Characteristics and Perceived Effectiveness of Staff Development Practices in Selected High Schools in South Dakota.

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The purpose of this study was to determine the characteristics and perceived effectiveness of staff development practices in selected high schools in South Dakota. The review of literature and research related to staff development examined the following questions: What types of staff development practices are being employed to encourage and promote the professional growth of teachers? In which types of staff development activities have teachers participated during the past two years? How are staff development activities planned? Who comprises the planning committee for staff development? What types of planned evaluation of staff development activities are utilized? How much input do teachers feel they have in planning, and implementing staff development activities?

The analysis of the data suggested that well organized meetings that are short and to the point with practical information that teachers can take to their classrooms are among the staff development practices that teachers prefer. The primary recommendation to emerge from the study focused on increased involvement and cooperation among teachers and principals in planning, implementing, and evaluating staff development activities

Significance of the Study

Information from this study will assist practitioners in determining the philosophy, understandings, and perceptions of staff development practices in selected high schools in South Dakota. The study developed a descriptive profile of staff development programs in selected high schools in South Dakota. This study also serves as an impetus for further research on staff development practices in South Dakota.

Methods and Procedures

The population for the study included all full-time high school teachers in South Dakota. It also included all grade-level and subject area teachers within the selected high schools. A list of all high school teachers and their schools was obtained from the South Dakota Department of Education. A sample of ten teachers from forty schools were randomly selected to participate in the study. A random sample was conducted to ensure that each member of the population had an equal chance of being

chosen for the sample. All schools and teachers within each school were ordered alphabetically and assigned consecutive numbers.   An identification number was assigned to each high school in the population to be studied. Using a table of random numbers, forty schools were selected from the school directory. Ten teachers from each of the forty schools were randomly selected from a table of random numbers.

The survey contained twenty-two items formulated to answer each of the specific research questions posed for this study. Section 1 of the instrument consisted of demographic items using a check-list response format. Section 2 of the survey consisted of seven items related to staff development practices within respondents' schools. Responses to items in Section 2 were gathered using the Likert scale format. Participants responded to the questions using a five-point Likert scale ranging from Not At all to Very Much. The final section consisted of eleven open-ended questions regarding staff development practices within each of the respondent's schools.

Instrumentation

Considering the nature of the study and the population to be surveyed, a mailed survey provided the best method of data collection (Wiersma, 1995). The data-collecting instrument contained survey items formulated to answer each of the specific research questions posed for this study. Section 1 of the instrument consisted of demographic items using a check-list response format. Demographic information included years of experience, age range, highest degree earned, and gender. Section 2 of the survey consisted of seven items related to staff development practices within respondents schools. Responses to items in Section 2 were gathered using the Likert scale format in which the following response options were available: 1) = Not At All, (2) = A Little, (3) = A Fair Amount, (4) = Much, and (5) = Very Much. The final section consisted of eleven open-ended questions regarding staff development practices within each of the respondent's schools.

Data Collection

A survey instrument, cover letter and self-addressed stamped envelope were mailed to each teacher selected to participate in the study at their respective schools. Each survey was numbered for follow-up mailing to those who did not respond to the first survey. The initial mailing took place during the first week of September 1998. A follow-up mailing of the survey was completed two weeks after the initial mailing of the survey to all individuals who failed to respond to the first survey. The cover letter explained the purpose of the study and the importance of

respondent's participation. The teachers were requested to return the completed survey in the stamped self-addressed envelope provided.

Data Analysis

Descriptive statistics were used to analyze the data. The four questions in the demographic section generated nominal data, and frequencies and percentages were used to report this information. Means and standard deviations were used to report data from questions five through ten comprising Section 2. This information also answered research questions seven through eleven. Frequencies and percentages were used to report data from question eleven, which also answered research question sixteen. In Section 3, the open-ended questions from thirteen to sixteen answered research questions one through six, twelve, thirteen, fourteen, and fifteen. Responses to the open-ended questions are listed and their frequency of occurrence noted. Selected information was displayed in tables to add meaning to the narrative description of the results.

A survey instrument, cover letter, and self- addressed stamped envelope were mailed to each teacher selected to participate in the study at their respective schools. Four hundred surveys were sent to selected high school teachers in South Dakota. Two hundred and seventy-three surveys were returned. Two blank surveys were also returned representing respondents who chose not to participate in the survey. Complete and usable returns were available for 273 teachers for a 68.2 percent return rate. Responses were received from teachers from all forty selected high schools in South Dakota.

Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

The research provided a descriptive statistics regarding demographic characteristics of the participants. The frequencies and percentages of respondents' number of years of experience as teachers are summarized as follows: Those having more than fifteen years teaching experience represented the single largest respondent grouping (38.5%). The three remaining groups demonstrated similar frequencies, with the zero to five years group being slightly smaller (18.3%) than the other two. The largest group of respondents by age grouping was the forty-one to fifty year-old group (28.6%). In contrast, respondents comprising the twenty to thirty year-old group represented the smallest grouping (20.5%). The majority of teachers indicated that they had earned either a bachelor's degree (49.1%) or master's degree (44.0%). None of those responding held a doctoral degree. The final demographic characteristic examined was gender of the teachers who took part in the study. The majority of teachers that completed the survey were female (57.5%).

Research Questions

Due to multiple responses for each questions, total percentages may exceed 100 percent. Data were collected to develop answers to the following research questions

Staff Development Practices Currently Employed

What types of staff development practices are being employed to encourage and promote the professional growth of teachers?

Being given money to attend conferences was the staff development practice most frequently reported by teachers (73.3 %). In contrast, the fewest teachers (4.3%) indicated that early dismissals were being used to encourage and promote the professional growth of teachers. Slightly more than one-quarter of all respondents (26.7%) mentioned that no staff development practices were being used. Table 1 provides data for staff development practices being utilized to encourage and promote the professional growth of teachers.

Table 1: Staff Development Practices Employed to Promote Professional Growth

	Frequency	Percentage
Money to attend conferences *	200	73.3
No staff development practices are being employed to promote professional growth	73	26.7
Part of college classes paid for	64	23.4
Increase in salary for taking college classes	35	12.8
Time to visit other schools	20	7.3
Good guest speakers	15	5.5
Early dismissal to attend workshops	12	4.3
*Note: Due to multiple response for each question, total percentages may exceed 100 percent.		

Participation in Staff Development

In which types of staff development activities have teachers participated during the past two years?

Most of the teachers (87.9%) indicated that they have participated in staff development activities related to computer technology in the past two years. While staff development activities related to music received the fewest responses (2.9%), more than 12 percent of the teachers responded that they had not taken part in any staff development activities

during the past two years. The responses to research question two are summarized in Table 2.

Table 2: Participated in Staff Development Activities

	Frequency	Percentage
Computer technology	240	87.9
Never participated in the past two years	33	12.1
Math workshop	27	9.9
Curriculum planning	21	7.7
IEP Seminar	17	6.2
Drug abuse seminar	13	4.6
School climate conference	11	4.0
Music	8	2.9

Planning of Staff Development Activities
How are staff development activities planned?

The majority of teachers (69.2%) responded that staff development activities are planned in response to the needs expressed by staff and administrators. The remaining responses indicated that perceived needs of administrators (30.8%), superintendents (23.4%), and vice principals (16.5%) determine which activities are planned. Data regarding planning of staff development are summarized in Table 3.

Table 3: Planning of Staff Development

	Frequency	Percentage
Needs from staff and administrators	189	69.2
Administrator suggest needs for planning	84	30.8
Superintendent suggests what to plan	64	23.4
Vice principal sees needs from evaluation	45	16.5

*Note: Due to multiple responses for each question, total percentages may exceed 100 percent.

Planning Committee for Staff Development
Who comprises the planning committee for staff development?

A majority of teachers (62.6%) indicated that teachers and administrators comprised the planning committee for staff development activities. In contrast, the smallest number of teachers (3.7%) stated that selected teachers comprised only the planning committee for staff development. Data regarding the planning committee for staff development are summarized in Table 4.

Table 4: Planning Committee for Staff Development

	Frequency	Percentage
Teachers and administrators	171	62.6
Administrators comprise planning committee	102	37.4
Principal	50	18.3
Superintendent	12	4.4
Selected teachers	10	3.7

*Note: Due to multiple responses for each question, total percentages may exceed 100 percent.

Planned Evaluation of Staff Development Activities Utilized
What types of planned evaluation of staff development activities are utilized?

Most of the teachers (82.4%) reported that survey forms completed by each participant after each session are used as planned evaluation for staff development activities. The smallest group of teachers (17.6%) indicated that no evaluation of staff development activities are utilized.

