

Building Better PL: What Works with RPPL

Nov. 16, 2022, 1:00–2:00 ET

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



Stacey Alicea
RPPL Executive
Director



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



Sarah Johnson
RPPL Vice Chair
CEO of Teaching Lab

Overview of Today's Event

1. Introductions (5)
2. About RPPL (5)
3. Building Better PL: Presentation (30)
4. Building Better PL: Q&A (15)
5. Closing (5)



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**

There is so much we don't know about PL



Equity

What works for whom, how, in what contexts, and with what level of impact?



Time & Format

What is the number of hours focused on a topic or delivered in a particular format that leads to impact?



Content

What is the specific content knowledge or pedagogical content knowledge teachers should focus on to improve practice?



Stickiness / Sustainability

What sustains impact on teacher practice and student learning *long after* the end of a professional learning engagement?



Scale

How do we scale professional learning programs and maintain quality? (Impact declines when a program includes more than 100 teachers.)

We busted some myths about PL...

... which led us to what we DO know works



Building Better PL:

How to Strengthen Teacher 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

Read all of this in our new brief

annenberg.brown.edu/rppl/what-works



Determining What Works In
Teacher Professional Learning

October 25, 2022

Building Better PL: How to Strengthen Teacher Learning

Heather C. Hill | Harvard University & Annenberg Institute at Brown University
John P. Papay | Annenberg Institute at Brown University

Why did we write this brief?

- **As we wrote our last brief on dispelling PL myths, we asked a lot about what we know works in the literature.**
- **It seemed like an opportunity to add...**
 - With the publication of dozens of rigorous studies of PL, we have better evidence than ever before.
 - We wanted to stick close to the lessons from rigorous causal and descriptive studies.
- **We suspected that we would find some surprises in this literature.**

How we approached this review

- Reviewed PL meta-analyses and reviews focused on its impact on student outcomes; read studies written after those reviews were completed.
- Relied on lessons from causal studies to generate our recommendations – but the recommendations are not based on causal methods. It's complicated but important.
- Found few causal studies of PL focused on equity. This is a problem RPPL hopes to address.

Interpreting our findings

- We focused on *features* of effective professional development.
- Program features not recommended do not necessarily = program failure.
- Instead, PL tends to be more effective with the program feature.

What did we learn?

Some design features do appear to improve instructional practice and student outcomes across classrooms and contexts.

HOW PL is delivered (formats)



Built-in time for teacher-to-teacher collaboration around instructional improvement.



One-to-one coaching, where coaches work to observe and offer feedback on practice.



Follow-up meetings to address teachers' questions and fine-tune implementation.

WHAT gets covered in PL (foci)



Building subject-specific instructional practices rather than building content knowledge alone.



Supporting instruction with concrete materials like curricula or formative assessments rather than leaving behind only general principles.



Explicitly attending to teachers' relationships with students.

What makes these features effective?

Promising practices seem to share two common principles:

1. Effective PL supports teachers' day-to-day practice – focus more on improving what teachers do in classrooms.

2. Effective PL involves accountability for change and improvement—follow-up from other educators.

HOW PL is delivered (formats)



How #1:

Encourage peer collaboration for improvement

Peer collaboration focused on instruction can boost student achievement.

Examples:

- Direct discussion of or rehearsal of instructional practices
- Feedback from peer observations
- Informal consultations and assistance

What's the evidence for this?

- There is growing evidence that teachers can and do learn from each other; teacher effectiveness improves when teachers have more time to collaborate.
- Collaboration seems to work better when it embodies joint work around shared and specific goals.
- Collaboration requires dedicated time for learning together and strong and supportive cultures.

Why does this work?

- Teachers learn from colleagues who have expertise and context-specific knowledge
- Learning is rooted in day-to-day problems of practice
- Collaboration can promote social accountability and follow-up



How #2:

Rely on coaching to get the work done

Coaching is one of the heaviest investments the U.S. makes in improving the classroom experiences of children. Studies suggest it works.

Examples:

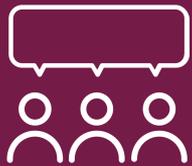
- 1:1 work with teachers that includes modeling, observing, feedback and/or reflection
- Leading and supporting PLCs
- *Non-examples: coaches helping with standardized testing, other admin duties*

What's the evidence for this?

