



professional LEARNING

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What does the economic stimulus plan mean for professional development?



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The Department of Education has outlined initial guidelines for three components of American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) funding: the State Fiscal Stabilization Fund, Title I, and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). You can find detailed information about the guidelines and the distribution of funds through www.ed.gov.

In addition to distributing monies quickly to avert layoffs and stimulate job creation, a key principle that will guide the use of ARRA funds is improving student achievement through school improvement and reform. The Department is emphasizing improvements in teacher effectiveness and equitable distribution of qualified teachers as well as providing support for the nation's lowest performing schools. Specifically, the legislation identifies developing teacher leaders as coaches and instructional leaders as one possible strategy. Therefore, these funds have the potential to significantly impact the reach and quality of professional learning for all

educators. Given the time constraints surrounding this legislation, the funds must be used on one-time investments vs. programs with ongoing commitments. Most importantly, these funds must be applied in ways that demonstrate to the investors – the public – a significant improvement in teaching and learning in schools.

In consideration of these parameters, NSDC has outlined some strategies that we believe have potential to meet these expectations:

- Prepare more instructional coaches by developing the knowledge and skills necessary to support improved educator practice and student learning.
- Prepare more teacher leaders to advance the NSDC definition of professional development.
- Contract with one or more external consultants to provide one-on-one technical assistance to principals to create new master schedules that enable collaborative teacher teams to engage in professional learning two or more times each week.
- Identify and support demonstration sites to serve as models of excellence in implementing effective professional learning.

- Prove two years of intensive technical assistance and support for leadership teams in low-performing schools
- Provide two years of intensive coaching and instructional leadership support for principals in low-performing schools
- Conduct a Professional Learning Audit; organize a local task force to critically review and assess the purpose, form, and results from professional development in the school district. Similarly, administer and use the results of NSDC's Standards Assessment Inventory.
- Organize facilitate, and support volunteer teams of teachers who want to pilot the continuous cycle of improvement described in NSDC's definition of professional development. Contract with one or more external consultants or institutions of higher education to document and assess each team's experience.

NSDC challenges districts to create effective professional development in a difficult economy

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Stephanie Hirsh, National Staff Development Council's Executive Director challenges districts to maximize both the effectiveness of their professional development and the resources on it. In a recent NSDC blog Dr. Hirsh offers ten tips for "ensuring quality professional development during difficult economic times, when higher expectations and increased scrutiny are placed on professional learning. These ten tips offer school districts and PD professionals a real opportunity to fine-tune the professional development they offer, and focus on what's really important: increasing student achievement." A brief summary is provided below. The full text can be found at <http://www.nsd.org/learningBlog/post.cfm/creating-effective-professional-development-in-a-difficult-economy>

1. Focus on students

Higher expectations for student performance and more rigorous accountability standards have shifted the focus of professional development from what teachers want to what students need. Every planning group needs to begin the process with the same two questions: What do our students need to know and be able to do, and how well are they achieving our expectations? With these questions answered, we can turn our attention to the knowledge and skills principals and teachers need to promote student success, and identifying the professional development that will help administrators and teachers develop that knowledge and those skills.

2. Target specific teacher groups

While everyone can benefit from professional development, our efforts may have to focus on serving those teachers and students for whom professional development is most essential.

3. Reorder your priorities

Hone your school-wide improvement efforts to your highest priorities. Lay everything out on the table, and determine criteria for prioritizing initiatives. Then choose the two or three that are most important. This process should produce focus, build commitment, and increase results.

4. Invest in proven strategies

In times of economic uncertainty, we must limit professional development to teacher learning experiences that research and/or experience indicate will increase student learning. We must invest in proven strategies that address specific needs.

5. Invest in follow-up

Most of us have heard the phrase training without follow-up is malpractice. We need to support workshop attendance with school-wide and team meetings to discuss implementation challenges and promote reflection; provide model teaching and peer coaching to support full-scale implementation; focus classroom walkthroughs on new learning strategies; collect data, display data, and discuss data; and celebrate progress and results.

6. Leverage team learning

NSDC supports team-based professional learning. Within NSDC's definition of effective professional development, every teacher and

principal is a member of at least one learning team that meets the equivalent of several hours a week for learning and problem solving. When teachers join together in team learning, their learning and their actions have the potential to impact more teachers and all students.

Many view this recommendation as a pipedream given the time available for professional development. But what I'm calling for is a reorganization of our work and school days so that we prioritize both teacher learning and student learning.

7. Use local experts

We must create systematic processes for ensuring the important lessons and insights of our most valuable resources, the people working in schools, is shared from classroom to classroom and then from school to school.

