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Does Staff Development Do Any Good?

David W. Champagne

There is evidence that staff development results in improved supervisor-teacher and teacher-student relations.

With the triple pressures of inflation, demands for accountability, and low confidence in education, educators are squeezing every area of their budgets. One of the first areas to be hit is staff development, supervision, and evaluation. All of us know that when we take that step we are also squeezing the life out of our education system. Still, we have not been able to argue convincingly to ourselves, our staff, or our clients that these development funds are not only necessary, but that they produce tangible, visible results in student learning.

First, let me describe what I mean by staff development, supervision, and evaluation. Behavioral

definitions of objectives for the learners in the system are the beginning, followed by a commitment to specific instructional models most likely to achieve those learning objectives. From these objectives and models, clear role expectations are written for every instructional and support position. Finally, a frank assessment of training needs is constructed so that persons in each role have the skills to carry out the tasks for which they are responsible.

The alternative to this training function is to hire only those people who already have the skills you need. Such people do *not* exist. No preparation program can ever be that specific. And, even if you find the people with the skills you need today, by tomorrow they will be partly incompetent and in five years they would have to be fired because your needs would be different. Though you can expect personally directed growth on the part of some employees, such expectations from *all* are patently unrealistic.

Reasons for Staff Development

There are many reasons for a clear staff development, supervision, and evaluation program built along the lines I described:

- There is no more complicated, enervating, or frustrating job in the world than teaching. To keep at it, most of us need help and encouragement; staff development is an effective means to provide this encouragement.

- All of us have a need for an outside observer of our work. Each of us has unintegrated behaviors that need to be examined, and supervision provides this outside other.

- We can model appropriate ways of interacting with students by the ways we interact with our staff in our development and supervision program.

- Regular staff development and supervision may assist us in identifying problems and needs of a whole school setting before they become crises.

- The curriculum is constantly changing; new topics need to be integrated into what is taught. New methods of instruction are being developed, tested, and proved useful for student learning. These changes don't just happen; they must be formally planned.

- Due to economic and social conditions, our present staff is likely to be with us for a long time. We can no longer count on new people regularly bringing in new ideas. Development and supervisory programs must perform this function.

- Some people do not know how to best use the resources provided them or how to identify resources they might use effectively. Training identifies these needs and assists utilization.

- We can set clear expectations, plan ways to reach them, implement our plan, and evaluate the reality of our achievements in the context of a staff development and supervision program.

- There are demonstrable results in student learning when a supervisory program focuses on instruction of students.

Evidence of Success

Here are three strands of evidence that well-organized, well-managed programs of staff development and supervision produce visible results. The evidence comes from two programs with which I have been associated and from the work of David Aspy and his associates.

1. In Pennsylvania, we have a statewide testing program developed over the past decade. Called EQA (Educational Quality Assessment), the program meas-

ures basic skills and attitudes related to school and learning. In one district, Freedom Area, students' test scores were lower than predicted for that setting. And, as elsewhere, SAT scores in Freedom were dropping precipitously.

This school district decided to do something about the problem and, after a year of meetings with faculty, students, and community, they chose to intervene with an intensive externally-managed staff development workshop using ESEA Title III funds. Development efforts focused on instructing the professional teaching staff in high-interest instructional techniques (Project/I/D/E/A). Teachers in the workshop were required by the district to offer at least one high-interest project in their classes the following academic year.¹ The major purpose of the project was to change the relationship between teachers and students.

In the year following the implementation of their program, the EQA results showed dramatic increases in 8 of the 10 goals. The range of increase was +17 to +48 percent with only two goals showing a drop, -12 and -29 percent. "Interest in School" increased from the eighth percentile in 1971 to 56th percentile in the spring of 1975. At the same time, "Basic Skills" increased by 33 percent verbal and 22 percent mathematics. The latter results were achieved with *no* increase in the time or emphasis on work in these areas. Since the students were doing so many high-interest projects they were actually spending less time in traditional study in these skills areas.

In addition, during the two years of the projects, SAT scores showed dramatic increases while national scores dropped another 30 points. School vandalism dropped to almost zero, student attendance increased, and teacher absenteeism dropped significantly. Discipline referrals dropped during this time also.

Unfortunately, during the 1975-76 academic year, the superintendent's time and energy focused on other issues. Title III money for staff development and student high-interest projects disappeared. The school, which had not had a concurrent staff development program for its administrators, reverted to previous administrative and bureaucratic procedures. This meant that the new relationships mostly disappeared and the old ones reappeared as did the old trends in vandalism, truancy, tardiness, and test scores.

Though we made a mistake in this staff development program, my conclusions are that direct teacher development effort that is focused on instruction and

¹ These results are reported in greater detail in: "An Exercise in Freedom: A Place Where Test Scores Appear to be Rising," in *The Test Score Decline*, ed. L. Lipsitz (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Education Technology Publications, 1977), Chapter II.

teacher-student relationships has obvious positive effects on the school and on student learning. The students also reported liking themselves better and liking school during this period. That would justify the effort even if there had been no concurrent changes in test scores.

