

# Continuous Professional Development

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## Background

There has been considerable interest and research in the effectiveness of continuing professional development (CPD) for teachers. Implementing large-scale reform requires close attention to the most effective means of improving teaching and student outcomes. Cornerstone has identified professional development and teacher education as the essential ingredient in the drive to improve literacy standards. This unit will identify some key research findings and policy developments that should inform and guide the design of our professional development programs.

## Research

A considerable body of research conducted in a number of different countries establishes six indicators that appear to contribute to effective CPD. This research in continuing teacher professional development is drawn from a paper presented to the British Educational Research Association by Denis Fennessy in August 1998 and a recent publication by Dennis Sparks prepared for the National Development Council in the USA in 2002. Both pieces attempted to analyze the mutual effects of the key indicators that appear to contribute to effective CPD. The information that follows draws on a review of the literature to outline the indicators and key research sources.

The six indicators, in no particular order to the relative importance of the different indicators, appear to be determined by context and the purpose of the development. Work has been done to examine the relationships that exist between the indicators.

## The Six Indicators

1. Practice and feedback
2. Coaching and expert modeling
3. Instructional leadership
4. Whole school and administrative support
5. Collegiality
6. The quality of information presented and demonstrated

–Cornerstone has identified professional development and teacher education as the essential ingredients in the drive to improve literacy standards.

## Indicator 1: Practice and feedback

The opportunity to engage in practice and feedback appears to exist in CPD programs when:

- Participants have opportunities to practice their new skills. (Joyce and Showers, 1988)
- Training and demonstration help participants make connections to their own classrooms. (Sparks 1983)
- Practice helps participants to get a better understanding of implementing new skills. (Hall, et al., 1985)
- Sufficient time is given to practice skills during training. (Joyce and Showers, 1988)
- Feedback helps participants improve their performance of skills and procedures. (Joyce and Showers, 1980)

## Indicator 2: Coaching and expert modeling

During the implementation of Cornerstone, coaching has for some time been identified as a critical element in successful CPD. Five features have been identified in the research as particularly important:

- Teachers are given feedback on their own attempts to use ideas from the CPD. (Joyce and Showers, 1988)
- Feedback is designed to build confidence as participants try new classroom practices. (Fullan and Promfret, 1977)
- Feedback is sensitive to the characteristics of participant's school and class. (Showers and Joyce, 1996)
- Feedback is given by a person who team teaches with the participants when new ideas are tried. (Joyce and Showers, 1995)

## Indicator 3: Instructional leadership

Principals, intent on leading sustainable change, must understand and be able to lead in ways consistent with the research on leadership best practice. In addition, principals must also be able to build greater capacity to do this work by helping others understand and lead in ways consistent with leadership best practice. (Cornerstone module on change)

- The principal works directly with the teachers to solve classroom problems when they implement new practices. (Van der Vegt and Knip, 1988)
- The principal becomes knowledgeable about the ideas promoted by the CPD. (Little, 1989)
- The principal monitors the introduction of ideas from CPD through classroom observation, reviews of planning, and pupil performance. (Hall 1988)
- The principal supports teachers to understand how their CPD fits into a shared goal of whole school development. (Fullan, 1991)

## Indicator 4: Whole school and administrative support

This category includes non-classroom based activity, including management structures and decision-making processes which have been identified as influential in supporting CPD.

- The openness and approachability of the system to teachers wanting to discuss concerns and grievances.

### –Cornerstone

has identified coaching and modeling as a critical element in successful continuous professional development.

If we don't model what we teach, we are teaching something else.

Abraham Maslow

- The confidence teachers have in the system to be supportive when the going gets tough. (Hill, Holmes-Smith and Rowe, 1993)
- Staff (teachers perceived to be from the 'chalk face') are involved and included in the development of CDP priorities for the whole school. (Odden and Odden, 1996)

### **Indicator 5: Collegiality**

In-service education programs are likely to have a stronger impact in schools with higher levels of collegiality. (Ayling, 1989; Little, 1982)

Little, in her study of six schools, identifies the value of collegiality when she concludes that professional development is best achieved when, "Teachers engage in frequent, continuous, and increasingly concrete and precise talk about teaching practice. Teachers plan, design, research, evaluate, and prepare teaching materials together. Teachers teach each other the practice of teaching." (Little, 1982, p.331)

### **Indicator 6: The quality of information presented and demonstrated**

The ways in which new information is presented and demonstrated is clearly identified as critical. The use of technology, training techniques, and strategies is aligned to this element of CPD. However, five underpinning features appear to be particularly important:

