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ABSTRACT

The strong emphasis on staff development stems, at least in part, from studies of innovation that profilerated in the wake of "A Nation at Risk" (1983). Current guidelines for staff development provide specific information about instructional strategies that promote student achievement, and the kinds of interventions that help teachers master those strategies. This Research Brief summarizes the recent literature on staff development, focusing on 5 strategies that emerged in the late 1980s. In particular, it looks at staff development from the viewpoint of School Based Management/Shared Decision Making (SBM/SDM), which the New York City Schools have been attempting to introduce. The five strategies that are the focus of this brief are: (1) the importance of staff development for promoting student achievement; (2) linking research and practice, often through joint inquiry on a particular issue; (3) collaborative models, such as coaching and teamwork; (4) changing the culture of the organization toward collaborative work structures that encourage more interdependence among teachers; and (5) helping teachers meet the challenges of SBM/SDM, a setting in which staff development is central to the mission of the school. An insert, "Trendlines USA," provides information on case studies that highlight the importance of staff development to SBM/SDM. Thirty-two references are cited. (AMH)

NEW YORK CITY PUBLIC SCHOOLS • JOSEPH A. FERNANDEZ, CHANCELLOR

RESEARCH BRIEF #4

A Bulletin Linking Research with Educational Practice

MAKING STAFF DEVELOPMENT PAY OFF IN THE CLASSROOM

In the eighties, staff development was considered by many to be a cornerstone of the school restructuring movement. Not any more. In the nineties, many educators see it as virtually the whole foundation. One prominent researcher notes the "increasingly sprawling prominence" of staff development, adding that, "it is correctly seen as the central strategy for improvement" (Fullan 1990).

The emphasis placed on staff development stems, at least in part, from studies of innovation that proliferated in the wake of the alarming *Nation at Risk* report in 1983. This research showed that:

- Most teachers use a narrow repertoire of instructional practices (Sirotnik 1983).
- They expand that repertoire only when they are given substantial and carefully designed training.
- Sustained change in curriculum and instruction depends on a shared understanding of the nature of the change and what it can accomplish (Joyce et al. 1987).

Today, the link between school improvement and staff development is an article of faith for the educational reform movement. But as recently as 15 years ago, the educational literature was just beginning to establish staff development as a key element in successful innovation (Fullan & Pomfret 1977, cited in Fullan 1990).

> Significant change in teachers' beliefs and attitudes takes place only when they see concrete evidence that their teaching methods have boosted achievement.

By the late 1980s, American schools were spending several billion dollars on staff development each year — most in the form of salary increments for teachers who take university courses and earn advanced degrees. Often, there has been little evidence of return on this investment in terms of concrete benefits to children: many teachers consider these courses too remote from the schoolroom to be of real value; in-service activities have generally been closer to reality, but in many cases have had little impact on teaching practices (*Harvard Education Letter*, July 1986).

Where do we stand in 1991? Thanks to the last decade's expansion in educational R&D and new research in applied psychology, we now know a great deal about effective schools and effective teaching. We also know what effective staff development looks like.

The vague guidelines for staff development that proliferated in the seventies and early eighties (e.g., "Promote professional growth," "Use hands-on activities") have given way to more specific information about instructional strategies that promote student achievement, and the kinds of interventions that help teachers master those strategies.

That's the good news. The bad news is that despite all of this new knowledge, staff development is still not well practiced (Fullan 1990).

Nevertheless, teachers continue to support staff development efforts. In the late 1980s, a study by the University of California at Berkeley found that "among teachers, consistent supporters of staff development outnumber consistent critics six to one" (Little 1988).

