Busting Professional Learning Myths with RPPL

Feb. 15, 2022, 12:00-1:00 EST

We’ll begin shortly.

- CHAT your questions/comments
- Your VIDEO can be on or off
- Please stay MUTED until Q&As
- This session is RECORDED
Quick Introductions

In the chat, share:

• your name,
• your org, and
• what brought you here today.
On Behalf of RPPL’s Members ...

Annenberg Institute at Brown University

Instruction Partners

Leading Educators

Teaching Lab

TNTP

UnboundEd
... and Research Advisory Council ...

Robert Berry
University of Virginia

David Blazar
University of Maryland

Travis Bristol
University of California, Berkeley

Julia Cohen
University of Virginia

Hunter Gehlbach
Johns Hopkins University

Monica Higgins
Harvard University

Constance Lindsay
University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

Eric Taylor
Harvard University

Kirk Walters
WestEd

Judith Warren Little
University of California, Berkeley

Suzanne Wilson
University of Connecticut
Today’s Speakers

Emily Freitag
RPPL Chair
CEO of Instruction Partners

Sarah Johnson
RPPL Vice Chair
CEO of Teaching Lab

Heather Hill
RPPL Senior Researcher
Professor at Harvard Graduate School of Education and the Annenberg Institute at Brown University

John Papay
RPPL Senior Researcher
Associate Professor of Education and Economics at the Annenberg Institute at Brown University

Nate Schwartz
RPPL Senior Researcher
Professor of Practice at the Annenberg Institute at Brown University
Overview of Today’s Event

1. Introductions (5)
2. Dispelling PL Myths (30)
3. More about RPPL (10)
4. How to Join as an Affiliate (10)
5. Closing (5)
Dispelling the Myths: What the Research Says about Teacher Professional Learning

Heather Hill
RPPL Senior Researcher
Professor at Harvard Graduate School of Education and the Annenberg Institute at Brown University

John Papay
RPPL Senior Researcher
Associate Professor of Education and Economics at the Annenberg Institute at Brown University
Overview

We explore common ideas that policymakers, district officials, and professional learning (PL) providers tend to hold about teacher development and PL that are either refuted by or not directly supported by research evidence. These cluster in 3 areas:

**Teacher Learning**
- **Myth 1.** PL is a waste of time and money.
- **Myth 2.** PL is more effective for early career teachers and less effective for veteran teachers.

**Learning Focus**
- **Myth 3.** PL programs must be job-embedded and time-intensive to be effective.
- **Myth 4.** Improving teachers’ content knowledge is key to improving their instructional practice.

**Program Structure**
- **Myth 5.** Research-based PL programs are unlikely to work at scale or in new contexts.
- **Myth 6.** Districts should implement research-based PL programs with no modifications.
Myth 1
PL is a waste of time and money.

Kernel of truth
Many PL opportunities, as currently instantiated, are expensive and do not lead to improvements in teacher practice or student learning.

Reality
Evidence shows that PL can lead to shifts in teachers’ skills and instructional practice with direct payoffs for student learning.

- Decades of research – including robust evidence from gold-standard randomized experiments – show that effective PL programs can help teachers substantially improve students’ academic and non-academic performance.

- Furthermore, teachers improve much more rapidly in some schools than in others, particularly schools where their development is supported by strong school leaders and better instructional feedback.

- Strong PL programs that have demonstrated substantial impacts on teacher practice and student learning. For example, recent meta-analyses found substantial impacts of coaching programs (0.12 SD) and STEM PL (0.13 SD) on state student test scores.
Myth 2
PL is more effective for early career teachers and less effective for veteran teachers.

Kernel of truth
Teachers do improve their practice more rapidly early in their career because of substantial on-the-job learning.

Reality
PL opportunities have been shown to support teacher development at all levels of experience.

- Research relying on overly strong assumptions found that teachers stop improving after 3-5 years on the job. Recent evidence relaxes these assumptions and finds substantial growth.

- Pianta and colleagues found large effects of the MyTeachingPartner PL on a sample of teachers with substantial experience (16 years, on average).

- The Instructional Partnership Initiative, which paired teachers to work together in collaborative partnerships based on areas of relative strength and weakness from teacher observation ratings, found equivalent impacts for early career and more veteran teachers.
Myth 3
PL programs must be job-embedded and time-intensive to be effective.

