NSW EDUCATION STANDARDS AUTHORITY

Applying Professional Development

Applying Professional Development

In 2015 over 100,000 NSW teachers were surveyed about their professional development experiences, preferences and needs. Almost 12,000 teachers responded to the survey. Among other things teachers were asked about their experiences when putting ideas and strategies from professional development into practice. They first were asked to choose whether they found it primarily 'challenging' or 'exciting' to apply the learnings from their PD.

Exciting or challenging?

Most teachers found it exciting rather than challenging to apply PD to their practice.

Of 8397 respondents, the majority 6986 (82%), responded that they found it exciting to implement the ideas and strategies they had learned from their PD while 1503 (18%) responded that they found implementing PD challenging.

Responses from teachers who found it challenging to implement PD indicated that it became less challenging to implement PD with increasing years of experience (Table 1), was less challenging for respondents from metropolitan areas (Table 2) and for teachers who had trained pre-2004 (Table 3). Respondents found it more challenging to implement PD if they were from government schools (Table 4), temporary-part time/casual teachers (Table 5) or were secondary teachers (Table 6).

Table 1 Percentage of teachers of different levels of experience who found it challenging to implement PD

Years' experience	1-5	6-10	11-15	16-20	21-25	26-30	30+
% challenging	20.6	20.4	17.2	14.1	15.3	12.1	13.2

Table 2 Percentage of teachers in different geographic locations who found it challenging to implement PD

Location	Metropolitan	Regional	Rural	Remote
% challenging	16.4	19.3	18.3	19.9

Table 3 Percentage of teachers at different levels of accreditation who found it challenging to implement PD

Accreditation Status	Pre-2004	Conditional	Provisional	Proficient
% challenging	13.9	23.5	19.9	19.1

Table 4 Percentage of teachers in different sectors who found it challenging to implement PD

Sector	Government	Systemic	Independent	Other
% challenging	18.6	16.7	15.9	16.3

Table 5 Percentage of teachers of different employment statuses who found it challenging to implement PD

Employment status	Permanent F/T	Permanent P/T	Temporary F/T	Temporary P/T (Casual)
% challenging	16.0	14.1	18.0	22.3

Table 6 Percentage of teachers from different setting who found it challenging to implement PD

Setting	Early childhood	Primary	Secondary	Other
% challenging	11.1	15.4	20.6	14.7

Why challenging?

Most teachers who found it found it challenging to apply PD to practice responded that this was primarily due to lack of time and redesigning than they had available, and lack of resources to make the changes they would like.

Teachers who responded that it was challenging to apply PD to practice were asked to indicate their strength of agreement with nine statements about the possible sources of the challenge by responding strongly disagree, disagree, agree, or strongly agree. The responses for the strongly disagree and disagree categories were aggregated, as were the agree and strongly agree categories. The scores from the 1473 teachers who responded to these questions have been presented as percentages.

The main reasons teachers found it challenging to implement PD are lack of time and redesigning than they have available (87%) and lack of resources or support to make the changes they would like to make (78%). The challenges least often appeared to arise from a lack of confidence to lead or make changes to practice (30%), from being risk averse (29%), or from not knowing how to makes changes or review practice (25%) (Table 7).

Table 7 Reasons PD is challenging to apply to practice (n=1473)

	Strongly disagree/ disagree %	Strongly agree/ agree %	N/A %
It requires more time and redesigning than I have available	9.6	87.5	2.9
I don't always have the resources or support to make desired changes	18.8	78.1	3.2
It is difficult in isolation or on my own	23.0	73.5	3.6
It is difficult to transfer what I have learned when I return to school	16.3	79.9	3.8
Ideas and strategies don't match my school/classroom environment	26.4	68.1	5.5
I find I am effective in my own practice but cannot influence/sustain wider change	39.4	55.8	5.1

