Prologue

This book presents an inquiry into professional development aimed at sorting out its varieties, the organizational processes designed to make them work, and the effects they can have when they are implemented properly.

We have assembled information from four sources:

First is the set of commonly used models of professional development; we find them in practice and in books and articles describing and advocating them.

Second are sources of data about professional development and its organizational context. These take the form of reports of formal research, descriptions of action research and evaluation of particular approaches, and reports of practice. Studies of learning by educators and effects on student learning are a small but highly important source.

Third are studies of the intricate layers of the organizations in which staff development models are sheltered and where healthy nests need to be developed if any model is to succeed.

Fourth are reports of rarely used but promising models, ones we can project as feasible on a larger scale.

Altogether the results of our inquiry amount to a description of the current models of staff development, potential future ones, and a consideration of the organizational characteristics that need to be addressed to bring any of them to life.

The Strength of the Knowledge Base

Candidly, research on professional development is in its infancy, although formal research began to appear 30 years ago. However, the

field has not attracted programmatic researchers—those who pick up a model and conduct a series of studies to generate precise information about its effects and how to reshape it for greater effect. Related fields have yielded relevant information—for example, there is a large body of research on various models of teaching and teaching practices—but the important related fields of school improvement and organizational development have not attracted much programmatic research either.

Conducting research on staff development is technically demanding for several reasons, which we can illustrate by considering the evaluation of any particular approach or model:

First, quality of implementation becomes a factor. A potentially effective model comes to life in the complex organization of schools and schooling and has to be of high quality if it is to be fairly evaluated. For example, during the development of professional learning communities in a large school district, the quality of the organizational climate of the schools can vary considerably. In some poor climates, the communities may not develop at all. In others, thriving communities may develop. The researcher has to contend with variance in implementation.

Second, where effects on student learning are important, the effects on educators have to be studied first. And there is almost surely variance in what the educators learn and implement that has to be measured if effects on students are to be assessed.

Third, a number of models of staff development are designed to help teachers alone, in groups, or in faculties to generate their own directions for growth. And those will not be identical. Essentially, the teachers and administrators will legitimately go in many directions. When that happens (and it should happen if the model does its job), the growth of neither teachers nor students can be specified and measured in advance.

Fourth, the various models have somewhat different objectives—they are directed toward different aspects of educator behavior. Consequently, comparative studies are difficult. No single dependent variable (such as the use of a new teaching practice) covers the objectives of all the models.

These considerations and the relatively small amount of programmatic research combine to make general assessments of staff development very difficult. Those who hope to do a meta-analysis of the

research literature and come up with a series of best options will be disappointed. But we are confident that many fine options for staff development exist. And there are enough data to allow us to be optimistic.

When we bring the scattered evidence together, we can conclude with confidence that teachers (and principals) have wonderful learning capacity and can learn from a variety of models. Far more important than a hunt for what model is most effective is a storehouse of models that can work well if properly implemented. Poor implementation can make any model ineffective. Conversely, a good learner does not make a poor approach effective.

Thus our contention that the critical question with respect to research on staff development is "What is good for what?" Because the likely outcomes from the various families of models can be significantly different, the big question is less "What works best?" than "What do I want to achieve?"

The knowledge base will get better. Efforts to survey the existing evaluations, studies, and relevant work from school renewal are increasing. For example, the recent effort for the National Staff Development Council by a team headed by Linda Darling-Hammond is particularly important for its breadth and because it should engender serious discussions about what is known and the kinds of studies that are badly needed (see Darling-Hammond, Wei, Andree, Richardson, & Orphanos, 2009).

Within the following chapters, we have included detailed descriptions of several studies where we have collaborated with school districts to evaluate intensive professional development programs and conduct research within them. These are included because they illustrate the complexity of embedded formative and summative studies. They all illustrate how the lines between evaluation and research become blurred as schools and school districts address their practical need to assess their efforts and have to explore theoretical issues when they innovate in staff development and school renewal.

What Makes a Model of Professional Development?

A model is a prototype, a pattern that, in education, can be used to create an environment for learning. Polished, a model takes on aspects of the ideal: at least a good way of doing things, though not the only way. As we looked at current and recommended practice, we selected as models approaches with the following characteristics:

First, they have a view of how people learn skills, acquire knowledge, and develop beliefs and attitudes. In the literature, the view is sometimes more implicit than explicit, but it is there.

Second, that view is connected to objectives—to particular skills, knowledge, and beliefs that are engendered by the model.

Third, the approach is clear, practical, and, therefore, disseminable.

Fourth, their implementation is measurable—we can document whether the aimed-for objectives are attained and to what degree.

Fifth, if the objectives for educators are believed to connect with student learning, the types of learning can be specified and measured.

These criteria make up the attributes of the types of professional development that we have netted from the literature and our knowledge of practice. As we will see, the models that emerged are not mutually exclusive. They are discernibly different, but they overlap and can even depend on parts of one another.

What makes a family of models? Throughout the book we will use these criteria as we describe families of models and the knowledge underpinning them. What is a family? It is simply a cluster of approaches to staff development that share specific attributes to a considerable extent. The members of a family are not identical, or they would have disappeared into one another, but they are more alike than different.

More about this later as we work through the models and families.

Terms

The language of professional development is not standardized. In these pages we use several terms that frequently have different meanings in various contexts and several different terms that have the same or similar meanings.

Let's begin with . . .

