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**E**valuation is “a systematic, purposeful process of studying, reviewing, and analyzing data gathered from multiple sources in order to make informed decisions” about professional learning (Killion, 2008, p. 8).

Standards-aligned professional learning requires the use of data for continuous formative and summative evaluation to measure its processes and progress toward identified short- and long-term outcomes and to make data-informed decisions about midcourse adjustments to increase the likelihood

of positive results.

Evaluation of professional learning illuminates the interactions that occur in the implementation of planned learning experiences and the necessary supports designed to improve professional practice and its effects on students. It investigates how a set of actions designed to achieve defined short- and long-term outcomes occur over time and how they strengthen professional practice and ultimately effect student results.

In schools and school systems, however, educators who lead, facilitate, manage, and advocate professional learning as a primary means for

improving educators’ professional practice and student results struggle to find practical, meaningful, cost-effective, and timely means to evaluate this crucial work. Evaluation of professional learning is challenging work primarily for three reasons: the need for clear outcomes, clear purpose, and appropriate methodology and design. This article explores these challenges and recommends ways to avoid them.

#### **CLARITY OF OUTCOMES**

Evaluation of professional learning depends on its evaluability. Evaluability is the “ability to be evaluated” (Killion,

# WHY INITIATIVES FAIL

TO ACHIEVE MEANINGFUL  
RESULTS, ADDRESS THESE  
COMMON CHALLENGES

2008). For professional learning, as with other change initiatives, this means that the program to be evaluated must have evidence that depicts sufficient preparation and planning for the professional learning.

These include defined outcomes that delineate the expected changes in knowledge, attitudes, skills, aspirations, and behaviors (known as KASAB), a theory of change that details the pathway toward expected changes and the assumptions on which it is based, indicators of success, and potentially a logic model that details the alignment among the program's actions, resources, outputs, and outcomes (Killion, 2008).

After planners of professional learning use data to determine student

and educator learning needs and before they determine the appropriate and sufficient actions necessary to produce the expected changes, they first delineate the specific changes they want to achieve through professional learning.

“Beginning a change project without knowing where one is going creates confusion — uncertainty and doubt about what to do differently to see changes in educator practices and improvement in student results. When educators focus on activities first, they assume that changes and improvements will result” (Killion, 2008, p. 46). Outcomes for educators specify the changes in practice expected to occur as a result of professional learning —

## DATA:

**Professional learning that increases educator effectiveness and results for all students uses a variety of sources and types of student, educator, and system data to plan, assess, and evaluate professional learning.**

Source: Learning Forward, 2011.

changes that are necessary to achieve the desired changes in student learning (Bradley, Munger, & Hord, 2015).

One way to address the challenge of clear outcomes is to use the KASAB framework to define them. The table on p. 28 summarizes the KASABs, provides a definition of each, and offers an example for a particular professional learning initiative.

Because learning is a dynamic process that builds on the interdependent nature of knowledge, beliefs, skills, aspirations, and behaviors, the outcomes are nested together. They build on each other and are not necessarily linear. In many cases, a behavior change depends on other outcomes and may serve

EDUCATOR OUTCOMES DEFINED AS <b>KASABS</b>		
Student outcome: Students will apply critical thinking processes to solve problems in multiple authentic situations and explain their selection and use of appropriate thinking processes to solve the problems.		
Educator outcomes	Definition	Sample educator outcomes for each KASAB
<b>K</b> nowledge	Content, concepts, principles, information, etc., used as a basis for determining and implementing actions.	Educators develop a shared understanding of attributes and types of critical thinking, appropriate uses of the types, and understanding about how students at various developmental levels apply critical thinking.
<b>A</b> ttitudes	Beliefs about the value of particular information, strategies, processes, or actions.	Educators demonstrate the value of explicit teaching of critical thinking skills by integrating it into lessons and units and by assessing students' use of critical thinking.
<b>S</b> kills	Strategies and processes to apply knowledge; capacity to act.	Educators articulate procedures and strategies for explicit teaching of developmentally appropriate critical thinking skills and integrate them into planned lessons and units.
<b>A</b> spirations	Desires, or internal motivation, to engage in a particular practice.	Educators demonstrate the intention to implement explicit instruction in critical thinking by designing content-specific lessons and units within which they will teach and students will apply critical thinking skills.
<b>B</b> ehaviors	Consistent application of practices within authentic settings.	Educators design student learning tasks that provide students opportunities to learn and apply critical thinking skills in content-specific authentic learning, implement explicit teaching of critical thinking skills, assess students' use of critical thinking, and reflect on the effects of their own practice to refine future practice.

