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## ABSTRACT

This publication presents information from an April 1999 meeting of the National Partnership for Excellence and Accountability in Teaching and Learning and the Learning First Alliance, which brought together representatives of schools and districts where outstanding faculty development was underway. This guide presents the story that these leaders, and many of the nation's leading researchers who participated in the conference, told one another about how to best facilitate teacher learning that results in student learning and how to implement the necessary policies and practices. Section 1, "Introduction," discusses "School Improvement, Professional Development, and Expert Teaching" and "Prospects for Change." Section 2, "Implementing Learner-Centered Professional Development," includes "Supportive Schoolwide Conditions"; "Systematic District Support"; "Building a District Infrastructure"; and "The Issue of Quality Time." "Multiple External Influences on Teacher Learning" contains "NSF and Systemic Reform," "California's Reading Initiative," "Collaboration That Reaches Arkansas Classrooms," "Union Initiatives," and "National Commission on Teaching & America's Future." Challenges to redesigning professional development into learner-centered professional communities are described. (SM)

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*What  
learner-centered  
professional development  
looks like*

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# REVISIONING PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

## **THE NATIONAL PARTNERSHIP FOR EXCELLENCE AND ACCOUNTABILITY IN TEACHING**

(NPEAT) is a voluntary association of 29 national organizations. NPEAT engages in collaborative research-based action to achieve teaching excellence that raises student performance.

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## Foreword

I N 1997, 29 national organizations came together, with financial support from the Office of Educational Research and Improvement of the U.S. Department of Education, to form the National Partnership for Excellence and Accountability in Teaching (NPEAT). Ten of the NPEAT organizations and the National Parent Teachers Association had earlier formed the Learning First Alliance (LFA). Both groups recognized that significant school improvement would require substantial investments in professional development and that such investments would need to be made in new ways if they were to result in high student achievement.

To focus attention on effective professional development and to learn more about best practice and related policies, NPEAT and LFA invited educators and policy makers to a working conference in Washington, D.C. in April 1999. Over two dozen presentations of research findings and exemplary practice were featured.

This guide to actions is rooted in the work of the NPEAT/LFA conference. However, while many of the examples and expert commentaries come from presentations at the conference, this is not a record of conference proceedings. Rather, this report seeks to succinctly identify the characteristics of effective professional development and to examine how to address some of the challenges to implementing new and promising strategies to facilitate teacher learning that enhances student learning.

The Office of Educational Research and Improvement provided primary funding for this publication. The AT&T Foundation provided additional support. The primary author of the guide was Anne Lewis whose work was enriched by the contributions of Willis D. Hawley, Donna C. Rhodes, and Robert McClure. In addition, the National Staff Development Council contributed its expertise to publish and distribute this final report.

Tony Rollins chaired the conference planning committee. Gloria Frazier facilitated the development of participant consensus and Deborah S. Collins coordinated the conference activities and the publication of this guide.

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REVISIONING  
PROFESSIONAL  
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*What  
learner-centered  
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“School improvement happens when a school develops a professional learning community that focuses on student work

and changes teaching... In order to do that, you need certain kinds of skills,

capacities, and relationships. Those are what professional development can

contribute to... Any school that is trying to improve has to think of professional

development as a cornerstone strategy.” \*

– Michael Fullan, 1999

\* Unless footnoted, comments by individuals that are cited in this guide are taken from presentations by and interviews with participants at the April 1999 conference sponsored by the National Partnership for Excellence and Accountability in Teaching and the Learning First Alliance.





## INTRODUCTION

ONE reason greater investments in professional development for teachers have not been made is because strategies typically used in most schools, school systems, and universities have been perceived as unproductive. It is important, therefore, to be clear that the professional development being called for in this guide is very different from what is now common practice. Thus, the first order of business is to paint a picture of “learner-centered professional development.” One way to do this is to look at this approach to facilitating teacher learning through the eyes of a committed educator named Janet Moore.

For most of Moore’s years as a teacher, professional development time had been wasted time. Stand-alone workshops focused on low level teaching skills that someone – she seldom knew whom – decided she and her colleagues needed to know. The outside “experts” were good at presentation all right, but what they talked about infrequently connected to the problems she and her school faced as they tried to meet the dizzying array of new standards and mandates issued by state officials and state boards. So far as she could tell, no one ever paid attention to the superficial evaluations she filled out after each “learning opportunity.” She had taken so many university courses in the evenings and on weekends that she couldn’t count them – though they did show up on her paycheck, if not in her repertoire of instructional strategies. Not surprisingly, she had taken these courses in administration just in case she decided to leave teaching.

This past year, however, things had been different. After a brief but successful stint as a principal, Moore was appointed superintendent of a small urban district and had pledged to the school board, teachers, and administrators that professional development in the district would be different and effective. The time was right for change. Researchers studying professional development seemed to have come to common conclusions and, even more surprising, these conclusions matched those of a number of

important professional organizations. “Professional development” in Moore’s district took on new meaning – and meant something.

In Moore’s district, what teachers had the opportunity to learn was determined largely by teachers themselves, based on their systematic analysis of how close students were to meeting the goals set for them. Professional development was focused on instructional strategies to address problems students were having mastering the core learning goals set by the district and the state. Moore and her staff helped principals bring in outside experts when that was needed and find ways to give teachers time to learn from one another.

Most of the time, professional development activities were school-based although many teachers were able to visit the classrooms of outstanding teachers in other schools who were achieving remarkable results with so-called “disadvantaged students”. About 10 percent of the district’s teachers had been sent to workshops and conferences to learn about and develop specific capabilities teachers in their schools needed. These teachers were later responsible for sharing what they had learned. After consulting with teachers and principals, Moore worked with a local university to focus more of the learning opportunities the university offered on the school improvement plan in the district. Some of these one- to three-credit courses were available online and at schools throughout the district.

Moore had worked hard to promote the idea that professional development was happening pretty much all the time, not just at the time set aside for teacher learning. The days before and after the school year that had been “professional development days” were cut and that time was distributed throughout the year. During common planning periods, teachers compared notes. Principals and district staff took teachers’ classes on occasion so teachers could visit colleagues to learn with and from one another. Through networked computers in every classroom, teachers had access to resources for learning that were linked to specific



curricular goals. With support of the local education fund, professional books, videos, and journals were added to school libraries. The district had facilitated study groups to help interested teachers prepare for the National Board of Professional Teaching Standards assessment process.

Janet Moore's experience is a fable. But it represents the experiences that increasing numbers of teachers are having. While few teachers find themselves in Moore's somewhat idyllic situation, some of the characteristics of what is here called "learner-centered professional development" are found in many schools.

In 1999, the National Partnership for Excellence and Accountability in Teaching and the Learning First Alliance brought together representatives of schools and school districts where outstanding professional development was underway. This guide tells the story that these leaders, and many of the nation's leading researchers who participated in the conference, told one another about how best to facilitate teacher learning that results in student learning and how to implement the necessary policies and practices.