Educational leaders across the nation also value staff development, and are giving it high priority in their reform efforts. Here in New York City, Chancellor Joseph A. Fernandez has emphasized that professional development is vital to his efforts to introduce School-Based Management/Shared Decision Making (SBM/SDM) into the city's schools. His first budget message underscored its importance:

"We will not impose from above the kind of sessions that generations of teachers have been required to sit through, whether or not the content addressed their interests or needs, or those of their students. Rather, we are committed to a responsive, flexible program of professional development, planned by school professionals. We are committed to a program that includes parents, so that they can acquire the skills and information they need to help their children and to take part in school reform." (Fernandez 1990)

This *Research Brief* summarizes the recent literature on staff development, focusing on five strategies that emerged in the late eighties and the first years of this decade. (Our next *Research Brief* looks into the related issue of parent involvement.) In particular, it looks at staff development from the viewpoint of SBM/SDM. It is not a "how-to" guide for organizing staff development activities; rather, it stresses principles that promise to make staff development pay off, in terms of lasting impact on teaching practices, and most importantly, on student achievement.

1. *Promoting Student Achievement*

Staff development can have many consequences: it can change teachers' attitudes and behaviors; it can help to professionalize teaching; it can encourage collegiality. These are very important benefits, but researchers tend to agree that educators should not undertake staff development for those reasons alone. They should do so for one primary reason: to help teachers help students reach their full potential.

For many years, researchers argued that the impact of staff development on achievement was too indirect, and affected by too many variables, to be measured with any confidence. The success of a staff development activity, or an entire program, was usually evaluated on the basis of feedback from participants and their supervisors: What had they expected to learn? Did they learn it? Would they use the material in their classrooms?

Only in the last few years have researchers systematically demonstrated a relationship between staff development and school achievement (Joyce & Showers 1987).

Numerous recent studies have shown that strong staff development components were essential to the effective implementation of a variety of innovative teaching practices. Stallings (cited in Fullan 1990), for example, compared the effects of three different teacher training designs on reading scores, showing the potential of carefully designed staff development for implementing single innovations.

This research has had several very important consequences:

- Schools can now plan and implement staff development programs with the expectation of bottom-line results, in terms of higher student achievement.
- They can choose among numerous training models that are known to promote student learning.
- They can introduce greater accountability for the use of skills taught in staff development sessions.
- They can promote greater commitment on the part of teachers; for researchers tell us that significant change in teachers' beliefs and attitudes take place only when they see concrete evidence that their teaching methods have boosted achievement (Guskey 1985).
- Finally, they can create greater opportunity for success.

2. *Linking Theory and Practice*

Recent educational research has demonstrated the effectiveness of numerous instructional approaches, such as cooperative learning, and offers a fair amount of detail about how they work. In this sense, research is more relevant than ever; but too often, it is not reaching the people who need it.

In fact, it appears that teachers are less able or willing to use results of relevant research, compared to members of other professions that traditionally rely on research and development to inform practice (Schiller, Caroll, & Pankake 1986; Brandt 1984; both studies cited in Fleming 1988). This finding stems, at least in part, from the nature of much educational research.

According to Fleming (1988), teachers remain wary, believing that most research:

- ***Has little potential for improving practice:*** In one study less than half of the respondents agreed that educational research gave them practical suggestions for improving instruction.
- ***Is too remote from the classroom:*** It lacks immediacy. It is inaccessible, irrelevant, and sometimes inaccurate.
- ***Doesn't reflect teachers' values:*** Most research, particularly quantitative studies, misses the human dimension that is so important to teachers: the emotional demands and rewards of teaching.
- ***Is not "user-friendly":*** Teachers pressed for time are often presented with too much information, in a form which is too hard to sort.

How can teachers find their way through the labyrinth of educational research to pinpoint the strategy that may help them meet the specific needs of their students? Once they've located relevant research, how can they translate its most important findings into concrete classroom practices that they can use? These are major challenges of staff development today. Meeting them requires a great deal more than photocopying stacks of articles: theory alone rarely results in skill acquisition or transfer of skills into the classroom (Parker 1988).

When teachers observe and discuss what they have learned with each other, they're more likely to use new approaches effectively than teachers who work in isolation.

Increasingly, staff development is being seen as a way to engage in joint inquiry on a particular research issue. Done right, it gives teachers a chance to respond together to the question: How does this research speak to our needs and those of our students? How can we use it to improve outcomes?

Joint inquiry is important, but not sufficient. Researchers tell us that teachers learn new techniques best when they can see them used in actual classrooms, try them out and get feedback on their efforts, discuss them with fellow teachers, and integrate them into existing classroom routines (*Harvard Education Letter*, July 1986).

