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Norms of Collegiality and Experimentation: Workplace Conditions of School Success

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Semistructured interviews with 105 teachers and 14 administrators, supplemented by observation, provide data for a focused ethnography of the school as a workplace, specifically of organizational characteristics conducive to continued "learning on the job." Four relatively successful and two relatively unsuccessful schools were studied. More successful schools, particularly those receptive to staff development, were differentiated from less successful (and less receptive) schools by patterned norms of interaction among staff. In successful schools more than in unsuccessful ones, teachers valued and participated in norms of collegiality and continuous improvement (experimentation); they pursued a greater range of professional interactions with fellow teachers or administrators, including talk about instruction, structured observation, and shared planning or preparation. They did so with greater frequency, with a greater number and diversity of persons and locations, and with a more concrete and precise shared language. Findings suggest critical social organizational variables that lend themselves to quantitative study.

A 1-year study (Little, 1981) in six urban, desegregated schools yields insight into some of the ways in which the social organization of the school as a *workplace* bears on teachers' involvement in formal or informal occasions of "learning on the job." This work builds on the descriptive case study research in organizational change by specifying the norms of interaction and

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interpretation that characterize the school as a *work* setting, by speculating on the consequences of those norms for practices of school improvement and by proposing constructs that lend themselves to quantitative study.

GUIDANCE FROM PAST WORK: AN ORGANIZATIONAL PERSPECTIVE

McLaughlin and Marsh (1979) speculated that one of the reasons for the failure of many of the educational reforms of the 1960s and early 1970s was the underestimation of teacher training needs. A broader ground for failure might be the absence of attention to social organizational features and contexts in which changes were attempted, and in terms of which staff development activities assume particular relevance. (See also Berman & McLaughlin, 1978; Fullan & Pomfret, 1977; Gross, Giacquinta, & Bernstein, 1971; Mann, 1976; Miller, 1980; Sarason, 1971; Schiffer, 1980.) Particularly at issue here are the nature of role definition, the shape of role relationships, and the degree to which existing role expectations permit or encourage teachers' professional development (Fullan & Pomfret, 1977; Lieberman & Miller, 1979; Miller & Wolf, 1979).

METHOD

This study was conducted as a focused ethnography (Erickson, 1977), drawing on prior work to give substantive guidance and on the methodological resources of ethnography and sociolinguistics to generate new discovery and to add depth and specificity. Six urban, desegregated schools (three elementary and three secondary) were selected to represent a range of involvement in schoolwide projects of staff development and a range of demonstrable school success.[1] (See Table I.)

One elementary and one secondary school were selected as sites with "high success" and "high involvement" in formal programs of staff development; from these schools, we sought insight into staff development's contribution to school success. One elementary school and one secondary school were chosen as "high success, low involvement" schools; from these schools we expected to learn what situational contributors to success might be incorporated into future programs of staff development in the district and to learn how teachers sustained quality instruction. Finally, one elementary school and one secondary school were selected as "low success, high involvement" schools; in these schools, we hoped to learn what aspects of the work setting or of the staff development programs had limited the programs' influence on school success.

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[1] Schools were classified as relatively more successful or relatively less successful on the basis of aggregate standardized achievement scores over a 3-year period in reading, language arts, and mathematics. The list was further narrowed through a nomination procedure undertaken with distinct administrators and staff developers.

TABLE I

Summary Characteristics of Participating Schools

Descriptive Characteristic	Elementary Schools			Secondary Schools		
	Carey	Smallwood	Westlake	Park HS	Springer JHS	Reed JHS
Success	Low/moderate	High	High	Low	High	High
Staff Development	High Schoolwide faculty participation in 2-week training in instructional improvement, with classroom follow up	Low Individual teachers take classes, workshops	High Three-year faculty and principal training in mastery learning as one of five pilot schools. Weekly in-service, classroom observation	High Two-year collaboration with Teacher Corps for school-based training Faculty group participation (one-third) in 2-week instructional improvement training	High Group participation (one-third) in 2-week training in instructional improvement, with classroom follow up	Low Individual's attendance at mastery learning training (1 week, with follow-up observation)
Busing for Integration	yes	no	no	no	yes	yes
Paired School for Integration	yes	no	yes in early stages; not presently	N/A	N/A	N/A
Ethnic Distribution:						
White	37.0%	54.0%	56.0%	27.1%	45.0%	40.3%
Black	56.0%	2.1%	3.8%	3.5%	6.3%	51.0%
Hispanic	3.1%	41.4%	34.0%	64.5%	46.0%	5.7%
Oriental	3.6%	2.3%	4.6%	3.6%	1.8%	3.0%
American Indian	0.0%	.7%	1.9%	1.3%	.8%	.4%

