

Understanding Effective Professional Development for Teachers of Second Language Learners

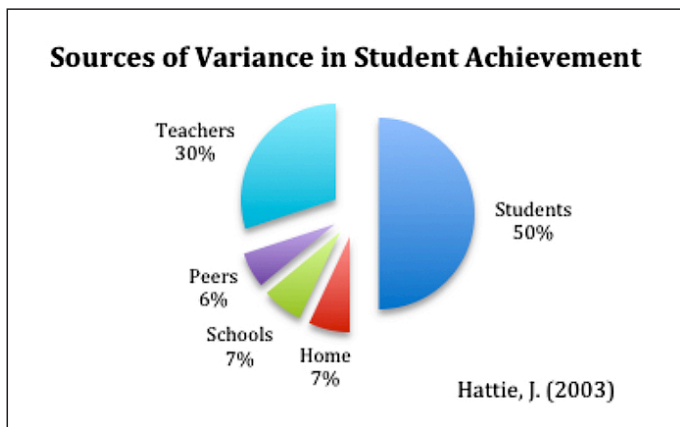
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The educators at DLeNM have long considered teacher development as the most effective way to support student outcomes. In order to positively impact second language learners, we focus our expertise on quality professional development for their teachers and school administrators. Through conversation and research, several key points have emerged that guide our work with schools and districts in developing high quality dual language education.

Effective Professional Development in General— What the Research Says

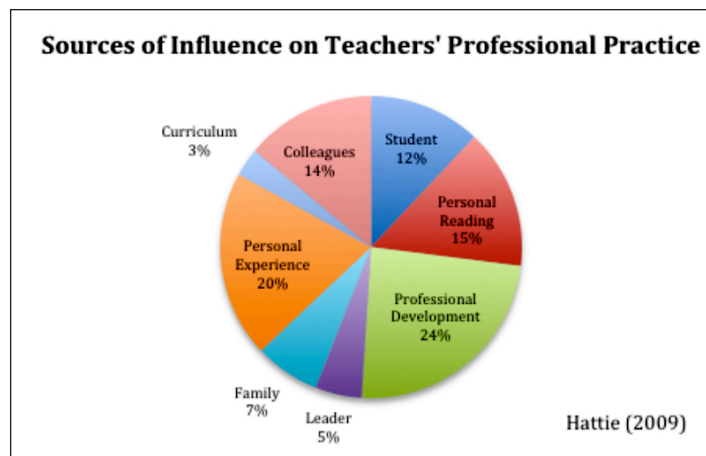
Focus Professional Development on Classroom Teachers

Of all of the possible areas in which to invest education funding, the research is clear that the most important malleable variable in improving student outcomes is the classroom teacher, as evidenced by the chart below:



The research of John Hattie (2003) clearly shows that developing “expert” teachers is of far more instructional value than teachers’ years of experience. According to Hattie, students who are taught by expert teachers “... appear to exhibit an understanding of the concepts targeted in instruction that is more integrated, more coherent, and at a higher level of abstraction than the understanding achieved by other students [with non-expert, experienced teachers]” (p. 14). Hattie identified five major dimensions of expert teachers—teachers who can: (1) identify essential representations of their subject, (2) guide learning through classroom interactions, (3) monitor learning and provide feedback, (4) attend to affective attributes, and (5) influence student outcomes.

A related study identified the variable impact of sources teachers have to develop such expertise, outlined in the chart below:



This research demonstrates that the most influential malleable factor in student learning is the teacher, and the teacher’s most influential source to develop expertise is professional development. The question lies in where to focus professional development, as well as how to monitor whether or not it is impacting change in teacher practices.

High Leverage Professional Development Components:

According to Calnin and Lawless’ synthesis of the research (2008), effective professional development is most effective when it is characterized by the following:

- focused on improving and building teacher skills for classroom practice,
- mediated through a learning community,
- led by a skilled and knowledgeable leader,
- focused on the everyday *work* of classroom teachers,
- focused on the everyday *practices* of classroom teachers,
- data-informed and evidence-based, and
- located in the everyday work of teachers (job embedded).

Additionally, for instructional practices to take hold, the professional development must include in-class modeling and follow-up coaching. Linda Darling-Hammond (2010) asserts, “Although intensive, focused professional development of this kind is sometimes available in the United States, national data show that it is still rare. Although most teachers participate in some

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kind of professional development each year, few have the chance to study any aspect of teaching for more than a day or two.” Darling-Hammond continues:

... most of this professional development does not meet the threshold needed to produce strong effects on teaching practice or student learning. A summary of experimental research found that short-term professional development experiences of 14 hours or less appear to have no effect on teachers’ effectiveness, while a variety of well-designed content-specific learning opportunities averaging about 49 hours over a 6- to 12-month period of time were associated with sizable gains: students of participating teachers gained about 21 percentile points more than other students on the achievement tests used to evaluate student learning (p. 204).

In *Instructional Rounds in Education* (2010), Elizabeth City et al. contend that the focus of improvement efforts should be on what they term the “instructional core,” which is the convergence and interaction of student–teacher–content. Within the Instructional Rounds framework, the activity of the instructional core is most effectively monitored and refined through teams of educators observing classroom instruction together. This process brings together the effective professional development elements described above in a context that includes 60% of the sources of influence on teachers’ professional practice: student, colleagues, leader, curriculum, and professional development.

Distinct Features of Effective Professional Development for Teachers of ELs

All of the above features are key to the success of professional development initiatives in general. However, there is also specific content that must be addressed for teachers of second language learners. Effective professional development for teachers of English learners (ELs) should address the following components.

1. *Focus on language*—Every lesson provides an opportunity and a need to teach students the academic language skills (beyond vocabulary lists) that they need in order to (1) comprehend content lessons and (2) communicate (speaking/writing) what they know and are able to do. This focus on language should include listening, speaking, reading, and writing, as well as language structures, functions, semantics, etc. (Snow and Wong-Fillmore, 2002).
2. *Plan for peer interaction*—Language learning is an interactive process. Therefore, teachers must be adept at setting up instructional structures that facilitate student use of the target language, risk taking, negotiation of meaning, etc.

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A Developing Framework: Shifting the Paradigm of Professional Development and Sheltered Instruction

by Victoria Tafoya, Director of Operations—
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One of the aims of Dual Language Education of New Mexico is to disseminate information about best practices in schools to support culturally and linguistically diverse students. For our regular readers, you may recall the Fall 2014 issue of *Soleado* when the notion of sheltered instruction was revisited. A series of practical follow-up articles followed in 2015, allowing us as educators to think a bit deeper about the concept of sheltered instruction.

We know schools around the country are challenged in meeting the individual needs of children. Schools are seeking strategies that will transform their schools. But how do the strategies fit into the overall structure of a school system? We can agree that with every change effort, any significant project needs to be part of a coherent, well-planned approach to teaching and learning. We should aim for a school system that is a learning organization where effective daily instructional practice is desired and a collaborative community is apparent.

In the offices of Dual Language Education of New Mexico, professional conversations continue about the eight components of sheltered instruction being *key* to learning in a second language. Up to now, our focus has been on individual teachers and classrooms. While we have always believed the eight components should be woven into everything we do in the classroom, we have inherently known that to have the most impact, they should be part of something much larger within a school community. Hence, we are working to create a professional development framework in which the eight components and a series of training modules are integrated to support a schoolwide and systemwide process of school improvement.

The systemic framework with associated modules is an approach to teaching and learning within the context of a school system. In fact, we are taking what we have learned about effective schools research conducted over the past 20 years and coalescing the eight components with the correlates of effective schools, all while aligning to the Guiding Principles

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