

GROUNDING PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN THE WORK OF SCHOOLS AND SPECIFIC STUDENT LEARNING GOALS

LEARNING IN THE TEACHING WORKFORCE

Heather C. Hill, *The Future of Children*, Spring 2007

In this article Heather Hill examines the effectiveness of two forms of teacher learning—graduate coursework and professional development. She concludes that a lot of graduate coursework is of low intellectual quality and disconnected from classroom practice. Thus, most research finds no link between teachers' graduate degrees and student learning unless the degree is in the teacher's primary teaching field. Similarly, most professional development workshops, institutes, and study groups appear to be brief, superficial, and of marginal use in improving teaching. But it does not have to be this way, argues Hill. Professional development can enhance teaching and learning if it has three characteristics. It must last several days or longer; it must focus on subject-matter-specific instruction; and it must be aligned with the instructional goals and curriculum materials in teachers' schools. Such high-quality programs do exist. But they are a tiny fraction of the nation's offerings.

BRIDGING THE GAP BETWEEN STANDARDS AND ACHIEVEMENT: THE IMPERATIVE FOR PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN EDUCATION

Richard Elmore, Albert Shanker Institute, 2002 (in pocket)

In this Albert Shanker Institute publication, Richard Elmore argues that education reforms that are based on standards and accountability will fail unless policymakers also adopt a strategy to ensure that educators have the knowledge and skill they need to help students succeed. Elmore also explains that, to use professional development as an instrument of instructional improvement, schools and school systems must reorganize themselves to make substantial changes in the conditions of work for teachers and students. But the bottom line, says Elmore, is not in issues of governance and process, but in how the quality of instructional practice affects student learning.

LEARNING POLICY: WHEN STATE EDUCATION REFORM WORKS (CH 8, "POLICY AND LEARNING")

David K. Cohen and Heather C. Hill, Yale University Press, 2001

Education reformers and policymakers argue that improved student achievement requires stronger academic standards, stiffer state tests, and accountability for students' scores. Yet these efforts seem not to be succeeding in many states. Here, the authors argue that effective state reform depends on conditions which most reforms ignore: coherence in practice as well as policy and opportunities for professional learning. The authors report that state policy influenced teaching and learning when there was consistency among the tests and other policy instruments; when there was consistency among the curricula and other instruments of classroom practice; and when teachers had substantial opportunities to learn the practices proposed by the policy. When these conditions were met for teachers, their students' test scores rose. Unfortunately, this was the case for only a small minority of teachers.