From Professional Development To Professional Learning

If schools are to change to meet their increasingly urgent needs, Ms. Easton argues, teachers will have to move from being trained or developed to becoming active learners. Significant change will require educators to alter their attitudes and behaviors.
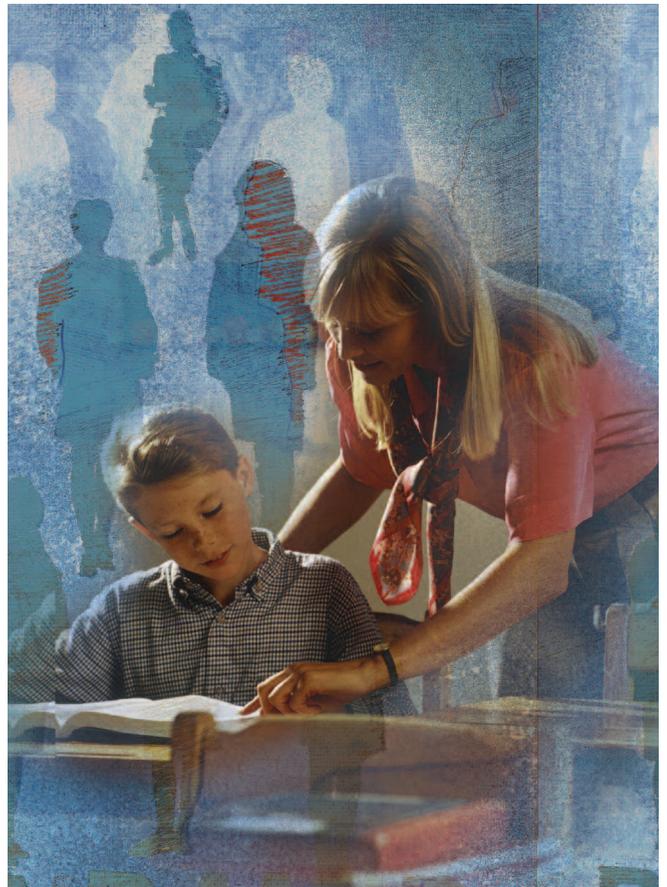
By Lois Brown Easton

ONCE WE called it *training* — what educators underwent before and sometimes during the school year. They were trained. For some, the word brought to mind a factory where employees were told precisely how to tighten a screw as products rolled by on the assembly line. *Training* certainly fit the factory model of education. To others, the word conjured images of what one does to animals, getting them to sit, roll over, and play dead. Few educators now describe their learning experiences as training.

The word *development* may be an improvement, but just a small one. It evokes images of what someone does to someone else: develop them. In education, professional development has, in fact, often been what someone does to others. The back-to-school speaker holds forth in order to motivate the teaching staff for the coming year. The specialist arrives from the capital to increase teachers' knowledge of state standards. The university professor advances the careers of educators through courses that offer credits to move them up on the salary scale.

Such development activities as these (and even some training activities) are neither bad nor wrong. In some cases they are vital to professional and organizational growth. But they are not sufficient. If all educators

needed to do was develop (i.e., grow, expand, advance, progress, mature, enlarge, or improve), perhaps development would be enough. But educators often find that more and better are not enough. They find they often need to change what they do, on a daily or sometimes hourly basis, as they respond to the needs of the learners they serve. Doing this takes learning.

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Why isn't it good enough to keep doing what we're doing, just do it better? Phillip Schlechty put it well more than a decade ago:

> Change in schools is much more urgently needed than most teachers and school administrators seem to realize. Indeed, I believe that if schools are not changed in dramatic ways very soon, public schools will not be a vital component of America's system of education in the 21st century.[1]

And evidence is all around us. Students are dropping out of school as early as seventh grade; as few as 70% of U.S. students graduate from high school. The percentage graduating is even lower for young people of color.[2]

The United States has a legal and moral commitment to educate all children, and its citizens must keep that commitment even though not all children are easy to educate. Currently, the pressure is on from those at the top, but insufficient and unevenly allocated resources make it tough for schools and districts to educate all students to high standards. Meanwhile, the mobility rate for students is rising, and, for some young people, homelessness is all they have known. The number of students for whom English is not a first language is rising. The world is complicated, with global maps changing overnight and knowledge exploding. More than ever, students need at least a high school diploma to escape menial labor and earn enough to support a family.

