

The Distinction Between Follow-up and Evaluation

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Follow-up support and evaluation are two essential practices of effective professional development. Within the context of professional development, they share several core aspects. First, neither practice should be a one-time occurrence. Follow-up support and evaluation are ongoing practices and should be planned systematically, that is, in a "thoughtful, intentional, and purposeful process." (p. 42, Guskey, 2000). Second, both follow-up support and evaluation take into account all levels of an organization, from the leadership to teachers to students. Guskey emphasizes that professional development should be a systemic process. Not only should it be planned, implemented, and evaluated at different levels; but the goals of the PD program, specifically the expected changes over time and the long-term effects, need to be considered. Pulling these key concepts together, follow-up support and evaluation can occur at different levels of an organization and at different time periods, and take into account the objective(s) of the professional development program.

Since follow-up support and evaluation are similar in some aspects (as described above), the terminology used to describe these two practices is often confused; however, the definitions are, in fact, very distinct. (See chart, "The Distinctions", on the following page.) Follow-up support refers to providing a targeted strategy or set of strategies after a professional development event in an effort to reinforce new learning and strengthen the transfer of learning. For professional development to lead to positive results, follow-up support should be planned before the professional development event and given as much priority as the initial event. Tom Guskey states, "follow-up assistance during the time when teachers are adapting their practices to fit the new ideas, and adapting the new ideas to fit their unique

situation, is critically important." (Guskey, 1998, p. 2). Building on that premise, the magnitude and frequency of follow-up support must be determined by the degree of change expected for participants in professional development.

On the other hand, evaluation, in the context of professional development, is the systematic collection of information about the activities, characteristics and outcomes of a professional development program. This information can then be used to support judgments about the program's impact on teachers, the organization, and students, and to help make decisions for future professional development. As programs face more demands for accountability, professional development programs need to be evaluated to improve the quality of the professional development and to assess effectiveness.

Traditionally, there are three major types of evaluation, including planning, formative, and summative. However, Guskey determined that in order for effective and useful evaluations of professional development to occur, more specific levels needed to be specified. Guskey's (2000) model identifies five levels of professional development evaluation.

Level I – Participants' reactions. Measures participant initial satisfaction with the professional development. Results are used to improve program design and delivery.

Level II – Participants' learning. Measures new knowledge, skills, and attitudes. Results are used to improve program content.

Level III – Organizational support and change. Measures organization support for skills and knowledge from professional development. Results are used to docu-

ment and improve organizational support and to improve future professional development efforts.

Level IV – Participants' use of new knowledge and skills. Measures degree and quality of learning transfer and implementation of new knowledge and skills. Results are used to document and improve implementation of what was learned from professional development.

Level V – Student learning outcomes. Measures student achievement, attitudes, and skills. Results are used to demonstrate the overall impact of professional development and improve professional development design, implementation, and follow up.

Professional development evaluation is most often conducted at Level I, primarily because it is the easiest to conduct. However, if increased professional growth and improved successful implementation are the intended outcomes, Level I evaluation is not adequate and higher levels of evaluation are highly recommended. As with follow-up support, knowing what you want to accomplish with your professional development program will help you to plan effective evaluation by identifying the evidence you need.

Understanding these distinctions, knowing your training outcomes and pre-planning for both follow-up and evaluation will go far to ensuring success with your professional development programs.

References:

- Guskey, T. (1998, Spring). The importance of follow-up in professional development. *RMC Colorado School Health News*, (13)4.
- Guskey, T. (2000). *Evaluating professional development*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.



The Distinctions

	Follow-Up	Evaluation
Relationship to PD:	Essential component of effective professional development.	Essential component of effective professional development.
Definition:	Providing or implementing a targeted strategy or set of strategies after a learning event in an effort to reinforce new learning.	Systematic collection of information about the activities, characteristics, and outcomes of a professional development program.
Purpose:	To strengthen transfer of learning.	To assess and make judgments related to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Program effectiveness, • Decision-making, and/or • Future programming.
Timeline:	Ongoing over time. Strategies may change as participant skill and need changes.	Pre-determined checkpoints before, during, and/or after a learning event. May include one or more of the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pre-event assessment • Post-event assessment • Process check during event • Post/Post event assessment
Best when:	Planned in advance of the delivery of the learning event.	Planned in advance of the delivery of the learning event.

