



Implementation keeps great ideas going — and growing

Think fast: Identify three professional development programs that you experienced or even planned that had great starts, but today you wonder what happened to them. The three I recall from my district days are DuPont Leadership Training, HOTS, and Accelerated Schools.

Individually, they were powerful programs that in some places had the impact we hoped to achieve in our school system. Yet, as happens in many school systems, they started off with a bang and ended with a whimper.

Rather than recognizing and providing the support necessary for these programs to have real impact, we got them under way and then turned our attention to the next important item on our lists. Maybe we assumed people were smart and would figure out for themselves how to use the great ideas to which we exposed

them. Maybe we weren't sufficiently committed to the new programs. Or maybe we didn't fully understand what it takes to achieve substantive outcomes

from professional learning.

We introduced the Implementation standard in our latest revision of the standards because, too often, professional development fails to achieve its intended outcome. While some of the reasons for this failure are obvious, too many of us still ignore them: great planning with no follow-through; no resources to sustain change over time; and lack of recognition of the difficulty of the change process.

In my early years with Learning Forward, I spent considerable time in the field working with educators, and I used two organizers to outline the elements necessary for long-term change. The first was RPTIM: readiness, planning, training, implementation, and maintenance. This offered a logical order for considering the steps necessary to achieve intended outcomes. I recall drawing a vertical line between training and implementation and quoting my colleague Susan Loucks-Horsley, who used to say to her clients that they should prepare to use half their resources on the first three phases and the other half on the last two. If they weren't prepared to do that, there was no reason to initiate the change process. People nodded with understanding, but few took the advice seriously.

Later, I learned about Michael Fullan's three I's for change: initiation, implementation, and institutionalization. Fullan, like Loucks-Horsley, made it clear that educators

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need to understand and attend to all three phases of change to achieve professional development's desired outcomes. Without attending to the later stages of the change process, the best we can accomplish are powerful visions and plans that live in notebooks rather than transformation of practices for educators and results for all students.

These two organizers cover foundational ideas within the Implementation standard. In some ways, our earlier sets of standards had their own false starts. Many individuals and organizations aligned their plans to the standards and then failed to do the follow-through work called for in the original Learning standard. When we elevate implementation to the level of a standard, we intend that everyone understands that attention and resources devoted to this concept are not a recommendation. Implementation is essential to linking professional learning to changed practices and transformed results. ■

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