Assessing the Impact of Professional Development

The DEEP Consortium is committed to optimizing the positive effects of professional development on instructional practice. In service of this objective, we encourage both providers of professional development and the school practitioners with whom they work to implement a material process to assess the impact of each intervention. Only by intentionally tracking changes in instruction over time will educators be able to discern how they have improved their own practice and, in turn, have helped to enhance students' learning.

The following brief suggests a sequence of steps that providers and practitioners can take together to conduct such assessments methodically and, in so doing, enabling all to, first, appreciate and then, continue to pursue professional growth.

WHY EVALUATE PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT?

Researchers have determined that the effects of professional development interventions can be measured along five domains or core questions:[1]

- *Level 1* – Participants' reactions: Did participants feel the professional learning was useful?

- *Level 2* – Participants' learning: Did they acquire the intended knowledge and skills?

- *Level 3* – Organization support and change: To what degree was the professional learning implementation advocated, facilitated, and supported at the school?

- *Level 4* – Participants' use of new knowledge and skills: Did participants effectively apply the new knowledge and skills?

- *Level 5* – Student learning outcomes: What was the impact on students?

Too often, both practitioners and professional development providers examine the results of interventions no further than whether or not teachers liked the experience (Level 1), mostly because answering this question is easiest to do by collecting feedback surveys and testimonials. Indeed, assessing longer-term impact on teaching, learning and school culture (Levels 2 – 5) does entail a more complicated and protracted process of gathering and analyzing data from multiple sources. Yet,

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[1] This primer on evaluation of professional development is based upon the following report released under the auspices of the U.S. Department of Education: Breslow, N. and Bock, G. (2020). Evaluating Professional Learning: A Tool for Schools and Districts. Washington, DC: REL Northeast. See also Guskey, T. (2000). Evaluating professional development. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.

exploring these questions is the only way to ensure that all can appreciate just how professional development might have changed what teachers do and how students learn.

It may not be possible or even desirable to assess each and every professional development engagement within all five domains. Rather, simply by actively tracking how teacher practice has evolved typically prompts those educators to become more proactive in employing instructional strategies that better support students' learning. In short, in their aim to furnish students with the highest-quality education possible, teachers must first grasp the nuances of the connection between their own practice and students' learning.

THE EVALUATION PROCESS

The members of the DEEP Consortium are committed to helping school practitioners to track the outcomes of their professional development interventions. We endeavor to partner with school leadership to put in place a structure and process to explore our impact on individual teachers, on school culture, and on the overall student learning experience.

Below we outline the six key steps that are the foundation of any worthwhile evaluation of the impact of professional development on teaching and learning.

ACTIVITY	RESOURCES
1. Setting Goals To answer the question of whether professional development has had any impact on changing teaching practices, one needs first to define what the intended effects are. School leaders, as well as teachers, and the professional development provider should work together from the outset to delineate the learning objectives for teachers and, perhaps even effects on students. These goals should follow the SMART formula – Specific, Measurable, Attainable (and simultaneously Ambitious), Relevant and Time-bound.	• Examples of SMART Goals for Teachers • Video of how to develop and use SMART Goals
2. Aligning Activities to Goals Within any given professional development intervention model, the provider should draw an explicit connection between the learning activities in which the teachers engage and their ultimate purpose (i.e., how they will lead teachers to attain the SMART goals fixed at the outset). Often, practitioners find it helpful to see this cause-and-effect chain (specific activities leading to specific outcomes) in the form of a Logic Model.	• Kellogg Foundation Logic Model Development Guide • Brief video on how a logic model works

3. Identifying Key Indicators and Data Sources

The five distinct levels of impact noted above are measured in different ways and require different levels of sophistication and effort. It will not be possible to measure everything, but professional development providers should partner with school practitioners to determine what data can be collected from stakeholders in order to inform the question of impact. Note that in some cases potential data sources are already in place (e.g., student work product) and will simply need to be applied for this purpose.

- DEEP Summary of Potential Data Sources

- Measuring Implementation to Impact (pp. 18 – 19)

- Guide to developing effective stakeholder surveys

4. Collecting and Organizing Data

Both parties must take responsibility for collecting the data as identified in Step 3. Drafting and implementing a data collection calendar that lays out both when data sources will be activated and the parties responsible for each activity can go a long way to ensure that all data is collected as intended.

- Sample data calendar on p. 20 in Evaluating Professional Learning

5. Analyzing Data

In examining the data together, school practitioners and PD providers can explore the degree to which the intervention has met the goal(s) developed at the outset. Keep in mind that measuring changes in educator practice and in student learning is an inexact science. Yet, with excellent measurement tools, practitioners and providers should, with sufficient data and reflection, be able to develop a reasonable appraisal of whether and how a particular intervention affected practice.

- Evaluating Professional Learning (pp. 21 – 28)

- Measuring Implementation to Impact (p. A6)

6. Planning for Growth

After determining changes in instructional practice resulting from the professional development interventions, school educators should collaborate with the professional development provider to determine what further activities may be needed to advance teacher practice and what infrastructure and policies should be put in place to ensure continuous improvement.

- Primer on continuous improvement in schools