

Professional Development Not a 'Perk'

By Bambi Betts

Teaching is a serious profession. We cheapen it significantly when we approach the notion of professional development as a 'perk' rather than an essential ingredient for improving student learning. It's not about who 'gets to go' to that conference in a sunny warm place in the dead of winter, or who 'deserves' it because of all their service.

Professional development activities are the vital link between student learning and the growing understanding of what makes learning possible. Serious teaching professionals pay attention to the latest understanding about how learning happens and seek out those specific opportunities which will help them translate that new understanding into classroom practice.

Professional development can be both job-embedded as well as 'external'. As we enter the second half of the school year, many international teachers will be looking for the 'external' opportunities to boost their learning.

Some things to look for:

- Is the session directly related to the desired results our school is attempting to achieve?
- Are the learning objectives clearly stated?
- Are the learning objectives primarily skills that a teacher would use in the classroom?
- Is there evidence that participants will actually practice skills during the workshop?
- Is the intended content commensurate with current research?
- Are there any built-in follow-up strategies (e.g. a 'next steps' planning processes embedded in the materials)?