	Strongly disagree/ disagree %	Strongly agree/ agree %	N/A %
I find it too great a risk to try new things in my situation	67.1	29.7	3.3
I don't have the confidence to lead or make changes to practice	68.2	28.7	3.1
I don't know how to change or review my practice	70.5	25.5	3.9

Geographic location

Responses from metropolitan, regional, rural teachers were compared and the small number of remotely located teachers (53) were removed from the data. When examining responses from the three geographic locations it was evident that the findings were consistent with the findings for the overall cohort above, however metropolitan teachers most often responded that they required more time and redesigning than they had available, (metropolitan 91%, regional 84% and rural 86%). Rural teachers more often responded it was difficult in isolation or on their own (rural 82% compared to metropolitan 74% and regional 71%), that they didn't always have the resources or support to make the desired changes (rural 83% compared to metropolitan 77%, regional 78%) and were effective in their own practice but couldn't influence/sustain wider change (rural 63% compared to metropolitan 56%, regional 57%). Regional teachers less often felt that the ideas and strategies didn't match their classroom environment (regional 67% compared to metropolitan 72% and rural 71%).

Sector

Teachers from all sectors responded to the challenges preventing them from applying PD with consistent ratings to the entire cohort above, and with a high degree of consistency between sectors. However categorised as 'other', were less concerned by a lack of time and redesigning than were teachers in the other three sectors (other 76% compared to government 87%, systemic 90% and independent 95%). Teachers in government schools more often felt they didn't have the resources or support to make desired changes, and teachers in independent schools were the least impacted by lack of resources or support (government 81% compared to systemic 76%, independent 68% and other 76%). Only 20% of teachers in independent schools were not confident to lead or make changes to practice, compared to government 32%, systemic 29% and other 35%.

Teaching experience

Teachers with less experience more often faced difficulties in implementing PD than their more experienced colleagues.

When the responses of teachers with experience of 1-5 years (451), 6-10 years (441), 11-15 years (177), 16-20 years (98), 21-25 years (106), 26-30 years (70) and 30 plus years (130) were analysed similar results to those for the entire cohort were found although it was clear

that teachers with less experience more often faced difficulties in implementing PD than their more experienced colleagues, for example, not having the confidence to lead or make changes to practice (1-5 years 37% compared to 6-10 years 30%, 11-15 years 24%, 16-20 years 24%, 21-25 years 30%, 26-30 years 20% and 30 plus years 17%), finding it too great a risk to try new things in their situation (1-5 years 35% compared to 6-10 years 29%, 11-15 years 21%, 16-20 years 27%, 21-25 years 28%, 26-30 years 17% and 30 plus years 23%) and not knowing how to change or review their practice (1-5 years 33% compared to 6-10 years 23%, 11-15 years 23%, 16-20 years 20%, 21-25 years 24%, 26-30 years 17% and 30 plus years 20%) (Figure 1).

