

IMPLEMENTATION OF STAFF DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM FOR MALAYSIAN SCHOOLS

Rahmad Sukor Ab Samad
Azuraida Shahdan
University of Malaya
rahmad@um.edu.my
azzu@um.edu.my

According to the National Commission on Teaching and America's Future (1996), staff development programs can be defined as ongoing learning opportunities made available to teachers through their school or school district. Notably, the staff development program is one of the effective ways to achieve world-class education. This paper will propose the best practices of Staff Development Program that are appropriate for schools, specifically in the Malaysian context. The focus of this paper is to discuss the six indicators that appear to be the contributing factor for the development of Malaysian teachers. To elaborate, the characteristics of the six indicators include practice and feedback; coaching and expert modeling; instructional leadership; whole school and administrative support; collegiality; and the quality of information presented and demonstrated. There are five important steps required in implementing the staff development program successfully, namely preparation, planning, training, implementation, and maintenance. Significantly, these steps are crucial for staff development program effectiveness.

Keywords: Staff development program, world-class education, expert modeling

Staff development often refers to verbal and tactile skills required for maintaining a specific career path or to general skills offered through continuing education, including the more general skills area of personal development. It can be seen as training to keep current with changing technology and practices in a profession or in the concept of lifelong learning. Developing and implementing a staff development program is often a function of the human resources or organization development department of a large corporation or institution.

Teachers need a wide variety of staff development opportunities. For example, a science teacher might need to attend classes to learn more about the content of the science she is teaching. In addition, she might need other types of staff development to learn better ways to teach that new science material. She might also need to learn more about classroom management techniques, how to incorporate technology into instruction, and how to better address the needs of language minority students in her classroom.

Attending classes, workshops, or conferences is one way that teachers – and other school employees – learn some of what they need to know. But other types of staff development are just as important and, often, more effective than traditional sit-and-get sessions. For example, when teachers plan lessons together or study a subject together, that is a form of staff development. A teacher who observes another teacher teach is also participating in a form of staff development. If a teacher is being coached by another teacher, that is staff development too. Visiting model schools, participating in a school improvement committee, writing curriculum, keeping a journal about teaching practices – all of those can be staff development activities.

Effective school managers provide frequent guidance, coaching and feedback to their staff throughout the year on job duties and responsibilities, performance goals and expectations, progress at meeting goals and performance areas to be developed. The goal of the Staff Development Program is to provide staff members with feedback on their performance and accomplishments for the previous year. The program should also assist staff members in understanding their job responsibilities and supervisor's performance expectations. Performance goals for the upcoming year and specific plans to help staff members meet those goals should also be established through this process. Competencies

which are vital to the staff member's success in the current position and/or will enhance his/her professional development should also be addressed.

The Six Indicators

Considerable interest has been shown and research done on the effectiveness of staff development programs for teachers. Implementing large scale reform requires close attention to the most effective means of improving teaching and student outcomes. Professional development and teacher education have been identified as the essential ingredients in the drive to improve literacy standards, thus this paper will identify some key research findings and policy developments that should inform and guide the design of our staff development programs.

A considerable body of research conducted in a number of different countries established six indicators that appear to contribute to effective staff development programs. This research in continuing teacher professional development is drawn from a paper presented to the British Educational Research Association by Denis Fennessy in August 1998 and a recent publication by Dennis Sparks prepared for the National Development Council in the USA in 2002. Both pieces attempted to analyze the mutual effects of the key indicators that appear to contribute to effective staff development programs.

The information that follows draws on a review of the literature to outline the indicators and key research sources. The six indicators, in no particular order to the relative importance of the different indicators, appear to be determined by context and the purpose of the development. Work has been done to examine the relationships that exist between the indicators, which are practice and feedback; coaching and expert modeling; instructional leadership; whole school and administrative support; collegiality; and the quality of information presented and demonstrated.

