

# IMPACT II and the Problem of Staff Development

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IMPACT II works in a world where innovation is supposed to be rare. School improvement buffs have been tilting a four-bladed windmill:

- We can get teachers to attend workshops but not to carry what they learn back into the classroom and behind the closed door.

- If one teacher does something, not many others will follow.

- Teachers will faithfully do what a grant supports them to do, but that seldom survives the end of the money.

- What works for Bug Tussle, Arkansas, will be rejected by Sindona, Arizona.

That IMPACT II can overcome these classic barriers still seems incredible, despite the fact that the data are unambiguous and the evaluation research design is among the most carefully constructed and laboriously implemented in the history of staff development projects (for example, pre/post measures of attitude and behavior change, quantitative and qualitative data collection, four-year longitudinal evidence, and a cross-site public and private school stratified random sample of more than a thousand teachers). But how can miniature and one-time grants of \$300 and \$200 make a difference? The fact is they don't. Dollar grants are less important than the network of social and professional support that grantees are drawn into; they are less important than the previous availability of tangible things that make a difference in classrooms; and they

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**By giving grants to creative teachers, establishing teacher networks, and helping good teachers to help their peers, IMPACT II simultaneously nurtures innovation and teachers' professional commitment.**

are less important than the fact that interested teachers are put in touch with other people like themselves who have the ideas, the time, and the support to help.

Eighty percent of the teachers in our analysis echoed Rodney Dangerfield's complaint of "no respect." But 85 percent reported positive gains in self-esteem as a result of IMPACT II activities. Although these teachers volunteer 10 hours a week of their own time, 90

percent would repeat the grant experience. And, more than three fourths reported changes in their methods of presentation and their use of innovative teaching ideas. An astonishing 90 percent reported improvement in student discipline and student attendance (teacher enthusiasm is contagious); three-fourths reported their students learned different things; two-thirds that students were better motivated; more than half that students enjoyed

learning more—all because of the grant-plus-network.<sup>1</sup>

Do the program's ideas travel from one teacher to another and from one place to another? Scores from "adapters" (teachers taught by master teachers) changed more than did their "developers" (teacher mentors). In 1983, the average teacher grantee talked with 43 other teachers about the grant idea and improving classrooms! Despite the massive difference between public and private schools in New York City, and despite the radically different school climates in Houston, Texas, and in New York, the gains attributable to the program are similar across all sites. The process has been remarkably successful, at a cost in New York City of 27 cents a child per year. When the effects of an intervention override the differences among places, something powerful is going on.

### Keeping Good Teachers Teaching

In fact, IMPACT II works because it unites three important facets necessary to change. Respect, self-esteem, and professional commitment are built through the first facet, recognition for achievement. The grant award is a peer review competition, publicly celebrated. The recognition part of IMPACT II gives businesses and industry an appropriate role to play since they can pay for things teachers find important but that public schools can't buy: flowers for a reception, color graphics, and released time.

The second engine of the IMPACT II dynamic is in the networking of like-minded teachers, brought together in circumstances more congenial to innovation than the average faculty lunch room. The networks are city-wide or regional in order to guarantee a critical mass of excitement, new

ideas, surprise, and support. IMPACT II is aimed at teachers, not at school improvement, although proposals have come from a majority of the New York's 900-plus school buildings.

Finally, IMPACT II draws on what was learned from a previous generation of projects. Temporarily placing exogenous change agents into hostile organizations has never worked very well. Farmers only believe other farmers; superintendents only believe other superintendents. Teachers are no different, and IMPACT II *systematically locates the best teachers in the system and then arms them to take their already tested, classroom-based ideas to colleagues who have an interest in being better teachers.*

Not all teachers are the same. They vary markedly in both their stock of knowledge about good instructional practice and in their propensity to innovate. Most staff development programs work only with volunteers and end up helping the good teachers get better while leaving the source of the policy problems in school unchanged. IMPACT II demonstrates that we can design programs to get more deeply into the needy strata of teaching ranks.

Are all teachers motivated by the same things? Our survey samples said that more money would not buy better teaching, and when we checked that result with personal interviews in the field, respondents laughed at the proposition. The key to professional behavior is through treating teachers as professionals. Teachers who don't have those attributes to begin with probably can't be reached either through more money or more recognition. But our most able faculty will respond to professional self-esteem and a chance to help.

Do teachers have to leave the classroom if they want to be involved in their own and others' professional de-

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velopment? Promoting gifted teachers out of the classroom cannibalizes the faculty and disheartens those who stay behind. IMPACT II grantees believe that the experience of working with other teachers has renewed their dedication to teaching and given them a previously missing sense of merit and self-worth.

### Open for Change

The Metropolitan Life Insurance survey discovered something about rank and file teachers that their titular leaders should contemplate:

Teachers in the United States are wide open for change in reforming public schools, including those changes which will undoubtedly require sacrifices and extra effort from the teachers themselves.<sup>2</sup>

In that survey, 87 percent favored establishing “career ladders that provide teachers with greater opportunities to take on more responsibility and pay.”<sup>3</sup>

With its teacher-to-teacher development network, IMPACT II adds an upbeat note to staff development's not so illustrious history by effectively harnessing teacher energy and commitment. □

<sup>1</sup>Metropolitan Life Insurance Company, “The American Teacher” (New York: Metropolitan Life, June 1984).

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 41.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 41.

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