1. The need to introduce teachers to new ideas and skills; it must be about more than confirming existing practice. (Joyce and Showers, 1988; 1995)
2. Providing links to relevant research. (Nelson, 1992)
3. Presentation and demonstration is responsive to participants' existing skills. (Fullan, 1991)
4. Input is connected to the experiences of practicing teachers.
5. Presentation includes demonstrations of skills that will help participants see how teaching strategies can be implemented. (Joyce and Showers, 1995; Sparks, 1983)

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# Cornerstone Commitment to Professional Development

Cornerstone is committed to *Ensuring student literacy through professional development* (Cornerstone mission statement). The priority given to continuing professional development (CPD) is appropriate and well founded. The research evidence from schools with high levels of student achievement and teacher engagement demonstrates how they build infrastructures for staff development within their day-to-day arrangements. Such infrastructures involve portions of the school week being devoted to staff development activities such as curriculum development and implementation, discussion of teaching approaches, regular observation sessions, and on-site coaching. The quality of CPD in cornerstone schools is variable. The aim of this unit is to propose a structure and sequence to assist the work of coaches as they plan, deliver, and review the professional development provided in their schools.

## Key Training Components

The research on staff development identifies a number of key training components which, when used in combination, have much greater power than when they are used alone. The major components of training are:

- Presentation of theory or description of skill or strategy.
- Opportunities to engage in the use of new techniques and strategies.
- Modeling or demonstration of skills or models of teaching.
- Practice in simulated and classroom settings.
- Structured and open-ended feedback (provision of information about performance).
- Coaching for application (hands-on, in-classroom assistance with the transfer of skills and strategies to the classroom).

## Location of Staff Development

It is also helpful to distinguish between the locations in which these various forms of staff development are best located – either in the workshop or the workplace. The **workshop**, which is equivalent to the best practice on the traditional staff development course, is where teachers gain *understanding, see demonstrations* of the teaching strategy they may wish to acquire, and have the opportunity to *practice* them in a non-threatening environment. If the aim is to transfer those skills back into the **workplace** (the classroom and school) then merely attending the workshop is insufficient. The research evidence is very clear, that skill acquisition and the ability to transfer vertically to a range of situations requires on-the-job-support. This implies changes to the workplace and the way in which staff development is organized. In particular this means the opportunity for *immediate and sustained practice, collaboration and peer coaching, and studying development and implementation*.

The paradox is that changes to the workplace cannot be achieved without, in most cases, drastic alterations in the ways in which schools are organized. Yet the transfer of teaching skills from CPD sessions to classroom settings will not occur without them. Consequently staff development is perhaps the most crucial of the enabling conditions for school improvement.

## Range of Staff Development Activities

In terms of contemporary CPD practice, the range of staff development activities necessary for effective school improvement are considerable:

- Whole staff development days on teaching and learning and school improvement planning as well as curriculum tours to share the work done in departments or working groups.
- Inter-grade meetings to discuss teaching strategies.
- Workshops run inside the school on teaching strategies by teachers from the school and collaborating schools, together with some external support.
- Partnership teaching and peer coaching.
- The design and execution of collaborative enquiry activities, which are, by their nature, knowledge-generating.

## In-classroom Support or Peer Coaching

The wide range of staff development activities represent a fairly sophisticated infrastructure for sustained professional development. An important element in all of this is the provision of in-classroom support or peer coaching. It is the facilitation of peer coaching that enables teachers to extend their repertoire of teaching skills and to transfer them from different classroom settings to others. In particular, peer coaching is helpful when:

- Curriculum, teaching, and assessment are content of staff development.
- Workshops are designed to develop understanding and skill.
- Faculty-based groups support each other to attain transfer of training.
- Peer coaching teams are relatively small, e.g., 2-4.
- The entire staff as well as principals and other school leaders participate in training and practice.
- Formative study of student learning is embedded in the process.

The argument being made here is for effective school improvement such forms of staff development are essential. The links between effective teaching and the constellation of staff development activities just described make the structural link between the classroom behavior of teachers and enhanced levels of student achievement clear and achievable.

## Staff Development Design

In summary, the design of staff development that leads to enhanced levels of student achievement needs to be based on the following principles:

- Build in time for collective inquiry.
- Collective inquiry creates the structural conditions for school improvement.
- Studying classroom practice increases the focus on student learning.
- Use the research on teaching and learning to refine the teaching learning process.
- By working in small groups the whole school staff can become a nurturing unit.
- Staff Development as inquiry provides synergy and enhanced student effects.

