

# What is Effective Teacher Professional Development?

Professional development (PD or ProD) can be defined as teachers' ongoing learning to improve the way they teach, and it occurs in both formal and informal ways. PD days are the most familiar formal structure of professional development and usually feature a combination of presentations, hands-on workshops, and collaborative teamwork that are often organized in advance by school and school district leadership. Teachers also routinely set their own, informal, ongoing PD agendas, such as taking additional courses, pursuing graduate study, personal study of their subject matter or teaching approaches, sharing resources and ideas with colleagues, and building learning networks through social media.

According to research, effective teacher professional development:

- Recognizes that teachers are professionals who should be given an opportunity to select what they would like to learn from a variety of research-based ideas about improving students' learning.
- Provides long-term, ongoing opportunities for teachers to reflect upon both their chosen and mandatory PD experiences.
- Provides opportunities for teachers to coach one another and work together to analyze new teaching techniques, which often connects new teachers with experienced colleagues.
- Provides opportunities for teachers to study and gather data on the effects of changes in their teaching approach, particularly in response to new ideas or initiatives in education.

One of the clearest findings from modern research is that “one-time” workshops have little long-term impact on how someone teaches. Research also confirms that all forms of PD require a sustained commitment of time and resources; that teachers need to have the chance to put what they learned into practice and to reflect on how new ideas and teaching approaches work within their classrooms; and that students are more successful when teachers have meaningful, ongoing, PD opportunities.

**For online resources as well as the research references that inform this issue, please visit:**  
**[www.cea-ace.ca/facts-on-education](http://www.cea-ace.ca/facts-on-education)**

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