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# Follow-Up, A Key Component of Successful Professional Development

Peter J. Smith

*University of Nebraska at Omaha*, [pjsmith@unomaha.edu](mailto:pjsmith@unomaha.edu)

Diana Casey

*Omaha Public Schools*

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# FOLLOW-UP, A KEY COMPONENT OF SUCCESSFUL PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT\*

Peter J. Smith  
Diana Casey

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## Abstract

Inexperienced teachers' perceived classroom effectiveness of their planning and preparation, classroom environment, instruction, and professional responsibilities domains were analyzed to determine the effects of active follow-up compared to information-based follow-up of classroom management training (N = 50). Inexperienced teachers enrolled in I Can Do It Classroom Management Training were randomly assigned to active follow-up to the training (n = 24) or information-based follow-up to the training (n = 26). As reflected by the pretest and posttest evaluation form measuring their perceived effectiveness in the domains of planning and preparation, classroom environment, instruction, and professional responsibilities, teachers participating in active follow-up of the training demonstrated statistically significant growth in each of the domains. Teachers participating in the information-based follow-up demonstrated little or no growth in each of the domains. Pretest-posttest and posttest-posttest analysis of perceptions of teachers engaged in active follow-up demonstrated significant growth in three of the domains identified in the professional development model and significantly higher classroom effectiveness scores than teachers engaged in information-based follow-up. The study's results should encourage district officials to look at professional development and the type of follow-up included in staff development initiatives.



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## 1 Introduction

Leaving no child behind is a formidable task. There is constant pressure from all levels to educate all students to high standards. Consider this mandate while at the same time realizing student mobility is ever increasing, the number of students for who English is not the first language is growing, poverty and homelessness is on the rise, and resources continue to be scarce. This scenario requires that educators must do more than simply learn new skills and techniques; they need to learn to change (Easton, 2008). Professional development must reflect this ever changing reality and should include teachers working with teachers, in the school where they teach, with feedback and professional expertise provided, and should be sustained and continuous rather than short-term (Newman, King, & Youngs, 2000). Effective professional development programs view all participants as important contributors and provide them with a sense of ownership. While at the same time, collaboration builds a sense of collegiality, belonging, learning culture, and self-respect (Wong, 2004).

When properly planned and implemented, professional development can have a significant positive impact on teachers' classroom performance (Darling-Hammond, 2000; Wenglinsky, 2002) and classroom management (McNeely, Nonnemaker, & Blum, 2002). This is especially critical for new teachers. Many times, the assistance and guidance that new teachers need are neither recognized nor met (Kardos, Johnson, Peske, Kauffman, & Liu, 2001). Some new teachers are virtually abandoned the moment they enter their building. There is little to no induction, support, or collegiality. Teachers need to feel they belong. An ongoing professional development program with a structured induction program combined with a supportive school community can meet the needs of new teachers (Wong, 2003). New teachers who perceive an increase in support increase their self-efficacy. These teachers also view their teaching assignment as less difficult (Hoy, 2000). Research also suggests that new teachers are more amenable to professional development. Torff and Sessions (2008) found that teachers' attitudes about professional development are most positive during the first two years of teaching, followed by a decline in attitude from years three through nine, and then a leveling off and an unchanging attitude after ten years of teaching.

A new teacher usually does not become an effective teacher overnight. Most effective teachers develop over the first five to seven years of teaching. Induction programs are not enough to assist teachers in becoming effective. Professional development must provide teachers with effective, ongoing opportunities to develop their skills. Teachers learn more with extensive, high-quality, ongoing programs. Honing the skills necessary to be an effective teacher cannot be accomplished by providing one-time, short-term programs (Richardson, 2003; Wong, 2003).

A variety of methods can be used to deliver high-quality professional learning. Of these methods, strategies that allow teachers to identify areas of need and access the information and support at any time are highly effective (National Staff Development Council, 2001a). Creating a culture of ongoing programs with follow-up activities included are not only possible, but also very sustainable (American Educational Research Association, 2005). The National Staff Development Council's Standards for Staff Development can provide the framework for meaningful professional development offerings. These standards focus on three key areas that directly impact student learning. The Context Standards, Process Standards, and Content Standards all address professional development from the perspective of improving student achievement.

