
Foreword

It was my first year as a district staff developer, and I was so excited—and so unprepared!—to plan my first staff development experience for the school principals. At the conclusion of the evening, I collected evaluation forms from the few who remained until the bitter end; as you might imagine, the ratings were poor. I'll never forget the following comment: "Who hired this person, and what makes her think she knows what would be helpful to principals?"

After working through the shock of the experience, I vowed I would spend the next several years proving I was the right choice. More importantly, I set out to ensure that whatever the district offered in the future for principals would meet their needs and, someday, exceed their expectations. I had a lot to learn.

In the 1980s, many educators across the country, not just in my school system, described their professional development experiences as large-group lectures delivered by so-called experts who someone else had determined would be helpful to them in their classrooms. They resented the fact that, like the principals in my district, they were asked neither what help they needed nor how they would prefer to use their staff development time. Fortunately, there were many educators who recognized that there had to be better ways to plan professional development and some who spoke and wrote specifically on that subject to help us.

In 1990 Dennis Sparks and Susan Loucks-Horsley introduced a new framework for professional development in "Five Models of Teacher Development." They described meaningful, engaging approaches to professional development—including action research, study groups, peer observation, lesson planning with colleagues, and journal writing—that were very different from what most educators were experiencing. And staff developers across the country saw the framework as offering a new way to think about organizing their work.

Then in 1994 Dennis Sparks wrote an article, "A Paradigm Shift in Staff Development," in which he stated, "History teaches us the power of a transforming idea, an alteration in world view so profound that all that

follows is changed forever. Such a paradigm shift is now rapidly transforming the discipline of ‘staff development.’” Sparks described three powerful ideas he viewed as shaping schools in the United States: results-driven education, systems thinking, and constructivism. In response to these shifts, he said that staff development must change as well. In 1997 Dennis Sparks and I coauthored *A New Vision for Staff Development* and presented eleven shifts we observed taking place, offering case studies from the field as our evidence. One of those shifts is the subject of this book: the movement from training conducted away from the job as the primary delivery system for staff development to multiple forms of job-embedded learning.

Educators advocating for job-embedded learning were confident that it would be more helpful than the typical professional development most teachers were still experiencing. Job-embedded learning was based on the assumption that “the most powerful learning is that which occurs in response to challenges currently being faced by the learner and that allows for immediate application, experimentation, and adaptation on the job” (Sparks & Hirsh, 1997, p. 52). While many educators reported that they wanted to move away from the more traditional staff development, there were few examples or reasons to assist organizations interested in making the shift.

Then the standards and accountability era began, and school performance ratings became public. Research confirmed that teachers were the single most important factor influencing student learning, which meant school systems had to find ways to improve the quality of teaching if all students were to successfully achieve new standards. Savvy district and school leaders recognized professional development as the key and also realized that one-size-fits-all workshops would not meet the needs of a diverse teaching staff. These educators knew that the most powerful learning occurs closest to the work of the learner, when learners (in this case, teachers) are able to see an immediate impact from the results of their efforts. And confining professional development to two days a year would not produce the changes that needed to occur in schools and classrooms. They had the answer—job-embedded learning—they just needed a better strategy for using it.

Fortunately, despite initial skepticism, evidence has continued to surface demonstrating the potential for school-based, job-embedded learning. And a number of resources have become available to assist educators in moving from a district-led effort to a school-based enterprise. *Powerful Professional Development: Building Expertise Within the Four Walls of Your School* is a valuable guide to be added at the top of your list of such resources. The authors recognize that when the shift occurs to job-embedded learning, there is an accompanying shift in the responsibility for planning it. Effective job-embedded professional development becomes a shared responsibility among central office, school leaders including teachers, and

external partners. Teacher leaders play a central role in the process; they must serve as advocates, facilitators, coaches, experts, and more. School-based professional development works only when every participant shares the same goals and is willing to be accountable for the results.

There are many aspects to this book that practitioners will appreciate; chief among them is the rare ability of Diane Yendol-Hoppey and Nancy Fichtman Dana to synthesize the work of theorists, trainers, and practitioners alike into organizers that will have meaning for school-based educators. Typically a resource concentrates on theory or practice. Yendol-Hoppey and Dana masterfully balance attention to both with this book that so effectively meets the needs of its audience: school-based leaders who must assume responsibility for professional learning.

I wish I had had a copy of this text when I planned that first professional development experience! Fortunately, many educators now will—and as a result, the experience for their colleagues will be very different and much more positive. As staff development leaders, we have a responsibility to understand the foundations of our field as well as be able to serve the needs of educators with whom we work on a regular basis. *Powerful Professional Development: Building Expertise Within the Four Walls of Your School* helps us achieve both goals. School teams that embrace its message and use its tools will succeed in their efforts to ensure effective job-embedded learning that improves the day-to-day learning and effectiveness of educators and students alike.

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