Chapter and Case Study Discussion Activities

Chapter 6: Designing Effective Professional Development

In this chapter, we focused on components of a 21st-Century Model of Adult Learning. The chapter highlighted how professional development needs to be intensive, data-driven, and both collaborative and interactive. We also looked at steps to use data to design effective professional development. Use the following case study from Chapter 6, along with the questions below, to reflect on how concepts and key takeaways from the chapter apply to your professional work and setting.

After seeing the last child off, Melinda, the director of the Explorations Early Learning Center, sits down at her desk and turns back to her quality rating report—the self-assessment is due at the end of the week. Melinda's mind is churning; she is at a loss for why scores on their formal classroom observation tool continue to show that the quality of instructional support in nearly all of the classrooms is low, and why there is so much variation across her teachers in the domain of emotional support. She has been focused with her staff on the features of the high-quality learning environment—the classroom conversations and warm responsive interactions—for months now, and the teachers at her center are up to date on their professional development hours. In fact, from her records, Melinda sees that her teachers have all exceeded the required 20 hours of training per year.

Recently, Jada, in the Pre-K room, attended a half-day workshop at the local community college called Give Them Something to Talk About. Her co-teacher, Maria, went to one of the trainings advertised on the flyer they receive each month from the state; this training was about creative thinking in the classroom, and she heard from Maria that the presenters showed very interesting examples of student work that gave her ideas for a series of classroom projects. Melinda saw readily how these projects could get children talking eagerly, and engaged in positive interactions. Plus, in preparation for the classroom observations, Melinda sent all of the teachers at the center a webinar about leading classroom discussions. Puzzled, Melinda thinks to herself: Why don't the teachers apply what they are learning from all these trainings?

Questions for Leaders to Consider

Why do you think this investment in training had not translated into better assessment scores? As leader, how do assessment scores impact your decisions and strategies?

In the case example, educators attend trainings to build their knowledge but often struggle to implement strategies. How can you, as a leader, support educators to implement new practices? What support mechanisms are needed at the setting and system-level and how can you respond to these needs?

Case Questions for Leaders to Use in Professional Learning Discussions

- What questions do you have for Melinda after reading this case study? What do you want to know more about?

- Why do you think the current approach to professional development has not translated to better assessment results in this case example? What gaps are present in this center's current professional development system?

- What are the barriers to implementing new ideas or making use of strategies suggested at trainings? When have you successfully incorporated information you learned at training into your practice? When have you been unsuccessful with implementation? What's different about the trainings or the support mechanisms when you have been able to successfully implement?

- In this chapter, we learn about three components of effective professional development: intensive, data-driven, collaborative and interactive. How does the professional development you design and/or access align to these components? How could the professional development be more aligned?

- We also read about three steps to create data-driven professional development: take stock of available data, identify patterns in site-level data, zoom in on a very limited number of goals. Regardless of your role in making decisions about professional development, how could you use this process to review data? For classroom teachers, how does this process mirror how you work with child assessment data? How is it different?

- The chapter mentions two structures that could bring the different components of professional development together for greater impact: professional learning communities and connected coaching. Have either of these structures helped you implement new ideas or improve your practice? How?

Self-Study Activity

This discussion highlighted the importance of using data to make decisions for professional development and pointed out three important steps: take stock of available data, identify patterns, and zoom in on a very limited number of goals.

- How can you use this approach to determine your goals related to professional development in your work?
- What data do you need to determine your strengths and areas of need? Is this child assessment data? Classroom observation data? Network data? State data?
- What patterns do you see that may point to areas of growth?
- What specific goal could you focus on to improve your impact?
- Write down a goal for growth and professional development after reviewing your data.