

The Crucial Time Factor in Sustainable Teacher Development and Assessment of Student Outcomes

Rita Elaine Silver and Jessie Png

KEY IMPLICATIONS

1. Successful and sustainable teacher professional development requires a multi-year investment that supports teachers beyond the initial introduction of new instructional strategies.
2. Student outcomes for learning are also best determined by taking a longer term view with multi-year assessments.
3. Teachers are keen to embrace pedagogical change if they see the relevance to their teaching and feel confident that they can master the new instructional strategies.

BACKGROUND

This report focuses largely on the third in a series of projects launched as a collaboration between the research team and one primary school. The goal was to enhance student reading comprehension and teacher understanding of the importance of classroom discussion.

While teachers who were involved in the previous intervention study (OER 09/10 RS) displayed increased understanding of the strategies introduced, they still lacked confidence in their ability to lead other teachers—a necessary component for sustainability of the intervention. In addition,

they had not fully mastered some aspects of the strategies. Data on student learning also needed further investigation.

FOCUS OF STUDY

The goal of this project was to facilitate and follow up on the intervention throughout 2013 in order to enhance scalability and sustainability. The research team continued to lead some parts of the intervention (e.g., workshops and feedback on lesson observations) while the participating teachers worked together on lesson development. At the same time, the research team continued to monitor teacher development through observations and interviews, and further examined student learning through reading comprehension tests. In 2014, the research team progressively stepped back in leading the intervention while encouraging the first generation of participating teachers to take on a greater leadership role.

KEY FINDINGS

1. Though the teachers feared that lower-achieving students would be disadvantaged in the type of whole-class discussion introduced in the intervention, this was not the case. Evidence from lesson observations and student tests showed that

lower-achieving students did at least as well, if not better, than higher-achieving students.

2. Teachers found that they could do “on-the-spot” assessments of student learning through discussion while they guided student learning during reading. More class time could be given to discussions and worksheets were not needed for all lessons. At the same time, vocabulary instruction could be addressed as needed for student comprehension.
3. Teachers were able to continue to use and develop instructional strategies learned in the previous intervention with continued support of the research team. The school was then able to develop this into a PLC project for other teachers. In this way the project became scalable (within that school) and sustainable.
4. Statistically significant findings for student learning did not emerge until the 3rd year. These gains became evident after teachers and students had time to develop their expertise.

SIGNIFICANCE OF FINDINGS

Having multiple years to work collaboratively was the critical factor in professional development and student learning.

Short-term interventions or one-off workshops did not seem to be as effective, especially for scalability and sustainability.

POPULATION

From 2009–2013, 12 teachers participated with 7 teacher participants in 2013. All were at one mainstream primary school. In 2014, the school continued the project as a PLC with approximately 7 participating teachers.

RESEARCH DESIGN

The study used collaborative lesson planning, lesson observations, post observation interviews and written reflections to gain information on teacher learning. Student tests designed for the study were used to assess student learning.

RESOURCES

Kim, Y-h., & Silver, R.E. (2016).

Provoking reflective thinking in post observation conversations. *Journal of Teacher Education*, 67(3), 203–219. doi:10.1177/0022487116637120

Png, J. (2016). Questioning the author: English language teachers' perspectives. *International Journal of Bilingual and Multilingual Teachers of English*, 4(1), 25–31. Retrieved from http://offline.uob.edu.bh/uob_files/698/vol4-1/paper%204.pdf

Silver, R.E., & Png, J. (2016). Learning to lead reading comprehension discussion. *RELC Journal*, 47(1), 71–78. doi:10.1177/0033688215609217

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