



PROBLEMS OF PRACTICE (POP) PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

~~—one size fits all—~~
~~—sit and get—~~
~~—disconnected from classroom reality—~~

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INTRODUCTION

TRUE STORY

LESSONS LEARNED FROM OUR QUEST TO DESIGN
PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT THAT TEACHERS DON'T HATE &
THAT ACTUALLY MAKES A DIFFERENCE FOR STUDENTS

I was charged with planning professional development for a turnaround middle school and quickly learned that traditional PD methods were not going to lead us to the desired results.



“Despite these efforts, most teachers do not appear to improve substantially from year to year—even though many have not yet mastered critical skills.”

- *The Mirage: Confronting the hard truth about our quest for teacher development* (TNTP, 2015)

Our way of doing professional development was like pouring water into a bucket full of holes. We didn't just need high quality PD; we needed a better PD system. Our redesign resulted in the **Problems of Practice** or **POP PD model**. Here's how it works.

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2. RETHINKING USE OF PD TIME
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SIGNS THAT YOUR PD ISN'T WORKING AS WELL AS IT COULD BE

Your school has several outstanding teachers, but other teachers in the building are unaware of what amazing things they're doing in the classroom. They aren't able to see or learn from each other.

A packet of best practices is shared during the faculty meeting, and that packet goes into a binder on a shelf never to be seen again.

Teachers can grade papers during PD sessions without detriment to their comprehension or participation.

Every year starts from scratch. Teachers new to the school community don't have access to the PD materials and lessons learned from the previous years.

If a faculty member misses a professional development meeting, there's no systematic way for him to find out what he missed. And, the fact that he missed it has little impact.

When teachers try a new instructional practice in their classroom, they infrequently receive specific and timely feedback to support reflection and refinement.

WHERE DO WE HAVE ROOM TO GROW?

IF WE FOCUS PROFESSIONAL LEARNING ON THIS,
WILL IT HAVE A SIGNIFICANT IMPACT ON STUDENT LEARNING?

Finding focus is an essential ingredient for working smarter not harder. If you're designing professional development for a school, curriculum office, grade level, or content area department, ask two questions: 1) Where do we have room to grow? 2) If we focus professional learning on this, will it have a significant impact on student learning?

In an attempt to personalize PD, some schools have created systems where any educator can focus on anything. This is like a group of arrows all going in different directions. In order to move a school forward as a team, establish a focus and then personalize professional learning by considering:

- Levels of teacher expertise.
- Content area(s).
- Background knowledge.
- Grade levels.
- Particular areas of interest (e.g., technology, working with primary sources, community engagement).



“Unfortunately, in schools all across America we have settled for working in groups as opposed to truly creating collaborative teams.”

- Rick DuFour on Groups vs. Teams
(Solution Tree, 2009)

Thinking about our middle school's professional development as one journey with differentiated paths, our problems of practice focused on literacy across the content areas, and we identified several strategies to implement in all classrooms. We also recognized, however, that a strategy like List-Group-Label would look different in a science classroom versus a language arts classroom. Building on the expertise of our teacher leaders, we created focused PD videos that content area teams would use to collaboratively plan implementation. While we were all focused on literacy, teachers could select the strategy and related video that corresponded with their curriculum, content area, and grade level.

List Group Label Predict

Author: Nicole

Synthesize new learning

Predictions	Support (Cite Evidence FOR)	Refute (Cite Evidence AGAINST)
Living things are connected in a web.		
Photosynthesis is like recycling.		
Some living things decompose and disappear.		

Connect academic vocabulary

List

Group

Label

Predict

3:10

3:30

LESSONCAST TRANSCRIPT

ATTACHMENTS

GRADES & KEY SKILLS

STANDARDS

ASSESSMENTS

COMMENTS

HEAR teachers explain specific instructional practices.

SEE classroom examples.

DOWNLOAD handouts and resources.

This teacher PD video was created by teachers using Lessoncast technology, which makes it easy to produce multiple versions and change individual video segments to meet the needs of different content areas and grade levels. Click [here](#) to view the List-Group-Label PD video modeled with science content.

This approach, focusing on a problem of practice, works for a range of topics. We've worked with schools focused on core teaching practices, personalized learning, integrating technology, and cultural proficiency. Once the focus is identified, create multiple pathways that support the needs of individuals and teams of teachers.

Buyer, beware! In finding focus, do not over-rely on an off-the-shelf program to deliver dramatic results. Comprehensive school reform programs lead to sustainable improvement in teacher and student learning only when adaptation takes place.