## **SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT, PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT, AND EXPERT TEACHING**

School improvement and learner-centered professional development go hand in hand. Education reform that makes a difference for students requires teachers and principals to respond in new ways to the need for change and to rebuild the very foundation of their thinking about teaching and learning. The research presents a solid consensus on why and how to strengthen professional development. This report seeks to make this shared understanding come alive through examples of research in practice and illustrations that suggest implications for decision makers, whether at school, district, or state levels. In essence, the stories in this guide draw a picture of an environment where teachers model the learning they want to see in their students. In it, a teacher's professional life centers on what defines him or her as teacher – knowledge of what students should be learning and the expertise to enable all students to be successful at meeting high standards. It is a totally learner-centered environment.

Expert teachers are constantly curious about the progress of their students, using a variety of ways to evaluate student learning. They draw insights from analyzing student work, knowing that the work can be no better than their own assignments. Thus, student work tells them of their learning needs as well as those of their students. Expert teachers relate their instruction and students' learning to agreed-upon standards, which they have stud-

ied and used to align their curriculum and teaching strategies. They also know what comprises good professional development and how it should support what they do in their classrooms.

In the new view of professional development, teachers are engaged in professional learning every day, all day long. It pervades the classroom and the school. It is embedded in the assignments and analyses that teachers perform every day as they continually draw understanding about their performance from student performance. Teachers learn together. They solve problems in teams or as a whole faculty because every teacher feels responsible for the success of every student in the school community. Rather than looking only outside of the school for expertise, teachers build it within their own environment, becoming avid seekers of research and best practices that will help themselves and others.

Learner-centered professional development focuses on students. Principals are partners in shaping and participating in teachers' learning, and the goal of all the professionals in a school is to make sure professional development supports both their own and their students' continuous learning opportunities. It makes it possible for teachers to become reflective practitioners and to build upon what they know, just like their students.

## **PROSPECTS FOR CHANGE**

It is important to move beyond discussions of what changes are needed to the difficult challenge of figuring out how to create the changes. In the next few years, at national, state, and local levels, policy makers will be willing to increase investment in teacher professional development with the expectation that such professional development will be much more effective.

There are at least three reasons to believe professional development policies and practices could be replaced in the near future:

First, it is happening. The examples cited in this guide and in the proposals submitted for recognition by the federal government's professional development awards program provide evidence of an unmistakable movement toward learner-centered professional development.

Second, professional and policy organizations are increasingly acknowledging the importance of professional development to school improvement. For example, several national organizations and the federal government itself have issued reports that focus on the centrality of professional development to improvements in student achievement and subscribe to the characteristics of learner-centered professional development.<sup>1</sup>

Third, research identifying the characteristics of effective

<sup>1</sup> See Willis D. Hawley & Linda Valli, "The Essentials of Effective Professional Development: A New Consensus," Linda Darling-Hammond & Gary Sykes, eds., *The Heart of the Matter: Teaching in the Learning Profession*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass. Pp 127-150.



## *Improving professional development, research-based principles*

Whatever their content and goals, professional development activities that have the characteristics below are more likely to be effective than those that do not. The principles reflect a synthesis of current research and are influenced by and mapped closely on similar propositions by the U.S. Department of Education and the National Staff Development Council, as well as other organizations concerned with professional development.

- The content of professional development focuses on what students are to learn and how to address the different problems students may have in learning the material.
- Professional development should be based on analyses of the differences between (a) actual student per-

formance and (b) goals and standards for student learning.

- Professional development should involve teachers in identifying what they need to learn and in developing the learning experiences in which they will be involved.
- Professional development should be primarily school-based and built into the day-to-day work of teaching.
- Most professional development should be organized around collaborative problem solving.
- Professional development should be continuous and ongoing, involving follow-up and support for further learning – including support from sources external to the school that can provide necessary resources and new perspectives.

- Professional development should incorporate evaluation of multiple sources of information on (a) outcomes for students and (b) the instruction and other processes involved in implementing lessons learned through professional development.
- Professional development should provide opportunities to understand the theory underlying the knowledge and skills being learned.
- Professional development should be connected to a comprehensive change process focused on improving student learning.

NOTE: The source of these design principles is the National Partnership for Excellence and Accountability in Teaching's web site at [www.npeat.org/strand2/pdprinpdf.2](http://www.npeat.org/strand2/pdprinpdf.2)

professional development is growing (for a list of research-based design principles for effective professional development, see box above.)

Because it is so challenging to implement changes in already entrenched policy and practice, much of this guide is devoted to identifying what can be – and what has been – done to achieve three conditions essential to putting in place and sustaining learner-centered professional development. In truth,

research is more helpful in knowing what to do than in determining how to overcome the obstacles to change. This guide, therefore, relies on evidence about effective strategies for implementation from the collective wisdom of participants in the 1999 Conference of Teacher Professional Development and from stories from several schools and districts that have been using learner-centered strategies for professional development.

<sup>2</sup> See also, Hawley and Valli, *Ibid.*



“

W e've always had evidence that an individual school  
could change itself successfully, transform itself into a

highly successful school where all children achieve at high levels. But the long-term  
ability of that school to sustain itself is questionable if you are not building a dis-  
trict infrastructure that supports and aligns with what's going on at the school  
level. I think that you've got to work on the school as the unit of change and build  
the district infrastructure at the same time in order to have that dynamic interplay  
to sustain school transformation.”

– Colleen Seremet, Assistant Superintendent, Dorchester County Schools, Maryland



## IMPLEMENTING LEARNER-CENTERED PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Three sets of organizational and political conditions appear to facilitate the introduction and improvement of professional development:

- Supportive schoolwide culture and structure;
- Systematic district level support; and
- External policies that are aligned across the various influences on teacher and student learning.

These three sets of conditions are interdependent. While it is possible for schools to go it alone, so to speak, doing so makes the hard work of change even harder.

Whether one starts thinking about how to achieve learner-centered professional development at the school level or whether state policy makers try to implement statewide initiatives, the most promising way to bring about needed changes is to work on all three sets of conditions in concert.

### SUPPORTIVE SCHOOLWIDE CONDITIONS

A 1999 National Academy of Sciences report examining *How People Learn*<sup>3</sup>, contends that the design for optimum learning should be linked to the process of learning, transfer, and competent performance. The most important influences on these processes are:

- Learner-centered environments. Learners use their current knowledge and what they believe at the moment to interpret new information. Learners' current knowledge sometimes supports, sometimes hampers, learning.

