

The Differences in Professional Development With Corporate Companies and Public Education

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ABSTRACT

Like practitioners in other professional fields, educators must keep current with the emerging knowledge and must be prepared to use it to continually fine-tune their conceptual and craft skills. Is there a difference between the professional development training 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?

Introduction

School districts are facing one of the most critical reform challenges of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) act by requiring teachers to successfully teach all students to high standards. Sparks' forward (as cited in Guskey, 2000) stated for that goal to be met everyone who affects students learning must be learning all the time. That includes not only teachers and principals, but superintendents, school board members, and all school staff members. The problem is 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). On the other hand, doctors, nurses, attorneys, dentists, and etc. must remain current in their fields by attending professional development training. “In the age of accountability, organizations must prove the value of professional development investments (Shaha, Lewis, O’Donnell, and Brown, 2004)”.

The purpose of this article is to discuss the difference in professional development given to educators and other professionals. An evaluation focusing on the quality of professional development training between the education world and private corporations will hopefully give insight into ways of improving professional development training overall. Professional and staff development programs are intended to equip employees with new or refined skills and techniques for achieving better results in their field, in doing so employees will be more confident, capable, and fulfilled. 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 (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 lagged so significantly so long? Answers to this question comes 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).

Learning

Learning is part of the corporate culture. In today’s corporations, where you must change and adapt so quickly, transformation has to be the focus of learning. Corporations can spend money on training their employees the skills needed to perform in their work environment but if the employees do not see the value in their training, time and money is wasted. Employees have to believe that learning is important and sharing information with colleagues is beneficial (Solomon, 1999). If corporations want to develop a culture that supports learning, they should first start by rewarding and promoting employees that are team players who are learning continually, and sharing their knowledge with each other. Organizations are always looking for ways for improvement, 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. (NLCB) 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).

Professional Development

In creating professional development for teachers, administrators often forget the two most important traits: individuality and self-determination. In a study conducted by (Lowden, 2003) found that 70% of the respondents indicated that district level administrators were making decisions regarding professional development in school districts. 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. 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 never been inside a public classroom.

Ineffective Professional Development

The quality or the lack thereof 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. Educational leaders and parents use a reactive approach. Money is spent on everything except meaningful professional development. 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 by ignoring the fact the professional development is a process that is intentional, ongoing, and systemic. "Instead, they tend to reinforce the perception of professional development as a series of unrelated, short-term workshops and presentations with little follow-up or guidance for implementation" (Guskey, 2000). When educational leaders endorse this perception, it also undermines opportunities to build a school culture of continuous learning for all. More districts today are recognizing that they cannot educate all youngsters to high levels without well - designed professional development initiatives (Sparks and Hirsh, 1997). Guskey (2000) stated that true professional development is a deliberate process, guided by a clear vision of purposes and planned goals. These goals form the criteria by which content and materials are selected, processes and procedures developed, and assessments and evaluations prepared (p. 17).

Corporate Training

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. Although topics that were discussed varied, one of the topics discuss was the comparisons of the quality of education teachers received 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)."

No Child Left Behind

Under the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) 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.

Concluding Remarks

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) confirmation in their study 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 individuals schools and teachers. It is uncertain if the same ineffectiveness exists in corporate training. Solomon (1999) stated, "Continual learning is no longer a buzzword – today it's a business requirement of critical importance". It will be interesting to see if corporate employees have the same viewpoints about their professional development as public educators.

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