Today, few teachers take part in these activities on a daily or even weekly basis. That is why coaching and other collaborative models have become a major focus of recent literature on staff development.

3. *Working Together: Coaching and Other Collaborative Models*

Few teachers can move directly from the in-service session to the classroom and begin implementing new strategies or innovations successfully. This process takes time — "spaced" time to plan and try out new approaches, experiment, and work with colleagues (formally or informally) to evaluate successes and problems (Parker 1988).

A number of recent studies focus on the importance of "coaching" during these intervals, as teachers adapt new methods to the needs of their students (Joyce et al. 1987; Parker 1988; *Harvard Education Letter*, July 1986). Beverly Showers has called coaching the most effective way for making sure that training gets translated into actual classroom practice (cited in Parker 1988).

Coaching generally means pairs or small groups of teachers working together, observing each other, offering each other pointers, and sharing experiences on a daily basis. Research shows that when teachers observe and discuss one another's efforts to use what they've learned, they're more likely to use the new approaches effectively and appropriately than teachers who work in isolation (Fullan 1990).

These collaborations, both formal and informal, appear to be critical to the sustained impact of staff development. In fact, it's been found that changes in behavior persist as long as feedback continues; then behaviors gradually return to the starting point (Fullan 1990).

The success of collaborative models depends in part on availability of collaborative time. And that requires a willingness on the part of school planners to make fundamental scheduling changes; it may mean restructuring the school day, giving teachers an additional preparation period in which to observe other classes, coach colleagues and receive coaching, or take part in focused discussions of teaching.

Few schools are now organized to allow these activities. Indeed, the average teacher observes someone else's class once every three years (*Harvard Education Letter*, July 1986). School-Based Management/Shared Decision Making can address this problem by giving schools the opportunity to restructure schedules to make time for staff development.

In the long run, successful staff development hinges on educators' desire and ability to make lasting changes in the culture of the school, creating a more reasonable balance between the kind of ongoing collaboration that reinforces change, and the kind of solitude that teachers need to get their work done and protect their sanity (Fullan 1990).

4. Changing the Culture of the Organization

Borrowing from the relatively new discipline of organizational development, educational theorists like Michael Fullan and Judith Little have stressed the need to change the culture of the organization. They argue that the likelihood of successful implementation hinges on the presence of collaborative work cultures.

Little, for example, offers a model in which teachers taking part in staff development activities move from complete independence to interdependence, increasing both the frequency and intensity of their interactions with other teachers. In this model, teachers move through four stages:

1) brainstorming and scanning for ideas,
2) aid and assistance,
3) mutual sharing, and
4) joint work.

"Joint work" for Little means encounters among teachers that rest on shared responsibility for the work of teaching. She stresses that in and of itself, joint work does not guarantee benefits for children; indeed, teachers may support one another in continuing stale, ineffective approaches. But from her point of view, the risk is worthwhile, since without joint work, the lasting benefits of staff development are questionable.

Like other researchers who stress organizational culture, she believes that staff development programs that introduce a single new innovation into a school — including a coaching or mentoring program — have little lasting impact on the culture of the school.

Those who stress school culture tend to take a more global approach to staff development, which they see as a key to changing the nature of the institution. Their agenda is broad, and increasingly it is shared by leaders of private industry: introducing the notion of life-long learning into our institutions, and making that goal a central factor in their organization, routines, and accountability structure.

The notion that successful staff development both hinges on, and leads to, collaborative work structures is basic to School-Based Management/Shared Decision Making. SBM/SDM proceeds from the premise that every major step toward school reform inevitably changes the school culture; and that only by changing the school culture can we bring about reform.

5. Helping Teachers Meet the Challenges of SBM/SDM

SBM/SDM provides an opportunity to restructure schools to facilitate staff development. At the same time, it places new demands on staff development.

SBM/SDM makes the local school the basic unit of responsibility and accountability. It assumes that local educators and parents are the best people to make decisions about the specific children in their schools. Its success therefore hinges on efforts to give them the information and tools they need to make those decisions.