"The highest level of implementation of an innovation is defined by adaptation." (Marzano et al., *Doing the Right Work*, p. 81)

HOW CAN WE SPEND THE BULK OF OUR PD TIME ON *PRACTICE* INSTEAD OF *COMPLIANCE*?

HOW CAN TECHNOLOGY HELP US TO ELIMINATE WASTED TIME?

We never seem to have enough time, but the truth is that significant amounts of time are devoted to professional development. Has it been time well spent?

“

“After a little over a decade in the classroom, the average teacher in the districts we studied would have spent the equivalent of more than an entire school year on professional development.”

- *The Mirage* (TNTP, 2015)

Is the majority of your school’s professional development time spent listening to lecture? Have you experienced or been the culprit of near-death by PowerPoint? Are most faculty gathering times filled with administrivia? Are teachers grading papers during the PD meetings? Then some may have decided that this is not a good use of their time. Are your professional learning sessions collaborative, requiring active participation to tackle real problems of practice?

Time is precious. So when designing school PD, we decided that the majority of our face-to-face PD time would be spent co-planning, collaborating, and creating – instead of sitting and getting. The POP PD model applies the following format to collaborative planning time:

POP PD Module format:

- 1.WATCH (2-5 min)
- 2.PLAN (1 planning period)
- 3.PRACTICE (1 class)
- 4.REFLECT (≈1 hour)
- 5.SHARE (1 click)

Grade-level, content area teams met for one collaborative planning period every Wednesday. During that time, teachers watched a teacher-created video and planned an upcoming lesson that would put that focus practice into effect. Then the following Wednesday, teachers reflected on implementation and discussed ways to refine classroom practice. This process was facilitated by a key role, the coach.

WHO ARE YOUR INTERNAL COACHES AND HOW CAN YOU BUILD THEIR CAPACITY?

To get over the hump of *listening* and *learning* about a best practice to *doing* and *improving* upon that practice, the coach plays a pivotal role. When properly equipped, internal coaches (department chairs, mentor teachers, peer coaches) draw out teacher expertise in others. In our POP PD model, instructional coaches co-planned with teachers, observed implementation, and exchanged feedback about what worked and didn't work.

“

“I never cease to be amazed at the power of the coaching process to draw out the skills or talent that was previously hidden within an individual, and which invariably finds a way to solve a problem previously thought unsolvable.”

- John Russell

As a community, it's important to provide tools for developing coaching capacity rather than relying on superstar coaches. The superhero solution has a short lifespan in school improvement. Your school's amazing mentor teacher this year might be another school's assistant principal next year. Community coaching tools provide systematic support for this key role.

Coaching tools may include PD rubrics and indicators; lookfors – like the samples pictured to the right; or coaching prompts shown on the following page, excerpted from one of the Lessoncast coaching guides.

Reading Strategies	
Teacher Activities	Student Activities
Vocabulary	
🍏 Did the teacher utilize a <i>living</i> word wall during daily instruction?	🍏 Were students able to employ vocabulary strategies to decipher unfamiliar, higher-level words?
Student Engagement	
🍏 Did the teacher use information gleaned from student responses to adapt instruction and facilitate understanding?	🍏 Were all students able to process/engage with the content at a 10:2 minimum ratio (listening to actively participating)?
Rigorous Instruction	

As part of the literacy across the content areas initiative, this list of Reading Strategies Lookfors was given to all administrators, instructional coaches, and teachers.

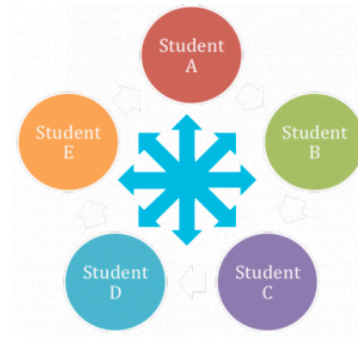
Key Concepts

Opportunities for student-to-student interactions | Structures for student collaboration | Purposeful and Flexible Student Groups
Evidence-based discussions | Student academic talk | Data-informed coaching

OPPORTUNITIES FOR STUDENT-TO-STUDENT INTERACTIONS

Common Challenges

An essential component to this module is helping teachers recognize the difference between student *output* versus *interaction*. When students share responses to a prompt, this is called output. Think-pair-share and Round Robin structures often facilitate output, which is a precursor to interaction. Interaction requires two or more students to work together to co-construct meaning. For example, students may need to examine the causes of an historic event and rank the causes in order of importance. Structures that facilitate interaction require that students challenge each other (respectfully), encourage elaboration, clarify information, and build on each others' ideas. **Simply having students share responses does not equal interaction.**



Coaching Prompts

- What opportunities for student-to-student interactions have been observed during instruction? How many? When did they occur during the lesson? Were there other opportunities to incorporate student interactions?
- How are the student-to-student interactions facilitating the learning objective?
- Are the instructional activities facilitating student *outputs* or student *interactions*?
- If the instructional activities are primarily facilitating outputs instead of interactions, how can the teacher facilitation shift to allow students to co-construct meaning, encourage elaboration, clarify understanding, and build on ideas?

