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ABSTRACT

This brief report summarizes the staff development benefits that occurred as a result of teachers participating in the Research and Development Utilization Program (RDU). Surveys of 540 teachers revealed the five most frequently cited staff development benefits to be: (1) learning more about curriculum development; (2) learning more about the availability of research- and development-based materials and programs; (3) acquiring new resources for helping other staff members; (4) gaining in self-confidence; and (5) learning more about the problem-solving process. Features of the programs that aided staff development were the use of school-based "local action teams"; the focus of training and the program on actual problems facing teachers in their work; and the use of tested, high quality materials. The report concludes that teachers who participated on a team benefited more than those who did not, and that providing expert training in implementing a new curriculum produced staff development benefits. The study suggests that merging inservice/staff development programs and planned change programs will create a more complimentary use of limited school funds. (Author/MLF)

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STAFF DEVELOPMENT AND CURRICULUM CHANGE: WHAT'S GOOD FOR TEACHERS IS GOOD FOR SCHOOLS (Draft)

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STAFF DEVELOPMENT AND CURRICULUM CHANGE: WHAT'S GOOD FOR TEACHERS IS GOOD FOR SCHOOLS

Inservice and Staff Development in Schools: Will Teachers Benefit in the 80's?

Teachers and administrators alike agree that an effective staff development program is essential to meeting the educational stresses of the next decade. In many cases teachers will stay in the same job for longer periods of time, since many women are choosing to remain in the work force and mobility is limited by declining enrollment and school closings. In addition, the pressures to use increasingly limited school resources effectively will be enormous, yet, we suspect, the drive toward efficiency and effectiveness in basic education is unlikely to be accompanied by an abandonment of all of the enrichment curricula that were added during the late 60's and 70's. Finally, with the spread of minimum competency testing, teachers will increasingly be expected to respond to the newest R&D findings about how they can best affect students achievement--and schools will be expected to respond to any evidence that their performance could be improved. These are but a few of the pressures that are likely to increase both teacher "burnout" and the psychological distancing from school and students that affects some teachers at various points in their careers.

Inservice and locally designed staff development programs are one powerful means of dealing with these stresses but, in many school districts, these programs are administered in a way which makes them unresponsive to teacher needs and preferences. All too often, teachers' needs do not determine the content of the programs. Inservice may be provided only on a district-wide basis, which does not allow any tailored programs for smaller groups, or for specific schools. Finally, too many inservice programs involve teachers only as a student, rather than engaging them as active participants and developers of the inservice programs. In many cases the experts who are brought in to conduct inservice programs are perceived as irrelevant or out of touch with local levels of expertise among the teaching staff. Despite teacher complaints, reform of inservice programs is often a low

priority in central offices already beleagered by their own staff cutbacks. Major changes may also be viewed as too expensive in a time when the shrinking resources may require cuts in basic educational services.

While this picture may appear gloomy, findings from a recent federally funded study suggest ways of changing non-productive inservice and staff development programs into programs which can successfully serve the needs of both teachers and schools--and at a cost which may not exceed the resources of current inservice and staff development budgets.

Marrying Staff Development and School Improvement Activities: A Federal Demonstration Program Succeeds!

In 1976, the National Institute of Education sponsored the R&D Utilization (RDU) program--a demonstration program whose purpose was to assist schools in using existing research based information to solve locally defined problems, and also to help improve the process by which problems were identified and solved. The demonstration operated through seven projects, which, together, provided information and technical assistance to more than 300 schools over a three year period. One of the seven funded demonstrations was sponsored by the National Education Association and, of the seven, it was the only one which directly emphasized inservice for teachers. The remaining six focused primarily upon curriculum improvements, in either basic skills or career education. The seven programs were:

- The National Education Association Inservice Education Project, operated in collaboration with the departments of education and corresponding state education associations in 12 states: Alabama, California, Iowa, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Tennessee, Washington, Wisconsin, and Wyoming;
- The Northwest Reading Consortium, involving the state department of education and other agencies in Washington, Oregon, Alaska, and Idaho;
- The Consortium, operated by The NETWORK, a non-profit research and service organization that coordinated the efforts of agencies in six states: California, Connecticut, Kansas, Massachusetts, Minnesota, and Washington;
- The Georgia Research and Development Utilization Program;
- The Pennsylvania School Improvement Program;
- The Florida Linkage System; and

- The Michigan Career Education Dissemination Project. This project was operated by the state department of education as were the projects in Georgia, Pennsylvania, and Florida.

