



Professional Development Scenarios is an excerpt from *Learning from Teaching in Literacy Education: New Perspectives on Professional Development* by Emily M. Rodgers and Gay Su Pinnell. © 2002 by Emily M. Rodgers and Gay Su Pinnell.

All rights reserved. No part of this material from *Learning from Teaching in Literacy Education: New Perspectives on Professional Development* may be reproduced in any form or by electronic or mechanical means, including information storage and retrieval systems, without permission in writing from the publisher, except by a reviewer, who may quote brief passages in a review.

Heinemann, 361 Hanover Street, Portsmouth, NH 03801-3912, USA

Phone: 800.225.5800

Fax: 603.431.2214

URL: <http://www.heinemann.com>

1 | PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT SCENARIOS

What Is and Might Be

EMILY M. RODGERS

GAY SU PINNELL

In every school district across the country, every year, literacy teachers receive some form of professional development; however, change in classrooms is not always the result. The difficulties in bringing about reform in education have been well documented. We probably all agree that things do need to change. We might agree, for example, that an achievement gap is growing between higher and lower performing students, as a recent NAEP report identified (U.S. Department of Education 2001). We might also agree that the recently announced Federal Department of Education's goal to improve student achievement by raising teacher and principal quality is well reasoned and necessary (Department of Education's Strategic Plan 2002).

Yet we still know very little about "what works" in professional development. The popular method to communicate new techniques and knowledge is to simply tell teachers what to do, perhaps showing videotapes as demonstration, and depending on reading materials to do the rest (See Hughes et al., this volume). Teachers sometimes refer to this professional development experience as a "one-shot workshop" or "sit-and-get." We are skeptical about this didactic style of professional development and feel it is just a small step forward from the days when teachers were considered "trained" when they entered the profession and from that time needed only cursory looks at specific materials in order to know how to use them.

First, individuals, including teachers, do learn by being told, and demonstrations help, but learners need a wide variety of demonstrations to internalize action. Learners learn best by doing; and they learn faster if they have expert support as they try out new ideas.

Second, for an innovation to "work," teachers must embrace it, be committed to it, and do all of the little extra things that make it effective as they are working with children. For example, good teachers typically embroider every kind of approach with minute adjustments to the individual children in their classes. They encourage just at the right time; they make the activity

fun; they bring in children’s own interests and backgrounds; they praise and celebrate children’s learning. The crucial role of teacher motivation and engagement in a teaching approach’s success is acknowledged in The National Reading Panel Report, in this case, to teach phonics:

Few if any studies have investigated the contribution of motivation to the effectiveness of phonics programs, not only the learner’s motivation to learn but also the teacher’s motivation to teach. The lack of attention to motivational factors by researchers in the design of phonics programs is potentially very serious . . . [Future research should] determine which approaches teachers prefer to use and are most likely to use effectively in their classroom instruction. (Report of the National Reading Panel 2000, 97)

Professional development has to be more than “sit-and-get”; teachers’ current practices, knowledge, and motivation must be taken into account in any reform of instructional practices.

WHAT IS AND WHAT COULD BE IN PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

To frame this section, we’d like to look at three scenarios. The first scenario describes typical professional development for teachers while the two scenarios that follow describe what could be a model for professional development.

Scenario #1: District-Based Staff Development

Carol has an important role in her school district. Her task is daunting and complex. She is charged with providing the support systems that teachers need to assure that the district’s elementary school students meet standards for literacy. And that means performance on the state proficiency test as well as meeting district-designated benchmarks. She is assigned to ten elementary schools as a staff developer and coach.

Understandably, Carol is very busy. She organizes district-level committees on standards and the adoption of materials; she is in charge of managing the professional development for teachers around preparation for proficiency tests. She attends a great many meetings and also works with grant writers to generate funds for the district. When there is a district-wide in-service, she performs a major organizational role and also documents the attendance of participants.

Carol has a high level of expertise. She has taken courses and reads a great deal. She has attended many national conferences and workshops and has a sound understanding of the underlying theory of how people learn to read. She has also acquired an understanding of staff development and school change. An issue for her is that, with her district-level duties, she has had little

time to try out new procedures with children even in a rudimentary way. When she makes presentations or facilitates workshops with teachers, she is talking from the written materials she has perused rather than from her own experience. She is an excellent presenter but tends to rely on forms and directions to teachers, rather than helping them deeply engage in processes.

Carol represents a very traditional model of professional development in which a staff developer at the district office provides a series of experiences, usually in the form of presentations. It is difficult to imagine how the district's professional development can be improved because Carol is obviously stretched to the limit. Small districts such as hers may have one or two staff developers in her role; large districts may have a director and a staff of individuals, each assigned to particular schools or working across the total number of schools. This traditional model of professional development seems to reach many teachers, but the quality of the sessions is questionable regardless the expertise of personnel. District staff developers typically do not know if teachers incorporate the new ideas in their teaching or whether or not the professional development can be linked to student achievement (See Hughes et al., this volume).

