



## APPROACHES OF PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT OF TEACHERS

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### Abstract

*Professional development is a broad term, encompassing a range of people, interests and approaches. Those who engage in professional development share a common purpose of enhancing their ability to do their work. At the heart of professional development is the individual's interest in lifelong learning and increasing their own skills and knowledge. Professional development refers to skills and knowledge attained for both [personal development](#) and career advancement. Professional development encompasses all types of facilitated learning opportunities, ranging from college degrees to formal coursework, conferences and [informal learning](#) opportunities situated in practice. It has been described as intensive and collaborative, ideally incorporating an evaluative stage. There are a variety of approaches to professional development, including consultation, coaching, and communities of practice, lesson study, mentoring, reflective supervision and technical assistance.*



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### Introduction

In a broad sense, professional development may include *formal* types of vocational education, typically post-secondary or poly-technical training leading to qualification or credential required to obtain or retain employment. Professional development may also come in the form of pre-service or in-service professional development programs. These programs may be formal, or informal, group or individualized. Individuals may pursue professional development independently, or programs may be offered by human resource departments. Professional development on the job may develop or enhance process skills, sometimes referred to as leadership skills, as well as task skills. Some examples for process skills are 'effectiveness skills', 'team functioning skills', and 'systems thinking skills'.

Professional development opportunities can range from a single workshop to a semester-long academic course, to services offered by a medley of different professional development providers and varying widely with respect to the philosophy, content, and format of the learning experiences. Some examples of approaches to professional development include:

- **Case Study Method** - The case method is a teaching approach that consists in presenting the students with a case, putting them in the role of a decision maker facing a problem.
- **Consultation** - to assist an individual or group of individuals to clarify and address immediate concerns by following a systematic problem-solving process.
- **Coaching** - to enhance a person's competencies in a specific skill area by providing a process of observation, reflection, and action.
- **Communities of Practice** - to improve professional practice by engaging in shared inquiry and learning with people who have a common goal.
- **Lesson Study** - to solve practical dilemmas related to intervention or instruction through participation with other professionals in systematically examining practice.
- **Mentoring** - to promote an individual's awareness and refinement of his or her own professional development by providing and recommending structured opportunities for reflection and observation.
- **Reflective Supervision** - to support, develop, and ultimately evaluate the performance of employees through a process of inquiry that encourages their understanding and articulation of the rationale for their own practices.
- **Technical Assistance** - to assist individuals and their organization to improve by offering resources and information, supporting networking and change efforts.

### **Five Research-based Approaches to Teacher Development**

#### **Approach #1: Professional Learning Communities**

“To create a professional learning community, focus on learning rather than teaching, work collaboratively, and hold yourself accountable for results.” Teaching has often resulted in tremendous isolation for classroom instructors. However, when teachers are supported to work with one another to address problems that students may be having, look at data, study together, and support one another to try new approaches, they often experience greater engagement and reinvest energy in their teaching.

#### **Approach #2: Teacher Workshops with Expectations of Implementation**

The stand-alone “sit and get” workshop rarely results in improved instruction. However, when interactive online, in-person or hybrid workshop series are designed to align with school or district improvement goals and there is an expectation that teachers implement the practices introduced, there is a greater chance of an impact on classroom practice. Structures that introduce new teaching strategies, provide relevant examples, permit time for teachers to think about and plan for how to apply the practices to their own work, expect teachers to try

the practices out in the classroom, and provide time for them to return and share, ensure that professional development money is not wasted.

### **Approach #3: Instructional Coaching**

There is a growing body of research and practice literature that supports the effectiveness of instructional coaching. Like any other strategy, the key is quality implementation. In this approach, even more than in the others, the role of school leaders is critical to success. One important issue is communication about the role of the coach and the expectation for how teachers will interact with the coach. Here are additional recommended elements for leaders to consider making sure that coaching is likely to be effective- Selection, Preparation and Training, Effective Practice, Evaluation.

### **Approach #4: Teacher Action Research**

When teachers are supported to investigate a problem of practice, design an intervention or response, and collect data as to the effects of their work, they are empowered. Teacher action research can support a culture of active inquiry and continuous improvement and motivate teachers to learn new skills in order to meet the needs of their students. Success can be contagious – when teachers share their work, their efforts and their data, others become intrigued and want to investigate aspects of their own classroom practice. While the process does not have to be formal, professional development in how to conduct quality action research is important as is ongoing initial support for those conducting inquiry projects.

### **Approach #5: Participation on a Leadership Team or Task Force**

Another powerful teacher development strategy is active participation on a leadership team or task force. When a group of teachers are allowed to make or recommend data-based decisions to improve teaching and learning in their school, they typically take this responsibility very seriously, sharing professional knowledge, investigating options, seeking new knowledge and developing processes for coming to consensus. Many veteran teachers find this type of opportunity to be professionally rejuvenating while newer teachers gain understanding and appreciation of problems of the profession and can contribute new perspectives.

### **Roles of School and District Leaders in Supporting Teacher Development**

In our review of the research and practice literature related to teacher professional development three clear themes emerged. First, that all of these professional development structures required that structures be in place to support their success (e.g., time to meet, clear expectations for implementation, resources and materials). Second, that support must be balanced with accountability (e.g., classroom observations, presentations of results, teacher evaluation, and instructional walkthroughs). Third, that sustaining and spreading change in

classroom practice is dependent on making the work public and transparent with opportunities to talk, present, and share in multiple ways.

School leaders should also be aware that professional development may be needed to support the successful implementation of these approaches and arrange for this to be available to participants. For example, teachers participating in professional learning communities may need support to understand student performance data; instructional coaches may need support in learning to work effectively with adult peers; and leadership team members may need instruction on how to reach consensus.

### **Conclusion**

These five approaches to teacher development can be effective levers to improved teaching and learning in your school when supported by school leaders and implemented in accordance with the best practices outlined in the research and practice literature.

Effective professional development is ongoing, includes training, practice and feedback, and provides adequate time and follow-up support. Successful programmes involve teachers in learning activities that are similar to ones they will use with their students, and encourage the development of teachers' learning communities. A key strategy involves finding ways for teachers to share their expertise and experience more systematically. There is growing interest in ways to build cumulative knowledge across the profession, for example by strengthening connections between research and practice and encouraging schools to develop as learning organizations.

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