8. Curtail broad-guage professional development

Again, training without follow-up is malpractice. We must commit to forgoing next fall's beginning-of-the-school-year district-wide pep talk by the latest high-priced motivational speaker or one-size-fits all professional development consultant. Instead, set aside resources to support the celebration you will want to host to promote the benefits of your new approach to professional development.

9. Organize and support participation in networks.

Many years ago, the state of California allocated funds to support statewide subject matter networks. Research conducted on the initiative produced evidence of impact on many of the participants. Networks promote leadership, learning, and reflection. Encourage voluntary participation in subject- and role-alike networks.

10. Make greater use of other professional development resources

Tap the free services and expertise of state department of education consultants, regional education service agencies, textbook company consultants, professional associations, and others. Make greater use of the many free and low-cost resources on the Internet. Of course, we have many on the NSDC web site, as do Education Week and Teacher Magazine, Library of Congress, and others.

In summary, professional development is essential if teachers are to have the necessary knowledge and skills to ensure success for all students and to achieve the goal of our new president: every child will be ready for post secondary education or employment by 2020. When we accept the idea that at school, everyone's job is to learn, we will be positioned to achieve that goal.

If your school or district is up to the challenge and wishes to implement any of these ideas, don't hesitate to contact Amy B. Colton, MSDC, Executive Director at abc40@aol.com with any concerns or questions with which you may want help.

Book Review

Talk About Teaching! Leading Professional Conversations

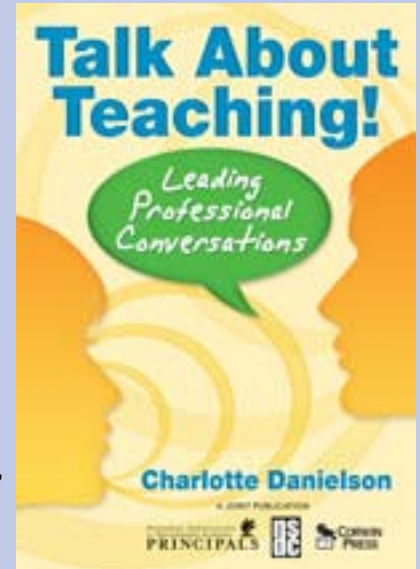
by Charlotte Danielson

2009. Corwin Press; a joint publication with NASSP and NSDC.

ISBN: 9781412941419.

Reviewed by Kathleen McBroom, MSDC Board Member

This latest offering from prolific author Charlotte Danielson emphasizes the value of promoting rich and meaningful conversations between teachers and administrators to create "cultures of professional inquiry". In order to improve student learning, teachers must examine instructional practices and their impact on students. Professional conversations that incorporate reflection and analysis can provide teachers with valuable feedback, support, and encouragement. Onsite administrators are urged to move away from structured, often staged formal observations, and instead initiate scenarios featuring guided conversations where teachers feel free to openly discuss and reflect on classroom practices. Danielson argues that professional conversations are the one most effective element in effective teacher learning.



Danielson also acknowledges that there are numerous obstacles that can hinder open and honest communication. The traditional closed-door classroom system isolates teachers, inhibiting opportunities for review and reflection. Occasionally teachers may be nervous or defensive when being evaluated, and hesitant to admit to any areas of concern or perceived shortcomings. To assist administrators in overcoming these hurdles, Danielson suggests strategies to create atmospheres of trust and shared purpose. Entire chapters are devoted to conversation topics, conversation skills, and implementation issues, such as creating a safe environment, maintaining confidentiality, and coming to consensus on what defines success. A final chapter offers implementation activities, which identify basic ingredients for successful encounters (sample questions, tools and prompts, possible responses, desired outcomes, etc.) for a variety of big picture themes: high level learning, student motivation, and so on.

The ultimate goal is for teachers to develop self-reflective habits of mind that enable them to become adept at evaluating their own teaching. This accessible guide will aid administrators in providing teachers with the skill set and impetus for continuing improvement in teaching and learning.

Does Race Impact Adult Relationships In Schools and Do Adult Relationships Impact Student Achievement?

This article is excerpted from the full report, [*“Wisdom of Elders: Does Race Impact Adult Relationships in Schools?”*](#) by Karen Schulte, Eastern Michigan University, who conducted research in partnership with Elaine Bennett, Ann Arbor Public Schools (retired). The full report can be accessed online at the link above.

“Absolutely. Race impacts relationships of everyone in society so it definitely impacts it in the schools...probably more so than many other professions...”

-African American teacher

“It shouldn’t, but my gut tells me that it does.”

