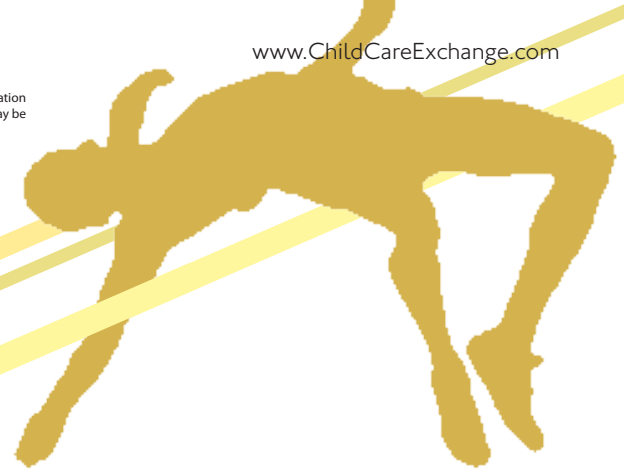


Copyright © Dimensions Educational Research Foundation  
All rights reserved. A single copy of these materials may be  
reprinted for noncommercial personal use only.  
Visit us at [www.ChildCareExchange.com](http://www.ChildCareExchange.com) or  
call (800) 221-2864.

# Raising the Bar:



## The Components of High-quality Professional Development

by Bethany Snyder

Mention the words “professional development” or “training,” and you will likely be met with sighs and slumped shoulders. Too often, training and professional development are seen as a drain on time and money. Providing your staff with high-quality professional development opportunities is one way you can ensure the children in your program receive the best care; but you need to be certain the training is effective, appropriate, worth everyone’s time, and suitable for your budget. Let’s take a look at the components of high-quality professional development, and the difference it can make to your staff and your program.

### High-quality Professional Development Has to Meet Your Needs

You’ve found a training course that would be perfect for your program leader, but it would require her to fly to another city and be away from the class-



Bethany Snyder is the creative director at CypherWorx, Inc., where her primary focus is ensuring that all content produced by the company is of the highest quality. She is an instructional designer, writer, editor, and voice over

artist, with extensive experience developing e-learning for early care and education providers. She is also an award-winning fiction writer, and serves as co-editor for a literary magazine based in Keuka Lake in Western New York.

room for several days. That puts strain on the rest of the staff, the children, and your budget. In your search for professional development opportunities, make sure that it meets your needs in terms of staffing and finances. It might be more cost-effective to pay for several virtual seats in an online webinar, or there may be a shorter version of the same content that your program leader can take as an e-learning module at her convenience.

In considering professional development opportunities, it’s also important to reflect on the learning needs of your staff. Review the goals you’ve developed for the professionals who work in your program. What do they need to learn in order to meet those goals? Look for training with S.M.A.R.T. objectives — that is, objectives that are Specific, Measureable, Achievable, Results-focused, and Time-bound. These criteria will help you determine whether the training will meet your needs. When you ask your staff to take training, they should have a clear understanding of what they will be able to do once they’ve completed it, and how it matches with the goals you’ve set for their professional development.

When professional development asks too much — of people, time, or budget — it is rarely successful. Assessing the needs of your staff, your finances, and

your program can help you to identify training that will meet all of those needs.

### High-quality Professional Development Must Be Accessible

Think about the staff under your supervision. They likely come from diverse backgrounds, and have a wide range of educational experiences. In addition, they probably have different comfort levels when it comes to using technology. You can lessen or eliminate many barriers to learning by considering the makeup of your staff and accessibility issues they may have as you search for professional development opportunities.

Assess your staff’s comfort level with technology before selecting any online professional development; effective material will fail to reach its audience if the interface is too complicated or confusing. Is your program able to provide computer-based and internet access for your staff, or will you be asking them to complete professional development at home? If your staff will be attending classroom-based training, take into account any special needs they may have, both in terms of learning styles and physical considerations, such as hearing or vision issues.

When you are researching appropriate training curricula for your staff, consider whether or not it is appropriate and engaging for all levels, from those with a high school diploma or GED to those with bachelors' or masters' degrees, from front-line staff to directors. Do you need to find different modules for different staff members? Training that spends too much time on "the basics" will likely be unsuitable for accomplished staff, while higher-level or more in-depth training may overwhelm staff with less experience.