This excerpt from a Lessoncast Coaching Guide highlights common coaching challenges and provides sample coaching prompts to facilitate collaborative planning and feedback.

“

“A good coach will make his players see what they can be rather than what they are.”

- Ara Parasheghian

HOW DO WE KNOW IF OUR CHANGE IN PRACTICE IS WORKING? WHAT SHOULD WE DO DIFFERENTLY NEXT TIME?

As teachers focus on a problem of practice and implement new professional learning in the classroom, feedback is the fuel to fight the common PD challenge of “marching in place.” In most school settings, professional growth appears to plateau after five years, and this happens prior to mastering key teaching skills.



“School systems are not helping teachers understand how to improve – or even that they have room to improve at all.” - *The Mirage* (TNP, 2015)

Feedback and reflection drive continuous improvement. Coaches provide feedback during the planning process and post implementation. As teachers reflect and, in some cases, create digital portfolios showcasing new professional learning, targeted rubrics (pictured below) help to provide specific feedback focused on the problem of practice.

T6 Facilitate student-to-student interaction and academic talk
Author:

SHOW INDICATORS

Planning Student-Centered Instruction

Authentic Connections Inquiry

Student-to-Student Interactions

0:02 5:03

RATE LESSONCAST
1 of 6
NEXT

Student Interactions (0-4 pts)
Student Interactions I
Opportunities for student-to-student interaction.

☐ **Highly Effective (4 pts)**
Teacher provides multiple opportunities for student-to-student interaction and students lead academic discussions with minimal teacher support.

☒ **Effective (3 pts)**
Teacher provides multiple opportunities for student-to-student interaction.

☐ **Developing (2 pts)**
Teacher provides few opportunities for student-to-student interaction.

☐ **Ineffective (1 pts)**
Teacher provides no opportunities for student-to-student interaction.

Add Comments

LESSONCAST TRANSCRIPT ASSIGNMENT ATTACHMENTS GRADES & KEY SKILLS STANDARDS ASSESSMENTS COMMENTS

REFINING WITH REFLECTION

Reflection and feedback also help to continuously improve the community's PD resources. For example, as an assistant principal, I frequently observed classroom implementation in order to give feedback. On a few occasions during the observation, I realized that our PD video failed to mention a key consideration. The feedback and reflection process helped us to revise the PD videos as we learned more about effective implementation.

Side Note: This is where technology makes a huge difference. With our original screencast PD videos, it was painful to make an update to a portion of the video, and we often had to re-record the whole thing. Now with the Lessoncast web application, we are able to easily change small segments and edit audio and video separately, which helps when we are continually learning more about what works.

This step in the model also helps teachers, coaches, and school leaders gauge whether or not they are working on the right problems of practice. During our focus on literacy across the content areas, we examined student results and realized that we needed to adjust priorities. We needed to focus more on vocabulary strategies in order for some of our students to successfully apply other comprehension strategies. If we had not taken time to pause, reflect, and measure progress, we would have burnt ourselves out working hard on the wrong things.



“Putting the portfolio together was an opportunity to reflect on the evidence from my lesson and analyze the student data related to the lesson. I felt like I was more focused on the whole lesson planning process as well as the impact it had on students. I would love to participate in this type of professional development again because I enjoy self-paced learning and reflection.”

- Teacher, Baltimore City Schools

Through reflection conversations, teachers shared comments like, “Now that I feel comfortable with some of these student engagement strategies, I’d really like to learn more about Universal Design for Learning. Can we take a look at that?” How often do you hear teachers asking for more PD? With the POP PD model, *more* professional learning is the natural next step.

Impact can be Measured

HOW CAN WE SHARE TEACHER EXPERTISE AND PASS ON OUR COLLECTIVE PROFESSIONAL LEARNING?

