

Facilitating Professional Learning

Craft Knowledge and the Facilitation of Professional Learning

Rolland Barth (2001), a highly respected educational leader and scholar, defines “craft knowledge” as “the massive collection of experiences and learning that those who live and work under the roof of the schoolhouse inevitably accrue during their careers.” Barth believes that sharing such “craft knowledge” can make a significant difference to professional learning within a school, as well as, the teaching and learning that takes place within it.

Barth contends that “tragically, this craft knowledge is rarely viewed by school people as legitimate, rigorous or useful.” He goes on to state “sadly, our profession seems neither to trust nor to rely on the accumulated wisdom of its practitioners.” Barth observes “a belief commonly held by many who work in schools is that one’s knowledge, skills and successes are a private matter, best kept behind closed doors.”

Barth wrote those observations over a decade ago and they were based on his experiences in the United States. My own experience has been that his observations may be true in some schools; however, in an increasing number of schools and centres there has been an increased emphasis on within school professional learning opportunities and a recognition of the value of them, especially after the publication of the parading-shifting article by Lois Easton (2008) entitled: From professional development to professional learning.

In the above article, Easton challenged the value of traditional professional development programs, which she noted were usually relatively formal, one-time events, organized by people outside the school or centre. Easton made a strong case for professional learning, which she viewed as being an active ongoing process focused on student and teacher learning. Moreover, as Barth (2001) had done, she emphasized that professional learning is especially valuable when it is teacher-led, school-based, with some external support from people outside the school or centre.

It is interesting to note that Learning Forward (<http://www.learningforward.org>), a leading professional development organization in the United States, strongly recommends that educators move from a focus on professional development to one based on professional learning.

Over the next few weeks, I will be sharing a number of resources related to the facilitation of professional learning. I will begin with CRAFT, an acronym-based reminder on ways to encourage the development and sharing of craft building stories. A professional learning practice that Rolland Barth strongly recommended.

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