2. In Connecticut, a state that now requires a clear evaluation system for all professional employees of school districts, one district with which I have worked, Newington Public Schools, both anticipated the law and understood the spirit of staff development. Using a modified MBO system, they began the identification and development of supervisory and evaluation skills in their administrative staff. This whole project was internally managed and supported with some external conceptual help from two consultants.²

In 1974-75, the first year of systemwide administrative training in staff development, supervision, and evaluation skills, a sample of administrative personnel (two elementary principals, two middle school principals, a high school principal, and two program supervisors) showed a four-fold increase in the number of supervisory conferences held (from 57 to 206). Building administrators and program supervisors increased the amount of their time spent in develop-

ment work with individual teachers and with groups of teachers from 26 percent to 54 percent. They cut general office work (24 percent down to 15 percent); writing memos and reports (15 percent down to 8 percent); record keeping (8 percent down to 3 percent); and meetings (6 percent down to 2 percent).³

Each June in Newington there is an administrative survey of the professional staff. In June 1974, the year immediately preceding the beginning of the current staff development effort, of the 210 comments about supervision, 57 were generally positive about supervisory processes and 161 were generally negative. That year there were 49 written complaints, inquiries, and concerns by teachers about supervision; seven of these comments led to formal grievances being filed. By June 1975, the first year after the staff development effort began, with the same number of

² A colleague, Richard M. Goldman (Nova University), and I were involved in a continuing relationship with this administrative team from September 1974 for a period of over two years. We each spent about five days a year in the district.

³ Data from Newington through 1976 are taken from the ERIC reports by William P. Ward, ERIC ED 119387+EA 008 045. Most recent data are from private communication with Ward and are extracted from his year-end school board reports.

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comments about supervision, 203 were positive and only 15 were negative. The number of inquiries had dropped to 14 and there was only one formal grievance. In June 1978, two years after completion of the outside intervention, but with continuing work on the part of the administrative team within the district, of the 225 total comments about supervision; 216 were positive and only nine were negative. The number of written complaints was down to seven and there was still one formal grievance.

These are dramatic and continuing results. The total cost to the district for outside help, during the two years it was used, was less than \$5,000. My estimate of their total cost for staff development, outside regular salaries for administrative and program personnel in those years, is only about \$40,000 in a budget of several million dollars.

What we learned from the Newington development effort is that lasting results can be achieved by changing administrative behavior. These changes positively affect teachers' morale and behavior. The changes can be supported by school districts over significant periods of time without continuing outside help.

3. Because we did not collect student data in Newington, I needed a third connection before I could make a complete case for the results possible with a staff development effort. That connection is in the work of David Aspy, whose research has a much stronger base than any with which I have been associated. Aspy has devoted over a decade to research in a field others have labeled humanistic education.⁴

Aspy investigated the effects of varying levels of three factors in the classroom on the cognitive growth of children. The three factors are: Empathy—feeling as others feel; Congruence—verbal and non-verbal behavior giving the same messages; and Positive regard—valuing others and their contributions. Aspy calls these three factors facilitative conditions:

The data indicate that a teacher who provides high levels of facilitative conditions tends to enhance students' cognitive growth, but a teacher who provides low levels of these conditions may retard students' learning.

A second aspect . . . explored the relationship between the teachers' facilitative levels and their students' daily absence. Their findings revealed an inverse and significant relationship between these variables (p. 165).

Those are interesting conclusions and valuable in themselves. It is, however, the next steps Aspy took that are most relevant to the argument I am making here. Aspy trained teachers, using Carkhuff's procedures, in these facilitative skills. He found that teachers "made significant gains for the interpersonal conditions during their teaching" (p. 166). Here Aspy

David W. Champagne is Associate Professor of Education, University of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

is showing that training-development efforts do have an effect on teachers.

His next step, based on Carl Rogers' belief that the helpers must themselves be growing and developing persons, was to look at the effects of teacher trainers. "The trainees of the high functioning trainer made significant gains (at the 0.05 level) on all the facilitative interpersonal conditions" (p. 166).

A second study carried this problem into the school setting by investigating the effect of a principal on his faculty.

The first school (high functioning) had lower absence, higher achievement, fewer discipline problems, more parent involvement, etc. The list includes nearly every constructive index. Also we have replicated this study several times . . . with very similar results. It is quite clear to us that the principal's level of interpersonal functioning accounts for a great deal of variability in a school's general level of effectiveness (p. 167). The principal's level of interpersonal functioning can be affected by giving him/her specific formal training, i.e., staff development.

My conclusions about Aspy's work are: staff development can show specific cognitive, affective, and behavior results with students; middle management's consistent treatment of their professional staff will produce those same results; focused training has effects in changing the behaviors of adults in the directions intended by the training.

These pieces of evidence taken together add up to a persuasive argument for continuing staff development, supervision, and evaluation. Successful programs will have visible, tangible results at all levels and justify the energy used to create them and the money used to sustain them. *EL*

⁴ My source for most of Aspy's work is: David N. Aspy and Flora N. Roebuck, "From Humane Ideas to Humane Technology and Back Again Many Times," *Education* 95(2): 163 pp., 1975.

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