The *Context Standards* improves the learning of all students by ensuring that the professional development:

- Organizes adults into learning communities whose goals are aligned with those of the school and district. (Learning Communities)
- Requires skillful school and district leaders who guide continuous instructional improvement. (Leadership)
- Requires resources to support adult learning and collaboration. (Resources)

The *Process Standards* improves the learning of all students by ensuring that the professional development:

- Uses disaggregated student data to determine adult learning priorities, monitor progress, and help sustain continuous improvement. (Data-Driven)

- Uses multiple sources of information to guide improvement and demonstrate its impact. (Evaluation)
- Prepares educators to apply research to decision making. (Research-Based)
- Uses learning strategies appropriate to the intended goal. (Design)
- Applies knowledge about human learning and change. (Learning)
- Provides educators with the knowledge and skills to collaborate. (Collaboration)

The *Content Standards* improves the learning of all students by ensuring that the professional development:

- Prepares educators to understand and appreciate all students, create safe, orderly and supportive learning environments, and hold high expectations for their academic achievement. (Equity)
- Deepens educators' content knowledge, provides them with research-based instructional strategies to assist students in meeting rigorous academic standards, and prepares them to use various types of classroom assessments appropriately. (Quality Teaching)
- Provides educators with knowledge and skills to involve families and other stakeholders appropriately. (Family Involvement)" (NSDC, 2001).

A common theme found throughout the staff development standards is the need for professional development to be ongoing and continuous, with a focus on professional learning communities, collaboration, and understanding the change process. Newman, King, and Youngs (2000) argue that professional community, a key element of school capacity, can impact the success of professional development. They also stress the need for professional development to be sustained and continuous.

Sadly, professional development without follow-up has frequently become the norm in education. And the necessary follow-up activities for teachers have not always been the guiding principles for providing professional development. Not only has investing in ongoing professional development not become a priority for many school districts, many times professional development becomes the first program to be cut during budget limitations (Darling-Hammond, 1996). School districts must cultivate the culture of life-long learning for all school personnel. This investment into professional learning must include quality professional development offerings combined with a built-in follow-up component. Danielson and McGreal (2000) argue that an important role for district professional development plans is to ensure the inclusion of meaningful follow-up activities beyond the training session.

This study examines the impact of providing active-based follow-up compared to information-based only follow-up for a proven successful classroom management training program on inexperienced teachers perceived classroom effectiveness.

A large Midwest Education Association, a National Education Association local affiliate, provided classroom behavior management training for teachers in their first five years of teaching based on the *I Can Do It Classroom Management Program* developed by the California Teachers Association. This program was developed in 1996, by the California Teachers Association and a group of San Bernardino County superintendents, who collaborated on the creation of a classroom behavior management training to assist new teachers (California Teachers Association, 2003).

The *I Can Do It* training contains eight areas of focus:

1. Getting to know your students.
2. Rules and routines.
3. Reinforcements.
4. Polishing your techniques.
5. Smoothly flowing classrooms.
6. Communication styles.
7. Home and school communication.
8. Dealing with difficult behaviors.

The training session provides teachers with the tools to effectively understand the role of classroom behavior management, to develop an effective environment for students to achieve, and to collaborate with other professionals to enhance personal learning. These are key components of the National Staff Development Council's Standards for Staff Development (2001). The follow-up activities focus the new teachers

on using data to target specific areas to improve their classroom and increase student learning. Follow-up also provided the facilitators with a focal point for providing needed support and information as part of the follow-up. These are also key components of the National Staff Development Council’s Standards for Staff Development (2001).

## 2 Methodology

Teachers with less than five years experience were invited to participate in identical classroom behavior management training sessions. Fifty of the teachers were randomly selected to participate in follow-up activities which included either active-based or information-based follow-up, and were asked to complete an additional final self-evaluation at the end of the follow-up. All participants received the opportunity for follow-up. Not all participants elected to participate in follow-up.

When participants registered at the training session, they completed an information form that had contact and basic demographic information. The information form was used to randomly assign follow-up.

The teachers were randomly assigned to two groups, an active-based follow-up group and an information-based follow-up group. The active-based follow-up to classroom behavior management training (AFCMT) group and information-based follow-up to classroom behavior management training (IBFCMT) group served as the two independent variables of this study.

Immediately prior to the classroom behavior management training, all participants evaluated themselves using a self-evaluation form based on the Summative Teacher Evaluation, based on the work of Danielson (1996). Four distinct domains of professional practice: planning and preparation, the classroom environment, instruction, and professional responsibilities were measured using the Summative Teacher Evaluation (Danielson & McGreal, 2000). The pretest instruments for teachers’ perceived classroom effectiveness was distributed at the initial I Can Do It Classroom Management Training session. The independent *t*-test data displayed in Table 1 indicate that there was no significant difference ( $\alpha = .05$ ) in the participants’ perceived classroom effectiveness between those teachers in the active-based follow-up group compared to the teachers in the information-based follow-up group when they entered the training program.