## Support for the Adoption of the Principles

To support the adoption of the principles identified under *Staff Development Design* and to facilitate better access to the considerable resources and materials available from Cornerstone we have developed a four-part cycle.

Stage 1: What is our focus? & Why is this our focus?

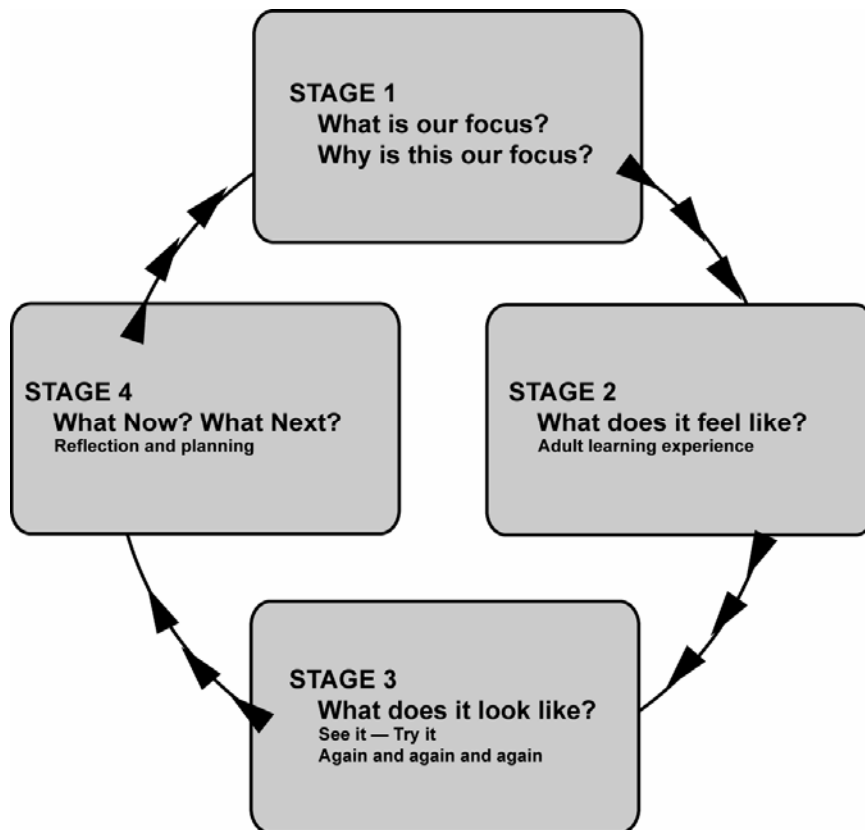
Stage 2: What does it feel like?

Stage 3: What does it look like?

Stage 4: What now? & What next?

The four stages establish a structure for adult learning and will help to ensure that CPD priorities identified in the Literacy Action Plan (LAP) are tackled through a systematic, transparent, and open process.

## The Four Stages of Continuous Professional Development (CPD)



## Designing professional development

In designing a long-term cycle of professional development for teachers, the leadership team needs to first meet and study their Literacy Action Plan (LAP) to decide on the focus of this cycle of professional development. In order to

establish a shared understanding and shared purpose of the instructional focus (or school issue) the leadership team might ask the following questions of itself:

***Identify a goal for professional development***

- What goal (from the LAP) is this professional development tied to?
- How will our work in this area further our work towards the LAP goal?

***Articulating our moral purpose***

- Why is this area of work important?
- How will this support better student learning?

***Identifying success indicators***

- What are our expectations for this cycle of professional development (practice of teaching, student learning, and living language)?
- How will we know this professional development has been effective?

**STAGE 1: What is our focus? & Why is this our focus?**

***Narrative description***

The four-stage process in which the group will engage should be explained in order to make it open and transparent for all involved so that all know what is involved and understand the value of the process. During the first phase/stage of the planning process the whole group, i.e., entire school faculty or grade group, depending on who will be involved in the planning, will convene in order to establish a common core of understanding about an issue/area that needs to be systematically inquired into. The leadership team has already decided on the focus and is now facilitating the group's understanding of:

- What the goal for professional development and theoretical grounding is.
- Why we're doing it and moral purpose.
- What the four-stage process of continuing professional development will look like.

This initial stage is usually quite brief, intended only to set the stage for this cycle of professional development. A description of the skill or teaching strategy, as well as a brief introduction into the theory, are primary goals of this first stage. The reason, or moral purpose, behind this work is initially discussed by the group or expressed by leadership. One or more of these activities might be done after school at a staff meeting. The leadership team's decision about what process to use will be informed by appropriateness to the topic.