It is clearer today than ever that educators need to learn, and that's why *professional learning* has replaced *professional development*. Developing is not enough. Educators must be knowledgeable and wise. They must know enough in order to change. They must change in order to get different results. They must become learners, and they must be *self*-developing.

In the sidebar, Qualities of Powerful Professional Learning (page 757), I outline 12 features of professional learning that make it different from professional development.

IMPLICATIONS FOR ORGANIZATIONS

Professional learning requires a new action plan for systems that are engaged in improving so that all children can learn. These systems may be whole schools, districts, Boards of Cooperative Educational Services (BOCES), universities, or teacher centers.

Time for professional learning and how that time is used are the first changes to consider. An orientation toward professional learning also requires thinking differently about where learning takes place, about

leadership and governance, about data collection and use, about appropriate learning activities, about evaluation of professional learning, about role changes, and — ultimately — about cultural changes that both promote and result from learning. Of course, all of these have an effect on budget.

Consider time and how it is used. A typical district plan for a year's professional development looks something like this:
- Day 1.   Beginning-of-the-year motivational speaker
- Day 2.   Planning and grade preparation
- Day 3.   Selection from among five daylong workshops
- Day 4.   Planning and grade preparation
- Day 5.   Selection from among five daylong workshops
- Day 6.   Planning and grade preparation

A plan more likely to create conditions that lead to real professional learning looks more like this:
- Day 1.   School-level focus on school vision, mission, goals, needs, and data
- Day 2.   Identification of professional learning that needs to take place for school staff
- Day 3.   Initiation of learning
- Day 4.   Follow-up activities and problem solving
- Day 5.   Coaching, mentoring, observing
- Day 6.   Continuation of learning and looking at data
- Day 7.   Follow-up activities and problem solving
- Day 8.   Coaching, mentoring, observing
- Day 9.   Continuation of learning and looking at data
- Day 10. Follow-up activities and problem solving
- Day 11. Coaching, mentoring, observing
- Day 12. Data analysis and planning for the next year

Educators engaged in professional learning are still likely to need time to prepare grades and do individual planning, but if the school's focus is on professional learning, planning might very well be incorporated into learning events. In terms of learning, however, educators will take part in activities such as school-based conversations (Days 1, 2, and 12); learning, follow-up activities, and problem solving (Days 3, 4, 6, 7, 9, 10, and 11); coaching, mentoring, and observing and being coached, mentored, and observed (Days 5, 8, and 11); collecting data (Days 6, 9, and 12); and analyzing data, making recommendations, and planning (Days 6, 9, and 12).

Planning for professional learning is messy. Aside from the days that schools focus on their own vision, mission, goals, needs, and data and perhaps even identi-

Qualities of Powerful Professional Learning

The following qualities of professional learning are derived from *Powerful Designs for Professional Learning*.[1]

1. *Powerful professional learning arises from and returns benefits to the real world of teaching and learning.* This is more important than it sounds. Often the superintendent or principal who wants to start the school year off right hires a speaker. Sometimes a committee chooses the person. But usually staff members are clear that not much change is expected as a result of the speech. It may also be clear that the speaker knows very little about the school or district and may be giving a generic speech, perhaps one that has gone well in other venues. After such speakers have bowed to the applause, folded up their notes, and disengaged their projection technology, nothing much changes in the real world of teaching and learning.

2. *Powerful professional learning requires the collection, analysis, and presentation of real data from student work and teacher practice.* Test scores matter, but so do other representations of achievement, and so do demographics, perceptions, and programs and practices that operate in a school. All of these, according to Victoria Bernhardt, are important to collect before, during, and after professional learning experiences.[2] Before, they help educators decide for themselves what they need to learn. During, they help educators monitor changes happening in classrooms and schools, adjusting as necessary. After, they provide evidence of improvement and suggest next steps.

