SCHOOLING
VOLUME 2, NUMBER 1, 2011

Professional Development: A Vehicle to Reform Schools

Fred C. Lunenburg
Sam Houston State University

ABSTRACT

Professional development is critical for the preparation and continued growth of teachers and school administrators. Professional development scholars suggest that professional development should provide opportunities for teachers to reflect critically on their practice and to fashion new knowledge and beliefs about content, pedagogy, and learners. Furthermore, they suggest that professional development should prepare teachers to see complex subject matter from the perspective of diverse students. Professional development for school administrators would enable them to refine leadership practices and to increase school effectiveness.

Every proposal to reform schools emphasizes professional development as an important vehicle in efforts to bring about the necessary change (City & Elmore, 2010; Friedman, 2012; Fullan, 2011). Due to the dynamic influence of contextual environments, it is impossible to make precise statements about the components of an effective professional development program that will work in all situations. Nevertheless, the following procedural guidelines for implementing change are critical to the professional development process (Darling-Hammond, 2010a; Fullan, 2010; Guskey, 1999; Guskey & Huberman, 1995; Hargreaves & Fullan, 2010; Lieberman & Darling-Hammond, 2011).

Recognize That Change Is Both an Individual and Organizational Process

Schools cannot be improved without improving the skills and abilities of the teachers and principals who work in them (Darling-Hammond, 2008, 2009a; Lieberman & Darling-Hammond, 2011). Teachers are the ones who ultimately will implement change. Therefore, professional development processes must address their needs and concerns (Darling-Hammond, 2010a, 2010b).

To view change as merely an individual process can limit the effectiveness of professional development. Organizational characteristics and system politics cannot be neglected (Evans, 2011). A negative environment can inhibit any change effort no matter how much we exhort individuals to persist (Bulach, Lunenburg, & Potter, in press).

To focus on change as merely an organizational process is equally ineffective, however. A typical device of educational policy makers and school administrators is to tinker with the organizational structure. This communicates to the public symbolically that they are concerned with the performance of the system. Yet evidence shows that such structural change does not lead to changes in how teachers teach, what they teach, or how students learn (Reeves, 2011). To facilitate change, we must look beyond policy and consider the embedded infrastructure that most directly affects the actions of individuals who ultimately implement change—principals and teachers (Elmore, 2005; Lunenburg & Irby, 2006).

Think Big, but Start Small

The most successful professional development programs approach change in an incremental fashion (Lunenburg & Ornstein, 2012). Efforts should be made to illustrate how the new practices can be implemented in ways that are not too disruptive or require a great deal of extra work.

Although the changes advocated in a professional development program must not be so overwhelming, they need to be sufficiently broad in scope to challenge professionals. Narrowly conceived projects seldom bring about significant improvement. This is what Guskey and Huberman (1995) mean by "think big."

Professional development efforts should be designed with long-term goals based on a broad vision of what is possible. For example, a program might seek to have all students reading on grade level by the year 2016. At the same time, that vision should be accompanied by a strategic plan that includes specific incremental goals for one, two, or three years into the future (Goodstein, 2011): 50 % of students will be reading on grade level in year one; 70 % of students will be reading on grade level in year two; 90 % of students will be reading on grade level by year three.

Work in Teams

Some measure of discomfort typically accompanies most change efforts (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2010). This discomfort will be greatly compounded if participants feel isolated and detached in their implementation efforts (Spector, 2011). Therefore, it is important that professional development programs involve teams of individuals working together (Harrington-Mackin, 2008).

To ensure that the teams function effectively and engender broad-based support for professional development efforts, it is important they involve individuals from all levels of the organization: teachers, non-instructional staff, building and central office administrators, and in some contexts parents and community members (Fletcher, 2011).

The teams must be linked to established norms of continuous improvement (Smylie, 2010). That is, teamwork must have the expectation that all involved in the change process are constantly seeking and assessing potentially better practices. Such an expectation provides a purpose for meaningful collaboration. In addition, working in teams allows tasks and responsibilities to be shared, reduces the workload of individual team members, and enhances the quality of the work produced.

Provide Feedback on Results

If new practices resulting from professional development programs are to be sustained, participants need to receive feedback on the effects of their efforts (Sisk-Hilton, 2011; Marzano, 2011). Practices will be accepted and retained when they are perceived as increasing one's competence and effectiveness. This is especially true of teachers, whose primary rewards come from feeling that their practices affect student growth and development (Christian, 2010; Clark, 2010; Hanif, 2010). However, new practices are likely to be abandoned in the absence of their positive effects. Therefore, specific procedures for feedback on results are essential to the success of professional development efforts (Sisk-Hilton, 2011).

In most professional development programs involving student learning, teachers receive feedback from their students through regular formative assessments (Cizek, 2010). They can take many forms, including writing samples, skill demonstrations, projects, reports, performance tasks, norm-referenced tests, criterion-referenced tests, teacher-made tests or quizzes, or others. These periodic checks on student learning provide teachers with evidence of the results of their teaching efforts (Guskey, 2009). This data can then be used to guide revisions in instruction.

