

# Getting a Return on Your Investment in Professional Development: Putting Practices in Place that Yield Results

By: Dr. Jill Bella

*Note: This resource is part of a self-reflection series focused on professional development. Read the rest of the series [here](#).*

In the resource shared in the previous Points to Ponder, “[Professional Growth: Do You See What I See](#),” you reflected on the value you place on professional growth within your program. Valuing professional growth is a critical first step, but administrators must also foster norms of continuous learning by putting practices in place to support this value. To demonstrate one way to do this, I would like to focus on a challenge often raised by administrators in early care and education.

Administrators frequently tell me that they spend a lot of money on professional development experiences for staff, yet they don’t feel like they get a big return on that investment. Staff often come back from workshops excited, but that excitement seems to fade quickly and implementing what they learned is a rare occurrence. After hearing this repeatedly, I began to ask several questions.

First, I would ask administrators about their own follow through after attending professional development. Did they return from their own professional development experiences and implement ideas they learned about? If not, why not? If so, how long did these new practices last and what strategies helped them to accomplish this? In many cases, responses to these questions were eye-opening. Administrators were candid and admitted they, too, didn’t always follow through with what they had learned. Sometimes they would tell me that time was a barrier, other times the barrier was related to a feeling of lack of support or buy-in from other staff or families, other times administrators just felt overwhelmed by all that needed to be changed and their enthusiasm for the new idea faded as they began to think about the logistics of implementation. These conversations helped to create a shared understanding about the obstacles that prevent people from putting great ideas into action. In some cases the conversations involved generating strategies for supporting themselves and their teachers.

Next, I would ask administrators what practices they had in place to support staff *before* leaving for a professional development opportunity and *after* they returned. Overwhelmingly this question was met with a look of bewilderment. Therein lies the problem. There is often a disconnect between participation and application. One solution to this challenge is to consider the practices that are in place to support staff who attend professional development such as trainings and workshops. For example, if administrators want staff to not only attend professional development opportunities, but implement what they learned and grow professionally from the experience, the center’s norms, routines, messaging, and policies, along with their leadership style need to support this. More specifically, if staff return from a professional development experience and they are never asked to reflect on its meaning to them or how to incorporate the new

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learning into their practice, there is little chance that new knowledge will be applied, let alone thought about again.

For some concrete examples of how to embed professional development into both administrative and pedagogical leadership practices click on the following link to the resource [Putting Professional Development Into Practice](#).

### Points to Ponder

In what ways are professional development opportunities supported in your program's practices and by you as an administrator?

What prevents you from supporting professional development opportunities and what can you change in your program to make it more likely for staff to put into practice what they've learned from attending a training or workshop?

If you would like more ideas, check out [Inspiring Peak Performance: Competence, Commitment, and Collaboration](#), which is a great resource for embedding professional growth throughout your organization.

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