From the director
[audrey m. cotherman]

Increasingly, principals and district administrators are seeking innovative ways to stretch professional development dollars. Districts, particularly those not meeting the annual yearly progress standards, are renewing their efforts to identify, fund, and implement "best practices," hoping that by doing so they can enhance their students' achievement and boost test scores.

Some districts opt for implementing one-shot workshops and seminars, which can sound less expensive, but seldom add value. With little or no support for continued informal and formal collaboration with their peers, whatever insights gained in professional development events tend to fade into day-to-day class management and the sometimes mandated drill to prepare for high-stakes tests.

Professional development, however, must be ongoing, research-based, and collaborative if it is to have an impact. Rather than a drain on district and school resources, professional development is an investment with enormous returns.

District administrators, school principals, and teachers, however, need to be able to recognize quality professional development and to develop the strategies needed to adapt knowledge and skills to the school culture and the needs of their students.

As school districts and individual schools work harder to fund, implement, and meet the requirements of the No Child Left Behind Act, teachers and their principals find they are in greater need than ever of research-based information, instructional strategies, and material resources.

Unfortunately, material resources are in increasingly short supply, and organizational support, despite the best of intentions, is often ineffective.

But, as Adam Gamoran, new director of Wisconsin Center for Education Research, argues in this monograph, district and school administrators—by implementing high quality professional development—can build organizational support and beneficially affect both teacher practice and student achievement.

"Professional development," notes Gamoran, "is the most powerful engine of change if you’re trying to change what goes on in schools." Counter to traditional views, he adds, “professional development can generate needed resources—there really is not a one-way flow of resources.”

In this monograph, we first examine issues that have a significant impact on professional development.

Laura Desimone, Andrew C. Porter, Beatrice F. Birman, Michael S. Garet, and Kwang Suk Yoon discuss district management strategies and professional development characteristics most frequently associated with higher quality professional development.
Adam Gamoran describes organizational support for high quality professional development.

Virginia Richardson discusses the interplay of American culture and reform professional development, noting that even recommended practices might need to be adapted to fit teacher (and student) needs.

Tom Vander Ark outlines strategic choices that districts face in making school systems successful.

In this issue we also examine efforts by principals and teachers to adapt and enhance their professional development programs to reach at-risk student populations.

Megan Franke, Elham Kazemi, Jeff Shih, Stephanie Biagetti, and Daniel Battey describe the experiences of a school’s principal and teachers as they work to reform instructional leadership and supervision.

Cal Stone discusses the successful transformation of East High School in Des Moines, IA, where principal and faculty worked together to reorganize the ninth-grade into smaller learning communities geared to enhancing the learning of their at-risk student population.

Mildred Pierce describes the need for professional development for principals.

Judith Hankes describes the efforts of one Oneida teacher to adapt her experiences in a reform professional development program to the context of her Oneida students.

We close with the Professional Development IQ from the National Staff Development Council.
KEYING IN TO HIGH QUALITY PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT: DISTRICT STRATEGIES AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT FEATURES THAT CONTRIBUTE TO QUALITY PROGRAMS

[laura desimone, andy porter, beatrice f. birman, michael s. garet, kwang suk yoon]

In the current environment of state and federal standards-based reform efforts, districts play a critical facilitating role in communicating instructional policy, lending it coherence, and influencing the type and nature of professional development opportunities available to teachers. Districts face major challenges, however, in determining what constitutes high quality professional development programs and in ensuring that professional development supports both teacher change and student achievement.

In our examination of Eisenhower Program–funded professional development, we identified management and implementation strategies that were strongly associated with higher quality teacher professional development. Our findings suggest that supporting districts’ increased capacity to use these strategies can make professional development more effective for teachers and, ultimately, have a strong effect on the learning and achievement of their students.

In this article, we briefly describe professional development activities associated with higher quality professional development and summarize our findings in regard to district strategies to provide effective professional development. We suggest that characterization of high quality professional development programs and activities can lead to better program choices and, thus, more effective use of the often limited funds available for professional development.

KEY FEATURES OF EFFECTIVE PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT ACTIVITIES

Our country’s current education reforms seek to foster high standards for teaching and learning for all children. The success of such ambitious education reforms hinges, in large part, on the instructional capacity of teachers. Unfortunately, much of the investment in professional development, as noted earlier, has supported ineffective practices and activities (Cohen, 1990; Cohen, McLaughlin, & Talbert, 1993; Elmore, Peterson, & McCarthy, 1996; Little, 1993; Richardson, 1994; Stiles, Loucks-Horsley, & Hewson, 1996).

Teachers are more likely to change their practice if their professional development is connected to other professional development experiences and fosters professional communication.

1 Our analyses are part of a national evaluation of the Eisenhower Professional Development Program. The Eisenhower program was the federal government’s largest investment focused solely on developing the knowledge and skills of classroom teachers. The program funded a wide range of activities, including workshops and conferences, study groups, professional networks and collaboratives, taskforce work, and peer coaching.

2 The analyses and findings are drawn from three separate data sets: a national probability sample of participant-teachers, a purposeful longitudinal sample of participant-teachers, and a national probability sample of district coordinators in participating districts. The full study also included a national sample of State Agencies for Higher Education, which is not discussed here, but is reported in Desimone, Birman, Porter, Garet, & Suk Yoon (2003).
and involving collective participation had greater impact on teacher practice than activities that had neither element.

**Content, Coherence, and Opportunities for Active Learning**

Our research joins several recent studies that document the profound importance of content (e.g., Cohen & Hill, 2000; Kennedy, 1998). In particular, several works suggest that professional development that focuses on specific mathematics and science content, and the ways students learn such content, is especially helpful (Cohen & Hill, 2000; Kennedy, 1998).

In our examination of Eisenhower-funded programs, we found that effective professional development (a) focuses on deepening teachers' content knowledge and their knowledge of how students learn particular content, (b) encourages coherence in teachers' professional development experiences, and (c) provides opportunities for active learning.

We also note that in both our longitudinal and national cross-sectional samples of teachers, we found that generic professional development that focuses on teaching techniques without also focusing on content does not appear to be effective.

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**Effective professional development focuses on deepening teachers’ content knowledge and their knowledge of how students learn particular content, encourages coherence in teachers’ professional development experiences, and provides opportunities for active learning.**

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**Duration and Collective Participation**

As suggested in the literature on professional development, we found that reform types of activities are more likely to have stronger instantiations of core features of high quality professional development (i.e., content focus, coherence, and opportunities for active learning). Reform activities also tend to produce more positive reported outcomes than do traditional activities.

Our results, however, also indicate that this relationship between reform activities and positive outcomes is largely indirect. We found that the advantages to reform activities, and the better outcomes associated with them, appear to be explained primarily by the greater duration of reform activities. Specifically, we found that the strength of reform activities was that they tended to involve more contact hours and span a longer period of time than did traditional activities.

Activities of longer duration and those that encourage collective participation of teachers in the same school or grade tend to (a) place more emphasis on content than do other activities, (b) provide more opportunities for active learning, and (c) provide more coherent professional development. We found that traditional and reform activities of the same duration tend to be associated with similar outcomes.3

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**DISTRICT STRATEGIES THAT SUPPORT HIGH QUALITY PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT**

School districts can and should play a critical role in setting the vision, focus, and context of professional development, and the policies and practices of individual districts can have major impact on the quality of a district’s “portfolio” of activities. Determining strategies that enhance the effect of professional development can be crucial to both organizational budgets and district results on high-stakes assessments.

In our examination of Eisenhower-funded professional development programs, we found the following management and implementation strategies to be strongly associated with high quality professional development programs:

- Aligning professional development to state or district standards and assessments and other reform efforts across the district (Cohen & Spillane, 1992; Elmore & Burney, 1996; Spillane, 1996);

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3 Our analyses replicate for the first time on a national probability sample the importance of duration. These analyses extend earlier work, directing us to rethink the mechanisms through which “reform” activities appear more effective.
School districts can and should play a critical role in setting the vision, focus, and context of professional development. Policies and practices of individual districts can have major impact on the quality of a district’s “portfolio” of activities.

- Working to ensure that “continuous improvement” efforts (e.g., establishing indicators, conducting needs assessments and evaluation) are well designed and taken seriously;
- Taking advantage of multiple funding sources and coordinating funding of professional development across the district; and
- Involving teachers in planning efforts at both the school and district levels.

Such efforts increase program coherence (Cohen & Hill, 2000; Smith & O’Day, 1991), which in turn can increase teacher motivation and encourage changes in instruction (Fullan, 1996; Spillane & Jennings, 1997).

Researchers across the United States (see, e.g., work by the National Center for Improving Student Learning and Achievement in Mathematics and Science, the National Center for Reform in Mathematical Sciences Education, and the many national research centers funded by the Institute for Education Sciences, formerly the Office of Educational Research and Improvement) have found that such changes can have substantial impact on student learning and achievement as well as on high-stakes test scores.

**Aligning Professional Development to Standards and Assessments**

The alignment of professional development to district and state content standards can seem a logical step in program coherence, but in practice many seminars and workshops are not aligned. Focused on skill development or scripted to cover specific focus areas, activities sometimes correspond little to state or district standards. In contrast, high quality professional development often makes exploration of the standards a part of professional development. Teachers in quality programs are generally supported in their exploration of concepts (as determined by state and national standards) and frequently practice adapting instruction to the needs of their students as well as to the structure and format of state assessments.

Such experience in professional development not only can affect instruction (and student achievement) in a teacher’s own classroom, but can also resonate throughout a department or grade.

**Supporting “Continuous Improvement”**

District continuous improvement efforts are significantly related to increased opportunities for active learning in professional development and increased targeting of teachers of special populations of students (e.g., at-risk students), perhaps in response to the needs assessments and evaluations provided by teachers (which are part of these efforts). Such strategies, including establishing evaluation and accountability mechanisms (O’Day, Goertz, & Floden, 1995) and using indicators to shape priorities and evaluate activities (Fuhrman, Clune, & Elmore, 1988; Guskey, 1997; Loucks-Horsley, Hewson, Love, & Stiles, 1998), have also been shown to help target local priorities.

Yet despite this significant relationship, district continuous improvement efforts are not as strong as they could be. We found that few districts use district performance indicators in designing professional development activities. Although almost all districts we examined conducted some form of needs assessments and evaluations, these processes are typically based on teacher satisfaction surveys, informal conversations with teachers, or participation counts rather than on more direct assessments of teacher behaviors.

The strength of reform activities was that they tended to involve more contact hours and span a longer period of time than did traditional activities.
Given that continuous improvement efforts are commonly implemented but weak in design, districts wishing to build overall capacity for quality professional development might do well to examine and enhance these areas. If using data to make decisions is to be a serious endeavor, districts need assistance in building capacity, for example, in learning how to develop well-constructed and useful indicators, how to collect meaningful data, and how to interpret and use improvement indicators. We also note that district efforts in this area might have strong carryover impact on the public’s view of district accountability.

**Developing Co-funding of Program Activities**

High quality professional development is expensive. Districts often have very limited resources, and many administrators feel pressure to provide professional development for all district teachers. Leveraging resources, however, can enhance the quality of professional development that districts offer (Corcoran, 1995); and co-funding activities can enable districts to take stronger steps toward a coherent focus for their professional development programs (Elmore & Burney, 1996; Guskey, 1997).

In our work, we have found that districts that engage in co-funding and coordination with other programs tend to support a greater proportion of reform types of activities than do other districts, tend to provide more opportunities for collective participation, and tend to involve teachers more widely in planning, which in turn is related to increased targeting of teachers of special populations (e.g., at-risk students).

More coordination is also associated with the use of a greater number of continuous improvement strategies, which in turn are related to an increased number of opportunities for active learning and increased targeting. Coordinating professional development and building a critical mass of funds through co-funding from multiple sources can be essential in fostering the provision of high quality professional development activities.