Indicator 1: Practice and Feedback

The opportunity to engage in practice and feedback appears to exist in staff development programs when participants have opportunities to practice their new skills (Joyce & Showers, 1988); training and demonstration help participants make connections to their own classrooms (Sparks, 1983); practice helps participants to get a better understanding of implementing new skills (Hall et al., 1985); sufficient time is given to practice skills during training (Joyce & Showers, 1988); and feedback helps participants improve their performance of skills and procedures (Joyce & Showers, 1980).

Indicator 2: Coaching and Expert Modeling

Coaching has for some time been identified as a critical element in successful staff development programs. Several features have been identified in the research as particularly important. The features are: teachers are given feedback on their own attempts to use ideas from the staff development programs (Joyce & Showers, 1988); feedback is designed to build confidence as participants try new classroom practices (Fullan & Promfret, 1977); feedback is sensitive to the characteristics of participant's school and class (Showers & Joyce, 1996); and feedback is given by a person who team teaches with the participants when new ideas are tried (Joyce & Showers, 1995).

Indicator 3: Instructional Leadership

Principals intent on leading sustainable change must understand and be able to lead in ways consistent with the research on leadership best practice. In addition, principals must also be able to build greater capacity to do this work by helping others understand and lead in ways consistent with leadership best practice. The principal should: work directly with the teachers to solve classroom problems when they implement new practices (Van der Vegt & Knip, 1988); become knowledgeable about the ideas promoted by the staff development programs (Little, 1989); monitor the introduction of ideas from staff development programs through classroom observation, reviews of planning, and pupil

performance (Hall, 1988); and support teachers to understand how their staff development programs fit into a shared goal of whole school development (Fullan, 1991).

Indicator 4: Whole School and Administrative Support

This category includes non-classroom based activity, including management structures and decision-making processes identified as influential in supporting staff development programs. Here, it depends on the openness and approachability of the system to teachers wanting to discuss concerns and grievances, apart from the confidence teachers have in the system to be supportive when the going gets tough (Hill, Holmes-Smith, & Rowe, 1993). Besides, staff (teachers perceived to be from the 'chalk face') who are involved and included in determining staff development program priorities for the whole school (Odden & Odden, 1996) are also eligible as one of the contributing factors.

Indicator 5: Collegiality

In-service education programs are likely to have a stronger impact in schools with higher levels of collegiality (Ayling, 1989; Little, 1982). Little, in her study of six schools, identifies the value of collegiality when she concludes that professional development is best achieved when, "Teachers engage in frequent, continuous, and increasingly concrete and precise talk about teaching practice. Teachers plan, design, research, evaluate, and prepare teaching materials together, as well as teach each other the practice of teaching" (Little, 1982).

Indicator 6: The Quality of Information Presented and Demonstrated

The ways in which new information is presented and demonstrated is clearly identified as critical. The use of technology, training techniques, and strategies is aligned to this element of staff development programs. However, five underpinning features appear to be particularly important, which are: (1) the need to introduce teachers to new ideas and skills must be about more than confirming existing practice (Joyce & Showers, 1988, 1995); (2) providing links to relevant research (Nelson, 1992); (3) presentation and demonstration is responsive to participants' existing skills (Fullan, 1991); (4) input is connected to the experiences of practicing teachers; and (5) presentation includes demonstrations of skills that will help participants see how teaching strategies can be implemented (Joyce & Showers, 1995; Sparks, 1983).

Steps in Implementing the Staff Development Program

Basically, certain steps are required in implementing staff development programs. Good professional development design include both strong content and an effective process for making initial and ongoing decisions. Relevant content is essential to ensuring that staff development programs help teachers meet student learning goals. But good staff development program content without a strong decision-making and organizational process to support it will be short-lived. The best steps for successful professional development design are summarized as follows: preparation, planning, training, implementation, and maintenance.

1. Preparation

The first thing to be considered is to decide who is included in decisions. People who have input into the staff development program design process typically include some combination of the following: students, teachers, other staff, parents, principals, district staff development programs' staff, district management (e.g., superintendents), community members, and expert resources (e.g., professors, consultants).

