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ABSTRACT

Reading, writing, and reflecting can be used as tools during teachers' professional development opportunities. Various forums and activities that support an evolving view of professional development tend to encourage active participation and decision-making, reflective practice, and constructing knowledge based on discussions and readings. Book talks center around a topic of interest. Learning autobiographies (in which the writers investigate systematically their pasts as learners, discovering strengths and potential blind spots) help teachers encourage learning in their students. Professional development groups involve from three to six participants, reading and discussing the same text or multiple texts on the same professional topic. Professional Resource Infomercials require participants to review a professional book and then prepare a commercial to entice the audience to read the resource. Various publishing opportunities, in-class or out, help writers develop sensitivity to their audience and gain confidence in their abilities. Reflective journal writing may be useful in conjunction with almost all of the other forums. Structured Sustained Silent Reading (SSSR) is useful with preservice teachers, who read self-selected articles chosen from a classroom collection. Teacher research can lead to understanding children in classrooms and the teaching/learning that occurs on a daily basis. Teacher study groups/book groups give teachers a place to share ideas and explore new avenues in a social context that supports critical dialogue and reflection. Contains 29 references. (SR)

Running head: PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Professional Development:

Extending Literacy Roots

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Professional Development: Extending Literacy Roots

The changing faces of knowledge, instruction, technology, and demographics present constant challenges to classroom teachers. In addition, teacher accountability, budgetary constraints, and socio-political issues impinge upon teacher decision-making and affect classroom environments. Consequently, teachers' learning experiences through professional development opportunities must evolve to meet changing educational needs. This paper proposes to illuminate issues related to effective professional development and illustrate various forums for professional development for inservice and preservice teachers.

Issues

Traditional inservice approaches for practicing classroom teachers often leave a void. Teachers feel left out of the decision-making loop, perceive lack of support (Pierce & Hunsaker, 1996), and lament short time frames for training (Pollard & Tomlin, 1995). Frequently, teachers seeking outside opportunities for professional development often do so on their own time and at their own expense (Pollard & Tomlin, 1995). Inservice training effectiveness is often limited by lack of knowledge of how teachers learn and the context in which they work (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1993), a viewpoint of teaching as technical rather than professional, and absence of support networks, collaboratives, and partnerships (Lieberman, 1995).

In response to concerns with traditional inservice training for teachers, approaches for professional development are evolving in many school settings. Implementing and sustaining professional opportunities require a great deal of dialogue between and among interested parties. Key decisions about power relationships, availability, logistics of time and location, balancing teacher's, school's, district's needs and sometimes university and state policies, instilling trust, and measuring effectiveness often determine the feasibility of attempting alternative methods of professional development (Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1995; Hirsh & Ponder, 1991; Lieberman, 1995; Pierce & Hunsaker, 1996; Pollard & Tomlin, 1995). Evans (1995) adds good professional development needs a clear focus, substantial support, and occasionally outside perspectives. She indicates top-down approaches are usually ineffective and teachers' involvement in identifying and planning processes is important. Furthermore, follow-up assistance such as peer coaching, team mentoring, study groups, and other forms of collegial supports necessary to provide feedback and sustain change are paramount. Vacca (1994) offers several guidelines for effective professional development: using hands-on activities related to teaching and learning, encouraging reflective responses, engaging in collaborative partnerships, and extending development over time.

Thus, professional development is differentiated from inservice training. Professional development is viewed as a self-actualized, motivated, and

proactive approach to teacher training. Teachers seek solutions to perceived problems or investigate particular areas related to their own instruction. Control of topics and approaches tends to be local and personal. Teachers go beyond listening to good ideas or ways for understanding teaching practices to being actively involved in the process. These engagements require knowledge and trust by teachers, instructional leaders, administrators, and university representatives. To prepare teachers for proactive professional development, preservice training must emphasize collaboration, risk-taking, and responsible decision-making within a supervised framework so that future teachers can continue their own personal and professional growth once they are the teacher of record. Professional development is a powerful part of the entire context and life of schooling (Lieberman, 1995).

A dynamic view of professional development allows for varied approaches for information exchanges and constructing knowledge about learning and teaching. Accordingly, multiple approaches for professional development are evolving.

Professional Forums

The purpose of this paper is to illuminate issues related to effective professional development and to illustrate various forums for professional development for inservice and preservice teachers. Based on the literature and our own practice, we originally saw opportunities for professional

development in three areas: reading as a tool, writing as a tool, and reflecting as a tool. These forums chosen for professional development opportunities supported the need for teachers to construct their own knowledge, the need for teachers to work on real-life challenges associated with their own classrooms, honored teachers' expertise, and supported an expanded view of learning. However, as we began to write about practices involved in professional development, we became keenly aware of the recursive nature of the activities we had chosen to highlight. For example, as teachers read professional journals, they may write reflectively or may expect to use the information in personal inquiry projects.