**Pretest Domain Scores for Active-Based and Information-Based Follow-Up**

|                               | Active-Based Follow-Up ( $n = 24$ ) |        |  | Information-Based Follow-Up ( $n = 26$ ) |        |      |       |     |
|-------------------------------|-------------------------------------|--------|--|--|--------|------|-------|-----|
| Domain                        | M                                   | (SD)   |  | M  | (SD)   | d    | t     | p   |
| Planning and Preparation      | 2.69                                | (0.24) |  | 2.67                                     | (0.45) | 0.07 | -0.24 | .81 |
| Classroom Environment         | 3.04                                | (0.36) |  | 2.85                                     | (0.45) | 0.46 | -1.62 | .11 |
| Instruction Domain            | 2.71                                | (0.34) |  | 2.63                                     | (0.2)  | 0.18 | -0.63 | .53 |
| <i>continued on next page</i> |                                     |        |  |  |        |      |       |     |

|                               |     |      |        |  |      |        |      |       |     |
|-------------------------------|-----|------|--------|--|------|--------|------|-------|-----|
| Professional responsibilities | Re- | 2.92 | (0.25) |  | 2.79 | (0.55) | 0.32 | -1.06 | .29 |
|                               |     |      |        |  |      |        |      |       |     |

**Table 1**

After the training, teachers received either active-based follow-up or information-based follow-up to assist them in further developing their classroom behavior management.

### 3 Active-Based Follow-up

There were 24 teachers who received active follow-up after the I Can Do It Classroom Management Training (CMT). These teachers received a minimum of three emails and one structured phone call every two weeks for a minimum of sixteen weeks to discuss components of the training and the implications for their classroom. Emails encouraged discussion, collaboration, and sharing of ideas. One of the three emails contained an electronic packet providing written information that discussed components of the training and the implications for their classroom. Participants received a minimum of eight electronic packets. The packets reflected all eight of the I Can Do It training modules. Email allows teachers to manage their conversations and self-direct future conversations (Goodwin, Graham, & Scarborough, 2001; Kabilan, 2004). Research shows that email discussions gave beginning teachers insight into their own experiences and teaching as a whole (Merseth, 1990) and strengthens learning (Goodwin, Graham, & Scarborough, 2001). Reflection is a central component of self-assessment, leading teachers to self-direct their own professional learning and development (Danielson & McGreal, 2000).

### 4 Information-Based Follow-up

There were 26 teachers who received information-based follow-up after the I Can Do It Classroom Management Training (CMT). These teachers received an electronic packet providing written information that discussed components of the training and the implications for their classroom. Participants received a minimum of eight electronic packets. This mailing was identical to the mailing received by the active-based follow-up group. The information-based follow-up group did not receive phone calls or encouragement to provide feedback to the trainers or other participants. However, the participants could take it upon themselves to initiate email contact with the trainers, and if they did initiate comments or questions, the trainers did respond.

Following the final week of follow-up, teachers were asked to complete an identical, self-evaluation form to determine any changes in self-perception related to the professional practice domains.

Posttest scores for participants engaged in active-based follow-up were compared to posttest scores for information-based follow-up were compared using independent *t*-tests for each classroom management domain: planning and preparation; classroom environment; instruction; and professional responsibilities. Posttest scores and comparisons are contained in Table 2. Results indicate that those teachers included in the active-based follow-up rated themselves significantly higher on the each of the classroom management domains than teachers who were offered information-based follow-up only.

To determine the significance of the growth for teachers participating in the professional development, pretest-posttest scores for each of the two groups were compared using repeated-measure *t*-tests. The results of the repeated-measure *t*-tests are displayed in Table 3. As seen in Table 3, the growth was significant for the participants in the active-based follow-up in the planning and preparation, classroom environment, and instruction domains, but not significant for the professional responsibilities domain at the .05 alpha level. The participants in the information-based follow-up group showed no significant growth in any of the domains at the .05 alpha level.

