

Restructure Staff Development For Systemic Change

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ABSTRACT

This paper presents a systems approach based on the work of W. Edwards Deming to system wide, high impact staff development. Deming has pointed out the significance of structure in systems. By restructuring the process of staff development we can bring about cost effective improvement of the whole system. We can improve student achievement while eliminating the need for expensive remedial, gifted, learning disabilities and most special education programs.

Keywords: Systems do more with less; Deming; Structural Change

INTRODUCTION

This article describes how staff development can increase the system's capacity to improve while costing less. Three essential steps are necessary for successful staff development to cause systemic change. We now have access to more exciting educational innovations available to schools than ever before. Dozens of well developed staff development programs are going on constantly. Yet we consistently hear a disturbing question. "We trained all our teachers in a great program three years ago, and almost none of it seems to be in place today. Why?" Extensive training in well known and accepted programs shows little or no difference in a year or two. For staff development to have significant and lasting impact, three essential steps must take place.

The need for staff development must be recognized by the staff to be trained.

Sending teachers for training to improve instruction is based on the assumption that improvement is needed. If the staff to be trained does not see this need, there is virtually no chance for significant long term change as a result of such training. In the case cited above, the central office had mandated training in Hunter's program. Mandates, we are coming to learn, may bring some degree of compliance, but only commitment can bring excellence. The teachers all attended the sessions (i.e. compliance) but did not commit to implementing the training. The best way to gain consensus of staff for the need for training is through skillful use of clear data.

Staff to be trained should be involved in choosing the training program they want.

Even when staff see and agree upon need, the success of staff development can be thwarted when someone else chooses the training program. Staff must not only recognize the need for training, but also recognize the training program most appropriate to meet their need. Both are necessary for commitment. A small committee of staff can explore and gather options for the entire staff to review. Time must be taken to discuss options and develop consensus on which program is best. Without such consensus, school wide lasting change cannot result.

All staff involved should go through the training together with leadership.

By experiencing the training together, a community of interest is formed. When we go back to the school to implement the new program, we can support and act as resources for each other. It is also critical that all who supervise the program go through the training with the teachers. It makes no sense to train the whole elementary teaching staff in a new reading program and not the principal. Deming refused to train any organization unless the leadership participated in the training.

While these three steps require time and a different structure for setting up staff involvement, taking them virtually guarantees successful lasting change as a result of staff development. Without them, there will be little or no success as there is and has been for decades.

The structural difference in this process from traditional staff development makes it far more effective and of greater impact. For example, training a whole elementary staff in a more effective reading program will improve student achievement in reading far more than remedial programs which have consistently failed to improve achievement. Remedial programs only exist because of the failure of the regular program to address students’ needs. The cause of student failure is program ineffectiveness. The solution is to improve the program, not set up band aid remedial programs which tend to do the same things as the regular program and continue failure.

Each year we spend hundreds of billions on remedial programs without success. This process for staff development is not only more effective to improve the regular program but costs less. When the regular program addresses the needs of all we will be able to eliminate not only remedial reading programs but also remedial mathematics, remedial writing, special education (for all but the most severely disabled), gifted programs and others.

Some time ago I served as a consultant to a high school that had about 300 students out of 400 fail a state minimum competency test in writing. When I met with the language Arts department I asked for their thoughts. They suggested the school district hire a writing specialist to teach writing. I pointed out that one writing specialist might be able to handle five classes of 20 students. That would cover 100 students (5 classes of 20 students each). What about the other 200 failing students? They responded hire two more writing specialists. In so responding they were simply suggesting the same ineffective remedial process as we already had for reading and mathematics.

I suggested that the district did not have funds to hire two more teachers. How about if they, the Language Arts department, teach them? They said they had never been trained to teach writing. I suggested they could be trained to teach it. Why not explore the options for training and see if they could agree on one they preferred. They agreed and did so.

Within two years their failure rate on the same writing minimum competency test was zero. Granted it was a “minimum competency” test. None the less it was a remarkable improvement.

The comparative cost effectiveness of the traditional remedial model vs. the restructured staff development model is striking. Table 1 shows the relative cost effectiveness for one program for ten years.

Table 1

Traditional Remedial Model	Restructured Staff Development Model
Hire 3 remedial writing teachers	Train 10 teachers in the Language Arts Department
Cost: \$40,000 X 3 teachers = \$120,000 per year; \$1,200,000 = 10 years	Cost: \$5,000 = a onetime expense for training; \$0 = next 9 years (Department chair trains new teachers)
1 year effectiveness/Impact = 300 students taught by 3 teachers per year (5 classes of 20 X 3 teachers)	1 year effectiveness/Impact = 1,000 students taught by 10 teachers per year (5 classes of 20 X 10 teachers)
10 year effectiveness/impact: 3,000 students taught	10 year effectiveness/impact: 10,000 students taught

Consider the possible implications of the present remedial model for multiple academic programs for multiple years in Table 2:

Table 2

No. Schools	No Programs	years	Cost
1	1	1	\$120,000
1	5	1	\$600,000
5	5	5	\$15,000,000
5	5	10	\$30, 000,000

Given the demonstrated ineffectiveness of the “traditional remedial model” in terms of failure to improve academic achievement, the waste nationally over years is in the billions. Meanwhile the restructured staff development program used to improve the entire regular program offers a systemic change that can have tremendous positive results in terms of improved student achievement. This is true not only regarding remedial programs but for special education, learning disabilities, gifted and talented and other “special programs.”

Tables 1 and 2 clearly indicates the cost – effectiveness of improving the regular program (using existing resources) over the addition of remedial or special programs. “Special programs” exist only because the regular classroom program does not meet the needs of millions of students. Like remedial programs, these special programs, expensive as they are, are limited in terms of the amount of time students can spend in them. They spend the bulk of their in school time in the regular classroom program which does not meet their needs. It is time to stop all of the ineffective band aid special programs and improve the full time program to meet the needs of all students all day all year k – 12, indeed k – 16.

Staff development, structured and conducted according to the three requirements noted above is the primary means to more effective programs in the regular classroom. That will bring significant achievement gains for all students while reducing required resources significantly.

AUTHOR INFORMATION

Dr. Thomas F. Kelly is Professor of Educational Administration, Leadership and Technology at Dowling College, Shirley, NY. This article is an excerpt from his new book *We Can Do More and Better With Less: Education Reform Can Work*. Publication by Infinity is expected March 2012. www.wecandomoreandbetterwithless.com. E-mail: Tkelly7662@aol.com or kellyth@dowling.edu.

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