Improving Teacher Satisfaction with Professional Development
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Introduction
Depending on whom you ask in education, professional development can either be an exciting part of a fundamental commitment to ongoing learning, or it can be a burden to professionals who find it irrelevant and/or boring. The National Staff Development Council’s Standards for Staff Development (2001) defines staff (professional) development as “the means by which educators acquire or enhance the knowledge, skills, and attitudes, and beliefs needed to achieve high levels of learning for all students” (NSDC p. 2). If student outcomes are the ultimate goal, why should we pay attention to teacher satisfaction with professional development? As we strive to maximize the use of our resources to impact student learning, professional development must adapt and achieve outcomes for high quality and satisfaction among all educators. If it does not, we run the risk of our community perceiving our schools as poor managers of the precious resources of time, money and professional expertise. In addition, without satisfying professional development for educators we will surely continue down the well-worn path of dissatisfaction and burnout that causes an estimated 50 percent of all new teachers to leave the profession within five years (Surpyna & Jordan, 1997).

Determining Needs and Priorities
Our middle school has a Professional Development Team (PDT) which consists of teachers and administrators that meets to plan for staff professional development. A Liltical survey was administered to measure levels of staff satisfaction with a variety of elements of professional development. Generally the staff expressed high levels of satisfaction (74% to 95% agreed or strongly agreed) with statements about feeling that their ideas are valued, knowing what is expected of them from their leaders, feeling supported by administration, and feeling recognized for their professional development work. Satisfaction was lower (54% to 64%) agreed or strongly agreed with statements that dealt with having sufficient time and resources to complete tasks and to collaborate with colleagues. The most obvious trend, however, was that for nearly every question where monthly all-staff meetings were compared to grade level meetings, the satisfaction was from 31% to 62% higher for the grade level meetings, and was quite low for all-staff meetings, ranging from only 21% to 51% of staff expressing satisfaction. This trend can clearly be seen in Figure 1, question numbers 3, 6, 7, 14, 18, 20, 22 and 24.

Factors Influencing Teacher Satisfaction

In order to gain insight into the survey responses that indicated lower levels of satisfaction, interviews were conducted with each grade-level team. Trends clearly emerged through the interview process. First, the staff was dissatisfied with the technology training taking place at all-staff meetings. Reasons included a perceived irrelevance of the chosen topics to their teaching, disorganized presentation, and lack of time to practice. Second, staff wanted to be asked about what they’d like to see happen during professional development time. There was a feeling that our staff possessed a great deal of expertise and we have much we can learn from each other, if given the chance to choose what we’d like to focus on. However, several staff members expressed that they did not want to be asked their opinion if they wouldn’t see their input translated into action. Third, staff felt the size of the all-staff group was not as effective for training as smaller groups such as grade level or content area teams. Factors that contributed to this feeling were that group agreements had not been established and that the meetings themselves were not being taken seriously by several staff members, either through lack of attendance or participation.

Theory and Practice

Developed in the 1940’s, Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs ‘remains valid today for understanding human motivation, management training, and professional development’ (Chapman, 1995-2008, ¶ 5). The 5-level hierarchy (see Figure 2) progresses from biological and physiological needs toward the final step of self-actualization. Essential to this theory is that we must “satisfy each need in turn, starting with the first. Only when the lower order needs of physical and emotional well-being are satisfied are we concerned with the higher order needs of influence and personal development” (Chapman, 1995-2008, ¶ 5). Keeping this in mind, one can see that there are multiple factors and steps involved in creating professional development that is both professionally meaningful as well as personally satisfying. Ma & MacMillan (2001) suggest that factors affecting teachers’ job satisfaction can be divided into three areas: (a) teachers’ feelings of competence, (b) administrative control, and (c) organizational culture. Professional development plays a role in all three of these areas, and therefore one can either positively or negatively influence a teacher’s overall job satisfaction. As shown in Table 1, there is a correlation between these areas and Maslow’s hierarchy. Each of these areas should be considered when developing a plan that hopes to improve teacher satisfaction with professional development.

<table>
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<th>Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs</th>
<th>Factors Influencing Job Satisfaction</th>
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<tr>
<td>Physiological needs</td>
<td>Administrative control</td>
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<td>Safety, needs, protection</td>
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| Administrative control      | 1. Safety needs: protection, security, order, line, trauma, stability. |
|                            | 2. Esteem needs: achievement, status, responsibility, self-esteem. |
|                            | 3. Irrelevant topics               |
|                            | 4. Size of group remains large      |
|                            | 5. Ratio of pd staff to classroom   |
|                            | 6. PD opening new format for PD on  |
|                            | 7. PD staff training options available for first trimester and |
|                            | 8. Teachers select first trimester  |

Opportunities for Improvement of All-Staff Professional Development

1. Survey staff for ideas and have them vote on the topics they wish to have at monthly all-staff meetings. Administrators choose staff members to lead trainings or bring in a trainer or presenter.

2. Restructure the format of all-staff meetings to be led by administrators, with topics chosen by the PDT.

3. Eliminate professional development from monthly all-staff meetings. Meet as an entire staff only for birthdays, announcements, etc. (Combine with option four or five)

4. Restructure the format for professional development to take place entirely within grade-level teams, with topics to be decided by each team.

5. Restructure the format for professional development into multi-week sessions, with multiple topics to choose from, resulting in small work groups (one per trimester).

The main reasons teachers gave for dissatisfaction can be correlated to Maslow’s hierarchy and the three areas affecting teachers’ job satisfaction (described by Ma & MacMillan) as follows:

**Level 2 - Safety needs:** protection, security, order, law, limits, stability, etc. (Administrative control)

- Irrelevant topics
- Disorganized presentation
- Group agreements not established
- Lack of time to accomplish tasks

**Level 3 - Belongingness and love needs:** family, affection, relationships, work group, etc. (Organizational culture)

- Lack cohesiveness in large group

**Level 4 - Esteem needs:** achievement, status, responsibility, reputation (Teachers’ feelings of competence)

- Not being asked to share expertise
- Not being given responsibility to choose their own needs

When considering which action to take that would address these multiple elements, a combination of the options outlined above seems most likely to bring about the desired changes in teacher satisfaction. Our school will combine option 3 and 5, using the following timeline:

- Sept-Nov 2009:
  - Beginning implementation of monthly ‘meet & greet’ + weekly PD
  - Use feedback forms to evaluate continued effectiveness of structure; make modifications for second trimester as needed

- Second and Third Trimester:
  - Continue new structure, including utilizing teacher feedback to make ongoing changes during the year

Impacts/Expected Outcomes

Budget: Budgetary impacts are minimal; there are no new expenses. Rather, PD funds can be assigned to directly reflect the needs determined by smaller teams.

Schedule: This plan allows more time in the PD schedule for team meetings by reducing all-staff time. There is no need for further scheduling changes since the Wed. structure remains intact.

Staffing: There will be no change in staffing. However, some staff members may become more deeply involved in PD by choosing to instruct (individually or in teams) peers. The PDT will continue to serve as links between teachers and administrators. Administrators may find the need to change the way in which they oversee smaller group.

Expected Outcome: We would expect after implementing this plan that teacher satisfaction with the all-staff professional development activities would show significant improvement.

References