

### 3. Engage teachers in meaningful staff development activities

circumstances. Compared with the complexity and ambiguity of the most ambitious reforms, professional development is too often substantively weak and politically marginal. . . . Professional development must be constructed in ways that deepen the discussion, open up the debates, and enrich the array of possibilities for action. (p. 14)

Michael Garet and his colleagues (Garet, Porter, Desmone, Birman, & Yoon, 2001) conducted one of the most extensive studies on the effects of staff development activities. Their survey of 1,000 teachers revealed that those features of staff development with the strongest relationship to reported change in teacher behavior are (1) focus on content knowledge, (2) opportunities for active learning, and (3) overall coherence of the staff development activities.

**Focus on content** refers to the extent to which staff development activities address specific strategies for specific subject areas. This is not to say that staff development activities must be subject-specific (e.g., staff development for mathematics, staff development for science), though this is certainly an effective option. At the very least, pedagogical knowledge must be presented to teachers in the context of their specific subject areas. Staff development activities that present generic strategies and do not provide opportunities for classroom application are probably not very effective in terms of actually changing teacher behavior.

**Opportunities for active learning** elaborates on the notion that teachers are able to apply the pedagogical knowledge they learn. The best application task they might engage in is to actually try out a particular instructional strategy. This means that they return to

their classrooms and actually use the strategy in an action research environment—an environment in which they informally examine the impact of various strategies on student achievement.

**Overall coherence** means that the staff development program is perceived as a coherent, integrated whole with “staff development days” building on one another. Length and number of staff development activities are positively correlated with change in teacher behavior. Thus, the more staff development provided, the greater the change in teacher behavior.

It is easy to become disheartened with the staff development efforts in most schools. In my experience, most schools and districts violate virtually every principle in Garet’s study by (1) presenting staff development sessions that are not tied to specific subject areas, (2) not providing opportunities for teachers to translate generic strategies into the context of specific subject areas, (3) not providing opportunities for teachers to field test the strategies presented during staff development days, and (4) providing only a few staff development days that are unrelated and disjointed.

The pattern of staff development as practiced in the United States stands in sharp contrast to that in Japan. Stevenson and Stigler (1992) note: “By Japanese law, beginning teachers must receive a minimum of twenty days of in-service training during their first year on the job” (p. 159). Additionally, Japanese staff development activities employ hands-on efforts to change specific lessons and units. Stigler and Hiebert (1999) note that this is done in the context of what the Japanese refer to as “lesson study” or *jugyou*

*kenkyuu*, which is an aspect of *kounaikenshuu*, a comprehensive set of activities that form the crux of school improvement. While engaged in *kounaikenshuu*, teachers work together on various teams with various roles and functions:

One of the most common components of *kounaikenshuu* is lesson study (*jugyou kenkyuu*). In lesson study, groups of teachers meet regularly over long periods of time (ranging from several months to a year) to work on the design, implementation, testing, and improvement of one or several "research lessons" (*kenkyuu jugyou*). By all indications, lesson study is extremely popular and highly valued by Japanese teachers, especially at the elementary level. It is the linchpin of the improvement process. (pp. 110-111)

Although it would probably be difficult to perform a wholesale transplant of lesson study as practiced by Japanese educators into the U.S. system, certain characteristics might

be readily transported. To do this, Stigler and Hiebert recommend that teachers organize themselves into teams based on common interests or issues in teaching their subjects. They then systematically employ specific techniques in the context of specific lessons and observe each other doing so. They give each other feedback regarding what worked well and what could be changed in these trial lessons. Finally, they capture and archive collective knowledge gained from these efforts for others to build on.

## Summary

Defining features of collegiality and professionalism includes the manner in which teachers interact with one another and the nature, scope, and sequence of professional development activities. Collegiality and professionalism involve interactions between teachers that are collaborative and congenial.