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Accountability by design in literacy professional development

As more resources are allocated to professional development, it is imperative to use meaningful methods for evaluating efficacy.

Competent, accomplished teachers play a critical role in student success. Good teaching matters, and high-quality reading instruction *really* matters (Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998; Taylor & Pearson, 2002). Educators and policymakers must ensure that teachers are engaged in professional development that supports accomplished teaching. What are the identifiable characteristics of professional development that lead to excellent instruction and enhanced student learning? Although much of the literature has historically concentrated on the quality of teacher preparation, there is an identified need and an emerging trend in research addressing professional development for practicing teachers (Anders, Hoffman, & Duffy, 2000).

The purpose of this article is to (1) identify principles of high-quality professional development based on research, (2) use those principles to examine a statewide literacy professional development project, and (3) report data from across the project as well as from a subset of teachers. We conclude this article with implications and additional questions related to meaningful, robust accountability systems for professional development.

The Literacy Specialist Project

The Literacy Specialist Project (LSP) is a statewide professional development initiative

launched in August 2000 by the Ohio Department of Education in the United States. The primary goals of the project are to disseminate widely foundational knowledge of literacy pedagogy to K–3 classroom teachers and to build capacity within districts to sustain high-quality professional development. The centerpiece of the professional development is *Teaching Reading and Writing: A Core Curriculum for Educators* (Roskos, 2000). The curriculum focuses on developing knowledge, skills, and dispositions essential for skilled literacy teaching.

The curriculum is organized into four domains of practice: knowing, planning, teaching, and assessing. Each domain includes sessions that address specific components related to literacy practice. For example, in Domain I, Knowing the Content of Literacy Education, the components of the four sessions are literacy development, English language, literacy processes, and literacy education models and methods. Domain IV, Assessing Literacy Achievement, includes components related to assessing reading and writing behaviors, translating assessment results, and reflecting on literacy assessment goals and uses.

The content is delivered in 15 sessions throughout an academic year. Each session includes theoretical background on aspects of literacy teaching and learning, problem-solving activities, and reflection. Fieldwork at the end of each session provides opportunities for teachers to apply concepts to everyday practice.

The Core Curriculum sessions are disseminated through a network of university reading faculty (referred to as field faculty), literacy specialists (or coaches) who are teachers with a strong literacy educational background and experience in literacy

teaching, and classroom teachers. Field faculty members meet monthly throughout the year with literacy specialists to guide the study of the content and coaching of teachers. In turn, literacy specialists meet with small groups of teachers (typically 10–15) approximately 15 times throughout the school year. In these two- to three-hour sessions, literacy specialists present, discuss, and apply literacy teaching and learning concepts. Literacy specialists also provide in-classroom coaching to support teacher development of skillful practice. In most cases, teachers participate in the sessions voluntarily. From 2000 to 2003, participants included 14 field faculty from 10 universities, 353 literacy specialists, and 2,490 teachers in 122 school districts throughout the state of Ohio. For more details about the LSP and the content of the Core Curriculum sessions, visit the project website, www.literacyspecialist.org.

Examining the LSP through design principles of literacy professional development

In this section, we describe six principles of high-quality professional development based on the relevant literature. We relate each principle to literacy professional development using examples from the LSP.

Guskey (2003) and Hawley and Valli (1999) reviewed what educators have identified as characteristics of effective professional development. Anders et al. (2000) reviewed the research specifically related to professional development in literacy and identified similar features to those identified by Guskey and Hawley and Valli. Desimone and colleagues researched professional development from several aspects, including policy, district (Desimone, Porter, Birman, Garet, & Yoon, 2002), and teacher perspectives (Desimone, Porter, Garet, Yoon, & Birman, 2002; Garet, Porter, Desimone, Birman, & Yoon, 2001). We drew from this body of literature in identifying principles of high-quality professional development.

Design Principle 1: High-quality professional development directly connects to student learning goals that are clear and accepted by all. Professional development content must align with what students need to know and be able to do, often

as articulated by content standards and district courses of study. Therefore, the professional development for teachers must focus on the theory and practice underlying pedagogical content knowledge. A clear statement of what students and teachers must know and be able to do should drive the professional development.