- Knowledge-centered environments. A knowledge-centered perspective on learning environments highlights the importance of thinking about designs for curricula. To what extent does the environment help learners learn and understand rather than promote the acquisition of disconnected sets of facts and skills.
- Assessment to support learning. Feedback is fundamental to learning, but feedback opportunities are often scarce in classrooms. Rather than just grades on tests, students need opportunities to revise and improve the quality of their thinking and understanding. Assessments should reflect broad learning goals, such as problem solving and application knowledge.
- Community-wide environments. The importance of connected communities becomes clear when one examines the relatively small amount of time spent in school compared to other settings.

These conditions for optimum student learning have their counterparts in environments for teacher learning. The success of such efforts to develop and manage collaborative problem solving that is focused on evaluating and implementing strategies to enhance student achievement seems to depend on meeting four challenges:

- **Creating** a collaborative culture;
- **Developing** leadership skills;
- **Enhancing** teachers' and administrators' capacity for data analysis; and
- **Building** communities of learning that transcend the school.

Perhaps the most common problems that teachers and

<sup>3</sup> John D. Bransford & Ann Brown, eds. *How People Learn – Brain, Mind, Experience and School*. Washington, D.C.: National Research Council, 1999. See also, M. Suzanne Donovan, John D. Bransford, and James W. Pellegrino, eds. *How People Learn: Bridging Research and Practice*. Washington, D.C.: National Academy Press, 1999.



## T A L E S O F T W O S C H O O L S

No single example of successful professional development embodies all of the ideas and principles identified here. However, the Samuel Mason elementary school in Boston, Massachusetts and the H.D. Hilley elementary school near El Paso, Texas, illustrate much of what needs to be done at the school level to create learner-centered professional development.

**SAMUEL MASON ELEMENTARY SCHOOL**

In only a few years, Samuel Mason elementary school in Boston reversed its level of student achievement. It went from two-thirds failing to read at grade level to two-thirds reading at grade level or above. This was “a powerful turnaround” for a school where 90% of the students are low income and the families of one-fourth of the children do not speak English well, said Mary Russo, Mason’s principal during most of the transformation years.

Mason was in the first group of Boston schools to receive a substantial increase in funding for professional development (all schools are now being funded), allowing teachers to plan on in-house expertise through a coach they selected themselves. After a few years, the faculty decided it wanted a few teachers to become experts for the school, providing professional development to others, then selected those for training. As peer coaches, they are available all day, all week. “You can go into the classroom of one of these teachers to observe how they do something, or learn from them in before-school or after-school study groups,” says Russo. “There is real expertise in the building that is not going to evaporate.”

The turnaround actually began by teachers asking critical questions about their literacy program. What are children who are excellent readers and writers able to do? What does their work look like? From discussions around such questions came a sequence for school-based professional development:

- Establishing very explicit core beliefs as a vision for the school;
- Benchmarking best practices by visiting other schools and establishing criteria for success;
- Identifying a balanced approach to literacy and the professional development teachers needed to learn it well;



administrators face when they consider what it would take to significantly restructure teacher learning involve finding more time and more resources. While schools can do a lot to change access to time and resources, substantial change is most likely to occur when districts adopt relevant policies and provide appropriate support. Thus, we turn to the issues of time and resource allocation in the next section of this guide.

**CREATING A COLLABORATIVE CULTURE**

As Michael Fullan points out, “an innovation won’t go anywhere unless the school culture is favorable in terms of the way that people solve problems and work together.” According to Fullan, there are change factors and change processes and the two should not be confused. Collaboration is essential to a new design for professional development, Fullan says. But until schools value collaboration because they can see its impact on student learning, creating a collaborative culture will remain more rhetorical than real.<sup>4</sup>

Participants in a professional learning community interact around professional matters, focusing on pedagogy, content, and assessment. This is the center of daily work within a school. Such engagement is different from what Fullan describes as “contrived collegiality,” or strategies that contain and control how adults interact and work together. Instead, professional community is a mindset that builds a culture of sharing, trust, and support. Collaborative skills overcome the fragmented individualism that traditionally characterizes classrooms and the division of school cultures into “camps” representing certain attitudes/beliefs. Collaboration fosters a desire to learn together and to be responsible for student learning together. A person in a collaborative culture, however, recognizes that conflict is part of the process. To bring about comprehensive and lasting change, people must develop collaborative relationships with those with whom they might disagree.

The process of creating collaboration that makes a difference is something that can be evaluated and modified as it proceeds. Fullan cites the increased amount of planning time in the school day, the support for team work, the connection of practice to “bigger efforts at change,” and the creation of external partnerships as processes that lead to a professional culture in school.

Although some propose using formal models to modify the isolation of teachers and implement new approaches to professional development, such as adopting schoolwide comprehensive reforms, others place more importance on changing individual beliefs and practices. Too often, says Terry Dozier, special advisor to the U.S. Secretary of Education, staff development is seen as a means to an end rather than an end in itself. “It is used as a tool to

<sup>4</sup> See Michael Fullan, *Change Forces: The Sequel*. Bristol, PA: Falmer Press, 1999.



get people through a problem," she notes, "but in other places it is seen in the context of a moral vision, that it helps student succeed."

Collaboration, certainly within a school, requires personal commitment, but the largest question for policy makers and administrators is how to structure it to be central to the development of learning communities within schools and, ideally, within districts.

## DEVELOPING LEADERSHIP SKILLS

One way of fostering greater leadership skills is to "reintegrate the principal into the teaching profession," in the words of Tom Mooney, president of the Cincinnati Federation of Teachers. This means restoring the original meaning of school leaders as "principal teachers." Most school districts investing heavily in standards-based reforms recognize the need to pay as much attention to principal professional development as to that of teachers. The proliferation of principals' academies or requirements that they participate in the same professional development experiences as teachers are important policy decisions. In District 2 in New York City, for example, principals learn to recognize standards-based classrooms, and they serve as mentors for each other. In Long Beach, Calif., principals meet monthly to learn what a rich literacy classroom environment looks like and to discuss their observations in feedback sessions.

Leadership, however, occurs at all levels. School boards, for example, will be willing to invest in professional development more readily if their members are committed to the professional growth of their teaching staff. In some districts having success with standards-based reforms, such as the districts in the El Paso collaborative, parents participate in professional development along with teachers.

Many schools redesigning their professional development see the effort as a way to develop teacher leaders. At the Santa Monica (California) Alternative High School, four teacher leaders work once a week with every teacher in literacy and math. Teachers write action plans for what they want to learn about instruction, and the teacher leaders observe that behavior, then immediately provide feedback to the teacher about their instructional practices. Teachers are in charge of their own learning, but the teacher leaders support them and continue to build their strengths. The school's leadership team consists of the principal, the teacher leaders, and the ESL coordinator; it meets two hours a week to discuss the common professional development needs of the staff. Teachers meet for a "staff dialogue" one afternoon each week.

