

Effective PD must be ongoing, interesting, and meet the needs of participating personnel. The five core principles of PD for those teaching ELs, presented here, are based on the tenets of adult learning theory, the published work of several researchers, and “the fundamental belief that all teachers bring strengths to their profession and want their students to achieve and feel successful.” SEAs and LEAs can use these principles to structure PD opportunities to facilitate successful outcomes for EL teachers and their students.

CORE PRINCIPLES FOR PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT OF TEACHERS OF ELS

Principle 1: Build on a foundation of skills, knowledge, and expertise.

Professional development must build upon the current foundation of basic skills, knowledge, and areas of expertise of the educational personnel involved. Professional development will link new knowledge and activities with what the practitioners already know and are able to do, and will extend their thinking. Those attending any professional development activity will bring with them different experiences, knowledge, and skills. The individual(s) providing the activity must determine the current level of expertise, the needs of participants, and develop appropriate materials and activities. Professional development activities that do not target a specific audience must, at a minimum, offer basic knowledge to ensure that practitioners are operating from the same foundation.

Principle 2: Engage participants as learners.

Professional development should include rich and varied opportunities that engage educational personnel as learners and offer the opportunity to apply new skills and knowledge. Professional development is effective when the materials are presented in a hands-on manner using techniques that suit various learning styles. In addition, practitioners need time to try out new methods in a safe environment before either moving to another topic or attempting the method in the classroom.

Principle 3: Provide practice, feedback, and follow-up.

Professional development should offer educational personnel opportunities for (1) practicing the new skills, strategies, and techniques; (2) providing feedback on performance; and (3) continuing follow-up activities. A constructivist approach to staff development precludes the didactic presentation of decontextualized knowledge and skills. Principle 3 reinforces the precept that information about skills and knowledge must be presented to educational personnel in a manner that allows them to link new information to their current knowledge and skills, and allows them to construct their own meanings. Interactive, hands-on approaches to professional development make use of sound principles of adult learning. Modeling specific skills with practice sessions also will allow practitioners actively to make meaning out of the new information. Finally, a period of classroom application followed by formal observation and feedback should be used to reinforce the development of new skills.

Principle 4: Measure changes in teacher knowledge and skills.

Successful and effective professional development should be manifested by measurable increases in participant knowledge and skills. The evaluation of a participant’s knowledge and skills is essential to the effectiveness of the professional development program. In order to evaluate the participant, an appropriate amount and variety of information about what participants do and their effect on people should be collected. Assuming that the participants are teachers, then a variety of evidence of the genuine teaching work and performance of the teacher should be collected.

Principle 5: Measure changes in student performance.

Professional development should be linked to measurable outcomes in student performance, behavior, and/or achievement. A direct link to student outcomes is necessary to determine what types of

professional development activities are effective within specific contexts. The local level district involved in focused, long-term professional development activities must first identify what measurable student outcomes it wants to change. The problem for which professional development is sought may provide the type of outcome to be assessed. For example, a school district recently wished to link professional development more closely to student outcomes. The outcomes this district identified as important to change were the number of EL students

- (1) placed in pull-out English as-a-second language (ESL) programs;
- (2) who received low grades in reading, math, and science; and
- (3) who dropped out of school. Principle 5 states that a link must be established as evidence that professional development contribute to significant improvement in the quality of educational programs or student achievement.