

Professional Development in North Carolina

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It's All About the Process

When Anais Nin, author of *Winter of Artifice* said, "Life is a process of becoming, a combination of states we have to go through," perhaps he was thinking of professional development planning. Nin concluded his thought by adding, "Where people fail is that they wish to elect a state and remain in it. This is a kind of death."

The North Carolina Professional Development Standards address three critical components – content, process, and context. All three

components must be addressed. To ignore one component diminishes the quality of the planned professional development. Selection of appropriate content or the "what" of professional development is crucial as is creating a supportive context. However, in addition to a supportive context, the processes used to design and facilitate learning determine to a great extent the success of that learning.

Processing the Process Standards

Selecting the right process (or strategy or design) is an important consideration for those developing and participating in professional development designed to make a difference.

The process standards provide direction for collecting and analyzing data to make sound decisions. Data from various sources can serve a number of important professional learning purposes – selection of professional development content, planning of the design of professional development, and documentation of change in instructional practice and improvements in student learning.

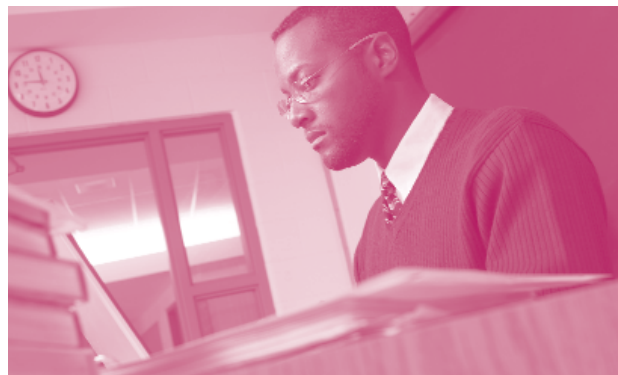
The process standards also provide direction for designing appropriate evaluation of professional development. Well-designed evaluation serves two broad purposes: improving the quality of professional development and determining the effects of professional development in terms of the intended outcomes.¹

As a result of the No Child Left Behind Act, many schools and districts are, for the first time ever, focusing on planning professional development that has a strong research base. The process standards direct educators to become wise consumers of educational research and when

appropriate, to design pilot studies to determine the effectiveness of approaches.

Just as successful teaching requires that teachers be adept at using a variety of research-based instructional strategies, so too does successful professional development require that planners select learning strategies that are appropriate to the intended outcome and other situational factors.² The process standards provide direction for designing professional development using appropriate learning strategies.

Additionally, the process standards provide direction in planning professional learning for adult learning and change and collaborative learning.



The Essential Elements of the Process Standards

Professional Development That Improves the Learning of All Students...	Essential Elements
uses disaggregated student data to determine adult learning priorities, monitor progress, and help sustain continuous improvement.	Data disaggregation Need analysis Continous Improvement
uses multiple sources of information to guide the improvement and demonstrate its impact.	Evaluation design Learner evaluation Student results
prepares educators to apply research to decision making.	Access to research Application of research Action research
uses learning strategies appropriate to the intended goal.	Delivery options Learning strategies Follow-up support
applies knowledge about human learning and change.	Supporting change Adult learning needs Educators'professional goals
provides educators with the knowledge and skills to collaborate.	Collaborative climate Interactivity Group development

High-Quality Professional Development

High-quality professional development does not simply “happen,” and too often we wrap “hope” around professional development – we hope for good sessions, we hope teachers learn something, we hope people are happy, we hope that student achievement is positively impacted.

Consider Deming’s words, “If you can’t describe what you are doing as a process, you don’t know what you are doing.” Energy does not have to be spent on hope when the process standards provide the direction for planning, implementation,

follow-up, and evaluation. That energy can be better spent analyzing data, planning evaluation, looking at research, determining appropriate design, selecting learning strategies, and creating collaborative structures. These are the practices and processes that will yield high-quality professional learning experiences.

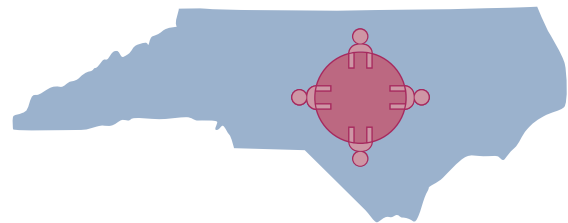
Finally, recall the thoughts of Bel Kaufman. “Education is not a product. It is a process, a never ending one.” So, too, is professional development.

REFERENCES

¹ National Staff Development Council’s standards for staff development: Advancing student learning through staff development. (2001). Ohio: Author.

² Ibid

³ E-Learning for educators NSDC/NICl: Implementing the standards for staff development. (2001). Ohio: Author.



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