

Learning

Learning ... TO GO!

Developing Take Aways and Best Practices for Professional Learning in Your Own Building

Professional learning and development will not only affect the knowledge, attitudes, and practices of individual teachers, Principals, Vice-Principals and other school employees, but will also alter the culture and structures of the organizations in which those individuals work and ultimately improve student learning and achievement.

(Sparks, Hirsh, and Jones)

Designing professional learning and development (PLD) opportunities is often a complex planning and learning process that Principals and Vice-Principals face as they focus on meeting the individual needs of their schools and the community of learners they serve. Leading, teaching and learning occurs in a diverse landscape, where policy, research, history, experience and communities shape practice.

(LeFevrae, Timperley, Twyford, Ell, 2020)

by

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As we travel along our own Professional Learning and Development journey at the BCPVPA, we review and consider multiple resources, research and materials to guide us in the design of PLD opportunities that can include programs, conferences, workshops and learning sessions.

Research materials and resources in the field of Professional Learning and Development are extensive, and we want to share some key learnings that may help you as you plan for professional learning in your own school community.

Characteristics of powerful professional learning and development include:

- Establishing a school culture focused on teaching and learning
- Honouring the staff's professionalism, expertise, and skills
- Promoting inquiry and reflection
- Ensuring a level of application of the skills and strategies learned in the PLD design

(Lois Brown Easton)

Key components and features of effective PLD include:

- The quality of content
- The learning design and implementation
- Continued support and sustainability

(The State of Educator's Professional Learning in Canada)

This article focuses on four key take-aways:

- 1) Models of PLD
- 2) Framework for PLD
- 3) Change Process
- 4) Learning Designs for PLD

1) Major Models for Professional Learning and Development

based on research by Guskey, Sparks, Loucks-Horsley, Drago-Severson and Lee Anne Sulzberger

Principals and Vice-Principals who design professional learning and development experiences or opportunities for their schools should consider several of the major models before determining the most appropriate approach for their context.

Ask yourself, "What knowledge, skills and attitudes do my staff need that will support them in their work and ultimately impact and improve student outcomes?"

Then, consider these models, and review the examples of what the BCPVPA offers in each area:



Training: This model of professional and learning development is familiar to most educators. Training is typically presented in the form of a workshop, seminar, institute, conference or some other form of large-group presentation.

Connecting Leaders Conference
Effective Feedback Institute

Observation/Assessment: This model of professional learning and development is based on the use of collegial observation and feedback to provide educators with information about a specific practice or skill. For teachers, such activities may involve peer observations of lesson design and instructional strategies.

Leading a Culture
of Learning
1 & 2

Involvement in a Development or Improvement Process: Educators are often asked to serve on a curriculum committee or school growth plan team. Such groups can provide a valuable source of professional growth as educators work collaboratively to solve a specific problem, review relevant research on a particular content area or reflect upon the effectiveness of a newly implemented process or strategy.

Leadership Standards Review
Committee
Leadership Planning Guide
Committee
All Program Development
Committees

Study Groups or Learning Teams: Study groups or learning teams expand upon the concept of the development and improvement processes by involving an entire school staff in finding solutions to common problems. Small groups of educators focus on different aspects of a problem or issue. Topics should arise out of the careful study of the school data and student achievement.

Article Review Study Series
Book Studies
Indigenous Committee
Wellness Committee

Inquiry or Action Research: In the inquiry or action research model, participants use a structured method to investigate how a change in a particular practice impacts teaching and learning. An example of an inquiry/action research model could be the six stages of *Spirals of Inquiry* designed by Dr. Linda Kaser and Dr. Judy Halbert.

Short Course II

Individually Guided Activities: Educators involved in this model of professional development determine their own professional learning goals and select the activities they believe will lead them to successfully meet those goals. This model of professional development provides a variety of flexible options that enable educators to individualize their professional growth experiences. Activities such as professional portfolios, reflective journaling, and video/audio self-assessment are examples of individually guided activities

Growth Plan Model in
BetterEducate

Mentoring/Coaching: Mentoring/Coaching, as a model of professional learning and development, pairs experienced, successful educators with colleagues who are less experienced and who can benefit from the guidance and support provided by the mentor or coach.