*Involving Teachers in Planning at School and District Levels*

Teacher participation, at any level of planning, is associated with high quality professional development. Active participation of teachers can be important in developing teacher support for the professional development program, as well as for ensuring that activities focus on methods and approaches that teachers think are important. In some districts, teachers not only have assisted in planning district-level professional development, but also have had significant impact on district-level policies (Franke, Kazemi, Shih, Biagetti, & Battey, 2005; Webb, Romberg, Ford, & Burrill, 2005).

We need a better understanding of how teacher participation in planning addresses individual and school needs, and how it affects the core and structural characteristics of professional development in order to better assess the importance of school-level implementation and planning of professional development.

**CLOSING NOTE**

In the context of an evaluation of the Eisenhower program, our work provides empirical support, based on national probability samples and longitudinal data, (a) of district policies and practices that foster high quality professional development and (b) of professional development features that improve teachers’ knowledge and skills and foster changes in instruction.

These findings have major policy implications. The choice of management and implementation strategies can have strong impact on the quality of professional development. Certain strategies—specifically, alignment with standards and assessments, district co-funding, continuous improvement efforts such as establishing indicators and conducting needs assessments and evaluation, and teacher involvement in district-level planning—are related to the effectiveness of professional development.

Certain elements of professional development activities are similarly associated with quality outcomes. Specifically, activities with an emphasis on content, coherence, and opportunities for active learning, coupled with the collective participation of teachers over an extended period of time are key to effective professional development.

These findings point to positive directions that schools and districts can take to increase the quality of the professional development that they provide and, thus, to increase the possible positive effect on teachers’ practice and on the learning and achievement of their students.
For further discussion of the analyses referred to in this article, please see—


REFERENCES


ORGANIZATIONAL CAPACITY FOR CHANGE:
RETHINKING PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

[adam gamoran ]

SCHOOLS ARE DYNAMIC SYSTEMS, BOTH INFLUENCING AND INFLUENCED BY THE PROGRAMS IMPLEMENTED WITHIN THEM (GAMORAN, SECADA, & MARRETT, 2000). IN OUR STUDIES OF SCHOOL AND DISTRICT CONTEXTS, WE HAVE FOUND THAT TEACHER PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT IS THE PRIMARY ENGINE OF CHANGE BOTH IN THE SCHOOL AND IN THE CLASSROOM.

Professional development can transform material resources into new human and social resources: Teachers gain new knowledge and skills, strengthen their relationships with other educators, and come to better understand their students’ thinking and learning. As a result, professional development can have significant immediate and long-term impact on student achievement. We suggest that schools can best support school improvement and student achievement through the support of high quality professional development.

SUPPORTING QUALITY PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

The findings of our research suggest that rich, collaborative professional development is the most productive investment a school district can make: High quality professional development can generate new resources in the form of human and social capital for teachers, and, unlike investment in equipment, textbooks, and training, this investment does not depreciate.

Effective professional development, however, depends heavily on the presence of school and district leaders who encourage teacher learning through teacher community and collaboration, support shared leadership and teacher autonomy in instructional content and pedagogical methods, and allocate resources in ways responsive to and supportive of teachers’ efforts to enhance the learning, understanding, and achievement of their students.

Fostering a Teacher Learning Community

Teachers in high quality professional development examine student work collaboratively. They discuss what students are thinking and how that thinking changes in response to classroom experiences. Together they work on activities that enhance their students’ understanding. This collaborative process can foster group cohesiveness and over time build professional community. Participants come to rely on each other.

Shared values, collective focus on student learning, opportunity for collaboration, reflective dialogue, and the open sharing of their teaching practices—all are elements that contribute to the growth and development of a teacher learning community. Although outside expertise can be essential to stimulating teachers’ initial investigations and learning, in the long run the substantive expertise of the teachers themselves (created or developed through professional development) can prove more important, as this suburban high school teacher notes: “People that I work with—that resource is invaluable. I don’t know what I would do in another situation where I didn’t have the experience of the other teachers to draw on…”

Teachers need the support and advice of colleagues, and they need continuing access to new developments in their fields. As teachers take on their new knowledge, skills, and relationships with colleagues, they will also, if in a supportive context, participate in mentoring and take on informal and sometimes formal roles of leadership. Our findings suggest that this process can do much to sustain effective professional development. We note, however, that sustainability of community rests not only on the role of teachers but also on the strength of distributed leadership and on strong linkages with district and school administrators.

Sharing Leadership

From the perspective of many teachers, one of the most important contributions that principals can make to their efforts is simply to stay out of the way. We have found, however, that supportive principals do more than just avoid posing barriers: They respond to new directions that teachers identify and foster the distribution of leadership among a variety of participants, particularly teachers, who then play active roles in leading their own learning.

“People that I work with—that resource is invaluable.
I don’t know what I would do in another situation where I didn’t have the experience of the other teachers to draw on…”
We have found that teacher professional development is the primary engine of change both in the school and in the classroom.

As one urban principal in Massachusetts explained, “I look at myself as [taking] a facilitator, cheerleader role, not an expert role.” His comments were echoed by a suburban principal in Wisconsin who said, “I see my role as a facilitator, someone who creates the environment where good teaching can take place and where decisions can be made in the best interests of kids.”

Organic management is not the bureaucratic leadership of directives and supervision. Leaders in districts can play facilitative roles, making it possible for teachers to work with outside experts. Rather than pushing a particular approach, principals and district leaders can serve as linkages, helping teachers with common approaches find one another.

As one principal noted: “You go into administration with the idea that you’ll be able to control and have an effect on what happens with that school. And the biggest lesson for me in all of this is the best way to control it is . . . you stand on the sidelines, and you say, ‘That’s great! Good job!’ . . . as opposed to saying, ‘This is how it’s going to be done.’”

As one senior district administrator explained: “Our model of governance is not just shared decision making, it’s shared leadership.”

We also note that successful administrators we have studied often have a broad commitment to teacher autonomy: They allow teachers to identify their own sense of what constitutes excellent teaching, and to pursue that vision with vigor.

Allocating Resources

The importance of material resources in supporting teachers’ efforts to apply what they learn cannot be overstated. Lack of time and prepared materials from the district or school can impair teachers’ ability to carry new ideas back to their classrooms, especially in large urban districts, where this lack is often compounded by the usual problems of obtaining basic supplies.

Allocating time.

From the perspective of teachers, time, specifically time for teachers to work together on issues of student thinking, is a vital material resource.

Many principals we have spoken with regard the allocation of time to issues of concern to professional development as a sacrifice: They feel compelled to use professional development time for school-wide issues. The teachers we have studied, on the other hand, often view time as an administrative barrier—either to time that they are required to devote to other tasks, or time denied them when they want to be working collaboratively.

Scheduling time for collaboration is difficult. If professional development is scheduled during class time, substitutes must cover classes. Teachers, however, are often frustrated with the quality of their substitutes and worry about the loss of time with their students. Meeting during common planning periods during the school day (or after school) can mean that the collaboration competes with other planning issues for teachers’ attention.

In contrast, paid time added onto the normal work schedules can be successful, in part because teachers feel valued as professionals and in part because teachers can then use school-scheduled planning time to share with colleagues what they are doing in professional development. Regular teacher meetings and school-sponsored activities thus become occasions for diffusion of ideas and materials drawn from professional development, creating a sustained base of support that extends beyond the participants.

Using prepared material resources.

We found overall that prepackaged curriculum materials were less essential
Overall, prepackaged curriculum materials were less essential for supporting professional development, in part because developing curricular approaches and materials often constitutes much of the work of the professional development.

for supporting professional development, in part because developing curricular approaches and materials often constitutes much of the work of the professional development. Such professional development also helps teachers to better match their curricular interests and needs to their students’ emerging thinking.

**CLOSING NOTE**

Although material resources (especially the availability of time) are clearly indispensable to the implementation of any professional development program, human and social resources in the form of teacher leadership, the creation (or strengthening) of community, supportive school and district administrators, and outside linkages are vital to quality professional development outcomes.

We note that principals are increasingly held accountable for the success (or failure) of their schools, regardless of obstacles to effective use of district resources, preexisting conditions and past performance of the schools, or staff shortages. We also note, however, that building teacher community, sharing or redistributing leadership, and allocating resources in ways that support teacher collaboration—issues we have studied in depth—can have substantial positive effect on the creation of high-functioning learning environments and can generate resources that support the success of those environments.

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For further discussion, please see—


[ about the author ]

**ADAM GAMORAN** is director of the Wisconsin Center for Education Research at the University of Wisconsin–Madison.

**REFERENCES**

The growing body of research on professional development has provided us with consistent guidelines for planning and implementing staff development that may lead to the reform and improvement of practice. I can say this because I have been engaged in professional development and have conducted research on the topic for nearly 20 years. But I have been intrigued, concerned, and frustrated by the fact that, although we have had research evidence on the characteristics of effective staff development programs for some time, these features are not commonly seen in practice.

Indeed, most of the staff development that is conducted with K–12 teachers derives from the short-term transmission model; pays no attention to what is already going on in a particular classroom, school, or school district; offers little opportunity for participants to become involved in the conversation; and provides no follow-up. We have been engaged in this form of staff development for years, knowing full well that this approach is not particularly successful.

Why are the nine characteristics listed above not standard practice in school districts’ staff development programs? Although I do believe their use is increasing, the overall approach still is not standard. For some time, I have been thinking about reasons why these research-based practices are avoided, and I’ve come up with a number of explanations.

First, the approach is expensive. Second, such staff development processes need to take place over a long period of time. And, should the particular professional development process chosen be an inquiry approach, there are two additional reasons districts might avoid it: It is hard for a school district to determine how to support an inquiry approach (and even harder to figure out how to mandate it), and giving participants the power to make decisions about the goals to be pursued and the changes to be made might lead to unacceptable decisions. This last issue often leads districts to seek to standardize goals in advance, and that poses problems for teachers and professional developers who are involved in inquiry/constructivist processes (Richardson, 1994b).

But I am not completely satisfied with these explanations. There may in fact be a cultural norm—the norm of U.S. individualism—that works against the use of research-based staff development practices.
a problem and that requires their joint effort, while allowing them to maintain their sense of autonomy, expertise, and individual efficacy.

In approaching the cultural norm of individualism, I will refer to one of the most perceptive descriptions of the culture of individualism in U.S. institutions and character that has ever been written. In the second part of *Democracy in America*, Alexis de Tocqueville (1835–1840/1956) focused on the remarkable independence and rugged individualistic nature of the life of an American. In many nations, this foundational sense of independence and individualism is not present to the degree it is in the dominant culture of the United States.

Even as he was documenting the independence of the people he observed, de Tocqueville was not unconcerned about the problems posed by individualism, which he described as “a mature and calm feeling, which disposes each member of the community to sever himself from the mass of his fellows, and to draw apart with his family and his friends; so that, after he has thus formed a little circle of his own, he willingly leaves society at large to itself” (1835–1840/1956, p. 193). Against the background of individualism, he juxtaposed those “free institutions”—elections and political activities—that can bring people together in the understanding that they need one another. “Local freedom, then,” he continued, “which leads a great number of citizens to value the affection of their neighbors and of their kindred, perpetually brings men together, and forces them to help one another, in spite of the propensities that sever them” (p. 196). De Tocqueville suggested that voluntary associations and intermediate institutions put America on the road to democratic liberty rather than to a situation that he feared: the tyranny of the majority.

What, then, does this have to do with professional development? The American character strongly affects the way in which many Americans—teachers and other professionals included—approach their work. In schools, it is abetted by the egg-crate environment and the practice of “closing the classroom door.” Many classroom teachers would subscribe to the following view: “This is my space, and I am responsible for it. It is mine. It reflects me. I am the teacher here. This classroom is unique and is therefore unlike any other classroom because of my uniqueness and my particular group of students.”

