



Why I Differentiate Teacher PD

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When I read [Administrators Need to Differentiate Professional Development](#) by my fellow Indy K12 writer Andrew Pillow, all I could do was nod my head to each point he made. I found myself in a ridiculous situation a few years ago.

I had been a middle school English teacher for three years before I worked in Wayne Township teaching middle school English for five years. When I left Purdue University, I had a 5-12 English/language arts license and a 5-12 reading license. During my five years in the district, I earned a master's degree from IUPUI in language education. I added a P-12 English as a new language license and a P-12 library/media license. I taught on an ENL push-in team for two years, and when I switched to the special education push-in team during my last three years, I had a double-label homeroom class. All of my homeroom students were considered special education and English learners. Last, I was also an English learner building lead.

After five years in the district, I left to serve as an elementary ENL teacher. Then, I was a literacy coach at both the elementary and high school levels for a few years. While I was a

literacy coach, I added a P-12 reading license and a P-12 school administration license. After my job was eliminated when IPS consolidated high schools, I returned to Wayne Township as an elementary librarian/media specialist. It was one of my favorite jobs, but I left only after a year and on a sour note. One of those sour notes was PD.

The principal insisted that all new staff, whether they were new teachers or not, participated in new staff training and had a mentor. Actually, I didn't have a problem with this, but the execution was not great; it was a one-size-fits-all model. My mentor straight-up told me that he had no clue how he could help me, so I used him as my go-to person about school-based questions like how dismissal went and where the mailboxes were. Since I was a school librarian, I told the principal that I should not have to attend all of these mandatory monthly new staff PDs, especially the ones that did not apply to me. She agreed, and I went to the ones that applied to my role as a librarian and the ones where I needed development. All was well until I skipped the ENL PD.

I was asked to do a make-up session. I refused, and the principal called me over the intercom to her office at the beginning of the school day, and then she wrote me up. She threatened to continue to write me up until I complied. After consulting my dad, I decided not to die on that hill, but I wanted to. My dad called it a power play, and my mom called it petty. I decided this would be a learning opportunity I could use in the future.

A job I loved became a sour point in my career because the principal cared more about a checklist than providing PD that was relevant to me as a school librarian. Also, I was told I had to do the makeup PD in the front office which also was unnecessary. While the PD facilitator was going through the slides, I answered every question as quickly as possible, but I interrupted her when she got to one activity. I explained the activity to her. I explained what the trick questions were and why they were trick questions. The facilitator was caught off guard. This probably is the point that I should mention that I teach college courses. I teach literacy courses, assessment courses, and English learning courses. I had used the activity in one of my college courses. Even she did not understand why I was made to attend.

After I complied, the principal excused me from the rest of the new staff PD for the remainder of the year. At that point, I started making my exit plan even though I didn't want to give up a job I really loved. I got to talk about books all day and make non-readers readers. I took a school administrator job where I supervised a middle school English department, a social studies department, and a K-8 elective/special areas team. I differentiated all PD. There were only a few PDs that everyone attended. One teacher told me that I was good at my job

because I took the time to learn their strengths and weaknesses. Some administrators don't differentiate PD because they don't know their teachers' skill gaps to do so. That takes some work, and some principals won't do the work.

Now, I am a full-time education consultant, and I differentiate my PD for the schools I serve. I also give surveys to gauge how the PD is being received. Most teachers liked the PD I designed and implemented, and they actually implemented the strategies I shared. I tracked the implementation. Too many principals put their energy into making sure everyone does the same PD instead of matching each professional to the best PD and ensuring they implement it.

Although my return to Wayne Township did not end the way I wanted, I moved forward. I even had the principal on my Indianapolis Recorder show EdGems where she used the opportunity to mention her stance about PD. I hope that made her feel good. However, people who watched the episode and knew the information I am sharing in this piece said exactly what my mom said and called it "petty." My philosophy is I never let what a person does interfere with me doing my job. She was suggested as a guest I should interview, and I did. For the topic we discussed that night, it made sense to have her on the panel.

I do not regret the six years I spent in the district. Although my husband asked me to not return again in the future because he did not want me to go back to Wayne the second time. I have met lifelong friends in the district and grew as a professional due to Wayne Township PD when I was an English teacher, but not when I returned as a librarian. Yes, there were times the librarians/media specialists would meet together across the school district for PD but those PDs left a lot to be desired and did not align with the needs I wanted to address in the library I was over. The growth I made as a librarian was based on connections I made with librarians across the United States. A few of those librarians became friends.

When I became a school administrator, I did not want the teachers I was supporting to not be supported appropriately in their professional development. Teachers should not have to search for and even pay for PD because their school did not provide what they needed.

Now that Andrew has addressed the problem, and I shared my why, come back to Indy K12 later this week to learn how to differentiate PD for staff.