Evaluation Committee for Staff Development
Who comprises the evaluation committee for staff development?

Most teachers (60.1%) reported that a committee made up of teachers and administrators comprise the evaluation committee for staff development. The remaining group (39.9%) indicated that administrators, especially the superintendent and the building principal, comprise the evaluation committee for staff development.

Input Into Staff Development

      This section provides descriptive statistics regarding teachers' input into planning (research question seven), implementing (research question eight), and evaluating (research question nine) staff development activities. All ratings are based on a five-point scale with (1) = Not At All and (5) = Very Much.

      Teachers indicated having a moderate amount of input into planning (Mean = 2.95), implementing (Mean = 2.89), and evaluating (Mean = 2.85) staff development activities, with the amount of input being almost equal for all three aspects of staff development. Data regarding teachers' input in to staff development activities are summarized in Table 5.

Table 5: Teacher Input in Staff Development

	N	Mean	S.D
Input in planning staff development	273	2.95	1.35
Input in implementing staff development	273	2.89	1.34
Input in evaluating staff development	273	2.85	1.38

Satisfaction with Role in Planning Staff Development

      This section provides descriptive statistics regarding teachers' satisfaction with their role in planning staff development (research question ten), implementing (research question eleven), and evaluating (research question twelve) staff development activities. All ratings are based on a five-point scale with (1) = Not At All and (5) = Very Much.

      Teachers indicated having a moderate amount of satisfaction with their role in planning (Mean = 2.95), implementing (Mean = 2.95), and evaluating (Mean = 2.88) staff development activities, with very similar ratings for all three staff development components. Data regarding teacher satisfaction with a role in planning staff development activities are summarized in Table 6.

Table 6: Teacher Satisfaction with Role in Planning Staff Development

	N	Mean	S.D
Satisfaction with role in planning	273	2.95	1.41
Satisfaction with role in implementing	273	2.95	1.34
Satisfaction with role in evaluating	273	2.88	1.39

<u>What suggestions can teachers make for improving planning, implementing, and evaluating staff development activities?</u>

        The greatest number of teachers (28.6%) suggested that administrators should take into account the personal satisfaction needs of participants or determine staff needs when planning, implementing, and evaluating staff development activities. The remaining suggestions ranked by their percentages are as follows: provide time to accomplish goals (25.6%); involve every staff member in planning, implementing, and evaluating (25.3%); and, decide who can provide leadership and assign responsibility to him or her (20.5%). Data regarding suggestions for improving planning, implementing, and evaluating staff development are summarized in Table 7.

Table 7: Suggestions for Improving Planning, Implementing, and Evaluating Staff Development

	Frequency	Percentage
Take into account the personal satisfaction needs of participant	78	28.6
Provide time to accomplish goals	70	25.6
Involvement of every staff	69	25.3
Decide who can provide leadership and assign responsibility to him or her	56	20.5

Table 8: How Staff Development Practices Are Meeting the Needs of Teachers

	Frequency	Percentage
Sharing of ideas and materials through mentoring programs	105	38.5
Visitation to other schools to observe other teachers in situations similar to their own	60	22.0
Attending conferences, workshops and listening to inspirational speakers with good practical ideas	58	21.2
They aren't meeting our needs	50	18.3

How are staff development practices meeting the needs of teachers?
In response to research question fourteen, the largest group of teachers (38.5%) reported that the sharing of ideas and materials through mentoring programs was one of the practices that is meeting their needs. Some teachers (18.3%) reported that staff development practices were not meeting their needs. Data regarding how staff development practices were meeting the needs of teachers are summarized in Table 8.

What types of staff development practices do teachers prefer?
          In response to research question fifteen, the majority of teachers (57.1%) indicated that well organized meetings that are short and to the point with practical information that they can take to their classrooms are among the staff development practices teachers prefer. Interesting topics that they can relate to in their classrooms received the fewest responses (26.7%). More than 42 percent of the teachers indicated that observing other teachers demonstrate good teaching skills in their field is one of the practices they prefer. Data regarding types of staff development practices teachers prefer are summarized in Table 9.