Figure 1 Reasons applying PD is challenging by years of teaching experience
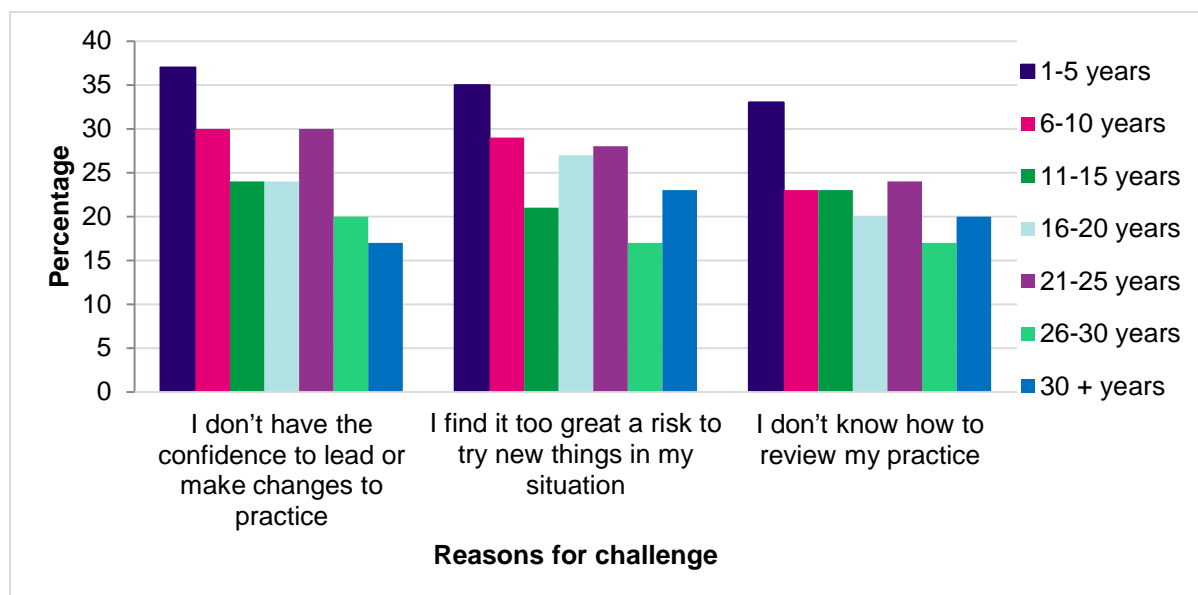
Employment status

The responses across employment groups were consistent with the overall cohort, however a greater percentage of full-time teachers reported that they required more time and redesigning than they had available than part-time teachers (permanent full-time 92% and temporary full-time 91% compared to permanent full-time 81% and temporary part-time 79%). Only 20% of permanent full-time teachers felt that they didn't know how to change or review their practice compared with permanent full-time 28%, temporary full-time 28% and temporary part-time 32%. Temporary teachers more often lacked confidence to make or lead changes than permanent teachers (temporary full-time 40% and temporary part-time 36% compared to permanent full-time 23% and permanent part-time 23%) and more often found it too great a risk to try new things (temporary full-time 37% and temporary part-time 37% compared to permanent full-time 22% and permanent part-time 23%).

Accreditation status

Responses were analysed from pre-2004, conditional, provisional and proficient teachers. Highly accomplished and lead teachers were not included due to the small number of responses (21). Findings about the challenges involved in applying PD were consistent with the entire cohort and between accreditation status groups with some exceptions. Pre-2004 were least restricted by confidence to lead or make changes to practice (pre-2004 22%, conditional 44%, provisional 36% and proficient 30%), least often found it too great a risk to try

new things (pre-2004 23%, conditional 51% provisional 34% and proficient 27%) and least often didn't know how to change or review their practice (pre-2004 22%, conditional 45% provisional 33% and proficient 22%).

Setting

When responses were analysed by sector, once again the same pattern as for the entire cohort was found, however it was evident that the smaller number of early childhood teachers and 'other' teachers were less often challenged by lack of time and redesigning than they had available (early childhood 79% and other 78% compared to primary 86% and secondary 88%). Early childhood and primary teachers were more often challenged by the difficulties of making changes in isolation or on their own (early childhood 79% and primary 78% compared to secondary 71% and other 72%). Early childhood and secondary teachers found that the ideas and strategies from their PD less often matched their classroom/school environments (early childhood 69% and secondary 71% compared to primary 63% and other 63%). Primary teachers and those from the 'other' group were less confident than early childhood and secondary teachers to lead or make changes to practice (primary 36%, other 39% compared to early childhood 27% and secondary 26%) and more often didn't know how to change or review their practice (primary 27%, other 32% compared to early childhood 21% and secondary 24%).

Why exciting?

Most teachers were excited to apply their PD to practice because of its potential benefit to their students and because it encourages them to reflect on their practice and try new ideas.

Teachers who responded that it was predominantly exciting to implement their PD were asked to indicate their strength of agreement with seven statements which gave possible reasons for the excitement under the headings strongly disagree, disagree, agree or strongly agree. The scores of the strongly disagree and disagree categories have been aggregated as have agree and strongly agree categories. These have been expressed as percentages below.

