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## What's in a Name?

### Professional Development vs. Professional Learning

Word choice is a critical element in the crafts of speaking and writing; in looking at terminology in the field of gifted, several words and phrases have varying meanings, connotations, and weights. Gifted, of course, can be a loaded term, but for the purposes of this article, the focus is the phrase professional development. The term “development,” according to the dictionary, suggests that someone or something is in the process of developing or being developed. Synonyms include advancement, expansion, evolution, and progress or change. “Learning” is the process of acquiring new or modifying existing knowledge, behaviors, skills, values, or preferences. Synonyms for learning include knowledge, education, scholarship, research and study. Now, let’s think of these terms in conjunction with the “professional.”



### Terminology

The term “professional learning” represents an evolution in this thinking about someone developing; it suggests an interactive, modernized approach to continual education for practitioners requiring a more intensive methodology (WGU, 2014). Moir (2013) further clarifies:

Professional development is typically single-shot, one-size-fits-all workshops for teachers based on the expertise of the individuals delivering the session. Professional learning, on the other hand is:

- targeted and based on the specific learning needs of the students and school community
- individualized for the strengths and needs of the teachers
- grounded in the principles of adult learning theory
- sustained and supported through implementation with coaching and follow-up
- consistently monitored and assessed to evaluate its impact on student learning and adjusted when necessary. (para 2)

Why the terminology shift? Ideally, the word learning evokes an ongoing process and moves the educational realm away from dry, sometimes ineffective in-services to comprehensive learning experiences.

What does professional development look like? Most of us participate in professional development in the form of seminars, lectures, webinars, meeting or workshops. This structure requires an expert to lead the discussion, impart knowledge or share information with the participants being generally passive. Professional development emphasizes educators growing as individuals, perhaps with a particular set of goals or objectives to be attained.

What does professional learning look like? Professional learning shares some similar attributes to professional development. But the professional learning process requires educators participating in interactive learning strategies rather than taking in knowledge in a more rote and impassive way. Professional learning emphasizes that educators, working together, focus on studying, implementing, and reflecting on ways to better meet the needs of their students. While both support the educator becoming a better teacher, the attention is now taken off of the educator and refocused onto students.

### Regulations and Standards

Current trends push for professional learning that encompasses these on-going reflective practices as opposed to development, which is indicative of single session workshops. ESSA standards reflect the definition of professional

learning, though the term used is professional development: “The term ‘professional development’ means activities that ... are sustained (not stand-alone, 1-day, or short-term workshops), intensive, collaborative, job-embedded, data-driven, and classroom focused” [S.1177, §8002 (42)].

Learning Forward, the national professional learning association, echoed this sentiment and purposefully chose the term “learning” over development for their standards. “The decision to call these Standards for Professional Learning rather than Standards for Professional Development signals the importance of educators taking an active role in their continuous development and places emphasis on their learning” (Hirsh, 2011, para 3). In 2013, NAGC published ***National Gifted Education Standards for Pre-K-Grade 12***, including Standard 6: Professional Development. While this standard is titled Professional Development, a review of the standard shows that the suggested practices are more closely aligned with the evolving definition of professional learning over the dated term of development. For example, the standards call for multiple modes of ongoing, research-supported professional development that is sustained over time, and include practices that require evidence of effectiveness.

## Moving Forward in the Field

In 2017, the NAGC Professional Development Network took hold of this initiative to support best practices and research in professional learning by agreeing to develop a series of three books related to professional learning and teacher preparation in gifted education. The purpose of this series is to present various topics supporting teacher training in identifying and meeting the needs of gifted learners as outlined and required in ESSA for PK-12 administrators and supervisors; coordinators of gifted programs; PK-12 educators and teachers of the gifted, and other stakeholders in the field. These books continue the discussions started in the resource *Using the National Gifted Education Standards for Pre-K-Grade 12 Professional Development* (Johnsen & Clarenbach, 2017) and offer experts’ suggestions for exemplary practices that maximize professional learning.



The first volume in the series ***Best Practices in Professional Learning and Teacher Preparation: Methods and Strategies for Gifted Professional Development*** (Novak & Weber, 2018), provides various chapters on topics which have not been addressed in previous NAGC publications related to methods and strategies for gifted professional learning. These topics support teacher training in identifying and meeting the needs of gifted learners as outlined and required in ESSA. A review of the literature and synthesis of research-based best practices in strategies for professional learning is a theme throughout several chapters. Other topics include different professional learning experiences, the role of reflection, differentiated professional learning, use of case studies, the sole practitioner, co-teaching, and implementing new technologies.

The second volume in the series *Best Practices in Professional Learning and Teacher Preparation: Special Topics for Gifted Professional Development* (Novak & Weber, Forthcoming 2019) explores professional learning strategies for special topics in gifted education and acknowledges specific challenges facing both practitioners and their students. Professional learning strategies and helpful resources related to several special populations and topics unique to the field, such as twice exceptional learners, underachieving gifted students, the underrepresentation of minorities, acceleration options, and assisting educators to work with parents, are presented.

The third volume in the series *Best Practices in Professional Learning and Teacher Preparation: Professional Development for Teachers of the Gifted in the Content Areas* (Weber & Novak, Forthcoming 2020) provides professional learning strategies for teachers of the gifted in the major content areas, the arts, foreign languages, the CLEAR curriculum, and for implementing growth mindset in the classroom.

The editors purposefully incorporated the shift in terminology from professional development to professional learning in the series; both terms were utilized in the titles - to support the name recognition of professional development, but also to recognize and support the move to professional learning, an ideological shift in practice to research-based strategies that align with professional standards and the legislative mandates found in ESSA. Considering what’s in a name is important as it begs the question - Are we about professional development or are we about professional learning?

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