National Research Focus: Investigating the Differences in Professional Development with Corporate Companies and Public Education in the United States of America

Yolanda E. Smith
Student
PhD Program in Educational Leadership
Prairie View A&M University

William Allan Kritsonis, PhD
Professor
PhD Program in Educational Leadership
Prairie View A&M University

ABSTRACT

To ensure all educational professionals adhere to the highest levels of the profession teachers and administrative staff members are required to complete many hours of professional development to hone their skills and use of technology in and about the classroom. Is there a difference between the professional development experienced by teachers verses the professional development provided to other occupational professionals? If so, how does that effect the quality of education given to students by educators who may feel that their professional development training is ineffective, not relevant, and out of touch.

P art of being a professional is remaining up-to-date with current ideas, strategies, and practices in the field. Too often, teachers view professional development as a waste of their time; something disconnected from their teaching, their students, and their classrooms (Vontz and Leming, 2006). However, doctors, nurses, attorneys, dentists, etc. must remain current in their fields by attending professional development training. Doors of public schools have opened to a variety of customers; customers who come with different ethnic backgrounds, different socioeconomic variables, different

cultural beliefs, and different political backgrounds. The same is true for the corporate world. In order to be successful, Darling-Hammond and McLaughlin (1995) assert that public schools must seek a form of professional development that prepares teachers "to see complex subject matter from the perspectives of diverse students: (p597). They also stated that professional development today also means providing occasions for teachers to reflect critically on their practice and to fashion new knowledge and beliefs about content, pedagogy, and learners" (597).

The purpose of this article is to discuss the difference in professional development given to educators and other professionals. To understand the meaning of professional development is to understand the epistemological nature of professional development. Professional development requires activities designed to build the personal strengths and creative talents of individuals and thus create human resources necessary for organizational productivity. "The nature of professional development for teachers relates directly to the nature of teaching" (Adey, 2004). Attention given to professional development has increased over the years. With the standards of highly qualified teachers coming out of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act passed in 2001 and the demands for high standards with calls for improving quality, teachers have a need, as never before, to update and improve their skills through professional development. This leads us to the question, why has the professional development of teachers apparently lagged so significantly so long? Answers to this question come from the continuing demand from society for improvements in the quality of education (Adey, 2004) A better question is, how complex is it to research professional development? Most importantly, it will be interesting to investigate the state of business development and how it is similar and different from the education within the school system (Natale, O'Neill, and Madden 1997).

Organizations are always looking for ways to improve and the public education system is no different. Corporate companies' survival is based on looking ahead and predicting the future trend; by doing so, they will increase their gains in profits. No profits, no company. Successful corporations hire the best available talent and provide for their employees' continued development. The No Child Left Behind Act demands public schools to hire Highly Qualified Teachers and to keep them well trained. Texas Education Agency (TEA) implements the NCLB Act by imposing the Highly, Objective, Uniform State Standard of Evaluation (HOUSE). Under HOUSE, teachers are required to demonstrate competency by completing 24 HOUSE points. These points are earned by participating in professional development training and/or Continuing Professional Education (CPE).

According to Meell (1985), professional development for teachers has been the focus of different studies, in particular, issues of weaknesses of organizations and needs assessment, control, and governance. The research also alluded to a study of teachers' attitudes and experiences with educational professional development in South Dakota suggesting that their previous experiences have not been useful. Effectiveness of professional development is the core issue. How can we get teachers to value professional development? What professional development training would result in effective performance?

In creating professional development for teachers, administrators often forget the two most important traits: individuality and self-determination. Unlike other professions teachers are not allowed to choose amongst a variety of professional development avenues (Marczely, 1996). Teachers often feel that administrators who conduct the workshops or seminars are too disconnected from the realities of the classroom. Like students, all teachers are not alike. School administrators need to follow the model of the corporate world. If real and lasting progress and change are to be achieved, they need to personalize professional development by allowing teachers to select from a variety of professional development programs and approaches. Other professionals like doctors and lawyers are allowed to choose areas of specialties within their field of practice. Doctors can be general practitioners, specialists, researchers, or consultants, to name a few. They can move freely from one interest area to the next without abandoning the basic calling. On the other hand, risk taking, experimentation, and movement within the teaching profession have never been encouraged and are often discouraged (Marczely, 1996). Practicing teachers are not encouraged to be writers or researchers. How often has a practicing teacher written a book on classroom management? Books that are written about such topics are written by teachers who have left the public classroom, or astonishingly enough, by people who have never been inside a public classroom.