#### Posttest Domain Scores for Active-Based and Information-Based Follow-Up

|                               | Active-Based Follow-Up (n = 24) |        |  | Information-Based Follow-Up (n = 26) |        |      |      |        |
|-------------------------------|---------------------------------|--------|--|--------------------------------------|--------|------|------|--------|
| Domain                        | M                               | (SD)   |  | M                                    | (SD)   | d    | t    | p      |
| Planning and Preparation      | 2.99                            | (0.35) |  | 2.73                                 | (0.25) | 0.90 | 3.05 | .004*  |
| Classroom Environment         | 3.31                            | (0.37) |  | 2.89                                 | (0.27) | 0.31 | 4.61 | <.001* |
| Instruction Domain            | 3.03                            | (0.32) |  | 2.63                                 | (0.36) | 1.17 | 4.12 | <.001* |
| Professional Responsibilities | 3.04                            | (0.25) |  | 2.78                                 | (0.29) | 0.92 | 3.25 | .002*  |
| *Significant                  |                                 |        |  |                                      |        |      |      |        |

**Table 2**

**Pretest-Posttest Domain Scores for Active-Based and Information-Based Follow-Up**

|                               | Active-Based follow-Up      |        |  |                   |        |      |      |        |  |
|-------------------------------|-----------------------------|--------|--|-------------------|--------|------|------|--------|--|
|                               | Pretest (n = 24)            |        |  | Posttest (n = 24) |        |      |      |        |  |
| Domain                        | M                           | (SD)   |  | M                 | (SD)   | d    | t    | p      |  |
| Planning and Preparation      | 2.69                        | (0.24) |  | 2.99              | (0.35) | 0.99 | 4.92 | <.001* |  |
| Classroom Environment         | 3.04                        | (0.36) |  | 3.31              | (0.37) | 0.74 | 4.59 | <.001* |  |
| Instruction Domain            | 2.71                        | (0.34) |  | 3.03              | (0.32) | 0.97 | 6.17 | <.001* |  |
| Professional Responsibilities | 2.92                        | (0.26) |  | 3.05              | (0.29) | 0.47 | 1.93 | .067   |  |
|                               | Information-Based follow-Up |        |  |                   |        |      |      |        |  |
|                               | Pretest (n = 26)            |        |  | Posttest (n = 26) |        |      |      |        |  |
| Domain                        | M                           | (SD)   |  | M                 | (SD)   | d    | t    | p      |  |
| Planning and Preparation      | 2.67                        | (0.45) |  | 2.73              | (0.25) | 0.17 | 1.22 | .234   |  |
| Classroom Environment         | 2.85                        | (0.45) |  | 2.89              | (0.27) | 0.13 | 0.99 | .332   |  |
| Instruction Domain            | 2.63                        | (0.52) |  | 2.63              | (0.36) | 0.00 | 0.00 | 1.00   |  |
| Professional Responsibilities | 2.79                        | (0.55) |  | 2.78              | (0.29) | 0.03 | 0.15 | .885   |  |
| *Significant                  |                             |        |  |                   |        |      |      |        |  |

**Table 3**

**5 Discussion**

Teachers participating in the professional development program modeled after the “I Can Do It Classroom Management Program” indicated that the active follow-up activities were an important component of the

training. The personal contacts, phone calls, and e-mails gave participants opportunities to reflect and share on the steps they were taking to implement the training. Lynn (2006) suggests that quality professional development include inquiry, reflection, and sharing. The results of this study reinforce the need to capitalize on the benefits of inquiry and reflection by sharing perceptions and beliefs with other professionals.

The ongoing interest and commitment of the presenters as demonstrated by their willingness to continue communicating with participants also leads to success. Quality professional development providers are able to develop a community of learners who are able to foster continuous growth (Buenaflor, 2009). If meaningful professional development becomes more possible when there is a personal commitment by the presenters, then having the presenters be members of the school and/or district being served could be helpful. Local providers of the training have a vested interest in the improvement of their peers, they understand and identify with the needs and concerns of the professional development participants, and they share ownership of the school/district vision and mission.

This study also reinforces the need to provide follow-up planning and sharing in addition to a meaningful, well-designed professional development program. Garat, Porter, Desimone, Birman, and Suk Yoon (2001) found that professional development is likely to be higher quality if it not only consists of a substantial number of hours, but also is sustained over time.

Finally, quality ongoing and sustained professional development reinforces the characteristics of professional learning communities. As Senge (1990) points out we are all learners. Learning comes naturally to us, and deep down we possess a love of personal learning. And truly professional teachers who are members of a professional learning organization are encouraged and expected to stay current and to learn about emerging concepts of best practices (DuFour & Eaker, 1998). Incorporating the follow-up model introduced in the project described in this study can make professional learning an ongoing and meaningful component of successful schools.

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