A Paradigm Shift in 
Staff Development

Many events of the past few years bode well for the field of staff development. Reports issued by governmental bodies, business groups, and various commissions emphasize the central role staff development must play in school reform efforts. In addition, there is greater recognition today at the local, state, and national levels that sustained, high-quality staff development is essential if all students are to achieve at high levels.

At the same time, however, more people are realizing that this professional development (the terms staff development, professional development, and inservice education will be used interchangeably throughout this book) must be considerably different than that offered in the past. Soon to be gone forever, we hope, are the days when educators (usually teachers) sit relatively passively while an “expert” exposes them to new ideas or “trains” them in new practices, and the success of the effort is judged by a “happiness quotient” that measures participants’ satisfaction with the experience and their off-the-cuff assessment regarding its usefulness.

Research and experience have taught us that widespread, sustained implementation of new practices in classrooms, principals’ offices, and central offices requires a new form of professional development. This staff development not only must affect the knowledge, attitudes, and
practices of individual teachers, administrators, and other school employees, but it also must alter the cultures and structures of the organizations in which those individuals work. While the need to help individual teachers and administrators do their jobs better is generally recognized, it is also essential that educational leaders pay attention to organizational change—if for no other reason than to bring a sense of coherence to the reform process. Many would agree with Michael Fullan, who argues that “[t]he greatest problem faced by school districts and schools is not resistance to innovation, but the fragmentation, overload, and incoherence resulting from the uncritical acceptance of too many different innovations” (1991, p. 197).

The Need for a New Form of Staff Development

Recognizing the link between staff development and successful educational change, Ann Lieberman, Linda Darling-Hammond, and Milbrey McLaughlin are among the leading school reformers who have called for a new form of professional development. Lieberman argues for a “radical rethinking” of professional development and points out some ironic shortcomings of the traditional approach: “What everyone appears to want for students—a wide array of learning opportunities that engage students in experiencing, creating, and solving real problems, using their own experiences, and working with others—is for some reason denied to teachers when they are learners” (1995, p. 591). She notes the similarities between the ways students learn and the ways teachers learn:

> People learn best through active involvement and through thinking about and becoming articulate about what they have learned. Processes, practices, and policies built on this view of learning are at the heart of a more expanded view of teacher development that encourages teachers to involve themselves as learners—in much the same way as they wish their students would (p. 592).

Constructing a continuum of practices that encourage teachers’ growth, Lieberman describes the movement from “direct teaching” (the current dominant mode of training-focused professional development), to “learning in school,” to “learning out of school.” “Because ‘direct-teaching’ currently dominates much of what the public and many dis-
tricts consider staff development," Lieberman states, "it is important that teachers, administrators, and policymakers become aware of new and broader conceptions of professional development" (p. 592). She believes that "teachers must have opportunities to discuss, think about, try out, and hone new practices" by taking new roles (e.g., teacher researcher), creating new structures (e.g., problem-solving groups), working on new tasks (e.g., creating standards), and creating a culture of inquiry. "What characterizes these examples of professional learning," Lieberman writes, "is that their life span is not one or two days. Instead, they become part of the expectations for teachers' roles and form an integral part of the culture of a school" (p. 593).

Darling-Hammond and McLaughlin (1995) suggest that staff development that is linked to a reform agenda must support a learner-centered view of teaching and a career-long conception of teachers' learning:

The success of this agenda ultimately turns on teachers' success in accomplishing the serious and difficult tasks of learning the skills and perspectives assumed by new visions of practice and unlearning the practices and beliefs about students and instruction that have dominated their professional lives to date. Yet few occasions and little support for such professional development exist in teachers' environments (p. 597).

Darling-Hammond and McLaughlin seek a form of professional development that prepares teachers "to see complex subject matter from the perspectives of diverse students" (p. 597), and they point out that understanding cannot be developed only through traditional top-down teacher-training strategies limited to teachers' acquisition of new knowledge and skills. "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" (p. 597).

