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Introduction

“A Professional Development Portfolio provides teachers with a framework for initiating, planning, and facilitating their personal/professional growth while building connections between their interests and goals and those of the school.” (Dietz 1991)

Professional Portfolios

To make student assessment more authentic, educators have begun using student portfolios to capture evidence of growth and development over time. Teachers are now asking students to reflect on their learnings, share their findings with peers, and set new goals based upon their strengths and weaknesses. Many educators, students, and parents find that portfolios show a dimension of the students' learning that is often not found in traditional and standardised tests. The portfolio is more personalised, allowing choice and encouraging reflection.

As teachers find success using portfolios with their own students, they realise that portfolios can provide clearer representations of themselves as professionals than the traditional twenty-minute observation by the principal each year. As Wolf (1996, 34) states, “Although portfolios can be time-consuming to construct and cumbersome to review, they also can capture the complexities of professional practice in ways that no other approach can. Not only are they an effective way to assess teaching quality, but they also provide teachers with opportunities for self-reflection and collegial interactions based on documented episodes of their own teaching.”

Educators have begun to explore the various uses of professional portfolios in documenting teaching practice. They have also begun to reexamine current staff development practices such as inservices to determine whether they facilitate long-term teacher learning and promote student achievement. As Sykes (1996, 465) states, “Teacher learning must be the heart of any effort to improve education in our society.”



The sums most school districts in the United States invest in continuing teacher development are paltry compared to what American business spends on continuing the education of its employees.

Inservice

Imagine hiring a football coach to come in once a month and advise players he has never seen play. He doesn't know their strengths and weaknesses, but he still prescribes the game plan they should use. Eisner (1991) uses this analogy to describe inservice programs in most schools. Someone is brought in to say something about curriculum, the teaching process, classroom management, or assessment. This person has never observed the teaching of the teachers to whom she is speaking; therefore, she hardly takes into account their individual strengths and weaknesses.

Usually the information offered in inservice programs is general because it has to meet the needs of P-12 teachers in areas ranging from year one reading to year twelve physics. Eisner (1991, 12) says, "The instructors would need to be clairvoyant to know what advice might be appropriate for individual teachers."

The more generic the presentations, the larger the audience and the shorter the time period—and the fewer chances for transfer. How many times have teachers left this type of "inservice du jour" and said, "Yes, but—I teach special education children and this doesn't apply to me," or "It will never work with the group I have this year," or "Obviously the consultant has never taught in 'high school'."

Furthermore, Shanker (1996, 223) says the sums most schools in Australia invest in continuing teacher development are paltry compared to what business spends on continuing the education of its employees. Moreover, the dollars that are spent are not spent wisely. Shanker says, "They go mostly for one-shot workshops devoted to the reform of the month, chosen by others and unconnected to the needs of students and teachers."

Professional Development

"Our society can no longer accept the hit-or-miss hiring, sink-or-swim induction, trial-and-error teaching, and take-it-or-leave-it professional development it has tolerated in the past." —What Matters Most: Teaching for America's Future as cited in Bradley 1996b

Professional development has been described as a lifelong process whereby an individual strives to deepen his knowledge base, hone his skills, sharpen his judgment, stay current with new developments in the field, and experiment with innovations that promise improvements in practice (Sykes, in Elmore 1990).

Bellanca (1995, 6) defines individual professional development as a decision to expand one's repertoire of knowledge or skills. A teacher may select a graduate program, workshop, conference, action research project, or visitation to another school to grow professionally. Bellanca defines a school system's professional development program as "a planned, comprehensive, and systemic program designed to improve all school personnel's

ability to design, implement, and assess productive change in each individual and in the school organisation.”

Shanker (1996, 223) says that for professional development to be effective, “It must offer serious intellectual content, take explicit account of the various contexts of teaching and experiences of teachers, offer support for informed dissent, be ongoing and embedded in the purposes and practices of schooling, help teachers to change within an environment that is often hostile to change, and involve teachers in defining the purposes and activities that take place in the name of professional development.”

Staff Development

Many people use the terms “professional development” and “staff development” interchangeably, but Bellanca (1995, 6) argues that staff development is “the effort to correct teaching deficiencies by providing opportunities to learn new methods of classroom management and instruction or to ‘spray paint’ the district with hoped-for classroom innovations.”