In a 19-week period, interviews were conducted with 14 members of the district's central administration, 105 teachers and 14 administrators in six schools; observations were conducted in the classrooms of 80 teachers, in staff development (inservice) meetings, and in the hallways, lunchrooms, faculty meetings, lounges, offices, and grounds of the six schools.

Interviews were semistructured, given direction and comparability by an inquiry matrix and discussion guide prepared in the first stages of the study. In elementary schools, interviews were sought with the building principal and all members of the faculty. In secondary schools, interviews and observations were concentrated on the administrative team and a purposive sample of teachers.[2]

Throughout the analysis, we preserved a careful reliance on persons' talk—in interviews and in naturally occurring interaction—as the basis for all interpretation and inference. The availability of and reliance on these records of actual talk constitutes one check on the limitations, or biases, introduced by researchers' own perspectives. All taped interviews were thereby transcribed in verbatim transcripts. Relying on teachers' and administrators' recorded statements, we generated a set of summary descriptive statements (3,190 in all), each reflecting a practice and a set of dyadic role relations (e.g., "we lend and borrow materials"). Summary statements were recorded for each respondent on index cards and assembled for each school in broad categories derived from the inquiry matrix. These cards served as the basis for all subsequent description and analysis.

To convert a large volume of recorded talk to a smaller number of summary statements, we relied on four principles of selection. The first, a heuristic for inventorying situated interactions, is derived from the analytic and theoretical framework offered by role theory (and specifically Gross, Mason, & McEachern, 1958; Jackson, 1966; Kjolseth, 1972; Little, 1978). The remaining three are principles of recurrence, immanent reference and contrast, all drawn from the work of Pittenger, Hockett, and Danehy (1960) on developing techniques for sociolinguistic microanalysis.

Applying these four principles, we constructed for each school, each respondent, and each nominal reference group (teachers, administrators, counselors), a finite set of descriptive statements. These descriptions, in each of the six schools, yielded a set of practices by which teachers and administrators in that school defined their respective roles and characterized their approach to "learning on the job." The statements further characterized practices according to their relative frequency, the degree to which persons approved or disapproved their inclusion in the work, and their value along certain other dimensions (e.g., utility or "practicality"; reciprocity or

[2] In secondary schools, teacher selection was designed to capture formal sources of influence (e.g., department or committee chairmanships), informal influence, distribution across content areas, and internal reputation for quality teaching.

"professionalism"). Traced across respondents and nominal role groups, they served as the basis for establishing how broadly or narrowly, firmly or tenuously established were certain practices, that is, how central they were to persons' views of their work. Taken as classes of interaction, they showed the nature and boundaries of teachers' and administrators' role repertoires. And finally, they were the basis for examining points of continuity or discontinuity between practices or role repertoires envisioned by staff development programs and those presently approved and enacted in the course of daily work in schools.

FINDINGS

Inventory of Work Practices

As teachers describe their work, they replace broad interpretations (e.g., a "close" faculty) with situationally specific portrayals of daily interaction. Drawing from interviews and from observations in six schools, we have constructed an illustrative inventory of teachers' interactions with each other, with administrators, specialists, and staff developers. Each of the characteristic interactions displayed in Figure 1 can be specified further by the relevant and probable actors (who interacts with whom) by its social location (classroom, faculty lounge, department meeting), and by the business at hand (exchanging materials, designing curriculum, swapping classroom war stories). Debating the relative merits of an approach with the principal is thus understood to be a different event from debating that same approach with fellow teachers; and either of those events assumes different import when conducted alone in the hallway than it does when played out in a faculty meeting in the presence of others.

Each of these situated interactions places more or less extensive demand on teachers' time, knowledge, experience, and good will. Each contributes in different measure to persons' competence, confidence, influence, and satisfaction. Each appears to be more or less powerful in fostering schoolwide norms that support continuous improvement and receptivity to staff development. And finally, each is more or less firmly a part of "being a teacher" in any one of the six schools.