The quality or the lack there of in regards to professional development effects how teachers value their profession. Society interferes with the professional growth of teachers by questioning its economic worth. Surprisingly enough, parents and board members view teacher development as time taken away from the learning process of students. They expect teachers to be in the classroom at all times. In the public eyes teachers are no more than glorified baby-sitters that get paid huge salaries for nine months of work and the expenditure of funds toward professional development that takes them out of the classroom is seen as a breach of the public trust and a waste of money (Marczely, 1996). This is in complete opposition to the philosophy of the corporate world which views professional development as an investment into the future (Mulder, Nijhof and Brinkerhoff, 1995). Corporate companies that take a proactive approach are more than likely to stay ahead than those who take a reactive approach as do educational leaders and parents. Money is spent on everything except meaningful professional development. Teacher retention is at an all time low (TEA) and if the trust of our future as a nation lies with the teachers who are at the front lines of the battle, then professional development should be looked upon as an investment in the future.

Educational leaders continue to create or endorse ineffective professional development training for teachers. At the same time they expect students' test scores to improve. In addition, teachers are burned out and teacher retention is low. In the past, professional development has too often been an afterthought as school systems initiated major innovations. More districts today are recognizing that they cannot educate all youngsters to high levels without well-designed professional development initiatives (Sparks and Hirsh, 1997).

Corporate training of effective performance has become critical throughout the global economy. Companies focus on their performance by analyzing their results and problems, and try to find solutions that may improve their results (Swanson, 1994). In the private sector corporate training is regarded as essential. When corporate training

contributes to effective performance, and corporate executives are convinced of that, corporate training may receive considerable attention, a high status, and sufficient funds (Mulder, Nijhof, and Brinkerhoff, 1995). At the Education and Value Conflict conference in 1997, a concern regarding the educational system was brought up. It was determined that a comparison of the quality of the education teachers receive and the link between teacher education and the business world, and the roles of government agencies in the education of teachers is needed (Natale and Fenton, 1997). Natale and Fenton stated that it will be interesting to investigate the state of business development and how it is similar and different from the education with the school system. "Two primary ways of intervening in the learning of individuals is through schooling and through the development that takes place in corporations (Natale and Fenton, 1997)."

Under the No Child Left Behind Act, school districts are mandated to hire highly qualified teachers. To be highly qualified, teachers must hold at least a bachelor's degree from a four-year institution, hold full state certification, and demonstrate competence in their subject areas (NCLB, 2001). Federal and state governments have issued new mandates that require teachers to assist all students in attaining high levels of achievement, and they have placed increasing pressure on those charged with delivering professional development experiences that impact teacher and student performance (Hackett, 2005). The concerns regarding effective professional development for teachers have increased since the NCLB act forcing school districts to examine new ways to improve teachers' knowledge and implementation of it in their classrooms.

In conclusion theorists have stated that productivity is improved through improvement in job satisfaction and employee attitudes (Meell, 1985). There is little research done on the comparison of public education professional development and the professional development performed in the corporate world. One study performed by Meell in 1985 dealt with the impact of motivational strategies on staff development programs in education and on training programs in business and industry. In regards to adult development Meell cited Oja (1980). He maintained the position that professional development should attempt to help teachers develop maturity on both the personal level and the cognitive level. Meell also noted in her research Wood and Thompson (1980 p. 374) three reasons why professional development was ineffective: 1) negative attitudes toward professional development because of poor planning and organization; 2) activities that are impersonal and unrelated to the day-to-day problems of the participants; 3) professional development that has a district-wide focus and does not meet the needs of the individual schools and teachers. It is uncertain if the same ineffectiveness exists in corporate training.

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