Table 9: Types of Staff Development Practices Teachers Prefer

	Frequency	Percentage
Well organized meetings that are short and to the point with practical information that they can take to their classrooms	156	57.1
Observe other teachers demonstrate good teaching skills in their field	117	42.9
Good speakers	105	38.5
Interesting topics that they can relate to	73	26.7

*Note: Due to multiple response for each question, total percentages may exceed 100 percent

How effective is the planning, implementation, and evaluation of staff development activities?
          The most frequent response (37.7%) indicated that the planning, implementation, and evaluation of staff development was very effective since everyone was included and allowed to participate. Less frequent responses suggested that the planning, implementation, and evaluation of staff development activities were not at all effective because the activities

did not meet their goals (33.0%), or were effective because the activities met only slightly some of their goals (29.3%). The frequencies and percentages of responses for research question sixteen are summarized in Table 10.

Table 10:   Effectiveness of Planning, Implementation, and Evaluation of Staff Development

	Frequency	Percentage
Very much effective	103	37.7
Not at all effective	90	33.0
A little bit effective	80	29.3

Research Findings
The following findings emerged from the results of data analysis.
1.   Being given money to attend conferences was the staff development practice most frequently reported by teachers (73.3 %).
2.   Most teachers (87.9%) indicated that they have participated in staff development activities related to computer technology in the past two years.
3.   The majority of teachers (69.2%) responded that staff development activities are planned in response to the needs expressed by staff and administrators.
4.   The majority of teachers (62.6%) indicated that all teachers and administrators comprised the planning committee for staff development activities.
5.   Most teachers (82.4%) reported that survey forms completed bye each participant after each session are used as planned evaluation for staff development activities.
6.   Most teachers (60.1%) reported that a committee made up of teacher and administrators comprised the evaluation committee for staff development.
7.   Teachers indicated having a fair amount of input into planning (Mean =2.95), implementing (Mean = 2.89), and evaluating (Mean = 2.85) staff development activities, with the amount of input being almost equal for all three aspects of staff development.
8.   Teachers indicated having a fair amount of satisfaction with their role in planning (Mean = 2.95), implementing (Mean = 2.95),

and evaluating(Mean = 2.88) staff development activities, with very similar ratings for all three staff development components.

9. When considering ways to improve staff development activities, responses were divided almost equally among participants considering the personal satisfaction needs of participants (28.6%), providing time to accomplish goals (25.6%), involving every staff member in planning, implementing and evaluating (25.3%), and deciding who can provide leadership and assign responsibility to him or her (20.5%).

10. The largest group of teachers (38.5%) reported that the sharing of ideas and materials through mentoring programs is one of the practices that is meeting their needs.

11. The majority of teachers (57.1%) indicated that well organized meetings that are short and to the point with practical information that they can take to their classrooms are some of the staff development practices they prefer.

12. The most frequent response given (37.7%) indicated that the planning, implementation, and evaluation of staff development is very effective since everyone is included and allowed to participate.

Conclusions

The conclusions that follow were derived from the findings and the data obtained for the study.

1. Most teachers believe that staff development practices are being employed to encourage and promote the professional growth of teachers.

2. Computer technology represents the most common focus of staff development activities.

3. Most staff development activities are planned in response to need expressed by teachers and administration.

4. Administrators and teachers jointly comprise the planning teams for most staff development activities.

5. Participant surveys represent the most common form of evaluation for staff development activities.

6. Most staff development evaluation committees are comprised of teachers and administrators.

7. Teachers have a fair amount of input into planning, implementing, and evaluating staff development activities.

8. Teachers are moderately satisfied with their role in planning, implementing, and evaluating staff development activities.

9. Teachers believe that administrators should take into account the personal satisfaction needs of participants or determine staff needs when planning, implementing, and evaluating staff development activities.

10. The sharing of ideas and materials through mentoring programs is one of the practices that is meeting teachers' professional development needs.

11. Well organized meetings that are short and to the point with practical information that teachers can take to their classrooms are some of the staff development practices that teachers prefer.

12. Teachers believe that the planning, implementation, and evaluation of staff development in their own schools and school districts is very effective since everyone is included and allowed to participate.

Discussion

Results from this study indicate that administrators and teachers comprise the planning teams for most staff development activities. School administrators play a critical role in a staff development program (Joyce, 1990). Joyce also claimed that administrators are responsible for the functions of planning, organizing, staff, directing, coordinating, and budgeting. In planning and organizing a staff development program, a decision must be made as to whether to operate staff development as a centralized or decentralized activity.