Characteristics of Work Practices

Range. Teachers distinguish interactions they typically pursue from those involvements that are "none of my business," "not my job," or "not right." While there are, predictably, variations among individual teachers in any single building, there also appear to be prevailing patterns of approved and disapproved interactions in each of the six schools. Lending and borrowing materials and asking for occasional advice are favored modes of interaction in all buildings, but advocating the adoption of a new idea is acceptable in just four of six schools and is actively encouraged by teachers in only one

FIGURE 1. An illustrative inventory of characteristic teacher interactions in six schools.

Lend and borrow materials.
Create a shared file of materials.
* Design and prepare materials.
Review materials or books.
Assign materials or books to grade level or course.
* Design curriculum units.
* Research materials and ideas for curriculum.
* Write curriculum.
* Prepare lesson plans.
* Review/discuss existing lesson plans.
Ask for project ideas.
Ask for classroom management ideas.
Ask for help with specific problems of instruction.
Ask for help with specific discipline problems.
Praise other teachers.
Criticize others.
Refer one teacher to another for an idea.
* Credit new ideas and programs.
Discredit new ideas or programs.
* Persuade others to try an idea/approach.
Dissuade others from an idea/approach.
Describe to others an attempt to try something new.
Make collective agreements to participate in a program (e.g., inservice).
* Make collective agreements to test an idea.
Trade teaching assignments/groups.
* Invite other teachers to observe.
* Observe other teachers.
Argue over theory, philosophy, approach.
Confront other teachers on issues of race (e.g., "disparaging remarks").
* Analyze practices and effects.
Praise individual students or classes.
Criticize or complain about individual students or classes.
* Teach others in formal inservice.
Make reports to others in meetings.
* Teach others informally.
* Talk "publicly" about what one is learning or wants to learn.
Attend inservices as groups or teams.
Talk about social/personal life.
Play cards.
Have a beer on Fridays.
Present evidence for student "staffing."
Spread the word about good classes or workshops.
Offer reassurance when others upset.
Ask informally about what is being covered in other grade levels, classes.
* Convert book chapters to reflect new approach (e.g., mastery learning).
Act as a "buddy" to new teachers.
Suggest that others "try this."
Divide up administrative chores.
Team teach (voluntary).
Team teach (involuntary).
Participate on committees.
Plan how to use new curriculum packages.
Defend or explain specific classroom practices.
Plan how to handle new grade level or course assignment.
* Design inservice.
Work on presentation for conference out of building.
Reach group agreement on solutions to schoolwide problems.
Decide how to use aides.†
Train aides.†
Complain about aides.†
* Evaluate performance of principals.
Give advice to others when asked.
Make suggestions without being asked.

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* Critical practices of success and adaptability.
† Elementary schools only.

school. Extensive discussion of teaching practice ensues in three faculty lounges, but typically stops short of any invitation to observe. Teachers in five buildings spoke of their willingness to work together to resolve problems related to student behavior (e.g., being late to class), but in three of those buildings they were hesitant to take a collective stand on interpreting curriculum in the classroom. Interactions pursued routinely in one school are considered out of line in another; interactions thought useful by one group of teachers may be dismissed as a waste of time by another; and involvements that receive official sanction and support in one school may go unrewarded in another.

Thus, schools are distinguished from one another by the interactions that are encouraged, discouraged, or met with some degree of indifference. From the large array of interactions that we observed and that could somehow be called "collegial" in character, four classes of interactions appear crucial. Continuous professional development appears to be most surely and thoroughly achieved when:

Teachers engage in frequent, continuous, and increasingly concrete and precise talk about teaching practice (as distinct from teacher characteristics and failings, the social lives of teachers, the foibles and failures of students and their families, and the unfortunate demands of society on the school). By such talk, teachers build up a shared language adequate to the complexity of teaching, capable of distinguishing one practice and its virtues from another, and capable of integrating large bodies of practice into distinct and sensible perspectives on the business of teaching. Other things being equal, the utility of collegial work and the rigor of experimentation with teaching is a direct function of the concreteness, precision, and coherence of the shared language.

Teachers are frequently observed and provided with useful (if potentially frightening) critiques of their teaching. Such observation and feedback provide shared referents for the shared language of teaching, at a level of the precision and concreteness which makes the talk about teaching useful.