3. *Powerful professional learning begins with what will really help young people learn, engages those involved in helping them learn, and has an effect on the classrooms (and schools, districts, and states) where those students and their teachers learn.* Educators who engage in powerful professional development first work to understand how a school or district can improve learning for all children, using data as well as their own skills, knowledge, and experiences.

4. *Powerful professional learning leads directly to application in the classroom.* Throughout the professional learning experience (which may be continuous), the focus remains on what is happening with learners (both student and adult) in the classroom, school, and district. During their learning, educators return to the learning environment to try out a new technique with learners, set up a research process to obtain data, receive feedback from students and coaches and mentors, reflect on what they are learning, confer with others about what is being learned, report results, modify what they are doing, and repeat these processes. They may also plan next steps.

5. *Powerful professional learning experiences may not formally end.* Powerful professional learning usually leads to the desire to continue making improvement, a process that is evolutionary and may even change an institution into a learning community.

6. *Powerful professional learning honors the professionalism, expertise, experiences, and skills of staff members.* When ad-ministrators rely on outsiders, they may communicate the message that those within a school or district lack expertise. Although this is sometimes the case, school and district staff members can develop their own expertise. During the process, educators identify content needs that fit the context of their environment and the people who can lead the learning, people who might very well be in the school or district itself. A culture becomes a continuous learning community when educators are asked to apply their skills and professionalism to improve student learning — and when they recognize the skills and professionalism everyone else brings to the improvement process.

7. *Powerful professional learning is content-rich.* The content is the school or district itself, its staff, and its learners. This is content that matters to the people engaged in the experience.

8. *Powerful professional learning is collaborative or has collaborative aspects to it.* Educators learn from one another, enriching their own professional lives and the culture of the school or district. They build a shared vision of a school or district, work on what matters, and help one another make changes.

9. *Powerful professional learning establishes a culture of quality.* Powerful professional learning encourages discussion about what quality looks like, in terms of both the work educators do and the work their students do.

10. *Powerful professional learning results in automatic "buy-in" because it uses the local talent.* Those who are going to implement change are more likely to do so if they are involved in the design of the change through powerful professional learning.

11. *Powerful professional learning slows the pace of schooling.* Educators seldom pause in their hectic schedules to make sense of what is going on. A slower pace provides time for the inquiry and reflection that promote learning and application. Powerful professional learning is a gift to educators who seldom have a chance to reflect on their own teaching and learning.

12. *Powerful professional learning designs provide the activities that make professional learning communities (PLCs) more than just a structure.* Without the meaningful learning activities that occur during powerful professional learning, PLCs may go the way of so many other structures, such as block scheduling and small schools, that were instituted without enough attention to how teachers and students would take advantage of those structures. — LBE

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1. Lois Brown Easton, ed., *Powerful Designs for Professional Learning* (Oxford, Ohio: National Staff Development Council, 2004).

2. Victoria L. Bernhardt, "Data Analysis," in Easton, pp. 111-18.

fy professional learning needs and begin their learning processes, most professional learning happens on an afternoon here, another morning there, and in third period a week later. In other words, beyond the first few days, districts cannot simply establish days for professional learning. Most professional learning — such

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as coaching, mentoring, observing, looking at student work, examining teacher practice, participating in critical friends groups, facilitating learning — happens at a variety of times in different schools. Still, time needs to be built into the schedule for these activities; they are every bit as legitimate as professional development days that districts are accustomed to setting.

Consider appropriate learning activities. The most beneficial learning activities are those that are embedded in the work that educators do. Such professional learning activities might include action research, assessment design, book studies, critical friends groups, lesson study, and many more. Other strategies help educators access student voices, use case discussions, do classroom walkthroughs, analyze data, mentor, coach, prepare portfolios, and much more.[3]

These designs and strategies are powerful ways to address any content area, to improve pedagogy and assessment, and even to enhance organizational development. They are essentially peer-to-peer professional learning activities.