The content of the Core Curriculum sessions addresses the knowledge, skills, and dispositions a teacher must have to support student literacy learning. For example, in Session 1, Knowing About Literacy Development, teachers are introduced to developmental continua in reading, writing, orthographic, and oral language development. The teachers return to these continua throughout the Core Curriculum sessions as a framework for understanding and analyzing what children should know and be able to do. Each session also has explicit links to the State of Ohio K–12 English Language Arts Academic Content Standards (www.ode.state.oh.us/academic_content_standards). For example, the fieldwork task for Session 1 requires teachers to collect and analyze oral language, reading, and writing samples from one or more students in their classrooms. The teachers then identify one Standard and Grade-Level Indicator from the K–12 English Language Arts Content Standards that most closely align with what the student needs to learn next in each of those areas. This connection to what students need to know and learn is typical across the 15 sessions.

It is important to note, and we will return to this point in Design Principle 5, that the teachers, with the support of the literacy specialists, drive the focus of the professional development. It is not prepackaged. Literacy specialists and teachers make decisions about the focus of discussions in the sessions based on the learning needs of the teachers and the students.

Design Principle 2: Professional development involves active learning for teachers. A theoretical knowledge base is important to emphasize, but the knowledge base must come alive and be made real for teachers in practice (Hiebert, Gallimore, & Stigler, 2002). As teachers make connections from what they are learning in professional development to classroom practice, they deepen their knowledge structures and apply what they are learning in novel

TABLE 1
Fieldwork Session 3

Session 3—Knowing About Literacy Processes

Purpose: To examine one student’s control of the reading and writing processes.

Directions: Select one student from your classroom as a case study. Gather a sample of the student’s oral reading on an instructional level and writing samples related to a published product. Examine the samples to determine to what extent the student shows control of reading and writing processes. Record your observations to share during the next session.

Process	Feature	Observations
Reading	Predicting Checking Comprehending	
Writing	Prewriting Drafting/revising Editing to convention	

situations. Teachers need to be thoughtfully adaptive in the instructional moment (Anders et al., 2000).

The Core Curriculum sessions are designed to meaningfully engage teachers in the content and the application of content to practice. This goal is accomplished in two ways. First, the structure of each session follows a before-during-after framework. *Before* the presentation of new materials, the teachers share their experiences through completed fieldwork from the previous session. Literacy specialists then present new material. *During* the session, the teachers participate in a problem-solving activity extending the concepts presented in the new material. *After* the activity, the teachers share and discuss new insights from the problem-solving activity.

A second feature of the Core Curriculum sessions that promotes active learning is that participating teachers complete fieldwork in their classrooms in the weeks between every session. The fieldwork builds on the learning activities from the session and provides a tangible artifact of teacher learning. Every session opens with a discussion of the fieldwork, thus creating a culture of thinking and sharing about practice. Table 1 is an example of the fieldwork from Session 3, Knowing About Literacy Processes.

Design Principle 3: Professional development is embedded in the context of work in schools and classrooms. The work of schools is to ensure that

all students achieve academic success. Teachers should, with support from instructional leaders such as principals, literacy coaches, and mentor teachers, be collaboratively and collectively involved in designing and implementing professional development that focuses on teaching that supports student learning.

This design principle is directly related to principles 1 and 2. Student learning is at the heart of the Core Curriculum fieldwork; teachers are actively engaged in applying the knowledge base to practice in their classrooms. The professional development of the project is embedded in instruction—the primary work in classrooms. In the fieldwork for the teaching and assessing domains, teachers analyze their own teaching through a series of structured analyses of transcripts of their teaching (see Kinnucan-Welsch, 2003, 2005; Rosemary, 2005). As part of this process, the teachers analyze what students need to know and what they are able to do and plan instruction accordingly. In other words, the teachers are engaged in continuous and reflective processes of diagnostic teaching or, more simply, an assess-plan-teach instructional cycle. An example of this design principle is presented through a vignette in the next section.