Many people argue that staff development as it is now practised does not encompass the potential for long-term application and transfer that professional development offers. And even when inservice and staff development plans are called “professional development,” they often do not involve long-term commitments of time, energy, and resources, nor do they allow for any personal choice. Also, most staff development does not focus on developing long-term goals and on mediating continuous growth and development to deepen one’s “knowledge, skills, and judgment”—qualities Sykes describes as being the hallmark of professional development.

Obviously, there are some outstanding examples of staff development being implemented in schools. The perception of many educators, parents, and reform analysts, however, is that staff development usually comes down to one-shot inservice days strategically placed throughout the year almost like “parachute drops” of the district’s hot topics or the state’s new mandates. Despite the intentions and efforts of the staff development coordinator, participants often feel that inservice programs do not meet their needs. Sadly, the information presented in these mandated inservices is *presented to all, appreciated by some, and used by few*.

As Fullan (1991, 315) states, “Nothing has promised so much and has been so frustratingly wasteful as the thousands of workshops and conferences that led to no significant change in practice when the teachers returned to their classroom.” In fact, the research of Joyce (as cited in NSDC and NASSP 1995) shows that when trainers present a theory and model new ideas, eighty-five percent of the audience understands the concept, fifteen to eighteen percent attain the skill, but only five to ten percent ever apply what they learn in their own classroom unless they engage in long-term peer coaching. Research by Joyce and Showers indicates that it may take up to twenty follow-up and coaching sessions to ensure the successful implementation of a particular teaching strategy. In



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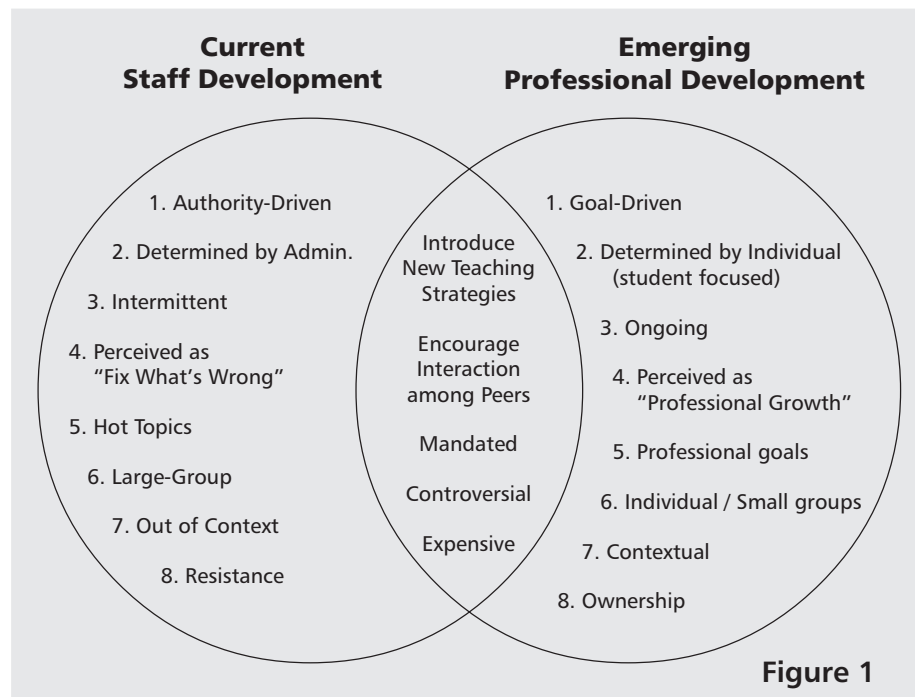
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other words, there is a meagre relationship between components of training and levels of impact (National Staff Development Council and National Association of Secondary School Principals Study Guide 1995, 31).

In addition, the “top down” structure of staff development does not allow the individual to make decisions and to try to solve problems meaningful to him. The very mention of staff development conveys the impression of something done *to* teachers and *to* students rather than something done *by* teachers *for* students. Cameron (1996, 226) is concerned about the hierarchy of decision makers who mandate the one-size fits-all approaches that do not serve students. “Only teachers and administrators prepared to make judgments about students and what they need to achieve can help students achieve quality learning outcomes.” The Venn diagram in Figure 1 compares some of the perceived differences between the current practice of staff development and the emerging practice of professional development.