Secondly, decide what types of input each group or person has. The types of input groups or people may have include final decision-making authority; active involvement in developing design details (working team); input of ideas, either up-front or in review of proposed plans; and being

informed about decisions and progress, but with no specific forum for providing input. Schools and districts may use different types of input at different stages. For example, in several award-winning organizations, small teams developed the initial staff development program plan, but many more people participated in ongoing decisions about its specific goals and activities. The breadth of participation and level of decision-making authority for staff development programs typically reflect the overall management structure and approach of each school and district. Organizations with more *centralized* staff development program control tend to be ones with more centralized management, accountability, and budgets. Organizations that put more staff development program control into staff hands tend to have more decentralized management, accountability, and budgets. It is important to note that award winning schools have aligned their staff development programs' decision process with the overall management process.

Thirdly, decide what level of professional development design is affected by each participant group. The levels of professional development design typically are district wide, school wide, team-level (e.g., grade-level teams, content-area teams), and individual.

The fourth element to be considered is how to get and use money well. Award winning organizations generally cited three critical elements for funding staff development programs: focusing on high-impact priorities, spending wisely, and tapping a variety of funding sources. These elements are described below.

- a. Focus resources on the highest-impact priorities.
Many (but not all) award winners said that how they allocated money was almost as critical as how much they had available. These winners were methodical about prioritizing funds, no matter what the source, to focus on high-impact efforts. They focused more of the school's overall budget on professional development and ensured that money went to the highest priority staff development activities first. Winners vary in how they made decisions about staff development program priorities. In some organizations, this decision was made at the district or school level. In others, instructional teams with their own budgets made spending decisions. Most award winners made spending decisions on a combination of levels, typically district, school, and team.
- b. Good at spending money wisely.
For example, more than one winning school collaborated with other schools in the district (or other districts in the state) to provide large-group training with high-quality speakers. Most used some version of a train-the-trainer method, sending staff "stars" in a content area to national conferences and having them share lessons with other staff upon return.
- c. Very good at raising money.
They found a variety of funding sources in addition to regular allocations: corporate foundations and direct corporate funding; private foundations (local, state, and national); federal grants; and budget line items related to staff development programs (e.g., funds allocated for staff planning time). Many said that aggressive grant writing is essential; it forces teachers to make a good plan and it adds money to teachers' budget. Grant-writing resources include district-level staff, teachers (typically on paid release time), and university staff for joint grant applications. These schools used their earlier research to demonstrate the strength of their staff development approaches and to increase chances of obtaining support. Forming a research partnership with a local university or community college to try innovative approaches to staff development programs was a common approach.

The fifth element is to obtain certain expertise. In addition to direct funding, award winning schools sought volunteer or inexpensive expertise. Sources included their own staff, district-level experts,

parents, university faculty, community college faculty, and union staff. Many of these sources also had a mission to train and educate; thus, partnerships helped everyone meet their goals. The last element to be considered is the ability to obtain facilities. Finally, physical space was an asset that some winners sought either to boost staff development programs directly or to save money in other budget areas. Sources included community colleges and universities, local corporate training and retreat facilities, and the local community agency.

2. Planning

The first and most important learning theme from award winners is that they made planning a priority even though it takes time, tremendous mental energy, and coordination of resources. They carved out staff, leader, and volunteer time to ensure that staff development programs focused on the student learning results they really wanted.

In award-winning schools and districts, both student learning goals (educational goals) and staff learning goals (staff development programs' goals) that are further "upstream" drive those "downstream." That is, district educational goals help determine school educational goals, which help determine instructional team educational goals, which help determine student learning goals for individual teachers.

Educational goals target student learning (and sometimes family and community) outcomes. They are driven by a variety of factors, such as selected state or national standards, current achievement level of students, and the school or district educational vision. The goals of staff development programs are the staff learning. They are driven primarily by the gaps between educational goals and actual student learning, the skills that staff members need to close those gaps, and the current staff skill level. Some of the planning that should take place is as follows:

a. Plan professional development content.

