

# Educator Learning for Student Learning: Coaching Impact

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A new report, [Effective Teacher Professional Development](#), from the Learning Policy Institute (June 2017) by Linda Darling-Hammond, Maria E. Hylar, Madelyn Gardner, and Danny Espinoza provides great guidance for leadership teams engaged in planning professional learning. Often, as teams plan for needed educator learning to drive increases in student learning, critical components are skipped. Later they wonder why the change in student achievement that was sought didn't happen. As I considered the seven elements identified in the study, the importance of coaching from instructional coaches, teacher leaders, administrators and colleagues was continually reinforced. See if you agree.

The authors analyzed 35 studies that have demonstrated a positive link between teacher professional development, teaching practices, and student outcomes. They defined effective professional development as structured professional learning that results in changes in teacher practices and improvements in student learning outcomes. They found seven widely shared features among the 35 samples of quality professional learning:

## #1 Content focus

Content focused PD is discipline specific within a curriculum and usually allows teachers to work in their classrooms with students more than is present in generic PD. This type of PD can provide teachers the opportunity to study their students' work, test out new curriculum with their students, or study an element of pedagogy or student learning in the content area. *"Ideally, the PD is aligned with school and district priorities, providing a coherence for teachers, as opposed to having PD compete with differing school and district priorities."* (pg5)

As an example in the STeLLA (Science Teachers Learning from Lesson Analysis) program, teachers taught a set of four to six model lessons themselves and analyzed their teaching using a structured protocol. Half of a study group would teach the lessons to their students, and the entire group would collaboratively analyze the teaching and student work, and revise the lessons for the other half to use. The roles would then switch and the second half of the group would teach the lessons in their classrooms, followed by collaborative analysis and subsequent revision. The analysis was highly scaffolded by PD facilitators.

**PD that treats only content learning is not as effective as PD that links content learning to pedagogies supporting teachers' students and practice.**

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## #2 **Active Learning**

Active learning moves away from learning models that are generic and lecture based toward models that engage teachers directly in the practices they are learning. Active learning engages educators in using authentic artifacts, interactive activities, and other strategies to provide deeply embedded, contextualized professional learning.

Active learning includes opportunities for "sense-making" activities such as modeling the sought-after practices and constructing opportunities for teachers to analyze, try out, and reflect on the new strategies. Active learning encourages teachers to transform their teaching and not simply layer new strategies on top of the old.

## #3 **Collaboration**

*Collaboration can span a host of configurations—from one-on-one or small-group interactions to schoolwide collaboration to exchanges with other professionals beyond the school. When whole grade levels, departments, or schools are involved, they provide a broader base of understanding and support at the school level. Teachers create*

*a collective force for improved instruction and serve as support groups for each other's work on their practice. Collective work in trusting environments provides a basis for inquiry and reflection into teachers' own practices, allowing teachers to take risks, solve problems, and attend to dilemmas in their practice. (page 9 /10)*

#### **#4 Use of Models and Modelling**

Modelling can occur through video or written case studies, demonstration lessons, teaching/learning plans, observation of peers, or sample student work and assessments.

A study by Doppelt et al. (Research in Science and Technological Education, 27(3) 2009, 339–354) identified that students whose teachers used new curriculum and participated in PD had statistically greater achievement than those students whose teachers used the new curriculum with no PD. Even more significant, achievement for students of those teachers who continued to use the older standard curriculum was greater than that of those students whose teachers used the new curriculum with no PD. This suggests that students were better off if their teachers did not attempt to utilize new curricular materials without effective PD supporting them. (pg 12)

#### **#5 Coaching and Expert Support**

Coaches can provide many of the elements identified on this list as critical to effective professional learning.

Recent literature suggests that coaching or other expert scaffolding can support the effective implementation of new curricula, tools, and approaches by educators. Research evidence identifies that teachers who receive coaching are more likely to enact desired teaching practices and apply them more appropriately than those receiving more traditional PD. Research demonstrates that expert supporters can play a critical role in creating effective PD.

#### **#6 Feedback and Reflection**

Professional development models associated with gains in student learning frequently provide built-in time for teachers to think about, receive input on, and make changes to their practice by providing intentional time for feedback and/or reflection.

The practices of generating feedback and supporting reflection often include opportunities to share both positive and constructive reactions to lesson plans, demonstration lessons, or videos of instruction. These activities are frequently undertaken in the context of a coaching or facilitated group workshops. Feedback and reflection create richer environments for teacher learning.

#### **#7 Sustained Duration**

Professional learning that includes the six characteristics listed above requires a commitment of time. It is unlikely, if not impossible, for the "calendar" days labeled for PD to impact teacher and student learning in any substantial way.

*"One benefit of sustained PD may be the opportunity for teachers to continue their learning outside the formal meetings of the program, whether in their own classroom, in collaboration with colleagues, or by less formal means. As Darling-Hammond et al. (2009) argue: "The duration of professional development appears to be associated with stronger impact on teachers and student learning - in part, perhaps, because such sustained efforts typically include applications to practice, often supported by study groups and/or coaching." By returning to PD settings over time, teachers have an opportunity to refine and apply their understanding of material in their classrooms." (pg 16)*

Consider these seven elements as your leadership team plans the educator growth necessary to reach your student growth goal. Shared with teachers, this study should shed light on why teaching needs to be a "team sport" and a "public act".