-White teacher

All of the teachers we interviewed felt that race does impact the development of collegial relationships among teachers. There was a distinct difference, however, in the tone of their responses. While White teachers were hesitant to say yes, African American teachers were adamant in their responses, using words such as “definitely” and “absolutely” and telling stories from their experiences to illustrate their points. White teachers couched their responses in words to demonstrate that they did not believe it should be true, but that perhaps it may be.

When asked whether they felt the adult relationships in a building impact student achievement, every interviewee said yes, with little difference between African American and White responses. Many mentioned that collegiality is necessary for staffs to develop meaningful common goals and improvement strategies as a way to improve student achievement. They mentioned the importance of having conversations about student work. Everyone felt that it is important for educators to be able to honestly talk with each other about specific student needs and academic work, as well as teachers’ related classroom practices. Sadly, only one of our interviewees indicated experiencing collegiality as a norm; most indicated that they had rarely experienced collegiality as the

norm in a school, with parallel play and congeniality being more common. We were somewhat heartened to hear that most interviewees had not experienced adversarial relationships as the norm.

Two teachers’ comments were particularly compelling. An African American teacher felt that “if my colleagues see me as competent...if their belief system allowed themselves to see me as competent...then when they go back into that classroom they see a little Black girl that almost looks like me (they may think) I could help her. She can make it.” A White teacher lamented the fact that he/she didn’t have more cross-race collegial relationships, “I don’t need a lot of hints and help to understand kids who are like me when I was their age. I get it. It’s other kids that are facing situations that I never faced where I can use help.” It is clear that the teachers we interviewed believe that collegial relationships are important to student achievement and that cross-race relationships may have specific benefits for improving the achievement of students of color.

What Are The Obstacles To Developing Cross-Race Collegial Relationships?

If teachers believe that developing more collegial relationships will improve student achievement, and if teachers believe that race does impact the development of collegial relationships among adults, what stands in the way of cross-race collegial relationships? When asked to discuss the obstacles to cross-race collegial relationships, there were significant differences in the responses of the African American and White teachers we interviewed.

Culture

Culture was the obstacle identified most frequently by African American interviewees. This included a number of things: language, use of touch, facial expressions, confrontation styles, and competition versus cooperative styles. Generally, African American interviewees felt that Whites have difficulty expressing themselves directly, say one thing when they really mean another, use facial expressions that don’t match the content of what they are saying, do not like to confront issues directly but rather “beat around the bush”, and are much more competitive than African Americans. This difference in styles, as perceived by African Americans, creates a situation in which they don’t feel as though they can trust Whites. Some of their statements included:

“I come from an environment of culture where we used to say ‘Good Morning’ to each other...and then you arrive in these environments and people go about their daily business without speaking...how can you form a collegial relationship with people when they don’t speak to you?”

“This smiling when you are upset versus you know having the facial and everything match your emotion is one cultural difference in communication.”

“And yet I found some people kind of false in the collaborative thing and then they will go off and do their own thing...trying to out show you... (this) tended to be more White teachers.”

Whites, on the other hand, were hesitant to say there are significant cultural differences between African Americans and Whites. As one teacher said, “I think every human being, no

matter what your ethnicity is, whether you are French or German, and both Caucasian, everybody has their own culture.”

Fear

Both African American and White interviewees identified fear as an obstacle, however they meant very different things. While discussing colleagues, one African American teacher said, “I sensed she had a fear of Black people,” and continued, “There are certain Black people that I think White people find it more safe to talk to and then they actually have a fear of other people.”

Another said, “I know seeing us together makes other people very uncomfortable so we have to be very careful. People are always puzzled by three of us (African Americans) together.”

In contrast, Whites mentioned fear of offending African Americans, fear of not being “politically correct,” fear of being negatively judged by African Americans, and fear of being seen as racist. As one teacher said, “To be honest, it’s probably because my life was pretty White for a long period of time...more of that comfort level of just being comfortable with your own race.”

Trust

Similarly, trust was also mentioned as an obstacle by both African American and White interviewees, but with very different perspectives. African Americans mentioned the need to “shift” their language and demeanor when around Whites, and as one teacher indicated, this makes it “difficult to relax around whites.” Conversely, one White teacher said, “African Americans seem secretive,” summarizing the feeling of many of the White interviewees that African Americans seem hesitant to be open with Whites. “African American teachers are very private, you know they’ve learned to kind of close in the ranks or close in on themselves. Some wouldn’t even share their phone number with staff and that kind of thing.” One White teacher felt that African American teachers may seem closed to Whites because “Black teachers are in an uncomfortable double role of being a teacher but

also sometimes being the only Black person in the group of teachers ...they are the explainers and they have to be in a double role of being a teacher but also being a Black person.”