Supporting stability in leadership when helping to redesign professional development is the special role of funders, consultants, university faculty, and national networks, according to Marla Ucelli of the Annenberg Challenge. They can help school

## TALES OF TWO SCHOOLS

- Analyzing student learning and teacher development in relation to the criteria for success;
- Developing a strategic professional development plan;
- Designing a school-based measurement system to determine success of professional development; and
- Targeting resources for deep and ongoing professional development in literacy.

Everyone at Mason Elementary, including the support staff, prepare personal professional development plans, and teachers are given 10 days to observe in a colleague's classroom or to use time outside of school for visits, research, and reading. The school's professional development investments are measured several ways. Quantitatively, the school adds up hours spent in professional development, advanced degrees received, and results of classroom walkthroughs. Student outcomes are part of the picture, such as results from running records on student reading levels, writing samples, and standardized tests.

Professional development at the school must offer teachers many ways to learn, according to Russo. Mason not only has study groups, mentor teachers, and lead teachers for literacy, but also mentors new teachers through a summer program in which they co-teach in the mornings and have professional development in the afternoons. As Russo says, "if you're asking people to change their teaching practice and to do all the hard work that this takes, then you have to give them the support they need."

### H.D. HILLEY ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

At H.D. Hilley elementary school in Socorro, Texas, a school once surrounded by cotton fields but now by trailer parks filled with low-income, limited-English-proficient families, collaboration among teachers and the principal became essential. "We were a group of superstars," says former principal Ivonne Durant, but changes in the district forced the school into a team approach, and from "executive" to teacher leadership. This came about through strong professional development, built on eight commitments:

- Professional development focuses on improving student performance through analyzing data. Test scores in reading, math, and writing are analyzed by grade level, teacher, and student, using a variety of standardized tests, and compared to state standards.
- Teachers identify their professional development needs. Teachers develop an annual plan of action with three pro-



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professional development goals to work on for the year. The “Circle of Learning” established by the school involves everyone in learning, e.g. teachers teaching peers, parents teaching each other, and university interns as part of the mix.

- Professional development is school-based and built into the daily work of teaching. Outside consultants model and work with individual teachers. By manipulating the schedule, teachers spend an hour together each week in professional development while students are in technology class, in the library, with a counselor, or receiving special help on literacy.
- Professional development is organized around collaborative problem solving. The school faculty is divided into vertical teams for communications, math/science, fine arts, and technology. The teams analyze assessment data, set goals, and involve parents. Grade-level teams work on instructional strategies.
- Professional development is continuous and involves focused support from external sources. University faculty and the regional service center provide ongoing technical assistance.
- Professional development incorporates evaluation of multiple sources of information on the link between instruction and outcomes for students. The assessment system includes classroom observations, self-assessments, and evaluation of individual teachers’ goal plans.
- Professional development provides opportunities to gain an understanding of the theories underlying the knowledge and skills being learned. The school improvement team, for example, stimulates discussions about technology use, research, and important books for teachers.
- Professional development connects to a comprehensive change process focused on improving student learning. The professional development assessment observations encourage timely feedback to teachers on how their instruction fits with reforms, and annual evaluations use student assessment to analyze teacher effectiveness.

districts avoid disruptions caused by too-frequent turnover of administrators. “We can connect folks to peers in other places who are worrying about the same things,” she notes, as well as support broadly representative groups in a district that continue to focus on such questions as “Is this what we want for our kids? Is this moving us in the right direction? What resources do we need?”

## ENHANCING CAPACITY FOR DATA ANALYSIS

Learner-centered professional development is, simply put, data-driven. The data that are key to professional development are those that describe student progress toward clear and shared goals. And, as Terry Dozier argues, if professional development is to be connected to goals for student learning, schools must work with achievement data every day. In order to place data analysis at the center of professional development, several conditions must exist.

First, the data to be analyzed need to be multi-dimensional. Teacher and administrator assessments of student performance must go beyond summative forms such as grades on tests. Teachers must be skillful with formative assessments, giving students opportunities to revise and improve the quality of their thinking and understanding, according to the National Academy of Sciences report, *How People Learn*. Teachers’ assessments should reflect learning goals. If the goal is to enhance understanding and the ability to apply knowledge, then it is not sufficient to provide assessments that focus primarily on memory for facts and formulas. Moreover, Marla Ucelli argues that teachers must have data that connects more deeply to what shapes the lives of students, their culture, and their previous schools, and to the resources of their neighborhoods and families

Second, teachers and school administrators need skills for interpreting data. Surveys of teachers suggest that many feel that they have had inadequate training in how to derive meaningful answers from data that allow for multiple interpretations.

Third, trust and strategies needed for sharing and examining data on student performance, curricula, and instructional strategies must be developed. The Montview Elementary School in Aurora, Colorado used comprehensive assessments of literacy levels and programs to restructure its professional development. Montview joined the Learning Network, a literacy program with built-in professional development, set up instructional dialogues for teachers, held quarterly monitoring conferences based on results, and restructured the use of Title I funds on the basis of what the data showed about the school’s traditional strategies. Similarly, Paul Heckman has documented the changes in teacher values and attitudes during the transformation of several Tucson, Arizona schools that led to behavioral changes that resulted in student success by using the information to move teachers, parents, and students to higher levels of trust and action. Formative assessments, while not providing instant cost-benefit analysis of professional development investments, nonetheless yield useful data to promote change.





Fourth, data on the effectiveness of professional development needs to be gathered and analyzed. Cincinnati, for example, collects data about the current state of professional development to redesign it from the bottom up. Connecting data on student learning to professional development is important not only because this will improve professional development but because it will justify productive investments. Dennis Sparks of the National Staff Development Council recommends studying schools within states where student achievement results are documented, then “highlighting where the adult learning is happening in those schools. It is there, but people often do not recognize it as professional development.”

## BUILDING COMMUNITIES OF LEARNING

The demands on schools come from the imperative of fostering student learning and the expectations from their environments. Communities provide resources that teachers can use to enhance student learning. Parents, church groups, civic associations, and businesses shape what students learn but they also are resources for teacher learning.

The Education and Community Change Process, started at Tucson’s Ochoa Elementary School, involved teachers in weekly meetings to discuss their work in the classroom and integrate the community into it. Ochoa – with 99% minority and 92% low-income students – was seen by teachers as a school of non-readers and disinterested parents. However, according to Vicky Montero, a teacher at the school during most of the project, “I think maybe the curriculum was just too disconnected from the students’ lives.”

During three-hour weekly meetings, Ochoa teachers began by identifying the major problems such as lack of parental involvement and dropout rates. The project linked teachers with community organizers, who empowered parents to improve their neighborhood. The perceptions of parents and teachers toward each other changed. The school also selected ‘third party’ staff members, who worked inside and outside the school, enlisting people from the community to join in-school dialogues among teachers. Gradually, the curriculum became more student-centered, and teachers and parents formed liaisons.

