

The Schultz Center Process for Evaluating Programs

The Schultz Center opened in February of 2002 as a facility expressly designed to provide capacity-building support for educators. As an independent, non-profit corporation, it was established to provide high-quality professional development and training to educators in Baker, Clay, Duval, Nassau, and St. Johns counties. By virtue of its physical location in the city of Jacksonville, a particularly close relationship exists between the Schultz Center and the Duval County Public Schools (DCPS). Since its creation, the Schultz Center has partnered with DCPS on many programs to further the district's goal of implementing a standards-based curriculum and instruction program for all students in Duval County.

Improving the quality of teaching and instructional practice is essential to implementing standards-based educational reforms that are at the heart of school improvement initiatives in the 21st century. In recent years, legislation from the Goals 2000 program, federal *Improving America's Schools Act*, and the *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001*, have generated renewed interest in identifying reform models for public schools that work, and in particular, those that can be successful with schools in economically disadvantaged areas, with students at all achievement levels, and from diverse family, racial, and economic backgrounds. Reviewing a group of the most successful reform models currently known, two common elements emerged. These elements were the need for *setting high, clear, and fair academic standards for students* and the *need for adults working with students to be equipped, empowered, and expected to improve instruction*.¹ If there is the will to make systemic improvement in

1. The Institute for Research and Reform in Education. (2003). First Things First: A Framework for Successful School Reform. A White Paper prepared for the Ewing Marion Kauffman Foundation by the Institute for Research and Reform in Education.

schools a reality, then the prevailing wisdom seems to support the choice of standards-based instructional systems as paramount, and a heightened need to equip teachers for their challenging roles in new and different ways.

Evaluating Professional Development

There seems to be general consensus that the improvement of teachers' skills and knowledge is one of the most important investments of time and money that local, state, and national decision-makers can make, and researchers now generally agree on the essential elements of what must be present in order to define professional development as "high quality". In a move to increase the level of accountability for the millions of dollars spent annually on teacher professional development, the NCLB legislation's definition of "high quality professional development" emerged as the use of *research-based training and delivery models* that showed evidence of *linkages to school and district improvement initiatives*, and incorporated the *on-going assessment of student outcomes to determine the impact of training on student achievement*. The Florida Department of Education supports the tenets of the NCLB legislation, and has imbedded these characteristics in its own Professional Development Standards Protocol system required for use by districts in designing and assessing the effectiveness of staff development and training courses offered in Florida school districts. In addition, the National Staff Development Council has endorsed the call for a new form of staff development that is results-driven, standards-based, and job-embedded.² By calling attention to the need for a more tightly focused and outcome-driven process for developing staff development, Dennis Sparks and Stephanie Hirsh have helped to define a more powerful vision of professional learning that can, and indeed will, have an observable impact on student learning.³

This vision of a more powerful design for professional learning has shaped the way we think about the delivery of professional development courses at the Schultz Center. From an organizational perspective, and because the Center is an independent, non-profit entity which is contracted for services by

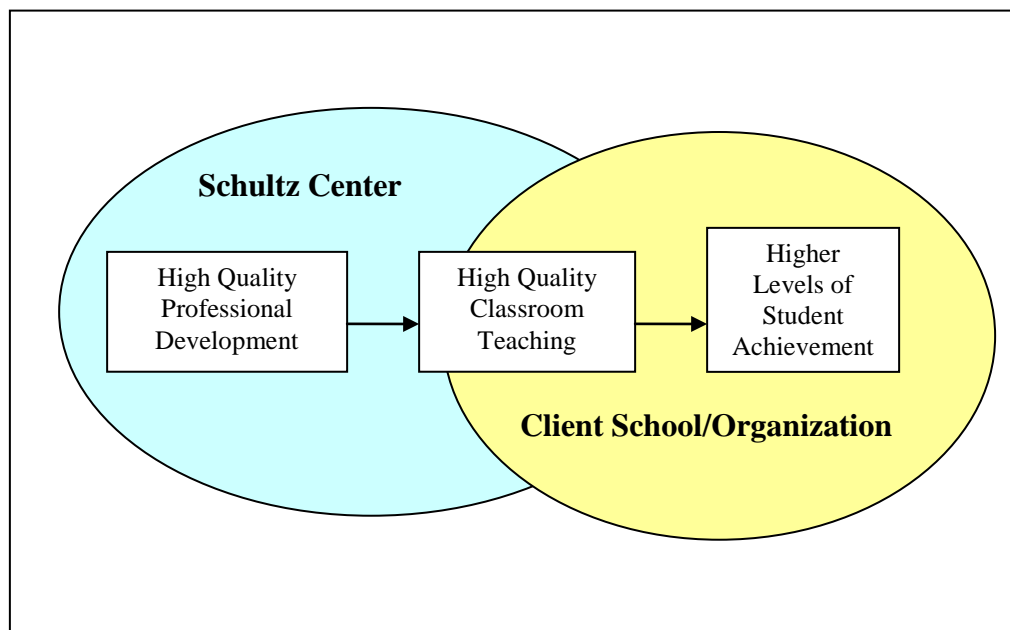
² Hirsch, S. & Killion, J. (2007). *The learning educator: A new era in professional learning*. Oxford, OH: NSDC.

