FOUL-UP WITH FOLLOW-UP

Yes, follow-up support is important. The challenge is to figure out what is most appropriate — and who should provide it.

In the last JSD, you read about Ruth Madison’s challenge to ensure participants in her workshop received appropriate follow-up support. Madison had been hired by Franklin Jones, the school district’s director of curriculum, to provide a districtwide math workshop for teachers. Jones told Madison he was working with a team of teachers to decide appropriate follow-up, but Madison tried and was unable to get any information about what was being considered.

Madison knew teachers would benefit more from her workshop if they had opportunities to continue learning and had support after the two-day training. She was thinking about teachers’ best interests. Jones, on the other hand, hired the best consultant he could find for the workshop and was certain that if teachers had a powerful learning experience, they would take the new information back to the classroom and use it. He fully intended to provide follow-up, but had not decided what kind. He wanted teacher input and had not had time to schedule discussions about it.

STAFF DEVELOPMENT CONSULTANT

A staff development consultant writes: “Everyone is busy, yet shortchanging the learning process for teachers seems like a waste of resources. There are many ways to provide follow-up support, and I wonder if Jones was reading Madison’s attempt to discuss follow-up as an attempt to get more work. Independent consultants must be careful to put learning before their own interests. Perhaps Madison could have written down some no-cost options for follow-up and sent them to Jones, then made a follow-up phone call to see whether he had questions or was interested in additional assistance beyond the workshop.”

STAFF DEVELOPER

A staff developer says: “Our greatest challenge is to provide the appropriate kind of follow-up support. What is the right thing to do after a two-day workshop? Teachers aren’t ready for coaching on what they have just learned. One thing I have tried successfully includes holding informal meetings at schools with small groups of teachers to talk about their reactions to the workshop, what they tried, and what they are interested in learning more about.

“This places a huge responsibility on me, yet if I want anything valuable to happen after a workshop, I know it is necessary to keep the learning in the forefront.”

PRINCIPAL

A principal’s response: “I expect to see evidence of what teachers learned after they go to a workshop. It is my job to make that happen. I have a variety of strategies to support and extend teachers’ learning. I always send teachers in teams to any professional development. I ask them to share what they learned with others at a faculty meeting. I ask the team to meet with me and discuss the implication of what they learned for their classrooms and our school. I examine materials they bring back and even ask to see demonstrations of the new strategies in the classroom.

“I want to engage teachers in the learning process and know that ongoing learning will happen only if I provide multiple opportunities and formats for following up on the professional learning that happens outside the school. The very difficult part, to be honest, is how to do all this with so many other responsibilities. It’s about prioritizing.”

TEACHER

Response from a teacher: “Maybe Madison went too far. She was hired to present the workshop, not to provide the follow-up. If she trusts what she is teaching, her training, and the participants, she will find that teachers will take back what makes sense and use it in their classrooms. If the strategies are not useful or practical, what is the purpose of taking them back? Assuming that everything needs follow-up is inappropriate. Teachers will ask for help with new strategies when they want it and when they see value in using the strategies to help their students learn.”

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In each issue of JSD, Joellen Killion examines ethical questions encountered by those providing professional learning experiences. Her columns can be found at www.nsdc.org/library/killion.html.
next situation / OPENING ACT

A principal she had known asked Dorothy Rich to speak to the faculty in the small-town school about a parent involvement program. When Rich accepted, the principal told her that her presentation time was limited. Rich reduced her presentation from two hours to about a half-hour. She was grateful for the opportunity to interact with teachers, even if her time was briefer than she would have liked.

When she arrived at the Blue Ribbon school, Rich was surprised to learn there was another presentation before hers, although that explained why her time with the staff was so limited. She was even more surprised to find the first presentation was a sales pitch for foot reflexology — offered by a local reflexologist who had treated one teacher at this school and a number of teachers at a neighboring middle school during the school day.

The essence of the presentation was the benefit of foot reflexology for the pressure and stress teachers experience. As Rich sat in the front row attempting to keep a smile on her face, she deliberated the best course of action.

“I was still sitting there unsure of what to say or do and not thinking that I had a lot of choice. If I walked out, I would offend. If I spoke up to say that this was inappropriate for a staff meeting, I would also offend. And what would be gained? I wasn’t sure. I was embarrassed, actually flabbergasted. But I am a persevering sort, and I knew that my goal was to provide a presentation on our academic programs. If I left, that would be lost.”

Just as the reflexology presentation appeared to be ending, Rich realized that staff members were setting up a table in the back of the room for teachers to receive complimentary treatments if they had signed up to do so. After they placed their names on a list, teachers were to take turns going to the back of the room to lie on the table and receive a treatment. This option was offered at the same time Rich was to be presenting.

When the principal moved to introduce Rich, she was faced with a dilemma. She wanted to share information with teachers, yet she wanted to express her frustration about the inappropriate use of staff meeting time. As a staff development provider, she wanted to follow the NSDC Staff Development Code of Ethics, particularly Principle 1 (offer services consistent with high standards of quality) and Principle 3 (select content based on student learning needs).

What would you advise Rich to do?

JOIN THE DISCUSSION

Readers are urged to share their comments about the situation online at www.nsdc.org/ethics.htm or with Joellen Killion directly at nsdckillion@aol.com.

QUESTIONS

• Was it appropriate to include foot reflexology as a topic in the staff meeting?
• Should Rich have said anything to the staff?
• Should she have spoken to the principal about the situation?
• How could she have improved the situation she found herself in, or should she have excused herself?