

**John Wash Elementary School
Sanger Unified School District
Fresno, California**



TRANSCRIPT: "FOCUS ON PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT"

WESLEY SEVER, PRINCIPAL: At John Wash Elementary, it is important that we stay focused. Professional development is a key to our success. It is vital that everybody that is involved in the classroom receives the same professional development so that we can learn; we can share strategies and ideas. In fact, it's vital that I receive the same professional development that they do. And I've sat through with them and I learned with them so that when we come back to John Wash, we can apply that professional development to the classroom.

Does every professional development work for us? No, but some professional development makes a huge difference. One of those has been Explicit Direct Instruction. That has given my staff a common language so we can discuss how we teach each student. It is focused on the learning objective, activating prior knowledge, skill development, concept development, independent practice and guided practice. All of my teachers know those terms. They know how they make a difference in a child's learning.

I don't go into a classroom to say "I gotcha". But I go into classrooms to be a coach, to make you a better teacher, to make me a better principal. We have this philosophy that every teacher comes to school not saying, "I want to teach the same way I taught yesterday." They're coming to John Wash saying, "I want to be a better teacher today than I was yesterday, step by step – one thing at a time."

JENNIFER TOVAR, TEACHER: My district, Singer Unified, as well as John Wash, the school really stresses professional development and that you continue to grow as a professional, as a teacher, as an educator. So I had training in EDI that I was able to take into my classroom.

We also work in PLCs - professional learning communities - and so I was able to work with two other 2nd grade teachers who have had years of experience, more than I did as a third year teacher. And they were able to share with me their ideas and their strategies that they use in the classroom. Also we went through a lot of the EDI training together and so we were able to work through the process together, work through our lessons together.

We never felt we were on our own. We always had each other. We also have our administrators. We had our principal. We had our CSP, our curriculum support provider – so there is always a support system in place.

The steps that we use in our lessons, we refer to as the skill development. So each lesson, we try to break up into specific steps. And these steps help break down the concepts for the students. So there are specific directions for them to follow. Almost like a checklist.

After introducing a new concept, a new skill, I like to think aloud. It is part of my modeling how to demonstrate the skills or the steps that we might have in the lesson. And so, I think that helps the students *hear* what I am thinking, how I go through the steps, how I use the steps in determining the correct answer to a question. So they can actually hear the process of reasoning and understanding why I'm choosing this answer. It's not, I didn't just know this answer, I didn't just guess this answer, there is a process. So they can hear the process and then use that process in their own thinking.

I really like my students to be able to pair share – to talk to their neighbor, to almost try out their answer. My English learners are paired with an English only student. So this way they can hear how the answer should be, the structure of the answer from their English only partner, but also so that my English learners can also practice having think time to think about their sentence and how they're going to form their answer. To find the words, the vocabulary, and then to practice saying it. I think it builds confidence for my students. They've been able to try their answer out. They've heard their neighbor's answer. I believe pair sharing is great for ELs but it's also a really important tool for the entire class.

Throughout the lesson, I'm looking to see who is answering those questions correctly and who is answering those questions incorrectly. And based on this, I determine who needs to be pulled back in a small group at the end of the lesson. So during my small group time, I am working with those students who did not seem to have a firm understanding; who didn't comprehend fully the skills of the lesson.

The small group instruction allows me to focus on those individual students, so I am able to address those individual needs and give them my focused attention. So I go through and we use the worksheets and we'll go through each step again together. Sometimes I'll have questions, and I'll have them bring their white boards so we'll work together on white boards. So my half hour of small group time is spent with those kids who needed that extra help with the lesson. They are also able to focus more because they're in a small group, while the other kids, during our small group time, the other kids are doing centers.

We use the center time to coincide with our small group time. We set that level of independence early on in the year. We have clear expectations. Everybody has a job. My job is the teacher and my job is to teach them and to make sure that they learning. And their job as the student is to make sure they are focused and they are trying their best and they are learning all they can. So they know that when it is centers time, they each have a job and they are each responsible for their job, just as I have my job.

Sometimes I have students who might need help with their centers. They know that they can ask people at their group...that you have to ask three other students before you can come ask the teacher. So, there's a lot of peer tutoring, peer interaction during my centers time.

JENNIFER DODD, TEACHER: We went through a lot of training to learn how to do this. So we are explicitly teaching concepts to our students. It is very direct in what is being said. And I think a lot of school districts – we have had a lot of visitors – like the idea of it, but they say, “Wow, how do I approach this? How do I attack something this large?”

We’ve been working on it for four years. We have to be open to change and be flexible in learning things and think, “How can I apply this in my classroom?” Taking small steps. Two years of training to go through, in how to incorporate our EL population; how to make it work in our school, our district, and our classrooms. Implementing a few steps at a time and building on that. And having a supporting staff, a supportive principal to learn from. Also the PLCs working together and being able to help each other. But it’s not an overnight process of how to do it. So, lots of training and lots of practice.