

**Effective Professional Development of Teachers:
A Guide to Actualizing Inclusive Schooling**

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ABSTRACT

This article examines how inclusive education activities can be facilitated through coaching as a means of professional development. A review of literature on effective professional development practices is discussed, and a recent study focused on individualized peer coaching is examined.

Introduction

Creating an inclusive education for students with and without disabilities poses a specific challenge to the existing faculty who earned their teaching credentials in the days of segregated educational environment of special education and general education. The purpose of this article is to provide a review of the professional development literature and the beginning literature on inclusive educational practices so that in-service development of teachers can be more effective. An example of a recent study is provided.

Effective Professional Development

Teacher attitudes towards inclusion influence the sustainability of such practices in schools (Hammond & Ingalls, 2003; Wilkins & Nietfeld, 2004). Transitioning to inclusion requires teachers, administrators, and specialized staff to develop the necessary attitudes and skills to implement and sustain such practices (Frattura & Capper, 2006; McLeskey & Waldron, 2002; Sari, 2007; Stanovich & Jordan, 2002). The term professional development has varied definitions. Showers, Joyce, and Bennett (1987) stated that the purpose of professional development is to increase levels of knowledge to sustain and support new practice until it becomes embedded into the daily practice. The term professional development is referred to as the cornerstone for reform (Fishman, Marx, Best, & Tal, 2003). Traditionally, professional development is delivered through the *sit and get* approach (McLeskey & Waldron, 2002). The sit and get professional development relies on an *expert* in the field to model and disseminate various information to the audience (Desimone, 2009; McLeskey & Waldron, 2002). Generally, it is a onetime in-service where participants listen to the *cutting edge* information. This method for professional development relies solely on the participants to take their new knowledge and implement the information individually (McLeskey & Waldron, 2002). Professional development in the form of a onetime event may not sustain or penetrate into the system. With the sit and get traditional approach to professional development, teachers change their practices individually, causing a varied approach that often does not have a ripple effect on the school structure itself.

Best Practices in Professional Development

There is a paucity of research on what constitutes effective and meaningful professional development. Bull and Buechler (1997) and Desimone (2009) have outlined effective professional development qualities. These qualities include: (a) be individualized and school based, (b) utilizes coaching and other follow up procedures, (c) engages in collaboration, and (d) embeds practices into the daily lives of teachers.

School based Professional Development. Effective professional development enables teachers to actively initiate and carry out research in their own schools and classrooms (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999). According to Desimone (2009), the most powerful teacher learning and application occur inside individual teacher's classrooms

through practice and self-reflection. Ongoing site visits to support inclusive schools and classrooms can provide teachers with a picture of inclusion (Roach, 1996). School based professional development allows for specific problem solving sessions in which teachers are able to work together to identify the needed resources and strategies to meet the needs of all the students in the classroom (Roach, 1996). Problem solving sessions focus specifically on the needs of each teacher and staff member and provide ongoing support and training.

Coaching and Follow-up Procedures. An essential element to professional development involves observations, peer support, and ongoing feedback to empower teachers to have a stronger belief and confidence in their teaching practices (Kennedy & Shiel, 2010). Peer coaching is defined as the assistance of one teacher to another in the development and furthering of teaching skills, strategies, and techniques (Denton & Hasbrouck, 2009; Kennedy & Shiel, 2010; Miller, Harris, & Watanabe, 1991). Peer coaching provides a safe environment for teachers to experiment with new strategies and skills and thoughtfully reflect and refine their capabilities (Kohler, Good, Crilley, & Shearer, 2001). Informal observations by a facilitator or coach allow teachers to collaborate and brainstorm ideas to strengthen their ability to meet the diverse needs of all students (Kennedy & Shiel, 2010; Villa, et al., 1996; 2013). Tschannen-Moran and McMaster (2009) indicated that follow-up coaching conversations enable teachers to process content and help highlight the teacher's skill level and implementation.

