Professional Development: Collective Participation

Why Is This Strategy Useful?

Professional development designed for groups of teachers has a number of potential advantages. First, teachers who work together are more likely to have the opportunity to discuss concepts, skills, and problems that arise during professional development experiences. Second, teachers who are from the same school, department, or grade are likely to share common curriculum materials, course offerings, and assessment requirements. By engaging in joint professional development, they may be able to integrate what they learn with other aspects of their instructional context.

Description of Strategy

Professional development that includes collective participation is a pedagogical activity that involves teachers who are from the same school, department, or grade. Too often, teachers participate in professional development activities in isolation from colleagues with whom they can share their experiences.

Research Evidence

At least two correlational survey-based studies support this feature of effective professional development. To measure systematically the features of effective professional development, a national longitudinal study surveyed a nationally representative sample of more than 1,000 teachers who participated in professional development sponsored in part by the federal government’s Eisenhower Professional Development Program. The study identified six features of high-quality professional development, of which collective participation was part. A second study collected survey data from teachers in 34 K–8 schools in four districts and identified a correlation between breadth of professional development participation and student achievement.

Sample Studies Supporting This Strategy


This study uses a national probability sample of 1,027 mathematics and science teachers to provide the first large-scale empirical comparison of effectiveness of different characteristics of professional development on teachers’ learning. Results, based on ordinary least-squares regression, indicate three core features of professional development activities that have significant positive effects on teachers’ self-reported increases in knowledge and skills and changes in classroom practice: (a) focus on content knowledge, (b) opportunities for active learning, (c) coherence with other learning activities. It is primarily through these core features that the following structural features significantly affect teacher learning: (a) the form of the activity (e.g., workshop vs. study group), (b) collective participation of teachers from the same school, grade, or subject, and (c) the duration of the activity.

The data for this report come from a longitudinal evaluation of a business-led partnership seeking to improve the quality of science instruction in grades K–8 in four school districts. The evaluators found that, on some achievement measures, student performance was related to the proportion of teachers in the school engaged in professional development, but 78% of the teachers in the school needed to be engaged in professional development before the relationship was apparent.

**Additional Resources:**