Teachers plan, design, research, evaluate, and prepare teaching materials together. The most astute observations remain academic ("just theory") without the machinery to act on them. By joint work on materials, teachers share the considerable burden of development required by long-term improvement, confirm their emerging understanding of their approach, and make rising standards for their work attainable by them and by their students.

Teachers teach each other the practice of teaching. In the most adaptable schools, most staff, at one time or another, on some topic or task, are permitted and encouraged to play the role of instructor for others. In this way, the school makes maximum use of its own resources.

Schools are thereby distinguished on the basis of specific support for discussion of classroom practice, mutual observation and critique, shared

TABLE II

Range of Collegial Interaction by School Success

School Success	Range of Interaction	
	Range of Total Inventory Practiced in This School	Range of "Critical Practices" Practiced in This School
Relatively Successful Schools		
Smallwood Elementary	47%	33%
Westlake Elementary	83%	100%
Springer Junior High	34%	28%
Reed Junior High	64%	83%
Relatively Unsuccessful Schools		
Carey Elementary	27%	22%
Park High School	21%	17%

efforts to design and prepare curriculum, and shared participation in the business of instructional improvement. These four types of practices so clearly distinguish the more successful from the less successful schools, the more adaptable from the less adaptable schools, that we have termed them the "critical practices of adaptability."

The six schools display considerable variation in the range of critical practices that prevail. Range of interaction is grasped most readily as the sheer number and diversity of activities that teachers and administrators take for granted as part of their work. In Table II, the range of characteristic interactions for each school has been displayed as (1) the percentage of the total inventory of reported teacher interactions; and (2) the percentage of all critical practices.[3]

Location. In successful and adaptable schools, all four classes of "critical practice" occur widely throughout the building and throughout the work week: training sessions, faculty meetings, grade or department meetings, hallways, classrooms, offices, workrooms, and teachers' lounge. Collegial experimentation is a way of life; it pervades the school.

In the elementary school selected as "high success, high involvement," it was difficult to encounter teachers when they were not engaged in some discussion about classroom practice. In the three remaining successful schools, topics of discussion were more variable, but the distinguishing fact

[3] Presumably, a school could exhibit a relatively narrow range of interactions, all of which were instrumentally directed to professional improvement. Or a school could conceivably show support for a broad range of interactions that touched only sporadically and superficially on central issues of classroom practice. While our main interest here is the range of critical practices characteristic of each school, we acknowledge that the prospects for persons to stimulate or strengthen those practices might be contingent upon teachers' and administrators' present commitment to (or avoidance of) other complementary or competing practices.

is that discussion about the business of teaching generally was permitted and sometimes encouraged in a range of locations. By contrast, in the less successful schools teachers were more likely to report that they restrict formal meetings to administrative business and were more likely to consider the faculty lounge off limits to "serious" topics:

> They're tired, they're tired. I, for one, do not want to go in there—I will talk about a child sometimes, depending, if something funny happened or something bad or whatever—but usually I want to get away from it. (Teacher, Carey Elementary)

Quite simply, there are relatively few occasions and relatively few places during the course of the school day where teachers find themselves in one another's presence. The more of those occasions and places that are considered appropriate for professional work, the more support there appears to be for visible, continuous learning on the job.

Frequency. In a work situation where time is a valued, coveted, even disputed form of currency, teachers can effectively discount any interaction by declaring it a "waste of time." Thus the sheer frequency of interaction among teachers must be taken as a clue to its relative importance. The more frequent the interaction, the more likely that it assumes the status of a "habit." In the most collegial schools, teachers talk about teaching daily over the lunch table and in other small, cumulative ways act as colleagues on a continual basis.

At Westlake, the "high success, high involvement" elementary school, teachers participated in formal inservice meetings once a week, devoted portions of their faculty meetings to the discussion of research or classroom practice, and worked together regularly in grade-level teams to prepare materials and lesson plans. At Reed Junior High, isolated departments reported improved student performance and classroom discipline when teachers met more often to work together on curriculum and specific classroom approaches. In both these instances, regular and frequent interactions among teachers were a stable feature of the work. In a third successful school (Smallwood), the frequency of interaction fluctuated with teachers' perceived needs for help and with the level of district-imposed demands and changes. And in one successful school and both unsuccessful schools, teacher privacy prevailed and interactions were few.

