

Making it Stick: Building a Continuum of Support for Professional Development

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, "[Getting a Return on Your Investment in Professional Development: Putting Practices in Place that Yield Results](#)," I mentioned how *"administrators frequently tell me that they spend a lot of money on professional development experiences for staff, yet they don't feel like they receive 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."*

We expect staff to be learning *during* a professional development experience, such as a training where they are gaining new insights and knowledge. And we expect them to extend and apply that learning into their practices once they return from training. Yet, what was learned doesn't often stick after the professional development is over. New knowledge and skills are more likely to persist when they are supported over time. *Preparing* staff for a professional development experience and then *following-up* with them afterward are two simple practices administrators can do to support and continue the learning. Each of these practices support the notion of [Pedagogical Leadership](#) (i.e., how administrators support teaching and learning).

Preparation for Professional Growth. The point of professional development opportunities is usually to help staff grow, which in turn, improves experiences for children and families. One way to help staff understand how a professional development experience directly impacts children and families is to emphasize this notion before the experience even begins. The previously shared resource, "[Professional Development Travel and Work Release Request Form](#)" offers strategies to help staff make this connection. This request form asks staff for general information about the professional development experience they are interested in. This helps them reflect on the purpose of the specific opportunity, create goals for the experience, think about how they will use the knowledge gained in their daily work, and consider how the experience will benefit the organization. Completing the form also helps build awareness about time commitment and cost, and reminds staff of the high value you place on their professional growth.

Follow-Up to Professional Growth. Another way to encourage the implementation of ideas and knowledge gleaned from professional development experiences is a post-professional development feedback or reflection form. For example, this [Professional Development Feedback Form](#) can be completed by staff after attending professional development opportunities. It includes questions related to their experience and

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questions about how they will integrate the learning into their work. [The Learning Team Reflection Form](#) is another form that is used as a follow-up after a professional development experience, such as a community of practice meeting. This form includes questions about team processes, participation, and future directions. Both forms encourage further thought about the experiences and how to apply what was learned, thus extending and building on knowledge and skills.

The resources provided in this blog are designed to be used by staff before and after a professional learning experience, making it more likely for what was learned to be incorporated into their work. Supervisors can also deepen the learning by meeting with staff to review these documents. By preparing staff for professional development and helping them reflect afterward, supervisors are encouraging staff to be intentional, make connections, continue building on what was learned, and bridge new knowledge to practice.

Points to Ponder

The process of reflection to prepare for and follow-up on professional development experiences is a way to help staff see the connection between their efforts and outcomes. The forms above guide such reflections. What else can you do to extend learning?

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