

FORUM

Redefining the Role of Professional Development

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In this era of educational reform, teachers are being asked to assume new roles and adopt new practices that emphasize teaching for understanding rather than the routine-driven, standardized teaching that has become accepted practice. These new roles and practices demand a new type of professional development, one that extends beyond the traditional teacher training of the past to incorporate time for reflection, inquiry, and collaboration that derive from the problems and issues of day-to-day practice. In the April 1995 issue of *Phi Delta Kappan*, two articles, by Linda Darling-Hammond and Milbrey McLaughlin, and Ann Lieberman, address changes in professional development policy and practices necessary for implementing educational reform. In each of these articles the authors suggest that teachers be involved as learners in much the same manner as their students and that new structures and institutional arrangements be offered for supporting and providing learning opportunities for teachers.

The authors propose that the learning opportunities that turn students into problem solvers and collaborators should also be given to teachers. Teachers need to have the freedom to explore, re-evaluate, and change the way they work. This type of professional learning involves creating new roles for teachers, such as teacher leader, peer coach, teacher as researcher, and teacher as participant in cooperative learning groups. Teachers also need to become engaged in new tasks, such as journal and proposal writing and developing peer reviews of practice. Peer reviews engage faculty in rethinking the curriculum and analyzing practices, problems, and concerns. These new tasks and roles create occasions for deliberation and problem solving about teaching and learning.

In addition to creating new opportunities for professional learning, teachers can find many opportunities that already exist within the current school routine; however, their potential to serve as avenues for professional development has not been recognized. Examples of such opportunities include:

- operating department meetings as short seminars where teachers examine and discuss materials, curriculum, and student work;
- viewing the assignment of student teachers as a chance for professional interaction and reflection; and
- regarding committee work as an opportunity to critique accepted practice and generate ideas for new and innovative methods.

Another approach is to become involved in learning opportunities outside the school setting. Lieberman (1995) states that networks, collaboratives, coalitions, and partnerships offer teachers professional development opportunities that differ in quality and kind from those that have been available inside the school or in traditional professional development programs. Such opportunities include:

- collaboration between schools and universities to develop curriculum, implement change, or conduct research;
- networking among teachers and schools to share ideas and reflect upon new practices;
- coordination with community-based youth organizations; and
- teacher participation in task forces, study groups, and standard-setting entities involved in curriculum development, evaluating teaching methodology and school practices, or creating standards.

These examples of professional development opportunities cannot be implemented without change in educational policy. Existing policies need to be carefully examined within the context of systemic reform. Darling-Hammond and McLaughlin (1995) offer the following examples of questions for evaluating how well proposed and existing policies relate to this new concept of professional development.

- How does the policy affect teacher isolation? Does it encourage or discourage it?
- Does the policy view the teacher as a learner?
- Does the policy expand professional development opportunities or does it limit them to short-term training?
- Is professional development tied to systemic change?
- Does the policy encourage open communication and problem solving?
- Does the policy involve all staff members or only teachers?
- Does the policy invite restructuring efforts in terms of time and space, or does it rely upon traditional structures?
- Does the policy emphasize learner-focused goals or does it focus on rote skills and memorization?

These and other questions will help teachers and administrators effect changes that view teaching as learning and growth rather than a static, routinized series of behaviors.

References

Darling-Hammond, L., and McLaughlin, M. (1995, April). "Policies that support professional development in an era of reform." *Phi Delta Kappan*, pp. 597-604.

Lieberman, A. (1995, April). "Practices that support teacher development." *Phi Delta Kappan*, pp. 591-596.