Now let's consider another scenario.

Scenario #2: School-Based Teacher Education

Eric is a teacher-educator and a teacher of children. Based at an elementary school, he spends about half of his time teaching language and literacy in a classroom; he also coaches teachers. Eric prepared for his role by taking part in a year-long course in which he had time to refine his classroom application of the new approaches he was learning. In fact, Eric is always developing expertise at the classroom level as new research informs his work, and he engages in continuous professional development to help him in his role.

In Eric's school, teachers complete sixty hours of an initial course designed to help them use a combination of research-based instructional approaches that are integrated in a language and literacy framework. The teachers enjoy reading, discussing, viewing videotapes of teaching, and hearing about new approaches in onsite, after-school sessions over the course of the year; however, the real learning occurs when Eric works with the teachers in their classrooms. On a regular basis, he observes, demonstrates, and coaches so that teachers are highly supported when taking on new learning.

The teachers have begun to reflect on their teaching, to analyze it, and to help each other. Even after the initial course, teachers continue in staff development sessions and coaching. Even more important, some say, is the informal access they have to Eric. They can drop into his classroom or small office to share what is happening in their classrooms. They can get a quick piece of advice or a recommendation for books and materials. They have colleagues who are interested in how their work is going. The conversations in the teachers' room have taken an entirely new turn, because teachers are sharing their successes.

Eric works mainly with teachers in grades 3 through 6; he has a counterpart staff developer who works with K–2 teachers and also teaches for half a day in a classroom. The two half-time staff developers work closely with the principal and a school leadership team who guide the implementation of change. A particular concern of theirs is measuring achievement using “hard data,” so they regularly examine benchmark assessment as well as yearly performance on standardized tests. The teachers in this school have taken accountability into their own hands. They know that the achievement of each student entering the school is the entire staff’s responsibility.

The professional development for the teachers in Eric’s building does not end there. Another layer provides instructional support for teachers who are working with the lowest achieving students and that is the next scenario.

Scenario #3: School-Based Professional Development for Early Interventions

Eric’s school provides an intensive early intervention program called Reading Recovery for the lowest achieving first graders. The staff recognizes that as classroom instruction improves, the gap between average students and those who are experiencing great difficulties learning to read may also grow unless they not only receive good classroom but also extra help.

In this building, first graders who are struggling receive one-to-one tutoring by a teacher who has been specially trained to teach effective early reading strategies. These teachers have taken part in year-long graduate course work taught by Raquel, the district’s “teacher-leader.” As a teacher-educator, Raquel, who has also taken part in a year-long graduate course of study to prepare her for her role, trains and then continues to provide ongoing support to the Reading Recovery teachers. What makes the professional development for these teachers different from the kind that Carol, presented in the first scenario, provides?

Like Carol, Raquel works district-wide, but the kind of professional development Raquel offers is grounded in real examples of teaching and learning. Teachers meet weekly for an academic year when they are learning how to teach Reading Recovery and, following the initial training, approximately every six weeks. In these sessions, teachers take turns teaching children behind a one-way glass. Freed from teaching, others in the class can sharpen their observational powers, reflect on teaching actions, specify in language what the child’s behavior is and what it indicates in terms of learning, and formulate hypotheses as to the most effective way to teach. Teachers use a structured format; knowing each child in detail, they can plan a systematic sequence of activities designed to take advantage of exactly what the child knows and needs to know next. Throughout their professional development, teachers learn to be effective decision makers.

Raquel teaches children in one-to-one lessons every day herself; the rest of the time, she visits and coaches teachers in their work. Children’s progress is monitored daily with precision, so that Raquel knows exactly at what level

each child in the system is working. She also works closely with the principal and leadership team in each school she serves; she reports on the progress of children regularly, and they all work together to assure efficiency and effectiveness.

The professional development that Eric and Raquel provide is complex. The teachers receive a high level of support initially while they are taking on the new instructional practices, but this support is scaled back once the teachers become more proficient. Even then, the professional development isn't withdrawn, but continues as long as the teacher remains in the role. This sustained contact is rarely seen in traditional teacher professional development.

Another distinguishing feature of this model is that the staff developers themselves continue to teach children, keeping themselves grounded in practice. In addition to the teaching of children and teachers, attention is paid to student outcomes. The staff developer oversees the systematic collection of data on students' achievement, which are then analyzed and shared with stakeholders. In other words, everyone pays attention to the fidelity and results of the treatment.

Even complex plans for professional development such as the ones provided by Raquel and Eric may come to be regarded as passing fads. In Raquel's district for example, even though many elementary schools in the district remain strongly supportive of an early intervention such as Reading Recovery, a new Associate Superintendent is convinced that one-to-one interventions are too costly and that systematic phonics instruction delivered to the whole class will take care of all reading problems. It seems likely that the early intervention model for professional development will be dropped.