This sense of individuality pervades everything we do; it is in the air we breathe. We usually aren’t completely aware of it, but it makes the development of a collective sense difficult for professionals and others even to contemplate. As teachers, the individualistic culture affects the way we think about change, how we seek help for the improvement of practice, whom we talk with about what we do in our classrooms. In fact, this way of being makes it very difficult to import great ideas from Japan or other nations where the ways of life are quite different.

I am not suggesting a change in this way of life. That would be a monumental task, and plenty has been written about the problems with communitarian life (Noddings, 1996). In fact, there is research indicating that teachers who avoid involvement in school-wide or district-wide reform programs and “tinker” with change in their own classrooms are much more satisfied with their careers later in life than are those who are heavily involved in such projects (Huberman, 1989). It is certainly important to understand this insular way of life and its consequences whenever we are working with teachers in a change process.

Nonetheless, there are times when a collective sense of goals and instructional approaches is called for. When teachers experiment with new activities in their classrooms, they judge the new practices according to whether or not the practices “work.”
is probably important for some students—particularly those at the lower end of the achievement scale—to have consistency in their programs across grade levels and, therefore, across teachers (Richardson, 1998). And the school is the ideal unit for reform because it is the level at which all parties can be involved in the decisions concerning reform.

One of the interesting things about all of this is that most education policies these days—particularly at the state and national levels—are working to break this individualistic way of life. These policies are pushing toward a standardization of curriculum and of teachers’ ways of thinking. Proponents of these policies believe that such standardization might reduce the incidence of poor teaching and thus improve all teaching. And the push toward standardization is being felt through national standards and assessments for students, for teachers, and even for teacher educators.

However, these policies are pushing for collectivity only in the sense that they seek to have all teachers at a particular grade level teaching a particular subject matter using the same curriculum and the same approach. Although these state and national policies are fighting the individualistic norms, they are not working toward any feasible alternative other than standardization—which I don’t think is viable. If not handled very carefully, this effort could become an example of what de Tocqueville called too much government, a condition that “hinders, compromises, enervates, extinguishes, dazes and finally reduces the nation to being nothing more than a herd of timid . . . animals, of which the government is the shepherd” (1835–1840/1956, p. 201).

Here we are again, in the midst of an educational dilemma. The need for some sense of community activity with common goals is apparent today, but we probably shouldn’t have too much of it. What’s more, we must always be careful of the tyranny of the majority—a situation that would certainly come about if we were to attempt to mandate collectivity. And we probably shouldn’t attempt to completely break the strong, independent, action-oriented culture that de Toqueville found in America. These individualistic norms are the default condition of teaching or any other professional activity in a democratic America. If once in a while we feel it is necessary to adjust these individualistic norms toward a more collective sense of teaching, we must first acknowledge their pervasiveness and then work to create an environment and the supporting structures to encourage the operation of voluntary collectivities with communal goals and actions around important topics in instruction.

This is where professional development comes in. What I would like to examine next is what we know and how we think about teacher change. This information can guide us as we consider the role of professional development and how we can all work toward a sense of collectivity for some of our educational activities.

**TEACHER CHANGE**

We have lived for a number of years with a model of change that suggests that teachers don’t change, that they are recalcitrant. This view is itself changing, though we still hear it repeated quite often. The recalcitrance model of change assumes that someone outside the classroom claims to know what teachers should be doing. And teachers—when told about or trained in these other methods, curricula, approaches to students, or ways of thinking—simply refuse to implement them. Examples of different “ways of thinking” include the process approach of teaching writing or the introduction of a content area reading program in Grade 2. Because some teachers don’t implement these changes in their classrooms, many people conclude that teachers don’t like to change—that they are recalcitrant.

On the other hand, there is considerable research that indicates that teachers change all the time. They reorganize their classrooms, try different activities and texts, change the order of topics in the curriculum, emphasize different interpersonal skills, and so on—all on a voluntary basis. When teachers experiment with new activities in their classrooms, they judge the new practices according to whether or not they “work.” When these...
new activities engage the students, do not violate the teacher’s particular need for control, match the teacher’s beliefs about teaching and learning, and help the teacher respond to system-determined demands for such outcomes as high test scores, they are deemed to work. If they do, they are internalized and absorbed into the teacher’s repertoire.

Our first step as professional developers is to try to operate within this naturalistic sense of teacher change. Because teachers change all the time, a strategy here would be to determine the ways in which they make their decisions to change and provide input and help when they do so. The second task is to help teachers see the usefulness of a collective approach to some change-related decisions and actions.

There is a popular and very effective way of working within this naturalistic model of change. It is called the inquiry approach. I have used this approach in several staff development programs designed to help teachers examine and improve their teaching of reading and the language arts. It is grounded in a constructivist theory of learning, and this affects the process.

Constructivism is the learning theory that suggests that human knowledge is constructed within the minds of individuals and within social communities. The theory states that individuals create their own new understandings based on the interactions of what they know and believe with the phenomena or ideas with which they come into contact. It is a descriptive theory that describes the way people actually do learn; it is not a normative theory that describes the way people should learn. It seems strange to be describing constructivist theory at this point because it is so much a part of our way of thinking about education these days that it may be thought of as our fundamental educational philosophy. However, it was introduced into schools relatively recently, and there are many, many classrooms in which this approach to teaching and learning is not present.

An inquiry approach to staff development has a number of characteristics that go beyond constructivism. It suggests that teachers have expertise that they can articulate, develop, and share. They also have questions, problems, and dilemmas that they are continually confronting. These and other questions and problems never go away, because many of them are enduring dilemmas (Berlak & Berlak, 1981). Thus an orientation that seeks continuous improvement is desirable. This is not change merely for the sake of change, even though much in education looks like that. Instead, this is an orientation that continually examines practices, student learning, goals, and achievements and that allows us to adjust practices to more closely meet our goals. The inquiry approach also asks teachers to engage in systematic inquiry—beyond the inquiry that is normal in teaching—for purposes of addressing specific questions.

This approach does not differentiate between experienced and novice teachers, old and young teachers, male and female teachers. Those who have worked with an inquiry approach in professional development have found that participants may change their practices and may even change their beliefs and understandings about teaching and learning. Indeed, research has been conducted that indi-
cates that the students of participating teachers gain in achievement—or at least learn what it is their teachers intend to teach. In my experience with this approach, for example, teachers changed their beliefs and practices, and their students gained in reading achievement (Richardson, 1994a).

Despite such successes, I do not want to advocate just the inquiry approach and nothing else. There are two reasons. The first relates to the individualistic aspect of the inquiry approach—particularly the one that I worked with—and the second has to do with the need for a mixed model of professional development. Let me start with the first issue.

In the original inquiry project in which I was the staff developer, we brought the teachers in a particular school together every two weeks to talk about issues of common interest. But we also worked closely with individual teachers as they pursued their particular interests in their classrooms. This personalized work included videotaping and something called “practical arguments,” in which the staff developer and the teacher examined the videotape together and talked about the premises behind the various decisions made and actions taken by the teacher (Fenstermacher, 1994). (It is important to note that this staff development did not focus on a particular approach to reading. However, there was considerable expertise available to help teachers think about different approaches and classroom behaviors.) As researchers, we were interested in helping teachers think about, experiment with, and justify changes in their practice. The process fit within the norms of individualism and independence in the professional act of teaching.

The question then becomes, why would I advocate a more collective approach to a reading program in a school? The answer seems obvious: It is for the students. It is not necessarily good for students—particularly low-achieving students—to move from one reading program to a very different one as they go from grade to grade. So although we might solve the problem of operating with teachers within a naturalistic framework of change, there is still the matter of developing a program that engages a group of teachers in solving a common problem that is best solved if they work together. For example, a group of teachers in a school could come up with a reading program that provides consistency for students as they travel from grade to grade.

Please note that such a process would be at the opposite end of the autonomy continuum from something like Success for All (Slavin et al., 1996), which also achieves the goal of providing all students in the school with a consistent program of reading instruction. After the teachers sign up for such a program (and there needs to be a strong buy-in from the teachers), they also buy into a highly scripted program that leaves them with few decisions concerning the nature of the curriculum. Is it possible to consider an approach in which the teachers have more autonomy in selecting their program and process?

Recently, M. Bruce King and Fred Newmann (King, 1999; King & Newmann, 2000) examined the relationship between staff development and the building of school capacity. On the basis of some research on school reform and capacity building, King suggested that the inquiry approach would be effective for building...
capacity. Therefore he examined such staff development in a number of high-capacity schools in low-income settings. He decided that an inquiry approach has the following characteristics:

- Teachers have considerable control over process and content;
- Teachers critically discuss issues of school mission, curriculum, instruction, or student learning;
- Teachers draw on relevant data and research to inform deliberations; and
- Teachers sustain a focus on a topic or problem and reach a collective decision.

I mentioned above that there is a second reason that keeps me from recommending that all professional development be inquiry oriented. It has to do with the fact that an inquiry program leads to a particular form of change—changing beliefs and understandings with regard to instructional practice and subject matter. It also leads to an improvement orientation and to significant reforms in instructional practice.

However, there are other goals for professional development, and staff development approaches other than inquiry might be more appropriate for pursuing these goals. Here are some of those other goals:

- **Increasing energy for the new school year.** A kind of rah-rah, feel-good process can help to increase energy for the task at hand. This is a legitimate goal and is usually handled by a skillful speaker, who can shift quickly from one topic to another, often accompanied by a multimedia presentation.
- **Learning a software program for use in instruction.** Direct instruction is probably fine for this goal. I am not interested in delving deeply into the theory of computers or the history of software used for these purposes, and I don't want to share deep understandings of computer usage with my colleagues. I just want to figure out how to make the thing work.
- **Obtaining a more in-depth understanding of the theoretical foundations of a process.** For example, suppose I were interested in reconnecting with the cognitive theory that frames reading in the content areas, so that I can begin to think through the teaching of reading in science and social studies in my second-grade classroom. A lecture will serve my needs just fine.
- **Learning about a specific practice in a fellow teacher's classroom.** In this case, classroom observation would be an excellent professional development approach.

Considerations such as these suggest that the approach to professional development must meet the specific goals of the institution or the individual planning to use the process. Although the inquiry approach is effective for goals that involve changing beliefs, understandings, and practices, it might not be effective for all goals.

**BACK TO DE TOCQUEVILLE**

Let us first assume that it is important that the profession of teaching muster some collective effort around the needs of students. Yet we still have a strong “close the classroom door” mentality in our profession. Most of the writings that treat this topic blame the teachers or the institutions for promoting this attitude. What de Tocqueville suggests is that it is not simply our institutions that push for an individualistic approach to teaching. Rather, it is a norm of the dominant culture that surrounds us. It is in our heads, our bodies, our beings.

If that is the case, we must think carefully about whether we really want to change this norm to allow for collective action. An examination of this issue suggests that the individualistic norm is extremely important in American professional lives. There is a certain sense of expertise, autonomy in practice, and self-efficacy that accompanies this way of life. A communitarian approach to change in schools and districts has its downsides, particularly in relation to the time that must be devoted to meeting in groups and coming to agreement about goals and implementation strategies. And such approaches may also be more difficult for those in the minority. Noddings (1996) points out: “In all strong communities, there is a significant measure of normocentricity . . . [which] can produce admirable or deplorable results” (p. 254). Although it is important that some collective activity within a school, school district, or state take place, it is probably not necessary for all aspects of teaching. Individual teachers need to see that it is in their own best interest to work together at times. But a forced collectivity could lead to the tyranny of the majority.
Thus a judicious approach that maintains individual autonomy while bringing teachers together to make crucial decisions collectively becomes a significant element of school reform through professional development. This approach certainly complicates the process of staff development. Although those new to the field might think that all you need to do is tell the teachers the right things to do and make sure they do it, those of us who have been in it for a number of years know better. Professional development is a complex enterprise—full of ethical, structural, and cultural dilemmas. Considering such foundational sources as Democracy in America can help us think about the nature of the society within which we are working as we strive to achieve significant and worthwhile school change through professional development.