Collaborative Information. Implementing inclusion is an intensive process. Cooperative planning is a component of professional development that allows for educators to meet regularly, plan units, lessons, and differentiate and delineate roles and responsibilities necessary to facilitate inclusion. According to Fullan (2007), teachers are the most effective facilitators of change. Collaboration between general and special education teachers provides the framework for changing the way we meet the needs of all students. According to Bauvens and Hourcade (1996), consistent and collaborative planning occurs every week to every two weeks. These frequent meetings lead to an open and collaborative atmosphere where teachers can feel safe to share their concerns and brainstorm freely with their colleague which leads to more successful practice (Kennedy & Shiel, 2010; Villa, et al., 1996).

Embedding Practices into the Daily Lives of Teachers. Successful inclusion does not happen instantaneously. It is an educational process that requires ongoing questions, interrogating personal assumptions, and genuine reflection. Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1999) stated that collecting and analyzing *data* of daily life in schools is critical to professional development. Data collection can take various forms from journaling to problem solving sessions with colleagues; however, the importance of analyzing the data is to examine the change process throughout the various stages of implementation.

According to Bull and Buechler (1997), teachers have reported that professional development designed specifically to their needs in creating an inclusive classroom is most meaningful because the strategies can be implemented immediately (Roach, 1995).

This model is not often utilized because it is a slow, time consuming process that is based upon the needs of each individual school (Roach, 1995). Although the collaborative approach to professional development requires more time and effort, it has an effective change in teacher practices and student outcomes (Bull & Buechler, 1997; Kennedy & Shiel, 2010; Sprinthall et al., 1996). There is a critical need for a collaborative approach to professional development.

Teacher attitudes towards inclusive practices have been studied and researched for the several decades, yet the implementation of effective professional development has not been utilized. Collaboration and co-teaching are a key component to professional development.

Collaboration and Co-Teaching

Collaboration and co-teaching blur the traditional boundaries of general and special education (Friend, et al., 2010; Villa, Thousand, & Nevin, 2013). Although multiple barriers have been identified to inhibit collaboration, co-teaching is a vehicle for creating inclusive schools (Villa, et. al., 2013). According to Friend, et al. (2010), designing, implementing, and evaluating collaborative inclusive models preserve the civil rights of all students including students with disabilities. The challenge for schools and districts is to provide ongoing meaningful support to teachers in implementing a collaborative teaching model. Friend, et al. (2010) found that professional development can lead to successful and sustainable inclusion. As the field of special education continues to evolve and include students with disabilities in general education, the demands and accountability for student success has also increased. Effective collaboration among professionals may yield positive changes in the deep structure, changes in teacher attitudes, as well as improvements in the academic and social progress for all students (Villa, et. al., 1996).

According to Stover, Kissel, Haagm, and Shoniker (2011), for meaningful change to occur, teachers must have a voice in their own learning. Furthermore, at the core of professional development is a trusting relationship (Stover, et al., 2011). Coaching also needs to be differentiated in order for the content to be relevant to the needs and interests of their teachers. Every teacher brings to their classroom their own teaching style, experience and knowledge. Consequently, a one size fits all approach to professional development is not applicable to individual needs and learning nor does it lead to sustainable systemic change (Stover, et al., 2011).

Conceptual Framework for Coaching. Desimone (2009) outlined critical components for effective professional development related to coaching. Figure 1 delineates the conceptual framework and flow for coaching. The first critical component of effective professional development centers on content and active learning for teachers (Desimone, 2009). Engaging in active learning can take many forms but is typically characterized by interactive feedback, collaborative discussions, and problem solving sessions. These collaborative problem solving sessions generally consist of weekly meetings between three to five educators to develop and refine their teaching strategies and newly obtained skills (Miller et. al, 1991). A second critical component to

professional development entails collective participation in which teachers are able to collaborate with teachers from the same school and grade level (Desimone, 2009). Figure 1 describes the various coaching models that can be implemented in classrooms to change instruction and improve student learning.