The great majority of the 6924 respondents (97%) indicated that they found it exciting to apply PD because of the potential benefits to their students and to feeling encouraged to reflect on their practice and try new ideas. Over 90% indicated they were inspired by PD and that they felt they had a strong knowledge and experience base to make effective changes. Approximately 20% strongly disagreed or disagreed with the proposition that they worked in an environment where positive change is made possible and 23% felt they were not supported through colleagues to review and improve practice. Forty three percent felt that time and resources were not provided to support their action (Table 8).

Table 8 Reasons it is exciting to apply PD expressed as percentages (n=6924)

	Strongly disagree/ disagree	Strongly agree/agree	N/A
I can see a potential benefit to my students	1.1	96.7	2.2
I feel encourages to reflect on my practice	2.5	96.8	0.7

	Strongly disagree/ disagree	Strongly agree/agree	N/A
and try new ideas			
I am inspired by PD	4.9	93.4	1.6
I feel I have a strong knowledge and experience base to make effective changes	6.6	92.0	1.5
I work in an environment where positive change is made possible	20.0	77.7	2.4
I am supported through colleagues to review and improve on my practice	23.0	74.1	2.9
Time and resources are provided to support my actions	43.3	53.0	2.8

Geographic location

Responses from metropolitan, regional, rural, and remote teachers relating to sources of excitement for PD were consistent across geographic locations except for the small number of remotely located teachers (210) who more often felt they were provided with the time and resources to support their actions than other groups (remote 58% compared to metropolitan 55%, regional 51% and rural 52%).

Sector

When responses to sources of excitement for PD for government, systemic, independent and other teachers were analysed, the only variations from the general pattern were that the independent and 'other' groups more often felt that time and resources were provided to support their actions than their counterparts (independent 58%, other 58% compared to government 52% and systemic 53%). Government and 'other' teachers less often felt they worked in environments where positive change is made possible (government 76%, other 73% compared to systemic 80% and independent 81%).

Teaching experience

When responses from teachers were analysed by career stage, results generally were consistent with those of the entire cohort and across career stages although the least experienced teachers indicated they less often felt they had a strong knowledge and experience base to make effective change (1-5 years 84% compared with over 93% for all other groups). Respondents' belief that their working environment was supportive of change increased with years of experience (from 76% for 1-5 years to 82% for 30 plus years).

Employment status

The sources of excitement for permanent full-time, permanent part-time, temporary full-time and temporary part-time teachers mainly were consistent with the entire cohort, however temporary part-time teachers generally responded a little less positively than other groups. The clearest example of this trend was the response to working in an environment where positive change is made possible (temporary part-time 70% compared to permanent full-time

81%, permanent part-time 76%, temporary full-time 80%). Full-time teachers, whether permanent or temporary, more often agreed/strongly agreed to having time and resources to support their actions than the other groups (permanent full-time 55%, temporary full-time 58% compared to permanent part-time 51%, temporary part-time 51%). Temporary full-time teachers more often agreed/strongly agreed they were supported through their colleagues to review and improve their practice (temporary full-time (81%), compared to permanent full-time (76%), permanent part-time (72%) and temporary part-time (65%).

Accreditation status

Teachers at higher levels of accreditation and pre-2004 teachers responded they were more often inspired by PD (highly accomplished/lead teachers 97%, pre-2004 94%, proficient 94%, conditional 91%, provisional 91%), and derived more excitement about implementing PD from the fact that they have a strong knowledge and experience base to make effective changes (highly accomplished/lead teachers 97%, pre-2004 96%, proficient 93%, conditional 87%, provisional 93%). Provisionally and proficiently accredited teachers least often felt they worked in environments where positive change is made possible (provisional 74% and proficient 76% compared to pre-2004 81%, conditional 80% and highly accomplished/lead teachers 85%).