Some school districts offer a unified program for all teachers, whereas others leave decisions on the content, format, and timing of developmental activities to the staffs of each school (Seyfarth, 1996). Several claims for the superiority of decentralized staff development relate directly to involving teachers in decisions about program content and format, which lead to higher levels of interest and commitment. Seyfarth also claimed that site-based programs increase collaboration among and between teachers and principals, and that program offerings are more relevant and practical than programs that are centrally directed. Likewise, teachers in the present study indicated having moderate input into planning, implementing, and evaluating staff development activities. They also reported a high level of collaboration among teachers and administration in relation to staff development activities.

Teachers in the present study indicated that well organized meetings that are short and to the point with practical information that they can take to their classrooms are some of the staff development practices they prefer. Guskey (1986) and Seyfarth (1996) documented similar

findings in studies related to planning staff development. Guskey stated that teachers are more likely to try new ideas when the presentation focuses on concrete practices rather than theoretical issues. Attention to specific rather than global teaching skills is also helpful. Presenters who have credibility with teachers and those who address teachers' personal concerns related to adopting the change are more likely to be successful in achieving teacher support for change. According to Seyfarth (1996), when planning staff development programs that involve technological change, it is important to bear in mind that teachers are not likely to be persuaded about the value of a new technique until they have seen for themselves that it works. If a technique works without being unduly costly in terms of teachers' time and effort, they will be more likely to embrace it than if it is unproven. Subsequently, staff development personnel should concentrate on selecting strategies that have been shown to work and should offer assistance and support for who are trying the new procedures.

Teachers reported that the sharing of ideas and materials through mentoring programs is one of the practices that is meeting their needs. Results from studies conducted by Bey and Holmes (1992) suggested that mentoring as a special relationship between the protege and experienced teacher holds tremendous potential for the professional development of new teachers during the initial years of teaching. This is a critical time for professional development; teachers are establishing patterns and attitudes that may persist throughout a career of teaching. Likewise, mentoring is a teacher development activity that provides a high level of intensive support for the early professional growth of a protege. The preparation and growth of teachers occurs in teacher education through various means. It happens when mentors offer assistance to intern teachers, help beginning teachers be successful during the first few years of teaching, or motivate tenured teachers to renew teaching skills. Such occurrences exemplify the reality of mentoring and make it meaningful to the development of teachers.

Being given money to attend conferences was the staff development practice most frequently reported by teachers. Lortie (1975) documented similar findings in studies related to planning staff development. Lortie classified work rewards into three groups. First, there are extrinsic rewards, such as the money and prestige associated with particular roles. Second, there are ancillary rewards; that is, rewards that remain constant and are considered part of the job, such as unpaid summer vacation, professional conferences, and tenure. Third, there are intrinsic rewards which are subjective and valued differently from person to

person, such as compliments and self-satisfaction. These reward classifications can be applied to discover incentive systems for teacher- and staff-development programs. That is, policy makers can select incentives that embrace the continuum of extrinsic, ancillary, and intrinsic rewards.

Recommendations from the Study

Based on the findings and conclusions of the study, the following recommendations are offered.

1.   There should be a major commitment by all individuals involved with planning, implementing, and evaluating staff development programs. A systematic program should be developed to solicit and incorporate cooperation among all teachers and administrators involved with planning, implementing, and evaluating of staff development programs.

2.   Principals and teachers should share the leadership for planning and presenting staff development activities for professional staff members at the school.

3.   Summative and formative evaluation should be conducted with staff development programs. Formative evaluation is helpful as new programs are being established to provide feedback that will allow administrators and teachers to make needed adjustments. Formative evaluation also provides information on how well a program is running at a point in time when the program can be changed if it is perceived that not all is going well. Summative evaluation, on the other hand, focuses on the finished program. Summative evaluations may be used to make decisions regarding whether a given program should be continued or terminated.

4.   School board members and administrators should devise more effective ways of motivating all teachers to continue their education and to acknowledge teachers for their efforts in improving their skills.

Recommendations for Further Research

The following recommendations are suggested to enhance the findings of this study and future research.

1.   Additional research should be attempted in smaller schools and larger schools to determine the effects that size may have on the characteristics and perceived effectiveness of staff development practices.

2.   The study should be expanded to include additional school systems in other states to determine if the conclusions are unique

to South Dakota, or if these conclusions are representatives of high school teachers in general.

3.   The study should be replicated using high school teachers and elementary teachers to determine the characteristics and perceived effectiveness of staff development practices.

4.   A follow-up study should be conducted within several years to see how changing funding has affected staff development practices

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