The "content" of staff development programs is the topic knowledge, skills, or competencies staff members need to meet PD goals. In other words, this is "what staff members need to know." In award-winning organizations, the content of the staff development program at the district, school, and team levels was driven almost exclusively by its goals and underlying student education goals. The career goals and interests of individual staff members also affected the content of individual development.

b. Plan the professional development process.

Most award winning schools used a two-part process in implementing staff development programs. Part one, the organizing process, is the set of steps staff or others go through to ensure that the right content is addressed and activities are chosen, with all stakeholders involved and informed. Part two is the process used in activities such as workshops, team discussions, observation, and so on. In some cases, the "process" is the "content." One example is when a school's goal is to "integrate staff development programs with daily classroom activity." Teacher teams whose primary mode of staff development is frequent discussion of student performance use this "process" both to learn "integration" and to organize resulting activities. While both parts of the process were seen as important, award winning schools were more focused on making the organizing process a learning event in itself than on ensuring that workshops were well taught. Many noted that even workshops with great "process" were limited (although still useful) in their impact.

c. Plan professional development activities.

Award winning schools used numerous kinds of activities, many of which are not new. The critical factor was that award winners selected activities to meet their school or district's specific goals. They defined development activities to support both their staff development program principles and their specific goals. They also found ways to embed staff development learning into ongoing school

activities and management. One of the critical themes from them is that the very best staff development programs can be quickly applied to daily work in the classroom (or other places that most directly affect students).

3. *Training*

Award winning schools typically organize different activities at different organizational levels. For example, award-winning districts often offer workshops on topics needed by many teachers (or other staff or parents). Districts have the clout and funds to get top-grade speakers and facilitators to serve a large number of district staff at one time. Even then, most award winners have very few mandatory development activities taking place at the district level; typically (although not always), district offerings are voluntary. Individual staff members and their supervisors determine which district offerings fit their needs, based on school goals and the skills that individuals need to develop to meet them. Examples of activities from award winners include:

- a. Team work, including test development, grading, student performance analysis and problem solving, curriculum development, and school management in teams
- b. Curriculum development (requiring research and planning)
- c. Action research (forming and testing a hypothesis in the classroom)
- d. Workshops and conferences
- e. Individual or small-team research (using mini-sabbaticals or other time)
- f. Staff study groups
- g. Mentoring—veterans mentoring new teachers; internal or external (e.g., university) experts mentoring staff
- h. Observation of others (e.g., “stars” in a skill area; demonstration teaching)
- i. Peer or supervisor observation, with or without feedback
- j. Model classrooms for PD innovation testing
- k. Parent/community learning activities

4. *Implementation*

The award-winning steps for successful professional development implementation are:

- a. Stay abreast of and incorporate best practices into teaching, learning, and leadership.

Award winning schools not only conducted initial research, they also found ways to stay abreast of best practices and to continue trying new ideas to meet school goals. These strategies include assigning clear responsibility. Consistent with initial research, they were very clear about assigning accountability for ongoing research. Some divided ongoing research responsibilities among staff development program committee members (e.g., teachers, other staff, parents, and so on) into areas narrow enough not to be overwhelming. Many counted on district-level staff to help with research.

- b. Use a variety of information sources.

The sources of new information were varied. Some used “action research” to formally test new ideas in their own schools and to make improvements based on findings. At either the school or district level, most award winning schools ensured that someone maintained contact with national organizations (e.g., National Staff Development Council, Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development) for quick access to new ideas. Others used local university resources to stay fresh. Whatever the source, winners were most satisfied with their ongoing research when they had an established, systematic way of gathering information.

- c. Create a forum for using research findings.

Award winning schools found that they needed a forum for reporting back and using new ideas. This forum varied, depending on how ongoing staff development programs were organized. Typically, new ideas were shared either through formal or informal presentations to the group(s) making ongoing decisions at the district or school level.

