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A Renaissance of Professional Development

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The CAPE teaching staff has, over a 10-year period, engaged in action research to address areas of concern within the classroom. With support, each teacher or teaching team developed their individual research plan with the ultimate goal of increasing student learning. We then shifted to school-wide professional development in program areas that were seen as needing attention such as numeracy, literacy, and integration.

Identified learning losses stemming from COVID-19 restrictions demanded a different approach to professional development. The CAPE administration responded by redesigning professional development to address the learning losses and social-emotional deficits of students, while promoting the

acquisition of meaningful and effective strategies within the teaching staff.

The benefits of personalized professional development have been touted by numerous researchers, including Zheng Ke and Huang, 2019; Bakhtiyarov et al., 2020, Hall and Trespalacios, 2019; and Chaipidech et al., 2020.

Undoubtedly, the personalization of professional development allows teachers to identify and address areas within their practice that require enhancement, which in turn, builds teacher efficacy. One consistent aspect of CAPE's professional development experience was the autonomy to individualize priorities in learning and the associated modality. By 2021, prioritized professional development needed to be resurrected as decision fatigue, lingering apprehension and the daily demands of the classroom's complexities monopolized the energy of teachers and

support staff. We needed to rebuild anew, and a four-stage plan emerged.

The first stage of the plan was to re-evaluate the preferred delivery methods amidst an electronically saturated environment. With many staff tired of separation, professional development needed to bring people together while fostering professional learning. As an instructional staff, skill development involved large group delivery and small group workshops linked to topics that had immediate impacts in the classroom – student regulation and learning deficits, in that order.

The second step of our professional development plan involved pinpointing subtopics under these two larger umbrellas and providing a variety of group-oriented opportunities for staff to learn together. Physicians, clinicians, and therapists presented to and worked with instructional staff to increase capacity. While some collegial groups worked to differentiate skills deficits from clinical conditions, other teams honed their co-regulation skills. While literacy deficits were indeed noticeable, the delays and gaps in numeracy were glaring. This required focused learning on the development of numeracy skills through skilled teaching of mathematics. While much of the second step, focusing on subtopics, was successful, there was limited transference with staff who were struggling to engage with a high-level math course. Upon investigation, we were able to determine that a key point in our plan had yet to be identified – staff endurance for learning within such an immense time of change.

The third stage of our professional development started in 2023 and continued into 2024. Throughout these two years, staff were again grouped for professional development, but all experiences were focused on a book study format. A key ingredient for this strategy was sessions guided by site administrators. Information was presented to educational assistants, teachers and administrators through the lens of our specific context allowing for collective learning. Staff engagement

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increased substantially as the detail, level, pacing and application of the material could all be fine-tuned to the needs of the group.

Professional development themes for the 2024 year were identified using the data from the 2023 professional growth plans. Leaders currently include administration and team leads, thereby broadening the expertise within the school. Each professional development group is supplied with a budget so that they may purchase resources, register for events, or secure outside expertise. Each teacher is required to identify areas of growth based on the Teaching Quality Standard, implement strategies to improve learning for students, and report on how this will impact their practice. In the 2024 school year, over 55 per cent of our teaching staff are actively participating in additional individual professional development opportunities: masters courses, administrative training, formal collegial mentorship, literacy and numeracy support. In 2025, plans for professional development include a return to action research teams.

By the time the fourth stage is underway, all instructional staff will be involved in collegial learning that is research-based and data-driven to increase capacity and efficacy.

To reiterate the findings of Gümüs & Bellibas (2021), “teachers who participated in job-embedded professional development activities, such as coaching or mentoring, teacher networks, and action research, were likely to have higher perceptions of self-efficacy.” Additionally, this redesign integrates the seven elements of effective professional learning; focus on content, active learning, collaborative support, models of effective practice, coaching and supporting, feedback and reflection, and sustained duration (Bates & Morgan, 2018). By implementing a four-stage professional development redesign we have created a promising path to academic recovery from the pandemic and to teacher efficacy. ○

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