

Putting Professional Development into Practice

Have you ever been discouraged because the staff at your program returned from attending a professional development experience such as a training, workshop, conference, institute, or professional learning community without implementing anything that was learned? This may have occurred because of gaps in the administrative and pedagogical leadership practices that are in place. An important question to ask yourself is how is continuous learning and professional growth supported within the program?

The following are several questions to consider when reflecting on how professional development opportunities are supported through both administrative and pedagogical leadership practices:

Administrative Leadership

- What policies are included in an employee handbook to support professional development opportunities?
- What messages are shared during the hiring and probationary period that demonstrate the value placed on professional development experiences?
- Do job descriptions include a responsibility related to professional growth? Is this expectation assessed on performance appraisal forms?
- Do staff identify how a training topic is related to their performance goals before attending the training?
- How is the application of new learning from professional development experiences addressed at team meetings? Is this a standing agenda item?
- What evidence is displayed and disseminated that demonstrates the value of professional development experiences? Can this be seen in posted materials, and is it visible in behaviors, conversation topics, and language used?
- How does the program budget support professional development? Is there a line item dedicated to professional learning, both job-embedded and externally delivered?
- How do supervisors consider how professional development experiences align with individual performance goals and the program's mission and strategic plan?
- Does the overall program function as a professional learning community (PLC)? If so, what outcomes have resulted from the PLC?
- How does the staffing schedule support participation in professional development experiences? Is there time for reflecting on practice? Is there time for supervisors to observe staff and provide feedback? Is there protected time for professional learning communities to meet?
- What protocols exist to embed new learning through professional development into work?
- What barriers need to be overcome to better support the professional development of staff in your program?

Pedagogical Leadership

- Do supervisors meet with staff prior to attending a professional development opportunity to discuss how the experience will benefit their work, what they hope to learn, questions to consider, etc.?
- What considerations do you make to reduce a staff member's workload while they attend training—to eliminate stress, allow for guilt-free learning, and encourage them to focus?
- What resources are available to staff to learn about topics that will help supplement or scaffold their learning?
- In what ways do administrators provide instructional leadership, facilitate reflective activities, and share resources as follow-up to the professional development experiences?
- Is there opportunity for coaching? If so, is there a process for staff to receive feedback based on observation of practice?
- How are families made aware of the program's commitment to continuous learning?
- In what ways could families be included in professional learning experiences along with staff?

Administrators are more likely to see lasting change in teaching practice if they support staff through both administrative and pedagogical leadership practice. Professional growth must be encouraged before, during, and after the learning experience. What is learned is less likely to be carried out when there are not practices in place to encourage and support professional development. That is a costly, and an unfortunate mistake.

Adapted with author permission from: Masterson, M., Abel, M., Talan, T., & Bella, J. (In press). *Building on Whole Leadership: Energizing and Strengthening Your Early Childhood Program*. Lewisville, NC: Gryphon House.