³ Sparks, D. & Hirsh, S. (1997). *A new vision for staff development*. Arlington, VA: ASCD and NSDC.

client organizations, there are both individual and joint interests in determining the effectiveness of the professional development training provided to participants of all courses. Depending on the type of training contracted, the scope and length of services involved, the audience(s) being served, and the nature of skills and content being taught, there will be different specific plans for evaluating the quality and effectiveness of training. In most cases, however, there will be a shared interest in seeing that new knowledge and skills conveyed in professional development find their way into classroom practice.

Figure 1 below depicts the way we conceptualize these separate and shared interests with partner organizations. The primary responsibility for establishing “quality” in the professional development offered to participants belongs to the Schultz Center, based on joint needs assessment planning; the primary responsibility for assuring “quality” instruction in the classroom belongs to the school system or educational entity, but the Schultz Center still has a major interest and stake in those results.

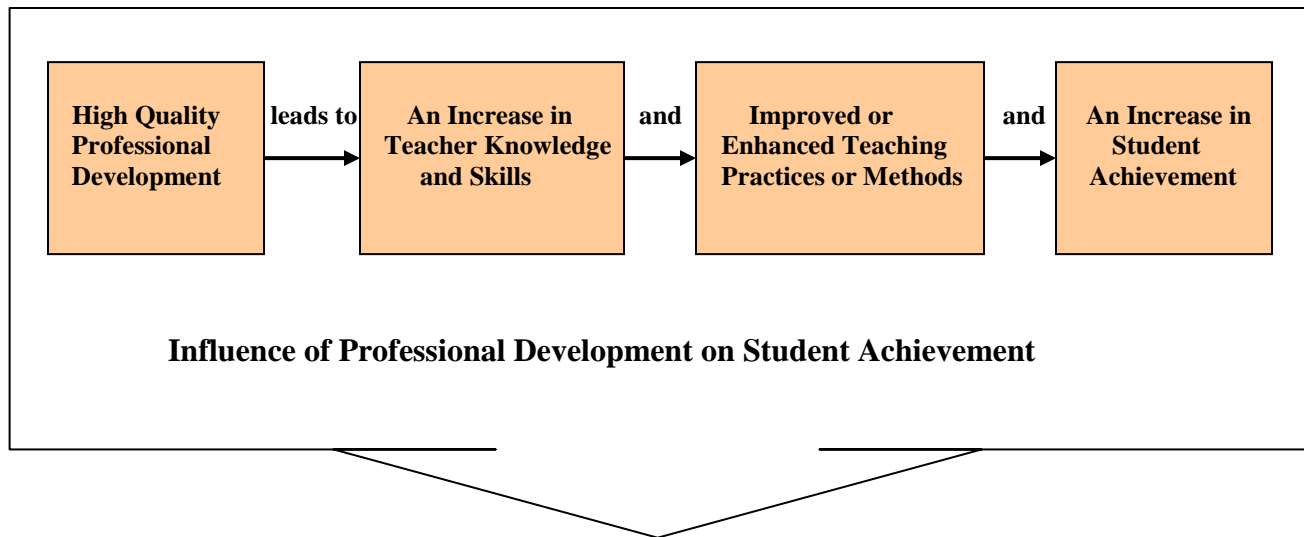
Figure 1: The Shared Responsibility for Evaluating the Impact of Professional Development



Our perspective on this work is that a joint, mutual need and interest exists in developing methods, measures, and procedures for obtaining data to

measure the fidelity and depth of practices implemented in classrooms. This intermediate step for determining (in program evaluation terms) the *interim program outcomes*, has too often been overlooked. It is critical, though, before it is possible to move to the next level of confidence in establishing a *cause and effect* relationship between high quality professional development and what we hope to see as improved levels of student achievement.