- Across dozens of studies in diverse subjects, programs that contained coaching worked to improve both average classroom instructional quality and student outcomes.

Why does this work?

- Starts with where teachers are, and builds with new instructional techniques
- Relevant and motivating; psychological benefits
- Social accountability



How #3:

Add follow-up meetings to address teacher concerns

Teacher-driven follow-up meetings are a low-cost feature of many successful PL efforts.

Examples:

- A quick meeting with PL providers to talk about how the first weeks of implementation went
- A walk-through by a program coach
- Ongoing meetings with program designers

What's the evidence for this?

- A recent meta-analysis of STEM instructional improvement programs found that follow-up meetings boosted overall program effectiveness.

Why does this work?

- Fosters collaboration and problem-solving, and possibly positive adaptation of the program
- Enhance teacher agency
- Social accountability

**WHAT gets
covered in PL (foci)**



What #1:

Target subject-specific instructional practices over content knowledge

PL focused on new instructional methods in classrooms leads to greater student benefits than PL focused on content knowledge.

What's the evidence for this?

- STEM: Program-induced changes in teachers' instructional practice correlate positively with changes in student outcomes.
- STEM and ELA: PL programs that focus on new instructional strategies – and why they work – tended to have larger effects than programs that focused on conveying a body of knowledge to teachers.
- Science: PL around video analysis of instruction led to large student gains as compared to content-focused PL.

Why does this work?

- May be hard to substantially change content knowledge in a short period
- Practice-focused PL clearly delineates what teachers must do in classrooms to enact new ideas
- Highly relevant to teachers' day-to-day needs



What #2:

Prioritize PL with practice-supportive materials over general principles

Practice-supportive materials provide teachers with concrete ways to reach PL goals.

What's the evidence for this?

- Two recent meta-analyses found that when PL opportunities featured new curriculum materials, they yield larger effects on student outcomes than PL programs that did not.
- PL opportunities focused on teacher study of student data seem to work **only** when that data is linked to materials that provide specific next steps in the classroom.
- Two successful formative assessment programs provide teachers with item banks to use regularly in their classroom.

Why does this work?

- Teachers do not have to integrate what they have just learned in PL into practice
- “Give me something to use the next day”



What #3:

Deliver more PL focused on relationships with students

Improving teacher-student relationships is crucial and potentially easier to address than other forms of content-focused PL.

What's the evidence for this?

- Empathy-based intervention for teachers can cut their disciplinary referrals, especially among at-risk students.
- Perspective-taking intervention can increase teacher investment in perplexing students, and improve student-reported relationships with teachers and students' grades.
- My Teaching Partner emphasizes teachers' regard for students and the creation of emotionally supportive environments, and produces both gains in student achievement and reductions in racial disparities in classroom discipline.

Why does this work?

- Reducing disruptions leaves more time for learning
- Invites student engagement
- Feelings of safety and belonging reap cognitive benefits, especially for historically marginalized students

Where do we go from here?

Additional research about the design features that matter

Confirm whether these PL formats and foci are indeed effective in producing teacher and student learning

Explore other design features that are theoretically justified but have less existing evidence

Explore the reasons why they work, for whom they work, and the conditions necessary to make them more successful

Broaden the research base beyond STEM and ELA

In particular, deepen our understanding of how to best improve equitable instruction and how to support educators in developing culturally responsive teaching practices

What implications does this have for your work?



Use the CHAT



Come OFF MUTE to share

Q&A



Use the CHAT



Come OFF MUTE and ask

Closing



Sarah Johnson
RPPL Vice Chair
CEO of Teaching Lab

Share & learn with us

- Complete your exit ticket (survey)
- Learning something important about PL relevant to RPPL's learning agenda? Share it with us!
- Participate in future shared learning and research opportunities with RPPL

Coming by email

1. Survey
2. Brief
3. Slides
4. Recording

CONTACT US

Stacey Alicea: salicea@rpplpartnership.org

Heather Hill: heather_hill@brown.edu

John Papay: john_papay@brown.edu

Sarah Johnson: sarah.johnson@teachinglab.org

General: team@rpplpartnership.org

