
Staff Developers as Social Architects

To build "cultures of learning" in the schools is the challenge facing staff developers in the '90s.

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"Until recently, I taught in a school where teachers were isolated, but I wasn't conscious of this fact. The students enjoyed my lessons. I was looked upon highly by both staff and administration. Developing lessons and securing materials presented little difficulty. I effectively dealt with problems that arose in my class. Granted, the principal was of little help and ruled with an iron fist, but I was secure within my personal domain.

"It was only after I came to my present school that I realized how deadening this experience had been. I entered an environment where teacher-sharing was the norm and where the principal empowered us to make schoolwide decisions. There were inservices on classroom problem-solving techniques and the best ways to assure student success. I found that many of my methods were outdated and ineffective, that complaining about students was reserved for just a few of the 75 faculty members, and that a sense of community was a necessity for those interested in being considered good teachers" (Pedersen 1990).

A teacher's insights from his experiences in two very different schools illustrate the need to redefine basic assumptions about our goals for schools and staff development. In fact, staff development, as we know it, may be drawing its last breath.

The "Empty Vessel" Model

From the first Teachers' Institute in Connecticut in 1839 to such recent and usefully crafted models as theory-demonstration-practice-coaching, the emphasis has been on the teacher as a vessel to be filled, an apprentice to be molded into someone's image of "a good teacher." And we can point to modest successes (Joyce and Showers 1988).

Yet even our recent refinements in staff development have not altered the century-old sameness of schooling or the destructive pedagogical pluralism that exists in many schools. In these settings, teachers work hard but in relative isolation with different blueprints and outmoded tools. Is it any surprise that, nationally, half our entering teachers leave the profession within five years? We cannot allow this continuing exodus of our most intellectually capable teachers.

The New Staff Development

Not all schools are so stifled or stifling as the one in the first example (Rosenholtz 1989). Many brilliant exceptions exist in which deliberate, conscious leadership has made schools into "cultures of learning." Two terms may need elaboration here. Culture is a conscious pattern of values, actions, and artifacts, subject to assessment and change. In a learning culture, "collaborative creativity" is fundamental, and success is measured by the "combined

wisdom of groups and the synergy, leadership, and service of the organization as a whole" (Jaccaci 1989).

What, then, is the new staff development that will help schools reflect a culture of learning? To begin, staff development is support programs for new teachers, training in teaching methodologies, and the study of curriculum. These purposes will always need to be fulfilled, but to bring about the changes all schools require, staff development must be much more.

The new staff development is teachers, administrators, classified staff, resource personnel, all learning together, in self-reflective and creative ways, making the school experience a richer one for students. It engages teachers as professionals and full partners in the shaping of the organization, governance, and curriculum of schools. From such rich staff development, the school evolves as a more relevant, effective environment for students and adults alike.

The staff developer of the '90s is truly a social architect whose goal is to build a culture of learning. The dominant staff development task of the decade, therefore, is to modify the structure of the workplace. When teachers, along with principals and others,

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develop as caretakers of learning communities, and as collaborators, problem seekers, action researchers, and designers of responsive student-centered curriculums, then students will work harder, more meaningfully, and with more satisfaction than ever before.

Opportunity on the Horizon

The new directions are not easy. While shared decision making is essential to a learning culture—and perhaps to the survival of our system of schooling—it is also perilous. Many school faculties that have adopted participatory forms—even those that have succeeded in increasing student learning—have suffered frustration, exhaustion, and isolation.

No universal strategy will transform schools into cultures of learning, where the major concerns of educators are, "What are the values, purposes, and soul of this school?" "What do I have to contribute?" "How can we grow together?" Even so, there is solace in knowing that beyond these troubled waters lies exceptional promise for transforming American schools. □

References

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