While each of the programs was independently designed by its sponsoring agency, they had a common strategy for trying to help schools solve their locally defined problems:

- The projects all dealt directly with the local schools or school districts served in the program.
- Each project stressed the importance of local decision-making. RDU-sponsored school improvement activities were supported at the site level through the establishment of local decision-making structures such as advisory councils or local action teams.
- Each project supported two or more linking agents who coordinated the services provided to local schools and school districts.
- The linking agents assisted local staff in following a sequence of problem-solving activities, including identification of a problem or set of problems; examination of alternative solutions to the problem; selection of specific materials considered capable of reducing these problems; implementation of new practices within the appropriate setting; incorporation of a solution and evaluation of the entire process and its results.
- In addition to the linking agents, each project relied to some extent on a network of resource agencies which cooperated in providing assistance to schools. These included state education agencies, intermediate service agencies, public and private universities and colleges, federally funded R&D centers, teacher centers, and independent firms.

Staff Development Outcomes of the RDU Program

With the exception of the NEA inservice project, staff development was not an explicit objective of the RDU program. However, early site visits and interviews with teachers in all projects revealed that, from their perspective, staff development was a major outcome. Comments from teachers pointed to cognitive outcomes (some commented that they learned more about current curriculum issues from their involvement in the program than they had in recent university courses) to very personal benefits (such as gaining more self-confidence in group discussion situations with col-

leagues). Thus, because staff development outcomes seemed so prominent, they were measured along with the intended objectives of the program in surveys of involved teachers in all projects.

What About RDU was Beneficial for Teachers?

First, we may ask what types of staff development impacts were most likely to be reported by teachers involved in their program. Ten different types of personal development were measured. The five most frequently occurring personal impacts and the percentages of teachers indicating that they perceived substantial benefits in these categories were:

- learning more about curriculum development;
- learning more about the availability of R&D based materials and programs;
- acquiring new resources for helping other staff members;
- gaining in self confidence;
- learning more about the problem solving process.

What was it about the RDU program and its assistance strategies that led to these positive personal impacts for teachers? A statistical analysis, based on surveys of 540 teachers, point to several clear features that made it work well as a staff development program: the use of school-based "local action teams", the provision of tailored training, and the focus of the program on actual problems facing teachers in their work and the use of tested, high quality materials. Each of these will be discussed below.

Participation and local teams. Teachers are certainly used to working on school level committees which provide advice to administrators about curriculum or inservice. However, the local teams that were established by the RDU program were quite different from the more typical school committee, and most teachers (80 percent) perceived them to be quite different in the following ways:

- The team has a role in arriving at decisions, not just rubber-stamping them. The team's influence when compared to that of the administrator is greater than the influence of most advisory committees.

- The level of team effort is generally higher than that of other committees or task forces.
- A "problem-solving/knowledge utilization" model is followed to accomplish the specific objectives of the school improvement effort. This model is characterized by:

  a. Needs assessment. No matter what the specific objective, it is approached in the context of overall school objectives and needs. Those engaged in the school improvement effort take a step back in order to specify problems--to search for concrete indications of problems, analyze apparent causes, assess specific needs, and weigh them in relation to other school needs--prior to searching for, selecting, and implementing a solution.

  b. Systematic interaction with external providers of information and assistance. Information and assistance are sought from outside the district--for example, from intermediate service districts, universities, educational R&D labs, educational information storage and retrieval services, etc.