One of my greatest frustrations with traditional PD was that we would conduct workshops, bring in speakers, set high expectations; then the following year, we would start all over from scratch. I started to think about how we might build our own bank (designed to make deposits and withdrawals) of professional learning resources with the voices of our teachers focused on the needs of our students. What if we had a platform where our teachers captured their expertise and learned from one another? And when we travel to off-site workshops or bring in outside speakers, how do we articulate how that practice will work in our classrooms with our schedule and available resources? How can this bank continue to grow and evolve over time?

Below is a screenshot of the bank of PD video resources that we developed through our focus on literacy across content areas. Click [here](#) to view.

Lessoncast Gallery

Area: Grade: Groups: rseries Search Reset

List Group Label Predict	Comparing Academic Vocabulary	Visualizing	Middle School Reading Initiative Presentation	Rigor for Real Classroom Instruction	Drawing Conclusions
Close Reading for Author's Style	Summarizing: Getting to the point	Flip It Word Parts	CSSR: Understanding Unfamiliar Words	Close Reading Jigsaw	Word Wall – Secondary Edition
Making Connections: Beyond a Reading Strategy	Synthesis: Quest for New Understanding	Asking and Answering Questions for Reading Comprehension	Making Inferences to Read Between the Lines	Close Reading for Imagery	Close Reading Vocabulary

Aside from making adequate yearly progress (AYP) that year, we changed the culture and climate around professional learning. Teachers identified areas of need, felt supported in implementing new practices, contributed to the school community, and felt valued for their expertise. We built the Lessoncast technology so that others could apply the model, tools, and lessons learned to support their school's shared journey with differentiated paths.

BY BUILDING A BANK, COMMUNITIES REACH HIGHER LEVELS OF PROFESSIONAL LEARNING

LEAD

Build a bank of learning artifacts to share and build upon. Design better professional learning experiences with your school community.

CREATE

Use a guiding framework to concretely and concisely explain an instructional idea. Demonstrate mastery of new practices.

Learners retain 90% when teaching someone else what they have learned.

ADAPT

Take an existing lessoncast and tailor it to meet the specific needs of a learning community. Differentiate PD resources for teachers' expertise and experience. Refine and update implementation as new insights are learned about what works to improve student learning.

APPLY

Use a lessoncast as a concrete resource to support classroom implementation.

Learners retain 75% when applying new learning.

DISCUSS

Focus professional learning and collaboration. Develop a shared understanding of effective instruction.

Learners retain 50% when engaged in critical analysis and discussion.

WATCH

Access new instructional ideas on-demand in an easy-to-digest, audio-visual format.

Learners retain 30% when watching a model demonstration.

SIGN UP FOR A FREE CONSULTATION

Looking for starter PD resources that your school community can customize and adapt?

Sign up for a free consultation, and we'll help you think through how the POP PD model can work for your school.

SIGN UP

ABOUT LESSONCAST

Lessoncast is a customizable teacher learning platform designed to:

- Capture and spread teacher expertise.
- Provide differentiated professional learning experiences with built-in coaching support.
- Build a bank of on-demand resources tailored for a specific learning community.

Our POP PD engine provides starter modules and templates to help educators design professional learning experiences that target specific instructional practices and result in measureable impact. To request a free trial, contact info@lessoncast.com.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Nicole (@MsTuckerSmith) is CEO of Lessoncast.

Currently residing in Baltimore, Maryland, she's been an assistant principal, coordinator of systemwide PD, consultant, adjunct professor, supervisor of parent support services, and - most importantly - a teacher.

In founding Lessoncast, she believes the future of student learning depends on our ability to merge innovative best practices with classroom realities.

For speaking engagements, contact info@lessoncast.com.



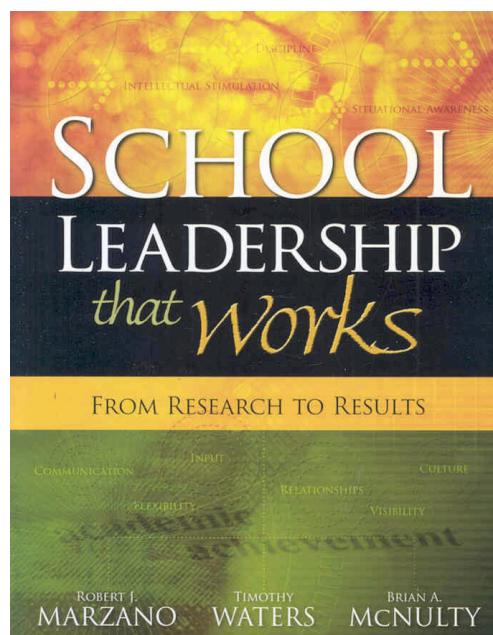
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