Adapted with permission from Phi Delta Kappan. For complete article, please see—Richardson, V. (2003, January). Dilemmas of professional development. Phi Delta Kappan, 84(3), 401–406.

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REFERENCES


Virginia Richardson is professor of teacher education and former chair of the Educational Studies Program at the University of Michigan.
Few, if any, public school districts can be called high-performance systems. It’s not yet clear how—or even if—public school districts, as currently conceived and governed, can meet the challenge of the growing diversity, the emerging opportunities and challenges of information technology, the evolving knowledge about high-performance organizations, and new propositions that all students can and should achieve at high levels.

**HOW SHOULD THE SYSTEM WORK?**

The most important question for state and district leaders to answer is, What will success look like? Specifically, they must define what students need to know and be able to do and what forms of evidence will be required. (These questions imply an even more fundamental agreement about the purpose of education, a shifting and unstable foundation at best.)

The second question, which has largely been answered at the local level, is “How will success be achieved?” Specifically, the superintendent and school board members must come to a set of temporary agreements about how the system should work, who will make what decisions, what level of discretion schools have, how the district will support schools, and how parents and community members will be engaged. With tradition often taken as a given—and virtually cemented into place by mounting layers of federal, state, and local programs and policies—these important questions are seldom asked.

State and district leaders must define what students need to know and be able to do and what forms of evidence will be required.

Worse than suppressing thoughtful conversation about organizational strategy, though, the burgeoning bureaucracy has created rampant incoherence. With schools viewed simply as buildings in which various programs are implemented, it is little wonder that not enough works together for students.

Here’s a frequent set of observations in a typical U.S. school: A teacher attempting a new instructional strategy she learned about during a drive-by professional development seminar doesn’t have sufficient training to successfully execute the new strategy; a mountain of adopted textbooks offers little support; the daily schedule was developed to support time with various specialists (physical education, music, art, and library), not planning or prep time; and no one else in the building has a clue what she’s doing.

Few, if any, public school districts can be called high-performance systems.

This typical situation illustrates what I will call incoherence and a lack of alignment. I use coherence here to refer to the desirable situation in a school in which everything works together for students and teachers. One senses coherence in a school after visiting several classrooms and observing similar goals, strategies, themes, and instructional materials. This coherence reflects a common intellectual mission, a shared pedagogy, a supportive structure and schedule, and a regularly scheduled time for teachers to work and learn together.

Alignment, the second term, implies that curriculum and instruction are aimed at district and state standards. A good private school might have a high degree of coherence without alignment to state standards. Good charter schools may achieve coherence through unique pedagogies and structures and still be aligned with state standards.
Although centralization is emerging as the new conventional wisdom, a variety of approaches have recently been attempted or advocated. The following four strategic choices are representative of the continuum:

1. **Fully centralized system.** Superintendents can attempt to rapidly drive instructional improvement in the schools with common pedagogy, curriculum, school structure, and type of professional development.

2. **Centralized system with local variations.** The most common strategy used today is a standards-based curriculum and shared support services, with locally adopted variations on schedules, themes, and so on. Most urban districts fall into this category.

3. **Differentiated management.** Cincinnati takes a portfolio approach by dividing schools into five categories according to a variety of performance indicators. High-performing schools receive autonomy, moderate performers receive assistance, and low performers receive prescriptive direction and are closed and replaced if they do not improve. During Gerry House's term as superintendent in Memphis, individual schools adopted evidence-based models with associated support services.

4. **Charter district.** Such districts provide a system of choice in which diverse schools operate under performance contracts with local community boards.

The first two strategies are attempts to build effective “school systems”; the last two are efforts to encourage diverse “systems of schools.” Whether a system is centralized or not, it takes the school board, senior district staff, unions, business and civic leaders, and parents and students working together to make the schools work. Radically changing the way a school system operates takes an act (or many acts) of heroic leadership and a reshaping of virtually all the agreements between the district and schools, as well as many of the basic agreements within schools. Making any system work appears to take a sustained effort of at least a decade, with concerted efforts to broaden the leadership and ownership at all levels.

When Rudy Crew, the former chancellor of the New York City Schools, was superintendent in Tacoma, WA, he told people there that he and the board defined “what” students needed to know and the schools defined “how” students would learn it. With two interlocking circles, which intersected in the area of negotiated support services, he gave staff members a simple explanation of his vision of how the system should work. Whatever the organizational strategy, it appears critical that system leaders be able to describe it in simple terms and support it with consistent organizational behavior.

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**Effective practices** typically evolve over a long period of time in high-functioning, fully engaged systems.

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**ORGANIC OR SURGICAL?**

A second strategic choice revolves around the degree to which a community or district leads the system reform. The choice may simply indicate where the impetus for reform originates—in the boardroom, in the classroom, or in the neighborhood. In practice, this leads to reform that can be, for example, community led (emerging from the work of neighborhood groups and/or churches), community engaged (emerging through dialogue with focus groups over a period of time to in-
volve the community in public conversations about school redesign), community-informed (emerging from strong district leadership and through frequent communication with the community), or district-led (implementing through rapid surgical strikes aimed at instructional improvement).

Many superintendents muddle with an inherited systemic reform agenda that they are unable to clearly articulate. And even if they can, most teachers and principals cannot do so, and others experience a completely different reality. These efforts to create alignment and coherence at scale are based on three rarely challenged assumptions: that coherence can be created across a large system, that designed coherence will be deemed desirable by parents and teachers, and that it will work for all students. It seems likely that each of these assumptions will prove to be only partially true as the standards movement matures.

There may well be a lesson here for everyone attempting to implement “best practices.” Effective practices typically evolve over a long period of time in high-functioning, fully engaged systems. Powerful conversations lead to adult learning, which results in agreements, products, and practices. When particular components are extracted and implemented without the foundational conversations and broad parent–teacher learning, there is a risk that they will be only partially implemented or rejected altogether.

Very bold moves or high-wire acts can meet enormous resistance from teachers and parents. Such attempts will either demonstrate rapid improvement—or be rejected by a new school board (or both). The risk is that a district using this approach will shortcut engagement and become just another modestly successful effort to layer the new model on top of an obsolete system.

WHERE TO START?

Like the answers to the question of how the system should work, the answers to the question of where to start depend on a variety of factors: the superintendent’s life experiences, board opinion, community and union leadership, local tradition, performance levels, and system capacity.

Decisions about organizational strategy not only may be affected by a superintendent’s bias and the most pressing needs uncovered in an initial assessment, but they also may be strongly influenced by politics. The trend toward mayoral control and a growing number of state interventions increasingly expand the number of politicians and political bodies involved in these decisions.

CLOSING NOTE

The lack of strategies that depend on high engagement points to a significant research and development opportunity. The Annenberg Institute for School Reform at Brown University and the Center for Reinventing Public Education at the University of Washington house some of the only people in the country studying the issue of success at scale. The most important question in U.S. education deserves more attention than it is getting. Admittedly, the issue is a big one—one well suited to study by teams of graduate students in several fields (education, political science, sociology, and economics, to name a few) and tailor-made for meta-analysis of various districts’ efforts.

Changing the basic organizational strategy of an U.S. urban school district may be the toughest assignment on Earth. Superintendents must be politically savvy, possess sophisticated consulting skills, and be adept managers of change. Most preparation programs are lacking in all three areas. Superintendents leading large districts must be prepared to design and facilitate the improvement processes of whole systems, and they must be able to develop the political support to sustain them over time.

Superintendents and policymakers who take seriously the issue of success at scale should not have to offer the apology of Nobel prize–winning poet Wislawa Szymborska, “I apologize to big questions for small answers.”

Adapted with permission from Phi Delta Kappan and the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation (Education).

For complete article, please see—

[ about the author ]

Tom Vander Ark is Executive Director of Education for the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation (Education).
In our study of professional development, we have found the formation of relationships, including that between principal and teacher, to be critical to the development of communities of learners and to the potential for professional development to become self-sustaining.

In this article, we describe some of what we learned from engaging with the entire school in professional development focused on the development of children's mathematical thinking. We specifically focus on one principal's attempt to reconstruct supervision to accommodate renegotiated leadership, her school's redirection of school leadership, and the resulting incidental effect on district math standards.

### RECONSTRUCTING SUPERVISION

Ms. J, principal of an urban school, played a major role in supporting innovative professional development in her school. As part of her support, she worked to adapt her practice as principal and reconstructed her teacher supervision and evaluation from the practice of observing classrooms to document teachers' pedagogical practice to detailed conversations with individual teachers about the work of their students. As part of this process, three times during the school year, Ms. J asked each teacher to bring in a set of student work to discuss with her.

"It is hard for a teacher to sit with you one on one and not talk about how he or she can help a child," she explained. "I found that this was a way that I could push them to see what students could do and I could ask them, 'So what are you going to do to help this child?'"

In explaining her change in practice, she noted that she "was dissatisfied with observation because I found that anybody could do anything for an hour, no matter what they were doing on a daily basis. And little of what I saw, or we talked about, ever got to how the students were doing."

In her supervisory conversations with individual teachers about their own students' work, Ms. J and the teacher together detail the student thinking in the work and then "look at the strategies the teachers are using with the students that are doing well and the strategies they are using with the students they are concerned about, and then we talk about what they think they should be doing next."

### GENERATING LEADERSHIP

Often leadership in schools is seen as a teacher taking on a particular type of responsibility or task. Although this occurred as we worked together, what we noticed was that a different form of leadership emerged. Teachers took on the responsibility of speaking out in the professional development meetings in ways that put forth an idea with evidence to back it up. They put themselves and
their students’ work on the table for discussion, and they made their teaching practice public, especially when they wanted to make a particular point that would move the group conversation forward. This required knowledge, skills, and a sense of themselves as school leaders in mathematics education, and they regularly struggled to make sense of their practice with their colleagues.

Teachers found ways of evaluating and justifying practice beyond a general sense that the practice was a “good idea” or was “working.” Teachers learned to detail what a student did to solve a problem and what students’ strategies told them about the students’ mathematical understanding. They could use these details to argue about when to teach the algorithm or when to move on to a new mathematical idea.

Teachers engaged in inquiry as they shared student work. Although initially not all teachers engaged in inquiry (or engaged consistently), a school-wide culture of inquiry based around student thinking developed over time.

Before this collaborative work, teachers’ inquiry around practice had been conducted in isolation—individual teachers working alone in their classrooms. The focus and structures of inquiry afforded opportunities for shared work and the emergence of leadership.

In retrospect, we recognize how redistributed leadership and the different forms it took played a role in the developing community. Particularly, we noticed what can happen when leadership decisions align with the professional development, opportunities for developing leadership allow leaders to be learners, and all members of the community are encouraged in different ways to take on leadership roles (Lord, 1994; Spillane & Thompson, 1997).

Teachers, concerned about these lists of skills, attended the district mathematics curriculum committee meeting and proposed that the district standards be rethought. Surprisingly (to the teachers and the principal), the superintendent and the rest of the committee agreed that the issue should at least be addressed. The teachers took the lead. They told us, “This is it. We can do this. We have to—for us and the kids.” They began by grouping the standards under the grade-level conceptual headings that their school committees had recently identified. They were not worried about being able to come up with a new set of standards. Instead, they were worried about creating a document that would be acceptable to their district colleagues.

They shared their groupings with their colleagues, with the principal, and with the professional development staff. They then made adjustments, practiced presentation of their standards, and took them back to the committee. Through this collaborative work, these teachers ended up not only convincing the curriculum committee to adopt this form of the standards, but also convincing the superintendent and the school board of its value.

Although the process was a challenging one, the teachers were excited about their ability to argue their case. They had evidence from their classrooms and research they themselves had done in their classrooms that suggested that their new version of the standards would be more helpful to teachers and a better fit for the development of their students’ mathematical thinking—and they had research to back it all up.

When the district later adopted the teachers’ adaptation of the standards, the teachers understood that they had had the knowledge to make their voices heard.
They realized that they had been effective in changing the district standards because they had known exactly what they wanted and had been able to articulate and to support their reasoning.

