Chapter 45
Cultivating Communities of Inclusive Practice:
Professional Development for Educators – Research and Practice

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ABSTRACT

Significant disparities in educational outcome, opportunity, and achievement endure for students with disabilities and those from culturally and linguistically diverse groups. A need for effective, responsive, and inclusive practices in schools is imperative. Educators are at the heart of providing the challenging, responsive education that each child and adolescent deserves. Professional development is the lever of change, but can or help or hinder educators in improving instructional and school practices that result in improved outcomes for all students. This chapter examines the evidence base surrounding professional development and inclusive practice. Four approaches to professional development supporting more transformative professional learning and change are featured: inquiry groups (teacher study groups and lesson study); coaching, Professional Learning Communities; and Professional Development Schools. Snapshots to practice are included with each approach to provide integrated descriptive examples of varied inclusive professional development practices.

INTRODUCTION

Teachers, I believe, are the most responsible and important members of society because their professional efforts affect the fate of the earth… (Helen Caldicott, n. d.)

Widespread concerns endure regarding achievement disparities in educational opportunity, access, and outcomes for students from culturally and linguistically diverse groups, including students from minority racial groups, English Learners (ELs) and students with disabilities (Blanchett, Klingner & Harry, 2009). Educators are at the heart of providing the challenging, responsive education that each child and adolescent deserves. Effective teaching requires educators to individually and collectively assume responsibility for the educational outcomes of all students. Their effectiveness is impacted by multiple factors including attitudes, dispositions, self-efficacy, developmental and contextual knowledge of learners, knowledge of content and effective pedagogy, and facility with collaborative and advocacy skills (Herring, Curran, Stone, Davidson, Ahrabi-Fard & Zhabnova, 2015). Thus, as Shulman (2005) conceptualized, effective professional learning must involve an apprenticeship of the head (knowledge), hand (skills), and heart (attitudes). When teachers are weak in one or more of these areas, their ability to be effective with inclusive teaching is limited. General and special educators have identified a need to receive ongoing education and experience in inclusive practices addressing effective teaching strategies and collaborative practices (Narian & Oyler, 2014; Royster, Reglin & Losike-Sedimo, 2014; Shady, Luther & Richman, 2013). Educators have demonstrated more positive attitudes and self-efficacy toward inclusive practices (Panscsofar & Petroff, 2013) as well as implementation of effective instructional practices and services supporting inclusion (Brusca-Vega, Alexander, & Kamin, 2014, Causton-Theoharis, Theoharis, Bull, Cosier, & Dempf-Aldrich, 2011) following professional development experiences centered on inclusion. Thus, effective professional development is a key lever for inclusion.

The complex learning needed, however is not easy nor naturally occurring. Traditional models of professional development (PD) that focus on one-shot workshops to implement top-down change are not successful (Klingner, 2004). Effective teacher PD requires ongoing, sustained, and supportive connections that include teachers' voices and address their needs in collegial networks that provide opportunities (1) to collaborate and reflect on both theory and practice, and (2) to examine evidence of impact on student learning (Darling-Hammond & Richardson, 2009). Structures adopted to support effective PD include inquiry groups, coaching, Professional Learning Communities (PLCs), school-university partnerships and Professional Development Schools (PDS), to name a few.

This chapter will examine the inclusive implications of PD in each of the above areas through a (n):

- Review of evidence-based practices in PD;
- Illustration of PD models and how they support inclusion in practice; and
- Synthesis of recommendations and implications for research and school-wide practices

PROFESSIONAL LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT

An education system is only as good as its teachers. Unlocking their potential is essential to enhancing the quality of learning (UNESCO, 2014, p. 1)

The knowledge, skills and dispositions educators require to positively impact the learning of their students is neither static nor isolated. Traditional practices supporting educator learning have focused on a more individualistic view of teacher growth, centered on discrete skills and behaviors (Little, 2006). However, more contemporary views of what constitutes professional learning and development recognize a more complex view of teacher thinking and learning situated within professional community and rooted

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