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RIPE FOR THE PICKING

Collection of 21 strategies satisfies a taste for context and content

By Lois Brown Easton

Imagine a school that has an environment of staff growth and learning. The climate that makes learning possible for adults in this school can always improve, but the school can legitimately call itself a professional learning community. This school has the context for adult learning.

Imagine that this school has collected and analyzed data from a variety of sources. Staff members know what they need to learn to do better so students can learn better. Teachers know the content they must study.

What they need to know is how: How will they learn what they need? What strategies will help them learn and help them make changes that affect student achievement? What processes will they initiate?

As a school-based staff developer, you are required to make frequent decisions about the right process (or strategy or design) to use for professional learning that will make a difference. Process is so important that the National Staff Development Council made it one of three aspects designers of professional development must consider, along with context and content (NSDC, 2001).

Imagine that our imaginary school has determined that students need to improve their reading skills in the content areas. The staff wants to learn

how to help students understand materials they read in social studies and science, for example. You consult a resource that describes powerful strategies for professional development — such as NSDC’s book, *Powerful Designs for Professional Learning* (NSDC, 2004) — and select a variety of processes that could be used. Some of these designs work individually. In some, staff work individually and then get together in groups. Six months into their focus on reading in the content areas, teachers come together, bringing a variety of viewpoints after experiencing a variety of professional development activities — though all focused on reading. Their professional development continues with other processes as they implement the changes they have identified.

Let’s be more specific. In the first six months, one teacher decides to **access student voices** by having students talk about reading in focus groups. Other teachers begin **action research** projects, mostly working alone but get-



ting together every other week to share their results. A few individuals keep **journals** about reading in their own classrooms. Some of these individuals create **portfolios** to share with others. Another group conducts **case discussions** on reading, and another looks at curriculum as **curriculum designers**. The principal and associate principals do **classroom walk-throughs** that focus on reading. Another group **analyzes the data** that initiated this professional learning cycle; this group wants to know the details behind the scores that alarmed the staff about reading in the content areas. The last group examines classroom and district **assessments** for levels of questioning about text.

At the end of the first six months, these individuals and groups learn from each through **visual dialogue**, and the staff as a whole creates a plan for action. The action research individuals and groups continue their work, as do the journal writers and portfolio makers. The curriculum designers and the assessment group expand their work, and other groups begin to form. Some staff members begin to meet in **critical friends groups** and do **tuning protocols** around student understanding of text. A small group decides to **shadow students** in another school, known for its focus on critical reading skills.

Later, as implementation continues (and gets tougher), a group forms to do lesson study related to reading in science classes. Another group looks at assignments through the standards in practice process. Finally, the staff decides to have a school coach help them focus on literacy across the curriculum.

This article and the tools on pp. 14-17 will guide you in choosing the designs that will work for your school.

Who?

All of the 21 professional development designs included in *Powerful Designs for Professional Learning* (listed at right) work well with classroom teachers as well as administrators at the building and district levels. The p. 14 tool identifies designs that will benefit by including college or university staff or community members, parents, and policy makers as partners.

Regardless of who is involved in profession-

al development, always ask, “Who else needs to be here?”

1. Who should be involved?
2. Will people work as individuals or in groups?

What and why?

Each of the 21 designs has roots in what happens in classrooms, focuses on learners and learning, and is collaborative in some way. All designs honor professionals. All lead to application. All promote inquiry and reflection.

Beyond these standards for powerful professional development, however, are other more specific purposes that can be promoted through certain designs. These more specific purposes take the form of questions listed below. Designs that are especially oriented to these specialized purposes are listed in the tool on pp. 15-16.

