

Effects of the Culture in Two Schools on the Process and Outcomes of Staff Development

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Abstract

Research suggests that traditional staff development programs that neglect the context of the school and the classroom have not been successful. Failure to recognize participants' beliefs and understandings and the influence of school context can strongly affect the results of a staff development program. In this article we examine a staff development program implemented in 2 elementary schools that focused on the beliefs and understandings about reading comprehension instruction of 12 teachers in grades 4–6. This staff development program attempted to shift responsibility from the staff developers to the teachers and incorporate teachers' beliefs, practices, and concerns into the program content. We describe interactions in the group-level staff development process. Additionally, we explore whether there were differences in the processes in the 2 schools and whether these differences could be attributed to differences in school culture. Results suggested that group collaboration and empowerment were strongly affected by the interaction of school culture and the staff development process involved. The effectiveness of a staff development program may be related to the social norms within a school that encourage teachers to discuss their beliefs and practices. Finally, we consider the need for an alternative approach to staff development.

Staff development programs have been recognized as promising and accessible paths to professional development (Fullan, 1991; Sparks & Loucks-Horsley, 1990) as well as important and powerful ways of apprising teachers of the rapid changes in schooling (Fenstermacher & Berliner, 1985). Moreover, programs attempt to "alter the professional practices, beliefs and understanding of school persons toward an articulated end" (Griffin, 1983, p. 2) and "advance the knowledge, skills and understanding of teachers in ways that lead to changes in

their thinking and classroom behavior" (Fenstermacher & Berliner, 1985, p. 283). Yet, traditionally, programs that focus on improving the skills of individual teachers away from the context of school and classroom (Goodlad, 1983) have not been productive. Although district and state administrators as well as teachers view them as a panacea, research has underscored the lack of success of such programs (Guskey, 1986).

Two hypotheses have been suggested to explain this failure. The first implies that a failure to recognize participants' knowledge, understandings, and, particularly, beliefs will lead to disappointing results. According to Fenstermacher (1979), Hollingsworth (1989), and Russell (1988), teachers do not adopt ideas that are not closely related to their own beliefs. The second explanation for the failure of traditional staff development programs is that staff development and change occur within a school context, and the culture of the school can strongly affect the process and results of a program (Goodlad, 1983; Griffin, 1983; Howey & Vaughan, 1983; Joyce, 1990; Lieberman & Miller, 1991).

In this article we investigate a staff development process in which participants' beliefs and understandings played a central role. This process was one element of a 3-year research project funded by the Office of Educational Research and Improvement, U.S. Department of Education. The full study is described in Richardson (1994) and Richardson and Anders (1990). See Anders and Richardson (1991) for a description of the staff development process. The staff development process was implemented in two elementary schools and was designed to help teachers in grades 4-6 examine their beliefs and practices in teaching reading comprehension and to experiment with new practices. The process consisted of both individual and group components. One aim of the group component was to help teachers in each school begin to work with fellow teachers in such a way that they would develop collegial relationships (Little, 1987)

that encouraged discussions with each other about classroom practices and their justifications. In this article we examine the relationship of school culture and the staff development process by first characterizing interactions when teachers met in a group. This section focuses on whether teachers began to take control of the process and discuss their beliefs and practices. Next, we examine whether there were differences in the processes in the two schools and whether these could be attributed to differences in school culture.

Conceptual Framework

Staff Development

Sparks and Loucks-Horsley's (1990, p. 245) extensive staff development literature review identifies five elements critical for successful staff development programs: (1) common goals and objectives among participants, (2) dynamic leadership (teacher and/or administrator) that fosters collegiality, (3) a commitment to risk taking and willingness to implement new ideas, (4) participation in collegial relationships for the purpose of improving practice, and, finally, (5) relationships with other educators that provide teachers with support for their change efforts. Unfortunately, many staff development programs are missing some of these critical elements (Little, 1987), and few programs have been successful (Guskey, 1986; Howey & Vaughan, 1983).

Zeichner (1986), for example, found that innovations do not succeed unless participants' beliefs and values are addressed. Other current literature proposes that concern for teachers' beliefs is another critical element in teachers' implementation of change and that addressing these beliefs will enhance the success of staff development programs. Hollingsworth (1989) found that change occurs in the classroom if a teacher's existing beliefs are congruous with the new information. Richardson-Koehler (1987) suggested that teachers respond positively to proposed change when they can appraise their belief systems and

consider change in relation to their assumptions about their professional lives.

Recent writings in staff development have suggested new directions for the process. Joyce, Weil, and Showers (1992) suggested, among other models, study groups. Baird (1992) and Groarke, Ovens, and Hargreaves (1986) recommended collaborative action research. And staff development programs within constructivist frameworks are becoming more established (e.g., Au, 1990; Tobin & Jakubowski, 1990).

Although these new programs may differ in terms of program content and who controls it, all emphasize the importance of participants' beliefs in the change process. Other considerations, however, such as school culture, may be important in the implementation of staff development.

School Culture

When examining teachers' beliefs and belief systems, issues of culture surface because the classroom and activities within it do not occur in a vacuum. Rather, schools have their own cultures (Feiman-Nemser & Floden, 1986; Lieberman, 1988; Page, 1988; Sarason, 1982), and teachers participate in those cultures. Current research on staff development (Anders & Richardson, 1991; Lieberman & Miller, 1991; Little, 1987) suggests that school culture powerfully influences what does or does not occur during a staff development program.

School culture connotes the beliefs and expectations apparent in a school's daily routine, including how colleagues interact with each other (Fullan & Hargreaves, 1991; Joyce et al., 1992; Rossman, Corbett, & Firestone, 1988) and is manifest in the norms or beliefs shared by participants—students, teachers, administrators, parents, and other workers within a school. Culture is the socially shared and transmitted knowledge of what is and what ought to be symbolized in act and artifact. How individuals participate in their classroom, view their role in the classroom, and, in turn, how they and their classrooms are viewed by others in the

school and community affect everything that occurs in that classroom and school.