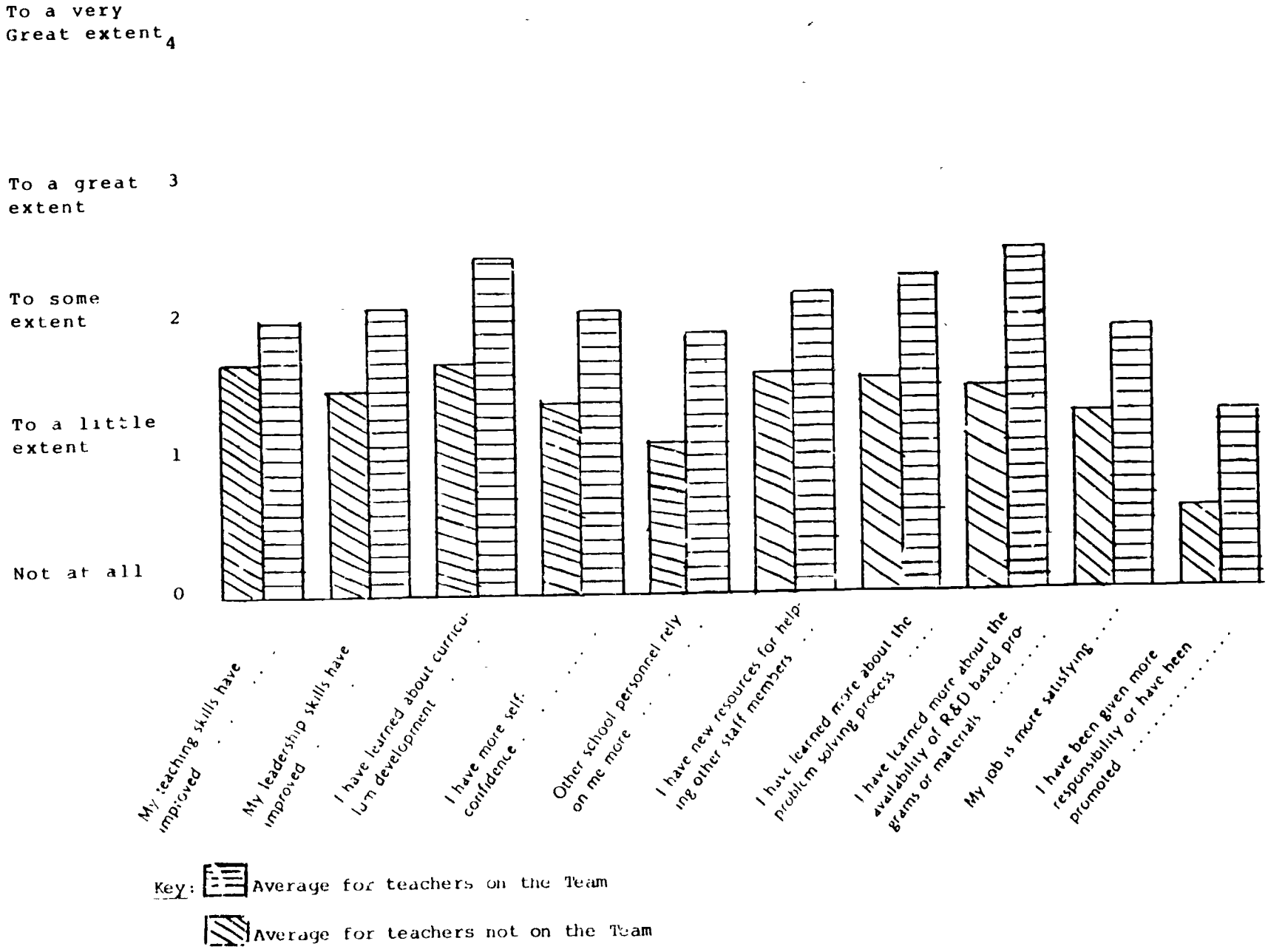
  c. Emphasis on seeking field-tested, empirically validated solutions. While the RDU program assumed that school needs must be locally defined, it also assumed that in most cases a school would not need to develop a completely new program to meet those needs. Rather, the school could search among available programs and materials for a product that could be adapted to local circumstances.

Participation on the team was a key feature in predicting staff development outcomes: those who participated actively were more likely to report personal benefits (see Figure I).