We have in mind a simple *Theory of Action*:



In the past there have been serious concerns raised about the real effectiveness of many professional development activities and programs. As a body of work, the literature supporting real evidence for the impact on student achievement of professional development is filled with a litany of disappointing results.⁴ For many reasons, we understand that evaluating the impact of professional development on teaching and learning is a complex and multifaceted endeavor. One of the problems has been in defining the “activity” or “program” being evaluated. Professional development comes in many forms: one-day workshops, mentoring relationships, teacher collaborative activities, individual inquiries, group studies, and even university courses. The criteria in

⁴ Guskey, T.R. (1986). Staff development and teacher change. *Educational Researcher*, 15(5), 5-12; Corcoran, T.B. (1995a, June). Helping teachers teach well: Transforming professional development. CPRE Policy Briefs. New Brunswick, NJ: Consortium for Policy Research in Education, Rutgers University

each case for determining effectiveness of the professional development activities have been similarly varied. ⁵ In the past, the most common form of criteria used to describe the effectiveness of staff development activities have been participant reactions to their experiences. More ambitious efforts at evaluating impact have included attempts to measure changes in attitude reported by participants, and participants' self-reports of implementation. Instances of using any real measures of student learning as key measures for determining success of professional learning activities have been extremely rare. This is changing, however, as evidence of the effect on student learning is increasingly becoming the kind of evidence that policy makers want to see. ⁶

As a result of these demands for better evidence of effectiveness, and in particular, evidence of impact of teacher training on student achievement, there has been greater attention paid to incorporating the design features of professional development programs that would allow for systematic and results-driven evaluation. There are two components that have to be addressed if we are to successfully evaluate the effectiveness of programs for teachers, and the impact these programs have on students. These include: 1) a more careful articulation of the elements of a specific training delivered, and 2) a clear description of the kind of evidence that would be required to arise from that training that would *certify* its effectiveness for policymakers and school leaders.

We have moved well beyond the shallow forms of evaluation previously provided by simply documenting attendance in staff development and recording the satisfaction of participants as evidence of success. In order to provide better ways to evaluate the impact of programs, Thomas Guskey identifies four design principles of effective professional development:

- 1) a clear focus on learning and learners
- 2) an emphasis on individual and organizational change
- 3) small changes guided by a grand vision, and

⁵Kirkpatrick, D.L. (1996). Great ideas revisited. Techniques for evaluating training programs. Revisiting Kirkpatrick's four-level model. *Training and Development Journal*, 50(1), 54-59.

⁶Guskey, T. R. (2000). *Evaluating Professional Development*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press, Inc. pp. 32-33.

- 4) job-imbedded and ongoing activities. ⁷

In terms of a more results-driven evaluation process itself, Joellen Killion provides three basic questions that have to be addressed:

- 1) What's working and how do we know it?
- 2) What isn't working and why?
- 3) What can we do to produce even better results (for teachers and for students)?⁸

Schultz Center's Process for Evaluating Programs

In a recent brief written for policy makers by the American Educational Research Association, the authors identify two critical elements of professional development that have been found most necessary to support actual changes in classroom practice: 1) *a focus on content knowledge and coherence* which includes building on existing teacher knowledge and aligning programs with state and district standards and assessments, and 2) *supporting communication and collaboration* among teachers who are attempting to reform their instruction in promising ways.⁹