Fortunately, irresistible forces currently at work in education are creating a new form of staff development. History teaches us the power of a transforming idea, an alteration in world view so profound that all that follows is changed forever. Such a paradigm shift is now rapidly transforming the discipline of staff development.
Three Powerful Ideas

Three powerful ideas are currently altering the shape of schools in the United States and the staff development that occurs within them. These ideas are results-driven education, systems thinking, and constructivism.

RESULTS-DRIVEN EDUCATION

Results-driven education judges the success of schooling not by the courses students take or the grades they receive, but by what they actually know and can do as a result of their time in school. (The term results-driven education is used throughout to avoid the many connotations associated with the term outcome-based education.) Results-driven education requires that teachers and administrators acquire new instructional knowledge and skills and alter their attitudes (e.g., from the belief that grades should be based on the bell curve to the belief that virtually all students can acquire the school’s valued outcomes provided they are given sufficient time and appropriate instruction).

"Results are inevitable," someone once observed, and that truism captures the essence of results-driven education. Every form of education produces some results; results-driven education simply begins the educational process by stipulating the desired results as a means of designing curriculum and instruction in a way that makes those results more likely to occur.

What could be easier to understand than the notion that, as Stephen Covey puts it in The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People, if you want to accomplish something, you start with the end in mind? Yet, it is not uncommon that we begin the planning process by listing activities rather than specifying intended results. In schools, that approach historically has meant that we have focused on the classes students take rather than the knowledge, skills, and dispositions we expect students to acquire as a result of their experiences.

Results-driven education begins when school systems or schools clarify their educational purposes, and it is based on "the simple principle that decisions about curriculum and instruction should be driven by the outcomes we’d like children to display at the end of their educational experience" (O’Neil 1994, p. 6). According to Kathleen Fitzpatrick (1995),
four operational principles guide results-driven education: (1) clarity of focus, (2) beginning with the end in mind, (3) high expectations for all students, and (4) expanded opportunities for success in student learning.

In results-driven schools, the school community—which includes parents, students, and business and community representatives as well as teachers and administrators—asks itself, What should a high school graduate know or be able to do as a result of his or her education? These schools typically value the perspectives of various constituent groups in determining the desired outcomes. Results-driven education systematizes the numerous decisions teachers make each day about what is important for students to learn—what students will be held accountable for when they are quizzed, tested, or asked to do various assignments. Further, it makes these outcomes explicit for teachers, students, and parents alike.

Results-driven education represents a dramatic shift in thinking regarding the purpose of schools and what we expect of students; and in a logical progression, results-driven education for students requires results-driven staff development for educators. Traditionally, a “seat-time” view of K–12 education has led to a similar approach to staff development. Staff development departments have typically reported the number of hours of workshops or courses attended by employees and their satisfaction with those activities rather than noting any changes in on-the-job behavior or effects on students or the organization. It has become increasingly clear, however, that a seat-time view of staff development is incongruous with a results-driven educational system. Staff development’s success will be judged not by how many teachers and administrators participate in staff development programs or how they perceive its value, but by whether it alters instructional behavior in a way that benefits students. The goal is improved performance—by students, staff, and the organization.

**Systems Thinking**

The second transforming idea, systems thinking, has been described by Senge as “a discipline for seeing wholes. It is a framework for seeing interrelationships rather than things, for seeing patterns of change rather than static ‘snapshots’” (1990, p. 69). Senge believes systems thinking is required because we are becoming overwhelmed by complexity, and
systems thinking offers a language that can restructure how we think about various types of relationships and about how organizations change. "We are conditioned to see life as a series of events," Senge says, "and for every event, we think there is one obvious cause" (p. 21).

Rather than seeing events, systems thinkers see the interconnectedness of all things and understand that causality is circular rather than a straight line. As a result, changes in any part of the system—even relatively minor changes—will affect in complex ways the other parts and the system as a whole, sometimes favorably and other times unfavorably. Likewise, Michael Fullan points out that systems thinking is more than the "mere articulation of one element of a big system to another element. It's the recognition that elements dynamically interact" (O'Neil 1993, p. 11).

