

State and District Mandated Staff Development: Teacher' knowledge and Skills

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Abstract: Professional staff development is a major component of any step toward education improvement. Professional staff development provides the teacher with skills and knowledge for both their personal development and career advancement. It is required by the most states, districts and schools that teachers' complete in-service professional development courses to renew their professional education certification. However, few teachers criticize mandatory professional staff development and believe it should be optional. This review of the literature explored the significance of professional staff development programs on teachers' knowledge and skills and discussed the mandatory aspect of professional staff development for teachers. Most of the studies have found a positive relationship between teacher performance after attending professional staff development programs and students' achievement. Moreover, studies have shown that professional staff development programs improve teacher confidence, effectiveness, teamwork skill, and leadership. Therefore, I believe that state, district and school have the right to mandate certain professional staff development courses for teachers to guarantee a high quality of education.

Keywords: Professional staff development, Mandatory professional staff development, Teachers, Teacher skill, Teacher knowledge.

Introduction

Staff development is a major element of any step toward education improvement. Nowadays, most districts and schools require a certain amount of professional staff development for teachers to teach students professionally. Teachers are required to pass the National Teacher Exam, so they can earn a license. Moreover, most states require teachers to take some professional development training to maintain their license. Teachers have to develop an individualized development plan according to certain specifications such as student's age, subject taught and other knowledge or skills he/she feels are important to learn to reach the expected outcomes (Zaslow et al., 2010; Mizell & Forward, 2010; Kennedy, 2016).

These professional development plans must fit the district, state and national standards as well as the framework of the National Staff Development Council. In 1988, Florida law started requiring teachers to complete in-service professional development to renew their Professional Educator Certification (Florida Department of Education, 2008). 120 in-service points or six college credits or a combination of both are required every five years. Among these mandated professional credits or points, 50% should be spent on the teacher's specialization area. (Florida Department of Education, 2008).

Professional staff development programs are crucial for gaining skills and knowledge both for personal development and career advancement. Development programs aim to facilitate learning opportunities, and ranges from college degrees to formal coursework, lectures and demonstrations. Staff development for teachers has been defined as "the provision of activities designed to advance the knowledge, skills, and understanding of teachers in ways that lead to changes in their thinking and classroom behavior" (Fenstermacher & Berliner, 1985, p. 281) Teachers with updated teaching methods will benefit students and develop schools. There are several factors that combine to make a teacher effective; they must have extensive knowledge of the subject matter they teach, current curriculums, and the latest theories about how students learn. All of the above, change as the surrounding society progresses and demands shift from one area to another. For example, in the past the core subjects of reading, writing, and arithmetic were valued above all else, but now many employers put more of an emphasis on teamwork and cooperation. Schools and teachers must adjust accordingly or run the risk of falling behind.

Studies have shown that an inspiring teacher is the most important school factor that influences students to achieve their goals. Teaching is a complex activity and requires a teacher who has proper training to know how to manage the class and deliver knowledge efficiently to the students. In 2003, Wayne and Youngs conducted a literature review regarding the relationship between teacher characteristics and student achievement gains. The researchers concluded that "students learn more from teachers with certain characteristics". Furthermore, in terms of teachers' college ratings and test scores as they relate to student achievement they found that "...positive relationships exist and should be investigated further to learn about the relative importance of specific college characteristics and tested skills and knowledge"(p.107).

Students in the past waited for a new generation of teachers to bring new teaching methods. However, the case has changed nowadays. Wenglinksky, 2000 stated, "today's students do not have the luxury of waiting for a new generation of highly qualified teachers to staff our schools. For these students, it is imperative that their classroom teachers, today, are as effective as possible" (p.2).

Research significance and Aim

The staff development for the teacher is one of the most important elements in improving the education system. New knowledge and skills are earned through these courses and programs. The benefits of staff development will be reflected in students' performance and achievements. However, some of the teachers criticize mandatory professional staff development and believe it should be optional. Researches on teacher continue education and staff development is substantial and discussing doubtful issue is advantageous. Therefore, this research aimed to review the importance of staff development for teachers and to discuss the significance of making staff development mandatory.

Importance of staff development for teachers:

According to the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development, knowledge doesn't stay fixed and trends change quickly nowadays. Taking into consideration rapidly developing technology and ever-evolving skills demanded in the job market, teachers have to be ready to deliver the latest information to their students in the most efficient way possible.

Staff development programs are important because they will deliver educational benefits to the individual, professionals and the public. These benefits will occur because staff development programs will ensure the teachers' abilities comply with current standards. Moreover, it will maintain and enhance the knowledge and skills that teachers already had so they will be able to manage the class and deliver lessons in the right way. Staff development will make teachers more effective and willing to be involved in teamwork since they will feel that they have something to contribute. It is clearly important because it will prepare a new leader who can manage and influence others. In addition, staff development makes teachers interested in what they are teaching because every time they learn new information about teaching methods it will motivate them to try it in school. Also, students will enjoy having lessons delivered in a fresh and more effective manner. Staff development will increase the confidence of the teachers in themselves and deliver a deep understanding of what it means to be a teacher and show your impact in the school environment (OECD, 2009, P.49).