- d. Make sure school/district policies and practices support actual staff development programs in schools.

Besides providing funding and access to expert resources, the most significant policy issue cited was allocation of staff time. Finding the quantity of paid, frequent staff time needed to fully incorporate staff development programs into daily school life was a challenge for all. This challenge is addressed in various ways, depending upon the nature of their current policies and reasons for them.

- e. Ensure that resources remain available to organize and implement staff development programs.

Dwindling funds, volunteer time, and other resources are common problems after an initial burst of energy for any nonprofit organization. Schools are no exception. Award winning schools have found a few key tactics to deal with the problem.

- f. Make staff development programs part of everyday life at school.

Most award winning schools took one or more of the following three critical paths toward making staff development programs part of everyday life at school. The goal in most award winning organizations was to keep staff members' minds on professional development so they could seize immediately on opportunities for improvement.

- (i) Set aside time daily or weekly to focus exclusively on staff development.
Some carved time out of the regular school day, every day or most days, for planning time that could be used for staff development programs. Most at least carved out weekly time for staff to focus individually or in teams on staff development programs.
- (ii) Integrate staff development into other activities.
Some winners made classroom planning and teaching a staff development program event in itself by moving to team planning, teaching, and student evaluation. These organizations consider the exchange of ideas among teachers and the opportunity for staff to "push" each other toward excellence as an effort with high impact on student results. Asking staff to team teach was not enough, though; winners ensured that the teams had time as a group to plan, work, evaluate, and improve.
- (iii) Create cultural change.
In most cases, school or district leadership created cultural change, making staff development program discussions among staff an expected part of the day, informally as well as formally. The cultural changes were typically emphasized by symbols such as a short, clear, ever-present mission statement and big annual events to celebrate. The culture change was reinforced by key management (e.g., principal, superintendent) behaviors such as encouraging debate and discussion among staff and rewarding staff (often with even more opportunities) who contributed to staff development program efforts. Whether they used the popular term "learning community," the award winning schools stretched themselves to include all staff and other critical members of the school community in the quest for improving student

learning. In most cases, all staff members were included in staff development programs (although the learning goals and activities differed according to staff role).

5. Maintenance

The award-winning steps for successful staff development maintenance can be summarized as follows:

- a. Use staff development programs' design goals to determine evaluation measures and standards for success.

The message here from award winners is simple: Make a plan and stick to it. Award winning schools were generally meticulous about getting down to brass tacks with staff development program goals and measures during the planning process. They were equally meticulous about using the plan to evaluate specific events and the overall effort.

- b. Clarify who is accountable for collecting, analyzing, and reporting data and for facilitating "next steps" decisions.

Award winning schools typically put responsibility for evaluating staff development programs in the hands of the people responsible for organizing them. This responsibility varied tremendously depending on the school (or district) and on the level of evaluation (individual, team, school, and district).

In many award-winning schools, a formal committee of staff, administrators, and parents was responsible for pulling together all of the data and coming to conclusions about staff development program effectiveness. In others, a small, informal team conducted this process for the whole school. In still others, a significant portion of the evaluation and improvement took place at the instructional team level where incremental evaluation and improvement could be made.

- c. Use evaluation findings to improve staff development programs.

Most award winners took one of two overall approaches to this most critical part of evaluation, and some used both approaches. Some took an incremental approach to evaluation, taking frequent measures of progress against goals and making incremental changes in staff development programs in response to data. This approach kept staff focused on results throughout the year, and it refocused staff development programs' time and money to directly and immediately impact student learning results. This approach worked particularly well where planning and organizing were integrated into staff team planning and teaching.

Others took measures on an annual basis, analyzed results over this longer period, and made "big" changes in staff development programs on this annual schedule. The value of this approach was that they could draw clear, research-based conclusions about student performance over the longer period; they could more easily publicize results to the broader community (e.g., via "annual reports"); and it was easier to make radical changes in the programs. This approach worked well where a central body or team was the primary organizer of staff development programs.

