

The antecedents of teacher satisfaction with professional development programs

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Abstract

Literature has shown that on-the-job professional development programs are most beneficial when they are long-term, focused on students' learning, and linked to the curricula. We hypothesized that the higher the control teachers have over job professional development processes, and the greater the resemblance of these processes to the typical teaching culture in classrooms, the greater the teachers' satisfaction with job professional development processes. The findings of this study demonstrate that the main factors affecting teachers' satisfaction with the instructional programs are related to their desire to maintain instructional processes "close to home", and to shape these processes in accordance with their needs and expectations. The implications of the study are discussed with relation to decision-makers in the school setting and at the local authorities' level.

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1. Introduction

One major issue related to professionalism of the teaching force refers to the necessity to bridge the gap between knowledge acquired during formal pre-service studies and further developments occurring while teachers are employed in schools.

On-the-job professional development programs attempt to bridge this gap by allowing teachers to develop new vision that will enrich their teaching experience (Mtetwa & Thompson, 2000), enhance

and update their teaching skills and practices (Desimone, Porter, Garet, Yoon, & Birman, 2002a), change their attitudes, beliefs and perceptions (Guskey, 2002) and bring about improvements in their teaching and in their students' academic achievements (Blandford, 2000). More specifically, the programs are intended to equip teachers with a "toolbox" that will extend their knowledge regarding the subject matter taught, instructional strategies and interpersonal communication skills. In this sense, professional development is considered a key component in improving school performance and students' outcomes (Guskey, 2003; Lee & Smith, 1996; Louis & Marks, 1998; Newmann, King, & Youngs, 2000), although the empirical evidence connecting professional development processes and

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student's outcomes is rather mixed (Corcoran, 1995; Garet, Porter, Desimone, Birman, & Yoon, 2001; Newmann et al., 2000; Wang, Frechtling, & Sanders, 1999).

While research evidence has shown that more successful schools tend to make greater use of internal experts for professional development purposes (Newmann et al., 1996), in many cases on-the-job training processes are carried out by external experts, i.e., supervision instructors, who are familiar with the updated didactic and pedagogical innovations. These professionals are assumed to promote school effectiveness by helping teachers to acquire, among other things, new instructional skills and new teaching methods (Desimone et al., 2002a) and to increase their self-confidence and classroom efficiency (Bolam, 1993). Nevertheless, these in-service programs "consist of outside experts with little knowledge of local conditions who present irrelevant, sometimes amusing, often boring pre-packaged information" (Wilson & Berne, 1999, p. 174).

Literature has shown that professional development is most beneficial when it is long-term, school-based, focused on students' learning, and linked to the curricula (Barak & Waks, 1997; Darling-Hammond & Sykes, 1999; Garet et al., 2001; Garrett & Bowles, 1997). In their study of the effectiveness of professional development, Garet and associates (2001) provide a list of advantages in carrying out professional development for groups of teachers from the same school, department or grade level. Among them are the opportunity for teachers to discuss problems and issues that come up during their professional development experiences, sharing common curriculum materials and assessment requirements, discussing students' needs across classes and grade levels, and building up a shared professional culture in which teachers "develop a common understanding of instructional goals, methods, problems, and solutions" (p. 922). In contrast, other claims argue that site-based professional development may not always be effective (Holloway, 2000; Latham, 1998) since local-level decisions are not always good (Guskey, 1996) and because "the decentralization of decision making appears to be undermining the use of knowledge rather than promoting it" (Corcoran, Fuhrman, & Belcher, 2001, p. 81).

Nevertheless, the findings (Barak & Waks, 1997; Darling-Hammond & Sykes, 1999) regarding the benefits of school-based professional development

imply that programs aimed at being "close to home" may yield better results for the school and the students than programs provided outside of the school site (Sztajn, Hackenberg, White, & Allexsaht-Snider, *in press*). These findings are not surprising as school staff members, mainly the teachers, are characterized by a unique mix of competencies and attitudes (Fullan & Stiegelbauer, 1991; Newmann et al., 2000) and are the ones to know more than anyone else what is best for themselves (Burbank & Kauchak, 2003). School-based programs also allow teachers the freedom to choose what best suits their teaching strategies, unless the school principal is authoritative and does not promote the participation in decision-making of teachers regarding these programs. In order to increase the effectiveness of the organizational processes, teachers need to be more involved in the decision-making processes (Wall & Rinehart, 1998) regarding planning, shaping and evaluation of the professional development programs. To succeed in this task, the teachers need to be well acquainted with the needs and interests of all stakeholders (teachers, students, principal, parents and the local authority).

Another advantage of having school-based instruction programs is related to the school's organizational learning. "As teachers learn to learn from one another and interact around substantive issues of teaching and learning and their own professional growth, their joint insights may shift the emphasis from individual classroom innovations to contributions to the teaching profession, resulting in organizational learning and change for the benefit of students" (Collinson & Cook, 2004, p. 330). Organizational learning in a school setting is dependent on the dissemination of each teacher's individual learning that entails the sharing of knowledge, skills and insights achieved during collaborative exchange of ideas. School-based instruction programs are an example for such occurrences that may potentially benefit each teacher and the school as a whole.

In considering that "there is an irreducible element of art in professional practice" (Schon, 1983, p. 18) and that teaching is best conceived as a practical art form (Stenhouse, 1988), having control over the content of what is being taught and the process by which the professional development is taking place is an important ingredient to the success of the program (Ball, 1996). Participation of teachers in planning professional development at

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