Rochester City School District



Office of Professional Learning

Professional Learning Methods

Immersing in Teacher Practice

Format for Learning Method

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Immersing in Teacher Practice

Description:

Immersing in teacher practice allows teachers to over time, intensely participate in the content in which they teach. For teachers to develop a rapport of strategies that work when teaching their content they must first engage in how to learn that content. This design is based on the premise that teacher knowledge, both depth and breadth, is key to success in the classroom. Additionally, this model focuses on building capacity within teachers. Gaining firsthand knowledge of a content area results in improved practices for teaching and student learning. To be able to think and act as a reader, writer, mathematician, historian or scientist is really a key component to being able to teach the content. This approach to professional learning allows teachers to recognize the complexity of their content. While tasks may seem simple, engaging in the practice reveals the challenges and layered cognitive processes of learning (Easton, 2008).

Critical elements of immersing in teacher practice include a focus on building capacity and a commitment to teacher leadership. Building the capacity of a school or a teacher to support student achievement takes a commitment of time and possibly a leap of faith. Immersing in teacher practice allows teachers to not only see what does work with students but also what students might struggle with. Additionally, immersing teachers in a content area allows teachers to take a role as a leader.

Benefits:

- Teachers become deeply engaged in and reflective about their subjects.
- Insight is gained into how teachers can better work with the students that they teach.
- Helps teachers to become informed decision makers.
- Allows teachers to become designers of strategies that work for students and provide constant modeling for their students.

Norms:

It is important that participants establish norms that are a consistent part of the process. Below is an example of possible norms. The group may decide on their own preferred set of norms. The norms may include being on time, remaining confidential, being prepared, etc.

Example of Possible Norms:

- Participants must spend more time *doing* the work and less time talking about the work.
- Maintain a positive, growth-minded attitude.
- Learn from and with one another.
- Be a risk taker.

Roles:

- **Facilitator**: a leader who is knowledgeable in the discipline – from within the school context or outside of the school. The facilitator decides on the meeting content and procedures. Additionally, she/he decides on the times that the group will meet.
- **Critical content friends**: All participants are present throughout the entire learning experience, and take an active role in discussions and group activities. They bring meaningful contributions in sharing, dialogue, questioning and feedback. They are collaborative and supportive working together to grow in their knowledge.

Implementation:

1. **Design opportunities for teachers to be learners in the disciplines that they teach.** Content teachers need time to come together to reflect on what they are teaching through new learning opportunities. Extended professional learning opportunities such as a summer institute or consistent weekly meeting allows teachers to engage in experiences that enhance their own learning.
2. **Structure the extended learning opportunity.** Ample time must be provided for participants to engage in the work of their content area as well as in reflection. These experiences can include reading, research and practice in the field through adult learning. This will help to remind participants what types of experiences their students are encountering and where they might struggle or excel.
3. **Pay attention to the learning environment.** This intensive type of immersion requires time, money and support from a sponsor (school or even a local college). Teachers immersing in practice need an extended period of consistent time arranged for this experience. Whether it occurs during the school day, after school hours or during summer time, the teachers need ample time to hone their craft. Four weeks in the summer is ideal while two hour meetings across the school year are also a possibility.
4. **Go public as a practitioner.** Receiving formal feedback regarding their own work mirrors the real life experiences that students have as learners. In small groups of like-minded colleagues, teacher-participants exhibit their work and receive feedback (Easton, 2008).

Sample Idea – Immersing in the teacher practice of writing

Getting Started

"Most educators I have met… hate to write. There is no quicker way to empty a room full of educators and administrators than to ask them to write something and publicly share it."

Joe Check, Associate Professor, Graduate College of Education, University of Massachusetts
Former Director, Boston Writing Project

Often we have fears and misconceptions about writing. At the very least, most of us know how hard it is to write. Examining our experiences with writing is one way to unearth and reflect on whatever notions, positive or negative, we have about writing.

Prompts for writing

Write about your own writing history. Begin as far in the past as you remember. You might recall marking with crayons on a wall in your house or writing in pencil on the fat-lined paper in primary school. Feel free to write about your experiences both in *and* out of school.

Or

Write about a time when you had a learning experience that included writing. You might recall writing a BIG paper in school or writing to persuade someone to do something. Feel free to write about your experience both in *and* out of school.

Share your writing with others and compare experiences.
What do you have in common? How is your experience unique?

Forms:

Please Note: The following log should be used:

Immersing in Teacher Practice

Meeting Dates and Times:	
Meeting Location:	

Objectives – What do you wish to know or be able to do as a result of this professional learning experience?

- _____
  _____
- _____
  _____
- _____
  _____

Anticipated Outcomes	How you will assess outcomes	Actual Outcomes

Please Note: The following Final Report should be handed into the Office of Professional Learning and your school based planning team.

Immersing in Teacher Practice Outcomes-Impact

Title of Practice: _____

Beginning Date: _____ **End Date:_____Number of Hours: _____**

Please attach copies of the following to this report:

- **Participation Log**
- **Samples of implementation (e.g. strategies or student work samples)**
- **Data to support outcomes**
- **Final Product (e.g. power point, presentation, workshop, etc.)**

DESCRIPTION: What type of immersion did you participate in? Explain.

_____

_____

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_____

FINAL OUTCOMES: Were the outcomes/goals of this Immersing in Teacher Practice met? Explain.

_____

_____

_____

_____

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_____

Final Product: (How will you share your findings with colleagues or other interested audiences?)

_____

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