Kernel of truth
Teachers must attend at least some PL in order to learn from it, and longer PL provides more time for teachers to dig deeply into content.

Reality
Programs of varying lengths and formats can produce wide-ranging effects depending on how time gets used.

Lynch and colleagues’ meta-analysis of STEM PL programs found no relationship between program duration and effectiveness. “Programs that were limited in duration nonetheless generally had positive impacts on average. ... Several programs that combined new curriculum materials with a short amount of professional development documented moderate to large impacts on student achievement. In contrast, some studies of highly-intensive professional development programs showed little or no impacts.”

In her analysis of PL programs, Kennedy concluded that the core condition for program effectiveness was valuable content; more hours of a given intervention will not help if the intervention content is not useful.
Myth 4
Improving teachers’ content knowledge is key to improving their instructional practice.

Kernel of truth
Teacher content knowledge is a key feature of teacher effectiveness. Gains in knowledge do accrue from programs focused on conveying content to teachers.

Reality
PL programs that aim directly at instructional practices are more likely to shift student learning than PL programs with a focus on content knowledge.

In a STEM meta-analysis by Gonzalez et al, program gains in content knowledge did not positively correlate with gains in student outcomes. Gains in instructional practice did positively correlate with gains in student outcomes.

This pattern is driven by programs focused on content knowledge with only a modest practice component (e.g., Garet 2010; Garet 2016). These programs saw no impacts on student outcomes.

It is likely that successful programs improve content knowledge in the context of new curriculum and practices. The P-SELL curriculum, for instance, raised teachers’ science knowledge and instructional practice and ELs’ science achievement.
Myth 5
PL programs are unlikely to work at scale or in new contexts.

Kernel of truth
Program impacts do tend to be smaller when those programs are “scaled up.” We know that implementation difficulties drive some of these smaller effects.

Reality
Programs can have positive effects across a wide range of schools, and strong implementation can help sustain effects at scale.

Recent, rigorous evaluations of several large-scale PL programs have found large average effects over a wide range of schools (e.g., Building Blocks (Clements and Sarama); Reading Recovery (May); ASSET’s Advanced Professional Development).

Districts can increase the chances that ANY program will work locally by investing school leadership in new programs and building alignment between the program and any related instructional guidance.
Myth 6
Districts should implement research-based PL programs with no modifications.

Kernel of truth
Poor-quality implementation is associated with weaker impacts on student outcomes.

Reality
Practice fidelity first and adaptation with guardrails second.

Planned adaptation with “guardrails” can enhance program performance. READS (Kim) and KPALS (Fuchs) both show adaptation after an initial implementation year can advantage students.

“Troubleshooting meetings” after initial implementation can also help adapt the program to local contexts (Lynch et al).
Questions?

Use the CHAT

Come OFF MUTE and ask
Read all of this in our new brief!

https://annenberg.brown.edu/rppl/dispelling-the-myths
So What Is RPPL Anyway?

Why We Created RPPL & What We’re Studying This Year

Sarah Johnson
RPPL Vice Chair
CEO of Teaching Lab

Nate Schwartz
RPPL Senior Researcher
Professor of Practice at the Annenberg Institute at Brown University
Who We Are

The Research Partnership for Professional Learning (RPPL) is a collaborative of professional learning (PL) organizations, researchers, school systems, and funders.
What We Do

RPPL works to advance educational equity and student achievement by studying and sharing the specific features that make some PL programs more effective than others.
Our Goals

1. Uplift the current evidence base
2. Generate faster and better research on PL
3. Create the research and collaborative infrastructure so we can get that better research into practice in thousands of districts, schools, and PL orgs across the nation
4. Change who sets the research agenda
RPPL’s Evolution

**Formation**
1. Established concept
2. Held initial conference
3. Signed MOUs

**Phase I: Planning**
1. Established & launched RPPL with funding
2. Wrote our learning agenda and long-term plan
3. Conducted quick-win studies and a shared micro-study

**Phase II: 3-Year Chapter**
Learn things about PL through three types of research and ecosystem learning and development

