

Professional Development as an Opportunity to Enhance Your Praxis

Brittany Falco

Department of Education Studies

Stephen F. Austin State University

Faculty Sponsor: Dr. Sarah Straub



Abstract

This study examines the impact of participating in two different professional developments on enhancing praxis. The first professional development focused on skill-building while the second focused on reflective practice. Results indicate that both professional developments were effective in enhancing praxis, but the reflective practice approach had a greater impact on sustained improvement. These findings suggest that a combination of skill-building and reflective practice can be an effective approach to professional development for enhancing praxis.

Introduction

A shared quality amongst all educators is the pursuit of learning. A life long learner such as we, do not stop something as natural as breathing. Learning is pivotal for educators alike to maintain, develop, and hone life long skills in order to be a greater educator. Professional Development is more than meets the eye, it's a sustainable practice that develops educators observation, instruction, management, etc. Its value increases the more research goes into the pursuit of education and learning, alongside the changes in our society that we as educators must maintain a fine eye on. Which is why, since my field of study is core subjects, I have to keep a level of validity to learn from my students as well. Which brings me to the two particular professional developments I have chosen.

My objective for the beginning of the assignment was to find a professional development that will assist in future instruction, and one that will assist me in the social aspects of the classroom. Now, the first professional development I picked was "Increase Retention by Utilizing Hands-on Learning". I thought this professional development course would cover important points in creating activities garnered to hands-on learning. I value the idea of student's being able to utilize experiences outside the classroom. However, I was already familiar with the topics discussed in the course. The second professional development course I did was "Book Talk: Creating Successful Learners by Utilizing a Gender Lens". The course intrigued me, I wanted to know how utilizing a gender lens created successful learners. It was beneficial, and it has changed my way of looking and acting in the classroom towards the different genders of my students to truly treat them equal.

Theory and Methods

What makes professional developments successful? This was my personal account in finding a professional development where I could reflect, and utilize at a later point in my career. I had chosen two professional developments catered to the educational, and social needs of students. I utilized my background knowledge of sustainability to guide me in the evaluations to guide my perceptions.

I used a survey modified from The Teacher Professional Development Evaluation Guide to analyze two professional developments. The major purpose of this study was to evaluate two professional developments that were applicable to my own perceptions and alignments. This was a Likert-style survey and asked targeted questions regarding applicability, feasibility, and perceptions of others. It was useful in thinking of my professional development as more than a check off item to do for class, but as something that I could immediately incorporate into my practice.

There was also a qualitative element that was more of a narrative self-study task. I reflected on the activity and was able to give context to items that the quantitative instrument introduced.

To select my professional developments, I began with a recommendation from my professor to do social studies specific trainings. Both of my professional developments were provided by Social Studies School Service. Social Studies School Service is a developer of educational resources that works specifically to align social studies curriculum to school's curriculum goals.

The first training I selected was called Increase Retention by Utilizing Hands-on Learning. I selected the first the first one because professional development is an ongoing process that involves skill-building. The second one was called Book Talk: Creating Successful Learners by Utilizing a Gender Lens. It struck my interest because reflective practice is a crucial aspect of professional development. It involves the process of thinking about and analyzing one's actions and experiences in order to gain new insights and improve future performance.

Quantitative Results

The survey that was used had been modified from The Teacher Professional Development Evaluation Guide (Haslam, 2010). Questions that were asked were multiple choice and looked to evaluate my understanding of the purpose, usefulness, alignment of, and support for these professional developments. The first professional development was about incorporating hands-on learning for real world applications and practices in the classroom.

Ultimately, I found that the professional development was useful but did not provide any transformational information that I hadn't learned in my program. The second professional development focused more on utilizing a gender lens in the classroom. These were new ideas for me and were immediately applicable. Unlike the first professional development, I did not choose to talk to my mentor teacher about it but I did find the information applicable and I am eager to implement it.

Qualitative - PD 1

This professional development was about incorporating hands-on learning for real world applications and practice activities to use in the classroom. The importance of students' demographics and identities were involved. It also showed interesting uses of technology in the classroom. The key point of the course was the importance of student involvement. How we as educators can help our students retain knowledge through using activities that require student engagement. The type of activities catered to community involvement, but also how students can be aware and active in their pursuit of learning.

I wanted this professional development to be as grandeur as I imagined it to be. I've read journal articles provided by professors on the importance of hands-on learning. Letting the students have control of their education by having them be engaged throughout the process of their learning. I wanted to learn maybe a formula of a perfect hands-on activity. However, I wasn't left as disappointed. I loved the focus of community engagement, and the students applying real-world events around their own towns. I wish there were applicable resources to be used in the classroom, but I did gain some activity ideas for cross curriculum lesson plans.

Qualitative - PD 2

This professional development was about the impact gender has in education. It was a revolutionary course. Where it started with our own experiences of gender in the classroom. The first revolutionary concept the host brought is called "Bombing Rate" or the rate of which teachers interrupt students. The important part of the concept was the rate of which teachers interrupt students by gender. How girls observe from a young age to be quiet, and how girls are three times more as likely to be interrupted compared to boys. The focal point was how interrupting them takes away their autonomy; their voice. We were given tools to help us curve, and stop the continuation of 'bombing'. Our discussion then led to our own bias and stereotypes we have made, and continue to allow silent discrimination run rampant in the classroom. The best part of the course was the concepts of "Intrinsic vs Acquired Aptitude". How we are natured to think and act away vs what we are nurtured to learn as we grow older. Essentially it was the idea that no one is 'smart'. That it's a bad connotation, and that people are not born smart. People are conditioned by their environment, but even more so when you involve gender. I absolutely loved this professional development, and it has changed my way of thinking in the classroom. It wasn't even a week later that I was discussing with my friend about the course, and how I've begun to think closely about what I say to specific demographics of students. How I can be an advocate for social, and emotional well being.

References

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