Setting

When responses for early childhood, primary, secondary and 'other' teachers were analysed, early childhood and primary teachers more often agreed/strongly agreed with many of the reasons being sources for their excitement for PD, for example, that they worked in an environment where positive change is made possible (early childhood 84%, primary 80%, secondary 76%, other 75%) and were supported by colleagues to review and improve their practice (early childhood 82%, primary 76%, secondary 72%, other 68%). Secondary teachers least often felt they had the time and resources to support their actions (secondary 50% compared to early childhood 69%, primary 57%, other 56%).

What influences the impact of PD on practice?

> Teachers found leadership, personal, colleague and school factors to be effective in influencing the impact of PD on practice.

Respondents were asked to indicate the extent to which sixteen factors influenced the impact of PD on practice on a four-point scale where in order of increasing agreement the points were labelled not effective, somewhat effective, effective, and very effective. Effective and very effective results have been aggregated for purposes of this report.

The most effective factors were supportive leadership (very effective/effective 94% and somewhat effective 4%), high personal motivation (very effective/effective 93% and somewhat effective 6%), a prevailing sense of optimism (very effective/effective 92% and somewhat effective 7%), working with colleagues applying best practice (very effective/effective 93% and somewhat effective 6%), a positive organised and orderly school environment (very effective/highly effective 91% and somewhat effective 8%), understanding what's required to support and improve student learning and engagement (very effective 92% and somewhat

effective 7%), and environment with an emphasis on improvement (very effective/effective 90% and somewhat effective 9%). At the same time teachers indicated that an environment with emphasis on accountability and measurement was the least effective (very effective/effective 65%, somewhat effective 26%) (Table 9).

Table 9 Factors that influence the application of PD (n=8186)

	Not effective	Somewhat effective	Effective	Very effective
Supportive leadership	1.1	4.4	33.9	60.3
High personal motivation	0.8	5.7	44.1	49.3
A prevailing sense of academic optimism (a belief in every student's ability to learn)	1.2	6.6	42.7	49.5
Working with colleagues applying best practices	1.1	6.2	47.1	45.7
A positive, organised and orderly school environment	1.1	8.0	47.3	43.6
Understanding what's required to support and improve student learning and engagement	0.8	7.0	52.8	39.4
An environment with emphasis on improvement	1.3	8.7	51.3	38.8
Having clear professional goals	1.7	14.0	53.5	30.8
Having constructive feedback on my professional practice	2.2	15.6	51.4	30.7
Formal opportunities for collaboration	1.6	15.3	55.8	27.3
An environment where there are established school priorities	2.9	18.2	53.5	25.4
Engaging through education networks or professional associations	2.7	20.8	51.4	25.1
Being able to engage effectively with the community	3.8	22.0	51.3	22.9
Access to a range of student data	3.7	23.2	49.8	23.4
Working with consultants or external expertise	3.7	23.3	52.4	20.6
An environment with emphasis on accountability and measurement	9.2	25.7	45.4	19.7

Geographic location

Responses relating to factors influencing the impact of PD on practice from metropolitan, regional, rural and remote were consistent with the overall findings and across locations.

Sector

Responses from government, systemic, independent and 'other' teachers were mostly consistent, however, teachers in government and systemic schools were more positive about access to a range of student data than teachers from the independent sector and the other

group (government 75%, systemic 76%, compared to independent 71% and other 60%). Responses from the 'other' category found it more effective to be able to engage effectively with the community (other 81% compared to government 74%, systemic 74%, independent 73%) and an environment where there are established school priorities (other 81% compared to government 74%, systemic 74%, independent 73%) as more effective than their counterparts.

Teaching experience

The responses from teachers across years of experience generally were similar, however the rated effectiveness of several of the factors increased with teaching experience.

