Professional development of teachers is a career-long process

Teacher professional development begins with initial teacher education and continues until retirement, and it is generally agreed by teachers and other education professionals to be a good investment of education dollars.

Professional development is available to all teachers in NSW.

Professional development positively impacts student outcomes

One of the most cited meta-analyses looking at the effect of professional development on student outcomes calculates an effect size of 0.54. It claims that average students would increase their achievement by 21 percentile points if their teachers participated in quality professional development.

However, a question arises:

- In teaching what are the elements of professional development that improve outcomes for students?

There is insufficient evidence on the effectiveness of the following elements of professional development:

- The appropriate number of contact hours or delivery timeframes for professional development programs.
- The effectiveness of professional learning communities.

This is not to say that professional development programs of a longer duration and professional learning communities do not work to improve student outcomes. However, there is no conclusive evidence to definitively support these elements.

More evidence is needed

Many studies investigate the impact of professional development on teacher knowledge, teaching practice and teacher satisfaction. Far fewer take the extra step of examining the impact of professional development on student achievement.

There is a clear need for further research that focuses on which elements of professional development have the greatest impact on student learning outcomes.

Available research reveals that the following elements of professional development have a positive impact on student outcomes:

- A focus on teachers’ content knowledge of the subject matter.
- A focus on teachers’ knowledge of how students learn.
- Alignment to clear and specific contextual goals.
- Support from school leaders.

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Further Information

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