RPPL Member Organizations

ANNENBERG
BROWN UNIVERSITY

INSTRUCTION PARTNERS

Leading Educators

TNTP
reimagine teaching

Teaching Lab

UnboundEd
There Is So Much We Don’t Know About PL

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Equity</th>
<th>Time &amp; Format</th>
<th>Content</th>
<th>Stickiness / Sustainability</th>
<th>Scale</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What works for whom, how, in what contexts, and with what level of impact?</td>
<td>What is the number of hours focused on a topic or delivered in a particular format that leads to impact?</td>
<td>What is the specific content knowledge or pedagogical content knowledge teachers should focus on to improve practice?</td>
<td>What sustains impact on teacher practice and student learning <em>long after</em> the end of a professional learning engagement?</td>
<td>How do we scale professional learning programs and maintain quality? (Impact declines when a program includes more than 100 teachers.)</td>
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### RPPL Priority Workstreams

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Framework</th>
<th>Types of Studies</th>
<th>Ecosystem Learning and Development</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>ANCHOR STUDIES</strong></td>
<td>Major, cross-organizational studies designed to gain deeper insight on a key topic of interest in the RPPL learning agenda</td>
<td><strong>SHARED LEARNING</strong></td>
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<td>Rapid learning based on repeated minor shifts to organizations' standard operating procedures in order to build quick knowledge about program design</td>
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<td><strong>CONTRIBUTING STUDIES</strong></td>
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<td><strong>RESEARCH EFFECTIVENESS</strong></td>
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<td>Direct research technical assistance and consulting from RPPL researchers and affiliates to organizations</td>
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<td><strong>BUILDING RESEARCH INFRASTRUCTURE</strong></td>
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<td>Building the infrastructure and model for research between PL organizations, researchers, state/districts, and funders</td>
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**RPPL Priority Workstreams**

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### Anchor Study 2022-2023

**How can PL providers and districts best use their limited support time with teachers around curriculum to build stronger instructional practice and better, more equitable outcomes for students?**
Questions?

Use the CHAT

Come OFF MUTE and ask
How to Join Us

Become a RPPL Affiliate

Emily Freitag
RPPL Chair
CEO of Instruction
Partners
**RPPL Ecosystem**

**RPPL Members (Governing Body)**
Includes PL org members, research members (Annenberg), and one funder rep who conduct and execute studies and engage in learning and development

**RPPL Funders**
Any funders who contribute to RPPL

**Research Advisory Council**
Weigh in on learning agenda & studies

**Research Technical Assistance Providers**
Matched to an org and provide support & expertise

**Anchor Study PIs**
Lead anchor studies as the Principal Investigator

**RPPL Affiliates**
Stay connected to RPPL’s work and share what they learn on PL

**RPPL Districts/States**
Participate in studies with RPPL members
What’s An Affiliate?

Any organization, state, or district whose work is relevant to RPPL’s learning agenda and wants to stay close to the learning, put into practice relevant findings, and help advance answers to these questions.

Criteria: Your mission/work is relevant to professional learning; you engage in supporting PL for teachers, leaders or shaping conditions for PL.
What Do RPPL Affiliates Get?

**Advance previews of:**
- Research findings from studies conducted by RPPL members & researchers
- Landscape analyses and literature reviews on PL research
- Shared measures, tools, and resources created by RPPL members to help conduct PL research

**Learning opportunities with RPPL members and researchers, such as:**
- Brown Bag Lunches (monthly discussions), topical conversations, and webinars

**RPPL communications channels to share opportunities, chat, and exchange information about PL**

**The pathway to becoming a RPPL member org in 2023, if desired**
Affiliate Commitment

Attend monthly RPPL Brown Bag Lunches and briefings; share relevant findings with your team to incorporate into practice.

Share RPPL’s research findings and amplify RPPL’s communications through your channels.

Share what you are learning relevant to RPPL’s learning agenda.
Timeline to Join

Feb. 15
1. Online event for anyone interested to learn more about becoming an affiliate
2. Affiliate application opens

Mar. 7-17
RPPL members review applications

End of Mar.
New affiliates join

Feb. 15

Mar. 18
RPPL notifies all applicants of decision by email

Early Apr.
RPPL hosts new affiliate onboarding sessions
Submit your application via this Google Form by 11:59 pm EST on Friday, March 4.
Questions?

Use the CHAT

Come OFF MUTE and ask
Coming by Email

1. Quick survey about today’s event
2. Myth-busting brief
3. Affiliate application link
4. Recording