Factors influencing the outcome of PD seen to be more effective with increasing years of experience were; high personal motivation (ranging from 1-5 years 92% to 26-30 years 97% and 30 plus years 96%), working with consultants or external expertise (1-5 years 71% to 26-30 years 76% and 30 plus years 76%), and engaging through education networks or professional associations (1-5 years 75% to 26-30 years 79% and 30 plus years 81%). The least experienced teachers responded that they found constructive feedback on their professional practice (1-5 years 86% compared with between 79% and 83% for all other groups) and an environment with an emphasis on accountability as measurement as more effective than their more experienced colleagues (1-5 years 70% to 16-30 years 62% and 30 plus years 59%).

Employment status

When results were analysed across employment groups the percentage of responses were generally similar however the high level of personal motivation of full-time permanent teachers was reduced for temporary-part-time staff (permanent full-time 98%, permanent part-time 95%, temporary full-time 94% and temporary part-time 92%). A greater percentage of temporary full-time teachers rated the following as effective; access to a range of student data (temporary full-time 79%, permanent full-time 74%, permanent part-time 68% and temporary part-time 72%) an environment with emphasis on accountability and measurement (temporary-full time 70%, permanent full-time 64%, permanent part-time 63% and temporary part-time 65%) and being able to engage effectively with the community (temporary full-time 79%, permanent full-time 73%, permanent part-time 75% and temporary part-time 74%).

Accreditation status

When the responses of pre-2004, conditional, provisional and proficient teachers were analysed the results were consistent with the entire cohort, however a greater percentage pre-2004 teachers found formal opportunities for collaboration to be effective than other groups (pre-2004 86%, compared to conditional 77%, provisional 81% and proficient 82%) but were the least positive about an environment with emphasis on accountability and measurement (pre-2004 62% compared to conditional 69%, provisional 68% and proficient 66%). Provisionally accredited teachers were least positive about having constructive feedback on their professional practice (provisional 76% compared to pre-2004 81%, conditional 85% and proficient 81%).

Setting

When responses from early childhood, primary, secondary, other teacher were analysed, the clearest contrasts were between primary and secondary teachers. Primary teachers were more often excited by; a prevailing sense of optimism (a belief in every student's ability to learn) (primary 95%, secondary 90%), access to a range of student data (primary 80%, secondary 70%), having constructive feedback on professional practice (primary 85%, secondary 80%), being able to engage effectively with the community (primary 79%, secondary 69%,) formal opportunities for collaboration (primary 86%, secondary 80%), and working with consultants or external expertise (primary 78%, secondary 68%).

Summary

- Over 80% of teachers found it exciting to apply the ideas and strategies they had learned from their PD to their practice, while less than 18% responded that they found applying PD to practice challenging.
- Respondents who felt it was challenging to apply PD found it less challenging with increasing years of experience, if they were from a metropolitan area, were from the independent sector, or were trained prior to 2004. Respondents found it more challenging to implement PD if they were from government schools, were temporary part-time/casual or were secondary teachers.
- Teachers who found it challenging to apply PD to practice gave their main reasons as lack of time and redesigning than they had available and lack of resources or support to make the changes they would like to make. The challenges least often appeared to come from a lack of confidence to lead or make changes to practice, from being risk averse, or from not knowing how to makes changes or review practice.
- The great majority of teachers who found it exciting to apply PD to their practice reported that this was because of the potential benefits to their students and to feeling encouraged to reflect on their practice and try new ideas. Over 90% also indicated they were inspired by PD and that they felt they had a strong knowledge and experience base to make effective changes. Approximately 20% strongly disagreed or disagreed with the proposition that they worked in an environment where positive change was made possible and 23% felt they were not supported through colleagues to review and improve practice.
- The most effective factors influencing the impact of PD on practice were; supportive leadership, high personal motivation, a prevailing sense of optimism, working with colleagues applying best practice, a positive organised and orderly school environment, understanding what's required to support and improve student learning and engagement, and an environment with an emphasis on improvement. An environment with emphasis on accountability and measurement was seen to be the least effective factor.