

Joe McFarland and Nikki Mouton

Untangling 2 important change tools

Q What is the difference between a logic model and a theory of change?

In their role as coaches for the Learning Forward Academy, Joe McFarland and Nikki Mouton encounter this question a lot. Both logic models and theories of change help us plan, implement, and evaluate programs and initiatives. They are useful for targeting problems of practice like the ones Academy members identify and for a host of other goals. McFarland and Mouton weigh in on the difference between the two, how they can complement one another, and why we shouldn't get too hung up on terminology.

A: Theory of change and logic models have many commonalities, and it's understandable that people often confuse them. Yet there are significant differences in how they are used. They address related but distinct questions and encompass different levels of detail based on their purposes.

A theory of change answers the question, "Where do we want to go?" It provides stakeholders with a framework for how to get to the final goal and what that goal "looks like" when accomplished. It articulates the understanding of the systems, processes, and behaviors that are believed to bring about a desired change, along with



Joe McFarland and Nikki Mouton are coaches of Learning Forward Academy Class of 2020, whose theme is "To infinity and beyond" — a saying from the movie *Toy Story*. McFarland and Mouton stand with cutouts of two of the movie's main characters during the Learning Forward Institutes in Portland, Oregon, in July.

specifying the assumptions underlying the change.

Theory of change provides a mechanism for stakeholders to become involved in the process of developing and implementing a new initiative and can help create a compelling cause, which is important for getting buy-in from all stakeholders, as is critical in any professional learning initiative.

A logic model answers the question, "How will we get to where we want to go?" All too often, we educators are so focused on the development and implementation of plans for improvement that we overlook the importance of engaging in a comprehensive analysis of the project, what it is designed to do, who needs to be involved, the resources needed for it to be successful, and, most importantly, how success looks and how it will be assessed.

The logic model provides the framework to ensure all factors are taken into consideration to ensure success of the goal. It is the detailed action plan for taking all components into consideration and developing the systems, structure, activities, models, and resources (human and material) to bring the goal to fruition. It helps stakeholders ensure effective implementation and evaluate the components.

It details:

- Inputs: all of the required elements from the implementing organization, including human resources, fiscal resources, and others;
- Outputs: what the program or initiative does, such as the services it provides; and
- Outcomes: short-term, intermediate, and long-term

results expected to occur as a result.

A building analogy helps explain the function of theory of change and logic models. Think of your initiative as a house being designed and built. The theory of change is what architects call the schematic design, which gives a general picture of what the house will look like, including the major components, structure, and look, and how all the pieces fit together. This is the part of the design that is used to work out the “big picture” and that is shown to clients to get their buy-in and input in the design process.

The logic model is a process that architects call design development, in which all the details are laid out, like where the mechanicals will go, what hardware will be used. It can be tweaked as necessary when unanticipated needs arise. In

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

For more information about logic models and theory of change, including examples, check out these resources.

- *Assessing Impact: Evaluating Professional Learning* (3rd edition) by Joellen Killion. Available at the Learning Forward bookstore, learningforward.org/store or 800-727-7288.
- *Logic Models for Selecting, Designing, and Implementing Evidence-Based School Leadership Interventions*, published by the RAND Corporation. Available at www.wallacefoundation.org/knowledge-center/Documents/Logic-Model-Evidence-Based-School-Leadership-Interventions.pdf.

professional learning, as in architecture, design is an iterative process.

As you consider how to use these two tools to complement one another in your professional learning initiatives, don't get hung up on the terminology. The important thing is to develop an intentional process to guide design, implementation, and evaluation to ensure progress toward your final outcome goals.

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OUR TAKE / Stephanie Hirsh and Frederick Brown

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educators, children, and schools that have traditionally been underserved and those that have the greatest needs. Our commitment to equity is a significant driver in our recent shift to explore in depth the intersection of curriculum and professional learning.

Our commitment to equity also undergirds Learning Forward's Standards for Professional Learning. When we revised the standards in 2011, we embedded the concept of equity throughout. We believed then, as we do now, that when a district aligns its practices to the standards, each and every child will experience excellent teaching and learning every day.

However, we know that we must do more. While our new vision statement is an important step for our organization, it isn't the only step to take. Going forward, we will view all of our strategies through an equity lens

with the goal of making sure our efforts will help districts and schools ensure each and every child exceeds provincial, state, and local standards.

We also commit to reflect on our own assumptions, beliefs, and practices and how they can evolve. This is also a central task of high-quality professional learning. In that spirit, we are reflecting on these questions and issues:

- In what other ways should we define equity? In what other ways might districts and schools define it?
- What strategies and drivers have demonstrated success in ensuring that underserved students achieve high standards?
- Where do the biggest gaps lie for students? How can we influence policies and practices related to professional learning to address those gaps?
- How can the Standards for

Professional Learning be more explicit in addressing issues of equity?

- What types of learning might we craft that help systems address their equity challenges and opportunities?

As we continue to grapple with our equity questions, we ask you to send us yours. What questions and issues are you reflecting on? What new ideas or reflections does reading this issue of *The Learning Professional* bring up for you? Please share them with us.

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