

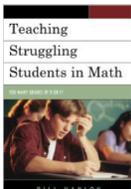
Nevada Public Education



Professional Development vs. Training Do you know the difference?

Bill Hanlon

What Nevada calls professional development isn't.



There is a difference between professional development and training. When parents, members of the community, talk about education, they are talking about their students learning math, science, social studies, etc. – academics.

They assume that when their children's teachers attend professional development, that means their children's teachers are engaged in learning based on the content they are teaching, strategies to teach that content, strategies to assess how students learned that content, and resources that support those strategies and content.

Additionally, we would expect the professional development to link what teachers are teaching to what has already been taught, outside experiences, and how what is being taught will be reflected in later learning. Professional development “embeds” other strategies for working with special populations, classroom management, as well as working with parents as part and parcel of the professional development.

Training, on the other hand should not be confused with professional development. Teachers receive training on how to use new programs and information pushed by special interest groups. The state pushes NEPF (teacher evaluation) training, that training doesn't address the content teachers are teaching. When groups like TFA conduct workshops on “community leadership”, which is half their training, as professional development, that's just plain wrong. That has zero to do with what the teachers are doing in the classroom. When the state requires teachers enroll in Family Engagement and call it professional development, that wrong. It has nothing to do with what teachers are teaching in the classroom. When principals purchase new programs, the vendors come in and provide training on how to use their product. That is not professional development. Again, it has nothing to do with what teachers are teaching in the classroom. So when teachers receive training on IReady, Evaluate, AimesWeb testing, that's not professional development – its training.

Having those activities labeled as professional development is very misleading and a reason why 75% of teachers indicate that the PD they attend doe doesn't help them in the classroom. The teachers view it as a waste of their time.

Let's be clear, we have a shortage of math teachers. The people we are hiring typically don't have degrees in math. Many of our new teachers probably know you can't divide by zero – but they don't know why. These new teachers don't know how to connect solving equations to the order of operations; or see how the Pythagorean Theorem is linked to the distance formula, equation of a circle, or trig identities. Teachers who do not possess the knowledge cannot transmit what they don't know or understand. Teaching topics in isolation makes math a lot more difficult for students. I marvel watching teachers teach graphing absolute value, parabolas, exponentials, logarithms, and trig functions during the course of the year like they all don't have the same format. Students, not seeing these connections, struggle needlessly.

Being able to link content allows teachers an opportunity to introduce new concepts and skills in familiar language, making students more comfortable, allows teachers to review and reinforce concepts and skills or address deficiencies. Linking these is important for students' comfort and understanding.

When new teachers enter the profession without this knowledge, student understanding and comfort levels suffer. Math seems disconnected. The simple fact is, math is very connected. Multiplying polynomials can be introduced using the same procedure learned in 4th and 5th grade multiplying multi-digit numbers. What changes most in math is how we describe the math, the vocabulary, and the notation – it depends on the context it is being used in. In math, we discuss slope, the change in y over the change in x . If you were driving over the mountains, slope would be referred to as the “grade” of the hill. In construction, slope would be described as the “pitch” of a roof. In education, it's called growth. Our teachers need professional development based on their academic assignment.

Sending teachers to a training on how to be a community leader, a better parent communicator, classroom management, or how to use a purchased product does not improve a teachers' knowledge of content, strategies to teach or assess that content, or be able to link concepts and skills.

We can see how teachers are being forced into “training” at the expense of actual professional development. The state requires “stand alone” classes that eliminates teachers being able to enroll in actual professional development.

Stand-alone “training” classes are often pushed by special interest groups and politicians, whether the special interest groups are pushing “community leadership”, ELL, diversity, family engagement, classroom management, etc., there is one thing they have in common, they reduce the time available for teachers to actually experience professional development that would impact their content knowledge, strategies and resources that will result in increased student comfort levels in math as well as achievement.

There is a need for both professional development and training, but my experience suggests that professional development should be prioritized and many topics covered in separate, stand-alone “trainings” should be embedded in the professional development. There are only so many hours in a day, and what teachers know is you can only use an hour once.

Bill Hanlon, is a noted speaker, an author, educator, consultant and coach for schools, former Director of the Southern Nevada Regional Professional Development Program, and is a national presenter for organizations such as AASA, ASCD, ALAS, NMSA, NASSP, NSBA, and NCTM. He was the coordinator of Clark County School District's Math/Science Institute and was also responsible for K-12 math audits. He served as vice president of the Nevada State Board of Education, Regional Director of the National Association of State Boards of Education (NASBE) and as a member of the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) States Partnership Board. He also hosted a television series, "Algebra, *you can do it!*" on PBS Las Vegas.

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