In this setting, staff development becomes central to the mission of the school. In the context of SBM/SDM, staff development means not only interventions geared to helping teachers implement specific school improvement strategies; in addition, it means offering the assistance they need to choose among an array of school improvement options; and the skills required for participatory decision-making.

SBM/SDM gives teachers greater responsibility for educational decision-making. Of course, decision-making is not new to teachers: every day of the week, every teacher makes hundreds, if not thousands, of decisions about educational practice (Conley 1989). Indeed, researchers have shown that a teacher makes a decision about how to interact with students on the average of every two minutes! (Clark & Peterson, cited in Stiggens, 1988).

However, when they meet with other local planners, in a collaborative process that results in decisions about the school's educational goals, practices, and budget allocations, school professionals and parents are finding that they need training in communication skills, conflict resolution, and team building. (See *Trendlines USA*).

Some of the challenges posed by SBM/SDM require comfort, if not expertise, in areas that lay outside the training or day-to-day experience of most teachers. Of these, none is more important than the ability to gather or access information about student and school achievement: to read and

TRENDLINES USA

SCHOOL DISTRICTS AROUND THE NATION FIND STAFF DEVELOPMENT ESSENTIAL TO SBM/SDM

The educational literature offers several case studies that highlight the importance of staff development to SBM/SDM.

Adams County, Colorado: An article by three administrators who were instrumental in bringing site-based management to this school district reviews the mistakes of their first year: "We had begun with training strictly limited to [school improvement] and had neglected training in the necessary underlying skills for shared decision making " (Harrison et al. 1989, p. 57). To remedy these shortcomings, the district's staff development department worked with school decision-makers to define collaboration and determine what processes to use in making various kinds of decisions. They also conducted workshops for teachers and administrators in facilitation, conflict resolution, communication skills, and participatory decision making (Harrison et al. 1989).

Cerritos, California: Teachers in the ABC District in Cerritos, California, where the schools shifted to a highly participatory structure, found that staff development was essential. Teachers were given considerable released time for staff development, assisted by a network of parent volunteers who committed time each week to support staff development time during the school day. The emphasis was on learning new communication and group decision-making skills. "'When we get to the planning of our vision," commented one teacher, "we find we need more skills" (Sickler1988).

Dade County, Florida: The number one recommendation of Dade County's Office of Educational Accountability, in evaluating the first year of the SBM/SDM pilot program, called for more technical assistance and staff development in three areas: moving from concepts to workable "products"; conducting more efficient SBM/SDM meetings; and conflict resolution (Cistone, Fernandez & Tomillo 1989).

Rochester, New York: As part of the Rochester public schools' Career in Teaching Plan, the school district and the teachers' union are collaborating to link staff development activities with assessment of teachers' job performance. When completed, performance appraisals will be designed to promote ongoing professional growth. One report notes, "developing a responsive performance appraisal system is an essential aspect of the teaching profession's efforts to restructure schools by revitalizing its own ranks" (Gillett 1989).

TRENDLINES NYC

SUPPORTING SCHOOL-BASED PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Professional development is crucial to the success of reform efforts in New York City. It encompasses a broad spectrum of programs and activities that pursue all of the traditional goals of staff development: supporting instruction, classroom management, and curriculum development. But underlying all of these activities, and lending coherence to them, is a commitment to moving the school system toward School-Based Management/Shared Decision Making. Two hundred of our public schools are now participating in SBM/SDM.

Citywide Efforts

Toward this end, the school system has undertaken two major, collaborative ventures:

The Professional Development Center (PDC), operated in collaboration with the Bank Street College of Education with support from the Aaron Diamond Foundation, supports schools' efforts to introduce SBM/SDM, and to help their students reach their full potential. The PDC provides training and support to principals, parents, and teachers seeking new skills to improve their schools. A primary component is skills upgrading for transferred principals. The PDC coordinates professional development resources of the public schools, colleges, universities, community and social service agencies, corporations, unions and other organizations.