Continuing professional development focused on understanding the culture of Ochoa students led to multi-age grouping, team teaching, using the community as a resource, and developing alternative assessments. Student scores on state tests rose from the 24th percentile to the 48th percentile; on other standardized tests, they were among the best-performing schools in the area.

The approach, according to Paul Heckman, discards top-down or formalistic professional development. It begins with a

set of beliefs about outcomes for students, then builds on the sharing of ideas, insights, and successes. It is an example, he says, “of people coming together in communities of what John Bransford called ‘learners,’ exchanging what we know, and over time developing common knowledge.”

While teachers need to develop and draw on expertise within their schools, they also need to connect with teachers in other schools and to learning resources in their environments. There are many ways professional networks can become part of teachers’ professional development experiences. Some are already established, like the National Writing Project and some can be fostered by districts, teacher organizations, or universities that bring teachers together in study groups for on-going inquiry.

Building such communities of learning would be a big chore for teachers. While teacher leaders have successfully undertaken this action, and should be encouraged to do so, ultimately school administrators and district staff are responsible for providing the resources and support for professional development networks.

The Internet and multidirectional compressed video have become increasingly accessible to teachers and can be resources for learning communities. Currently, the thousands of web sites aimed at teachers place great demand on teachers to separate the wheat from the chaff. However, software that allows teachers to link material on the Internet to specific needs is being improved and processes for evaluating web-based resources for both teachers and students are being developed.

## SYSTEMATIC DISTRICT SUPPORT

The vision for learner-centered professional development places schools at the center of teacher learning. However, the district must endorse and support continuous adult learning that is essential to the professional learning community and be committed to the idea that such learning must support whole school reform and student success. School boards, superintendents, and central office personnel may need professional development of their own to figure out how to help design a system that is supportive, aligned, and allowed to evolve.

## BUILDING A DISTRICT INFRASTRUCTURE

If districts are to provide the necessary support for learner-centered professional development, most will have to rebuild the organizational structures and retool and repurpose district personnel. Bruce Haslam, in a resource book published by New American Schools, has identified eight steps a district needs to take to fully support the new approach to professional development promoted in this guide.<sup>5</sup>

- The local education community recognizes and agrees that professional development is the cornerstone of school reform and

<sup>5</sup> Bruce Haslam, *How to Build a Local Professional Development Infrastructure*, Arlington, VA: New American Schools, 1997.



D I S T R I C T S U C C E S S E S

No single district has perfected its support for professional development. But, Memphis, New York City District 2, and Dorchester County, Maryland, are models that can guide other districts.

**MEMPHIS:** In Memphis, schools consider professional development “the cornerstone of school reform.” Moreover, teachers want good professional development because they are the ones who decide on the nature of the reform process in the school (all schools must adopt one of the New American Schools models) and are held accountable for reaching student achievement benchmark goals. The district’s Coordinating Council on Professional Development establishes standards for professional development and reviews and revises services to correlate efforts to support whole school change with the standards. This is part of the seven-step strategy recommended by New American Schools to frame the district professional development renewal. It includes:

- Convene a professional development task force;
- Agree on broad principles to guide local professional development policies and practices;
- Set the tasks;
- Map the current professional development infrastructure;
- Disseminate the map;
- Align current programs and policies with the eight attributes of the infrastructure; and
- Monitor progress.

Members of the Coordinating Council in Memphis include district leaders, representatives of the Memphis Education Association, and district leaders from student programs and services, school reform, research standards and accountability, and business operations. It not only develops the standards, but also links them to district policies and practices, creates a total system of professional development from new teacher induction to support for candidates for National Board for Professional Teaching Standards certification, and allocates resources according to the overall plan.

At the local school level, the professional development planned by the design teams (the leadership on carrying out the models) must tie into district goals. These are cross-functional teams, taking into consideration Title I planning, Goals 2000 and technology grants, and

that it should be routine work of teachers and administrators.

- All instructional staff have the basic knowledge and skills necessary to help all students achieve high and challenging academic standards.
- District policy assigns to school staffs responsibility for planning, paying for, and (as appropriate) conducting professional development in support of school transformation.
- School staffs have sufficient experience and training to make informed decisions about engaging in school transformation – including the choice of a design – and embark on the change process.
- District-level program administrators and staff are able and available to assist school transformation efforts.
- The district incentive system encourages and supports individual and collaborative work on school transformation and participation in related professional development activities.
- There is continuous evaluation of professional development and technical assistance, and evaluation results are regularly used for review, planning, and feedback to schools and providers, including both internal and external providers.
- School staffs have access to extensive information systems on district policy and programs, student results, and descriptions and documentation of successful reform strategies and models of high-performance schools.

**THE ISSUE OF QUALITY TIME**

The Cincinnati public schools evaluated the use of time for professional development, identifying investments in practices that did not seem to lead to improvement. In response, the district’s site-based decision-making plan gives schools true control over resources, including buying planning time by the school, provided it has a strategy for using the time. Instead of focusing discussions about resources on such items as supplies, the energy now goes to discussions on how to meet student learning goals, with at least 90 minutes per week for team planning. Models developed in the district, according to Kathleen Ware, associate superintendent, include:

- Five hours of core academic subjects for students each morning;

“Our structure of vertical and horizontal teacher leadership on professional development wouldn’t have had as much impact without our equally strong instructional leadership.”

– Lindsley Silagi, technology instructor,  
H.D. Hilley Elementary School, Socorro, Texas





specialists in physical education, art, and music take over after lunch giving core teachers 90 minutes of planning time.

○ School day is lengthened by 30 minutes Monday through Thursday, and students are dismissed two hours earlier on Friday. That student-free time on Friday creates an extended planning time for teachers.

To help teachers make good use of their newfound time working together, the district provides external coaches who guide teachers on evaluating student work. Furthermore, says Ware, schools can create common teacher time through various strategies such as: creating double periods, combining the professional development period with other non-instructional time, combining classes for specialist subjects, rethinking the use of student time such as with community internships or resource days, and reducing teacher administrative time.

In its 10 years of experience on reforming education, New American Schools, a collaborative research and development initiative focused on schoolwide change models, has found one major reason for failure: lack of teacher time focused on the right things. Districts actually may be providing sufficient support and time for professional development, but the results are less than desired because the time is not used well. In particular, it may not be used to support the changes in practice that schools need.

According to Karen Hawley Miles, a researcher with New American Schools, the models look at time for professional development in two ways. "Jump-start" time provides extra time in addition to the school day to learn new materials and skills such as site visits, institutes, and workshops. "Job-embedded" time, on the other hand, takes place during the teachers' work day as team planning times (at least 90 minutes long) and planning days at the school. When funds dry up or are diminished, jump-start types of professional development time usually end. On the other hand, districts rarely include job-embedded professional development in reporting on costs. Stipends and travel to conferences are direct costs and quite visible. Planning periods and salary increases for education credits are considered indirect costs, and often don't appear as line items.