Complex designs for professional development, such as the ones described previously, are still relatively rare and suggest what *might* be. In today's educational climate it is more likely that teachers will receive scanty and haphazard professional development. It is not uncommon for teachers to attend several different professional development sessions within a short span of time and hear competing messages and directions for "what works." No wonder it is sometimes difficult to get teachers to fully participate in new initiatives. We expect them to embrace whatever "new" vision comes along, but we do not offer them a multifaceted design for professional development that provides varying levels of support, over an extended period of time, along with the materials needed to be successful.

WHAT MIGHT BE

What if we had the power to buy whatever we need to improve literacy education? What would we want? Our answer would be that we would "buy" effective, ongoing professional development. But, despite what federal, state, and local politicians tend to promise, no amount of dollars can achieve the

vision overnight. It will take more than a massive infusion of funds to make a sustained change in literacy education.

It is also risky to suggest that by simply waving a punishing set of standards over educators' heads, schools will magically develop the capacity they need to assure that every child meets rigorous criteria for reading and writing. As Walmsley and Allington (1995) have so succinctly said, "There is no quick fix."

In addition to dollars and a system of accountability (which arguably standards might provide) we believe that school systems themselves have to change. This can happen if educators work together to build a system that has the capacity to

- analyze problems and find solutions;
- evaluate itself; and
- teach itself.

A system that has learned how to do these things will not be trying the professional development flavor of the month, but will have developed educators who can themselves target problem areas and decide together what support is needed to remedy the situation. Anders, Hoffman, and Duffy (2000) make this point well when they say:

Reading educators should be trying to develop teachers who analyze reading instructional situations and then in a thoughtful way, construct appropriate responses. (733)

How to accomplish this? Professional development is the key, but we need a broad and systemic district-wide approach that works within each building to do what needs to be done. We also know that professional development is not an isolated event and does not exist within a vacuum. It's not a matter of calling a good consultant to spend one—or even ten—days with a school staff. The two aspects that must work together to assure this march toward systemic change are

- integration of research with practice, and
- long-term professional development with clear parameters.

Integration of Research with Practice

We begin with research because the rigorous collection and analysis of data are at the heart of school reform. In any change effort, we must be able to measure whether and to what extent we are succeeding in terms of children's learning. Teachers' opinions certainly count in the mix of evidence, but they also must look systematically at their students' progress. Research provides an invaluable feedback loop that allows us to continually refine what we do. For example, a group of teachers looking at students' writing scores found that good ideas were coming through in the samples they evaluated, but that

spelling was well below expectations. That motivated the teachers to enter a year-long study group to support each other in implementing a phonics and spelling program across the grades.

Another group of teachers found that children's test scores showed they were reading accurately and decoding quite well, but had trouble answering questions and writing about texts. The teachers decided to look at a variety of ways to demonstrate and teach for comprehension.

In both of these examples, research and teaching are closely aligned. The need for new approaches emerged from the teachers' attention to data, and was not imposed from the outside. Further, the teachers' exploration of the issues, in whatever professional development format they use, will continue to be grounded in the teaching of children and not simply by listening to didactic-style presentations. It is also notable that these teachers are working very independently. Not only have they identified an instructional issue that needs to be resolved, but they have also designed their own professional development experiences. Research and practice can be aligned in these ways when staff developers, like Eric and Raquel, are school based and continue to work with students themselves.

Long-term Professional Development with Clear Parameters

Much of the criticism leveled at typical professional development practices is that they don't provide for systemic change. Usually a few teachers attend a professional development session featuring an invited speaker. It is up to these few teachers to then bring back to their colleagues what they have learned at the session. As well, there is often no coherence to the professional development experiences and teachers may see them as a series of unconnected topics.

There should be a clear design for professional development experiences that is related to the needs in the district. Staff developers may want to ask themselves the following questions:

- How are students presently progressing in literacy?
- What literacy-related goals do we want to achieve as a school district in one year, two years, and beyond? (In other words, what changes do we want?)
- How much professional support do we need to bring about the instructional changes required for change? Choices may range from closely guided professional development provided by a specially trained staff developer working side by side with the teacher in the classroom to teachers deciding for themselves how to structure their professional development.
- What structures need to be put in place in the system to support the change? For example, perhaps an arrangement with a local university is needed to provide graduate credit for the extra time the teachers will be working with the staff developers. Teachers may need to be reassigned to work with small groups or individuals, meaning changes in teacher

allocation and scheduling, or they may need new instruments or materials to carry out the new instructional practices.

- How will we know when we get there? A plan is needed to collect achievement on students and teachers. In other words, how will we determine the fidelity of the treatment and its results?

These are just some of the questions to be addressed in the design of a plan for professional development, which will, in turn, build capacity within systems. This complex design is far different from the haphazard and scanty approaches typically available to teachers.

In this volume we present an array of chapters, each describing a complex model of professional development for literacy teachers and suggesting what might be possible. The research and experience represented in these chapters encompass many varied settings. Across them all we have learned that true expertise means developing internal systems for *learning while teaching* and *teaching while learning*.