

Professional Learning Modes & Approaches

Definitions



Classroom-Focused

Professional learning that enables educators to participate through a ‘learner-centred approach’ through targeted observations and feedback to refine practice that focuses on growth and confidence in the classroom (Dabrowski & Mitchell, 2021).

Coaching

A professional learning activity that offers opportunities to address development needs, embedding techniques such as goal setting, effective questioning, and feedback to support professional growth.

It can often be described as an array of relationships between a coach (leader, experienced teacher) and coachee (early career or proficient teachers) depending upon the setting, focus or duration of the approach (Dabrowski & Mitchell, 2021).

Mentoring

An experienced, highly effective teacher facilitating and sharing their established skills and expertise with a beginning or less experienced teacher. It is typically a structured relationship between a mentor and mentee, with clear planning targeted towards specific goals, opportunities for the mentee to implement teaching strategies and the mentor to observe and provide feedback to refine practice over time.

The mentoring process promotes opportunities for mentees to reflect on their strengths and areas for improvement with their designated mentor through formal and informal activities, for instance:

- regular, scheduled meetings and check-ins
- ad-hoc conversations
- observation debriefs during scheduled breaks or outside of teaching hours
- other shared professional learning discussions or meetings

Observation of practice and feedback

A formal or informal act of observing teaching practice, accompanied by either verbal or written forms of feedback collected over time with the intent to improve outcomes for learners (AITSL, 2016).

Research suggests that in most cases, this practice is led by an experienced teacher or leader working collaboratively with a beginning or less experienced teacher, modelled through a continuous improvement approach that stimulates ongoing opportunities for mutual learning and increasing teacher confidence.

Community-Focused

Professional learning that promotes a ‘community of practice’ through the lens of collaboration, providing teachers with opportunities to engage in learning or addressing a shared problem or task in a group setting (Dabrowski & Mitchell, 2021).

Collaboration based on work samples

A shared process where teachers moderate and assess work completed by learners for the purposes of collecting evidence to inform where learners need to improve or to be extended, to understand how learners are progressing and for teachers to work collaboratively in planning future lessons.

This process can be dependent on the size and structure of the education setting, however in most cases, it is conducted within a small group of teachers and leaders or one-on-one between a teacher and leader.

Networks

The ability for teachers to build social connections and interactions with other teachers during their professional journey (Trust, 2017). These interactions can occur face to face, internally or externally from an educational setting or online, offering ‘just-in-time’ access to global information and solutions. Some examples can include:

- the exchange of teaching resources
- shared teaching and learning experiences
- collaboration in discussing teaching concepts
- attending a professional learning event together
- connecting with others through social media platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, and LinkedIn

This structure promotes stronger links between teachers and/or researchers, as opportunities for collaboration can extend beyond a single educational setting, state, or country (Dabrowski & Mitchell, 2021).

Professional learning communities (PLCs)

An approach for teachers to work collaboratively within an education setting, focusing on continuous improvement by linking the needs of learners with the professional learning needs of teachers.

PLCs promote a culture of continuous improvement using various forms of assessment to collect evidence of how learners are consolidating and progressing their skills, knowledge, and understandings in particular areas. Teachers work collaboratively in groups to plan, implement, and evaluate their teaching instruction as a form of professional learning that aims to improve learning. PLCs promote agency for teachers to develop and reflect upon their teaching practice and professional growth.

Face-to-face

Professional learning that connects teachers and leaders to participate in a face-to-face, shared learning experience based on a particular topic of focus within a group setting (Dabrowski & Mitchell, 2021).

Educational setting-based events

An on-site, specific group learning activity often delivered as a 'once-off' single dose presentation in an area of focus at the whole educational setting level or within a learning team/department level.

Face-to-face delivery remains the preferred presentation mode, however the increased accessibility of online meeting platforms now offers more opportunities for teachers to attend online.

External events

A conference, workshop or training course delivered face-to-face, online, or blended (face-to-face and online) for teachers and leaders to attend, with opportunities to engage and learn from educational experts in areas of focus at an individual level or across an educational setting.

Teachers and leaders who attend these events often receive opportunities to network with like-minded professionals, sharing expertise or experiences whilst identifying strategies for improvement that can be implemented back into their own educational setting.

Online

Professional learning in digital form, offering flexibility for teachers to learn and socially interact with like-minded professionals through targeted online programs or topic-based presentations (Dabrowski & Mitchell, 2021).

Modules and courses

A mode of delivering education or training in an online, interactive environment. In most cases, a learning management system hosts the content structure with set units of subject-related learning materials and resources for participants to learn from and complete to receive a certification or qualification.

The delivery mode can vary depending upon the presence of an instructor and the inclusion of opportunities to engage in discussion with fellow participants to promote networking as a form of learning.

Webinars/Online forums

A webinar is online event where a speaker or group of speakers deliver a presentation on a particular theme to a larger audience. It is often facilitated by a host who introduces the speakers, as well as providing instructions for attendees to interact with tools to submit questions. Webinars can be made available live (synchronous) or recorded and made accessible at any time (asynchronous).

Online forums are structured as a message board, with a facilitator instigating opportunities for attendees to exchange ideas and ask questions to a particular topic or theme.

Research-Focused

Professional learning that aims to establish ‘research capacity’ of educators through the engagement of education research, encouraging an inquiry-based mindset to enhance content knowledge and refine teaching practice (Dabrowski & Mitchell, 2021).

Inquiry/Action research

The ongoing process of reflecting on practice, undertaking and implementing professional learning and assessing the impact of a learning intervention. This mode of professional learning can initially be undertaken at an individual level; however, research suggests a collaborative approach, such as a professional learning community, can promote ongoing inquiry cycles.

Professional reading

Engaging with research and the education evidence-base as a mechanism to reflect on a relevant teaching issue and source alternative solutions that can enhance teaching knowledge and practice.

References

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