Although teachers typically work in isolation (Feiman-Nemser & Floden, 1986; Lieberman & Miller, 1991; Sarason, 1982), the school culture permeates that isolation in ways not completely understood. Although some beliefs are tacit and others are regarded as self-evident by members of the culture, the beliefs nevertheless provide a powerful foundation for members' understanding of the way members operate together. These beliefs convey routines; provide meaning for events, conduct, and language; and dictate people's actions (Rossman et al., 1988). Yet, often beliefs remain tacit and must be inferred from people's actions, language, and artifacts (Quinn & Holland, 1987; Spradley, 1980).

A number of scholars have indicated that school norms may affect the degree to which new programs are implemented in schools (Fullan & Hargreaves, 1991; McLaughlin, 1990; Rossman et al., 1988). Griffin (1991), Sarason (1982), and Schiffer (1980), for example, suggested that the failure to understand school culture has inhibited educational innovations and promoted impassivity. Often staff development activities focus only on the teacher as responsible for improving instruction, without sufficient attention to the cultural context in the school and school community (Howey & Vaughan, 1983; Joyce, 1990). Although, as McLaughlin (1990, p. 12) pointed out, "change continues to be a problem of the smallest unit," the individual teacher is still affected by the beliefs, norms, and values shared by the teachers in a school and the significance teachers attach to change (Rossman et al., 1988). According to Goodlad (1983), the failure of a staff development program to address tacit expectations of teachers related to school culture can constrain a teacher's use of information acquired in a staff development program and can reinforce old practices and discourage new ones. Understanding school cultures

can clarify the success, failure, or modification of change (Sarason, 1982).

Little (1987) suggested that norms of collegiality and experimentation are more important to successful school change than individual teachers' participation in a staff development program designed to implement a new practice. Rosenholtz, Bassler, and Hoover-Dempsey (1986) also examined teachers' willingness to learn and proposed that teachers felt that their self-perceived instructional success was related to collegiality with their peers as well as to instructional aptitude. These studies imply that if teachers have good professional partnerships with colleagues and strong instructional skills, they are likely to feel competent. Rosenholtz's (1989) subsequent research suggested that schools in which a strong sense of collegiality and a commitment to change have become norms are schools in which staff development programs will be particularly successful.

However, the staff development process described by authors who have written about school culture is quite different from the process we examine in this article. In general, other programs relied on a process in which an innovation was introduced by someone external to a school, and its successful implementation was determined by whether teachers adopted the practice in their classrooms. The staff development process examined in this article was designed to encourage teachers to question their beliefs and practices. If change in practice did occur, the nature of the change could not be predicted, since change resulted from the teachers' own choice. Thus, it was not clear how the school culture would affect such a staff development process. In this article we explore the relation between this staff development process and two school cultures in which it was implemented.

Method

Schools and Teachers

This study took place in two elementary schools in a large urban city in the South-

west (see Table 1). The schools were selected on the basis of reputation for willingness to change as well as absence of other large-scale staff development programs at grades 4–6. The teachers (see Table 2) were asked by their principals if they wished to participate in the study, and all intermediate teachers in both schools agreed to do so.

Jones Elementary School, a 7-year-old well-maintained school, was located in a diverse and growing suburban neighborhood on the edge of the city. The homes in the area were "starter" ranch houses. The ethnic makeup of the student population, which included 380 students in the first year and 440 in the second year, was 50% Hispanic, 47% Anglo, and 1% each African American, Asian, and Native American. Most students came from the immediate area, with a few bused-in special education students. Seven teachers (three females, four males) participated, one of whom was the learning disabilities teacher. Their experience ranged from 1–9 years, although four of the teachers had taught for 3 or fewer years. These teachers agreed that there were no characteristic ways of teaching reading or using reading-related practices at Jones School. Some teachers used basal readers, some used a whole-language approach, but all felt that variety in reading instruction was encouraged at the school.

Sumpter, built in 1929, was located on a fairly busy street in town and surrounded by small businesses and office and apartment buildings. It housed 360 students, with quite different populations in the primary versus the intermediate grades due to a desegregation order. The primary grades contained 35% Hispanic and African-American students delivered by bus to the school each day and 65% Anglo students, some from this working-class and highly mobile neighborhood and some bused in from an affluent area. The school's ethnic minority population fell to 10%–12% in the intermediate grades. Five female teachers, one of whom was the learning disabilities

TABLE 1. Background Information on the Schools

	Jones	Sumpter
School size (K-6)	380	360
Class size (average)	24	27
Location	Urban	Suburban
Student population:		
Minority (%)	50	35 (K-3) 10 (4-6)
Free/reduced lunch (%)	33	51 (K-3) 20 (4-6)
Iowa scores (grades 4-6)	District mean	Above mean
Organizational features	Simple, neighborhood; nearly new building; self-contained learning- disabled program; computer room	Complex, desegregation program; older building, under re- pair; fine arts re- source, computer rooms, curriculum specialist
Teachers:		
Average experience	8 years	14 years
Attitude toward school	Positive about school, leadership, students	Somewhat negative about school and its leadership
Relationships	Collegial, but not collab- orative	Isolated
Response toward staff development	Receptive initially, but eventually cautious	Cautious but eventu- ally interested and quite involved
Views of reading	Diverse, some differences in practices, not source of discussion	Similar views of read- ing and practices, a source of discussion
Principal:		
Gender	Female	Male
Experience	3d year	4th year
Reading background	Strong (Ed.D. in reading/ language)	Limited to undergrad- uate and teaching experience
Focus on instruction	High	Low
Support for project	High	Mixed
View of project	Congruent with own in- structional goals, "his- tory-making" teachers could be "lobbyists for change"	"Pipeline" to the uni- versity, a "carrot" for neglected inter- mediate teachers
Position on reading	Whole language, inter- ested in reading re- search	Not coherent, unin- formed about cur- rent reading re- search
Emphasis on achieve- ment tests	Low	High (reinforces skills emphasis)
Relation to district	Positive, emphasis on in- struction	Negative, focus on fi- nance and politics
Involvement in staff de- velopment	Less than promised, but reinforcing	None