The temptation, clearly, is to associate frequent interaction with professional growth. By teachers' accounts, however, it appears that frequency is inseparable from judgments of worth and relevance. Where teachers' experiences led them to believe that shared talk or work would contribute to their knowledge, skill, or satisfaction, frequent involvement confirmed a habit of collegiality and analysis and permitted effects of collegiality to become apparent. Where teachers were in doubt about the usefulness of these involvements, however, frequent contact appeared to erode their

commitment to subsequent participation. Thus it appears that the greater the frequency of interaction, the greater the prospects for it to build or erode commitment and the more salient are teachers' views of its utility, interest and importance.

Focus and concreteness. In successful and adaptable schools, interaction about teaching is consciously and steadily focused on practice, on what teachers do, with what aims, in what situations, with what materials, and with what apparent results. And crucially, a focus on practices as distinct from teachers helps to preserve self-respect and eliminate barriers to discussion; the utility of a practice is thus separated from the competence of a teacher.

Here, interaction about teaching is described as speaking specifically to the complexities of the classroom. The talk is concrete, "practical." This is not to say that it is not philosophical or theoretical, because teachers report that interactions that provide a broad perspective on teaching have been most helpful. It is, rather, to say that the philosophy or theory must always be brought to bear on specific actions in the classroom.

In the relatively successful schools, teachers appear to have built what Lortie (1975) terms a "shared technical culture"; their experiences lead us to conclude that the more concrete the language known to and commanded by teachers and others for the description, analysis, interpretation, and evaluation of teaching practice, the greater the probable utility of the interaction and the greater the potential influence on teachers' practices.

Still, the cultivation of precise and concrete talk about teaching is not without its risks. The more widely attempted is a language of description and analysis, the more it exposes the knowledge, skill, and experience of teachers; the more evident is the tie to (scrutiny of) classroom practice in teachers' daily interactions with each other or administrators, the more pressing become the demands on professional competence and personal self-esteem. As demands escalate, so do teachers' requirements for "support" in the form of clear, public, and visible sanctions for participation. It is in these terms that teachers distinguish "threatening" from nonthreatening occasions for improvement.

Relevance. In successful and adaptable schools, continuous professional development was made relevant to, an integral part of, the occupation and career of teaching. Teacher evaluations, access to resources, release time, and other perquisites are clearly tied to collegial participation in the improvement of practice. In one successful elementary school, job postings for new positions specified requirements for previous training in mastery learning and a willingness to participate with other faculty in regular, intensive inservice. In the other successful schools, teachers described how the principal's actions conveyed clear expectations for professional improvement. Two conclusions summarize the findings here:

1. The more relevant the interaction—the more clear it is that participation

in critical practices of discussion, observation, shared planning, and learning are required to satisfy the formal and informal obligations of the job—the greater will be the prospects that the interaction will influence teachers' practices and school success.

2. The more demanding the interactions and the more pressing the circumstances, the greater will be the perceived risk in participation and the more salient will be official sanctions in generating participation.

Reciprocity. In successful and adaptable schools, interactions about teaching are seen as reciprocal, even when they involve persons of different status (principal versus teacher) or different function (staff development consultant versus teacher). In part, reciprocity means an equality of effort by the parties involved. In part, reciprocity means equal humility in the face of the complexity of the task, and of the limits of one's own understanding. But crucially, reciprocity means deference, a manner of acting and speaking which demonstrates an understanding that an evaluation of one's practices is very near to an evaluation of one's competence, and which demonstrates great car in distinguishing the two and focusing on the first. In the relatively successful schools, specifically and observably reciprocal arrangements (e.g., for participation in inservice or classroom observation) appeared to permit a consistent and stringent attention to matters of classroom practice.

At Westlake, a predictable reciprocity has served to build and confirm expectations for extensive participation in interactions by which practices are subject to regular scrutiny and improvement, ideas are publicly discussed and judged, and innovation is a matter for collective debate without threat to social relations:

> T: Many people disagree on the best way of helping kids to learn. I'm sure my theories would be different from Joe's, for example.
> I: Is that ever a topic of conversation?
> T: Oh yeah, yeah. Not so much here in the mastery part of it as in the precision teaching part of it because we disagree on it. And it isn't so much that we disagree on the precision [theory] as the way it's done . . . about translation of theory. . . . We have some pretty outspoken people around here. We have some hot arguments at times, I guess, but it doesn't carry over anywhere else, as far as I know.