Provide Support

Effective implementation of a change requires support from top-level administrators such as the superintendent of schools and his cabinet (Marzano & Waters, 2010). Support from the superintendent usually means that administrators lower in the organization's hierarchy, such as building principals, will be committed to the change. It is particularly important for building principals to manifest supportive and considerate leadership behaviors when change is being implemented (Lunenburg & Irby, 2006). This type of leader behavior includes listening to subordinates' ideas, being approachable, and using employee ideas that have merit. Supportive leaders go out of their way to make the work environment more pleasant and enjoyable. For example, difficult changes may require training to acquire new skills necessary to implement the change. Administrators need to provide such training (Conger, 2010; Pasmore, 2011). In short, when procedures are established to implement changes smoothly, less resistance is likely to be encountered.

When change is imminent, most people say, “What’s in it for me?” Organization members are less likely to resist changes that will benefit them directly (Hargreaves &

Fullan, 2010; Spector, 2011). For example, during collective bargaining between the board of education and the teachers' union, certain concessions can be given to teachers in exchange for support of a new program desired by management. Such concessions may include salary increases, bonuses, or more union representation in decision making. Administrators can also use standard rewards such as recognition, increased responsibility, praise, and status symbols. Thus, building in rewards may help reduce organization members' resistance to change.

Integrate Programs

Education is notorious for introducing a steady stream of changes. Each year new programs are introduced in schools without any effort to show how they relate to the ones that preceded them or those that may come later. Moreover, there is seldom any effort to demonstrate how these various changes contribute to the professional knowledge base.

This pattern of continuous, unrelated change obscures improvement. If professional development efforts that focus on the implementation of changes are to succeed, they must include precise descriptions of how these changes can be integrated. In other words, each new change must be presented as part of a coherent framework for improvement (Smylie, 2010). When several strategies are systematically integrated, substantial improvements become possible (Blankstein, Houston, & Cole, 2009; Fullan, 2005).

In recent years, several frameworks for integrating a collection of programs or changes have been developed that teachers are finding useful. For example, Marzano, Pickering, and Pollock (2010) have developed a framework based on various dimensions of learning. Another developed by Guskey and Huberman (1990) is built around five major components in the teaching and learning process. These frameworks permit skilled teachers to visualize the linkages between various innovations.

Professional Development and Technology

Many schools have determined that one-time inservice training for the entire faculty is ineffective for teachers, particularly for teaching computer use and for helping teachers develop methods to use computers as instructional tools (Cohan, 2011). Innovative and relevant professional development programs are needed to meet teachers' diverse needs in technology (Iskander, 2009). Such programs should offer teachers opportunities to learn, practice, and integrate what they learn (Combs, 2010; Rothwell, 2010; Seidel, 2010). Additionally, they need to have informal and formal coaching on the new information, techniques, and pedagogy (Katz, 2010; Tomei, 2009). Experts agree that technology should be seen as a means to an end, rather than an end unto itself.

Even with a carefully designed professional development program, teachers who succeed in integrating educational technology into their instruction generally do so by spending a great deal of their own time before and after school. According to a study conducted by Seidel (2010), teachers spend an average of 36 hours a year learning how to

use technology in their teaching, and 60% of that time is spent working alone, and 17% of the time is spent in consultation with their colleagues. An even lesser percentage of time, 13%, is spent in inservice sessions or technology courses. Prior to the Seidel (2010) study, Harrington (2009) found that many teachers reported that their technology training was too hurried and lacked adequate follow-up support. The researchers also reported that the training usually occurred just before the actual use was to begin; therefore, the users complained that assimilation and practice of the newly acquired techniques was not long enough. Regardless of the amount of professional development opportunities afforded to teachers, the major factor, according to Katz (2010), in differentiating schools with exemplary computer-using, technology-integrating teachers is on-going staff support.

Conclusion

Professional development is critical for the preparation and continued growth of teachers and school administrators. Darling-Hammond (2009a) suggested that professional development should provide opportunities for teachers to reflect critically on their practice and to fashion new knowledge and beliefs about content, pedagogy, and learners. Furthermore, she suggested that professional development should prepare teachers to see complex subject matter from the perspective of diverse students. Darling-Hammond followed a call for a change in the professional development of teachers with a call for a change in the professional growth of principals that would enable them to refine leadership practices and to increase school effectiveness (Darling-Hammond (2009b). She suggested that principals who engage in self-assessment, in problem-solving dialogue with colleagues, in reading to gain information, and in establishing professional goals, are principals who direct and enhance not only their own professional development, but also the professional development of their faculty.

References

Blankstein, A. M., Houston, P. D., & Cole, R. W. (2009). *Building sustainable leadership capacity*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.

Bulach, C., Lunenburg, F. C., & Potter, L. (in press). *Creating a culture for high-performing schools: A comprehensive approach to school reform* (2nd ed.). Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.

Christian, B. (2010). *Building self-efficacy for classroom effectiveness*. Saarbrucken, Germany: Lambert Academic Publishing.

City, E. A., & Elmore, R. F. (2010). *Instructional rounds in education: A network approach to improving teaching and learning*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Education Publishing Group.

