Professional Development: What Works and What Doesn't

Article

Kehoe, K. F., & McGinty, A. S. (2024). Exploring teachers' reading knowledge, beliefs and instructional practice. *Journal of Research in Reading, 47*(1), 63–82.

What did they find?

- Teachers largely reported feeling prepared or well-prepared to teach reading. Teachers with higher self-efficacy often performed better on the knowledge-based surveys.
- However, some of these same teachers were observed implementing contradictory practices. Teachers placed high value on the standards, but then did not properly include those standards while lesson planning.
- Many elementary classroom teachers do not have the adequate definitional or applied knowledge to successfully differentiate while teaching reading in high-needs classrooms.

What did they do?

Researchers explored the relationship between teachers' knowledge of reading and student learning, with a specific focus on teachers' knowledge and self-efficacy beliefs in relation to their self-reported literacy instructional practices and lesson plans. Researchers worked with 34 teachers of beginning readers in four neighboring rural, high-needs schools in Virginia. All teachers were participating in a data-driven, decision-making professional development course. Teacher knowledge was assessed using the Teacher Knowledge Survey and the Literacy Practices Survey. Teacher practices were assessed using literacy lesson plans to determine whether evidence-based literacy practices were present.

What could this mean for teachers?

Professional development is most impactful for literacy instruction when tailored to specific knowledge gaps or misconceptions within the current setting, while respecting teachers' professional experiences.

Teacher performance can increase significantly following specific feedback from an observer. Teachers can also choose to self-reflect, perhaps by recording themselves teaching to determine if their practices align with their knowledge and beliefs.

The most effective teachers are flexible, confident, and willing to try new evidence-based literacy instruction practices in their classrooms to meet student needs. Teachers will need to leave behind ineffective practices to create room for stronger literacy instruction.

Professional development is most meaningful when it is focused on the site-specific strategies that promote growth in literacy instruction. The strategies provided must also be shown as effective for student reading outcomes. Combining solution-based professional development with follow-up coaching aids teachers in the successful implementation of new practices.

William & Mary School of Education | LITERACY LAB

Written by **DESIREE FOSTER** TRIP Fellow