1. Which designs are most useful for gathering and using information from within the school or district about learning?
2. Which designs are most likely to require outside resources to inform the work?
3. Which designs are especially useful in creating a learning community?
4. Which designs focus most on standards, curriculum, and assessment?
5. Which designs focus most on practice or pedagogy?
6. Which designs are most useful for looking at classrooms?
7. Which designs focus on the whole school and/or beyond?
8. Which designs are particularly reflective?
9. Which designs look at student work or involve students in some way?
10. Which designs are best for bringing others (other than teachers or administrators) into the school improvement effort?
11. Which designs can be used to address specific problems and seek solutions?
12. Which designs result in a concrete product? Which designs are the most experiential?
13. Which designs may involve modeling?

When?

To be effective, schools should plan to commit to a design for at least a year. No design

21 strategies

The strategies included in *Powerful Designs for Professional Learning*:

- Accessing student voices
- Action research
- Assessment as professional development
- Case discussions
- Classroom walkthroughs
- Critical friends groups
- Curriculum design
- Data analysis
- Immersing teachers in practice
- Journaling
- Lesson study
- Mentoring
- Peer coaching
- Portfolios for educators
- School coaching
- Shadowing students
- Standards in practice
- Study groups
- Training the trainer
- Tuning protocols
- Visual dialogue

should be implemented only once a year. They are meant to be continuous over a period of time.

See the tool on p. 14 for guidance in designs that will work well in three to six sessions a year, those that require at least monthly meetings, those that should occur at least weekly, and those that should happen daily.

In addition, the duration of any professional development activity or session can vary enormously. Some strategies that may require less frequent meetings may need three hours or more for each session. Some strategies may require educators to meet together more often but for shorter amounts of time. Individual work that results in later group sharing might require an hour or less.

How?

All 21 designs identified in this article can

be used with other designs to explore the same content. In fact, using a variety of adult learning strategies oriented towards the same need can enrich the results considerably.

The tool on p. 17 will help you identify strategies by answering the following questions:

1. Which designs require a facilitator?
2. Which designs require administrators to be involved?
3. Which designs work best when school is in session? Which designs work best when school is not in session?
4. Which designs cost the most?

Students will succeed when educators choose the best possible context for professional development, deliberately focus content on student improvement needs, and choose processes that help teachers learn to best address those needs. ♦

Each of the 21 designs:

- Has roots in what happens in classrooms.
- Focuses on learners and learning.
- Is collaborative.
- Honors professionals.
- Leads to application.
- Promotes inquiry and reflection.



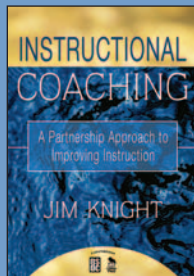
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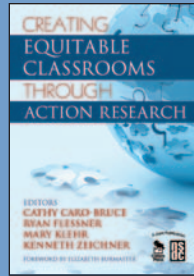
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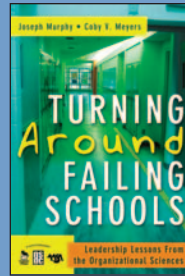
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POWERFUL DESIGNS WHO AND WHEN

POWERFUL DESIGN	Who? In addition to classroom teachers and administrators, who should be involved?					When? (Assumes no less than 1-year commitment)							
	University or college staff	Community, parents, policy makers	Individuals at first, then groups	Pairs	Large groups/ Concurrent small groups	Frequency				Duration			
						3 to 6 times year	At least monthly	At least weekly	Daily	Each session is 3 hours or more	Each session is 1 to 2 hours	Each session is an hour or less	
Accessing Student Voices			X			X					X		
Action Research	X		X				X*	X**				X*	X**
Assessment as Professional Development					X	X					X		
Case Discussions					X		X					X	
Classroom Walk-Throughs			X						X				X
Critical Friends Groups	X				X		X					X	
Curriculum Designers	X				X	X					X		
Data Analysis	X	X			X	X					X		
Immersing Teachers in Practice					X		X					X	
Journaling			X						X				X
Lesson Study					X	X					X		
Mentoring	X			X				X				X	
Peer Coaching	X			X				X				X	
Portfolios for Educators			X					X					X
School Coaching	X	X			X		X					X	
Shadowing Students		X	X			X					X		
Standards in Practice					X		X					X	
Study Groups	X	X			X	X					X		
Training the Trainer	X						X					X	
Tuning Protocols	X				X		X					X	
Visual Dialogue					X	X					X		

* = group sharing ** = individual work

SOURCE: *Powerful Designs for Professional Learning*, by Lois Brown Easton, Oxford, OH: National Staff Development Council, 2004. All rights reserved. Order through NSDC's Online Bookstore, store.nsd.org.

