



Professional Development Tips and Techniques

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Professional Development is about improving the teaching and learning in the classroom. Quality professional development for the teachers and staff of a school is one of the most effective ways to improve student learning. As such, it should be a major component of every school improvement plan. Almost every school improvement plan template has a section on professional development. Unfortunately, it is a section that frequently misses out on the thoughtfulness and organization it deserves. Quality professional development requires time and effort in planning, implementation and evaluation. Planning these sessions for teachers should be developed the same way we expect teachers prepare to teach their students.

There should be a plan that includes:

- a vision of what teaching should look like in the school,
- what professional development is needed to get there,
- how to follow up on what is learned,
- how to integrate new skills into the classroom and
- how to evaluate the changes made and their effect on the learning in the classroom.

Specific topics for professional development should be organized based on this plan. Professional development sessions should all be connected and build on earlier sessions just as each days class-work builds on the previous days work.

Professional development is not about schedules, seating charts, attendance rosters, lesson plans or any of the other important management issues a school must deal with. Keep these matters separate. It is helpful to use a different term for these types of meetings. Perhaps referring to these matters as School Management Meetings as opposed to Professional Development Sessions would be helpful in keeping the tasks separated. It is important to keep one from infringing on time needed for the other. If it is absolutely necessary to pass on information to staff on a day designated for professional development, try passing out an announcement sheet for them to read, rather than making announcements and answering questions. That way the time allotted to professional development is not shortened by school management.

Research shows that students learn, remember, and utilize information that they think about. This is true of all learning. In the past, professional development has been provided by experts who lecture to teachers on what to do in their classroom. This style of training, like lectures in the classroom, puts teachers in the role of passive learners. Like the move to making students active learners, we need to move to making professional development a participatory activity. Teachers need to think about what they are learning and discuss how to incorporate it in their class. Professional development should be about finding what works and building on it..

Preparing professional development sessions should be done with the same thoughtful planning as developing lessons for the classroom. If you want the session to be led by someone on your staff, be willing to give them extra time to prepare. Make sure they know the goals and objectives you want covered in the session and how it fits into the school plan. Give them time to design activities that lead the teachers to think about what you want them to learn and how to utilize it. Make sure there will be time and resources to follow up on the session and assist teachers in the integration of the new ideas into their teaching lessons. Give the presenter time to develop a handout or book to be copied for each participant. The handout should include everything that is covered in the session, with step by step instructions on how to accomplish the session's objectives. Hearing the information once in a session is not enough to make participants familiar with the material. Having a plan to provide support and resources for the teachers, as they implement new ideas, is an essential component of the professional development process.

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If you feel you can not give your staff time to prepare the sessions this completely and you choose to hire an outside consultant to provide the sessions, be sure they will meet with you to get a clear understanding of your goals and objectives. Be sure they will provide appropriate handouts for follow up and that they will customize the sessions to meet your needs.

Professional Development is required in every school, every district and almost every state. However, the quality of the sessions provided varies greatly. Sessions planned at the last minute with no connection to a complete plan are almost useless. Having teachers present to each other on successes they have had in their classrooms lets teachers see what others are doing. However, if it does not tie to a plan and stimulate thoughtful discussion, it is no more than an interesting morning.

If there is no professional development plan, schools end up selecting isolated classes at the last minute that do little to affect the classroom learning.

If professional development is truly important to your school improvement plan, everyone should take part. This includes the principal. As the instructional leader of the school, the principal, as well as other administrators, should take an active role as participants in professional development.

Professional Development should be an important component of the learning community of the school. As such it requires thought, planning, time and evaluation. Don't sell it short.

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