SOURCE.—Placier, 1989.

teacher, were involved. Two had 17 years of experience, two had 9 years of experience, and one had taught for 22 years. In addition, the curriculum coordinator at

Sumpter participated in all of the group staff development sessions. At Sumpter the teachers described the reading-related practices as fairly traditional, using basal read-

TABLE 2. Background Information on the Teachers

Teacher	Gender	Years of Experience	Grade Level	Subject	Program/Training	Training in Reading	Student Teaching/ Cooperating Teacher
Jones School: Emmett	M	9	6	Bilingual	Elementary education, bilingual education, library science	Bilingual reading, child literature	Worked with several teachers because of bilingual interest, phonetics training
James	M	8	4	Bilingual	Bilingual education (AZ)	Some whole language, some reading courses	Trained in use of basals
Consuelo	F	1	5		Elementary education (AZ)		Had negative experience
Randall	M	3	6		Elementary education (AZ)		Used basal and manual because instruction was modeled
Tammy	F	2	5		Elementary education (IL)		Flexibility was stressed
Ellen	F	3	4		Elementary education (CA)	One reading course	Cooperating teacher used basals and manual
Ralph	M	9	Learning disabilities, intermediate	Special education	Special education (MT)		1-year program in both regular and special education
Sumpter School: Jane	F	17	Multiply handicapped, intermediate	Special education	Special education (AZ)	Eclectic methods	Cooperating teacher emphasized phonics and used basal
Sarah	F	22	4, 5		Education (IL)		Trained to use manuals and remedial reading materials
Francis	F	9	5		Elementary education (CA)		Cooperating teacher used structured approach
Andrea	F	17	4		Elementary education (AZ)		Cooperating teacher taught by manual
Deloris	F	9	6		Elementary education (AZ)		Cooperating teacher used basals and reading groups with much waiting

ers. These teachers felt pressed to complete their reading objectives and found their tasks clearly outlined in the basal handbook.

Participants in the staff development also included university faculty and students. These participants included two primary staff developers, one with expertise in reading comprehension and one in teaching and teacher education (the second author). In addition, four graduate students (including the first author) were involved and contributed from time to time as staff developers.

The Staff Development Process

The theoretical framework that guided the development of the practical argument staff development (PASD) process was Fenstermacher's (1986) concept of practical arguments, which suggests that research related to teachers' practices can be introduced to teachers by encouraging them to examine their own beliefs in relation to findings from current research.

The goal of the PASD process was to develop an environment that would allow teachers to examine their practices and their explanations of their practices in relation to alternative conceptions and practices. Alternative conceptions could come from other teachers or from current research on reading comprehension. We thought that when teachers inquired into their beliefs and considered alternatives, they might wish to experiment with alternative practices in the classroom and discuss the results in subsequent staff development sessions. In this process, the teachers might alter beliefs or adopt new ones and thus reconsider and change classroom practices (for more information, see Anders and Richardson, 1991; Richardson and Anders, 1990).

The staff development process included both individual and group components so that teachers could explore and develop their beliefs in both contexts. The individual component initially involved one 1-hour videotaping of each teacher performing an activity or a task in the classroom (e.g., a con-

cept attainment lesson, a reading group activity). With three or four members of the university staff development team, teachers individually watched the videotapes of their classrooms and talked about their practices and beliefs. Team members asked questions that helped each teacher identify information and ideas that, until that time, had often been tacit. Each session culminated with the teacher identifying areas of practice that he or she would reconsider in understanding and in practice. This individual component of the PASD process provided topics for discussion during the group component.

The group component was designed as a constructivist activity in which the content of the staff development consisted of teachers' cognitions and beliefs about their practices, and current research on reading comprehension. The purpose was to provide an environment in which a group of teachers could explore these together and respond to the staff development literature that suggests that the school, not the individual, is the important consideration in staff development (Griffin & Barnes, 1986; Joyce, 1990; Lieberman & Miller, 1991). Our goal was movement toward shared control of the staff development process so that teachers and staff developers jointly selected topics and participated in discussions during group meetings.

The group component of staff development involved voluntary group meetings with all intermediate-grade teachers in the two schools at times and places selected by the teachers. Teachers in Jones met 11 times for 2 hours after school every other week in their school library. Teachers in Sumpter met eight times for complete afternoons in one of the staff developers' homes. In these meetings, teachers talked about the practices they implemented during reading comprehension instruction and reflected on these practices. The staff developers served as catalysts for these discussions and also as models for reflection. Further, they provided the knowledge base that teachers

used for both reflection and implementation, such as knowledge about theories of reading comprehension and examples of practices supported by those theories.

This study focuses primarily on the group component since we thought that effects of school culture could be seen most clearly in interactions among teachers.

Data Analysis

In addition to the data related to the staff development process and school context, which are described subsequently, the following are examples of the types of data collected for the larger study that helped to inform this study: interviews (audiotaped and transcribed) of all teachers about their beliefs preceding and following the staff development, interviews with principals about their beliefs, and observations of teachers.

The staff development process. The group sessions were videotaped, and extensive notes were taken during the sessions. These notes were important for two reasons. First, only one camera was used, and it was not wide-angle. The camera operator followed the spoken dialogue. The notetaker followed much of the nonverbal communication. Second, elements of the notes were interpretive and related current discussions to previous discussions, to concepts in belief interviews, to classroom observations, and to discussions of themes that had taken place in research staff meetings.