Numbers

Finally, every White teacher we interviewed mentioned the small number of African American teachers, most identifying this as the biggest obstacle to cross-race collegiality.

“I think it’s easier (to develop same-race collegial relationships) because there are more of them. There are more people like me.”

“We have never had a lot of diversity on our staff...and that’s where you have to start...you know the majority of the relationships that you have...all the people involved are White.”

“I’m in the majority and that’s who I deal with most of the time. I mean I haven’t had a lot of experiences with working closely with African American teachers.”

What Are The Implications For Professional Development?

We, whether White or of color, need to deepen our own understanding of the systemic nature of racism, its impact on each of us, and how to interrupt it. Such a shared understanding not only creates common ground for the cultivation of friendship, it also is a prerequisite for the transformative education we need for a more just society. (Tatum, 2007)

If schools are serious about improving student achievement by developing professional learning communities and implementing collaborative improvement efforts, the obstacles to developing cross-race collegial relationships must be considered when planning these efforts. We believe cross-race collegial relationships are an important prerequisite to improving student achievement, particularly the achievement of students of color. We learned much about this from the “elders” we interviewed, and we think their knowledge, wisdom and experience have much to offer professional developers.

- Issues of race, including its impact on adult relationships in schools, must be part of the school improvement discussion. Many of our “elders” told us, however, that these discussions should not occur in a vacuum, but must be continually connected back to classroom practice. Every teacher we interviewed felt that focusing on students facilitated the development of collegiality. As we become more racially conscious, we must always reflect upon and discuss how our learning impacts our practice.

- We can’t talk meaningfully about race with strangers; we must have opportunities to get to know each other on a personal level.
- Conversations need to take place in facilitated small groups, with guidelines to help people feel safe. Staff meetings are not the best venue for this type of discussion.
- Time must be allocated so that people are able to tell their stories and reflect upon their own and others’ experiences, without feeling rushed.
- Discussions must happen over time, rather than during “one-shot” activities. Racial consciousness evolves slowly, through a complex process including discussion, reading and reflection.
- Perhaps most importantly, we believe that conversations must be facilitated by trained, cross-race pairs of facilitators. Given the different perspectives of African Americans and Whites, it is important that both of these perspectives be considered in planning and legitimized in implementation.

Conversations about race are never easy. One of our interviewees stated that they are sometimes “too courageous.” However, if we truly believe that adult collegiality is necessary to improve the achievement of all students, we must develop practices to facilitate cross-race collegial relationships. Both students and adults will reap the benefits.

Mission Statement:

"MSDC advocates for quality research-based professional development policies and practices to increase the capacity of those who work to improve student learning."

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Three Elected to Board of Director Positions

In the recent Board of Director elections, Dr. Cynthia Carver, Terri Portice, and John Summerhill were elected to the board for the next three years.

Dr. Cynthia Carver is an Assistant Professor of Teacher Education at Michigan State University. As a member of the stakeholder group, she helped guide the development of the Individual Professional Plan for Growth (IPPG) template for supporting new teacher learning in Michigan. Dr. Carver said, "Whether working with teachers, principals, or policymakers, my motivation has been to improve learning outcomes for children by improving learning opportunities for teachers. Where teachers thrive, students thrive."

Terri Portice is the Director of Teaching and Learning at Kent Intermediate School District in Grand Rapids, Michigan. Terri has been involved in a county-wide project to identify common Power/Priority Standards in the four core content areas. Ms. Portice stated, "We need to work with superintendents,

curriculum directors, building administrators, teacher leaders and other organizations to collaboratively make the necessary changes in "How" we provide schooling for our students at all levels."

John Summerhill is the principal of Center Line High School in Center Line, Michigan. Mr. Summerhill has worked with high school staff to introduce SMART goals and the data analysis tool, Data Director, to improve student achievement and teacher development in instruction and curriculum implementation. He was quoted, "I would like to see MSDC further the advancement of collaborative work and development in school districts as it pertains to organized time for real staff development and growth that allows educators to improve teaching and learning utilizing quality data analysis."

We congratulate each of these new board members on their election and wish them well as they serve the Michigan Staff Development Council in promoting quality professional learning in Michigan.

Contact the Executive Director

For more information related to material found in this newsletter or any other questions or input for the Michigan Staff Development Council, please feel free to contact Executive Director Amy B. Colton at abc40@aol.com.

You can also check out our online presence for more resources and information at www.msdconline.org.