A distinctive characteristic of the LSP is that it supports the professional development of the literacy specialist and classroom teacher in the context of their work. In many traditional staff development events, an outside trainer comes into a

district to provide information. In this project, the literacy specialist, a professional inside the district, provides the professional development by teaching the Core Curriculum sessions to the teachers. Just as the teachers benefit from sessions with the literacy specialist, the literacy specialist benefits from the monthly sessions with the field faculty. This network structure is designed to build a professional development capacity within the district. Given the current attention to the role of the literacy coach in supporting high-quality teaching, this initiative can offer insights on the role and professional development needs of coaches (Dole, 2004; International Reading Association, 2004).

Design Principle 4: Professional development is continuous and ongoing. Teachers need adequate time to engage in meaningful activity embedded in the daily routine of the school over an extended period. Garet et al. (2001) found that “professional development is likely to be of higher quality if it is both sustained over time and involves a substantial number of hours” (p. 933). In a subsequent study, however, Desimone et al. (2002) did not find that number of hours and duration contributed significantly to changes in instruction. Taylor, Pearson, Clark, and Walpole (2002) reported that professional development over one year was one characteristic of effective schools. Researchers have not yet determined how much time teachers should engage in a specific professional development activity to yield optimum results.

Although there is some variation across districts, literacy specialists generally begin their Core Curriculum sessions in late September and end in late April or early May. Ten percent of teachers typically participate in the professional development a second year. The decision to encourage teachers to participate over the span of one year was based on the premise that professional development should be embedded in teachers’ instructional routines. The Core Curriculum is not an innovation but rather an ongoing opportunity to connect widely accepted foundational knowledge about literacy development and instruction to teacher practice. The amount of time spent on the Core sessions is not as important as the long-term goal that teachers, with the support of literacy specialists, will continue to reflect on practice after they have participated.

Design Principle 5: Professional development is based on an ongoing and focused inquiry related to teacher learning, student learning, and what we know about good instruction. In professional development based on the principles in this article, teachers are encouraged to ask themselves “What am I doing and how can I do it better?” In other words, professional development should encourage and support teachers to become more reflective and metacognitive in their instruction (Kinnucan-Welsch, 2005; Rosemary, 2005).

Teachers are active learners when they participate in the sessions. It is not sufficient, however, to merely be active. The activity must be focused on inquiry and analysis related to their teaching. Sessions 9–12, the Teaching Domain, provide a context through which the teacher, with the support of the literacy specialist, focuses on improving teaching. Through this process the teacher makes successive intentional shifts in teaching based on analysis of what the students need to know, what instruction will support the students in developing that knowledge or skill, and what the students learned through instruction.

As part of the fieldwork for sessions 9–12, teachers teach four lessons with a specific instructional focus (e.g., word sort, oral language), transcribe a portion of that lesson, and analyze their instruction with the support of the literacy specialist (see Freppon & Feist-Willis, 2002; Kinnucan-Welsch, 2003; Kinnucan-Welsch & Rosemary, 2004; Kinnucan-Welsch, Zimmerman, & Campbell, 2002; Rosemary, 2003; Rosemary et al., 2002; Rosemary & Grogan, 2002). This process supports teachers in being more deliberate, intentional, and metacognitive about their instructional decisions.

It is also important to note that teachers often need assistance from an expert other in the process of focused inquiry. The LSP is designed to improve classroom instruction in the area of literacy. A second, and equally important, goal is to build capacity in schools through the support of the literacy specialist as an expert other. This role is now emerging, requiring that the professional development needs of the literacy specialist (or coach) must be met as well.

Design Principle 6: Coherence is evident in all aspects of the professional development system.

Hawley and Valli (1999) suggested that professional development should be integrated with a comprehensive change process. They pointed to the need for school and district support, including funding, sustained central office follow through, and technical assistance. Garet et al. (2001) referred to the importance of coherence in all aspects of the system. They suggested that coherence is achieved by “incorporating experiences that are consistent with teachers’ goals, [by aligning] professional development with state standards and assessments, and [by encouraging] continuing professional communication among teachers” (p. 83).