The tapes were examined a number of times by us and others involved with the project to develop a sense of the flow of the conversation within each session and to determine whether a pattern of change in discourse could be discerned as the staff development process proceeded. The researchers met often to discuss the changes they perceived and found there was strong agreement about the changes (see Hamilton, 1989).

School culture. The study and description of school culture in this article include the following data: field notes of the school

that were written from the initial contact with the principal and from teacher and principal formal and informal interviews throughout the project (see Hamilton, 1989; Richardson-Koehler & Hamilton, 1988), observations of school activities, and school bulletins and other artifacts such as report cards and library holdings. Additionally, we used videotapes of the staff development sessions to identify norms related to the ways teachers interacted with each other.

Also informing this analysis were results of a school climate questionnaire designed from three large survey studies of teachers (Bachrach, Bauer, & Shedd, 1986; Rosenholtz et al., 1986; Smylie, 1988) to provide information on school characteristics that past research had shown were related to the success of staff development. (This questionnaire was developed and implemented by Peggy Placier, 1989.) All teachers in the two schools received a copy of the questionnaire at the beginning of the study, and the response rate was between 90% and 100%. The questionnaire spanned a range of items including clarity of responsibilities and school goals, adequacy of resources and time, the degree of autonomy and collaboration, and staff interaction and views of leadership.

Results

The conversations that took place during the group staff development meetings were examined from the notes taken on viewing the videotapes of the sessions. We examined who brought up topics of conversation and who participants talked to (i.e., the staff developers or other teachers). We thought this analysis would reveal whether teachers began to share ownership of the process—one goal of the process—and whether they began to talk with each other about their beliefs—another goal. (The Appendix contains a summary of the conversations during the meetings of Jones teachers.) It was then possible to search for patterns in the conversations over the course of the staff development program in the two schools.

Stages of Staff Development

This search revealed that the group staff development process appeared to follow certain stages, each stage taking different lengths of time in the two schools (see Fig. 1). During the *introductory* stage, teachers familiarized themselves with each other, their philosophies, and their ways of thinking. In this stage teachers did not question each other but rather listened politely to the conversation. The two staff developers talked quite a bit about general research-based practices in teaching reading comprehension and pressed teachers to describe their practices. For example, at Sumpter, Andrea (all names used in this text are pseudonyms) discussed at length what she was doing to establish a whole-language classroom. The curriculum specialist contributed to this conversation when she often asked Andrea to describe what occurred in her classroom, or the specialist described it herself. There were similar discussions at Jones, with one or two teachers initially willing to describe their own classrooms on being asked to do so by the staff developers.

The next stage could be labeled the *breakthrough* stage. A breakthrough occurred when a person or persons moved through a belief, or from a way of doing things to a new way of thinking about the topic. Sometimes teachers were hesitant about adopting new beliefs or practices, but

teachers recognized that tentativeness was part of the change process. At this stage, the teachers asked "do you" questions of one another. "Do you do literature groups?" or "When do you do skills?" The Sumpter teachers asked, "Do we have to use the basal reader? What is the barrier to not using the basal? How do you assess this work?" In response, all of the teachers began to offer their suggestions and ideas. Francis culminated one conversation by stating that "we were never asked what we thought about, what we did before." At the same time, the staff developers participated less. They more often listened than talked, and they became participants rather than leaders.

Finally, there was the stage of *empowerment*. In this stage the teachers claimed ownership of the staff development itself and dominated the conversation in the group sessions. They arranged agendas, asked and answered questions, and generally directed the sessions. At Sumpter, this stage was exemplified by the teachers becoming so interested in using literature groups that they planned a session to model the format.

Figure 1 illustrates that the staff development stages varied in length at the two schools. The introductory stage was considerably longer in Jones (eight sessions) than in Sumpter (one session), and Sumpter

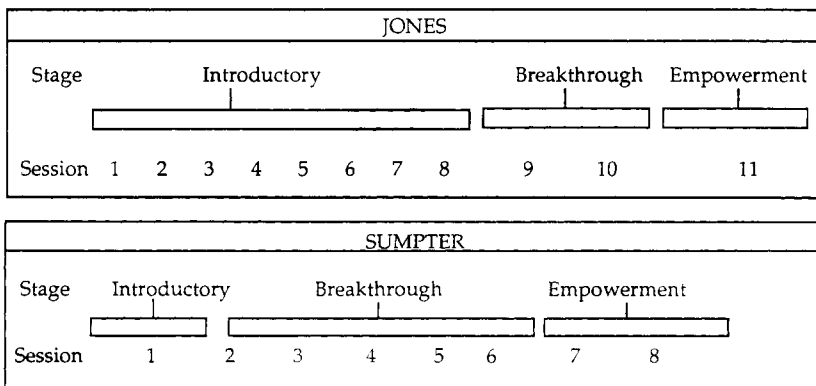


Fig. 1.—Stages in the staff development process at Jones and Sumpter

reached the empowerment phase (sessions 7 and 8) earlier than teachers in Jones (session 11). Further, analysis of the tapes indicated that the breakthrough stage was reached after eight sessions and with great consternation and frustration on the part of both teachers and staff developers at Jones, but much earlier (session 2) at Sumpter. Thus, the breakthrough stage lasted six sessions at Sumpter but only two at Jones. In the rest of this article, we will attempt to relate these differences in part to differences in school cultures.