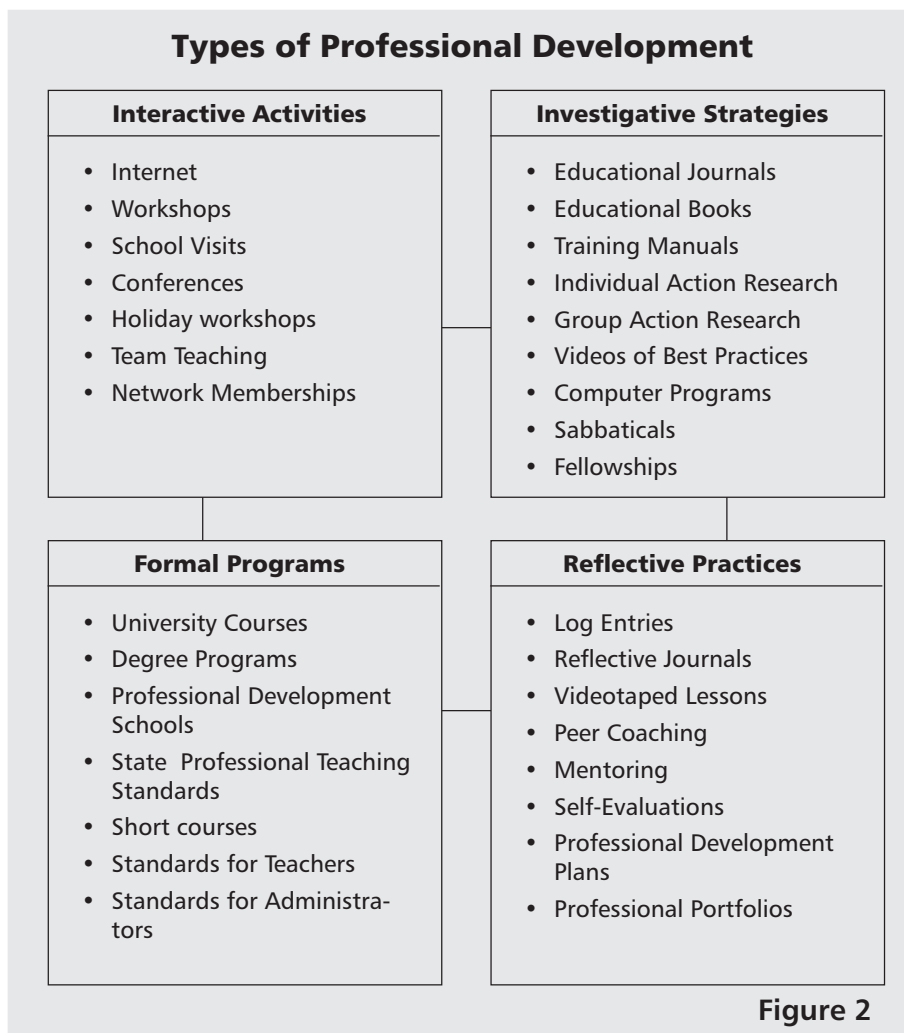


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Professional Development Plan

In their quest for substantive professional development, many teachers around the country have developed professional development plans (PDPs) to target goals they want to achieve for a one- to three-year period. They then can use any combination of the professional development types listed in Figure 2 to document their progress in achieving their goals. Often they decide upon their plan after conferencing with peers, mentors, or supervisors who become informal or formal partners. One advantage of this program is that it allows educators some flexibility in achieving their goals.



For example, one teacher may decide to explore Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences in his classroom over a two-year period in order to help students increase academic achievement. As part of his plan, he could devise the following strategy:

Professional Goals

1. Read books by Gardner, Armstrong, Lazear, Chapman, and Campbell on multiple intelligences.
2. Read relevant articles in educational journals.
3. Visit a teacher who uses multiple intelligences centres.
4. Attend a conference on multiple intelligences.
5. Create lessons designed to address the intelligences.
6. Create authentic assessment to measure the intelligences.
7. Graph students' achievement in classwork and on standardised tests.