What districts need, says Miles, is a professional development "audit" to determine how the time is being spent, for what subjects, and who makes the decisions. (See box on Page 14.)

## MULTIPLE EXTERNAL INFLUENCES ON TEACHER LEARNING

A central problem in implementing learner-centered professional development is the multiple influences on both the content and the processes. These influences include state mandates, federal requirements, district policy, university programs, activities of business groups, and parental expectations. Too often, these influences push different priorities, create conflicting incentives, and facilitate learning in substantially different ways.

## DISTRICT SUCCESSES

other sources of funding. Teacher and principal evaluation systems are linked to teacher growth plans – three-year plans for tenured teachers, annual ones for non-tenured teachers. Similarly, the district's professional development programs provide points for state teacher license renewal requirements. Most importantly, the district and its professional development program are aligned to results-oriented state incentive programs.

"The district wanted to get the education research base into the hands of teachers," according to Dale Kalkofen, former deputy superintendent for school reform at Memphis, "and the New American Schools design models were the way to do this." The decision meant the district would need to undergo a massive professional development effort. An important "symbol" of the district and community commitment to professional development is the Teaching and Learning Academy in a building purchased by the school district but renovated by the business community. The district teaching staff totals 8,000; the academy averages 60,000 contacts each year. It is a center of teacher dialogue and learning where "people come together in meaningful ways because they elect to come there. We have everything from groups of prospective principals to seasoned principals and their teachers who are experiencing professional development together," says Kalkofen.

**DORCHESTER COUNTY, MARYLAND:** There are four keys to building professional development capacity in the Dorchester County, Maryland public schools: stakeholder engagement, clarity of vision and mission, focus on challenging academic standards, and realignment of staff and funding. The effort began with a project to redesign the middle schools in December 1997, which provided administrators with new skills focused on observations of instruction and teacher evaluations. This led to staff realignment, placing reading teachers in six of the district's seven elementary schools, and a partnership to support professional development. When half of the district's schools received funding to adopt a comprehensive school model, everyone, from the school board to classroom teachers, became involved in professional development.

Dorchester County's professional development offers a menu of choices and long-term investment, coaching and follow-up. It is embedded in daily work of teachers, based on research and best practice, aligned to



D I S T R I C T S U C C E S S E S

district/school goals, and supported by a reward system. The chart below is the before-and-after picture of professional development outlined by district officials, with the goals being quite similar to NPEAT's design principles for professional development.

"You must have all of the pieces working together," says Colleen Seremet, Dorchester's assistant superintendent. "In order to not depend on charismatic leaders or having a particular principal or superintendent in place to create a professional development infrastructure, you have to build a system where the pieces are aligned and where there are connections between professional development and teacher evaluations and school improvement planning." The school needs to have the freedom and internal capacity to be in charge of its own change process, Dorchester officials contend, but that is difficult without district support, resource alignment, and, according to Seremet, "a district climate that encourages doing something different."

<b>INSERVICE TRAINING</b> <i>Before</i>	<b>PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT</b> <i>After</i>
Curriculum-centered	Student-outcome centered
Focus on system needs	Focus on school/individual needs
Separate from supervision process	Integrated with supervision process
Large group activities	Individual and small group activities
Little follow-up	Intensive coaching
Central office-driven	Principal-/teacher-led based on research/best practice

**DISTRICT 2, NEW YORK CITY:** District 2 in New York City developed an exemplary professional development strategy over a 10-year period under the leadership of former Superintendent Anthony Alvarado.<sup>6</sup> It is largely credited with moving student achievement in the district from a ranking of 16th among 32 community school districts in the city to second. According to Beatrix Johnstone, director of the district's Educational Initiative Committee, the major components of the strategy included:



This absence of coherence in what and how teachers learn undermines the contributions professional development could make to student learning. Even within each source of influence, policy may be inconsistent. State assessments, for example, need to reflect state standards and need to be consistent with state-sponsored and state-supported professional development. Good professional development depends upon informed and consistent policies that reduce the "noise" of change around teachers. If professional development has been fractured and unfocused in the past, then probably so have the policies that influenced it. As schools implement standards-based reforms and decentralized decision making and deal with increased parental choice, the need to align various influences on teacher learning with themselves and other educational policies becomes increasingly important.

**NSF AND SYSTEMIC REFORM**

The National Science Foundation has invested hundreds of millions of dollars to promote systemic reform and evaluation of these initiatives attest to the importance – and difficulty – of aligning policies that are relevant to professional development. NSF found that the policy environment defined the extent of professional development needed to improve science and math instruction. If, as was true in some districts receiving NSF grants, no policies regarding science instruction existed below the 8th grade, then the first task was to encourage the district to establish a more comprehensive structure.

According to Celeste Pea of NSF, setting standards for a high-quality curriculum is only the first step in changing learning opportunities for students. The curriculum, assessment, and instructional practices within a district must be aligned. "Once people mobilize behind a concerted effort based on research, and the curriculum is under constant review, and teachers have professional development that is continuous and ongoing to support these changes, then you will have improvement in student learning," she says.

Another policy goal is to create effective partnerships to support reforms and professional development. In many of the urban NSF sites, universities support improvements in the content and strategies used by teachers. When a district identifies a particular professional development need, according to Pea, it can request help from a university through the partnership relationship. In NSF's view, there should be a K-16 system supporting reform in the K-12 system.

6 For further discussion see, Richard Elmore & Deanne Burney, *Staff Development and Instructional Improvement in Community District #2, New York City*. New York: National Commission on Teaching and America's Future, 1997.





## CALIFORNIA'S READING INITIATIVE

Capacity building and informed policy making at the state level frame the California Reading Initiative. Beyond reducing class sizes in kindergarten and the primary grades, the Initiative includes grades K-8 adoption of resources for language arts that are aligned to state standards. For example, they must cover phonics, phonemic awareness, and spelling. Ninety percent of the state's K-3 teachers are included in a \$94 million allocation for professional development – \$550 per teacher. If state monies are going to pay outside vendors of professional development, then the state must certify them.

Now used by almost 30 school districts, the NSF-funded Reading Lions project focuses on a schoolwide process that embeds professional development in classroom instruction using new strategies and receiving immediate feedback. Each district in the project must have at least two full-time coaches drawn from the ranks of teacher leaders. Each coach works with about 30 teachers. The preparation of coaches includes an orientation and a 12-day summer institute to learn research-based instructional strategies and receive training from the publishers. Each coach is assigned to work with two schools where they conduct demonstrations, observe, and help analyze data. Administrators must participate in sessions on content and leadership. The comprehensive plan also includes ongoing assessments that are school-based, given every six to eight weeks by the teachers, and followed by teacher-written action plans.

