

Chapter 9

A Framework for Effective Online Professional Development

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ABSTRACT

This chapter presents a research-based framework for effective online professional development for in-service teachers. Changes in technology allow teachers to engage in different forms of professional development delivery, including online. In order to affect a change in teacher classroom behaviors, online professional development needs to be on par with effective face-to-face professional development. This study uses archival data from the Ohio Performance Assessment Pilot Project in which teachers engaged in either face-to-face or online professional development that was aligned to six characteristics of effective professional development (workshops, outside experts, time, duration, activities, and content). The results of this study found there is no statistically significant difference in student learning outcomes when teachers engaged in comparably designed face-to-face or online professional development. This framework serves as a guide for institutions of higher education as they continue to design and implement professional development through coursework and training.

INTRODUCTION

As shifts in educational policy have occurred since the 1980s, the emphasis on teacher expectations has also changed. This emphasis on developing highly qualified teachers is a direct result of Goals 2000: Educate America Act of 1994 (1994), the

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National Commission on Excellence in Education (1983) and the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 [NCLB] (2002). The content of professional development for in-service teachers in the past 30 years has also responded to these policy shifts. As the standards-based education movement continues to grow, the need to provide teachers with more academic content knowledge resulted. Indeed, under NCLB, professional development was seen as an avenue to improve teachers' knowledge of subject matter and instructional strategies that led toward teachers becoming highly qualified. According to the Business-Higher Education Forum (2007), institutions of higher education should play a role in improving teachers' content knowledge of and pedagogy, in part, through effective professional development programs.

Professional development of teachers is generally understood to be ongoing education and/or training of in-service teachers (Whitebook, Gomby, Bellm, Sakai & Kipnis, 2009). The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) (1998) defines professional development as an activity that develops a teacher's knowledge, skills and expertise. Effective professional development is structured professional learning that results in changes in teacher practices and improvements in student learning outcomes Darling-Hammond, Hyler & Gardner, 2017). The OECD (2009) suggests that types of professional development include informal dialogue, courses and workshops, reading professional literature, mentoring, and education conferences and seminars. Institutions of higher education can, and should, work directly with state and school districts to develop effective and comprehensive professional development programs for teachers (Business-Higher Education Forum, 2007).

With the passage of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) (the re-authorization of NCLB), a more specific definition of professional development for teachers emerged (Every Student Succeeds Act, 2015). Under ESSA, professional development is necessary for educators (including principals, specialized instructional support staff and other school leaders, not just teachers) to enable students to succeed. The shift in emphasis is from professional development directly impacting the teacher by certifying them as highly qualified to directly impacting the student as teachers change their instructional practices to enable students to master content that allows them to meet or exceed challenging academic standards.

The ESSA further suggests that professional development should be sustained over time and include intensive, collaborative activities that are job-embedded and data-driven. The delivery mechanism for professional development that teachers were used to – stand-alone workshops or after school sessions - is no longer sufficient to improve teacher' knowledge of academic subjects (subject-specific) or teach in a manner consistent with how students learn (pedagogy-based). Professional development under ESSA should advance teachers' knowledge of evidence-based instructional strategies and improve classroom management skills. Finally,

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