- d. Ensure that evaluation criteria include at least improvement in teaching, improvement in student learning and narrowing of student achievement gaps.

The message from award winning schools was simple: The goals of staff development programs should include improving teaching, improving student learning, and narrowing student achievement gaps. The evaluation process should include measuring how well they meet these goals. They did not just evaluate staff development workshops and the like; they looked at whether the overall education goals were being met. They assumed that the quality of staff development drove the successes and failures not just of teachers, but of students, too.

In addition, award winning schools consistently tracked student achievement for subgroups within the schools and districts to ensure that all students were benefiting from staff development programs and that achievement gaps were narrowing. If consistent patterns for subgroups appeared, then the efforts really focused on the needs of these students and their teachers.

Conclusion

Sharing the staff development program challenges and successes can be very helpful to others in the school and district as well as to schools and districts in other parts of the country. But sharing information effectively requires teachers to document their decisions clearly and to put their tools and materials in a form that will make distribution fast and simple.

Most teachers and managers of award winning schools found that staying organized and keeping up with the materials needed to organize and implement staff development programs was a significant task in itself. This was particularly true at the school level. But these actions, they found, were necessary for sharing learning with others. These teachers and managers, with their diverse backgrounds and resources, took a variety of approaches to creating high-impact staff development. Despite different approaches, they all created a rewarding process for staff and distinguished educational results for students.

Building on the successes of award winners, rather than starting from scratch, can save teachers time, money, and frustration. By focusing on what winners have in common and by using the lessons from their experiences, teachers can tailor their professional development processes to fit the organization's unique qualities.

A step-by-step approach to designing, implementing, evaluating/improving, and sharing learning will help teachers make the most of efforts to improve staff and student learning in the teachers' school or district.

References

- Ayling, K. (1989). Splendid isolation: The experience of a long in-service course. *British Journal of In-Service Education*, (15)2.
- Fullan, M., & Pomfret, A. (1977). Research on curriculum and instructional implementation. *Review of Educational Research*, 47(2).
- Fullan, M. (1991). *The new meaning of educational change* (2nd ed.). New York: Teachers College Press.
- Hall, G. (1988) The principal as leader of the change facilitating team. *Journal of Research and Development in Education*, 22(1).
- Hall, G., Loucks, F., Rutherford, L., & Newlove, B. (1975). Levels of use of an innovation: A framework for analyzing innovation adoption. *Journal of Teacher Education*, 26(1).
- Hill, P. W., Holmes - Smith, P., & Rowe, K. (1993). School and teacher effectiveness in Victoria: Key findings from phase 1 of the Victorian quality schools project. Melbourne: University of Melbourne, Centre for Applied Educational Research.
- Joyce, B., & Showers, B. (1988). *Student achievement through staff development*. White Plains, NY: Longman.
- Joyce, B., & Showers, B. (1995). *Student achievement through staff development: Fundamentals of school renewal* (2nd ed.). White Plains, NY: Longman.

- Little, J. W. (1982). Norms of collegiality and experimentation: Workplace conditions of school success. *American Educational Research Journal*, 19(3).
- Little, J. W. (1989). District policy choices and teachers' professional development opportunities. *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, 15(2).
- Nelson, B. S. (1992). Teachers' special knowledge [The making of a teacher: Teacher knowledge and teacher education]. *Educational Researcher*, 21(9).
- Sparks, D. (2002). Designing powerful professional development for teachers and principals. National Staff Development Council USA.
- Sparks, G. M. (1983). Synthesis of research on staff development for effective teaching. *Educational Leadership*, 41(3).
- Showers, B., & Joyce, B. (1996). The evolution of peer coaching. *Educational Leadership*, 53(6).
- Van den Vegt, R., & Knip, H. (1988). The role of the principal in school improvement: Steering functions for implementation at the school level. *Journal of Research and Development in Education*, 22.