5 Non-Negotiables of Professional Development
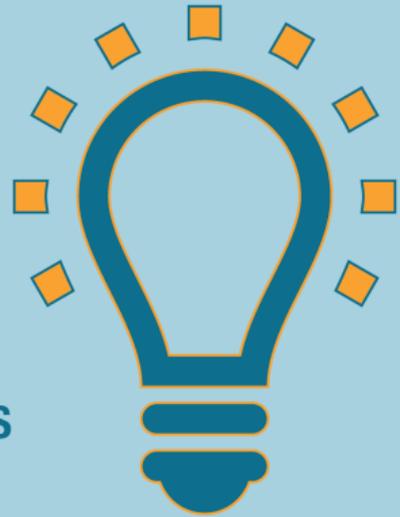
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Running any form of professional development can be a daunting task, whether it is at the district level, at a conference, etc. At the beginning of the planning process, facilitators often don't have much more than a blank slate and a job such as, "You have one hour to teach your audience about [insert trendy topic here]." I have been leading professional development for a handful of years, and I have found that preparing with certain non-negotiables in mind helps to (1) provide me with a solid direction, and (2) assist in making my sessions that much more effective.

Here are my professional development non-negotiables:

1. **Avoid, "So little time, so much to do!"** I always begin with the end in mind by asking myself, "With what enduring understandings do I want my audience to walk away?" This question helps me to better focus my work by taking a less is more approach, instead of trying to "cover" an entire topic in one session (e.g., differentiated instruction, close reading, formative assessment, etc.), which is entirely nonsensical if you think about it. It should also be noted that (1) sometimes these enduring understandings might develop across multiple sessions, and (2) these understandings should be explicitly stated for the audience. For example, in a recent presentation on Common Core mathematics, one of my statements was "I am

starting to think about teaching with rigor." In no way can a teacher be asked to overhaul his instruction overnight.

2. **Avoid, "You're telling us to teach one way, but our PD is done in another!"** In other words, every professional development session is an opportunity to model best practice. Each presentation that I conduct has an essential question somewhere near the beginning, usually after an initial hook, and then the question reappears at the end. These questions are meticulously crafted in order to spark curiosity, promote inquiry, and provide a context or umbrella for all of the presentation's content. These are the same types of questions that should be used with students as they are engaged in instructional units.

3. **Avoid, "I can't see the slides! My eyes!"** While you're creating your slides, if you even so much as question whether or not the content will be visible to everyone in the audience, change what you're doing. A few quick tips:
   - Save the sans-serif fonts for the screen (and your slides), and the serif fonts for print. An example of a sans-serif font is Arial, and an example of a serif font is Times New Roman.
   - [Do you best to make sure the size of your text does not drop below 30 points.](#) If there are instances in which this task does not seem possible, maybe you are trying to cram too much information into one slide.
   - Be careful with your color schemes. Do not use colors that are too bright or might be washed out by a low quality classroom projector. Also, for consistency, I usually try to create my slide decks with no more than 3-4 colors. Audiences appreciate the predictability (all headings in blue, all subheadings in red, all bullet points in orange, etc.).

4. **Avoid, "Can I get a copy of these slides?"** All slides and relevant resources should be made available to the audience at the very start of the presentation, at the latest.
   - If the only resource is a slide deck (made in PowerPoint or Keynote), convert it to a PDF, upload it to [SlideShare](#), and make its link available.
   - If you are dealing with multiple resources, one option is to upload to a Google Drive folder the previously mentioned PDF and any other resources. I like creating this folder before my slides are completely done, shortening the link to the folder through [tinyurl.com](#), and then making the link available on the first and last slides of my slide deck.

5. **Avoid, "Nobody cares what we think, and *we're* the ones with the students!"** As a presenter (especially one who is an administrator presenting to teachers), you never want to simply railroad instruction while letting the thoughts and ideas of your teachers fall on deaf ears. Also, a wildly successful session in one school could easily fall flat on its face in another, so make sure to always plan with your

audience's readiness level in mind. When you're done, evaluate the effectiveness of your professional development. There are countless ways in which this evaluation could take place, but at the very least I always ask for teacher feedback via a Google form. This feedback then helps to drive where we might go next with our learning.

These five points represent what I believe are five non-negotiables when planning any form of professional development. So the next time you are stuck with a blank slate and a task, call upon these ideas to get you started!

What are your non-negotiables?

[Ross Cooper](#)

Ross is the Supervisor of Instructional Practice K-12 in the Salisbury Township School District (1:1 MacBook/iPad) in Allentown, Pennsylvania. He is an Apple Distinguished Educator and a Google Certified Teacher. His passions are: curriculum and unit design, inquiry-based learning, assessment and grading, and quality professional development. He blogs about these topics at rosscoops31.com. Also, he regularly engages in speaking, consulting, and presenting. He has conducted keynotes, speaking engagements, and workshops ranging from 15 minutes to all-day. A list of what he has previously offered, and testimonials, can be found on his blog. Connect with him on Twitter at @RossCoops31.

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