Consider space and location. Typically, professional development days are set in large, central locations. However, professional learning must be school-based. Although educators from throughout a school district or a region can be brought together for some of the learning events (Days 3, 6, and 9 in the professional learning schedule above) and possibly for follow-up and problem-solving events (Days 4, 7, and 10), the rest of the activities need to occur at school sites. Coaching, mentoring, and observation, in particular, must take place within schools.

Consider leadership and governance. Professional development often begins at the top with an assistant superintendent or a director of professional development — perhaps working with teacher representatives from schools — making decisions about the kinds of learning teachers need. Professional learning starts at the bottom, within schools, with educators identifying what students need and so what they themselves need to learn.

Working with school staffs, the assistant superintendent or director of professional learning may identify some common needs among schools, as well as needs that are specific to one school or even to a grade level or subject area. The school principal or the assistant principal may serve as a spokesperson to the district with regard to staff needs.

Plan for data collection and use. As Victoria Bernhardt has established, data collection, analysis, and use are primarily school functions, with staff members meeting beforehand to learn what data they need to collect, how to collect data, and how to use what they learn for their own learning processes.[4] Giving school-based educators the time to collect and analyze data may be new to many organizations. Instead of doing it herself, the district person who handles data may, in fact, reconceptualize her role as providing support for educators in the schools, making various kinds of data available and helping with analysis.

Reconceptualize evaluation of professional learning. The "how it feels" evaluation ("The room was too cold" or "The lunch was great") is insufficient even for professional development. For professional learning, it is counterproductive. Professional learning must be evaluated by results that are evident on several levels.[5] The first level has to do with teacher behavior: how teachers change the way they work as a result of their learning. At this level, it is also possible to look for changes in how school administrators work and how the school runs or how the district functions.

At the next level, it is appropriate to look at changes in student behavior — in a classroom, in a school, in a district. Finally, it is necessary to look at student growth and achievement, using a range of indicators — from anecdotal records to test scores, from actual student work to graduation rates.

Evaluation also needs to be extended throughout the system. How has the school itself changed to accommodate, even encourage, professional learning? How have principals and assistant principals changed their work to learn themselves and to help teachers learn? How has the district changed? How have central office staff members changed what they do? How have supporting institutions, such as teacher centers, universities, and BOCES, changed?

Typically, indicators of change relate to skills or knowledge. But these are not enough to make substantive change in the education of young people. Joellen Killion makes the point that indicators should include descriptors of change in these five areas:

• Knowledge: conceptual understanding of infor-

mation, theories, principles, and research;

• Attitude: beliefs about the value of particular information or strategies;

• Skills: strategies and processes to apply knowledge;

• Aspiration: desire or internal motivation to engage in a particular practice; and

• Behavior: consistent application of knowledge and skills.

Together, these areas of change are known as KASAB.[6] Only if people alter attitudes, aspirations, and behaviors in addition to knowledge and skills can significant change take place.

Plan for role changes. Roles change as the shift is made from development to learning. Classroom teachers facilitate student learning, of course, but they also identify and solve problems; collect, analyze, and report data; coach, mentor, and observe. They may also take on new roles as facilitators of adult learning. They will need to learn how to learn from one another and when to find resources elsewhere. They will be using reflection and dialogue as tools for learning, and they will be opening up their classrooms so that all may learn.

Principals in a professional learning environment will share classroom teachers' roles, engaging in coaching, mentoring, reflecting, facilitation, and dialogue, but they will also need to learn how to share leadership. District administrators will need to spend time in schools, talking with teachers and students in order to learn what they have learned.

Districts may want to reorient the work of supervisors of curriculum and professional development (now learning) so that they support what teachers and school-based administrators need to do. Some may teach facilitation skills or coaching to school-based staff, for example, or those who handle data may want to refocus their efforts, helping others to collect, analyze, and report data.

Expect cultural changes. A school, district, or organization focused on professional learning rather than development will look and feel different. Richard DuFour and Robert Eaker have listed several aspects of professional learning communities that differentiate them from school as usual.[7] These conditions prevail as well when the change is made from professional development to professional learning.