You have already ascertained what your staff needs to learn in order to meet their individual and your program's goals; it is critical to consider the supports they need in order to make that learning successful as well. At best, failure to provide accessible professional development can lead to frustration for your staff. At worst, it will hinder their ability to provide appropriate, high-quality care to the children in your program.

### High-quality Professional Development Must Be Standards-based

Strong, measurable objectives are vital for ensuring that your staff learns what they need in order to meet their professional development goals. How do you know that the objectives defined by training are high quality, and that achieving them will translate to real-world performance improvement that will benefit your program and the children you serve? Look for training that is based on standards established by respected institutions, such as the National Afterschool Association and the National Association for the Education of Young Children, among others.

Organizations and subject matter experts have worked diligently to develop high standards for early care and education professionals to follow.

Best practices have been defined and shared. A quality training development organization works closely with these programs and people to ensure that their professional development offerings meet these specific standards.

When you select training that meets industry standards, you will know that it satisfies state professional development requirements, which, in turn, will improve the quality of care provided by your staff to the children in your program.

### High-quality Professional Development Must Be Intellectually Rigorous

Who helped design the training you're considering? Was it created by people who understand the principles of adult learning? Great! How about the complexities and nuances of early care and education concepts and content?

Look for training that has been developed with the help of a Subject Matter Expert with strong knowledge of early care and education content, issues, and standards. The SME should have an intimate and expert understanding of what it takes to be successful in an early care and education position. Ideally, the SME will be a thought leader in the field, with extensive professional and educational experience.

Training that is developed without the aid of a SME will likely be superficial, unremarkable, and insufficient to meet the needs of your staff. A qualified subject matter expert is a critical component of high-quality professional development.

### High-quality Professional Development Must Be of Clear Benefit to the Learner

Asking your staff to make room in their busy day for professional development can be a challenge. One way to improve staff support is to make sure any training clearly describes its learning objectives. Your staff will want — and deserve — an answer to the critical questions, "What's in it for me? Why is this training worth my time and attention?" If your staff meets the learning objectives stated by the training you're considering, will they then have the skills and knowledge necessary to improve the quality of care they provide? Will they be able to make the leap from learning to real-world performance?

What tools and resources are included in the training that will help your staff to apply and retain the knowledge they receive? High-quality training provides opportunities for practice and feedback in the form of knowledge checks, activities, and assessments. It also includes materials that can be saved, printed, and used on a daily basis to reinforce understanding and assist with applying the information.

If your staff cannot see the benefit of a professional development offering, it's likely they will be unmotivated, uninspired, and uninterested in engaging with the content, and, more often than not, the information you hope they will acquire will fail to translate into real-world changes and improvement.

### High-quality Professional Development Must Produce Results

Professional development is only as good as the results it produces. How do you know if the training you're considering actually works? Each training program should include an assessment

and evaluation phase that investigates its effectiveness. Does it meet the stated objectives? Does it improve job performance, allowing early care and education professionals to positively affect the development of the children in their care?

To answer these questions, look for training that has been thoroughly and critically evaluated by an unbiased expert in the early care and education field. Ideally, a training provider will use an assessment method such as the Four-Level Training Evaluation Model, developed by Donald Kirkpatrick, which allows training to be evaluated in terms of Reaction (to the training from the learner), Learning (what the professionals have learned from the training), Behavior (how behaviors have changed as a result of the training), and Results (whether or not outcomes of the training have been met).

You wouldn't hire a staff member without a thorough understanding of her skills and abilities. In the same vein, you shouldn't select professional development offerings that have not been rigorously examined and evaluated. Assessment also allows training organizations and early care and education programs to adjust what didn't work, and fine-tune what did.

Your ultimate goal is to help children learn, grow, and thrive. Providing your staff with high-quality professional development opportunities is an essential step in meeting that goal. As you search out appropriate opportunities for your staff, consider individual and program needs, and look for training that is accessible, appropriate, and engaging. When training meets industry standards, includes clearly defined objectives, and offers proof of efficacy, you can feel confident that it will be of benefit to your program, your staff, and the children you serve.

## Reference

The Kirkpatrick Model  
[www.kirkpatrickpartners.com/  
Our-Philosophy/The-Kirkpatrick-  
Model](http://www.kirkpatrickpartners.com/Our-Philosophy/The-Kirkpatrick-Model)

