

EDUCATOR ROLES AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Teachers need time for collaboration. Instructional leaders need to provide support and professional development opportunities. Learning coaches and master teachers need to be utilized in a greater capacity for mentoring young educators in and out of the classroom, team teaching, sharing their expertise and knowledge with curriculum and the program of studies.

Darlene Marcinkevics, Principal, Spruce Grove

The role of the teacher as guide, coach and career mentor, and the role of the administrator as instructional leader, are supported through professional development opportunities with collaborative and collegial school environments and professional learning communities. Administrators as instructional leaders thrive in collegial and collaborative learning environments, and bring a level of professionalism to their roles that benefits the entire school community. After all, in terms of high school redesign, professional development can mean collaborating with your colleagues. We all learn so much from each other. Janet Grenier says, “Teachers need to know not only their own curriculum, but what comes before and after, as well as the links with other curriculums.” Further, she stresses, “What’s vital for [cross-curricular knowledge] is professional development and time for teachers to get together and work. Teachers can’t be expected to do it all after class time.”

Strengthened and defined educator roles have an important place in high school redesign, and bringing about the shift to that place in the process is part of a new way of doing things. Darlene Marcinkevics says change “will only occur if instructional leaders provide the opportunity for collaboration and professional development to create a shift in school culture and a change in pedagogy.” So not only do educator and leadership roles need to be revised, but also the interaction between administrators and teachers so that there is a renewed and mutual empowerment.

What is the impact on students?

Lifelong learning is for everyone. When students see their teachers pursuing professional development, and hear about the teachers’ experiences, the whole impact of being a student is brought into a new, fresh perspective. From students’ points of view, having teachers who are interested in new technology, world issues, and the whole gamut of amazing and exciting learning opportunities that can be brought into the learning environment means students and teachers share an enormous and exciting capacity for learning.

Wanda Gerard, Josina Nagtegaal and Debbie Terceros say that, in their experience with high school redesign, professional development can mean improved student-

teacher rapport. “Students are developing better relationships with their teachers and their classmates because they share the responsibility for learning and advocate for what they need. They also feel less stressed because they have so much more control over their learning.”

Along with enhanced teacher learning, “Students are no longer just allowed to play the ‘school game,’” says Norbert Baharally, “where the teacher tells them what they need to learn, without using any of their creative thinking skills. There are now more meaningful conversations happening between teachers and students regarding assignment deadlines and opportunities to do things differently.”

What is the impact on staff?

Educator roles and professional development opportunities help teachers and administrators build professional learning communities. These collaborative communities challenge teachers to think in a new way. Trevor Mitchell says, “Flexibility challenges teachers to get to know kids better, to get to know the community better, to do good assessments because they can’t rely on canned programs and purchased resources. It’s great for teacher morale. Teachers have more autonomy and, with that, more accountability.”

In their experience, Wanda Gerard, Josina Nagtegaal and Debbie Terceros note, “Teachers require more time for professional development and professional time to have discussions, create solutions, and build supports within a new structure of learning.” To that end, their “colleagues have explored team teaching, wider use of technology, and an increased focus on developing learning opportunities.”

Professional development opportunities help teachers work with the curriculum, making it into something organically their own. Tom Christensen describes one approach. “We do curriculum deconstructs and builds, where we bring teachers together and look at key aspects of curriculum. If teachers don’t make the curriculum personal to them, it’s not going to be personal to the students. For eight or nine years, we’ve been doing professional development on project-based learning. Teachers have to be less of the sage on the stage,” he says, “and more of a learning facilitator.”

“Another aspect of this challenging, new way of thinking,” says Norbert Baharally, is that “This process has encouraged teachers to rethink teaching – every idea is considered. Teachers have had opportunities to collaborate with other colleagues in the school, in the province and across North America as we strive to improve our teaching. There is much more sharing of resources and lessons as teachers strive to change practices.”

How can other high schools facilitate this principle of Educator Roles and Professional Development? Baharally explains one way his school has gone about it. “We have implemented an instructional coach who meets with new teachers to help them as they develop their professional teaching methodologies and to work through the questions that often arise from our first year teachers. The instructional coach also meets with all staff members who are planning on attending PD opportunities to set goals beforehand and then later discuss how that teacher can share what they have learned with the rest of staff.”

“Change is hard. Rich, meaningful conversations must be rooted in a climate of respect.”

Wanda Gerard, Principal, Peace Wapiti Academy, with Josina Nagtegaal, Flex Coordinator, and Debbie Terceros, CONNECT Coordinator

With a focus on educator roles and professional development:

- structures are created to better support new types of learning relationships
- collaboration and shared decision making are encouraged
- administrators participate in the learning community and expand their leadership roles
- teachers build and have access to a growing repertoire of approaches to learning
- teachers work together to improve the design and delivery of the curriculum.

“Engage students, parents and teachers in a dialogue around school redesign. Develop avenues for input. Create methods for updating and communicating progress. Provide impetus and a rallying point for involved commitment from students, staff, parents and the community.”

Wanda Gerard, Principal, Peace Wapiti Academy, with Josina Nagtegaal, Flex Coordinator, and Debbie Terceros, CONNECT Coordinator

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