## COLLABORATION THAT REACHES ARKANSAS CLASSROOMS

Funded by the legislature in 1991, the Arkansas Leadership Academy includes partners from 12 professional associations, higher education institutions, government agencies, 15 educational cooperatives, the public television network, and businesses. The Academy is charged with expanding the vision for student learning, sustaining a focus on reform, developing leadership skills, and creating synergy across the state. "We want to become a state that is truly a community of learners," says Paula Cummins, an Academy facilitator. "When we came together, we asked what could we do together that does not replicate what we were doing individually? And we ask continually how we can build our own capacity, what information do we need, what support do we need, and what resources do we need to look at ourselves and change."

The Academy does its work through several types of institutes. The individual leadership institute brings in superintendents, principals, and representatives from the many Academy partners (e.g., school board members, higher education faculty, association leaders). Over 5<sup>1/2</sup> days, participants learn about research on school improvement and leadership skills, make specific change plans, and build networks. In order for district teams

## DISTRICT SUCCESSES

- Developing a vision. This began with a literacy initiative in the district ("Professional development must be about what it is you need to learn based on what your expectations are for students.").
- Disseminating research. This included "going to places and seeing how it can really work," and generated a desire to put ideas into practice. Creating good, successful learning environments for children gave teachers an intrinsic belief that they were doing a professional job.
- Including everyone in the district in the learning community. District administrators and principals participated in the same professional development as their teachers in order to become instructional leaders. Inter-visitations among teachers and principals in the district created "communities of people who are learning together." Principals mentored each other.
- Having accountability for results. Principals used student achievement data to help teachers focus on what they needed to do to improve learning. "Walk throughs" by principals and district leadership assessed classroom instruction. Feedback from observations was immediate.
- Recruiting and selecting teachers and principals willing to participate in continuous learning and to invest in their professional growth.





or teachers to attend institutes, the superintendents must have attended an individual leadership institute (the same requirement holds for associations/campuses/groups that send teams). Team leadership institutes also are week-long residential sessions for 10 to 15 teams at a time from schools and districts and usually focused on particular interests such as authentic assessments, using time more efficiently, or tools for teaming.

The teacher institutes are held for several days, four times a year, for the same participants. They are designed by teachers around issues of interest to them. As a follow-up to the institutes, teacher institute participants select peer learning coaches who receive special training to provide the teachers with continuous professional support, linking them to research and guiding them in action research and reflective practice. Teacher learning coaches are graduates of the teacher institute who show particular leadership skills and spend an additional year mentoring teacher participants in the institute. An electronic network provides continuing professional development and technology training for Academy participants and partners.

The Arkansas Leadership Academy's governance and structure mirrors the national collaboration efforts established through the Learning First Alliance. It represents at state and local levels many of the national groups in the Alliance. It links classroom teachers with the "big picture" of reforms and best practice. "Teachers are connecting with each other," explains Cummins, "and are gaining an understanding of policy and system issues that helps them develop a professional voice and take responsibility to improve the system."

## UNION INITIATIVES

Another example of collaboration around professional development occurs between teachers' unions and school districts. Certainly, the fundamental changes in working relationships evident in District 2 in New York City and Cincinnati would not have been possible without strong support from the American Federation of Teachers affiliates. Similarly, professional development became a key component of the National Education Association's Learning Laboratories Initiative, which selected school districts willing to make substantive improvements.

Westerly, Rhode Island, was among the first group of four districts to join the Initiative, and a decade later can point to a professional development program that is teacher-directed and strongly supported by the district. The district provides five professional development days, a two-day off-site conference for the district's more than 300 teachers, credit hours for professional development organized by teachers, and an increased investment in teacher learning. Contract language protects the professional development program.

A staff development committee of district staff, administrators, and the Westerly Teachers Association identifies professional

## *Analyzing time for planning and curriculum*

### CURRENT TIME USED FOR PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT – DAILY

- A. Official planning and development time.  
How many minutes of school time per week do teachers have which is designated as planning and development? (Regular classroom teacher, subject specialists, bilingual teacher, special education teacher, others)
- B. "Duty free."  
How many minutes per week do teachers have which are "duty free"? This is usually lunch time.
- C. Instruction-free periods.  
How many minutes per week do teachers have which are free from instruction but during which they perform administrative or other duties not related to instruction?  
When do teachers perform duties related to instruction, such as planning in team meetings, developing curriculum, serving as mentors or department heads?
- D. Required daily work hours.

### REGULARLY SCHEDULED TIME – MONTHLY

- A. Faculty meetings.
- B. Professional development days.
- C. Other regularly scheduled professional development for individuals or groups of teachers.

### OTHER PLANNING AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT TIME

- A. Staff retreats or summer sessions.
- B. Substitute time for planning and professional development.
- C. Time reimbursed through stipends for curriculum, professional development, or team planning.

**SOURCE:** Adapted from Karen Hawley Miles, *The Resources Review Guide*. Arlington, VA: New American Schools, 1999.



development needs, sets priorities, develops the budget, and plans the annual off-site conference. Its vision is comprehensive. An action research team looked at student data and research on students with reading problems, then proposed a long-range reading initiative. The district uses in-classroom coaches, common planning time, reading specialists, and study groups in math to form the priorities for professional development.

### **NATIONAL COMMISSION ON TEACHING & AMERICA'S FUTURE**

The 1996 report of the National Commission on Teaching

& America's Future (NCTAF) contributed significantly to efforts to align policies and practices of numerous influences on professional development. With NCTAF support, teams of leaders representing state and local government, professional associations of administrators and teachers, higher education, and other interested parties have been formed and are working in more than a dozen states to develop comprehensive strategies for improving the quality of teaching. Similar efforts are underway with NCTAF support in several urban school districts. Learner-centered professional development is a major NCTAF priority.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>7</sup> National Commission on Teaching & America's Future, *What Matters Most*. New York: author, 1996 and Linda Darling-Hammond, *Doing What Matters Most*, New York: National Commission on Teaching & America's Future, 1997.

“We need to understand that we all have a common agenda. And that agenda is: how do we guarantee

that every child will have the optimum opportunity to learn and to be successful.

So the school board, the central administrators, the teacher educators, the students

who are preparing to be teachers, and classroom teachers must work together to

develop programs and strategies that improve the quality of teaching.”

– Mary Futrell, Dean of the Graduate School of Education, George Washington University



## SUMMING UP

**R**edesigning professional development into learner-centered professional communities will be challenging. This is not just about changing structures, but about changing relationships and reallocating resources. The challenges include:

**LACK OF INITIAL BUY-IN** to significant changes in practice because changing professional development takes time. Many strategies will “lead the horse to water,” says Gary Sykes of Michigan State University. However, he says, developers of professional development programs should be wary of over-promising immediate results. Jim Cibulka of the University of Maryland points out that some strategies for changing professional development are very complex and will take time to show results. The effects of learner-centered professional development on students will not usually be evident in the short run.