Strauss and Sawyer in 1986 found that students' average performance on standardized tests rose when teachers had a higher average performance on the National Teacher Exam in North Carolina. Supovitz and Turner in 2000 used data from the National Science Foundation Teacher Enhancement Program and studied the relationship between professional development and the reformers' vision of teaching practices. One of their findings was a positive correlation between the quantity of professional development that teachers participated in and both inquiry-based teaching practice and investigative classroom culture.

There is clear recognition for the role of professional development in improving the quality of teachers in all educational systems. Supovitz and Turner in 2000 believe that professional development programs should be "intensive and sustained training around concrete tasks that is focused on subject-matter knowledge, connected to specific standards for student performance and embedded in systemic context" (p.964). Many teachers lack the ability to be able to apply new theories in the classroom and would benefit from some demonstration or modeling of these techniques. Based on my conversations with a FLDOE State-Certified American teacher, it seems that sometimes, cooperative learning strategies with coworkers can give teachers an opportunity to try new teaching methods together and discuss the results. If teachers have a chance to actually use what they learn, they will absorb much more of the information and both students and

teachers will benefit (N.L. Gilbo, personal communication, October 22, 2013). Teachers will not get the same benefits from reading this information on their own time at home; it must be learned within a certain situation as Supovitz and Turner (2002) have advised.

The influence of professional development on 4-6th grade science teachers was studied at two urban school districts. The professional development courses focused on teachers' science content and pedagogical techniques and on how to integrate that in elementary classrooms. The study found significant differences between teachers' knowledge and skills pre and post the professional development courses. In addition, students' achievement in standardized exams improved (Buczynski & Hansen., 2010).

Professional development that focuses on educational strategies will create and improve teachers' instructional skills. Desimone et al., 2002, studied the effect of professional development on teachers' instruction in mathematics and science from 1996-1999. A sample of 207 teachers from 30 schools and 10 districts were involved in the study. They found that professional development that targeted specific instructional skills increased teachers' use of those skills in the classroom.

A report released in 2004 by The Teaching Commission titled "Teaching at Risk: A Call to Action", discussed the importance of teaching as one of the most valuable professions in the nation. In addition, the report debates strongly that developing our teachers to be successful and helping our children to learn is a real human investment to guarantee America's future. In that report, they suggested many approaches to improve teachers and one that includes continuing and specific professional development to assist teachers in meeting the new standards.

Lotter et al., 2016 examined the effect of professional development program on teacher inquiry instruction and efficacy beliefs. The middle school teachers were participating in one year-long professional development program. The program was build based on Bandura's social cognitive theory of learning and other studies on effective professional development. Teacher level and quality of inquiry instruction were assessed by specific developed and valid survey before and after the training program. The result of this study has indicated a significant improvement in both teacher inquiry instruction and teacher efficacy belief.

Haos, 2018 investigated the influence of the trauma-informed practices training on central Illinois public school staff as it related to their beliefs, school practices and classroom practices. Training courses were provided during the school year and per-survey and post-survey were used to assess the effect. The study has shown that a significant change in teacher belief and understanding of childhood trauma after the training and indication of the change in school practice was observed (Haos et al., 2018).

Mandated staff development:

In 1998, Richardson discussed how teachers change and he believed that voluntary staff development approaches “may lead to an individually autonomous change process and thereby to incoherent educations for students. The suggestion I have arrived at so far is that the individualistic and empowering form of staff development be extended to the group level, involving all teachers in a given school or program”.

Teachers, like other professionals, must constantly learn and develop. To guarantee that teachers have the minimum level of current knowledge and teaching skills, a certain amount of professional development should be mandated. Justification for mandating staff development programs can be found in the quote, “Teachers may not choose to learn what they need to learn. A teacher’s knowledge base, like that of all professionals, eventually becomes obsolete. The organization must guarantee that teachers’ professional knowledge is current if appropriate change is to occur” (Lunenburg & Ornstein, 2008, p. 223). I believe state, district and school are quite justified if they ask teachers to take some mandatory professional development courses because that is a part of their responsibility to ensure quality education for their students. Teachers are different in their desires to improve and their motivation to update their knowledge and skills. Therefore, selected development courses are a crucial component to guarantee that teachers are keeping up with the times.

