



HERE WE GO

Suzanne Bouffard

LOOKING BACK HELPS US UNDERSTAND THE PATH FORWARD

I have seen the phrase “evaluation is more important now than ever” repeated frequently. Yet it never reads like a cliché because it is always true, and now is no exception.

Twenty years ago, this journal, which was then called *JSD*, was my first introduction to the unique considerations involved in evaluating professional learning. I was struck by how field leaders like Hayes Mizell, Joellen Killion, and Thomas Guskey provided guidance so elegant that the complex process of program evaluation seemed straightforward and almost natural.

Of course, elegance only *looks* easy. You’d be hard pressed to find a professional learning leader who would call evaluation easy, even among the experts named here. That’s why we still need guidance on how to do it and why we continue to hear impassioned calls to use the best methods available to fortify the evidence base.

As I’ve reread many years’ worth of articles and books, I have seen the phrase “evaluation is more important now than ever” repeated frequently. Yet it never reads like a cliché because it is always true, and now is no exception. With federal funds on the chopping block (again), ideological and strategic divisions, and competing priorities due to students’ compounding needs, it is of the utmost importance that we ensure professional learning is making a difference and document the impact. This issue is devoted to supporting your efforts to do just that.

This issue builds on *The Learning Professional’s* ongoing research and evaluation features to go deep into the topic. If you’ve been reading the journal for a long time, you’ll see updates to some classic resources, including Killion’s 2003 article, “8 smooth steps,” which was the first thing I — and many other educators — ever read about evaluating professional learning. The new version, “Is your professional learning working? 8 steps to find out,” has revised tools and timely examples.

At the same time, this issue highlights fresh voices and new directions in professional learning research and evaluation. For example, the Research Partnership for Professional Learning shares its efforts to increase studies’ rigor, and the Tennessee STEM Innovation Network, in collaboration with NWEA, describes a collaborative approach to designing and evaluating a statewide professional learning initiative.

Our team is pleased to debut some new features for the 2024 issues of *The Learning Professional*. The Changemakers column highlights educators whose professional learning work is making a difference for schools, systems, and students, as shared by their colleagues. The series kicks off with Stacie Angel, supervisor of instructional services for the Berkley School District in Michigan, who was nominated by colleague Angela Church.

District Member Spotlight showcases systems that are making high-quality professional learning a priority across schools, with the help of Learning Forward’s district membership. In this issue, you’ll hear from Melvina Crawl, who credits district membership with helping her build standards-aligned professional learning in Georgia and Virginia.

Finally, we’re making *The Learning Professional* easier to read than ever, with a digital flipbook version that allows you to turn the “pages” onscreen. Log in to our website to find this feature on each new issue’s landing page. The traditional PDF format will continue to be available as well.

Evaluation is more than a topic we write about. It’s a value we prioritize in all our work. To help us make our resources the best they can be, we encourage you to participate in our annual member surveys and focus groups and we invite you to reach out at any time with feedback. ■



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