



**We believe it is important for all educators to ground learning designs and plans in research about what works, then consider how that research applies to their contexts.**

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## RESEARCH REVIEW

Elizabeth Foster

# A READING LIST FOR TURNING RESEARCH INTO ACTION

**L**earning Forward's 2023 Annual Conference focused on the theme Evidence Into Action. This theme was in keeping with Learning Forward's commitment to building the evidence base on how professional learning leads to improved outcomes for students and schools.

We are invested in examining and applying research on high-quality, results-focused professional learning designs to our projects and services, and we seek to share what we and our partners are learning. We believe it is important for all educators to ground learning designs and plans in research about what works, then consider how that research applies to their contexts. To that end, I developed this list of must-read articles and reports cited or recommended by conference speakers.

► **Papay, J.P., Taylor, E.S., Tyler, J.H., & Laski, M.E. (2020). Learning job skills from colleagues at work: Evidence from a field experiment using teacher performance data. *American Economic Journal: Economic Policy*, 12(1), 359-88.**

A few conference concurrent sessions related to instructional improvement asserted that the strategies would be most effective if undertaken in a collaborative way, such as in a professional learning community or team meeting. Recognizing how precious collaborative time is for teachers, this means that it would benefit us to understand how to ensure that teacher collaboration is as effective as possible. The collaborative time in PLCs or team meetings is often also a way to support and induct new teachers and teachers with provisional certification, a pressing concern given the current teacher turnover and shortage realities.

This study is one of many cited in a recent report that summarizes emerging evidence on the promising features of professional learning that support ongoing teacher learning and development (Hill et al., 2022). The findings align with the Standards for Professional Learning, which note that research points to three professional learning formats for improving 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 (Learning Forward, 2022).

► **Chu, E., McCarty, G., Gurny, M., & Madhani, N. (2022). *Curriculum-based professional learning: The state of the field*. Center for Public Research and Policy.**

Curriculum-based professional learning was a theme throughout the conference. The term refers to professional learning anchored in high-quality instructional materials to increase student engagement and agency, expand access to grade-level content, and bridge home and school. According to research by the Center for Public Research and Policy, curriculum-based professional learning is poised to expand more consistently across the education landscape. The researchers call for diverse, interdisciplinary actors from across the education sector to work together to produce professional learning that strengthens educational experiences and outcomes for students. (See also Short & Hirsh, 2020.)

► **DiGirolamo, J.A. & Tkach, J.T. (2019). An exploration of managers and leaders using coaching skills. *Consulting Psychology Journal: Practice and Research*, 71(3), 195-218.**

One conference session featured a panel of experts focused on the importance and potential of coaching as a critical component of a comprehensive professional learning system. Panelists Jackie Owens Wilson, Jen Lara, and James Thurman explored when and how to choose coaching interactions over other modes of leadership, how to embed coaching into collegial and supervisory

conversations, and how coaching can sustain learning, bolster collaboration and collaborative cultures, and engender equity among educators. This 2019 study, recommended by facilitator Sharron Helmke, Learning Forward senior vice president of professional services content, includes a literature review, interview and survey data on the elements of effective coaching, what skills are crucial for managers and leaders, and the benefits of coaching as a strategy. The study also includes a scale to measure the frequency of the use of coaching skills by managers and leaders.

► **Hinnant-Crawford, B., Bergeron, L., Virtue, E., Cromartie, S., & Harrington, S. (2023).** *Good teaching, warm and demanding classrooms, and critically conscious students: Measuring student perceptions of asset-based equity pedagogy in the classroom.* *Equity & Excellence in Education, 56(3), 306-322.*

Brandi Hinnant-Crawford challenged Learning Forward conference attendees to think about research, evidence, and data in an inclusive way, calling on improvement science to ensure they consider the perspectives of all educators and students, especially those who are traditionally marginalized or underrepresented in the research. Hinnant-Crawford's research focuses on improvement science and strategies to ensure equity and justice and asserts how student perceptions can inform research about professional learning. In a recent article, Hinnant-Crawford and her colleagues state that the Asset-Based Equity Pedagogy Scale can capture student perceptions in a new way to better understand approaches to instruction, teacher expectations, care, and whether educators are encouraging students to analyze and address real-world problems, especially those involving injustice.

► **Gardiner, W. (2018).** *Rehearsals in clinical placements: Scaffolding teacher candidates' literacy instruction.* *The Teacher Educator, 53(4), 384-400.*

► **Cai, J., Morris, A., Hohensee, C., Hwang, S., Robison, V., & Hiebert, J. (2017).** *Making classroom implementation an integral part of research.* *Journal for Research in Mathematics Education, 48(4), 342-347.*

Several concurrent sessions discussed the importance of providing time and structures for teachers to practice new instructional strategies, both individually and collectively, as well as the importance of learning new practices and thinking about their relevance and application. Numerous studies support the active practice of instructional skills during professional learning, such as through rehearsal or role-play of instructional routines, and identify this as particularly effective in improving instruction (see Garrett et al., 2019). While this isn't a new discussion, it is critical to get clear about how to embed and protect opportunities for teachers to try out new practices, reflect, test different improvement strategies, and practice further.

► **Learning Forward. (2022).** *Standards for Professional Learning.* Author.

Throughout the conference, presenters made connections to the Standards for Professional Learning and its evidence base, noting how the research about coaching is evident in the Implementation standard or how studies about developing and practicing collaboration skills are called out in the Culture of Collaborative Inquiry standard. We know that the Standards for Professional Learning are a critical factor in informing and guiding professional learning systems (Darling-Hammond, 2017). In addition, sessions on the Standards for Professional Learning cited an empirical study that found consistent evidence that alignment with the standards is associated with improved teacher instruction and student achievement outcomes (Garrett et al., 2021). These findings offer a strong rationale for examining programs using the standards as a framework and leaning

on them in decisions about priorities for professional learning designs and resources.

I will close with the request I made to conference attendees: Please share what you are reading and learning with us at Learning Forward. First, let me know if there is a research study about professional learning that you think would be important to highlight in this column. Second, we need your support in gathering evidence about the impact of the Standards for Professional Learning. If you have used the standards, either in an evaluation at your school or district or as a framework or rationale for a study or a dissertation, we would like to know about it. Email [elizabeth.foster@learningforward.org](mailto:elizabeth.foster@learningforward.org) and let me know about your contribution to our evidence-building efforts.

## REFERENCES

**Darling-Hammond, L., Hyler, M.E., & Gardner, M. (2017).** *Effective teacher professional development.* Learning Policy Institute.

**Garrett, R., Citkowitz, M., & Williams, R. (2019).** How responsive is a teacher's classroom practice to intervention? A meta-analysis of randomized field studies. *Review of Research in Education, 43(1), 106-137*

**Garrett, R., Zhang, Q., Citkowitz, M., & Burr, L. (2021).** *How Learning Forward's Standards for Professional Learning are associated with teacher instruction and student achievement: A meta-analysis.* Center on Great Teachers and Leaders at the American Institutes for Research.

**Hill, H.C., Papay, J.P., & Schwartz, N. (2022, February 15).** *Dispelling the myths: What the research says about teacher professional learning.* Research Partnership for Professional Learning.

**Learning Forward. (2022).** *Standards for Professional Learning.* Author.

**Short, J. & Hirsh, S. (2020).** *The elements: Transforming teaching through curriculum-based professional learning.* Carnegie Corporation of New York. ■