

“Our schools can be no better than the people who staff them.”

Carnegie Forum on Education and the Economy

THE SYSTEM

TEACHER DEVELOPMENT

To prepare students to compete in today’s global economy, schools must teach much more than reading, writing, and arithmetic. They must provide the kind and quality of education once reserved for an elite few.¹

To meet this challenge, teachers must acquire a greater in-depth knowledge of the content of their field and the teaching methods appropriate to that field.² Are the current methods of training teachers adequate? If not, how can they be improved?

Issues

- Teachers are being asked to change how they interact with students. The professional consensus about what constitutes exemplary practice has shifted from a model of “teaching as telling” to “teaching as coaching,” with students actively involved in constructing knowledge. Most teachers have not been trained for this type of teaching.
- In 1994, 35 percent of U.S. public schools had access to the Internet; by 1999, that number had risen to 78 percent. In 1994, 3 percent of classrooms had Internet access; by 1999, 63 percent were connected.³
- Teachers are being asked to use new and often unfamiliar technologies, including computers with access to the Internet. Yet, many teachers received their professional education before these technologies were available for the classroom.
- Many teachers now are expected to use technology not only as a classroom tool but also for activities such as record keeping, communication with parents, distance learning, professional development, and curriculum development.
- Teachers increasingly are being asked to take on expanded roles and responsibilities outside the classroom, especially in schools where site-based management is being implemented.
- Teachers are managing classrooms that are more diverse culturally and linguistically. And these groups—whether students, parents, or community members—expect their special needs to be served.⁴

Induction Programs for New Teachers

The National Commission on Teaching and America’s Future (NCTAF) notes that new teachers often are assigned to classes and left to “sink or swim” with little or no support from more experienced teachers. NCTAF argues that this lack of support for new teachers contributes to high turnover and less effective teaching.⁵

A growing number of schools and districts are implementing formal induction programs to help beginning teachers adjust to their new responsibilities and work environment. Through these programs, experienced teachers help new teachers by

providing guidance on pedagogical challenges and chores, ethical dilemmas, student assessment, and classroom management, and by familiarizing new teachers with school programs, policies, and resources.⁶

Professional Development

Professional development once was thought of as a particular kind of activity such as a workshop or course. More recent conceptions include a wider range of activities that emphasize ongoing rather than one-time events and that focus on teachers' own practice rather than on someone else's pedagogical formula. Thus, activities such as joint work (where teachers share responsibilities that require teacher cooperation and interdependence), teacher networks, collaboration between schools and colleges, professional development schools, and participation in the assessment process leading to National Board certification now are viewed as professional development activities.

Critics of half-day workshops and other traditional types of professional development claim that they fail in both content and duration to address new concepts of teaching and learning and, thus, do not modify teachers' practices in any meaningful way. Effective programs, on the other hand, share many characteristics.

Effective professional development programs:⁷

- Address content areas central to teachers' needs.
- Are of sufficient duration to allow time for teachers to absorb new ideas and test them in their classrooms, get feedback from others about how they are managing, and then practice some more.
- Are problem-oriented and focus on inquiry and reflection—in and about classroom work and subject matter competence.
- Are collaborative.
- Provide sources of new ideas.
- Are coherent, intensive, and ongoing.
- Connect directly to broad goals for student learning and school improvement.

States historically have not played a lead role in shaping professional development except for their influence on the initial preparation of teachers through their regulation of teacher education programs. Now, however, many states are taking a more active role and trying to influence the focus, scope, and quality of professional development as well as its quantity.⁸

Corcoran has identified the steps some states are taking to improve teacher professional development.⁹ These include:

- Finding out how much is being spent for professional development and how it is being spent
- Conducting policy reviews to determine the impact of state policies on local decision making
- Developing guidelines, standards, and incentives for districts and schools
- Reexamining how time for professional development is being used

In addition, the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS) is working with teachers and teacher organizations to establish standards for advanced practice and a rigorous assessment and certification process. Ohio has been at the forefront of states encouraging national teacher certification.

Endnotes

1. Carnegie Forum on Education and the Economy, *A Nation Prepared: Teachers for the 21st Century*, Rochester, NY, Author, 1986. However, Paul Barton points out that occupations with both the highest and lowest requirements are growing at above-average rates (P. Barton, *What Jobs Require: Literacy, Education, and Training, 1940-2000*, Princeton, NJ, Educational Testing Service, 2000.).
2. National Commission on Teaching and America's Future (NCTAF), *What Matters Most: Teaching for America's Future*, New York, NY, Author, 1996.
3. National Center for Education Statistics, *Stats in Brief: Internet Access in U.S. Public Schools and Classrooms, 1994-1999*, Washington, DC, Author, 2000.
4. In the fall of 1986, 70.4 percent of U.S. students in grades K-12 were white, 16.1 percent were black, and 9.9 percent were Hispanic. Eleven years later in the fall of 1997, white students comprised 63.5 percent of the K-12 student population, blacks 17.0 percent, and Hispanics 14.4 percent. Despite much furor, the racial distribution changed little. Ohio's change was hardly noticeable: 83.1 percent white in 1986, 81.7 percent in 1997; 15.0 percent black in 1986, 15.6 percent in 1997; 1.0 percent Hispanic in 1986, 1.5 percent in 1997. (National Center for Education Statistics, *Digest of Education Statistics, 1999*, Washington, DC, Author, 1999.)
5. NCTAF, 1996.
6. Ibid.
7. M. Smylie, "From Bureaucratic Control to Building Human Capital: The Importance of Teacher Learning in Education Reform," *Educational Researcher*, 25(7), 1996, p. 10. See also J. Stigler and S. Hiebert, *The Teaching Gap: Best Ideas from the World's Teachers for Improving Education in the Classroom*, New York, NY, Free Press, 1999.
8. E. St. John, J. Ward, and S. Laine, *State Policy on Professional Development: Rethinking the Linkages to Student Outcomes*, Oak Brook, IL, North Central Regional Educational Laboratory, 1999.
9. T. Corcoran, "Helping Teachers Teach Well: Transforming Professional Development," *CPRE Policy Briefs*, June 1995.



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