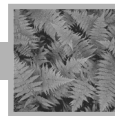


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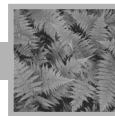
Topic 1

Why hasn't professional development succeeded?

For many years now, we have funded various professional development opportunities for teachers. We have 'in-serviced' them. We have sent them off to professional development. We have checked off dutifully the days they attended. All the while, we thought we were doing the right thing to create change in teacher pedagogy so that each and every student could be successful according to state standards and so that our schools could accomplish 'adequate yearly progress' according to the assessment and accountability system. Alas, after all this work, a little change may have occurred, but not nearly enough. Why? Someone once said regarding professional development, 'Our focus should be learning about what we do for a living every day – not just doing *something* with students.'

This is an issue of professionalism and building professionalism within a staff is crucial to achieving sustained school reform. Teachers are always asked to think about the students they serve, yet rarely are they expected to speak about themselves. They should be thinking about their own learning all the time. How can we, as educational leaders, help teachers to see that their own learning can produce higher student results?

For starters, we cannot treat them all alike. Teachers are like students. They all learn at different rates, in different ways and at different times. Assuming that since they are adults they learn the same way can be likened to doctors telling patients to take two aspirin, no matter what the symptoms. We would not expect physicians to practise in this manner; neither then should we expect professional development to be the same for all teachers.



As a middle years principal, I knew Beth was a high flyer, yet I still had to expect Beth to improve and I needed to know what improvement area she had chosen. For middle years educators, a big step in professional growth is to accept and truly believe that each and every child can learn and perform at high levels. There is no one simple solution to move teachers to accept fully that belief. For Beth, I realised it had happened when she stuck her head in the door one day and said, 'Got a minute?'

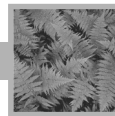
I asked her to come in and sit down. Putting my elbows on the desk, I folded my hands, leaned forward and began to listen as Beth described a situation in her classroom.

'The students have been writing personal narratives. We've participated in all these activities – things we talked about this summer – to involve the students in pre-writing exercises, so they connected with their writing before they wrote. After they wrote, I used some new tools I found in a writing book to push them to conference with their peers better and I hope, to create better pieces. And I've been looking at them. Of my 124 students there are still about 30 who are not "writing proficient" (writing at the expected level) in their personal narratives.'

Beth was disappointed and exasperated, but I was thrilled. I leaned back in my chair and stopped her, 'Listen to yourself,' I said. 'What's different about our conversation today?' Beth paused for a moment and thought. Suddenly a smile came over her face as she realised the difference.

'A year ago, I would not have cared if all the students accomplished the expected outcomes. I would not have known to assess their progress and determine where they all were – to think about them as individuals,' she stated with a bit of pride in her voice.

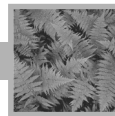
'You are exactly right,' I confirmed. We took a few seconds to absorb the moment before trying to devise a game plan that would assist those 30 students in meeting the outcomes. Soliciting other adult support for the students and meeting with our curriculum specialist to get more ideas emerged as steps to take.



community. This demands constant reflection about adult and student learning and then taking action based on those reflections. Expressing expectations, assisting individuals who are unsuccessful and then celebrating successes are appropriate actions. This type of learning community provides the foundation for teacher empowerment, student empowerment and even parent empowerment. People need to hear the 'You can do it' cheer inside their heads and thus be encouraged to step out and take risks. Helping others accept challenges also demands that the principal and staff are doing their own research and discovering cutting-edge practices. Once these practices are understood, the timing of introducing them becomes important.

Action steps

- Identify the superstar teachers in your school; then find ways that will challenge these excellent teachers to continue to grow professionally within your school culture. Seek their advice. Ask them to be mentors.
- Establish ways to help less accomplished teachers understand the expectation that every teacher needs to improve. Help them to get started on their improvement goals and assign them a mentor, possibly a senior teacher.
- Think ahead to those teachers in your school who are caught in the middle. Determine ways that you can interact with them to nudge them toward improvement. Share copies of pertinent articles and websites.



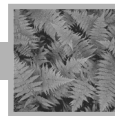
able to do. The consolidated plan provides a vehicle for school leaders and schools as a whole to stay focused and say, 'This is where we decided to go.' The next step is looking to school community member actions to provide a means of getting there.

Action steps

- Create an action plan of communication to ensure that teachers, parents and community members understand the school's long-term plan.
- Establish, if they do not exist, school procedures that ensure spending is consolidated and focused. Create policies that underpin efforts to make sure funding is spent on efforts to carry out the school's plan.
- Lead your school's stakeholders in integrating professional development opportunities within the school's improvement plan. Help them consider how these opportunities will impact instruction in the long term.
- Establish a system to ensure proper monitoring by school community members of the long-range plan. Use changes in teacher behaviour and student improvement data as benchmarks for success.