Coherence is ultimately defined by how teachers implement practice at the classroom level. Coburn (2001) argued that teachers shape the implementation of reading policy through a process she calls “collective sensemaking.” Coherence can be achieved through collaborative conversations, both informal and formal, that focus on practice. The reform literature is replete with lessons learned from those less-than-successful efforts that do not take into account prevailing practice and culture of schools. A systemic view in which professional development is seen as part of a focused effort on improving student learning is essential.

One challenge inherent in a statewide professional development initiative is that each district has idiosyncratic needs in terms of teacher expertise and student learning. In some districts, many teachers in the primary grades have advanced degrees, often with graduate work in literacy. Some districts experience a high rate of attrition, resulting in high turnover rates of faculty. In all districts, students come to school with varied background experiences that influence student learning.

In this time of increased accountability for student learning and teacher expertise, it would seem to make sense that district and building administrators agree on a course of action, focus resources on that course, and then allow the necessary time for positive outcomes to become evident. We have observed districts where teachers attend multiple workshops on the newest programs or methods. Simply attending workshops will not change practice. A professional development initiative such as the LSP is premised on building the knowledge and skills of teachers, not in implementing a packaged program.

All of the stakeholders—state departments of education, university preservice and inservice program faculty, and district and building administrators—must be willing to work together for coherence across the professional development system.

To summarize, we examined the Literacy Specialist Project through six principles of professional development design. We now turn to the question of teacher learning and some initial interpretations about the efficacy of the LSP.

Teacher learning, student learning, and the LSP

The literature on the professional development of teachers is consistent in that teacher learning and student learning are the measures against which efficacy and accountability should be assessed. As Sykes (1999) and Anders et al. (2000) have noted, we have little research addressing the clear links between professional development and student learning. Despite the lack of research in this area, current trends and legislated mandates include requirements for districts to demonstrate measured gains in student achievement and public reporting of student achievement. More research is needed to establish connections between professional development and student learning.

In this section we report data from two distinct aspects of the LSP. First, we report data collected from 2000 to 2003 across the project. Second, we report on a sample of teachers who participated in the Teacher Learning Instrument (TLI) study. We will briefly share our findings and conclusions about teacher and student learning.

The LSP 2000-2003: An analysis of teacher learning

School districts showing need for academic improvement were recruited to participate in the project. The literacy specialists were selected based on project-recommended qualifications and were recruited according to each district’s policies. In each district, literacy specialists and principals recruited the teachers.

As a measure of teacher learning, teachers completed pre- and postsurveys of understanding of literacy concepts. This survey consisting of 24

items linked to the conceptual elements taught in the Core Curriculum. Participants rated their perceptions of their understanding on a scale of 1 (understand [concept] thoroughly and could lead a discussion on the topic) to 5 (do not understand [concept] at all). A paired sample *t* test was conducted to determine pre/post differences in teachers' understanding of the concepts studied in the Core Curriculum. Table 2 shows the results of paired samples *t* tests for each year. Statistically significant positive differences were found between teachers' beginning and end ratings of their understanding of Core concepts, with greater understanding indicated by posttest total means. We concluded that participation in the LSP did contribute to perceived enhanced teacher understanding as measured by their survey responses.

As we know, self-report is limited in terms of drawing conclusions about the efficacy of a professional development initiative. To address the question of teacher learning and the related question of student learning in a more robust fashion, we analyzed data generated by the literacy specialists and teachers who worked closely in a coaching context as part of the LSP. Note that not all teachers and literacy specialists engaged in the activities and related research described in the following section, but it is the goal of the project that literacy specialists will enhance and develop the coaching role as the initiative matures.

Teacher and student learning in a coaching context

One powerful aspect of the LSP occurred with the use of the TLI (Rosemary, 2005; Rosemary & Roskos, 2001). As part of the fieldwork in the Teaching Domain, all participating teachers teach a lesson with a specific instructional focus, audiotape the lesson, and transcribe a segment. The teachers then analyze their instruction for evidence of what we know about good practice in reading instruction and for evidence of scaffolding learning. Six literacy specialists (coaches) and 11 teachers with whom they worked volunteered to participate in more extensive work with the TLI during the second year of the project.