Cizek, G. J. (2010). *Handbook of formative assessment*. New York, NY: Routledge.

Clark, S. (2010). *A comparative analysis of elementary education teachers' self-efficacy*. Saarbrucken, Germany: Lambert Academic Publishing.

Cohan, A. (2011). *Breaking the mold of preservice and inservice teacher education: Innovative and successful practices for the twenty-first century*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.

Combs, W. L. (2010). *Demystifying technical training: Partnership, strategy, and execution*. New York, NY: Wiley.

Conger, J. (2010). *The leader's change handbook: An essential guide to setting direction and taking action*. New York, NY: Wiley.

Darling-Hammond, L. (2008). *Preparing teachers for a changing world: What teachers should learn and be able to do*. New York, NY: Wiley.

Darling-Hammond, L. (2009a). *Powerful learning: What we know about teaching for understanding*. New York, NY: Wiley.

Darling-Hammond, L. (2009b). *Preparing principals for a changing world: Lessons from effective school principalship programs*. New York, NY: Wiley.

Darling-Hammond, L. (2010a). *A good teacher in every classroom: Preparing highly qualified teachers our children deserve*. New York, NY: Wiley.

Darling-Hammond, L. (2010b). *Powerful teacher education: Lessons from exemplary programs*. New York, NY: Wiley.

Elmore, R. F. (2005). *School reform from the inside out: Policy, practice, and performance*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Education Publishing Group.

Evans, R. W. (2011). *The tragedy of American school reform: How curriculum politics and entrenched dilemmas have diverted us from democracy*. New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan.

Fletcher, S. (2011). *Partnerships for new teacher learning: A guide for universities and school districts*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.

Friedman, A. (2012). *Continuing professional development*. New York, NY: Routledge.

Fullan, M. (2005). *Leadership and sustainability: Systems thinking in action*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.

Fullan, M. (2010). *All systems go: The change imperative for whole school reform*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.

Fullan, M. (2011). *Change leader: Learning to do what matters most*. New York, NY: Wiley.

Goodstein, L. (2011). *Strategic planning: A leadership imperative*. Alexandria, VA: American Society for Training and Development.

Guskey, T. R., & Huberman, M. (1990). Integrating innovations. *Educational Leadership, 47*(5), 11-15.

Guskey, T. R., & Huberman (1995). *Professional development in education: New paradigms and practices*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.

Guskey, T. R. (1999). *Evaluating professional development, Vol. 1*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.

Guskey, T. R. (2009). *The teacher as assessment leader*. Indianapolis, IN: Solution Tree Press.

Hanif, R. (2010). *Teacher stress, job performance, and self-efficacy among women teachers*. Saarbrucken, Germany: Lambert Academic Publishing.

Hargreaves, A., & Fullan, M. (2010). *Second international handbook of educational change*. New York, NY: Springer.

Harrington, R. (2009). *Digital media in the classroom*. Berkeley, CA: Peachpit Press.
Harrington-Mackin, D. (2008). *Team-building: Tips and tactics for effective workplace teams*. New York, NY: Amacom.
Iskander, M. (2009). *Innovative techniques in instruction technology, e-learning, e-assessment, and education*. New York, NY: Springer.
Katz, Y. J. (2010). *Impact of information technology: From practice to curriculum*. New York, NY: Springer.
Lieberman, A., & Darling-Hammond, L. (2011). *High quality teaching and learning: International perspectives on teacher education*. New York, NY: Taylor & Francis.
Lunenburg, F. C., & Irby, B. J. (2006). *The principalship: Vision to action*. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth/Cengage Learning.
Lunenburg, F. C., & Ornstein, A. O. (2012). *Educational administration: Concepts and practices*. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth/Cengage Learning.
Marzano, R. J. (2011). *Effective supervision: Supporting the art and science of teaching*. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.
Marzano, R. J., Pickering, D. J., & Pollock, J. E. (2010). *Classroom instruction that works: Research-based strategies for increasing student achievement*. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.
Marzano, R. J., & Waters, T. (2010). *District leadership that works: Striking the right balance*. Indianapolis, IN: Soluton Tree Press.
Pasmore, W. A. (2011). *Research in organizational change and development*. Bingley, UK: Emerald Group Publishing.
Reeves, D. B. (2011). *Finding your leadership focus: What matters most for student results*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.
Rothwell, W. J. (2010). *Handbook of training technologies: An introductory guide to facilitating learning with technology—From planning to evaluation*. New York, NY: Wiley.
Seidel, R. J. (2010). *From principles of learning to strategies for instruction: Empirically based ingredients to guide instructional development*. New York, NY: Springer.
Sisk-Hilton, S. (2011). *Teaching and learning in public schools: Professional development through shared inquir*y. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.
Smylie, M. A. (2010). *Continuous improvement*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.
Spector, B. (2011). *Implementing organizational change: Theory into practice, international edition*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall.
Tomei, L. A. (2009). *Information communication technologies for enhanced education and learning: Advanced applications and developments*. Hersey, PA: IGI Global.