**Source:** Adapted from Killion, 2008.

as an approximation for the four other outcomes. In that case, a single outcome, the behavior one, could substitute for all the other outcomes in the evaluation process. However, it is essential to collect formative data on at least one or two other outcomes for the purpose of formative assessment and interim adjustments and to provide evidence of the interim changes that contribute to the final ones.

Outcomes define the changes that occur within adults, not the actions they will take to achieve them. Too often in planning professional learning, the emphasis is on the actions to achieve the results and insufficiently on the outcomes. The lack of specific outcomes defined as changes in the adults that are likely to produce the expected results in students leads to evaluations that focus on the process of completing actions rather than achievement of results. Participation,

**PROGRAM OF PROFESSIONAL LEARNING: a coherent, planned set of actions and essential resources designed to result in positive changes in educator practice and student success** (Killion, 2008).

satisfaction, and enjoyment aren't indications that learning occurs.

Delineating what professional learning strives to achieve by clarifying the KASABs is an essential component of the evaluability of any professional learning effort focused on measuring its outcomes.

**CLARITY OF EVALUATION'S PURPOSE**

Another common challenge in evaluating professional learning is understanding the purpose or focus of the evaluation. The purposes are distinct from each other, and, while they may be related, each requires a

different type of evaluation design and data to address. There are essentially three primary foci for program evaluation: merit, value, and impact of the program.

**Merit** refers to the professional learning's intrinsic properties, characteristics, or attributes, such as whether it meets the Standards for Professional Learning. **Worth** is the perceived value of professional learning, such as participants' perception that professional learning is worth the time invested. **Impact** is the contribution professional learning makes to the effects it intends to achieve.

In addition, evaluators might also

COMMON EVALUATION DESIGNS	
Evaluation design	Description
<b>Descriptive</b>	“Descriptive evaluations provide a description of the program’s actions and the results obtained. Sometimes descriptive evaluations include perceptions of program participants or observations of their behaviors, often from results of a survey” (Killion, 2008, p. 72).
<b>Naturalistic</b>	“Naturalistic evaluations provide an in-depth analysis of the behaviors, motivation, and attitudes of a small number of participants. Case studies are the most common form of naturalistic evaluations” (Killion, 2008, p.72).
<b>Quasi-experimental</b>	“Quasi-experimental design uses comparison of the program participants and nonparticipants when they have not been randomly assigned. The comparison allows the evaluator to determine whether the program had an effect” (Killion, 2008, p. 72).
<b>Experimental</b>	“Experimental design allows the evaluator to form a conclusion about whether the changes that occurred can be attributed to the program. That is, did the program cause the changes? Using random assignment of participants to either a control or a treatment group, the evaluator looks at the differences that occur between the two groups after the treatment” (Killion, 2008, p. 72).
<b>Mixed method</b>	“Mixed-method evaluations use both qualitative and quantitative techniques to answer the questions the evaluation poses. Multiple methods strengthen the validity of an evaluation by overcoming the weaknesses of any one design” (Killion, 2008, p. 72).

focus on the **efficiency, design, and equity of access**. These latter purposes become the focus of evaluations of function of the professional learning system within a school district, rather than evaluations of specific programs of professional learning.

The purpose of evaluation is to measure the effectiveness and impact of a particular program of professional learning. If, for example, district leaders want to evaluate the coaching program, the evaluation may focus on both the implementation of planned actions and resources designed to change educator practice and student success as well as the attainment of defined outcomes. Measures of outcome attainment provide evidence of impact, while measures of implementation, resource use, and identification and handling of unanticipated consequences provide information for program improvement.