**POSSIBLE TENSION** between those who want specific models for change (such as the New American Schools) and those who want an organic approach (such as the Education and Community Change Project in Tucson). States or districts may push a design or model approach because it is easier to track results. But, unless teachers are thoroughly familiar with the model’s goals, support is sufficient and enough time is given to have an effect, even professional development built on models could fail. On the other hand, professional development that builds from shared values and knowledge, says Paul Heckman, still must occur in the context of an activity “that’s pushing us to be doing what we think we should be doing.” In either case, learner-centered professional development is essential.

**THE NEED TO ESTABLISH** stability and consistency. Efforts to bring about significant education reforms often founder on continuous changes in political and administrative leadership. Most of the comprehensive reform models being adopted around the country require a minimum time commitment from the

adopting schools and/or districts, backed by long-term professional development plans. Moreover, says Marla Ucelli of Annenberg, it is important to avoid short-cutting the process of establishing a vision of what the school/district means by saying it will improve student achievement.

**LACK OF AGREEMENT** on the best ways of evaluating effects of professional development. Projects such as New American Schools’ whole school reforms and the U.S. Department of Education professional development awards program offer guidance on what to look for in judging the effectiveness of professional development. But there is not yet as much of a consensus about how best to evaluate professional development as there is on the components that create effective ways of promoting professional growth and higher student achievement. Moreover, it will be difficult to distinguish the effects of professional development from those of the continuous improvement efforts of which it should be an integral part.

**EXPECTATIONS AND PROCESSES** that limit what teachers can accomplish. Professional development that is not as thoughtful as it should be or sensitive to the challenges teachers face as they try to respond to change make them feel that their efforts are really supporting old ways of doing things. The principles for learner-centered professional development emphasize personal and collective transformations, not formal activities that are easily quantified. They create structures for the continuing evolution of teacher and school capacities.

**THE PROBLEM OF OVERLOAD.** “Educational change creates constant overload and fragmentation, generating incoherence and confusion and ways to keep us off balance,” says Michael Fullan, dean of the College of Education at the University of Toronto. Educators must be able to go wider, tapping the external supports for themselves and their students, and deeper in their understanding of what it takes to make a difference in stu-



## *Contrasting the old and the new*

**L**earner-centered professional development is radically different in both form and substance from activities traditionally described as professional development. Here are some differences between traditional and learner-centered professional development

### **TRADITIONAL PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT**

Fragmented, unfocused.  
Activities based on preferences.

Little or no effort to assess student needs  
or provide consistent feedback to teachers.

Little or superficial reference to standards  
for students or teachers.

Disconnected from the day-to-day experiences  
of teachers.

Learning about . . .

Emphasis on discrete individual skills, e.g., cooperative  
learning, that do not require interaction among teachers  
on shared concerns.

Deference to “outside” experts unfamiliar with  
particular environments of teachers.

Central office control over professional  
development activities.

Little, if any, correlation between professional development  
and school improvement plans.

Reliance on workshop-type offerings with little feedback  
for teacher participants.

### **LEARNER-CENTERED PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT**

Focuses on what students are to learn  
and how to make sure all students do learn.  
Examines multiple measures of  
student learning and development.

Systematic inquiry by teachers focused on student work  
that identifies both student and teacher learning needs.

Standards for student performance and for professional  
development are well understood and widely shared.

Learning through professional development embedded in the  
daily work of teachers.

Learning to . . .

A focus on problem solving among teams and/or  
whole faculty.

Goal of building expertise within a school that knows how to  
draw upon learning opportunities and research  
beyond the school.

Principals and teachers plan and implement most  
professional development.

Professional development considered central to continuous  
school improvement.

Continuous professional development that uses feedback and  
reflection to deepen teachers’ knowledge and skills.





dents' lives to avoid getting stuck or overwhelmed. All of this makes enormous demands on teachers and administrators. Policy makers need to be sensitive to the scope and depth of changes in culture and process that are involved. Being sensitive in this case means being both supportive and flexible.

## MORE THAN ANOTHER REFORM STRATEGY

Learner-centered professional development is not just another way to increase student learning – though it will do that. Such professional development changes the ways educators relate to one another, organizational processes, and how roles are defined. Consider the observations of Dennis Sparks, executive director of the National Staff Development Council:

“We often describe professional development as transferring information and skills from one set of people to another set. In that situation, it makes sense to divide the people into categories of teachers, principals, and district administrators. But, if we start with an image of the school as the place where most of the learning is occurring, then it makes sense that the people sitting around the table cut across categories. There will be regular teachers and special educators and administrators. People will play different kinds of roles at different times, so that sometimes teachers will be acting as leaders while the principal will be a participant and learner. Those roles continue to change. Members of a learning group may meet daily and learn with and from each other in different ways and different forums. This is a different form of learning than the typical professional development, and it's one that lessens the importance of an individual's role. An individual's value is measured more by the contribution they make to the team and their willingness to admit that they don't

know how to do something and would like help from others.”

Learner-centered professional development defines the needs of professional development in terms of student needs rather than teacher or administrative preferences, political mandates, or university requirements.

Learner-centered professional development is about bringing together the many influences on teacher learning. As Mary Futrell, former president of the National Education Association and now dean of the Graduate School of Education at George Washington University, puts it:

“We need to understand that we all have a common agenda. And that agenda is: how do we guarantee that every child will have the optimum opportunity to learn and to be successful. So the school board, the central administrators, the teacher educators, the students who are preparing to be teachers, and classroom teachers must work together to develop programs and strategies that improve the quality of teaching.”

Perhaps most important, learner-centered professional development will change how we think about teachers and teaching. It is essential to further the professionalization of teaching. And it is likely to unleash the energies and further the commitment of teachers to their work. Cris Gutierrez, a teacher in Los Angeles, California, was asked to summarize the findings of the NPEAT/LFA conference. Her concluding observation stressed the moral purpose of professional development:

“I've heard a lot about effective practice here. It's a wonderful word, and it took me forever to feel comfortable with it. But it's the purpose and the passion and the spirituality of fostering teacher learning on which we must focus. The political will follows.”

## NPEAT PARTNERS

American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education  
American Council on Education  
American Federation of Teachers  
Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development  
Council for Basic Education  
Council for Exceptional Children  
Council of Chief State School Officers  
Council of the Great City Schools  
Education Commission of the States  
Education Week  
The Holmes Partnership  
International Reading Association  
National Alliance of Business  
National Association for the Education of Young Children  
National Association for Equal Opportunity in Higher Education  
National Association of Elementary School Principals  
National Association of Secondary School Principals  
National Association of State Boards of Education  
National Board for Professional Teaching Standards  
National Commission on Teaching & America's Future  
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