

The Many Faces of Follow-Up

Exploring Different Ways to Follow-Up Professional Learning

Follow-up has been a tenet of professional development for over 20 years since Joyce and Showers found that purposeful follow-up was a necessary component of professional development design. Most articles about follow-up accurately decry the lack of follow-up in school or district-based staff development planning.¹

One dictionary defines follow-up as "the act of repeating or adding to previous action so as to increase effectiveness." Many activities designated as follow-up are just events that provide additional information. This is insufficient. The purpose of follow-up should be to reinforce learning about the critical attributes of the new practice. This being the case, presenters and designers of professional development must have clarity regarding the desired outcomes of a presentation or professional learning experience and must be able to clearly delineate the expected changes in practice as well as specify the conceptual understandings that need to be acquired through the experience. For example, in cooperative learning, understanding the concept of positive interdependence is more important than learning 12 ways to group students. The focus, therefore, of the follow-up would target understanding the critical concept of positive interdependence along with implementation strategies.²

A second consideration when designing follow-up activities is the idea of conceptual redundancy. According to Cohen (1991), conceptual redundancy means offering individuals multiple opportunities to grapple with essential concepts through a variety of learning strategies. In other words, we need to do more than just repeat information; we need to approach the concept in a new manner. If initial training was conducted with a PowerPoint presentation, then subsequent follow-up sessions should use a different delivery mode.³ (See document entitled *Eight Ways of Learning Anything*.)

Follow-up can 'look' a lot of ways. As the presenter, one may not be in the position to provide the follow-up to a professional learning experience, but one can be ready to provide ideas and suggestions to the participants about how they can create their own personal follow-up experiences. Ideas to consider:

- Classroom visitation of a master teacher using the new practices along with debriefing
- Classroom demonstration lessons followed by a debriefing (consider asking other participants of the professional learning experience to observe the demonstration and provide feedback)
- Reading an article on the new strategy and discussing it with others who participated in the professional learning experience
- Co-planning and co-teaching lessons with a coach or knowledgeable peer

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- Planning with a study group or school team (grade or content area team) that focuses on implementing new practices
- Developing an Innovation Configuration with colleagues
- Videotaping a lesson and requesting collegial review and feedback
- Self-assessing new practices using a rubric
- Engaging in self-reflection (routinely and periodically reviewing notes made during reflection to determine change in practice and/or thinking)

Each activity addresses the same concepts but from different points of view and using different methods. This variety of activities allows educators, with different learning styles, to examine the same critical concepts about new classroom practices in different ways. Much like children, not all adults learn in the same way. Some require reading about a new practice while others learn best when they can see the new practices in action. Follow-up should provide a variety of approaches in order to maximize the number of people who understand and use new strategies.

The bottom line is that mere repetition does not increase conceptual understanding nor does it increase the likelihood that new classroom practices will result from the new learning. A variety of strategies and approaches must be used if follow-up is going to result in the desired change.

REFERENCES

1. Joyce, B. & Showers, B. (1983). *Power in staff development through research on training*. Alexandria, VA: ASCD.
2. Roy, P. (2005). A fresh look at follow-up. *Results*.