Mentorship Program
Essentials for New School Leaders

The models of professional learning and development each have their strengths and weaknesses; some are more appropriate than others to reach a desired outcome. The criterion for the effectiveness of professional learning and development is that it changes leader and teacher practice in ways that make a positive difference to the learning and well-being of their students. (Viviane Robinson, 2020).

When choosing a professional learning and development model one must also be reminded of the fundamentals of what makes learning meaningful for adults. "A team member's mindset influences how receptive he/she is to learn and change." (Elisa MacDonald, Carol Dweck) Adult learning theory is one of the most important sources of information about what works in terms of professional learning and development. Adult learning is different from student learning, and a good resource to further explore this concept is an article written by Lois Brown Easton and Terry Morganti-Fisher, "How to Choose the Right Learning Design" (2014), or the book *Learning to Listen, Learning to Teach: The Power of Dialogue in Educating Adults* by Jane Vella (2002), which outlines a comprehensive description of the needs of adult learners.

No matter which model is selected, the activities should:

- 1) focus on narrowing the gap between actual and desired levels of student learning;
- 2) involve stakeholders in identifying content and objectives of the model;
- 3) help participants understand both the theoretical and the practical aspects of the new learning;
- 4) be reflective, integrate follow up and provide support; and
- 5) be part of a larger change process that focuses on improving student learning.

(Lee Sulzberger, 2003)

2) Framework for Design

When designing the BCPVPA professional learning and development opportunities, we consider a simple framework that is based on questions of curiosity and that is reflective in nature.

The framework consists of these four elements:

Purpose: (Why?)

Why are we designing this professional learning and development opportunity? What data are we considering? Why is this learning important?

Context: (Where?)

Where will PLD learning occur? Who will be involved in this learning? What is the learning culture of the group?

Content: (What?)

What is our intended learning outcome? What research and resources do we need?

Process: (How?)

How will this learning best occur? How do we plan to move forward? What change process and strategies might we consider?

(adapted from *Learning Forward*)

3) Change Process

When considering the implementation of a PLD model that might involve a systemic change within your school culture, one should reflect on a change structure to use that will fit the context of learning culture and environment of the school.

In a variety of literature, change has been described as "... a process, not an event" (Hall and Hord) and something that happens over a period of time. There are multiple theories, processes and research on the concept of change, and it is important to view change simultaneously from both individual and institutional perspectives.

We know leaders are key facilitators of change. Michael Fullan stated in 2007 that "today, no more serious change effort would fail to emphasize the

role of Principals”. Robbins and Alvy in 2014 noted that, “It is critical to go about change in a way that shows sensitivity to individuals affected by change and the institution that will be transformed as a result of it. Change does affect the individuals and the organization.”

Before choosing a change model for your school, it is important for one to reflect on a variety of curious questions:

Why do we want to change?

What’s going on for our learners?

What do we want to change?

How do we know?

How do we change?

Why does it matter?

(Robbins and Alvy)

(Kaser and Halbert)

These sets of questions can help guide the change process that a Principal or Vice-Principal is about to undertake.

Change Model Examples

Shewhart

Halbert and Kaser

Fullan

Breakspear

Plan, Act, Do, Check Cycle

Spirals of Inquiry

8 Drivers of Change

Capture, Cleanse, Weave

There are multiple models of change demonstrated through research from which one can choose or adapt when developing a PLD learning opportunity. It is important to choose a change model process that fits the context and culture of your school as the process can be key to bringing about a change initiative. It is equally important to remember that whatever the model, a change process should develop new teaching and learning approaches that measurably improve student learning and performance.