In the less successful schools, the avoidance of talk about teaching was sustained in part by a perceived absence of reciprocity even in small matters (e.g., the lending and borrowing of materials) that led teachers to be cautious about exposing their difficulties or accomplishments:

> I: How much do you all exchange ideas?
> T: It's not consistent. . . . On an average, there seems to be an atmosphere of competition . . . the inference in some things: "Well, I've done that. You mean you haven't done it?"

Inclusivity. In adaptable and successful schools, interactions about teaching

tend to be inclusive; a large proportion of the faculty participates and is part of the group of innovators. Even where smaller groups explore new options for teaching, they are mindful of the consequences for other staff and prepare thoughtful strategies for including others or for preserving their good will (or at least neutrality).

In the relatively successful schools, then, where a greater number and range of staff endorsed and participated in the four "critical practices," teachers appeared to place a higher value on interdependent (rather than independent) work, to entertain and experiment with new practices, and to take others' interests and obligations into account. The notion of "critical mass" assumes a dimension of organized influence that goes beyond a matter of simple numbers. Teachers described it this way:

> T: I'm not enough of a dreamer to think you're going to get a whole faculty behind something without a little coercion, a little polite coercion. And if you don't do that you don't ever have any growth in your faculty.

The dimensions of interaction described here—range, focus, inclusivity (actors and locations), reciprocity, relevance, concreteness, and frequency—are by teachers' accounts interrelated, though their relative salience is not clear. Thus, interactions that are properly reciprocal may only prompt complaints if they focus on a narrow range of trivial concerns; reciprocity is not compelling, it seems, without relevance and concreteness. Talk that aims at concrete detail and that exhibits the needed professional deference may have limited utility where observation remains taboo; broadening the range of permissible practices appears to broaden the effect as well. These seven dimensions can be viewed conceptually as a way of mapping prevailing interactions in a school; empirically, they suggest variable dimensions of influence that lend themselves to quantitative study using the constructs and methods of role theory and analysis (Jackson, 1966).

Characteristics of Participants

If the practices of talking, watching, planning, and teaching about classroom practice—as ordinary parts of work in schools—are in fact consequential to school success, then a remaining question is: Who is likely to be engaged in those activities? Do some characteristics of persons lead some staff more than others to these crucial interactions? Three characteristics appear relevant.

Status. Who among teachers, administrators, counselors, specialists, and others has the right or the obligation to participate in work that is collegial or innovative in the ways that have been described here? Further, who has the right to initiate work along those lines? In effect, does one's formal status as teacher or administrator, department chairman, or committee member influence one's capacity to join in or initiate shared discussion, mutual observation, shared planning and preparation, or the design and conduct of inservice education? And does the informal status that accrues from a history

of good or bad work lead people to be credited or discredited as advocates of such work?

Not surprisingly, situational norms supporting professional development are built and sustained over time by the words and deeds of staff with high enough status—formal and informal—to command the attention and following of others. In all schools that staff characterize as highly collegial, teachers view the principal as an active endorser and participant in collegial work; they trace support to teachers and administrators who are held in high regard, including some "old guard" teachers, some department or committee chairmen, some assistant principals. Thus, the status of an actor, both ascribed (e.g., position) and achieved (a reputation as a master teacher) tends to govern the rights of the actor to initiate and to participate in collegial experimentation. In some schools, such rights are limited to principals, department chairs, and some influential teachers. In the more successful and adaptable schools, rights to initiate and participate are more widely distributed, rely less on formal position, and are variable by situation. Again, "critical mass" turns out to derive less from sheer numbers than from the norm-governed organization and display of influence.

Knowledge and skill. At any given time, actors' technical skills and knowledge tend to establish boundaries on their latitude to initiate, participate in, or lead collegial work. Particularly where a faculty has established a direction and developed an approach and a language, teachers who have not shared in the prior developments may find the "ante" too high; in the most consistently collegial and innovative of the successful schools, recently hired teachers find it a struggle to become truly integrated members of the faculty.

Social or role competence. Finally, in successful and adaptable schools, the staff have learned social or "role" skills. Playing teacher to students is different from playing teacher to a teacher. Daily interaction with students in a classroom is not preparation for providing a useful classroom observation for a peer.

The crucial matter of deference—the useful separation of practices and their consequences from persons and their competence—particularly requires role-taking skill. On the whole, teachers in less successful schools were not markedly less approving of collegial and innovator roles than were their peers in the more successful schools; teachers in the more successful schools were, however, more often openly confident of teachers' and administrators' abilities to act skillfully as observers, partners, advisors.

