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Evaluation without trepidation

School-based coaches and teacher leaders are committed to improvement. They strive in their work to improve teaching and student learning. They work to improve the culture within their schools so that teachers work comfortably together to learn and hone their teaching practices. They seek ways to refine their own practices as coaches and teacher leaders by engaging in ongoing professional development with peers and by reflecting on their own work.

Another way teacher leaders and school-based coaches improve their practice and its results is through evaluation. The term alone sends chills up the spines of many who envision evaluation as a process of finding fault or inadequacies. This fear is most often related to early experiences with teacher evaluation and dredge up memories of administrators visiting classrooms far too infrequently and scrutinizing practice to find shortfalls rather than successes. However, evaluation that is done well is a productive learning process that offers evidence for streamlining and maximizing the potential of improvement efforts. In other words, evaluation improves improvement efforts.

In their role as learning facilitators, teacher leaders and coaches evaluate the professional learning in their school. In this role, teacher leaders coordinate and facilitate professional learning for their peers. For example, a grade-level chair or department chair organizes weekly meetings in which teachers examine student work. These sessions are designed to help teachers use student work as one source of information about the effectiveness of teaching practices. In another situation, coaches engage teachers in lesson study to design a common lesson for a tricky concept.

There are several ways to evaluate learning.

In 1975, Donald Kirkpatrick identified levels

of evaluation related to training, the predominant form of professional learning occurring in businesses and schools then. The levels suggest increased sophistication of the effects of the learning experience.

Level 1 Participant reaction: Did you like the experience?

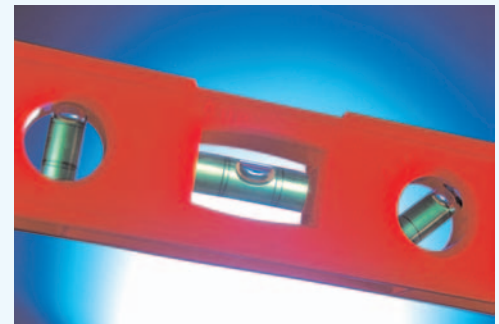
Level 2 Participant learning: What did you learn?

Level 3 Participant application: How are you using/Are you using what you learned?

Level 4 Impact: Are students learning more?

EVALUATION

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



In 1997, Jack Phillips added another effect of training: Return on investment. Was there a positive financial return on the investment in the learning?

In 2000, Thomas Guskey contributed another effect of professional development: Organizational change. How did the organization change?

NSDC's Evaluation standard speaks to the critical importance of evaluation of professional learning and stresses two points.

- First, evaluation uses multiple sources of information.
- Second, evaluation has two purposes: to guide improvements and demonstrate impact.

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

In evaluating professional learning, teacher leaders collect data from participants both throughout the process and at the end of learning experiences to know if the learning process, such as in the examples above — looking at student work or writing, observing, and revising common lessons — provides opportunities for teachers to learn about how students learn, how to modify instruction to improve student learning, and how instructional practices need to be modified to accommodate various learning styles of students.

In the examples cited, teacher leaders have access to several sources of information about the effectiveness of examining student work and lesson study.

1. The chair might make notes about teachers' participation in the conversations.
2. Chairs might analyze the content of teachers' conversations and note the topics that were addressed.
3. Teachers can share their perceptions about the value of the learning experiences.
4. Teachers can report on how the conversations helped them think differently about their teaching.
5. Teachers can bring examples of student work to the table as evidence of how students responded to the use of particular strategies.
6. In the lesson study, as each teacher teaches the lesson and others observe, the observing teachers can note how students respond to particular teaching strategies and instructional materials or resources.

The data collected provides both the teacher leader and teachers with information for evidence-based decisions about the effectiveness of their collaborative learning experiences.

For example, after an experience with lesson study, teachers may find that they spent insufficient time discussing the complexity of the examples teachers use in the lesson. They might have

discovered that the examples were on the easy end of the scale and that the lesson did not include more challenging ones that would have provided some differentiation for students who mastered the concepts more quickly. These data give them information to improve their next lesson study — including a consideration of the complexity of examples embedded in the lesson and preparing a range of simple to complex examples to use in the lesson.

Collected observation data on how students respond to the lesson, the work students produce during the lesson, and data on how students perform on the next classroom or benchmark assessment that incorporates this concept provide both the teacher leader and teachers evidence to determine the impact of teacher learning and practice on student learning.

Through an evaluation process such as this, teacher leaders can assess the impact of their leadership on teachers as well as on students. This evaluation process can also strengthen the learning experiences they facilitate and demonstrate the impact of their work on both teacher and student learning.

References

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