Inservice education, staff development, professional development, and professional learning. Until the early 1970s learning opportunities for educators were called "inservice education." For the most part, university courses were being referred to. Then, "staff development" was invented to refer not only to study in universities but also to opportunities developed and offered by school districts and

states. Today, "professional development" is becoming more common, partly to embrace school-generated opportunities as well as the others. The term *development* bothers some, and we hear "professional learning" in some districts, but it does not have general acceptance. We are happy with both staff and professional development and slide from one to the other.

Repertoire. This term refers to the body of professional knowledge and skill possessed by a practitioner. It can also refer to the body of knowledge of a group of teachers or even a whole staff. The repertoire can range very widely. Some teachers (look at Nancy in Chapters 1 and 2) have many ways of teaching and can draw on them as appropriate. Some have a very limited repertoire. There are many implications for staff development. For example, if a mentor has a limited range but is paired with a mentee with a very large range . . . draw your own conclusions.

Training. Coming out of applied psychology, *training* refers to the conditions that are developed to help someone learn knowledge and skill in some domain of performance—both knowledge and skill are included as objectives. Training methods vary widely, from the nondirective to collective inquiry and to highly sequenced sets of learning activities. In education some believe that the term has negative connotations. We do not. It applies to the education of brain surgeons, rocket scientists, and the tutors of beginning readers. We see it as a generic term with no ideological connotations attached to it.

Recitation. The REALLY TRADITIONAL mode of teaching. Studies of teaching have confirmed what informal observation can ascertain—a pattern of teaching where students are exposed to some content or skill and then questioned about it. The teacher can assign material to be read and then quiz the students—recitation being their response. The research on teaching has indicated that many, probably most, teachers were "brought up" on recitation and that it is the main staple of their repertoire. The implications are important in the planning of staff development. If the providers' primary repertoire is recitation, then that is what their students (your teachers) are exposed to. If it is the primary repertoire of a mentor, then the mentee is pushed in that direction.

Implementation. Important is the distinction between the nominal adoption of a model and *really* doing it. We can see this where districts hire folks who are assigned to "coach" the faculties of

schools but then have to go door-to-door to find teachers who would like to be exposed to their wares. Models come to life when they are implemented. That is, they have a good method, and they are connected with their clients interactively and with enough time to get the job done.

Solving the Time Problem: Something Everybody Has to Do to Ensure Success

In spite of the general agreement by professional educators, the public, and legislative bodies that the health and growth of teachers are basic to the health of schools, existing staff development is crammed into a tiny space of money and time. All approaches labor under these constraints and are hampered by them.

The contrast with some other occupational groups and professions is dramatic.

Let's consider the stories of Ted, Joe, and Amanda. None of them would identify themselves as professional educators. Ted is an accountant. Joe is a dentist. Amanda is a hairdresser. Ted (a practitioner of 40 years) and his primary staff in their firm in Menlo Park, California, attend a monthly one-day seminar and a yearly one- to two-week seminar on the practice of accounting and changes in regulations about taxes. Let's average this out at about 20 days a year. They pay for these seminars themselves, by the way, not to mention days the income lost when they could be selling services but are in study. Joe and his staff in Saint Simons Island, Georgia, study new techniques about 10 to 12 days per year. Amanda, also of Saint Simons Island, travels to Atlanta, Savannah, or Jacksonville for workshops that consume about 10 days per year, days in which she has no earnings but, rather, often pays for the service she receives. She also provides training in her specialties.

Ted, Joe, and Amanda are fine representatives of modern continuing education in their professions. They have good help, and they are not alone as they try to enhance their job-related knowledge and skills. Their occupational groups have tried to connect their practitioners to state-of the-art practice and trends. Lifelong occupational learning is routine for them.

Teaching is quite a different kettle of fish. *Formal staff development for the average practitioner is usually paid for by the organization—the school district*—but occupies only three or four days each year (see Cook, 1997, for a discussion of causes and remedies of the time problem).

And rather than seeking the same types of training as Ted, Joe, and Amanda do, teachers, administrators, and central office personnel express considerable dissatisfaction with the content and process of the workshops that are offered in those few days. For 20 years, authorities in the field have criticized the most common practices—the sets of brief workshops, and, by implication, the people who plan the smorgasbords of workshops—but the time allotment remains unchanged. What is so peculiar is that, in education, the employer pays for development opportunities for most practitioners but is often castigated for what it does, not for the small amount of time paid for but for how teachers, administrators, and central office personnel—the people who plan the workshops—feel about it and its effect on practice. For Ted, Joe, and Amanda, implementation is their responsibility (and all three work in view of colleagues and with them as they try to use new procedures in their workplaces), yet they continue regularly and actively to seek out more development, finding it of value.

A Nagging Thought

Is it possible that much of the perceived weakness in education staff development AND the din of criticism about it are products of its briefness? Would longer, stronger, workshops be both more effective and less criticized? Would a more collaborative workplace generate a more positive climate and greater satisfaction? We believe this is worth thinking about. In our own work where we have helped teachers learn more effective curriculums in the literacy area, the districts and schools have needed to expand greatly the amount of time available for study. In other words, the organizations have invested more heavily in the education of their faculties. How long will that investment be continued? Some of our client-partners have continued to dig down for as much as ten years, but some, generally because a new superintendent is not oriented toward staff development, wind down gradually. We need to spread the word that investment in people is a core, essential expense that strengthens competence and professionalism, builds morale, and lets imaginations soar as we improve and ultimately re-create education.