The Staff Development Process and School Culture

The original questionnaire results suggested that neither Jones nor Sumpter was an ideal candidate for staff development because of low collaboration among teachers reported in both schools. Jones, however, was higher than Sumpter on other critical factors, such as feelings of empowerment, which suggested that its faculty would be more amenable to staff development than teachers at Sumpter. Further, the principal of Jones was considered a strong leader. And yet, teachers at Sumpter moved much faster toward the empowerment stage than those at Jones. A description of the culture of the two schools reveals significant differences.

Jones. Seven teachers participated in the PASD process, and the principal participated whenever her schedule permitted. The teachers of Jones described their students as "having a full range of academic ability" and as often alert, curious, and good to each other. They felt that most, if not all, of their students would make it through high school because, as one teacher put it, "the gray matter was there." Although they appeared interested in the project, Jones teachers all proclaimed that time was a problem. They said, "I'm happy with what I'm doing" and "I don't need any of this" and maintained that limited time precluded collegial work. In response to the staff developers' encouragement to set their own

agenda, the teachers wanted to be shown the "right way to teach reading." Numerous times over the course of the staff development program, the teachers requested that the staff developers tell them what to do.

In the initial interviews, Jones teachers indicated that they knew each other socially and were congenial. They were, however, aware of considerable differences in each others' methods of teaching reading. As Ellen, a fifth-grade teacher, suggested:

Staff Developer: Do you think there is a characteristic way of teaching reading in the school?

Ellen: There was, but it's gone. When I came last year, they began, I think, in a strong basal orientation, very strong in the basic skills. [The principal] didn't come in and tell people they had to teach another way, but she let me and another teacher do a more whole-language kind of thing. . . . So now there's a really quite wide range I think. Some people are real hard-lined: read in your group, read your story. . . . Other people aren't. Nobody is on anybody else's case, which I think is really nice. We all kind of accept each other.

In contrast, Randall claimed to be unaware of his colleagues' approaches: "I haven't a clue. I'm so tied up in my own room and what I'm doing. I've talked to other teachers, but I wouldn't say that there is a characteristic way." For the most part the teachers stayed within their own classrooms.

Knowledge of these differences, and social congeniality, seemed to be barriers to the teachers' talking with each other about beliefs and practices. Observations indi-

cated that although the teachers were friendly on a superficial level, they were isolated from each other professionally. During informal discussions, teachers indicated that although they mingled socially, they rarely, if ever, discussed teaching. They found it uncomfortable to express opinions, and six of the teachers suggested in their final open-ended belief interviews that the staff development process could be improved by eliminating the group sessions.

From the first session, the staff developers encouraged the teachers to set their own agenda. However, throughout the introductory stage (sessions 1–8) the teachers at Jones pushed for the staff developers to “just tell us neat ideas about how to teach reading” rather than examined their own beliefs in front of their colleagues. As the sessions progressed, the teachers’ beliefs about teaching and reading became more apparent. For example, Ellen’s student-oriented approach and Emmett’s concern for pleasing parents became obvious, but teachers’ willingness to discuss their own ideas evolved slowly. Over time, themes of powerlessness and accountability emerged.

In sessions 9–10, the teachers were still waiting for the staff development process to “present a best way of doing reading,” and the staff developers were waiting for teachers to discuss practices. However, teachers moved into the breakthrough stage, expressing their feelings that the process was not working. Session 10 at Jones involved a confrontation concerning the purposes of the staff development and the style of the staff developers. The teachers accused the staff developers of having the “correct answer” and waiting for the teachers to guess it. Teachers mentioned that they had been talking about this all week in the halls. This session became a breakthrough session because the teachers had decided to assert themselves to express their feelings, revealing themselves and their beliefs. Furthermore, teachers addressed the nature of the staff development. Ralph described his vulnerability, because there was “more

emotion in this one [program]” and “ordinary staff development programs were cut and dried.” James claimed that his awareness had been awakened; he was not as comfortable with his reading program as he had been. Several teachers also complained that the staff developers were trying to tell them what to do, yet after complaining about the control of the project, the teachers asked for a “bag of tricks.” This confrontation seemed to allow the process to move to the empowerment stage.

The final session, session 11, was the beginning of the empowerment stage, where teachers began to discuss their practices. Consuelo addressed her concern about classroom management, and Emmett revealed his attitudes about reading. Classroom observation also revealed changes in practices, such as more elaborate reading lessons and an increased use of literature. Ten teachers seemed to shift away from skills and toward an interactive, literature-based approach to reading. Individual teachers made changes in language used in the classroom, in practices, or lesson plans. There were also subtle effects at the group level of having participated in a yearlong group staff development process. Teachers seemed friendlier toward each other and more protective of one another’s feelings. In a final discussion, the teachers made plans to extend what they had learned beyond the project.

The culture at Jones appeared to be based on congeniality. When explored beyond the surface, however, little more than this congeniality linked the teachers, which may have contributed to their resistance to collegial work. The teachers did not, for example, ask questions about what colleagues did, although they did listen quietly when colleagues spoke. Emmett was aware of and willing to discuss his practices, justifications, and theories but not particularly willing to work with the staff developers. Although his colleagues had a cordial social relationship with him, he maintained a dis-

tance between them and himself when addressing issues of practices.

In contrast, Ellen felt close to her colleagues professionally. She described their relationship as warm and sharing, yet she also alluded to their reluctance to discuss their philosophy of teaching reading. Ellen, however, liked being different. A self-described whole-language person, she was surprised to learn that Emmett also described himself that way. Furthermore, she appeared to underscore differences between her theoretical orientation and others'.

Interestingly, evidence from effective schools research (e.g., Little, 1987; Rosenholtz, 1989) would predict that Jones teachers would have participated enthusiastically in this project. The principal was considered a strong leader; the teachers seemed congenial; the student body seemed engaged in learning. However, teachers' lack of collegial interaction prior to the study discouraged their participation.

