



Success Indicator IN14: All educators have professional development opportunities to discuss, reflect upon and analyze their teaching of English Learners (ELs) in a safe, nonjudgmental environment. (5891)

Overview: Leading linguistically diverse classrooms requires teachers not only to know the techniques of teaching but also to understand social, political and cultural background differences that formalize their teaching strategies (Jiang, 2017). Building these skills and awareness requires long-term, nonjudgmental and personalized professional development opportunities that engage teachers in continuous reflection and refinement of practices in collaboration with their colleagues.

Questions: What professional development opportunities promote discussion, reflection, and analysis of EL instruction? What are some technologies that organizers of PD can use to foster this reflective discussion? Who benefits from this professional development approach to teaching ELs and why? How can school leaders create a safe, non-judgmental environment for teacher reflection?

What professional development opportunities promote discussion, reflection, and analysis of EL instruction?

Institutional professional development (PD) programs created by testing companies tend to design one-size-fits-all programs, via a "top-down approach." Through this model, teachers are talked at, instead of invited to share personal experience. This leads to artificial change instead of lasting curriculum improvements (Kabilan, Wan, & Embi 2011). To positively impact teachers' practices, professional development programs need to be on-going with a focus on enhancing discrete instructional skills (Gulamhusein, 2013). Effective professional development also addresses how teachers' backgrounds and personal life experiences affect students' learning and worldview (Peacock, 2009; Kubanyiova & Feryok, 2015). Teachers also need opportunities to explore biases about anti-immigration and native speaking in the classroom (Kibler & Roman, 2013). These PD opportunities should address personal bias and foster collaboration.

Personal Bias in PD: Professional development for teachers of ELs remains a neglected area of research and focuses heavily on instructional practices rather than issues of bias (Molle, 2013b). During PD, a trained discussion facilitator should be present to encourage intellectual and civilized dialogue among teachers and respectfully alter conversations away from negative minority talk while inviting divergent discourse. Discussions can include anything from teacher bias, parent-school communication and questions about immigration protocol (Molle, 2013a). Conversations among these groups remain part of any effective PD centered on serving ELs (Wilburne, Marinak & Strickland, 2011; Artiles et. al, 1998). Teachers may realize after speaking with their colleagues and students' issues of bias in something as common as practice math word problems given in class (Wilburne, Marinak & Strickland, 2011).

Collaboration in PD: School success should be built off a culture of sharing and open dialogue, but breaking down the private nature of individual classrooms, particularly in high schools, remains an obstacle (Musanti & Pence,



2010). Kirkham (2005) studied a case of a group of three new teacher hires who decided to volunteer for an overlooked organizational task. By working as a team, they not only planned logistics but enthusiastically and successfully engaged older and previously uninterested staff to participate. Through collegial interactions as opposed to top-down PD, teachers can share personal experiences, find commonalities and implement new teaching and learning techniques. This can solidify teacher trust and community and increase teacher self-efficacy (Desimone & Pak, 2017; Zonoubi, Raekh, & Tavakoli, 2017).

What are some technologies that organizers of PD can use to foster this reflective discussion?

Film: PD can include materials that are thought provoking and stimulate conversations about cultural identity. These tools will encourage teacher and student individual awareness. Smith Rorrer and Furr (2009) sampled thirty-three first-semester college education students, who took a one-year multicultural film analysis class. At the end of the year, they found that all students reported an increase in their sense of belonging and ethnic identity exploration. While a single film can spark conversations, researchers caution that PD must be sustained and not gimmicky (Desimone & Pak, 2017).

Blogs: New technologies should be utilized to encourage dialogue about teacher feelings and thoughts regarding teacher instruction and attitudes (Johnson & Golombek, 2016). Holmes (2005) implemented a successful training model organized by weeks. Each week there was a themed lesson that is applicable to multiple grades and links to relevant resources. Discussion response posts were due every Thursday and Sunday. The first post asked teachers to reflect on student learning, and the second post required teachers to offer ways to further the learning. Platforms like these help teachers collaborate online and become part of a social learning community, when time during the school day and face-to-face meetings can be a logistical challenge.

Who benefits from this professional development approach to teaching ELs, and why?

Zoshak, R (2016) found that teachers benefit from EL-focused PD, because it is an opportunity to address emotional language and multiple cultural identities. In addition to regular content transfer, EL teachers must figure out how to handle diversity and multicultural is-

sues. PD should link student individuality and teaching content. Teachers may not feel equipped to teach to EL students, so this development approach provides an environment to respond to the challenges ahead (Molle, 2013b). Teachers are more likely to better equipped for different classroom situations and feel more satisfied in the workplace if they have opportunities to form and maintain collegial relationships. These relationships, fostered during collaborative PD, reduce feelings of isolation (Brannan, D., & Bleistein, T, 2012).

How can school leaders create a safe nonjudgmental environment for teacher reflection?

Principals themselves must receive adequate training instead of a focusing on teachers alone, as reflective leadership is key to effective EL teacher PD (Desimone & Pak, 2017). Among three education districts in South Africa, fifteen principals of public primary and secondary schools surveyed unanimously said they felt better equipped to lead after continuous professional development (Mestry, 2017). The study aimed to understand the ways principals perceive their current professional development and how they are groomed to be better leaders. The principals who had continuous access to professional development training, tailored to their dynamic school issues, felt better empowered and competent when leading PD for teachers.

Principals must also know when to step back and let teachers lead PD that is relevant to their own classrooms. Personalized professional development should include teacher coaching because of its effectiveness, duration and coherence (Desimone & Pak, 2017). Different from mentoring, coaching entails a mutually beneficial relationship where two individuals can professionally engage and facilitate learning about leadership techniques. Teachers can take turns being the coach, or other school district personnel can participate. Through this partnership, there is an understanding that the partners can both grow and support one another. Coaches must use communication skills to establish trust and set a positive and motivational tone for professional development (Mohamad, Rashid, Yunus, & Zaid, 2016).

Ultimately, no one outside source or single workshop can provide quality PD, and no teacher-focused PD for ELs can have lasting effects without strong leadership (Desimone, 2009). All elements must work in tandem to



create safe, nonjudgmental environments for sustained, effective PD on how to best serve ELs.

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