Toward the Responsive Teaching of Middle and High School Teachers: Recommendations for Strategic Professional Development Design

We recognize that teachers will need a great deal of preparation for the kind of responsive teaching we envision, not least of which will be deep academic preparation in their disciplines. We offer these strategic designs for inquiry-based professional development as one contribution to the capacity building that is needed for high-quality teaching in our nation's schools. Based on our experience, and drawing on the work of others who have contributed to our way of working, we can highlight some principles to guide the development of effective teacher professional development in reading. In addition to the qualities of effective professional development already recognized by the field—that it engages teachers as learners over time, offers teachers the resources necessary to gain skill and knowledge, creates opportunities for teachers to reflect on their teaching and their students' learning, and recognizes (as well as builds) teachers' expertise—we offer the following. Professional development that effectively builds teachers' capacity to teach reading in response to student thinking does the following:

1. Takes teachers' convictions (about themselves, the domain of reading, and students) and perceived needs (for quick solutions) as a starting point for inquiry
2. Draws on teachers' expertise and prior experiences to build new understandings and practices
3. Engages teachers strategically in new inquiry experiences from which they can draw in the dynamic of teaching
4. Engages teachers in rigorous reading and metacognitive conversations about reading within and across academic disciplines
5. Focuses teachers' attention on particular ways of thinking, reading, and interpreting student performance that contribute to high-quality, responsive teaching
6. Provides teachers with frequent practice in thinking in these new ways through multiple inquiry activities, all designed to build these important capacities

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7. Provides teachers with practice in carrying out inquiry routines and instructional approaches with complex reading—that is, experience in doing the very things we promote for teaching students to become engaged and strategic readers
8. Offers teachers multiple ways to encounter the domain of subject area literacy, thereby helping them to build flexible and generative knowledge of strategic teaching and reading
9. Offers many points of connection to teachers' own classrooms through relevant and various classroom and student examples, including those from teachers' own experiences
10. Acknowledges teachers as decision makers and builds the capacity for professional judgment through cycles of experiential learning, classroom innovation, and inquiry
11. Models precisely those rich, collaborative, metacognitive, respectful, and reflective ways of learning that we envision for our nation's youth

There is increasing evidence that teacher quality matters for student learning and achievement (Darling-Hammond, 2000; Laczko-Kerr & Berliner, 2002). Our studies of inquiry-based professional development for middle and high school subject area teachers demonstrate that with the support of well-designed inquiry activities, teachers are able to make profound changes in their teaching practice. These changes in turn provide powerful new learning opportunities to students that make a difference in student achievement. Through this kind of generative professional development, teachers learn to closely and critically read both their curriculum materials and their students' performances to inform their professional judgment and instructional actions. They develop the means by which to weigh competing ideas about literacy and classroom methodologies and move beyond the eddying currents of debate and mandate to take warranted action in the classroom. They become designers as well as implementers, informed professionals rather than mere conduits for other people's designs and agendas. The ability to educate all children to their highest potential rests on this kind of professionalism. This, rather than training teachers to faithfully reproduce lessons and teaching strategies in the classroom, holds the promise to build the kind of world-class, responsive, and professional teaching force that we so badly need in our nation's schools.

Pages excerpted from Chapter 8, "Building Capacity for the Responsive Teaching of Reading in the Academic Disciplines: Strategic Inquiry Designs for Middle and High School Teachers' Professional Development" by Cynthia L. Greenleaf & Ruth Schoenbach