The TLI procedure. The teacher taught three lessons with the same instructional focus, audiotaping

TABLE 2
Teacher perception of learning Core concepts

Year of project	Pretest mean <i>SD</i>	Posttest mean <i>SD</i>	<i>t</i> value
1 (<i>n</i> = 161)	56.72 12.05	52.66 11.64	8.635*
2 (<i>n</i> = 229)	56.76 13.76	49.66 11.61	9.265*
3 (<i>n</i> = 393)	63.20 13.89	47.77 11.33	23.17*

Note. Based on rating scale, lower ratings indicate higher levels of conceptual understanding. **p* < .01.

the lesson and transcribing a segment afterward. After each lesson, the coach and teacher met for a debriefing session. These conversations were also taped. The transcribed segments of lessons became a context within which the coach and teacher analyzed the teacher's instruction. Because there were three successive lessons with the same focus, teacher learning became evident as the coach (the expert other) scaffolded for intentional shifts in teaching (Tharp & Gallimore, 1988). Both teacher and student learning became apparent in the lesson transcript and the transcript of the conversations between the coach and the teacher (Kinnucan-Welsch, 2005; Rosemary, 2005; Rosemary et al., 2002).

In this section, we present one vignette of a coach-teacher dyad in which teacher learning and student learning are evident through the lesson transcripts and the conversations between the coach and the teacher. Dana, a literacy coach, and Melody (both names are pseudonyms), a first-grade teacher, chose to focus on oral language, specifically the language of literacy. Many children in their district come to school lagging in oral language development. This was Melody's second year in the project and, having engaged in self-analysis of her teaching through the TLI the first year, she volunteered to participate in more extensive work with the tool. In the preconference during which she planned her lesson with Dana, Melody stated her goal:

Melody: I want them to write better. I don't expect them to be quoting Shakespeare but to

FIGURE 1
Story chain example



Table 3
Story impression example

The paperboy
The paperboy gets up in the dark. The paperboy is sleepy because he works early in the morning. The paperboy gets dressed. The paperboy eats cereal. He folds the papers in the morning. He grabs all the papers, rushes to his bike, and throws all the papers in the driveways. The neighbors are asleep. He rushes home because his work is done. He goes to sleep.

understand syntax.... You don't say, "Hers is doing it."

Dana: What you have to understand is that you're not going to change that home language in three or four times. You're not going to change that home language, but you could [assist the children to] internalize text language in some ways.

Melody: In just doing little things in oral language...giving them a chance to talk about things to each other. When I tell them what to talk about...it's getting them to be more expressive, and the more expressive they become, the more I see improvement in their writing.

Together, Dana and Melody decided to implement the story chain as an instructional strategy.

Melody had seen this demonstrated at a workshop, used the strategy with her class earlier in the year, and was pleased with the results. In this activity, Melody showed the cover of a picture storybook to the students. She then directed their attention to the story chain, which consisted of teacher-selected words and phrases from the picture storybook. Students were then encouraged to collaboratively develop a story impression using the chain as a prompt. It is a shared writing experience, with the teacher doing all of the scripting on chart paper. Figure 1 and Table 3 illustrate one story chain event with Melody's students.

During the planning conversation, Melody expressed her concern regarding the assessment of student learning:

Melody: How am I going to assess tangibly that [the students] have improved their oral language? I know by just listening to them, but how can I show that on paper? I would have written down from the first time that we did this to the next.... Are they using more descriptive language? Are they using more complex sentences? Isn't that what I want to assess?

Dana: You almost need to make a checklist for yourself on what you want to look for.

Melody: For what I want to look for...that would be easy to do. I think that's a good idea.... So lay out four chart papers [the story impressions] from the first to the end, and in between those we talk about thinking more elaborately, and looking more undercover, and what you could possibly think....

Over three months, Dana and Melody worked through the extended TLI. They audiotaped and videotaped each teaching event and prepared transcripts for analysis. Dana set the stage for the debriefing conversations:

Dana: We're going to look at a few minutes of your videotape so that everybody [the three teachers in the group] gets a kind of flavor of what you were doing. And then we're going to sit and talk about ways that we think we can either extend or improve [your] instruction.

Dialogue surrounding these analyses provides insight on teacher learning and student learning. In the example that follows, Dana scaffolds Melody's thinking about self-regulation and nudges her to consider possibilities for extending

her students' response to the prompts in the story chain to include elements for retelling.

