

Foreword



Unlike teachers of the past, whose job was configured as marching through a textbook with their students, today's teachers are being asked to teach an ever more diverse group of learners more challenging material in ways that result in deeper understanding and more equitable outcomes. Furthermore, knowledge is expanding rapidly and technologies are changing the nature of life and work daily. Many students entering school today will leave to work in jobs that do not yet exist, using knowledge that has not yet been discovered and technologies that have not yet been invented, facing complex problems our generation has been unable to solve. Students today need much more than simply to recall a canon of received knowledge. They need to be able to find, analyze, synthesize, evaluate, and apply knowledge to new ideas, answers, and solutions; communicate in multiple forms, use technologies, and collaborate with others; and become able to learn on their own throughout life.

The kind of teaching required to support contemporary learning goals in this context is very different from what was required when the goal was merely to “cover the curriculum” and “get through the book,” enabling some students to succeed if they could and others to fail. In order to enable very diverse students to learn the higher-order skills once reserved for a tiny few, teachers need a range of new skills. They must understand content more deeply and flexibly; they must understand the science of learning—how children learn and develop in cultural contexts, generally and individually, within and across distinctive subject areas; they must develop teaching strategies that foster analysis and reasoning; and they must continually incorporate appropriate technologies into their teaching practice.

As these realities place new demands on schools, the pressing issue of how to help teachers accomplish such daunting goals is critical. The changes schools are expected to effectuate cannot be teacher-proofed and handed down from on high. Supporting teachers' learning in systematic ways is the linchpin to school transformation. It is in the classroom that the direct engagement between students and the content and processes of their learning occurs and can be most effectively leveraged. The strategic moves that teachers make—in selecting and orchestrating

materials, activities, examples, and support—are the primary mediators of learning.

This insightful book by James B. Short and Stephanie Hirsh makes an important contribution to our collective learning by examining how curriculum frameworks and high-quality instructional materials can support teachers' actions in ways that motivate and support much deeper student learning for a much wider range of students. While high-quality instructional materials embedded in strong curriculum designs are a critical tool appreciated by teachers when they are available, they are not a “silver bullet” solution for better student outcomes. Instead, they are part of a more complex implementation process that relies on high-quality curriculum-based professional learning—something that is still relatively rare in the United States. The *Elements* provide a framework for system leaders, curriculum developers, and specialists in professional learning to address this challenge.

Whereas professional learning in many countries has long been grounded in a national or state curriculum, until recently in the United States, much professional learning has been focused either on how to use textbooks by marching through chapters focused on specific topics or on more general instructional principles that teachers seek to apply to their classrooms. It is only recently that we have seen more widespread efforts to design professional learning grounded in high-quality instructional materials aimed at higher-order thinking and performance skills associated with new curriculum standards.

A critical problem is that, for many teachers, the kind of teaching expected by these new standards differs from what they have taught in the past and from how they experienced learning themselves when they were students. This means a different type of professional learning is needed. Short and Hirsh provide a view of curriculum-based professional learning in which teachers immerse themselves in lessons as learners to experience student thinking. Because curriculum-based professional learning is anchored in the instructional materials teachers will use with their students, it provides teachers with opportunities to take on a learner perspective and experience the lessons and activities in high-quality instructional materials themselves to inform their curriculum planning. They then transition to planning that involves making decisions on how they will teach a lesson in ways that can meet the diverse needs of students and ensure the curriculum is culturally relevant.

This approach is hugely valuable and, based on prior research, likely to result in much greater success for students. In 2017, my colleagues at the Learning Policy Institute examined the studies on professional

development that documented changes in teacher practice associated with significant gains in student achievement. We found that there were seven common features of these efforts. This book illustrates how all of these design features can be implemented as Core, Structural, or Functional Design *Elements* of curriculum-based professional learning. For example, in *Effective Teacher Professional Development*, my colleagues and I observed that such learning:

- **Is content focused**, developing teaching strategies associated with specific curriculum content. This book's Core Design *Elements* describe how the use of high-quality instructional materials can help build teachers' disciplinary content knowledge, pedagogical knowledge, and pedagogical content knowledge.
- **Incorporates active learning** in ways that directly engage teachers in designing and trying out teaching strategies, providing them an opportunity to engage in the same style of learning they are designing for their students. In its discussion of Functional Design *Elements*, this book describes how adult learners can be actively engaged in experiencing the instructional approaches embedded in high-quality curriculum materials, thus mirroring active teacher learning on the learning teachers are expected to create for students in classrooms. The Learning Designs *Element* prioritizes inquiry-based learning experiences for teachers that model sense-making strategies teachers will use with students.
- **Supports collaboration** by creating space for teachers to share ideas and collaborate in their learning, often in job-embedded contexts. As part of the Structural Design *Elements*, the authors elevate the importance of collaboration among teachers who are using the same instructional materials to create a community of practice that can grow and learn together.
- **Uses models of effective practice** by providing curricular models and modeling of instruction that offer teachers a clear vision of what best practices look like. These may include lesson plans, unit plans, sample student work, observations of peer teachers, and video or written cases of teaching. The authors note that all these aspects of modeling are part of a successful launch and can be revisited through professional learning community (PLC) cycles and deeper support throughout the school year. In the book's section on Functional Design *Elements*, the authors describe how curriculum-based professional learning can support teachers in analyzing

the sample lessons and classroom videos of students engaged in learning with the materials.

- **Provides coaching and expert support** that offers expertise about content and evidence-based practices, focused directly on teachers' individual needs. These are incorporated in the Models *Element*, with an emphasis on choosing the appropriate model for the intended outcome.
- **Offers feedback and reflection opportunities** for teachers to think about, receive input on, and make changes to their practice. As a Functional Design *Element*, the authors define such opportunities as facilitated time when teachers think about new instructional materials, receive input on how best to use them, examine student work and assessment data, and make changes to instructional practice in response.
- **Is of sustained duration**, providing teachers with adequate time to learn, practice, implement, and reflect upon new strategies that facilitate changes in their practice. This is a key part of the Structural Design *Elements* and is carried through in the authors' discussions of leadership, resources, and coherence.

The final chapter of the book explains how to put the *Elements* into action, with recommendations for teachers, school-based coaches, professional learning providers, curriculum developers, and district curriculum coordinators, as well as school and system leaders. These recommendations provide guidance for creating better professional learning systems and pathways for teachers and leaders in ways that help translate the big ideas of curriculum-based professional learning into the day-to-day actions that can transform teaching.

It is exciting to look forward to a day when we may have systems of support for learning that bring together high-quality curriculum resources and expert teachers in a virtuous cycle of improved instruction on behalf of all students. Some years ago, when my colleagues and I were studying five leading nations for our book *Empowered Educators*, we noted that “Producing highly skilled and committed teachers is not the work of a single innovative school or the aggregation of heroic individuals who succeed against the odds. In high-performing countries, the opportunities for teachers to learn sophisticated practices and continue to improve are embedded systemically in education policies and practices.” This book points the way toward a coherent set of policies, tools, and practices designed that educational systems can use to ensure quality teaching in all communities. I trust there are many who will benefit from its wisdom.

—Linda Darling-Hammond