Selected activities encourage choice, engagement, and active participation. Some of the activities highlighted lend themselves better to inservice or preservice teachers; however, all can be altered to accommodate either setting. After deliberation, forums for professional development were listed in alphabetical order to avoid giving the impression of a hierarchy.

Book talks

Book talks (Rochman, 1987) center around a topic of interest, such as spelling, writing assessment, or poetry instruction. The reader selects a topic, locates journal articles, books and other resources, and reviews the material. Then, the reader prepares a seven to ten minute presentation

highlighting information they have discovered. During the book talk, the presenter may give a synopsis of an article, read aloud from a text, use an overhead projector to display graphs or figures, or relate new information to other familiar readings. The presenter may spend three minutes summarizing one text and less than thirty seconds connecting another text to one previously reviewed. To encourage conciseness, presenters adhere to a time limit and usually limit their discussion to five to seven resources. Current and classic resources help make a balanced book talk. In addition, each person in attendance receives an annotated bibliography of the resources included in each book talk.

Learning Autobiographies

Writing a Learning Autobiography offers preservice and inservice teachers involved in college course work an opportunity to investigate systematically their pasts as learners. Teachers' stories saturate the context in which they teach (Meyer, 1996). As teachers make sense of their stories, they can better understand the daily occurrences in their classrooms. Discovering strengths and potential blind spots can help teachers to more effectively encourage learning in the lives of their students (Graves, 1994).

Students craft their Learning Autobiographies with themselves as the primary audience. They record their salient learning experiences, both positive and negative. Students explore learning experiences across time, in and out of school, paying particular attention to their literacy learning

experiences. They also draw conclusions about their personal learning styles, about the characteristics of good teaching and good teachers, about the effectiveness of schooling, and about the differences inherent in diverse learning situations. Negative experiences provide a powerful model of behaviors to avoid. Learning Autobiographies help students capture the past and facilitate understanding thoughts and practices connected to learning and education.

Professional Development Groups

Professional development groups (Meyer, 1993) involve participants in groups of three to six reading and discussing the same text or multiple texts on the same topic. These groups operate in a manner similar to literature circles, but the textual focus is professional rather than literary. Assignment to groups is based on text or topic selection. Groups meet for approximately 30 minutes over a predetermined length of time. For example, in preservice teacher education classes, students can meet throughout the semester. During the half hour, participants summarize previously read material, clarify vocabulary and points of confusion, create a consensus statement about the material read, decide what to read next, and plan how they will share their selection with others.

For inservice teachers, this group dialogue gives teachers access to information on a variety of topics. This type of activity is an efficient way to keep teachers abreast of current topics. Professional Development Groups utilize the social collaborative aspects of learning and can generate powerful discussions on complex issues.

Professional Resource Infomercials

Professional Resource Infomercials (Bullion-Mears, 1998) require participants to review a professional book and prepare a commercial to entice the audience to read the resource. Titles may be selected from a prepared list that includes some popularizations related to education and children's books as well as literacy research titles. The only parameter is the infomercial may be no longer than five minutes.

This particular activity lends itself to preservice teachers' coursework. Creativity is encouraged. In the past, preservice teachers have used talk shows, newscasts, product commercials, movies, and the Home Shopping Network as sources of inspiration for their commercials. Many preservice teachers choose to videotape their commercials and show the video during the class time allotted for their presentation. Professional Resource Infomercials encourage unique and interesting interpretations of different texts and expose participants to a large number of quality titles.

Publishing Opportunities

Publication is a social activity and helps writers develop sensitivity to their audience and gain confidence in their burgeoning abilities (Tompkins, 1994). Most commonly, the work of preservice and inservice teachers is published through group sharing or evaluation by a course instructor. However, other venues are available. Students' work in articles can be submitted for publication in collaboration with a professor or submitted individually. Assistance

in publication exists on a continuum from substantial editorial assistance to simply providing the names and addresses of appropriate forums. Students must always receive full credit for their creative endeavors.

Reflective Journal Writing

Reflective journal writing may be used in conjunction with almost all of the other forums. For example, teachers may write in their journals as they read professional resources, discuss ideas with colleagues, and engage in inquiry projects (Flood & Lapp, 1994). Inservice teachers may use reflective journal writing to help them navigate through the maze of new ideas related to learning and teaching and to help them record their thoughts as they observe in classrooms in real school settings.