Sumpter. Five teachers and the curriculum specialist participated in the PASD process. The teachers described their students as relatively average but sometimes hard to handle. Four teachers expressed concern about the students making it through school, saying, "It's not so much that they couldn't, it's whether they want to," expressing concern that the home situation more than school affects school performance. In contrast, one teacher suggested that the Sumpter students were, on the whole, "from homes where they're expected to do well and a lot of emphasis is placed on education. One of the things I attribute to being able to work with them so easily is the fact that their parents are behind me 100%."

Despite these contradictory images of the students at Sumpter, the teachers agreed on their perceptions of the school. Jane described the teachers as "fairly traditional." Sarah confirmed this, saying, "I don't really know. To tell you the truth, I haven't been in any of the classrooms. . . . I think most everyone, with the exception

of one or two people, uses the basal reader." Deloris said she did not know: "You see, we're so isolated that I really can't tell if there is. There probably is, though; I can tell in terms of what the kids do who come to me."

All teachers thought they were isolated from their colleagues. They did not mingle and, from their comments, did not know the teaching philosophies of their colleagues, at least in reading. Few teachers in Sumpter knew each other before the staff development, and they seldom met as a faculty. In her first interview, Andrea blamed this on the configuration of the school, which consisted of a number of classrooms around a large courtyard:

Staff Developer: Do you think that there's a characteristic way of teaching reading in this school?

Andrea: You know, I really don't know. To tell you the truth, I haven't been in any of the classrooms to see.

Staff Developer: Do the teachers here exchange materials?

Andrea: Reading materials? Not that I know of.

Staff Developer: Or, really, any kind of materials?

Andrea: You know, our school isn't conducive. . . .

Staff Developer: You mean, the way it's laid out?

Andrea: Yeah. At first I didn't know who those people were for a long time. Or, where their room was. I've only been here 3 years. I very seldom get on the other side where the parking lot is, I never get over there. I didn't know anyone.

Staff Developer: There isn't a teachers' lounge?

Andrea: It's too small; we'd never fit.

The teachers did agree on one thing—a strong dislike of the principal. They thought

he was a barrier to their creativity: "He won't let me do that" was a theme throughout their initial discussions of new practices. Further, there were feelings of individualism and distrust among teachers. At the beginning of the program, they used the observer to send messages to each other about meeting times and places rather than talk to each other. The teachers were isolated and seemed to like it that way, valuing their ability to work on their own.

During the initial session (the introductory stage), although the teachers did not know each other socially and did not know what their peers were doing in the classroom, they seemed genuinely to enjoy getting to know each other through talking about their teaching, and they were able initially to coalesce around their dislike of the principal. They also began to consult with each other during school. Moreover, they appeared committed to using the staff development process to gain as much information and as many ideas as possible.

Throughout the breakthrough stage (sessions 2-6) the teachers came prepared to discuss their practices and their concerns with an almost quiet curiosity to learn about and consider their colleagues' practices. For example, Jane discussed her use of concept analysis, and Sarah discussed the modeling in her classroom. With each session the teachers talked more, and the staff developers contributed less. Teachers also monitored topics to be discussed and recommended strategies to be examined. Additionally, the Sumpter teachers used the project staff as coaches and consultants and brought back to the group what they had learned when they tried new approaches in their classrooms.

The discussions of practices continued in the empowerment stage, but these sessions were planned and directed by the teachers. The shift from breakthrough to empowerment was subtle. Each teacher had issues of practice she wanted to discuss, and the PASD process culminated with a session focused on literature groups that was

developed completely by the teachers. These teachers, who had hardly spoken prior to the PASD process, had become interested and active members of a group whose excitement and interest seemed to rise as this process progressed.

Francis, who at first resisted the staff development process, came to enjoy the meetings. During her individual session, the staff development sessions, and privately, she acknowledged that no one had ever asked her about her philosophy of teaching reading. In the seventh session, she affirmed that she found it "very important" to be aware of her philosophy when thinking about her teaching. When asked informally what they found most valuable about the staff development process, the teachers said resoundingly that it was the opportunity of getting together with colleagues. They felt that their experiences in the staff development process had opened new collegial vistas.

Changes occurred among the teachers at Sumpter School, both individually and in the group context. The teachers were clearer about their beliefs and reflected more often about possible innovations in the classroom. The teachers demonstrated an increased interest in an interactive, literature-based approach to reading. Final classroom observations indicated that four of the five teachers were using novels because they felt students were more interested in them. Teachers established students' background knowledge before and throughout reading. As a group, Sumpter teachers became more collegial, willing to explore ideas and questions with each other, open to considering alternatives.

Discussion

Several contrasts in addition to the variations in the stages between the two schools emerged from the data. The stages were simply markers that indicated to the staff developers the need to attend to potential cultural differences between the schools.

Initially, the research team thought that Jones School would provide a good envi-

ronment in which to conduct staff development. Its principal was interested in research, had expertise in reading, and was dedicated to her teachers. The teachers seemed interested in change and satisfied with their work environment and their principal. As the PASD process progressed, however, it became apparent that the teachers preferred congeniality to exploring their beliefs. Challenging their colleagues' ideas or more deeply exploring their own were not options these teachers chose. Moreover, they appeared to feel constrained by the environment, isolating themselves at every opportunity. In contrast, Sumpter School, which was predicted to fail in the staff development effort, blossomed during the process. Initially, teachers discussed the constraints they felt from the principal, students, and the environment. Yet as the staff development process unfolded, the teachers became receptive to change. They became curious about practices, requested modeling of strategies, and struggled against the constraints.

Collegiality

Jones appeared to have a code of teacher congeniality rather than collegiality (Little, 1987) that (a) did not encourage teachers to enter the rooms of colleagues, (b) did not promote questions about classroom practice, and (c) did not support criticism of colleagues. Further, at Jones there was little collaboration. The teachers did not discuss their practices, nor was there evidence of true cooperation among teachers. The staff developers tried hard to support a teacher-directed program by attempting not to interfere and to redirect teachers' questions about the best way to teach reading. The norms of the school, however, were so strong that staff development could not overcome them.