In addition, teachers may not realize the full value of a staff development program until after they have completed it and applied the new methods in the classroom. New ideas can seem intimidating and abstract without concrete experience in how they are applied. Mandated staff development programs often focus on specific challenges that teachers will encounter in their state or district. For example, ESOL education is a major issue in certain districts in the state of Florida. Many teachers do not have the training to know how to interact with these students to give them the best education possible. Simmons in 2009, discussed the issue of mandated staff development for ESOL teacher in the state of Florida and the importance of these programs which can be summed up in the following quote, “The issue of school achievement among k-12 English language learners (ELLs) has grown in recent years to become one that policy makers and school officials can hardly afford to ignore. A range of indicators including graduation rates, and Florida’s High stakes test the FCAT, attests to this general trend. English language learners in Florida are overwhelmingly mainstreamed in content classes and it has become the responsibility of teachers to provide a comprehensible and meaningful education to those not proficient in English” (112). Although these types of mandated programs have received a great deal of criticism from teachers in Florida, we cannot afford to continue without them.

The Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS) was conducted in 2007-2008 through the Organization for Economic Co-operation Development (OECD) with the purpose of looking for comparative

perspectives on the condition of teaching and learning in 23 countries. Data was obtained from over 70,000 teachers in these countries. The trial investigated the different aspects of professional development such as teacher beliefs, attitudes and practices. In that study, 51% of teachers' professional development was compulsory. Among the countries that had been studied, Malaysia had the highest percentage of professional development classes taken that were mandatory, which was 88%. On other hand, Austria had the least percentage, which was 31%.

According to that study, the reasons behind the mandated professional development in those countries was, "the skill and knowledge the development activities aim to enhance are considered important for teacher quality" (OECD, 2009). Similar to the United States, participation in these professional developments might be required for teacher certification.

However, if the program is not mandated, many teachers will never have the experience since they didn't take the initiative to involve themselves in such a program. If teachers learn how improving their own teaching can motivate and inspire their students, they will be more enthusiastic afterward. Although it may seem too authoritarian to make staff development programs mandatory, it is actually quite reasonable (N.L. Gilbo, personal communication, October 22, 2013).

In conclusion

Well organized and subject oriented professional development will produce a significant effect on student learning in a comparatively short time. Professional development will "build learning communities of teachers and administrators who use the knowledge base to shape initiative while studying curriculum, instruction and student response on a formative basis" (Joyce and Showers, 2002, P.1)

Professional development offers a wealth of benefits for teachers. Teachers have the opportunity to maintain and update their education. In addition, teachers will be confident in themselves. Many studies have shown a positive relationship between teachers' performance after attending professional development courses and the achievement of students. Students are our future and they deserve to be taught by qualified teachers so they will be ready to build the country. The motivation to improve and update one's teaching strategies is different among teachers and we cannot guarantee the same interest among them.

Finally, we recommend that professional staff development should be mandatory to update teacher's knowledge and skills, especially nowadays where knowledge and skills change quickly. In addition, to guarantee that teacher have the minimum level of current knowledge and teaching skills to warrant the quality of education. We believe that professional staff development programs should focus on leadership skills and education strategies to improve teacher's instructional skills and ability to influence others. It is recommended that professional staff development programs be built in way to ensure that teacher abilities

comply with the current standard. Professional development professional development programs must be evaluated to assess the outcomes of it and improve them.

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إلزامية التطوير المهني في الولايات والمقاطعات: معرفة ومهارات المعلمين

الملخص: إن تطوير قدرات الموظفين والمعلمين تعتبر عاملاً أساسياً لأي خطوة نحو تطوير نظام التعليم. تزود برامج التطوير المهني المعلمين بالمهارات والمعرفة من أجل تطويرهم على الصعيد الشخصي وتقديمهم الوظيفي، وتشتد كثير من الولايات والمقاطعات والمدارس إكمال برامج ودورات محددة في التطوير المهني من أجل تجديد رخصة التعليم المهني وعلى أي حال، فإن بعض المعلمين ينتقد فكرة إلزامية هذه البرامج والدورات، ويعتقد بأفضلية أن تكون أمراً اختيارياً. هذه المراجعة بحثت في الدراسات السابقة عن أهمية هذه البرامج في تطوير المعلمين من الناحية المعرفية والمهارية وناقشت فكرة أن تكون هذه البرامج إلزامية على المعلمين والموظفين. معظم الدراسات وجدت أن العلاقة إيجابية بين أداء المدرسين ونجاح الطلاب بعد حضورهم برامج ودورات في التطوير الوظيفي. وأوضحت هذه الدراسات أن هذه البرامج والدورات المهنية تكسب المعلم الثقة والفعالية والقيادة ومهارة العمل مع الفريق، واستناداً لتلك النتائج أكدت الباحثة على أنه يحق للولايات والمقاطعات والمدارس إلزام المعلمين بحضور هذه الدورات في التطوير المهني لضمان الجودة العالية في التعليم.

الكلمات المفتاحية: برامج التطوير المهني، إلزامية برامج التطوير المهني، المعلمين، مهارة المعلمين، معرفة المعلمين