve teacher practice and student outcomes. A core theme connects these features: Professional learning appears more effective when it couples robust support for teachers’ day-to-day practice with genuine teacher-level accountability for change and improvement.

REFERENCE

Hill, H.C. & Papay, J.P. (2022). *Building better PL: How to strengthen teacher learning.* Research Partnership for Better Learning.

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