We note that these teachers not only took on a new role and set of responsibilities, but did so within a very political climate. The teachers had to participate in political arguments about what was and was not good for students in mathematics, and they had to figure out how to get their points across without sounding dogmatic.

Often the teachers came back after a meeting and tried out ways of presenting their arguments. They took on the stance of expert in a way that they did not have to or want to within their school, but in working with the district committee, they saw themselves as representing what they and the colleagues at their school considered important for students to learn about mathematics.

These teachers were passionate about district-level work because they were addressing a particular issue that had an impact on student achievement and because they believed they had expertise to offer.

**CONCLUSIONS**

The school remained a thriving community of inquiry long after the professional development formally ended. That it did so suggests that no professional development list of best practices, even those that include engaging teachers in inquiry, focusing on students’ mathematical thinking, and attending to the developing community of practice, alone provides enough guidance or detail in designing and implementing a professional development program.

Any list of best practices can be construed and detailed in ways consistent neither with theories of practice nor with the local situation. In either case, such a list can lead to less than successful professional development.

These teachers not only took on a new role and set of responsibilities, but did so within a very political climate. The teachers had to participate in political arguments about what was and was not good for students in mathematics, and they had to figure out how to get their points across without sounding dogmatic.

What happened at this school had to do with teachers inquiring consistently and specifically about their practice with their colleagues. Teachers began to see themselves as a part of a community where they worked together on their practice. They realized that they could put forth a reasoned argument supported by evidence they themselves collected about why a particular approach was, or was not, a good idea. They found ways to talk with each other about disagreement and ways to theorize together about student thinking.

In other words, they came to see themselves as learners, as collaborators, as researchers, and, finally, as leaders.

What happened through this professional development study gradually permeated many school practices. It also led to the recognition of, and the support for, informal and formal leadership at all levels, including that taken by individual teachers in their workgroup conversations. What happened evolved (and continues to evolve) because of the people and their relationships.

**AUTHOR NOTE**

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For further discussion of this case study, please see—

**REFERENCE**


[about the authors]

**Megan Loef Franke** is associate professor in the Graduate School of Education and Information Studies at the University of California–Los Angeles.

**Elham Kazemi** is assistant professor in the Department of Curriculum and Instruction at the University of Washington.

**Jeffrey Shih** is assistant professor in the Department of Curriculum and Instruction at the University of Nevada–Las Vegas.

**Stephanie Biagetti** is assistant professor in Teacher Education at California State University–Sacramento.

**Daniel Battey** is postdoctoral fellow at the University of California–Los Angeles.
The difficulty of raising expectations within a large urban high school is likely to be lessened if teachers, students, and the principal work in unison. Effective school reforms are typically team efforts, dependent for success on the cooperation and initiative of many. Creating and empowering teacher teams is essential, and keeps decisions about reform in the hands not only of administrators, but also of those working directly in classrooms with students.

Improvement of the nations’ high schools through reorganization into smaller learning communities is a significant national school reform effort supported by funding from the U.S. Department of Education. The Comprehensive Center–Region VI (CC–VI) at the University of Wisconsin–Madison, through the Northwestern Educational Laboratory, works with the Midwest high schools and districts funded by the Department of Education to initiate small learning communities. (Other educational assistance agencies, primarily the regional education laboratories, work with schools in other parts of the country.)

In conducting site visits, often as the first step in providing help to these schools, we focus our observations on the development of characteristics commonly found in the most successful small learning communities:

- Has the school succeeded in personalizing the school environment so that all students feel a sense of belonging? Do students feel that their teachers care about their progress?
- Are all students held to high expectations? Do students know what is expected of them? Are all students receiving high quality instruction?
- Are teachers organized into teams that have autonomy? Are the teams empowered to make important decisions about student discipline, the curriculum, and instructional practices? Do teams feel accountable for results?
- Are the teachers involved in an inquiry approach to their professional practice? Are teachers engaged in a cycle of continuous improvement? Do teachers use and discuss data to determine students’ needs and to measure the success of their teaching?

REORGANIZING EAST HIGH

Three years ago, all five high schools in Des Moines, IA, embarked on major school reform efforts that called for reorganization of all the ninth-grade programs into smaller learning communities. Site visits during the third year of high school reform revealed that, although the five high schools had had equal opportunity to implement small learning communities, East High School had excelled not only locally, but even within the larger field of sites that receive U.S. Department of Education Small Learning Community grants.

Although at several of the Des Moines schools the ninth grade had not yet reorganized within that time, at East the freshman class was functioning as four “houses,” each made up of 125 (randomly selected) students. Each group of 125 students shared five teachers, representing English, social studies, math, science, and special education.

The East teacher teams had developed professional community. Teachers articulated a sense of shared ownership for the overall success of the 125 students in their charge. They shared information about ways to be successful with individual students and collaborated to dovetail the curriculum across academic subjects. With student literacy a district-wide goal, improving literacy was viewed as a priority across teams. East had also incorporated a flexible, one-hour block of time every other school day, during which teachers and ninth-grade students could work in small groups or one-on-one to personalize and customize activities and instruction.

East’s transformation had been rapid and successful. In our site visits, we documented and later analyzed this process of reform. In the rest of this article, we describe the experience of this school community and discuss the reasons for the success of this school’s reform.

ASSESSING THE NEED FOR SCHOOL REFORM

Iowa’s ACT scores are generally among the best in the nation, and Iowans are proud of their educational system. Yet, with a deeply entrenched tradition of local school control and decentralized
At East, professional practices were to be evaluated using a common standard, “Is it in the best interest of the students?”

Mr. Lee also visibly held himself to rigorous professional obligations. Rain or shine, in the mornings as staff and students arrived and in the afternoons as they walked out the doors, he was outside the building, smiling, greeting, listening, responding to concerns and making certain that the school was “a welcoming place for kids and teachers.” He was in the hallways during class change and in the classrooms much of the day, observing, listening, and interacting with students and staff about classroom activities and discussions.

Mr. Lee also made sure he ran interference for his staff. When, for example, a teacher who pointed out to a parent that the tube tops her daughter wore to school were no longer considered appropriate dress, Mr. Lee intervened in the resulting blow-up, personally taking responsibility for the decision and absorbing the impact of the mother’s anger. A parent could discuss the matter with the teacher involved, but only after emotions had calmed—“I’ll never turn an irate parent loose on a teacher.” Generally, Mr. Lee would remain to mediate and to guide these conversations to a constructive conclusion. By working to keep his teachers from being blind-sided...
by parents, he visibly displayed his support of their work. His actions reinforced teachers’ emerging trust of his policies and decisions.

Being principal entails an obligation to be consistent in dealings with staff and students, regardless of their status in the school. Staff and students noted that the principal’s tone of voice showed equal respect for student, teacher, or non-teaching staff. Such consistency was also evident in his simultaneous establishment of a dress code for students and faculty (though in the school setting, teachers were often held to a higher expectations than students). Although at times Mr. Lee’s belief in the need for consistency led him, in the view of some students and teachers, to interpret standards a bit too strictly, the intrinsic fairness and consistency of his decisions allowed even those of his staff and students who sometimes disagreed with him to respect his choices.

Expectations tied to accountability also affected the students, who were now expected to be not only consistently civil but also polite. Aggressive verbal behavior—threats and foul language—had been a problem. The school community requested cooperation from the police, who began issuing disorderly conduct citations, including a fine, to student offenders. After four citations were issued, the verbal aggression dissipated. There have been no further citations.

### ROOTING POLICY IN THE BEST INTERESTS OF THE STUDENTS

Expectations less concrete, but perhaps more fundamental to the success of reform efforts, were also put into place. The expectation that school decisions and the actions of teachers would be premised on the best interest of the students was clearly more abstract and, therefore, more likely to be subject to interpretation. Nevertheless, this expectation proved to be the cornerstone of efforts to improve the high school.

One incident relating to “the students’ best interest” entered into teacher folklore. The principal had made it a practice to enter classrooms frequently during the day to observe classroom atmosphere and quality of instruction. Sometimes he would follow up on a brief classroom visit with a note to the teacher, often showing appreciation for a job well done. In this particular case, the teacher was not doing well in terms of practices considered in the students’ best interest.

Mr. Lee made several visits, observing, offering suggestions, and attempting to engage the teacher in discussions about ways to improve. When this process did not lead to any attempts to change, Mr. Lee wrote up an informal evaluation that addressed the major issues in the teacher’s practice. When discussing these issues with the teacher did not open the evaluation to any possibilities of change, Mr. Lee told the teacher, “If you’re not willing to work with me on this, then sign it.” The informal evaluation became official, and the teacher resigned. The school-wide expectation that teachers were to make decisions in the best interest of the students trumped any lingering belief that school administrators would support their teachers at the expense of students.

Within the school culture, this and similar incidents actually served as a powerful statement about expectations and fairness. Generally, by the time the principal finally initiated a formal evaluation, the criteria for that evaluation were not a surprise, and the teacher had had substantial opportunity to demonstrate progress. When teachers are given reasonable opportunity to improve and the criteria on which they are evaluated are laid out in advance and thoroughly discussed, teachers view the evaluation as credible, and, importantly, they come to trust the school’s process of evaluation and view themselves as respected professionals.

### GROUNDING SCHOOL REFORM

Changes at East began in ways that communicated strong concern for students, high expectations for all, credibility and consistency, trust in staff and students, and fairness. These elements helped lay the groundwork for school change, but other events directly grounded the actual reorganization of the ninth grade.

Before coming to East, Mr. Lee had worked in middle schools where he had seen the effectiveness of interdisciplinary teaching teams working with designated, small groups of students and had witnessed teacher collaboration in the creation and
implementation of curriculum and their active sharing of perspectives on the needs of the students in their charge.

A small cadre of East teachers had previously created two ninth-grade “houses”—small, somewhat self-contained ninth-grade programs that no longer existed, but that had been successful. Several of these teachers volunteered to be on the planning group that later detailed the ninth-grade reorganization. Mr. Lee also invited former colleagues who had worked on such teams to join the East faculty. One, Dawn Stahly, eventually became the ninth-grade vice principal; another, Deb Markert, became the coordinator of the school’s efforts to restructure the ninth grade. Both of these educators became leaders of the committee that developed the plan for the reorganization of the ninth grade and were two of the plan’s strongest advocates.

Members of the planning group committee kept conversation about the possibility of reorganizing the ninth grade alive in the school’s hallways and cafeterias. For his part, Mr. Lee continued to spend his mornings and part of his afternoons greeting, building relationships, and discussing the committee’s focused ideas with both teachers and students.

**EMPOWERING THE FACULTY**

Effective school reforms are typically team efforts, dependent for success on the cooperation and initiative of many. Creating and empowering teacher teams is essential, and keeps decisions about reform in the hands not only of administrators, but also of those working directly in classrooms with students.

Deb Markert’s experience is an excellent example of the empowerment of East’s teachers. Recruited from a middle school, she brought with her knowledge related to the benefits of small high schools as well as nine years’ experience with team teaching. She joined the planning committee and was eventually selected as the coordinator for the ninth-grade reorganization project.

During her first year as coordinator (with a reduced teaching load), she had much contact with Mr. Lee, picking his brain for ideas and sharing her own. At this time, her contacts with the principal served as a kind of “safety net.” Sometime early in her second year as coordinator, the teachers began viewing her as a person who could speak for the school on important issues and decisions. She, along with Ms. Stahly attended team meetings, observed classes, and provided consultation to students and teachers—responsibilities that greatly contributed to the successful creation of smaller learning communities in the ninth grade.

