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Reframing STEAM PD

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Reframing STEAM PD

Abstract

The reflection addresses the important changes in approach to professional learning experiences in STEAM.

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Keywords

STEAM, professional development, adult learning

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Re-Framing Professional Development Through STEAM

Tiffany Shockley Jackson

Professional development for teachers and principals includes a standard recipe of prepared items. It consists of two parts professional reading and discussion, plus one part video, perhaps a dash of purpose setting, reflection, and table talk. Often the recipe includes some planning time, with people in the same grade level(s) or content areas grouped together, usually using a template provided by the facilitator and a set of standards from the state. Professional development is a predictable process, easy to engage in at a low level and often not challenging of norms of behavior or belief systems of participants.

I doubt if you watched teacher professional development that you would hear much cheering or sounds of excitement in these rooms. People typically attend out of obligation or some summer pay or perhaps the genuine interest in planning a unit or series of lessons. Nothing very innovative comes from these sessions and people generally return to their school sites and classrooms and either maintain the status quo or change out a few texts or ideas using the same methodology and student expectations.

Given the need for reform in education and the dire need for innovation within teaching to re-inspire teachers and classrooms, we cannot continue to in-service, train, or professionally develop teachers in the same manner. The ideals behind STEAM education provide some insight into how adults learn and some hope for reframing our profession. At first glance, STEAM is a focus on infusing the arts (A) into the standard STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) focus with the awareness of the need for creative thinking for addressing complex world issues. Yet with further inspection, STEAM challenges the way that we believe all people learn. Traditional professional learning experiences have people follow along a trainer's agenda. Yet people learn through experiences and being part of a group using a variety of strengths to support one another through challenge.

Adult exploration of real-world problems can lend authenticity to professional development. Most educators have an activist or change agent aspect to their core beliefs and appreciate having their voice heard as part of an inquiry and thoughtful set of actions. Facilitating and engaging in inquiry of an issue clarifies the purpose of professional development and allows the transfer of knowledge, both content and processes, to the classroom. It is theory in action, not theory lite for practitioners through video or curated reading that makes a difference in an adult learning experience.

We want our children and students to be able to engage in global, local, and personal issues with a heightened awareness to effects of actions, with critical thinking to not only analyze, critique, and question information but to feel and reason ethically. The perspectives and growing community around STEAM education allow those of us who work with teachers to stop the typical and be innovative ourselves by changing the professional development teachers engage in during the summer and school.