Similarly, teachers in three of the four more successful schools expressed greater tolerance for persons' efforts to learn the appropriate social skills; they acknowledged that in the early stages of collegial work some awkwardness was likely, some errors of tact probable. In all three of these schools, tolerance increased when groups of teachers or administrators struggled at the same time and in the same ways to master new practices.

CONCLUSIONS

The commonplace (and commonsense) view that persons learn by experience is hardly new. Precisely how and under what conditions persons gain competence and confidence in their work is less clear. Less certain, too, is the way in which the gains made by individuals bear upon the broader success of the organizations in which they work.

Drawing on interview and observation data from six urban schools, and concentrating here on the nature of teachers' perspectives and practices,[4] we have attempted to characterize certain powerful workplace characteristics of successful, adaptable schools. We have sought insight into the nature and extent of "learning on the job," as a point of departure for exploring the ways in which organized programs of staff development might serve to extend knowledge, skill, and satisfaction.

School as Workplace

First, the school as a workplace proves extraordinarily powerful. Without denying differences in individuals' skills, interests, commitment, curiosity, or persistence, the prevailing pattern of interactions and interpretations in each building demonstrably creates certain possibilities and sets certain limits.

We are led from a focus on professional improvement as an individual enterprise to improvement as particularly an organizational phenomenon. Some schools sustain shared expectations (norms) both for extensive collegial work and for analysis and evaluation of an experimentation with their practices; continuous improvement is a shared undertaking in these schools, and these schools are the most adaptable and successful of the schools we studied.

Expectations for shared work: a norm of collegiality. These are expectations for teachers as colleagues. One of the principal ways in which teachers characterize the buildings in which they work is by whether the faculty is "close" and by whether teachers routinely "work" together. In each of six schools, we looked to teachers' accounts of daily work and involvement in learning on the job to reveal the nature of norms of collegiality.

The variations on these themes are considerable. Expectations for shared discussions and shared work distinguish one building from another; some buildings are reportedly (and observably) more "collegial" than others. "Work together" is most usefully elaborated as an array of specific interactions by which teachers discuss, plan for, design, conduct, analyze, evaluate, and experiment with the business of teaching.

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[4] By virtue first of office and then of performance, principals are in a unique position to establish and maintain the important norms of collegiality and experimentation, and to promote and foster the critical practices of talk about practice, observation of practice, joint work on materials, and teaching each other about teaching.

To the extent that school situations foster teachers' recourse to others' knowledge and experience, and to shared work and discussion, teachers are likely to favor some participation in staff development; to the extent that they foster a belief that there is nothing to learn from others or that each teacher must pursue his independent course, staff development holds little appeal.

Staff development appears to have greatest prospects for influence where there is a prevailing norm of collegiality.

Expectations for analysis, evaluation, and experimentation: a norm of continuous improvement. These are expectations about the business of teaching. By the nature of the talk they hear, the advice they are given, the meetings they witness, and the appraisals they receive, teachers learn a stance toward classroom practice. They learn either to pursue the connections between teaching and learning with aggressive curiosity and healthy skepticism, or to take simply as self-evidently effective those tactics that sustain some measure of interest, achievement, and decorum among a reasonably large number of students.

To the extent that teachers view improvements in knowledge and practice as never ending, they do value staff development but place increasingly stringent and sophisticated demands on the nature and quality of assistance. Where analysis, evaluation, and experimentation are treated as tools of the profession, designed to make work better (and easier), and where such work is properly the work of the teacher, teachers can be expected to look to staff development to help provoke questions, organize analysis, generate evidence of progress, and design differences in approach.

In sum, staff development appears to have greatest prospects for influence where there is a prevailing norm of analysis, evaluation, and experimentation—a norm that may be unsupported by persons' actual experiences in learning to manage new and unfamiliar circumstances and that (in teachers' eyes) calls for a stability and a security that may be in short supply, especially in urban districts. Staff development proves consequential to the degree that by design and conduct (not merely intent) it stimulates or strengthens these "critical practices" at the same time that it builds substantive knowledge and skill in instruction. By celebrating the place of norms of collegiality and experimentation, we place the related matters of school improvement, receptivity to staff development, and instructional leadership squarely in an analysis of organizational setting: the school as workplace.

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