Evaluations have different purposes. For example, an evaluation may strive to measure the overall evaluation of the quality of, access to, or cost-effectiveness of professional learning rather than the attainment of a set of defined outcomes associated with a

specific program.

If the evaluation focuses on measuring the quality of professional learning, it might use an instrument such as Learning Forward’s Standards Assessment Inventory ([www.learningforward.org/consulting/sai](http://www.learningforward.org/consulting/sai)). This type of effectiveness evaluation measures the degree to which teachers’ experiences within professional learning meet the specific criteria as defined by the Standards for Professional Learning (Learning Forward, 2011) and is best used to identify opportunities for strengthening professional learning.

If the evaluation seeks to measure achievement of outcomes for educators and students, the purpose is about outcome attainment rather than program quality or participant satisfaction, participation, or access. In addition, when the outcomes specify change in practice that leads to changes in student learning, the evaluation cannot focus only on knowledge acquisition, attitudes, or aspirations. In some cases, evaluations of professional learning attempt to combine these purposes, and, when they do, the evaluation must be more sophisticated

and rigorous to measure the constructs reliably and validly.

To avoid complication and improve evaluation, it is essential to determine the evaluation’s purpose and appropriate audiences as well as the specific questions the evaluation seeks to answer. Often within school systems, policymakers want to know if professional learning impacts educator practice and student achievement, yet are unwilling to invest in outcome evaluations or attempt to substitute measures of quality for outcome measures. Doing so disappoints everyone.

### SELECTION OF APPROPRIATE METHODOLOGY

A challenge related to evaluating professional learning is choosing an appropriate evaluation design that will serve as the framework for the evaluation. Evaluation design can be simple or complex and depends on the necessary rigor of the evaluation.

For internal evaluations that are designed primarily for improvement purposes, a descriptive design may be sufficient. For a more rigorous evaluation designed to measure outcome

EVALUATION FRAMEWORK						
Professional learning goals (changes expected for educators and/or students) ...	Evaluation questions I want to answer (crafted from expected changes) ...	To answer the questions, I need to measure ...	By using the following evaluation design ...	By collecting the following kinds of data ...	Data will be most useful if it comes from (data sources) ...	Data will be collected using (data collection methods)...

Source: Adapted from Killion, 2008.

attainment of a particular program of professional learning, to measure the impact of particular approaches to professional learning, or to compare programs, a pre-test-post-test or quasi-experimental design might be necessary.

In fact, many evaluations of professional learning are not necessarily examining the effects or impact of a particular program but rather the perceived quality of all professional learning, a purpose accomplished with a descriptive design. The table on p. 29 outlines common evaluation methods and the best uses of each.

Many practitioners who are familiar with research and less familiar with evaluation hold misconceptions that complicate the decision regarding evaluation design. They struggle with evaluation in a natural setting that can provide valid conclusions about impact. They also face policymakers or decision makers who want proof that professional learning caused changes in educator practice and that those practices led to changes in student learning.

Not all evaluations and research studies are designed to prove a causal relationship among variables. To assess

the causal relationship of professional learning and educator practice or student achievement, the evaluator must apply a rigorous evaluation design such as quasi-experimental or experimental.

Decisions about the evaluation’s design require thoughtful consideration of the evaluation’s purpose, outcomes, questions, rigor, and use of results. Decisions regarding methodology affect the level of effort, sophistication of the evaluators, and cost of the evaluation.

**TAKING ACTION**

To begin planning an evaluation of professional learning, the evaluator starts by ensuring professional learning is evaluable. The goals guide the design of the evaluation questions, and the questions, in turn, guide the design of the evaluation framework. The table above is a starting point for planning an evaluation.

While evaluation may not be an area of expertise for practitioners who lead professional learning, they understand its necessity. They can increase their capacity by taking small steps to initiate evaluation such as creating a plan to

evaluate existing professional learning programs on a rotational basis and new programs as they emerge.

Evaluation ensures that professional learning achieves its outcomes, meets the Standards for Professional Learning, and provides policymakers, decision makers, and practitioners the information necessary to make crucial decisions about professional learning, including measuring and increasing its effectiveness and results, modifying processes to strengthen results, and justifying resources allocated toward it.

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