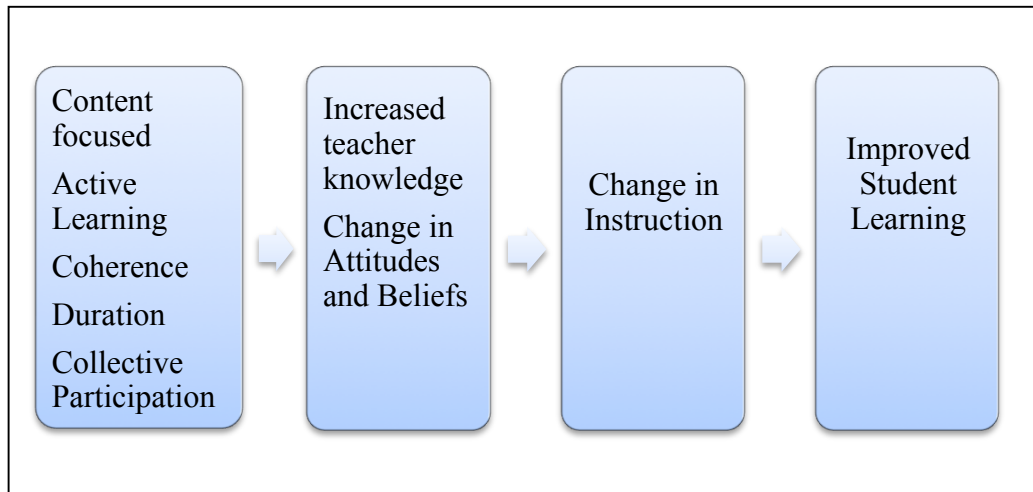


Figure 1. Coaching Conceptual Framework (Desimone, 2009)

Coaching models. The American Institute for Research (2004) published an overview of effective coaching models for increased student achievement and teacher development (see Table 2). Coaching models center on fostering an environment of collaboration and problem solving. Kohler et al., (2001) cited that as teachers participate in peer coaching, an environment of trust, support, and opportunities for change increase. The three models discussed in Table 1 include: (a) student-focused coaching, and (b) collaborative problem solving coaching. These three types of coaching models are a system of support for teachers to increase and improve student learning and achievement.

Table 1
Coaching Models

Model	Description
Student-focused coaching	Student focused coaching allows the coach to support the work of teachers as the facilitator while systematically addressing individual concerns (Denton & Hasbrouck, 2009; Kohler, et. al., 2001). Student focused coaching helps teachers problem solve academic and behavioral concerns by working with teachers to identify the root of the problem and develop a plan of action and assessment (Denton & Hasbrouck, 2009; Miller, 1991).
Collaborative problem solving	Collaborative problem solving coaches are

coaching	centered on a partnership with one or more teachers regularly meeting to addressing curriculum, student, progress, and other issues that educators face on a daily basis (Denton & Hasbrouck, 2009; Miller, et. al., 1991). The overall goal of problem solving coaching is to improve student achievement and increase instructional strategies for student success (Denton & Hasbrouck, 2009).
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Examination of Similar Research Studies

Over the past twenty years, there has been an increase in research studies regarding teacher attitudes and the need for professional development (Burstein, et al, 2004; Hammond & Ingalls, 2003; Kennedy & Shiel, 2010; Sari, 2007; Tschannen-Moran & McMaster, 2009; Wilkins & Nietfeld, 2004). Shown on the next pages, Table 2 synthesizes research in the area of professional development and coaching models that has been conducted over the past twenty years. Although, the past studies have not specifically addressed inclusive practices, the studies have added to the body of literature indicating the need for peer coaching in sustaining teaching practices versus the traditional *sit and get* professional development (Lombardi & Hunka, 2001; Latz, Neumeister, Adams & Pierce, 2009; McLeskey & Waldron, 2002; Sarason, 1995; Tschannen-Moran & McMaster, 2009). Studies described in Table 2, both qualitative and quantitative in nature, have indicated the benefits of peer coaching and the relationship between teacher attitudes. Few studies were located in the literature on the effects of a coaching model on teacher attitudes towards students with disabilities and the increase in confidence and ability levels to carry out inclusive practices.

Research conducted by Kohler et al. (2001) and Domitrovich et al. (2009), indicated the need to develop the coaching model to enable teachers to refine and reflect sustainable strategies to support diverse learners. Similarly, in a study conducted by Sari (2007), teachers increased their knowledge through professional development regarding deafness, and as a result, their attitudes towards students with hearing impairments increased. Additionally, Latz et al. (2009), indicated that peer coaching for teachers helped to sustain their skills for differentiated instruction for gifted and talented students.