Sumpter School did not appear to have such norms. The only real norm seemed to be a dislike of the principal. Once teachers coalesced around that, they opened up. Teachers at Sumpter seldom collaborated,

discussed their practices, or cooperated. However, in a year-end self-report, teachers indicated they were talking more often to each other about practices.

Individualism

A code of individualism was also in evidence. At Jones it was less apparent because the teachers were friendly and gave the appearance of working together. Yet, when we observed them, it was clear that contact between teachers was minimal and that they appeared to like their isolation. In Sumpter teachers seldom talked with each other.

The culture at both schools seemed to influence greatly teachers' willingness to change as well as their beliefs, actions, and participation in any school program. The teachers' similar perceptions of students were relatively permanent. Further, norms of individualism and isolation often prevented teachers from discussing ideas, which curtailed collaboration and sometimes affected their willingness to discuss practices. This research thus suggests that to be successful, a model of teacher change must consider school culture.

One explanation for the discrepancy between our findings and those of previous studies could be that the research on which the survey and its predictions were based evolved from a different conception of staff development than the one implemented in this study. Prior research (e.g., Little, 1987; Rosenholtz, 1989; Smylie, 1988) conceived of staff development and change programs as top-down processes that promoted a change in a particular classroom behavior or curriculum based on decisions by individuals outside the classroom. In our staff development process, we did not promote a single philosophy; instead, we asked teachers to reflect on their practices: to discuss beliefs—the whys of practices—with their colleagues.

The belief interviews revealed that although the teachers at Jones were highly congenial, they did not discuss their teaching. They felt that their fellow teachers

probably taught reading quite differently than they did. They found it difficult to express their beliefs about teaching in front of each other, and four of the teachers suggested in their final belief interviews that the staff development process could be improved by "eliminating the group sessions." Our staff development process attempted to overcome the norms of individualism and social collegiality (Lortie, 1975), which were strong in Jones.

Few teachers in Sumpter had even met each other before the staff development. They did not like the principal and seldom met as a faculty. They were relieved to find out that our staff development program was not just another classroom requirement imposed by the principal. They welcomed the opportunity to discuss teaching and by doing so were not breaking norms against collegiality that seemed present in Jones.

Given the Jones teachers' responses to the group staff development process, we believe that a more traditional staff development process may have been more successful in Jones than in Sumpter. A traditional process would not require that the teachers discuss their beliefs with each other and therefore overcome norms against professional collegiality. In traditional staff development, teachers could maintain their individual autonomy by deciding whether or not to experiment with a new strategy in their own classrooms. The Sumpter teachers, however, might view traditional staff development as another attempt by the principal to impose a method on them and therefore might be quite resistant to the change.

Two factors in addition to school culture could have affected the outcomes of the staff development process. The first relates to the power of individuals to affect the outcome of staff development. The traditional staff development literature emphasizes the importance of the school in the success of staff development. Little (1981, p. 4) suggests that school organization is not just the "context" of staff development but the

"heart of the matter." This emphasis on school organization can mask the effects of individuals on the process. In this study, one teacher in each school strongly affected the climate and progress of the staff development. The teacher at Sumpter was a highly empowered, efficacious teacher who was going through major changes in her beliefs about reading instruction. She was very willing to talk about her beliefs and practices. The teacher at Jones was deeply concerned about maintaining social congeniality among the teachers and was adamant that the staff development should "just tell us neat ideas to try."

Another difference in the staff development processes in the two schools could also have affected the results. The Jones sessions were held at the school, whereas Sumpter sessions were held in the home of one of the staff developers. We later asked the Jones teachers about meeting at the school. They thought this was a mistake, that meeting off-campus would have removed them from the problems of the school. It probably would also have removed them, to a certain degree, from the norms of individualism that so strongly affected the staff development process.

Conclusion

This study suggests that the interaction of school culture and the expectations for participation embodied within the staff development process strongly affected progress toward group collaboration and teacher empowerment. The traditional approach to staff development involves a transfer model of teaching, wherein "experts" inform teachers about methods mandated for classroom implementation. In contrast, our staff development process was designed to shift control from the staff developers to the teachers, and the content of the program was based in part on teachers' own beliefs, practices, and concerns. The effectiveness of such a process probably is related to factors quite different from those described in the traditional staff development literature,

namely, to social norms within a school that encourage teachers to discuss their beliefs and practices.

Our results suggest that the traditional staff development literature may not be a useful guide for the development of school-wide programs designed to help teachers discuss and examine their beliefs and practices and experiment with new ones. Our findings also imply that careful documentation of such teacher discussions and the culture in which they take place would contribute to new theory on the relationship between school culture and school improvement processes, and therefore to the effectiveness of staff development.

Appendix

Summary of Conversation during the Jones School Staff Development Group Meetings

Introductory Stage

This staff development program took place in the school library.

From the first session, staff developers encouraged teachers to set their own agenda, although the teachers did not seem to believe them. Throughout the first session and continuing throughout the introductory stage, the teachers asked for directions on the right way to teach reading.

Session 1

The project was introduced to the teachers.

Session 2

Teachers were asked to begin talking about their beliefs, using their belief interviews as a reference. Teachers responded to a request for volunteers to discuss their interviews. As one teacher asked a question about teaching reading, the group (both staff developers and teachers) responded.

This session also focused on different types of teacher questions, an area of interest identified by the teachers. Lists were made, and charts drawn, but time precluded a long discussion.

A recurring theme, "Doing it [teaching] right," was addressed during this session. All teachers seemed concerned about this theme. In fact, they appeared hesitant to discuss their practices because of that fear.

