

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT THAT STICKS

*How do I create meaningful learning
experiences for educators?*

Fred
ENDE

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Sticky Questions

It's Tuesday afternoon at 3:30. It's been an amazing day teaching science to your 8th grade students. Great work has taken place, and you have a million and one things to do in order to get ready for tomorrow. However, there's a faculty meeting (which would be fine, except for the fact that according to the agenda, it looks like a "sit 'n git" session led by an expert speaking on a topic with little relation to middle school, let alone middle school science), and you're feeling pretty mind-wiped at the end of the day. But you know you have to go, so you give up what you want to do and attend. As you sit there trying to absorb the information being shared, you ask yourself the often present question, "Why am I here?"

Sound familiar? This dismal picture is all too often what professional development (or PD) looks like: generic, impersonal, and largely forgettable. Why has this become the norm for educators? Why isn't their PD more engaging, relevant, and impactful? The sad truth is that there is a lack of agreement in the field about what "good PD" is and what it looks like, leaving many leaders with only a vague idea of how to provide their teachers with PD that will stick and have a lasting positive effect on both teachers and students. To demonstrate this point, let's begin with a quick quiz. I'll ask the questions, and you supply the answers. Easy, right? Here we go.

1. Professional development is . . .
 - A. An opportunity to grow as a professional.
 - B. A boring, wasteful chore.
 - C. Something over which I have no control.
 - D. All of the above.
 - E. None of the above.

2. Professional development and personal learning are similar/different (*circle one*) because _____.

3. In order for professional development to stick or be long-lasting, I need to make sure I do the following: _____.

4. Which of the following five activities are examples of professional development? Why?
 - A. Attending an Edcamp conference event to serve as a session facilitator.
 - B. Attending an Edcamp conference event as a participant.
 - C. Reading the *Marshall Memo*.
 - D. Meeting to discuss professional development needs with the district superintendent and assistant superintendent for curriculum.
 - E. Engaging in face-to-face and virtual conversations with colleagues about the meaning of the word *perception* and how it affects our lives as educators and parents.

After responding to these four questions, I have no doubt you had trouble settling on one answer for each. This

is probably a quiz you'd want to avoid if you had to select one "correct" response.

That's the funny thing about professional development. There isn't really a "right" answer in terms of what it is, how it works, or when it should happen. There are a lot of supporting ideas, sure, and we often do a decent job of explaining what it *shouldn't* be, how it *can't* work, or when it *shouldn't* happen. But none of that really gets to the heart of why professional development is so important and why it has to stick when we engage in it. We'll come back to the idea of "stickiness" throughout this book; first, let's define what professional development really is.

What Is Professional Development?

Like the duck-billed platypus, professional development is often easy to spot but difficult to categorize. We know it when we experience it and can see it happening, but we don't always know what it's all about. The purpose of professional development is pretty easy to speak to. In my ten years as a science teacher and department chair—and five additional combined years as a curriculum program director and assistant director of curriculum—I have yet to find the leader or learner who disagrees with this statement:

All of us, no matter what role we hold, no matter what organization we work for, no matter what profession we belong to, need to strive to keep getting better. And getting better requires lots of work—work that we often don't yet know how to do on our own.