

## As trainings grow shorter, follow-up plays a bigger role

Recently my job in Laos was to deliver a two-day training, then help plan follow-through. This had been a 14-hour seminar in what normally would have taken 24 hours over several months. Professional development activities are more and more often condensed into less preferable time frames in geographically isolated settings such as rural North America and in international schools. When training is abbreviated, follow-up — and planning follow-up — is even more important.

On concluding the training, I met with the Vientiane International School's professional development committee. Our purpose was to begin designing follow-up. The first requirements for this Friday evening meeting were an agenda and knowledge of implementation outcomes.

### IMPLEMENTATION OUTCOMES

Programs that develop teachers' skills have two important outcomes: having teachers develop unconscious competence and getting them to integrate the new skills into their work habits. Add a third outcome — reculturing — to the goals when the professional learning focuses on developing collaborative work cultures.

Developing follow-through to create unconscious competence is especially challenging. Unconscious competence follows unconscious incompetence (I don't know that I don't know), conscious incompetence, (I know what I don't know), and conscious competence (I am integrating new patterns into my work but with conscious, sometimes mechanical efforts). Aikido Master George Leonard (1991) says the deepest learning occurs in this third stage. Here learners unlearn old patterns of responding, making neurological and psychological adjustments. Reaching beyond conscious competence to unconscious competence requires consistent practice. Persistence is the key.

Professional development leaders should talk about the goal of unconscious competence during training. I often explain that only 20% of participants' learning will occur

inside the room and 80% will come from practicing outside the seminar setting. Follow-through is especially important here. Professional development leaders help by providing between-session assignments and record-keeping devices for continuing practice.

The second outcome, integrating new skills into work habits, requires that professional development leaders teach for transfer. In transfer, knowledge and skills associated with one context are applied in another context. Presenters help teachers learn to transfer when the presenter brings the abstract to a real example, making clear how the skill can be connected within a new context. Within the Laos training, for example, participants explored how a protocol involving planning conversations could be used in a parent conference. Professional development providers must help participants build the meta-cognitive skills they need to guide new systems of behavior. They must challenge participants to answer for themselves how to use their new skills.

Reculturing was our third goal. In the Vientiane School, we worked on two of 11 factors Marzano (2003) found affected student achievement. Marzano found collegiality and professionalism affect learning, as do the instructional decisions individual teachers make. Through Cognitive Coaching, we strove to make the habits and skills of collegiality and mediated thinking the values, skills, and norms permeating classrooms, staff meetings, parent conferences, and lunchroom talk.

### SEVEN KEY QUESTIONS

When planning a new program, seven questions drive how we design the professional learning experience. Answers to each question depend on the outcomes we desire and the skills we expect teachers to learn. We address these questions as we plan the training program, but in Laos, because of the shortened time frame, they became the questions the professional development committee used after the session to design follow-up work. Professional development providers can use these questions to frame early planning and plan follow-up:

#### 1. Quantity

How many repetitions do teachers need to learn the skill? The answer varies according to what is being learned and what standards are set for mastery. In Cognitive



In each issue of *JSD*, Robert J. Garmston writes about the challenges of creating effective groups. His columns can be found at [www.nsd.org/library/garmston.html](http://www.nsd.org/library/garmston.html).

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Coaching, for example, studies suggest that six to eight coaching cycles may be enough for the person being coached to internalize the coaching voice. This is less practice than teachers may need to apply other, moderately complex teaching strategies because for each coaching lesson, teachers generally have seven mental engagement points which are essentially individual practices: 1) develop a plan; 2) have a coaching conversation about the plan; 3) reflect before teaching; 4) remember the plan's goals, success indicators, and approaches while teaching; 5) reflect after the lesson; 6) have a reflecting conversation with a coach after the lesson; 7) continue to reflect after the conversation. Reflecting conversations also help the teacher move beyond episodic learning to generalize the learning and commit it to action.

## 2. Frequency

Is there an ideal frequency that teachers should practice the new skill as they begin to implement it so they develop

new habits? In one instance, as I cognitively coached two middle school English teachers, we all kept journals for a semester. We found that the coach's voice was still in their heads for about two weeks after a coaching session. However, early in the project, the teachers reported that beyond two weeks, old mental habits took over and the daily demands of teaching crowded out self-coaching thought. Professional development leaders must set clear expectations and provide time for frequent practice.

## 3. Relevancy

Can I use it tomorrow?

Professional development

providers must help teachers see the relevance of what they are learning. When teachers see limited benefits to the new behaviors, they naturally avoid practicing the skill. Without practice, they start a landslide in which quantity of practice, relevancy, frequency, and integrity are affected.

## 4. Integrity

As teachers practice the skills they learned in seminars, will the practice be true to the initial instruction? Variance in the way the learned skill is implemented is natural. Some mutations are benign, some are useful and should be shared with others, and some are destructive. Professional development providers must follow up by gathering, analyzing, and using data to determine whether the intervention is being implemented widely and properly. If not, providers must devise corrective steps. In Cognitive

Coaching, for example, losing intellectual rigor reduces the value of the experience. Reduced value affects its relevance, which tempers satisfaction, and that ultimately affects quantity and frequency.

## 5. Intensity

Is the initial training enough? Are additional skills required? For the Vientiane School, because the training was an abbreviated version of a full program, certain concepts and skills were not developed during the initial training and we planned for additional training in follow-up.

## 6. Transfer

How will you support teachers in transferring the new skills into other venues: with students, parents, full groups? Some transfer may occur naturally because of surface similarities. For example, a planning conversation with a teacher is similar to a parent-teacher conference. However, most transfer requires deliberately studying how to apply the skill in a different context. Until concepts and skills are transferred into the broader fabric of school life, neither integration nor reculturing can be accomplished.

## 7. Self-directed program implementation

What governance structures should be set up to allow teachers to be involved in decision making? Every new program needs someone to tend it, take pulses, watch for mutations, encourage, assess, and solve implementation problems. At the Vientiane International School, the professional development committee adopted several principles to create self-directed follow-up for the program:

- **Self-manage:** Approach tasks by setting clear outcomes, creating a strategic plan, and gathering necessary data. Draw from the literature and past experiences, anticipate success indicators, and create alternatives to reach the goals of competence, integration, and reculturing.
- **Self-monitor:** Look for indicators during the program of how the follow-through plan is working. In what ways does it work, and where is it not working?
- **Self-modify:** Reflect on information gained during monitoring. Evaluate, analyze, construct meaning, and apply the learning to future work strengthening the program.

Using the seven questions brought us to principles of self-directedness the Vientiane School professional development committee will use for follow-up to our session. Our plan was in place. As the evening ended, we said our goodbyes and the teachers rode off in ancient VW Bugs or astride motorcycles, ponchos and helmets gleaming in the light Laotian rain.

## REFERENCES

- Leonard, G. (1991).** *Mastery: The keys to success and long-term fulfillment*. New York: A Dutton Book.
- Marzano, R.J. (2003).** *What works in schools: Translating research into action*. Alexandria, VA: ASCD. ■

### KEY QUESTIONS

- 1. Quantity.** How many practice sessions?
- 2. Frequency.** How close together?
- 3. Relevancy.** How relevant is the new practice?
- 4. Integrity.** How true is the practice to the original model?
- 5. Intensity.** Are more skills/training sessions needed?
- 6. Transfer.** How will transfer of skills be taught?
- 7. Self-directed program implementation.** How will the program be managed?