***Activities***

Consider which of these activities might most appropriately set the stage for this cycle. Arrive at a shared understanding of the area of focus and why we are doing this by:

- **Discussing** connection of this work to the LAP, how this instructional focus will help to improve children's learning, and how this fits into the improvement of teaching and learning.
- **Survey the group's background knowledge** on this issue or aspect of instruction in order to know your audience and to differentiate and honor all participants.

- Brainstorming list (Example: “When I say the words *guided reading* what comes to mind?” Chart responses or what questions you have for this area of focus.)
- Written response – Participants respond to a prompt that gets them to access prior knowledge. (Example: Write about a time when you used guided reading.)
- Think, pair, share – Individuals think of what the focus means to them, pair up and talk with a partner about it, share what they talked about.
- **Read and discuss** a brief selected online article or journal to give theoretical groundwork.
- **Show a video** to give participants an overview of the area of focus.
- **Presentation** by a speaker or colleague with expertise in this area.

### ***Questions to consider when planning***

- What resources are available to us (our school) to be able to inquire deeper into this issue?
- What resources do we need to acquire?
- What are the implications for different grades and meeting the needs of different children?
- What will the structure of this session look like?
- Who will facilitate this stage?

### ***Next steps***

- What questions did people ask?
- What concerns were raised that should be addressed in the next stages?

## **STAGE 2: What does it feel like?**

### ***Narrative description***

The second stage of this professional development session offers the faculty an opportunity to experience what this type of learning feels like as an adult learner. As adults, we often forget what it feels like to be a learner and to be metacognitive about our learning. After an adult learning experience, you have the opportunity to operate from a place of knowing more about yourself as a reader and writer which can be shared with your students. The materials should be appropriate for adults and the structure should simulate the learning goals/experience that the children will have. The structure of this session should create and sustain an authentic adult learning experience. Facilitators of this stage might choose from one or more of the following suggested activities or develop new ones.

### ***Activities***

(Specific to the teaching skill or strategy you are trying to learn)

- **Reading workshop for adults** – One idea for an adult reading workshop would be to select a poem and use the comprehension strategy of inferring meaning. Structure the workshop as you would if you were teaching your students. The only difference is the text that you select. End by sharing what inferences participants had while reading their text.
- **Writing workshop for adults** – An idea for creating an adult writing workshop is to examine the poem that you used in the reading workshop

more closely. Study the craft that the author uses in creating his/her poem. Have participants create their own poems using the author's craft. End by sharing what participants wrote and how the author influenced their writing.

- **Word Study** – When creating a word study for adults, consider teaching words in a foreign language to simulate the experience your students, especially those who are English Language Learners, might have learning a new word.

### **Questions to consider when planning a learning experience for adults or children**

- What is the role of the facilitator? It is important that participants experience this content, so it is the responsibility of the facilitator to keep them in the experience as a learner. The facilitator or participants should not interrupt the experience by discussing teaching implications. Teaching implications should be left to reflect upon at a designated time at the end.
  - *Facilitator*: engages in negotiation, stimulates and monitors discussion and project work but does not control
  - *Guide*: helps the learner to construct their own meaning by modeling, mediating, explaining when needed, redirecting focus, providing options
  - *Co-learner/co-investigator*: instructor considers self as learner; willing to take risks to explore areas outside his or her expertise; collaborates with other instructors and practicing professionals
- What is the learning context?
  - *Collaborative*: How will the instruction conceptualize the learners as part of learning community? Will the activities be collaborative?
  - *Knowledge-building*: How will the learning experiences be set up to bring multiple perspectives to solve problems such that each perspective contributes to shared understanding for all?
  - *Empathetic*: Is the learning environment and experiences set up for valuing diversity, multiple perspectives, and strengths?
  - *Independent*: (Working alone to learning with others and learning from others) Is this learning going to be independent or learning from others?

### **Questions to reflect on after the learning experience**

- What did you learn about yourself as a reader, writer, or learner in general that will affect your planning and teaching?
- What parts of this experience were uncomfortable or hard for you to learn?
- What do you anticipate will be difficult for your students when teaching this strategy or skill?

## **STAGE 3: What does it look like?**

### ***Narrative description***

The goal of the third stage of this professional development session is a period to observe, rehearse, apply, and refine the teaching process again, again, and again. This stage is where the bulk of the work takes place and the longest period of time. Weeks and months are spent learning how to implement and

internalize this skill or strategy. This is a time where faculty members are motivated and encouraged to take risks in a non-evaluative environment.