(Clauset and Murphy, 2013)



Remembering your school context, it's important to understand that implementing one model may not suit your needs. There are times when the combined pieces of several models is more appropriate. An example of the adaptation of several models combined into one is PIER2 developed at Qualicum Beach Middle School. It provides a cycle that we sometimes apply for program development at the BCPVPA in order to keep programming both responsive and proactive.

- Planning
- Implementation
- Evaluation
- Reflection
- Revision

“Indeed the, measure of a leader may well be his or her capacity to understand and work successfully with change – to stimulate it, shape it, nurture it, guide it, manage it, revise it, and keep the change journey going.” (Robbins and Alvy, 2014)

4) Choice of Learning Designs

“A professional shift is taking place in the design, delivery and evaluation of professional learning and development for teachers and leaders....In short, the shift is from an adult-centred to a more student-centred approach ... Creating a school culture of formal and informal student-centred PLD is one of the most important things a leader can do.” (Viviane Robinson, 2020).

There are many learning designs for Principals and Vice-Principals in the literature of PLD to choose from and we offer a few suggestions for resources to read that focus on learning designs for educators.

The State of Educators' Professional Learning in Canada and in BC (2016) suggests there is consensus that effective professional learning design is long-term, embedded in one's work context, and incorporates high-quality facilitators. (Executive Summary)

Dr. Linda Kaser and Dr. Judy Halbert outline their powerful learning design in the book *Spirals of Inquiry* (2016).

Reduce Change to Increase Improvement by Viviane Robinson (2018) provides a design for how to move schools through an improvement process.

Michael Fullan and Joanna Quinn outline their learning design in the book *Deep Learning* (2018).

Lois Brown Easton offers 24 designs succinctly outlined in third edition of the book *Powerful Designs for Professional Learning* (third edition, 2015). The book outlines learning designs such as: action research, instructional rounds, lesson study and classroom walk-throughs.

Jenni Donohoo reminds us of the powerful impact that “believing as one” can have on students in her book *Collective Efficacy: How Educators' Beliefs Impact Student Learning* (2016)

The design should fit the unique context and learning culture of the school and often requires the adaptation of one or several published designs.

Effective professional learning and development opportunities, designed by Principals and Vice-Principals, should create and support the conditions to help teachers learn more about effective instructional strategies. Staff must be given the opportunity to design, apply, adapt and assess the success of new strategies in their particular setting, with a focus on evidence of impact of how these strategies improve student learning and outcomes. John Hattie (2012) has measured the impact of many important factors that predict and influence student learning in his book *Visible Learning for Teachers: Maximizing Impact on Learning*. Awareness of the findings of Hattie's research can further help Principals and Vice-Principals create a PLD learning opportunity that develops the learning culture of the school.

Professional learning and development is a process. It requires continuous inquiry into the purpose of a program, the implementation of a program, and the ability to monitor progress and make adjustments to the purpose, context, content, and processes. The four key elements outlined in this article are suggestions to consider as one embarks on designing professional learning and development opportunities for the school community one serves.

“The habits that produce significant change in teaching and learning begin with what leaders think, say and do.”
(Dennis Sparks)

“If quality teaching is to occur in every classroom, all teachers must be supported in turn by skillful Principals and Vice-Principals who work in systems that support their sustained development as instructional leaders.”
(Linda Darling-Hammond)



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TEXT RENDERING EXPERIENCE

The purpose of this exercise is to collaboratively construct meaning and clarity, and to expand our thinking about a text or document.

Roles

1. A facilitator to guide the process
2. A scribe to track the phrases and words that are shared

Set-up

Take a few moments to review the document and mark a sentence, a phrase, and a word that you think are particularly important for our work.

Steps

1. First Round: Each person shares a **sentence** from the document that they think or feel is particularly significant.
2. Second Round: Each person shares a **phrase** that they think or feel is particularly significant. The scribe records each phrase.
3. Third Round: Each person shares the **word** that they think or feel is particularly significant. The scribe records each word.
4. The group discusses what they heard and what it says about the document or text.
5. The group shares the words that emerged and any new insights about the document.
6. The group debriefs the text rendering process.