The PDC's wide array of activities includes many workshops each month that focus on such topics as managing the restructuring process; group process; various aspects of student development/instruction; and the use of microcomputers to support SBM/SDM. Numerous activities are designed to help parents become effective educational decision-makers, and gain an overview of school management, various curricula and mandated programs, and educational assessment.

Directed by Nola Whiteman, the PDC is located at the Bank Street College of Education, 610 W. 112 Street, New York, NY 10025. Telephone: (212) 222-6700.

The Professional Development Laboratory School Project, initiated with private funding from Morgan Guaranty Trust Company of New York, gives school professionals the opportunity to integrate theory and practice. Built on a peer coaching model, the project gives visiting teachers a chance to spend several weeks in the classroom of an especially successful teacher, focusing on a particular issue or range of issues. Says Project Coordinator Mary Ann Walsh, "This is not a deficit model. We want teachers to come to the lab because they want to grow and learn, and to become even more effective in the classroom than they already are." The project provides a cadre of adjunct, or replacement, teachers who spend time in the visiting teacher's class before (and sometimes after) the several-week absence, ensuring a smooth transition.

Professional Development Labs are now operating in District 2, where the focus is bilingual education; and in District 5, where the emphasis is on understanding the needs of middle school children, and improving achievement in English and science.

interpret these data, drawing conclusions about student strengths and needs; and to identify educational strategies needed to address the specific areas of weakness and strength pinpointed by the data.

These skills are especially important as educators work to devise alternative, performance-based assessment techniques. If they are to be effective, appropriate, and fair, these new techniques must come from teachers. Teachers have to be aware of them and understand them.

Today, most participants in school-based management teams have little, if any, training in assessment. Researchers have found, in a decade-long study, that teachers typically spend a third of their professional time involved in activities related to assessment (Stiggins 1988). And yet, most teacher training programs require no coursework in educational measurement; many programs do not offer any. A broad study based in the Pacific Northwest concluded that the vast majority of today's teachers probably received no assessment training whatsoever as part of their professional preparation (Stiggins 1991).

Despite this gap, inservice training in classroom assessment is rare. Perhaps based on earlier experience, many teachers say they neither need nor want any more training in testing. But asked if they want help with specific measurement topics that relate to them, their students and their classrooms, they say definitely (Stiggins 1991).

In summary, of the various staff development activities that sup-

HANDS ON

MAKING STAFF DEVELOPMENT PAY OFF

Use this checklist to review your school's staff development plan:

- ❒ Have teachers been involved in every aspect of planning?
- ❒ Does every staff development activity relate to the overall school plan?
- ❒ Have you scrutinized existing staff development programs, eliminating efforts that don't work and building on those that do?
- ❒ Does the plan reflect the needs and diverse backgrounds of all the children in the school, including those with special needs or talents?
- ❒ Does every activity incorporate multicultural education, giving teachers the resources they need to infuse this perspective throughout the curriculum?
- ❒ Has the content of staff development programs been selected from those approaches that have been shown to promote student achievement?
- ❒ Do teachers have an opportunity to help each other translate research findings into practice?
- ❒ Are in-service sessions followed up by coaching, or other collaborative models, that give teachers a chance to observe each other, offer advice, and share experiences?
- ❒ Have you considered changes to the school's organization, scheduling, or routines that may be needed to allow ongoing collaborative work among teachers and administrators?
- ❒ Does it help school professionals meet the challenges of SBM/SDM, offering sharply focused assistance to those who are taking new responsibility for educational planning and resource allocation?

port SBM/SDM, those that help teachers participate effectively in collaborative decision-making and use assessment data to select educational strategies are especially critical.

Conclusion

In the nineties, staff development is playing a leading role in school improvement. Its focus has sharpened, zeroing in on proven strategies — those that have been shown to help students achieve their full potential. We now know a great deal about what effective staff development looks like. The challenge is to put it into practice: selecting the content of staff development from those models or approaches that are known to promote achievement; helping teachers to translate research findings into classroom practice; taking advantage of coaching and other collaborative models; changing the culture of the school; and giving teachers and parents the skills they need to take part in SBM/SDM.

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