Training in implementation. Most inservice involves the use of either district or other specialists who provide the teachers with new information or ideas. As noted above, in many cases experts are perceived as irrelevant or out of touch with the local levels of expertise among the teaching staff. In the RDU program, by contrast, most of the involvement with specialists and trainers revolved around the process of implementing a new program--either a curriculum innovation, or an inservice program--

FIGURE I

STAFF DEVELOPMENT OUTCOMES REPORTED BY TEACHERS WITH HIGH AND LOW INVOLVEMENT IN LOCAL ACTION TEAMS



that had been selected by teachers. The experts were, typically, screened and selected by the team, and the training that they provided was usually targeted to a specific need for information or skills associated with the program being implemented. Thus, it provided teachers with skills and ideas that they could use right away. Several aspects of training were important in producing staff development outcomes. First, the amount of training, both before implementation and following training, to address problems or issues that were not forseen earlier, was important. Less training produced lower staff development results. Second, it was useful to have training provided by several different consultants, rather than a single individual. The most important source of training was from an individual who understood thoroughly the curriculum or inservice package that the school was using--that is, someone involved in developing the materials or approach--but it was preferable to have others, including state department personnel, intermediate education district specialists, or district specialists involved in the training activities, since they were often able to provide more sustained assistance over the long haul.

Focus on actual problems faced by teachers in the classroom: As we pointed out before, the RDU program was designed to address problems that were defined locally, at the school level rather than by the district or some other group. These ranged from problems of student attitudes, problems in interpersonal relations within the schools, problems in school administration, to more traditional types of problems involving student achievement and classroom organization and management. Surprisingly, staff development outcomes were most strongly associated with matters of classroom organization and curriculum materials and not with problems more directly related to staff skills, staff relationships or other needs that focused more specifically upon teachers. It seems that teachers are likely to benefit most when they focus their energies on needs that are central to their daily work life in the classroom. Also surprisingly, focusing on classroom organization and curriculum was likely to have spinoff benefits in the area of interpersonal relations in the schools. Working together on a common need appears to build collegial bridges and school-wide staff development more rapidly that focusing on staff relationships themselves.

The use of validated, high quality materials. One of the features of the RDU program was its attempt to provide teachers with materials that had been screened for quality. However, not all the materials were of equal excellence from the teachers' perspective. Good curriculum materials not only contributed to the teachers' perceptions that student achievement and/or other student behaviors improved, they also contributed to reported staff development outcomes. In other words, teachers felt that they learned more, and grew professionally when they grappled with new materials that stretched their skills, and provided them with genuinely new ideas. It is important to emphasize that this typically meant hard work: materials that contributed most to staff development were also more likely to require substantial change from previous teaching or classroom organization practices. However, since teachers had selected the materials themselves, they did not report that this effort was inappropriate.

While teachers enjoyed activities such as modifying the developer's tests to accommodate other features of the local curriculum, or developing materials to key a new reading management system to the local basal series, the need to engage in more substantial local materials development improved neither teachers' attitudes toward the materials, nor their reports of staff development benefits. In most cases where the materials were soundly developed, and carefully selected to match local needs, they required only minor work on the part of local teachers in developing new materials to supplement those provided by the program developer.

Planned Change in Schools and Staff Development: A Complementary Agenda

Perhaps the most important conclusion that can be reached from examining the R&D Utilization Program is that activities which contribute to the personal and professional development of teachers also contribute in significant ways to the improvement of the school. Measures of personal impacts were strongly related to other program outcomes, including the reports of the principals and teachers that new practices were being institutionalized in the classroom, and that student behaviors and achievement were improving. Furthermore, the study suggests that the broader the involvement

of teachers in the activities that were perceived as professionally rewarding, the more likely the school was to exhibit visible signs of vital, new practice.

The study suggests that local education agencies and teacher associations should plan and implement new strategies for staff development in the 80's. The new model staff development program will be based on the assumption that staff development and the need for school renewal and improvement are objectives that must be considered simultaneously. In addition, the new model staff development program should have the following characteristics:

- It should be based at the school level, and be responsive to the teachers' and principals' perceptions of most critical needs.
- It should involve faculty participation and control over meaningful decision-making and planning activities, with sufficient funding to allow for some release time for planning.
- It should draw upon information resources outside of the school and district, both for programs to meet locally defined needs of teachers and schools, and for training to provide teachers with new stimulation and skills.
- It should be based on the assumption that both staff development and school improvement require active involvement of staff in professional roles. Passive, "student" roles for the teacher will result neither in personal development nor in effective use of new materials and approaches in the school.

For a one page summary of additional statistical evidence on which this paper is based, or for more information about the RDU program, write to John Egermeier, Ph.D., Program on Research and Educational Practice, Dissemination and Improvement of Practice, National Institute of Education, 1200 19th St., N.W., Washington, D.C. 20208.