Consistent with the goal of empowerment and teacher assumption of broader responsibilities, teams at East began collaborating to use data to determine what to teach and to measure student progress. The focus on literacy, for example, became a collaborative team effort. Strategies and plans for attaining student literacy were discussed in team meetings; on some teams, teachers began to measure “value-added achievement” in reading by giving pre- and posttests to students. In addition, teams began taking on new responsibilities for student behavioral problems and attendance, and started to confront issues directly with students and to schedule parent conferences during teachers’ joint planning time. As a result, grade-level principals and the coordinator were freed to take part in team meetings dealing with curriculum and instruction

**When given reasonable opportunity to improve—and the evaluation criteria are laid out in advance and thoroughly discussed—teachers view evaluation as credible, come to trust the process, and view themselves as respected professionals.**

At East, the successful transformation resulted from collaborative professional development and the creation of teacher community.
and to be focused on the few remaining, and most difficult, problems that affected students.

MOVING PAST GRIDLOCK

Decision making is difficult in large high schools. Traditions are powerful, precedents are often long standing, and academic departments and the sheer size of the teaching staff often serve as powerful influences that contribute to gridlock and protect the status quo.

At East, the planning committee reviewed and presented educational research suggesting that student performance would improve if the ninth grade was reorganized into smaller learning communities. In spite of the evidence presented, there was resistance to the committee's proposal. Some ninth-grade teachers simply did not want to be members of teaching teams. Some upper-grade teachers argued that ninth-grade teams extended a middle-school idea into the high school and would "delay the maturity of the students." Even with a district mandate, the efforts of a school committee made up primarily of teachers, and the active support of most of the faculty, there was no consensus on the changes proposed.

In the ensuing discussion across the school, the detractors were challenged to "Show why the proposed changes are not in the students' best interest." Without a consensus, either decision—to implement the committee's proposal or to maintain the status quo—would be controversial. In addition, because the decision to implement small learning communities would affect jobs and the restructuring also meant that the student–teacher ratio in the upper grades would be increased, the discussion was highly charged.

In the absence of consensus, critical decisions about the school's direction fell to Mr. Lee. Going against long-standing patterns and practices was not easy. His decision to go forward with the change carried dramatic implications for the ninth-grade teachers, whose options were to accept and support the changes, or request a transfer either to the upper grades or to another school.

Without a school first having built strong elements of community, implementing such a sudden change would entail great risk and be less likely to succeed. Teachers can sabotage a principal's decisions by implementing them only half-heartedly, perhaps hoping that a lack of success will reverse the decision and return the school to "normal." At East this was not the case.

Creating and empowering teacher teams is essential, and keeps decisions about reform in the hands not only of administrators, but also of those working directly in classrooms with students.

Though the decision fell to Mr. Lee, the teachers who implemented the reforms gave them solid support.

Once the ninth-grade smaller learning communities were under way, related decisions were less controversial, apparently reflecting the East faculty's commitment to success of the reform. The district allocated East High a 23-classroom annex to house students displaced by major reconstruction in the main building. The school, with broad support, designed the annex as a ninth-grade facility, thus creating a separate site for the reorganization that, for students, has since become a secure home base. The proximity of the annex to the main high school building also allowed students access to important opportunities in the larger high school and paved the way for their 10th-grade transition to the main building.

The ninth-grade teachers, also housed in the annex, used the relocation as an opportunity to build a strong professional community with a healthy esprit de corps. This decision made a significant contribution to the program and is a prime example of the importance of focusing—in this case focusing building resources—to ensure the success of a new reform.

SOWING THE SEEDS OF CHANGE

At East, the successful transformation resulted from collaborative professional development and the creation of teacher community. Such professional development often little resembles formal profes-
“Home-grown” professional development efforts dramatically transformed East High in ways that were highly visible and that became embedded in the day-to-day workings of the school.

The notion of professional development carried out primarily by teachers themselves through team collaboration, even with the sustained support of building level administrators, may appear to some to carry insufficient guidance. Yet these unlikely “home-grown” professional development efforts dramatically transformed East High in ways that were highly visible and, very importantly, that became embedded in the day-to-day workings of the school.

What does East’s experience say to educators with limited professional development funds who want to successfully transform their schools? What we observed at East High suggests the following:

- **Create a clear, focused agenda.** East’s approach to reform was described in several staff interviews as “highly focused.” When Mr. Lee became principal, he rapidly established an agenda for high expectations and change premised on professionalism and strong concern for students, recruited new staff with team experience, and supported the empowerment of teams composed of these new teachers and existing faculty who had the experience, skills, and knowledge important for this particular reform.

- **Build trust.** In his visibility throughout the school, Mr. Lee defined the principal’s role as one of engagement and honest concern about the lives of his students and staff. As East’s agenda unfolded, he concentrated on being open about his goals, credible, consistent, and fair. Professionally and personally, the principal built trusting relationships that inspired school loyalty and support for the school’s new direction.

- **Build human capital.** At East, the skills of key personnel, who had previous experience with smaller learning communities, were recognized and utilized. Efforts were made to recruit outside personnel who already had experience with team teaching. These and other teachers who had volunteered to work on development of smaller learning communities—some actually skeptics—were supported, encouraged, and empowered to become a leadership team.

- **Turn obstacles into opportunities.** The renovation of the high school legitimately could have delayed the ninth-grade reorganization. As part of the school renovation, the district had committed to building an adjacent annex building to house classrooms displaced by construction in the school. Instead of moving classes at all grade levels out of the building as individual classrooms were affected (often the “normal” procedure) and delaying the transformation into smaller learning communities, the faculty at East decided to use the annex as a ninth-grade facility, thus also creating a long-term, secure home base for the teachers and students involved in the reorganization.

- **Work toward a school-wide focus on reform.** The school as a whole gave priority to the ninth-grade reorganization, including allowing the ninth-grade teams choice in terms of the location and design of the new annex. School focus on the success of the reform also included making certain
that the ninth-grade teachers had the needed joint planning time and the nearly full-time support of a coordinator to assist them in developing successful teams. As the 2003–2004 school year ended, the Des Moines district was facing hard economic times, and all schools were told they would lose teachers. East was to lose nine positions, again increasing the student–teacher ratio. The increase in the student–teacher ratio could have been muted if the ninth-grade teachers joint planning time was discontinued, but the school made the decision to maintain the joint planning periods because these were seen as critical to the continuing development and effectiveness of the teaching teams.

Under the right conditions, important new strategies can become an integral part of a school program—but in education, like farming, the most important work occurs before the seeds are sown.

Through the groundwork done by principals Tom Lee and Dawn Stahly, teachers like Deb Markert who supported the reforms from the beginning, and the skeptics who challenged the school to refine and defend reforms, East High became a fertile environment for innovation and reform.

Professional development, seen as community, collaboration, and shared leadership embedded in the day-to-day workings of the school and its teachers, provides strong support for a reform or innovation to “take” and to be sustained—and that, to borrow words from Tom Lee, is in the best interest of the students.

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**For further reading, please see—**


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**PRINCIPALS’ CENTERS**

Similar to the professional development of teachers, principals’ professional development must be planned, long-term, embedded in their jobs, focused on student achievement, supportive of reflective practice.

Programs should also provide opportunities to work, discuss, and solve problems with colleagues.

Principals’ centers were designed to provide practicing and aspiring principals the chance to meet in settings to explore and reflect on current school and leadership topics.

Their programs are varied and meet the unique needs of principals through conferences, forums, study groups, workshops, seminars, institutes, and grants to pursue self-designed school-based projects.

Many of the centers are modeled after the Principals’ Center (founded in 1981) at the Harvard Graduate School of Education, the first of its kind dedicated to the professional development of school leaders.

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[ about the author ]

**Cal Stone** is trainer and outreach specialist at the Comprehensive Center—Region VI at the University of Wisconsin—Madison.
U.S. principals are aging, and qualified candidates to fill vacant positions are scarce—regardless of grade level or community. Findings from studies and surveys done in the 1990s by the National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP) found that elementary school principals were retiring early (at an average age of 57), and that as many as 50% would retire by 2000. In a 2002 survey of NAESP principals, 60% of the respondents indicated that they would retire within the next decade. In summer of 2002, the Maryland state department of education reported that they expected 600 vacancies that year.

Principals work long days year round, often logging in evenings and weekends. They deal with teachers, students, school bus drivers, kitchen staff, parents, school board members, district administrators, and the general community. Seemingly tireless, they respond to such concerns as student participation in after-school programs, misbehavior in lunchrooms and hallways, this year’s achievement scores, last year’s maintenance budget, parental reaction to curricula, choice and scheduling of staff development, curriculum development and support, and implementation of local, state, and federally mandated initiatives, among the long list of issues brought to their desks. Responses to surveys of principals, administrators, and superintendents consistently emphasize the principal’s job stress, the quantity of time required for the job, and the insufficient compensation compared to responsibilities.

According to data collected in 2002–2003, the difference between the average salary of new assistant principals and that of highly experienced teachers was as little as 2% percent, and principals made as little as 17% more than relatively experienced teachers. The difference between the salaries of highly experienced teachers and new administrators in some cases reflected no significant salary improvement (Education Research Service data cited in Forsyth, 2003).

Frustration is a large part of the job. With less authority to effect change, principals are held accountable for factors often out of their control. They often need to spend more time on management issues and paperwork than on instructional leadership, and they increasingly need to focus on the issues, implementation, and directives arising from frequent high-stakes testing. Recent surveys of district administrators indicate that many believe there is little likelihood that the general conditions affecting the job of principal will change. In an attempt to ease principals’ time stress and school management overload, schools and districts are experimenting with shared leadership and school administration teams.

In large urban areas, however, what often looms largest is the shortage of principals, in part due to an aging population. More than 40 percent of current New York City principals will be eligible to retire by 2005. In response, the NYC Board of Education has decided to grow their own.

In 2003, the NYC Board of Education supported the creation of the NYC Leadership Academy, a professional development program specifically for principals. The Aspiring Principals Program (developed under the auspices of the Academy) was created to foster the emergence of new principals from among public school employees—teachers, assistant principals, staff developers, and guidance counselors—by immersing them for 15 months into the actual situations experienced by NYC principals. The first class of 77 graduated this summer and began their first jobs as NYC principals in fall 2004.

Response to the new NYC program has been encouraging, but despite these and district and school efforts nationally—and the supportive professional communities emerging through principals’ centers—the shortage of principals and the issue of principal burnout is likely to remain an K–12 challenge into the foreseeable future.

### REFERENCE
Contemporary models of school reform acknowledge the principal as the passport to school success. The modern principal is no longer the “principal” teacher, but rather the manager of an increasingly complex organization. Principals are expected to create a team relationship among staff members, acquire and allocate resources, promote teacher development, improve students’ performance on standardized tests, and build effective community linkages (Drake & Roe, 2002; Pierce, 2000).

In addition to working to meet these already complex demands, principals are supposed to interact with teachers, parents, community members, and students. In many respects, the demands on principals mirror those on teachers who are attempting to become facilitators of students’ learning and are rethinking their notions of content, pedagogy, and assessment (Neufeld, 1997). Strong collaboration and instructional skills have replaced strong bureaucratic skills as important attributes of effective principals (Drake & Roe, 2002; Pierce, 2000).

In addition to working to meet these already complex demands, principals are supposed to interact with teachers, parents, community members, and students. In many respects, the demands on principals mirror those on teachers who are attempting to become facilitators of students’ learning and are rethinking their notions of content, pedagogy, and assessment (Neufeld, 1997). Strong collaboration and instructional skills have replaced strong bureaucratic skills as important attributes of effective principals (Drake & Roe, 2002; Pierce, 2000).

As a result, principals increasingly need professional development opportunities to support their efforts toward school improvement and revitalize their commitment to creating and sustaining positive learning communities (Evans & Mohr, 1999; Foster, Loving, & Shumate, 2000; Neufeld, 1997).

**MODELS OF PRINCIPAL PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT**

Over the years, three different philosophical orientations have increasingly guided the education and professional development of school administrators: traditional management, craft, and reflective inquiry.

**Traditional Management**

In the traditional management model (similar to the university model), principals pursue additional coursework in an area of professional interest, obtain an advanced degree, renew or upgrade their administrative licensure, or accomplish a combination of these objectives (Daresh, 2002; Fenwick & Pierce, 2002).

