



NATIONAL STAFF DEVELOPMENT COUNCIL  
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*Select the strategy that works*  
**PROCESS**  
*for your context and content*

BY LOIS BROWN EASTON

**I**magine a school that has an environment of staff growth and learning. The climate that makes learning possible for adults in this school can always improve, but the school can legitimately call itself a professional learning community. This school has the *context* for adult learning.

Imagine that this school has collected and analyzed data from a variety of sources. Staff members know what they need to learn to do better so students can learn better. Teachers know the *content* they must study.

What they need to know is how: How will they learn what they need? What strategies will help them learn and help them make changes that affect student achievement? What *processes* will they initiate?

Selecting the right process (or strategy or design) is an important consideration for those developing and participating in professional learn-

ing that will make a difference. In fact, it is so important that the National Staff Development Council made it one of three aspects designers of professional development must consider, along with context and content (NSDC, 2001).

Imagine that the staff at our imaginary school has determined that students need to improve their reading skills in the content areas. The staff wants

to learn how to help students understand materials they read in social studies and science, for example. Rather than have administrators decide how they should learn, staff members consult a resource that describes powerful strategies for professional develop-

ment — such as NSDC's newest book, *Powerful Designs for Professional Learning* (NSDC, 2004) — and select a variety of processes that could be used. Some of these designs work individually. Some work individually and then suggest that individuals get together in groups. Some work best

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# Select the strategy that works

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in groups. Six months into their focus on reading in the content areas, teachers come together, bringing a variety of viewpoints after experiencing a variety of professional development activities — though all focused on reading. Their professional development continues with other processes as they implement the changes they have identified.

Let's be more specific. In the first six months, one teacher decides to **access student voices** by having students talk about reading in focus groups. Other teachers begin **action research** projects, mostly working alone but getting together every other week to share their results. A few individuals keep **journals** about reading in their own classrooms. Some of these individuals create **portfolios** to share with others. Another group conducts **case discussions** on reading, and another looks at curriculum as **curriculum designers**. The principal and associate principals do **classroom walk-throughs** that focus on reading. Another group **analyzes the data** that initiated this professional learning cycle; this group wants to know the details behind the scores that alarmed the staff about reading in the content areas. The last group examines classroom and district **assessments** for levels of questioning about text.

At the end of the first six months, these individuals and groups learn from each through **visual dialogue**, and the staff as a whole creates a plan for action. The action research individuals and groups continue their work, as do the journal writers and portfolio makers. The curriculum designers and the assessment group expand their work, and other groups begin to form. Some staff members begin to meet in **critical friends groups** and do **tuning protocols** around student understanding of text. A small group decides to **shadow students** in another school, known for its focus on critical reading skills.

Later, as implementation continues (and gets tougher), a group forms to do

## 21 strategies

The 21 strategies included in *Powerful Designs for Professional Learning*:

- Accessing student voices
- Action research
- Assessment as professional development
- Case discussions
- Classroom walk-throughs
- Critical friends groups
- Curriculum design
- Data analysis
- Immersing teachers in practice
- Journaling
- Lesson study
- Mentoring
- Peer coaching
- Portfolios for educators
- School coaching
- Shadowing students
- Standards in practice
- Study groups
- Training the trainer
- Tuning protocols
- Visual dialogue

**lesson study** related to reading in science classes. Another group looks at assignments through the **standards in practice** process. Finally, the staff decides to have a **school coach** help them focus on literacy across the curriculum.

This article and the charts on Pages 3-6 will guide you in choosing the designs that will work for your school.

## WHO?

All of the 21 professional development designs included in *Powerful Designs for Professional Learning* work well with classroom teachers as well as administrators at the building and district levels. The Page 3 chart identifies designs that will benefit by including college or university staff or community members, par-

ents, and policy makers as partners.

Regardless of who is involved in professional development, always ask, "Who else needs to be here?"

1. Who should be involved?
2. Will people work as individuals or in groups?

## WHAT AND WHY?

Each of the 21 designs has roots in what happens in classrooms, focuses on learners and learning, and is collaborative in some way. All designs honor professionals. All lead to application. All promote inquiry and reflection.