POWERFUL DESIGNS WHAT AND WHY

POWERFUL DESIGN	Useful for gathering data in a school	Involves gathering information from external sources	Particularly helpful in creating a learning community	Looks at standards, curriculum, assessment	Focuses on pedagogy and teaching	Involves looking at classrooms	Involves looking at whole school/behind
Accessing Student Voices	x						x
Action Research	x	x		x	x	x	x
Assessment as Professional Development		x		x			
Case Discussions		x		x	x		
Classroom Walk-Throughs	x					x	
Critical Friends Groups			x		x		
Curriculum Designers		x		x			x
Data Analysis	x						
Immersing Teachers in Practice				x	x		x
Journaling					x		
Lesson Study		x		x	x	x	x
Mentoring		x	x		x	x	
Peer Coaching		x	x		x	x	
Portfolios for Educators	x				x	x	
School Coaching		x					x
Shadowing Students	x	x			x	x	
Standards in Practice				x			
Study Groups		x		x			x
Training the Trainer							x
Tuning Protocols			x		x	x	
Visual Dialogue	x	x	x	x			x

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POWERFUL DESIGNS WHAT AND WHY (continued)

POWERFUL DESIGN	Is particularly reflective	Involves looking at student work or students	Good for involving others	Good for problem solving	Results in a concrete product	Is experiential	Involves modeling
Accessing Student Voices		x	x	x			
Action Research		x		x			
Assessment as Professional Development					x		
Case Discussions							
Classroom Walk-Throughs				x		x	
Critical Friends Groups		x		x			
Curriculum Designers					x		
Data Analysis				x			
Immersing Teachers in Practice						x	x
Journaling	x					x	
Lesson Study				x	x	x	x
Mentoring	x	x	x	x		x	x
Peer Coaching	x	x		x		x	x
Portfolios for Educators	x	x		x	x		
School Coaching			x	x			
Shadowing Students		x	x			x	
Standards in Practice		x		x	x	x	x
Study Groups				x			
Training the Trainer	x		x		x	x	
Tuning Protocols		x					
Visual Dialogue			x	x		x	

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POWERFUL DESIGNS HOW

POWERFUL DESIGN	FACILITATOR NEEDED			ADMINISTRATOR INVOLVEMENT			SCHOOL IN/OUT		COST
	No	At first	Yes	Support	Participation essential	Participation helpful	In	Out	
Accessing Student Voices			x	x		x	x		\$
Action Research	x			x		x	x		\$\$
Assessment as Professional Development			x	x	x		x	x	\$\$\$
Case Discussions			x	x		x		x	\$\$
Classroom Walk-Throughs	x			x	x		x		\$
Critical Friends Groups		x		x		x	x		\$\$
Curriculum Designers			x	x	x			x	\$\$\$
Data Analysis			x	x	x			x	\$\$\$
Immersing Teachers in Practice			x	x		x	x	x	\$\$\$
Journaling	x			x	x		x		\$
Lesson Study			x	x		x	x	x	\$\$
Mentoring	x			x	x		x		\$\$
Peer Coaching	x			x	x		x		\$\$
Portfolios for Educators	x			x	x		x		\$
School Coaching			x	x	x		x		\$\$\$
Shadowing Students			x	x	x		x		\$\$
Standards in Practice			x	x		x	x		\$\$
Study Groups		x		x	x		x		\$\$
Training the Trainer			x	x		x	x	x	\$\$\$
Tuning Protocols		x	x	x		x	x		\$\$
Visual Dialogue			x	x	x		x		\$\$\$

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