- Dana: Yes, you do that. I think that right there is where we have to really plan out now...how we're going to step back [to encourage self-regulation].
- Melody: I tried a little of this last time.... I tell them, "My goal is just to read to you the words and you do all the talking, and I don't have to help you. But I still have to do a little of it." So that's my goal: to get it to the point where... I'm not doing as much of the reading of it.
- Dana: I'm thinking that in your brain this is the way you have to be thinking. That you choose your words, [words that] have them do the setting, characters, main problem, and then the ending.... But then, as they tell you one sentence, lead them in to actually giving you more than one sentence so that there might be two or three sentences, and that way you'll not only expand their vocabulary but you will also expand the number of words they're writing and the number of sentences.

Toward the end of the conversation, Dana asked Melody to talk about how she would assess the students' oral language development. Melody explained that she was saving the charted story impressions and examining them using a checklist, which included the number of words, sentences, multisyllabic words, descriptive words, and transition words. Melody analyzed the three story impressions and compiled the data in a table (see Table 4). From this she could draw conclusions about student growth in oral language.

In this brief excerpt of a conversation between a literacy coach and a classroom teacher, we can see that through the coaching conversation the

teacher was prompted to adjust her teaching on the basis of her observations of student learning. It is in this context that teacher learning becomes most powerful, in that its focus is on intentional shifts in teaching based on student learning. Melody was able to make decisions on future use of the story chain to develop oral language on the basis of data she compiled from the story impressions.

This vignette is representative of the conversations that occurred across the six literacy coaches and classroom teacher dyads or small groups participating in this subset of the larger Literacy Specialist Project. It is in these coaching conversations that we can begin to better understand the complex role of the literacy coach as a key player in on-site professional development.

Thoughts for future direction

As more resources are allocated to professional development, it is important to have meaningful models for evaluating efficacy. To return to the three purposes we stated at the beginning of our article, we described six principles of professional development found in the literature. We drew these principles from widely cited references to professional development design. Then we examined the LSP for evidence of those design principles and provided examples from the project that bring the principles to life. What we learned from this process was that one aspect of accountability in engaging teachers in professional development must lie in the design itself. In the LSP, the principles were solidly embedded in the project's design. We suggest that those who sponsor professional development for teachers engage in a similar review

TABLE 4
Analysis of oral language from three story impressions

Story impression	Number of pages in book	Number of words	Number of teacher prompts	Number of sentences	Number of multisyllable words	Number of descriptive words	Number of transition words
1	42	70	9	9	13	5	0
2	30	66	10	9	18	11	0
3	32	92	6	12	15	15	4

for evidence of design principles. Finding the time for professional development in complex schedules is a challenge, and it is imperative that the professional development offered to teachers be based on effective professional development research.

Our third purpose was to report initial data from the project. We concluded that teachers who have participated in the LSP report differences in beliefs and practice. Furthermore, the vignette of Dana and Melody offers a glimpse of the potential for teachers and coaches to learn together through conversations focused on a close analysis of teaching. The LSP research results tell us that teachers do learn about literacy teaching and learning from a yearlong series of sessions based on principles of effective professional development. The research on the TLI studies (Kinnucan-Welsch, 2003; Kinnucan-Welsch et al., 2002; Rosemary, 2005; Rosemary et al., 2002; Rosemary & Grogan, 2002) sheds some light on how coaching can support teacher learning and student learning through change in practice.

Our analysis of the Literacy Specialist Project is an initial step in demonstrating accountability in professional development. In an effort to more meaningfully address accountability issues, research on the project will continue to examine the efficacy of this large-scale initiative and the role that coaches play in supporting teaching improvement. We need to establish strong connections between professional development participation, teacher learning, and student achievement. We also need to more clearly identify those components within the domains in which teachers demonstrate more or less conceptual understanding. Finally, as we continue to develop descriptions of the interactions between literacy coach and teacher, we will begin to construct a model of coaching that can guide practice in the evolving role of literacy coach. The future research agenda is substantive, and we look forward to learning from and with our LSP participants.

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