Participants are exposed to the research base on management and the behavioral sciences, and they learn general principles and specific rules of administrative behavior that facilitate organizational effectiveness and efficiency. Learning activities are institutionally defined and generally not tailored to the specific learning needs of the individual or reflective of his or her specific school context.

Many school districts, professional associations, and other education agencies have in recent years created in-service academies and workshops or seminars, which often have course delivery systems similar to universities and thus can be characterized as modern versions of the traditional model. Content is changed periodically, usually on the basis of needs assessments administered to potential academy participants. This approach is distinct from other in-service models because it is client driven, is of short duration, and tends to deal with a narrow range of topics, or with highly focused topics (Daresh, 2002).

**Craft Model**

In the craft model, the principal is trained by seasoned administrators whom she or he shadows in internships and field experiences. The shadowing permits the principal–observer to see how another principal interacts with school personnel and the public, deals with problems, and responds to crises. In the craft approach, the source of professional knowledge is the practical wisdom of experienced practitioners and the context for learning is a real school setting (Daresh, 2002; Fenwick & Pierce, 2002).
Quality professional development examines best practices, provides coaching support, encourages risk-taking designed to improve student learning, cultivates team relationships, and provides opportunities for reflection and renewal.

Reflective Inquiry Model

In the reflective inquiry model, principals are active participants in their learning and the source of knowledge is in self-reflection and engagement. Principals are encouraged to reflect on their values and their beliefs about their roles as school leaders, to take risks and explore new skills and concepts, and to apply their new knowledge and skills in real school contexts.

Networking, mentoring, and reflective reading and writing are key components of this approach (Daresh, 2002; Fenwick & Pierce, 2002). The focus is to create principals who are able to make informed, reflective, and self-critical judgments about their professional practice.

CONNECTING PRINCIPALS’ PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT TO SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

According to a policy brief issued by the National Institute on Educational Governance, “preparing current administrators for new modes of leadership will require changes in content and delivery of professional development” (U.S. Department of Education, 1999, p. 10).

If the education charge of the new millennium is to deliver on the promise of a quality education for all children, then a different understanding should guide principals’ preparation and professional development. In order to truly “leave no child behind” and reduce the racial achievement gap, reform efforts should structure schooling as “an opportunity structure.”

People of color and the poor are systematically undereducated in this country. Leadership can play a powerful role in getting the underserved educated. The new professional development model should center learning activities on a conscious equity agenda. When “real problems of real schools” is defined as improving educational outcomes for the lowest-performing students, professional development for principals looks different.

First, those who structure and facilitate professional development programs and opportunities should come from diverse backgrounds.

Second, professional development programs should encourage principals to gain at least a conversational level of fluency in the second or third most prominent language spoken by students in the school district in which the principal serves.

Third, scholarship by Black, Asian, Hispanic/Latino, Native American, and other typically marginalized scholars should be a prominent piece of professional development reading and reflection (Fenwick & Pierce, 2002).

Fourth, principals should learn the knowledge base and technical skills from practitioners, policymakers, and academics who have been successful in resolving educational equity concerns, advancing a social justice agenda, and improving outcomes for underserved children and their communities (Fenwick & Pierce, 2002).

Successful professional development, whether for principals or teachers, takes time. Quality professional development examines best practices, provides coaching support, encourages risk-taking designed to improve student learning, cultivates team relationships, and provides opportunities for reflection and renewal.

Principals and teachers should leave these experiences with a renewed sense of faith in the transformative power of schools in children’s lives.

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REFERENCES


[ about the authors ]

Mildred Collins Pierce is President and Executive Director of the Fund for Educational Excellence and former director of the Principals’ Center at the Harvard Graduate School of Education.

Leslie Fenwick is chair of the Educational Leadership Department at the Clark Atlanta University.
INTERSECTING CULTURE: A CASE STUDY OF PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

[ judith hankes]

Surprisingly little attention has been given to the teaching methods used in teaching ethnic minority students in this country, particularly when the notion of culturally relevant curriculum materials has been around as long as it has. It is as if we have been able to recognize that there are cultural differences in what people learn, but not in how they learn. (Philips, 1983)

Cultural compatibility and, more specifically, culturally compatible teaching methods are critical issues in the professional development of teachers working with students whose family cultures are not reflected in the dominant or majority culture.

This issue grounded my two-year investigation (Hankes, 1998) into the pedagogical compatibility between an Oneida Indian way of teaching and a reform approach to teaching primary level mathematics, Cognitively Guided Instruction (see Carpenter, Fennema, Franke, Levi, & Empson, 1999).

The study involved one kindergarten teacher, an enrolled member of the Oneida Reservation, Oneida, WI, and her class of 17 Oneida children. Over a 2-year period, this teacher participated in two 30-hour reform-type workshops (CGI), observed reform classrooms, and informally discussed reform principles with the researcher while implementing a reform curriculum (CGI) with her students. The study documents the teacher’s shift from culturally insensitive mathematics instruction to culturally responsive instruction through what became culturally sensitive professional development.

Native Americans and Alaska natives have the smallest percentage of secondary and post-secondary students performing at the advanced level in mathematics of all ethnic groups (Hillabrant, Romano, Stang, & Charleston, 1992; Nelson-Barber & Estrin, 1995; Trumbull, Nelson-Barber, & Mitchell, 2002). Yet the 17 Oneida kindergartners in this classroom, when assessed at the end of the study, were demonstrating performance similar to the non-Oneida kindergartners in an earlier CGI study (Hankes, 1998). These findings contradict assumptions of low mathematical aptitude among Native American children.

WALKING THE TALK: TEACHING IN A CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE WAY

Although the participating teacher was a member of the Oneida community, she was initially unable to articulate what an Oneida way of teaching might be. She possessed what Watson (1974) alluded to as "assumptions of everyday life . . . which are so much a part of the culture that they are not even consciously held." The teacher had never been asked to reflect on culturally responsive methods of instruction, and, when asked to, her response was, "I really don't know."

The teacher’s initial inability to reflect on a culturally sensitive way of teaching shifted the study from simply identifying shared methods, such as indirect instruction and cooperative learning, to investigating the deeply held cultural beliefs that informed her instructional practices. The investigation included culture-probing interviews with the teacher as well as with four elder Oneida educators. Interview analysis identified an underlying and unifying belief in spirituality and the divine act of creation. Three related values were also identified: harmony, generosity, and cooperation.

Interview analysis revealed that each informant linked instructional practices such as cooperative grouping, indirect instruction, even trusting the child’s ability to independently problem-solve back to the “Creator’s intended purpose for placing life on the planet.” As one elder educator noted:

The universal truth being that life-producing, life-making is a give-away and a sharing, and we are exemplifying the Creator who did that first when creating and who gave the original instructions that this must continue. . . . The importance of generosity and the importance of cooperation as a human phenomenon allow humans to replicate what is already surrounding us in nature. These behaviors help us fit...
into the interconnected schema … If we don't, things will go out of balance. There will not be harmony.

Interestingly, not until informal discussions with the kindergarten teacher reached this level of culture analysis was she able to reflect on her instructional practices and identify how her values and beliefs informed her teaching. Culture-probing interviews also enabled the teacher to reflect on the reform methods of teaching as she understood them and discuss how they corresponded with culturally sensitive teaching practices. In CGI, her students, she noted, were working on problems in ways similar to the traditional culture:

Children were given responsibilities and jobs that they were able to succeed at or were good at or they had the gifts to do. We believe that the Creator has given everyone some gift and everyone has different ways to do things. That way of teaching is culture, but it's also CGI because kids can solve problems in ways that make sense to them. There's not just one way.

In the classroom, the excitement of solving problems was shared, and problem solving was often cooperative in ways that reflected the children's experience outside of school. When problem solving was an independent activity, children were encouraged to find their own path to an answer, in part, she noted,

Because it's their own thinking. I don't want to say it's not white, that it's not a white man's way of thinking. You give the children the problem. It doesn't matter what tribe or color, and let the children work it out for themselves. This isn't anybody's way. This is the child's way.

She also noted that teaching in this manner meant that she was a guide:

Not telling them ... letting them find their own answers, letting them draw conclusions for themselves. ... Everybody is encouraged to work together. It's not like they are trying to decide who is the best or who is not the best. It's where they are that's important and what they can contribute to the group. That's culture, and I see that in CGI.

Before shifting from this discussion of cultural correspondence (and confirmed similarities) between reform professional development and Oneida beliefs, it is both interesting as well as important to reflect on the philosophical foundations of these two approaches: The Oneida way is grounded in deeply held spiritual values of Indian people; CGI principles are derived from the integration of research-based knowledge constructed by educators within academia. One community believes the learner capable of independent problem solving because that is what humans are created to do; the other believes the learner capable of independent problem solving because that is how human beings construct understanding.

**SHIFTING TO CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE INSTRUCTION**

Although the teacher possessed knowledge about Oneida culture, evaluated her instruction of most other content areas as culturally sensitive, and had been aware for some time that her students were confused and not successful at completing workbook pages, she continued to rely on a text and worksheets.

Though she was an Oneida tribal member and recognized by her community as knowledgeable about Oneida culture, she was unable to teach mathematics in a culturally sensitive way, and she readily admitted that her mathematics instruction mirrored that of the dominant culture. Her lack of mathematical knowledge and knowledge of children's thinking about mathematics forced her to rely on the textbook for instruction. The way she taught replicated the way she had been taught, and, having never developed mathematical understanding, she lacked the necessary knowledge to teach mathematics differently.

My findings suggest that for instruction to be culturally responsive, the teacher must possess both culture and content knowledge. Deep culture knowledge is that latent socially constructed and community-based knowledge that is integral to each person's life but difficult to articulate. It was this knowledge that the teacher had to become conscious of through thoughtful reflection before she was able to consider the cultural compatibility of Cognitively Guided Instruction.

But the teacher also had to become knowledgeable about the mathematics content, and her students' thinking about that content, before she was able to rely on this knowledge to inform her instruction and before she could recognize how processing this knowledge allowed her to teach in a culturally responsive way. Table 1 provides a comparison of the characteristics of three approaches to instruction: that of the dominant paradigm, reform (CGI) philosophy, and an overview of the culture and values background of traditional Oneida teaching methods. Analysis of the chart reveals the compatibility between reform (in this case, CGI) and traditional Oneida teaching methods.

By implementing the reform curriculum throughout the school year, the teacher's understanding of mathematics developed as well as her understanding of her student's mathematical thinking. Additionally, she reflected on how to incorporate Oneida culture into her lessons. She commented, “Now I use literature, integrate math into stories that I read aloud and then ask math questions from. I integrate the culture more. I ask math questions from culture stories.”
Findings of this study are indeed thought provoking. They provide convincing evidence that one Oneida Indian teacher changed her instruction from culturally non-responsive to culturally responsive. The outcome of this change was the documented problem-solving success of her 17 Oneida kindergartners. The teacher attributed her ability to change to the reform curriculum and to her reflection on the culturally based principles that grounded traditional Oneida ways of teaching.

