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Reeves, Douglas B. (2010). *Transforming Professional Development into Student Results*. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

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Reviewed by Robert Bishop
University of Colorado at Denver

In my 21 years as teacher and principal, I have been subject to a variety of professional learning experiences as both a participant and as a planner-presenter. I have sat through the range of the good, the bad and the ugly, and I have to admit that I am responsible for some of the ugly. I liken our concept of what is good professional learning or the “perfect professional learning experience” to that of cooking perfect pasta. Al dente pasta has a slight resistance in the center when the pasta is chewed. My father, who was enthralled with cooking, taught me that throwing pasta against a wall is the best method to check whether or not pasta is cooked. If the thrown pasta sticks to the wall, it is ready to eat and the perfect pasta has been achieved. I use this analogy because this is what we often do with educator professional

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development: we throw a myriad of designs and experiences out there to see if they stick.

But any good cook will tell you that the only way to check pasta for doneness is to bite into it, experience it. The analogy here is that after cooking up a training or professional development activity, judging its value based purely on teacher satisfaction, tells us nothing of the impact the professional learning will have on student achievement. A professional development leader needs to know where to look and how to assess if professional development is impacting student results. Reeves, in theory, would parallel the thinking of the experienced cook –to properly assess the outcomes; we have to go beyond throwing the pasta and actually bite into it.

The primary premise of Reeve's new volume is professional learning that is popular, well liked and appreciated does nothing for student achievement. Reeves asserts, "The central challenge for educational systems around the world is the substitution of effectiveness for popularity. *Transforming Professional Development into Student Results* is a guide for teachers, leaders and policymakers who are willing to take on this challenge" (p. 2).

In this three part "how to" book, Reeves takes us from a harsh examination of what is wrong with current professional learning to ideas on how to transform our current professional development models to "high-impact" learning that is sustainable over the long term. In "Part I: What is Wrong with Professional Learning?", Reeves examines the range of professional learning experiences in an effort to point out the good intentions of teachers and leaders as well as call out the primarily ineffective components of most professional learning models (Guskey, 2000). A clear distinction is made in this section regarding the primary outcome of professional learning that is focused on "training" teachers rather than connecting the professional development to student achievement. Based on careful review of current practices and past research by experts like Guskey, Fullan and Marzano, Reeves assesses and diagnoses the current state of most professional learning

in schools. In this section, he is right on in pointing out the folly of launching into initiative after initiative and approaching the demands of accountability and reform through a myriad of school improvement plans leading to scattershot professional learning. To illustrate this phenomenon, Reeves assessed one district's professional development catalog as containing "dozens of offerings that were not only inconsistent with the district's stated goals and policies but also inconsistent with each other, providing contradictory advice to teachers and administrators on a range of subjects such as differentiated instruction, assessment, and effective leadership" (p. 9).

Various forms of scattershot professional development are all too commonplace, leading Reeves to propose to fix these deficient models in "Part 2: How to Create High-Impact Professional Learning." In these chapters, Reeves highlights the components of current professional practices that will lead to meaningful professional learning that is focused on impacting student results. It is here that Reeves (2010) reminds us of the importance of focus. "It is nearly impossible to overstate the value of focus. As Gallagher (2009) reminds us, focus at the individual and organizational levels offers exceptional rewards" (p. 4). Reeves introduces four imperatives (teaching, curriculum, assessment, and leadership) to focused professional learning which must replace the laundry list of initiatives and programs that tie up our professional learning time. Clear professional learning goals and focus, coupled with research, is a final parameter to what Reeves adamantly promotes. The need for teachers to take part in action research is paramount to their learning and their commitment to apply academic research as part of their professional development. Through action research, teachers can reflect a wide range of topics (i.e. student behavior, instructional practice, etc.) in a way that creates a sense of ownership of the research topic and the outcomes. "Experimental research and action research are not in opposition to one another; the latter applies the former to the real world of the classroom" (p. 5).

Finally, in "Part 3: How to Sustain High-Impact Professional Learning," the lessons learned from this book are applied to

build sustainable improvements for schools. A clear understanding of the difference between teacher evaluation and assessment for learning is artfully presented. Reeves states, “that we must practice what we preach, engaging in performance assessment for teachers and school leaders” (p. 5). Assessment of learning is the act of providing feedback to teachers and leaders in an effort to improve performance. In this section, Reeves presents several case studies that demonstrate high-impact learning. This real world insight to professional learning that impacts student achievement is Reeves’ real message.

This latest book by Douglas Reeves does not provide a step by step or formulaic approach to solving the deficiencies in professional learning of our schools and educational systems. Rather, the brutal truths about what is wrong with professional learning are brought to light and a foundational framework and mindset are presented. Any school leader committed to the transformation of their school’s or district’s professional development model to impact student results should include this book as part of their research and planning. The content of the book is not intended to provide a template or formula for successful professional development, but rather it is intended to prompt in-depth thinking and reflection about what is wrong with your current professional development model, the key elements you need to include in your transformation and how to implement and launch your new approach to get impactful and sustainable results. As Reeves concludes:

High impact learning is not about creating a life of efficiency and ease for teachers and leaders. It is about undertaking the challenge of professional work with deep meaning and lifelong impact. The journey is neither easy nor popular, but the rewards of helping colleagues and students improve their learning environment will be incomparable. I invite you to take the next step on the journey (p. 108).

The perfect professional development experience has many definitions and may not even be achievable. However,

Transforming Professional Development into Student Results will help you develop professional learning that is focused, meaningful and assessed in a way that goes beyond the paradigm of hoping your professional learning “sticks to the wall”. The result will be high-impact professional learning that is sustainable and impacts student achievement.

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Editors

Gene V Glass

glass@edrev.info

Gustavo Fischman

fischman@edrev.info

Melissa Cast-Brede

cast-brede@edrev.info