Individual Growth Plans for teachers

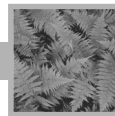
A teacher's professional development plan within their performance review should, of course, be linked with the school's long-term plan. It guides teachers' actions towards meeting both school and personal goals for improvement. When I first became a principal, I saw these forms as another thing I had to do. Teachers saw them the same way.



I soon realised how professional development plans could provide needed momentum for achieving differentiated professional development. Completing the plan became a part of every teacher's last performance review conference. The teachers who were not being formally evaluated on this yearly cycle completed theirs by 1 November. They could carry a growth plan forward to the next year if they had not yet mastered what they were working on during that year. After holding discussions with teachers regarding their plans, the vice principal and I used a general consensus of teacher needs to assist our school's existing professional development committee. The committee then developed a schedule of school professional development offerings that supported the goals of the consolidated school plan. These offerings included school-wide sessions, individual sessions and attending state, regional and national conferences.

After I became principal, individual professional development plans became guides for the professional development and curriculum coordinators as they worked with individual teachers. When the coordinator understood the individual growth needs of each teacher, the system of assistance and review worked in concert for professional improvement. Each of us held discussions with every teacher at different times, often on a weekly basis, in different contexts. For me, these contexts included times when I walked through the school, in meetings where we looked at student work and when we were formally participating in the review cycle. At first, many teachers were not sure about my wanting to have a keen sense of the teaching methods they used. They preferred to close their doors and teach as they had been teaching and they did not want a principal to push them to move to a higher level. Many of them had never had a principal who really wanted to know what students were learning and they were skeptical about my motives.

To deal with this initial attitude of some, I focused on the students. As I walked through the school, we talked about specific students' strengths or what other students needed to experience success. This type of transition helped teachers see that our conversations occurred because I cared about them as professionals, I cared about their success with students and I cared about the students' successes. Principals who walk the talk can accomplish the 'can do' spirit associated with constant improvement.

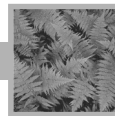


1. What are you learning?
2. Why are you learning it?
3. Is your work good?
4. How do you know it is good?

These four questions help an instructional leader understand how well teachers help students understand standards and the expectations associated with rubrics and other assessment tasks. Questions 1 and 3 are typically on target, but questions 2 and 4 tell the real story. For question 2, you would hope you would not hear students say, 'Because the teacher said to,' or 'Because it's in the book.'

Instead, one would like to hear, 'We are learning X to be able to do Y.' For question number 4, one would not want to hear students simply say their work was good, they worked hard or got good marks. A more appropriate answer would relate to the rubric or other assessment tasks and why they thought their work fit a category within the assessment tasks. When students can articulate that, they understand what they need to know and need to be able to do to perform the task.

The walk-through questions provide an opportunity for focusing on instruction and what students are learning as the principal moves through the school. They help the principal step back from classroom activity that looks good to gain a deeper understanding of the learning that occurs in classrooms. Using the questions does not mean that one could not talk with teachers or students about other things, but it does ensure that time is spent efficiently and focuses on instruction. Having completed a walk-through, it is desirable to send an email to people where good things are occurring in their classrooms. Sometimes an email can be sent to the entire school faculty and staff just to provide encouragement and encourage risk taking a bit. It is not expected that administrators would use the full walk-through process every time they are moving about the building. Sometimes one might just ask students a single question and other times one might have a brief exchange with the teacher.



Topic 3

Which comes first, the manager or the leader?

In conference after conference and meeting after meeting, *instructional leadership* is espoused as a crucial key to meeting the standards in school reform. If we agree with this priority, the question 'What does this really mean?' has to be faced. One thing is that we must first be able to manage so that we can lead. If we could successfully delineate the role so that the principal could be the chief executive officer in a middle school and hire a business manager to manage the operational issues, we would not have to manage so that we could lead. Realistically, this will not happen, although it has often been suggested that schools be run by business administrators, the idea has never caught on. However, the role can and should be structured to limit the managerial tasks, utilising other staff persons as appropriate. High-performing schools are led by high-performing principals. High-performing principals know where to put their energies. There are many documents and studies that help us know what the priorities should be,

What is the principal's most important role?

In a national Delphi Study the 59 characteristics of exemplary middle school principals, identified by an expert panel, were categorised into six roles: The exemplary middle school principal as

- a person
- a visionary
- an instructional leader
- a leader in an educational organisation
- a manager
- a school community facilitator.

The role of an instructional leader received the highest ranking, with the role of a visionary closely behind.

Source: *How To Become an Exemplary Middle School Principal: A Three-Step Professional Growth Handbook*, by Augustus Little and Suzanne Little (2001), National Middle School Association.