Beyond these standards for powerful professional development, however, are other more specific purposes that can be promoted through certain designs. These more specific purposes take the form of questions listed below. Designs that are especially oriented to these specialized purposes are listed in the charts on Pages 4 and 5.

1. Which designs are most useful for gathering and using information from within the school or district about learning?
2. Which designs are most likely to use outside resources to inform the work?
3. Which designs are especially useful in creating a learning community?
4. Which designs focus most on standards, curriculum, and assessment?
5. Which designs focus most on practice or pedagogy?
6. Which designs are most useful for looking at classrooms?
7. Which designs focus on the whole school and/or beyond?
8. Which designs are particularly reflective?
9. Which designs look at student work or involve students in some way?
10. Which designs are best for bringing others (other than teachers or administrators) into the school improvement effort?

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**POWERFUL DESIGNS: WHO AND WHEN**

POWERFUL DESIGN	WHO? <i>In addition to classroom teachers and administrators, who should be involved?</i>					WHEN? <i>(Assumes no less than 1-year commitment)</i>						
	University or college staff	Community, parents, policy makers	Individuals at first, then groups	Pairs	Large groups/ concurrent small groups	Frequency				Duration		
						3 to 6 times a year	At least monthly	At least weekly	Daily	Each session is 3 hours or more	Each session is 1 to 2 hours	Each session is an hour or less
Accessing Student Voices			X			X				X		
Action Research	X		X				X*	X**			X*	X**
Assessment as Professional Development					X	X				X		
Case Discussions					X		X				X	
Classroom Walk-Throughs			X						X			X
Critical Friends Groups	X				X		X				X	
Curriculum Designers	X				X	X				X		
Data Analysis	X	X			X	X				X		
Immersing Teachers in Practice					X		X				X	
Journaling			X						X			X
Lesson Study					X	X				X		
Mentoring	X			X				X			X	
Peer Coaching	X			X				X			X	
Portfolios for Educators			X					X				X
School Coaching	X	X			X		X				X	
Shadowing Students		X	X			X				X		
Standards in Practice					X		X				X	
Study Groups	X	X			X	X				X		
Training the Trainer	X			X			X				X	
Tuning Protocols	X				X		X				X	
Visual Dialogue					X	X				X		

\* = group sharing    \*\* = individual work

Source: *Powerful Designs for Professional Learning*, by Lois Brown Easton. Oxford, OH: National Staff Development Council, 2004. All rights reserved. Order through NSDC's Online Bookstore, [store.nsd.org](http://store.nsd.org).

**POWERFUL DESIGNS: WHAT AND WHY**

<b>POWERFUL DESIGN</b>	<b>Useful for gathering data in a school</b>	<b>Involves gathering information from external sources</b>	<b>Particularly helpful in creating a learning community</b>	<b>Looks at standards, curriculum, assessment</b>	<b>Focuses on pedagogy and teaching</b>	<b>Involves looking at classrooms</b>	<b>Involves looking at whole school/ beyond</b>
Accessing Student Voices	X						X
Action Research	X	X		X	X	X	X
Assessment as Professional Development		X		X			
Case Discussions		X		X	X		
Classroom Walk-Throughs	X					X	
Critical Friends Groups			X		X		
Curriculum Designers		X		X			X
Data Analysis	X						
Immersing Teachers in Practice				X	X		X
Journaling					X		
Lesson Study		X		X	X	X	X
Mentoring		X	X		X	X	
Peer Coaching		X	X		X	X	
Portfolios for Educators	X				X	X	
School Coaching		X					X
Shadowing Students	X	X				X	
Standards in Practice				X			
Study Groups		X		X			X
Training the Trainer							X
Tuning Protocols			X		X	X	
Visual Dialogue	X	X	X	X			X

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**POWERFUL DESIGNS: WHAT AND WHY**