The interrelationship between reading and writing is familiar to teachers, however, many do not see writing as a tool for their own personal and professional development. Reflective writing allows teachers avenues to work through their thinking, tie new knowledge to common classroom practices and self-evaluate. However, all writing takes time and patience (Keffer, Carr, Lanier, Mattison, Wood, & Stanulis, 1995), and sharing one's writing is sometimes uncomfortable.

Structured Sustained Silent Reading

Structured Sustained Silent Reading (Jacobson, 1993) lends itself well to working with preservice teachers. During the first 10-15 minutes of class time, students read self selected articles chosen from a classroom collection. Students then share a brief synopsis of what was read in pairs, small groups, or as a whole class. The instructor may comment on the synopsis or the content of a particular article, ask for questions, and help clarify points of confusion. If discussion is conducted as a whole class, the instructor may select a few students to share during one class session. Over the course of a semester, all students should have an opportunity to share their synopsis.

Structured Sustained Silent Reading not only exposes students to many different articles over a variety of topics throughout a semester but also stresses the importance of sustained silent reading as a classroom activity.

Teacher as Researcher

Many teachers are using research opportunities as the catalyst for their own professional development. In the teacher as researcher model, theory and practice merge, collaboration is encouraged, and knowledge is constructed (Osterman, 1991). Teachers confirm what they read in research journals, put research in perspective, as well as understand research better (Milz, 1989). This type of reflective activity is deliberate and results from active and thoughtful consideration. Teacher researchers are systematic and intentional (Cochran-

Smith & Lytle, 1993). In many cases, teachers are gathering evidence in their classrooms to test hypothesis and then evaluate results (Gove & Kennedy-Calloway, 1992). A plan for inquiry often helps teachers in their process. For example, Vacca & Vacca (1996) encourage teachers to identify problems or situations, formulate questions, determine methods or procedures, collect data, analyze data, form conclusions, and make decisions based on findings from their own research. To carry out such a plan, extensive reading in the professional literature helps teachers focus, know what others have done, and get ideas.

Teachers may not always adhere to the traditional parameters of research and theory, but their systematic inquiry can lead to understanding children in classrooms and the teaching/learning that occurs on a daily basis (Olson, 1990). Teachers may work as individuals or in collaboration with colleagues or with university representatives (Bredeson & Scribner, 1996). Collaboration with university researchers allows for diverse and varied perspectives (Klassen & Short, 1992). Action research begins with teachers' questions and aims at influencing practice; thus, teachers have a greater responsibility for directing their own professional development (Sardo-Brown, 1995).

Teacher Study Groups/Book Clubs

Teacher study groups/book clubs often have humble beginnings. Through word of mouth or by displaying notices, teachers and administrators who are interested in reading and discussing information connected with their needs, interests, and settings, begin groups. Teachers read for a variety of reasons on

a variety of topics. Book clubs and study groups give teachers a place to share ideas, challenge current thinking and instructional practices, and explore new avenues as they engage in a social context that supports critical dialogue and reflection while honoring personal response (Short, Crawford, Kahn, Kaser, Klassen, & Sherman, 1992).

A book club or a study group may not begin with a set agenda. As a group negotiates and plans, guidelines for proceedings, resources and space, as well as possible topics and/or books, and timelines are established (Flood & Lapp, 1994). Although any type of professional reading is appropriate, shorter selections will allow for more flexibility as well as fit into teachers' schedules for preparation (Flood & Lapp, 1994).

Final Thoughts

The original goal of this project involved examining issues related to traditional inservice and professional development opportunities for teachers. Differences in control of topics and resources, amounts of time for investigation, and views of teachers as learners were evident in the two broad approaches. After examining ideas for effective professional development, the next task was to discuss forums that were supportive of an evolving view of professional development. Forums discussed encouraged active participation and decision-making, reflective practice, and constructing knowledge based on discussions and readings. Many of the professional development opportunities highlighted in this article encourage teachers to get involved with professional literature.

According to Routman (1991), continuous professional reading is crucial to continued vibrancy as a professional teacher. Reflective writing and personal inquiry projects assist teachers in understanding and applying information gained through reading.

Professional development opportunities permit preservice and inservice teachers to make personal connections with the wider world of teaching that exists beyond the boundaries of one school. In addition, a variety of response modes may be called into action to help teachers delve into topics of interest as they are reflecting, making connections, better understanding practice and theory, appreciating different perspectives, and thinking critically (Williams & Owens, 1997). Furthermore, such a context stimulates and sustains teachers' learning and growth, which in turn may be the catalyst for educational reform (McLaughlin & Talbert, 1993).

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