• Everyone in the building, including students, knows and understands the purpose of the school (its mission, vision, and values). It is not enough for the science teacher to say, "My mission is to teach science" or for the student to say, "Nothing" when asked what she did today.

• There is constant questioning and searching for answers. "That's the way it's always been" or "We tried that three years ago, and it didn't work" represent the old culture. The culture of professional learning is one of inquiry.

• Being in one another's classrooms and school buildings becomes the norm. This is not to say that individual inquiry is not valued, but sharing learning is optimal for professionals.

• No one in a school waits for orders from above. When things need to be changed, they are changed — at the district, school, or classroom level. In fact, change is the result of constant questioning and searching for answers — in other words, learning. Nor is change random or quirky; it's based on solid study, observation, data, and conversation.

• "Been there, done that" is not often heard in organizations focused on professional learning. Educators cannot rest contented when the learning environment is constantly changing. Instead of one answer, there will be several answers, still more questions that require answers, and even questions that no one has thought of before.

DuFour and Eaker write of a results orientation. It is because of this orientation that professional learning — rather than development — is the appropriate goal for schools. Professional learning makes change possible.

Thus in a culture in which learning rather than development is the focus, attitudes, conversations, and behaviors change. Even mental models change, individually and collectively.[8] Schlechty calls organizations that focus on learning for both adults and students WOW schools because they "work on the work."[9] The culture of such organizations is very different from that of an organization that takes an approach focused on development.

Understand how budgets will change. Of course, the differences between professional learning and professional development affect the budget. Consultant expenses may be the most expensive line item for professional development, but consultant use may well be limited when pursuing professional learning. What is most expensive in a professional learning school is release time for educators themselves — either substitute pay or stipends for summer work. Role changes mean additional support for teachers and administrators. Educators need financial support for the days they are learning and also for the days when they follow up on their learning, collect and share data, analyze results, solve problems, and coach, mentor, and observe one another. Educators who are facilitating the work of oth-

er educators, for example, may need additional days for their own learning and support.

The ideal solution is to make these days — or most of them — part of the district schedule for educators, as many other countries do. The extended schedule for educators simply includes 12-15 days for professional learning, and it is expected that everyone who works with young people will take part. Naturally, a decision to lengthen the school year in this way affects the salaries of all involved.

If educators have any problem making a commitment to professional learning, they should consider this sharply focused statement of the problem made by Dennis Sparks:

> Too many students learn far less than they are capable of achieving. This problem is particularly acute in schools serving high concentrations of low-income students and is a tragic waste of human potential. In addition to the personal loss borne by these students, our democracy and economic well-being suffer when young people are unprepared to fully assume their responsibilities as citizens and wage earners in an increasingly complex world.[10]

The least educators can do is become learners themselves by engaging in a process of professional learning.

1. Phillip C. Schlechty, *Inventing Better Schools: An Action Plan for Education Reform* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1997), p. xi.

2. Paul E. Barton, "The Dropout Problem: Losing Ground," *Educational Leadership*, February 2006, p. 14.

3. These and other examples of designs and strategies can be found in Lois Brown Easton, *Powerful Designs for Professional Learning* (Oxford, Ohio: National Staff Development Council, 2004, 2008).

4. Victoria L. Bernhardt, "Data Analysis," in Easton, pp. 111-18.

5. Joellen Killion, *Assessing Impact: Evaluating Staff Development*, 2nd ed. (Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Corwin 2007), p. 38.

6. Ibid.

7. Richard DuFour and Robert Eaker, *Professional Learning Communities at Work: Best Practices for Enhancing Student Achievement* (Bloomington, Ind.: National Education Service, 1998).

8. Edgar H. Schein, quoted in Peter M. Senge et al., *The Fifth Discipline Fieldbook: Strategies and Tools for Building a Learning Organization* (New York: Doubleday, 1994).

9. Phillip C. Schlechty, *Working on the Work: An Action Plan for Teachers, Principals, and Superintendents* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2002).

10. Dennis Sparks, "Advocating for Powerful Forms of Professional Development," *Results*, National Staff Development Council, March 2001. ◄K

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