### **Activities**

- **Planning** – Before participants set out to begin this stage, have them:
  - Take time to think about ways you can try this skill or strategy out in your practice.
  - Work on ways of incorporating this learning into your lesson planning.
  - Decide ways you will measure the success of this skill or strategy in your students.
  - Sit down with a grade group and plan lessons around this skill or strategy to try together.
- **Modeling** – The coach or teacher models the teaching strategy or skill for a colleague.
- **Descriptive review of student work** – A group reviews a piece of student work guided by questions that elicit literal description. The information gained in this process would be used to inform future instruction of that student as well as future mini-lessons for the rest of the class.
- **Peer coaching** – Teachers pair up and take turns trying out the strategy or skill, giving each other feedback, revising lessons together, and developing lessons.
- **Video** – Watching a video more than once and seeing something different each time, possibly with a different question in mind each time you watch it.
- **Keeping a reflective journal** – To monitor your own comprehension, question, and implementation of the skill or strategy.
- **Visualizing** the hardest part of the lesson and rehearsing it alone or with a colleague.
- **Writing down on a post-it** the three most important things you want to accomplish in this lesson *before* the lesson.
- **Observing children** and take notes about their evidence of success or difficulties as they Compose Meaning in order to drive future instruction (another way of seeing it).

### **Questions to reflect on throughout this stage**

- What have you learned? What do you now know?
- What have you learned about the student learning since implementing this skill or strategy?
- What did you learn from a peer when observing them teach this skill or strategy?
- What did you learn from the feedback you were given from your peer when you taught this skill or strategy?

## **STAGE 4: What Now? What Next?**

### ***Narrative description***

In this final stage of the professional development cycle, the whole group meets in order to come to a corporate agreement about the value of the element of teaching that you've attempted to learn and to process the learning itself. Those facilitating this stage in the process might aim to have participants:

- summarize their impressions of their effectiveness at implementing this element of the teaching;
- reflect on the learning process itself;
- evaluate the value of this instructional focus, and
- decide on their next step as teacher-learners.

### **Activities**

- **Reflect on charts** generated by the group (brainstorm lists, questions we have, etc.) for signs of learning and growth.
  - Small groups study the group's initial lists of questions about the teaching strategy or skill, looking for questions that they feel were answered during this cycle of professional development and questions that still remain to be explored.
  - Generate a new chart, recording the group's learning. For example, you might create a double-sided entry of *What we thought we knew about \_\_\_\_\_, and What we now know about \_\_\_\_\_*.
- **Participants write reflections** about what they've learned or how they learned it (i.e., their own learning process) in response to a prompt and then share within small groups. You might decide to use one of the following discussion questions as a prompt for writing. For example:
  - What elements/components of this teaching strategy or skill do you feel you've learned well? (impressions of effectiveness)
  - How has what you've learned about this strategy/skill enhanced student learning? (impressions of effectiveness)
  - What are you doing *now*, as a teacher, that is helping students reach higher levels of achievement? (value of this instructional focus)
  - Think of one student you know has benefited from your learning about this strategy/skill. Write a short anecdote about the student that illustrates the value of this strategy/skill. (value of this instructional focus)
  - Think about yourself as a learner. What did we do in this cycle of professional development that best helped you learn and implement this teaching strategy or skill? (reflect on the learning process)
- **Facilitate a discussion** by posing some (but not all) of the following questions to the group. Summarize impressions of effectiveness and recall supporting information:
  - How effective were you at learning and incorporating this element of teaching into your repertoire of instructional techniques and strategies?
  - How would you judge the effect of this change in your teaching on student learning? Justify your evaluation with supporting information – vignettes, data, work samples, etc.
  - How do the results that you saw in your teaching and in student learning change (or validate) your beliefs about how children learn?
  - Reflect on the learning process:
    - What did we do during this process of learning that was effective for *you* as a learner that we should aim to replicate as we plan to learn about our next instructional focus?

- What did we do as adult learners that would also be effective in teaching children?
- Value of this instructional focus
  - What value does this element of teaching have in helping children achieve high levels of learning?
  - How will you apply what you learned to other areas of your teaching?
- **Analyze a video** of the strategy/skill in practice  
Using a videotape of someone using the instructional strategy or skill, view pre-selected portions of the video through a specific lens, one that will help you meet your goals for this session (mentioned above).

### ***Next steps***

As a community of learners:

- Commit to refinement and continued improvement.
  - What will we do to continue our growth in this area?
  - In what ways do we need to continue exploring this?
- Prepare for the next focus for learning.