

Evaluating the Success of a Professional Development System for Improving P-12 Learning and Higher-Order Instructional Dispositions

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No matter how highly qualified teachers are upon entering the classroom, the professional expectation is they continue to refine practice and become more distinguished in their ability to create learning environments and nurture student learning. PDSs are challenged to substantiate partnerships make a difference in preparing and sustaining highly qualified educators impacting learning.

Program Highlights

The UNCW Watson School of Education's Professional Development System (PDS) is a 17-year comprehensive university-public school partnership with over 1400 partners in 114 schools that align efforts and resources for the improvement of education in southeastern North Carolina. The partnership provides extensive collaboration with 11 districts and one charter school and early college for placement in field experiences and internship, reciprocal professional development, partnering in grants, and other educational initiatives while helping redesign teacher education programs.

At UNCW's PDS partnership, a learning-centered model provides environments for reflection and deep learning among candidates, faculty, and school partners developing and sustaining key *higher-order instructional dispositions* for increasing teacher effectiveness. Structures for self-assessment of teaching identify/assess desired results, determine student learning evidence, and engage partners in collective deliberation transforming instructional practices. (Wetherill & Calhoun, 2006).

Candidates are paired with partnership teachers trained in this model and committed to refining their practice. The systematic structure utilizes 8-10 *reflective coaching cycles* (pre-conference/data collection/post-conference) focused on making informed instructional decisions. Partner teachers facilitate, placing strong emphasis on candidate's ability to make decisions using data. The intent is for analytical thinking about pupil performance to become an automatic self-questioning script that candidates practice and see modeled by teachers/supervisors. It focuses on "mental rehearsal" (thinking out loud) using cognitive processes to develop strategies, learning activities, and assessment (Costa & Garmston, 2002).

Evaluating Success

A comprehensive study was undertaken with *three primary components* yielding triangulated data on the impact of the model explicitly connecting teaching to student learning:

- *A partnership teacher evaluation component*
- *An intern work-sampling assessment component*
- *A supervisor/partnership teacher evaluation component*

The *partnership teacher evaluation* had two phases. *Phase I* collected survey data from 100 teachers in 29 schools. Teachers identified six PDS model features having significant impact on student learning. These features are, using:

- *inquiry strategies*
- *reflective coaching*
- *individualized instruction meeting diverse needs*
- *pre-post assessment designing/evaluating instruction*
- *collaborative communication structures*
- *reflective decision-making improving understanding/application of best practices*

Using these data, *Phase II* measured teacher perceptions on the degree of impact these six features had on ability to improve learning. Data from 93 teachers in 26 schools rated all six features as having strong/very strong impact.

A second source of data used *interns' pre/post assessment of student knowledge* using NCLB subgroups to document their impact on student learning. Data analyzed/aggregated over three years strongly supported their ability to improve student learning across all subgroups.

A third component utilizing *supervisor/partnership teacher evaluations* rated interns' performance in designing, implementing/assessing instruction, and making responsive decisions related to their impact on student learning. Data revealed that interns scored at/or above 96% on all indicators.

These evaluation components strongly support this PDS model is systemic, sustainable, and replicable. The intentional self-assessing structures engaging all partners hold the key to improving teaching and student learning. As one partner stated:

The learning-centered model is a way to help teacher candidates reach their potential in teaching and also help me reach mine. Not only does it allow for the one who is being mentored to grow, but it allows for the one who is doing the mentoring to grow as well.

References

Costa, A., & Garmston, R. (2002). *Cognitive Coaching: A Foundation for Renaissance Schools Second Edition*. Norwood, MA: Christopher-Gordon.

Wetherill, K. & Calhoun, D. (October, 2006) *Cognitive Coaching: A Supervision Framework that Builds Capacity for Improving Learning and Teacher Higher-Order Instructional Dispositions*. Paper presentation to COPIS Annual Meeting, Gainesville, Florida.