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Fearless evaluation is a key part of coaching

Evaluation frightens most people, even though it's a process they use constantly. Do I like that color? Was lunch tasty? Is this new style attractive? Are these new clubs better than the ones I have been using? We ask these kinds of evaluation questions every day.

Evaluation is a high-level thinking process to determine the merit, value, quality, worth, or importance of someone or something. Unfortunately, some evaluation happens without predetermined criteria or careful consideration of the attributes of what is being evaluated.

Evaluation is part of what teacher leaders do in their classrooms and in their work with peers. They engage in evaluation when they determine which resources are most appropriate to use with a group of students reading below grade level. They do it when they examine instructional strategies to determine which might be most appropriate for a particular concept and group of students. They do it to engage in continuous improvement and to measure the impact of their work.

There are two forms of evaluation — formative and summative.

• **Formative evaluation** looks at what is occurring within the process. It asks questions such as: Are we doing what we planned? Do we have the resources we want? Is the program being implemented as we hoped?

The questions below can serve to guide formative evaluations:

- Are we doing what we planned to do?
- Are people doing what we hoped they would do?
- Are we using the resources as we planned?
- What changes are we making to accommodate surprises along the way?

• **Summative evaluation**, on the other hand,

looks at what happened as a result of the program or project undertaken. It asks questions such as: What happened as a result of using this strategy? Did we achieve the goal we established?

The questions below guide summative evaluations:

- Did we achieve our goals?
- If not, what might have interfered?
- If we did, what contributed to our success?
- What did we learn to apply to other similar situations?

NSDC's standard on evaluation advises that those engaged in evaluation use multiple sources of information to improve practices and measure results. Multiple sources of data help ensure that the results we are observing are not influenced by a particular source or form of data and that we are not looking at skewed information. For example, if a school improvement team looks only at student achievement data through the lens of the state assessment, it sees only one view of student learning taken at one point in time. The team gets a more accurate view of student learning if it looks at student grades, performance on benchmark assessments, and classroom work.

The process of evaluation seems challenging, and it does not need to be. The eight steps outlined in *Assessing Impact: Evaluating Staff Development* (NSDC, 2002) can be applied to the evaluation of any educational program.

Step 1: Assess evaluability.

This step asks program managers and evaluators to determine if the program is ready for evaluation. Are the goals clear and specific? Is the program design powerful and sufficient? Are the benchmark indicators of success established?

Step 2: Formulate evaluation questions.

The evaluator develops both the formative and summative evaluation questions that the

EVALUATION

Staff development that improves the learning of all students uses multiple sources of information to guide improvement and demonstrate its impact.

For more information about the NSDC Standards for Staff Development, see www.nsd.org/standards/index.cfm

evaluation will answer.

Step 3: Construct the evaluation framework.

The evaluator plans the evaluation by identifying the data sources, data collection methods, data collection timeline, and planned data analysis.

Step 4: Collect data.

The evaluator collects the data as planned.

Step 5: Organize and analyze data.

The evaluator organizes the data for analysis and applies analysis techniques to the data.

Step 6: Interpret the analyzed data.

The evaluator, working together with stakeholders, studies the analyzed data and seeks to construct meaning from the data.

Step 7: Report findings.

In this step, evaluators report what they have learned from the evaluation to the various stakeholder groups involved with the project.

Step 8: Evaluate the evaluation.

This step asks the evaluator to review his or her work as an evaluator and the process used and to reflect on the work in order to learn and improve it.

Following these eight steps, teacher leaders can feel comfortable engaged in evaluation. The

steps can be applied with academic rigor or informality to virtually any evaluation task.

Even if teacher leaders are not engaged in formal evaluation work, they will want to integrate “evaluation think” into their routine work. The five, simple questions below can be useful in practicing evaluation think. They can be used to structure a department meeting about the curriculum, a team meeting on student engagement, or a school improvement meeting on the new math initiative.

- What’s working?
- How do we know?
- What’s not working?
- How do we know?
- What are we going to do about it?

Continuous improvement depends on the ability to evaluate using multiple sources of information to both improve practice and to measure results. Teacher leaders often are responsible for leading evaluation to guide the continuous improvement within their schools. Using the eight steps outlined above or the “evaluation think” questions, they can be confident and successful in any evaluation work they do. ◆

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