	Is particularly reflective	Involves looking at student work or students	Good for involving others	Good for problem solving	Results in a concrete product	Is experiential	Involves modeling
<b>POWERFUL DESIGN</b>							
Accessing Student Voices		X	X	X			
Action Research		X		X			
Assessment as Professional Development					X		
Case Discussions							
Classroom Walk-Throughs				X		X	
Critical Friends Groups		X		X			
Curriculum Designers					X		
Data Analysis				X			
Immersing Teachers in Practice						X	X
Journaling	X					X	
Lesson Study				X	X	X	X
Mentoring	X	X	X	X		X	X
Peer Coaching	X	X		X		X	X
Portfolios for Educators	X	X		X	X		
School Coaching			X	X			
Shadowing Students		X	X			X	
Standards in Practice		X		X	X	X	X
Study Groups				X			
Training the Trainer	X		X		X	X	
Tuning Protocols		X					
Visual Dialogue			X	X		X	

**POWERFUL DESIGNS: HOW**

POWERFUL DESIGN	Facilitator needed?			Administrator involvement?			School in/out?		Cost?*
	No	At first	Yes	Support	Participation essential	Participation helpful	In	Out	
Accessing Student Voices			X	X		X	X		\$
Action Research	X			X		X	X		\$\$
Assessment as Professional Development			X	X	X		X	X	\$\$\$
Case Discussions			X	X		X		X	\$\$
Classroom Walk-Throughs	X			X	X		X		\$
Critical Friends Groups		X		X		X	X		\$\$
Curriculum Designers			X	X	X			X	\$\$\$
Data Analysis			X	X	X			X	\$\$\$
Immersing Teachers in Practice			X	X		X	X	X	\$\$\$
Journaling	X			X	X		X		\$
Lesson Study			X	X		X	X	X	\$\$
Mentoring	X			X	X		X		\$\$
Peer Coaching	X			X	X		X		\$\$
Portfolios for Educators	X			X	X		X		\$
School Coaching			X	X	X		X		\$\$\$
Shadowing Students			X	X	X		X		\$\$
Standards in Practice			X	X		X	X		\$\$
Study Groups		X		X	X		X		\$\$
Training the Trainer			X	X		X	X	X	\$\$\$
Tuning Protocols		X	X	X		X	X		\$\$
Visual Dialogue			X	X	X		X		\$\$\$

\* \$ = low cost    \$\$ = medium cost    \$\$\$ = high cost

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# Select the strategy that works

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11. Which designs can be used to address specific problems and seek solutions?

12. Which designs result in a concrete product? Which designs are the most experiential?

13. Which designs may involve modeling?

## WHEN?

To be effective, schools should plan to commit to a design for at least a year. No design should be implemented only once a year. They are meant to be continuous over a period of time.

See the chart on Page 3 for guidance in designs that will work well in three to six sessions a year, those that require at least monthly meetings, those that should occur at least weekly, and those that should happen daily.

In addition, the duration of any professional development activity or session can vary enormously. Some strategies that may require less frequent meetings may need three hours or more for each session. Some strategies may require educators to meet together more often but for shorter amounts of time. Individual work that results in later group sharing might require an hour or less.

## HOW?

All 21 designs identified in this article can be used with other designs to explore the same content. In fact, using a variety of adult learning strategies oriented towards the same need can enrich the results considerably.

The chart on Page 6 will help you identify strategies by answering the following questions:

1. Which designs require a facilitator?

2. Which designs require administrators to be involved?

3. Which designs work best when school is in session? Which designs work

## What are NSDC's process standards?

In terms of process, the NSDC Standards for Staff Development agree that staff development that improves the learning of all students:

- Uses disaggregated student data to determine adult learning priorities, monitor progress, and help sustain continuous improvement. (*Data-driven*)
- Uses multiple sources of information to guide improvement and demonstrate its impact. (*Evaluation*)
- Prepares educators to apply research to decision making. (*Research-based*)
- Uses learning strategies appropriate to the intended goal. (*Design*)
- Applies knowledge about human learning and change. (*Learning*)
- Provides educators with the knowledge and skills to collaborate. (*Collaboration*)

best when school is not in session?

4. Which designs cost the most?

Students will succeed when educators choose the best possible context for professional development, deliberately focus content on student improvement needs, and choose processes that help teachers learn to best address those needs.

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