Session 3

One teacher got angry when pressed to discuss his practices. He accused the project of promoting one "right" way of teaching reading. Al-

though the staff developers assured him that this was not the case, the teacher's conviction was strong. A later conversation indicated that he was actually upset with colleagues who, in his opinion, were misrepresenting their teaching practices to please the staff developers.

After continued discussion of belief interviews, the topic turned to questions teachers ask during reading instruction. A list of the questions was drawn, and the teachers discussed the purposes of questioning. Many agreed that they asked questions to develop and assess students' work. Emmett mentioned accountability for the first time in the context of wanting parents and principals to recognize his reading program and its value. This later became a major focus for discussions.

As the session progressed, the teachers' beliefs about teaching and reading became more apparent. For example, Ellen's student-oriented approach and Emmett's concern for pleasing parents became obvious. At this point the teachers were still not discussing their practices at great length, although they quickly began to mention their practices periodically.

Session 4

Staff developer 1 once again underscored the importance of teachers generating their own ideas for the staff development. She attempted to reassure the teachers that the staff developers felt it was imperative for each teacher to decide for himself or herself what was the "right" way to teach reading.

The topic then turned again to questioning and a matrix (which included descriptions of questions) designed from the teachers' information. Quickly, however, the discussion moved to accountability and grading. Concerned as they were with teaching the right way, teachers were also concerned with grading correctly. The teachers told a story about how the principal and the district "made" them do certain things. The principal, who was present in that session, refuted this allegation. Yet the teachers went right on believing it. They appeared uncertain about grading, confused about its purposes, and under a great deal of pressure, seemingly self-inflicted, to please parents, the principal, and students. The discussion indicated that grading may be the driving concern affecting teachers' beliefs about teaching.

Session 5

This grading theme continued in session 5. The staff developer made an initial attempt to return the discussion to the activity matrix, but the topic quickly returned to assessment. The teachers described many horrors about grading and accountability, but no one seemed to agree on either issue. Emmett mentioned his concern,

which continued, that grading was subjective but that teachers needed to fit it into an objective mold to be successful. A theme for Ellen also emerged—that of objectifying grades when she recognized them as subjective.

The teachers in this session also manifested hostility. They seemed anxious, fidgety, and unwilling to discuss their personal experiences. Their perceived powerlessness regarding grading seemed to make them very uncomfortable.

Session 6

This session, which was actually canceled after the research team arrived because the teachers had another commitment, involved more of the same topics. After the meeting cancellation, several teachers stayed to discuss feelings of powerlessness and the inadequacies of the grading system. In the midst of this discussion, the staff developers asked the teachers to direct the next session. The teachers asked, "What do you want to work on?" again attempting to relinquish their power. The staff developers reassured the teachers that they (the staff developers) would not present anything except topics chosen by the teachers.

Session 7

This session began in January. The teachers appeared to feel renewed when discussing the project. That, however, was quickly thrown aside when the teachers again asked the staff developers to tell them (the teachers) what they thought was interesting in the study of reading. Emmett suggested that the teachers bring their "pet concerns" to the group meetings and said he would discuss his "pet concern"—quality versus quantity approaches to reading.

Session 8

Although the teachers were given a reading assignment on assessment, they had not read it. The topic therefore moved to a discussion of what James was doing in his classroom with activities designed from his participation in this project.

The teachers next launched into an intense discussion of their students' inadequacies. Most of the problems were blamed on the home. One staff developer responded vehemently to what she perceived as negative comments Ralph made about his students. Although she apologized immediately, many teachers appeared uncomfortable. In Ralph's defense, Consuelo said that he was "just speaking the truth." This same staff developer then expressed her frustration about not conveying the importance of certain instructional strategies. She wanted the teachers to use them, and they were not.

Emmett turned the discussion to quality/quantity of reading. He described his practices

and the teachers questioned him. This was one of the first times that a teacher had described instruction.

Breakthrough Stage

Session 9

This session was a breakthrough session because the teachers attempted to assert themselves. They expressed their feelings and revealed themselves and their beliefs.

The session was devoted to a discussion of assessment. One staff developer pressed the teachers to elaborate on their beliefs about grading. She questioned their tests and their grading system. Both staff developers continuously attempted to draw out teachers' beliefs and to have teachers elaborate on their strategies. Unfortunately, the teachers were unwilling to consider alternative methods of grading and appeared quite angry about being pressed to elaborate on their beliefs.

Session 10

The teachers moved into the breakthrough stage. They expressed their feelings that the program was, in fact, not working. They were still waiting for the staff development program to "present a best way of doing reading." They said they wanted structure and boundaries added to the staff development program as well as specific assignments to complete.

Teachers discussed the nature of the staff development program, that it required them to reveal their beliefs. Ralph described his vulnerability, because there was "more emotion in this one," and ordinary staff development programs were cut and dried. James claimed that his awareness had been awakened; he was not as comfortable with his reading program as he had been. Some teachers, however, were still asking for "answers," even after complaining that the project was controlling.

After the critiques and complaints were all heard, the staff developers quickly discussed reading practices. They expressed their frustration about not being able to discuss the reading practices materials the research team had gathered.

Empowerment Stage

Session 11

The teachers, once warmed up, began to talk about their practices in the context of the definition of an "authentic" teacher. Consuelo, for example, talked about her concern for controlling her classroom. Emmett revealed his attitudes about reading.

The teachers decided that this should be the final session. Each discussed the effects of the project on his or her teaching. Several teachers

mentioned the importance of the discussions. Others were quiet. Emmett appeared to have been most affected by the project.

The themes of the staff development program at Jones School were accountability and the desire to do teaching "right." Teachers' comments indicated that they were far more concerned with these themes than with any issue related to reading. These concerns permeated teachers' decisions and actions.

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