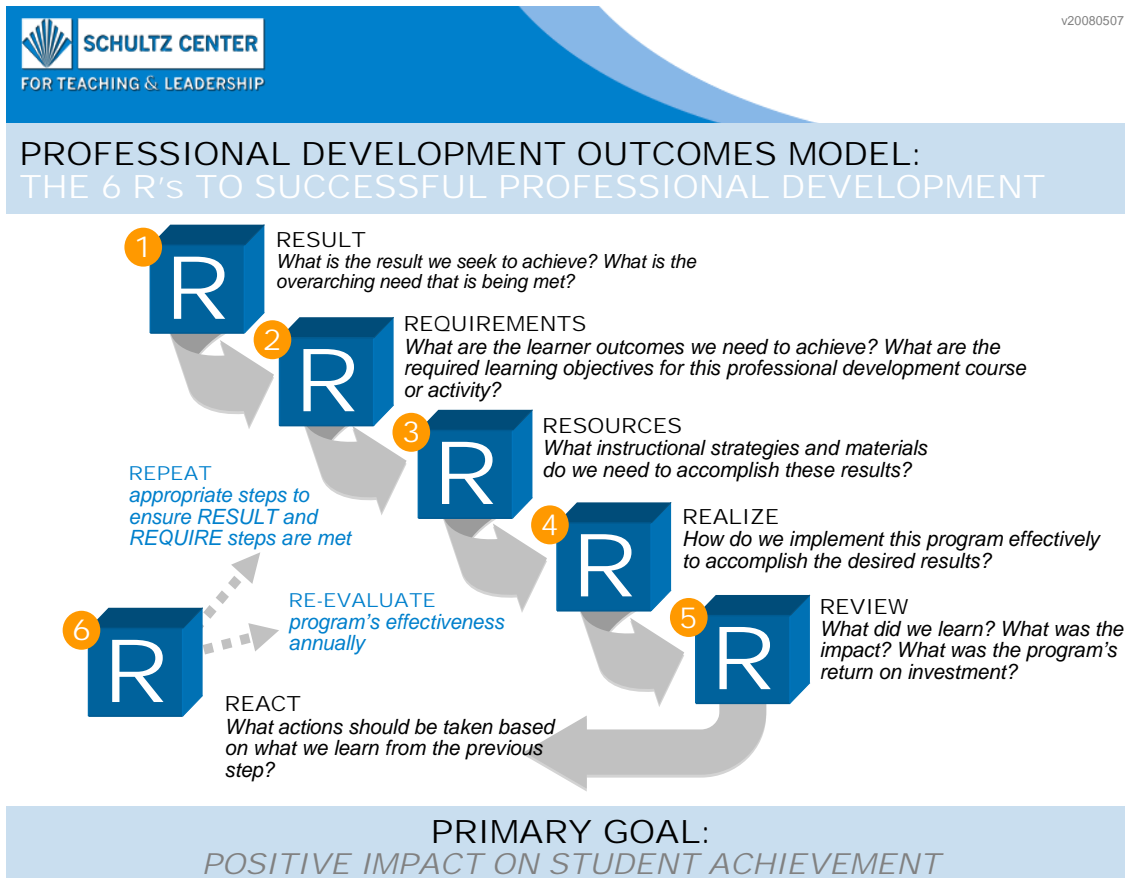
The Institute of Education Sciences (IES) of the U.S. Department of Education defines a process for *evidence-based decision making* that should guide the determination of program goals and necessary elements. In turn, this decision-making process can inform the process for adopting or developing programs or teaching practices that require the use of certain materials or require the expenditure of resources (both human and fiscal) that affect large numbers of students. Just as in effective school improvement planning, the IES decision making cycle outlines a process for using data to identify needs, considering the specifics of the context in which the needs occur, and systematically reviewing current literature and best-practices that inform the field *before* choosing an existing program or developing one from scratch to

⁷ Guskey, T. R. (2000). *Evaluating Professional Development*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press, Inc. pp. 36-38.

⁸ Killion, J. (2002). *Assessing impact: Evaluating staff development*. Oxford, OH: NSDC.

⁹ American Educational Research Association. (2005). *Teaching teachers: Professional development to improve student achievement*. Summer 2005, Volume 3, Issue 1.

fulfill the needs.¹⁰ Using this decision-making process as a foundation, the Schultz Center has developed its own process for evaluating student and adult learner needs, and for designing high quality programs that include the necessary components to deliver and evaluate the impact of these programs on educators in its service area.



both high quality in terms of the skill and expertise of trainers delivering the content, but also consist of a set of organized materials and activities designed for the adult learners that will be participating, and most important of all, that the choice of the content and the way in which it is taught was constructed with the needs of student learners in mind.

Program evaluation at the Schultz Center is conducted as a collaborative and ongoing cycle of continuous improvement, and relies on joint decision-making of client groups, program administrators, and evaluation staff. Annually, or on alternative funding cycles, plans for evaluating program outcomes are jointly determined to focus evaluation questions for the year, to determine data collection processes and timelines, and to imbed lessons learned from past cycle evaluations into the work to improve, refine, or retool strategies or methods that are not working to expected levels. Evaluation action plans are based on each program's stage of program implementation, the maturity of program processes, and feedback that arises naturally in response to Killion's three questions (above). Evaluation feedback is designed with a variety of audiences in mind, and provided in both print and electronic media formats to encourage confidence in the transparent nature of evaluative decision-making, the sharing of information, and accessibility to as many interested parties as possible. In addition, to be good stewards of the scant resources available for professional development of educators from traditional funding sources, we can address questions of cost-effectiveness and educational *return on investment* for individual programs, determined by calculating per unit (teacher, day, contact hour) of cost expended for various program delivery options, in comparison with increments of change seen in teacher knowledge, skills, or practice and the student achievement. ¹¹

¹¹ *Beyond the Black Box of Professional Development Spending*. Journal of Education Finance.