### TABLE 1 Comparison of Instructional Approaches

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Instruction Focus Area</th>
<th>Dominant Culture Beliefs</th>
<th>Reform (CGI) Beliefs</th>
<th>Oneida Culture Beliefs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Role of the Teacher</td>
<td>The teacher generally behaves in a didactic manner, disseminating information to students.</td>
<td>The teacher facilitates student learning by selecting developmentally appropriate lessons. The teacher is a “guide on the side” rather than “sage on the stage” during these lessons.</td>
<td>The teacher guides the student to learn age appropriate tasks. Conversational topics are not controlled by individual speakers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>View of Learner</td>
<td>Students are viewed as blank slates onto which the teacher etches information.</td>
<td>Students are capable of complex problem solving. Learning is a natural and motivational experience.</td>
<td>Each student possesses Creator-given strengths and is born a thinker with a life mission.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Curriculum</td>
<td>Curriculum activities rely heavily on textbooks and workbooks.</td>
<td>Curriculum blends content with meaningful real life situations. In this way, content becomes relevant and helps the learner link knowledge to many kinds of situations.</td>
<td>Lessons relate to real problems that will likely confront the student.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time</td>
<td>The day is partitioned into blocks of time and content coverage. “Time on task” is considered important.</td>
<td>Content is taught through problem solving that might take hours, days, and even weeks.</td>
<td>Instruction/learning is time generous rather than time driven. When an activity should begin is determined by when the activity that precedes it is completed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concept Formation</td>
<td>Concepts are presented part to whole with emphasis on basic skills.</td>
<td>Concepts, procedures, and intellectual processes are interrelated, in a significant sense, “the whole is greater than the sum of its parts.”</td>
<td>All knowledge is relational, presented whole to part not part to whole. Just as the circle produces harmony, holistic thinking promotes sense-making.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student-to-Student Interaction</td>
<td>Students primarily work alone.</td>
<td>Student-to-student interaction is encouraged. Interacting with classmates helps students construct knowledge, learn other ways to think about ideas, and clarify thinking.</td>
<td>Care-taking patterns of extended families and bonded community interactions are replicated in group learning experiences.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assessment</td>
<td>Student assessment is viewed as separate from teaching and occurs almost entirely through testing. Testing often stratifies students and promotes competition.</td>
<td>Decisions regarding students’ achievement are made on the basis of balanced and equitable sources that authentically document performance.</td>
<td>Age and ability determine task appropriateness. Learning mastery is demonstrated through performance. Creator-ordained mission determines one’s role in life and no one mission is better than another. Competition, situating one as better than another, is discouraged.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### REFERENCES


[ about the author ]

**Judith Hankes** is professor of mathematics education at the University of Wisconsin–Oshkosh.
1. ACCORDING TO THE PUBLIC, WHAT IS THE MOST IMPORTANT CHARACTERISTIC FOR TEACHERS TO POSSESS?
   a. Ability to communicate with parents
   b. Thoroughly educated in subject area
   c. Understanding how people learn
   d. Well-trained and knowledgeable about how to teach effectively

   Source:

   See more information about and ordering information for this survey at http://www.rnt.org/channels/clearinghouse/aboutrnt/1561_pubessentialsurvey.htm

2. WHICH STRATEGY DOES THE PUBLIC BELIEVE HAS THE GREATEST POTENTIAL FOR IMPROVING SCHOOLS?
   a. Reducing class size
   b. Recruiting and retaining better teachers
   c. Requiring standardized tests for promotion
   d. Giving greater control to the local level

   Source:
   Teacher Quality: A Review of Existing Data, Belden Russonelio and Stewart, Research and Communications, August 1999.

3. WHAT PERCENTAGE OF THE PUBLIC SUPPORTS SCHOOL–FINANCED PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITIES AS A MEANS OF ATTRACTING AND RETAINING PUBLIC SCHOOL TEACHERS?
   a. 90%
   b. 85%
   c. 70%
   d. 55%

   Source:
   31st Annual Phi Delta Kappa/Gallup Poll of the Public’s Attitudes Toward the Public Schools as reported in Teacher Education Reports newsletter, Vol. 21, No. 16, August 23, 1999, Washington DC: Feistritzer Publications.

   See information about this annual poll at http://www.pdkintl.org/kappan/kpolipdf.htm

4. ACCORDING TO RESEARCH, WHAT SCHOOL INVESTMENT YIELDS THE GREATEST INCREASE IN STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT?
   a. Lowering class size
   b. Increasing teacher salaries
   c. Increasing teacher experience
   d. Increasing teacher education

   Source:
   31st Annual Phi Delta Kappa/Gallup Poll of the Public’s Attitudes Toward the Public Schools as reported in Teacher Education Reports newsletter, Vol. 21, No. 16, August 23, 1999, Washington DC: Feistritzer Publications.

   See information about this annual poll at http://www.pdkintl.org/kappan/kpolipdf.htm

5. ACCORDING TO THE NATIONAL CREDIBILITY INDEX, WHICH OF THE FOLLOWING PEOPLE IS THE MOST BELIEVABLE WHEN SPEAKING OUT ON PUBLIC ISSUES?
   a. Member of the Armed Forces
   b. Teacher
   c. Community activist
   d. National expert

   Source:
   Teacher Quality: A Review of Existing Data, Belden Russonelio and Stewart, Research and Communications, August 1999.

   See information about the National Credibility Index at http://www.stonypoint-pr.com/credibility_index.htm

6. ACCORDING TO RESEARCH BY RON FERGUSON, WHICH FACTOR CONSTITUTES 44% OF THE IMPACT ON STUDENT LEARNING?
   a. Class size
   b. Qualifications of teacher
   c. Family involvement and support
   d. Socioeconomic status of family

   Source:

7. WHAT PERCENTAGE OF THE PUBLIC BELIEVES WE SHOULD INCREASE FUNDING FOR PROGRAMS TO KEEP TEACHERS UP TO DATE?
   a. 35%
   b. 50%
   c. 66%
   d. 70%

   Source:

   See the entire survey at www.pta.org/programs/parentsur/summary.htm#results

8. WHAT PERCENTAGE OF TEACHERS BELIEVE THAT PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS “GENERALLY WASTE THEIR TIME”?
   a. 10.5%
   b. 27.4%
   c. 41.7%
   d. 64.7%

   Source:

   See information about the Schools and Staffing Survey at http://nces.ed.gov/surveys/sas/
9. WHICH OF THE FOLLOWING STRATEGIES DID SUPERINTENDENTS AND PRINCIPALS IDENTIFY AS THE MOST EFFECTIVE FOR IMPROVING TEACHER QUALITY?
   a. Reducing class size
   b. Increasing teacher salaries
   c. Increasing professional development opportunities for teachers
   d. Requiring secondary level teachers to major in the subjects they are teaching


10. ACCORDING TO THE SEPT. 2000 GALLUP POLL, WHAT PERCENTAGE OF THE PUBLIC FEELS THAT THE STRATEGY WITH THE MOST PROMISE FOR IMPROVING ACHIEVEMENT IS ENSURING THAT THERE IS A QUALIFIED AND COMPETENT TEACHER IN EVERY CLASSROOM?
   a. 10%
   b. 17%
   c. 39%
   d. 52%

   Source: 32nd Annual Phi Delta Kappan/Gallup Poll (Sept. 2000).

11. OF THE FOLLOWING, WHICH ASPECT OF TEACHING IS MOST IMPORTANT TO STUDENTS?
   a. Caring about students
   b. Believing all children can learn
   c. Knowing the subject areas
   d. Maintaining discipline in the classroom


12. ACCORDING TO TEACHERS, WHAT IS THE NUMBER ONE REASON FOR PROFESSIONAL GROWTH?
   a. To improve student achievement
   b. To improve teaching skills
   c. To network
   d. To advance one's career

   Source: A National Survey of Teachers was conducted by Washington-based Greenberg Research, Inc. and the Feldman Groups with support from the NEA Research Department and NFIE.

13. WHAT PERCENTAGE OF TEACHERS BELIEVE THAT WEEKLY SCHEDULED COLLABORATION WITH OTHER TEACHERS IMPROVES THEIR CLASSROOM TEACHING?
   a. 62%
   b. 72%
   c. 82%
   d. 92%


14. WHAT DO PRINCIPALS BELIEVE IS THE MOST IMPORTANT ROLE OF A PRINCIPAL?
   a. Maintaining discipline and safety
   b. Creating a supportive environment for teaching and learning
   c. Supporting parents' involvement in their children's education
   d. Managing the school's budget and obtaining additional funds


15. WHICH STRATEGY DO PRINCIPALS BELIEVE IS MOST EFFECTIVE FOR RECRUITING AND RETAINING TEACHERS?
   a. Providing financial incentives
   b. Providing mentoring and ongoing support for new teachers
   c. Involving teachers in the creation of policies that they will be implementing
   d. Providing career growth opportunities


16. WHICH PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT ACTIVITY DO MOST TEACHERS FEEL IMPROVES THEIR TEACHING?
   a. New methods of teaching
   b. Integration of education technology in their grade or subject
   c. In-depth study in the subject area of their main teaching assignment
   d. Student performance assessment


17. WHICH PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT ACTIVITY DID THE MOST TEACHERS PARTICIPATE IN DURING THE LAST 12 MONTHS?
   a. Regularly scheduled collaboration with other teachers
   b. Networking with teachers outside their school
   c. Individual or collaborative research
   d. Common planning period for team teachers

18. WHAT PERCENTAGE OF PUBLIC SCHOOL TEACHERS BELIEVE THAT BEING MENTORED FORMALY BY ANOTHER TEACHER AT LEAST ONCE A WEEK IMPROVES THEIR CLASSROOM TEACHING MODERATELY OR BETTER?

a. 58%
b. 68%
c. 78%
d. 88%

Source: 

See information and reports from the Fast Response Survey System at [http://nces.ed.gov/surveys/frss](http://nces.ed.gov/surveys/frss)

19. ACCORDING TO THE 2001 NATIONAL BOARD OF CERTIFIED TEACHERS LEADERSHIP SURVEY, WHAT PERCENTAGE AGREE THAT THEY ARE SATISFIED WITH THE QUANTITY AND QUALITY OF ON-GOING PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITIES IN THEIR SCHOOLS?

a. 70%
b. 60%
c. 50%
d. 40%

Source: 

See highlights from the Leadership Survey at [http://www.nbpts.org/pdf/leading_from_the_classroom.pdf](http://www.nbpts.org/pdf/leading_from_the_classroom.pdf)

20. ACCORDING TO THE EDUCATIONAL TESTING SERVICE’S 2000 REPORT, HOW TEACHING MATTERS, ALL OF THE FOLLOWING INCREASE STUDENT OUTCOMES IN SCIENCE EXCEPT:

a. Major/minor in science/science education
b. Professional development in laboratory skills

c. Professional development in classroom management

d. Using frequent tests
e. Hands-on learning

Source: 

Download this publication at [www.ets.org/research/pic/teamat.pdf](http://www.ets.org/research/pic/teamat.pdf)

Additional Source: 

**NATIONAL STAFF DEVELOPMENT COUNCIL: A BACKGROUND**

The National Staff Development Council (NSDC) is the largest nonprofit professional association committed to ensuring success for all students through staff development and school improvement. The Council views high quality staff development programs as essential to creating schools in which all students and staff members are learners who continually improve their performance.

NSDC has published three sets of standards to guide school-based staff development at the elementary, middle, and high school levels. The standards are intended to be used by schools and school districts to improve the quality of their staff development efforts so that student learning will be increased. Based on the belief that “improvement is always unfinished,” these standards can be used to stimulate discussion and analysis that leads to greater staff development effectiveness no matter what the current level of performance.

To view NSDC standards and other staff professional development materials on such topics as smaller learning communities, family involvement, and school leadership, please visit [http://www.nsdc.org](http://www.nsdc.org).
A Last Word . . . From the Director

Within the next six months or so, 10 new technical assistance centers will be selected from nation-wide applications, and the 15 present Comprehensive Centers will close, at least in their current formations.

The new Regional Advisory Committees have been appointed, had their initial meetings, and begun their first task of needs assessment. At the time of this publication, the Request for Proposal (RFP) guidelines have not been published, and we do not yet know the specifics of the new competition.

Research has been the foundation of professional development services provided by CC–VI. We anticipate that the new centers will continue to help schools implement the No Child Left Behind Act— and will actively continue our work in building bridges between best practices based on years of classroom experience and validated, evidence-based research.

Here in Region VI, based at the University of Wisconsin–Madison, we have concentrated on the professional development of teachers and principals, with the objective of improving the learning process for all children. It is fitting, therefore, that the last issue of these monographs be about professional development.

— Audrey M. Cotheman