Thus, an important aspect of systems thinking is that change within the system is continuous; the system is always in a state of flux, which may or may not be evident at any given moment. To further complicate the situation, the changes that occur today in one part of the system may not become obvious for months or even years, which may lead observers to miss the link between two events.

Because educational leaders typically have not thought systemically, reform has most often been approached in a piecemeal fashion. For instance, graduation requirements may be increased, teachers may be trained in some new process, or decision making may be decentralized—with little thought given to how these changes influence other parts of the system. As a result, "improvements" in one area may produce unintended negative consequences in another part of the system (e.g., increasing graduation requirements in science without appropriate changes in assessment, curriculum, and instructional methods may increase the dropout rate).

To address this issue of disconnectedness, Senge encourages organizational leaders to identify points of high leverage in the system. "[S]mall, well-focused actions can sometimes produce significant, enduring improvements, if they're in the right place. Systems thinkers refer to this principle as 'leverage'" (p. 64). Applying the principle to education, change introduced into certain areas—assessment strategies, for example—can have a positive ripple effect elsewhere in the organization—in curriculum and instruction, for example. Unfortunately, these
points of high leverage, where small changes can produce big results, are often the least obvious. Senge points out that

> [o]ur nonsystemic ways of thinking are so damaging specifically because they consistently lead us to focus on low-leverage changes: we focus on symptoms where the stress is greatest. We repair or ameliorate the symptoms. . . . [T]he leverage in most real-life systems, such as most organizations, is not obvious to most of the actors in those systems. They don’t see the “structures” underlying their actions (p. 114).

Senge emphasizes the power of structure to influence human behavior. “When placed in the same system,” he argues, “people, however different, tend to produce similar results. . . . We must look into the underlying structures which shape individual actions and create the conditions where types of events become likely” (pp. 42–43). He points out that because we don’t understand the power of structures, we are unaware of their influence until we notice that we feel compelled to act in certain ways. Fortunately, we can alter the system structures within which we operate. That requires, however, the conceptual framework of structural or systems thinking. “Enthusiasm for creating our future is not enough” (p. 53).

Robert Fritz (1989) also emphasizes the power of structures and systems to influence behavior. He examines the recurring patterns that most people have experienced both personally and professionally when their persistent efforts seem to have no effect or, worse yet, the opposite of the ones intended. He argues that these unintended effects are the result of poorly understood, continuing structural conflicts that are dominant forces in our lives.

A structure, according to Fritz, includes the fundamental parts of something and their relationship to one another and to the whole. Everything has an underlying structure, Fritz says, and every structure has within it an inclination toward movement, a tendency to change from one state into another. Structures achieve their power in organizations through their influence on human behavior.

Fritz’s view is based on two premises: energy always flows along the path of least resistance, and traditional problem-solving methods cannot rescue us from structural conflict. Because some structures are more useful than others in producing desired results, improvement requires the creation of new structures that propel us toward different
outcomes. Structure, Fritz argues, determines behavior because it establishes the path of least resistance along which energy will flow.

Fritz points out that certain types of structures lead to "oscillation," a forward-and-back-again movement that produces a sense of accomplishment but no significant change (e.g., many people who eat less to lose weight find that after a while they have regained the pounds that were lost, and perhaps added a few more). Progress in these structures is always temporary.

Because structures have such a strong influence on behavior, the tension they create can be applied to improve performance, Fritz believes. A key question for him, then, is, What structures should I adopt to create the results I want to create? Because problem solving involves taking action to make something go away (the problem) and typically leads to oscillation, he prefers that individuals and organizations focus on creation—taking action to have something come into being. These structures, Fritz claims, produce a healthy tension that leads to resolution, not oscillation, which in turn increases the possibility and probability of further accomplishment.

Structural tension (which Fritz views as productive) occurs when we conceive of the results we want to create, thoroughly understand current reality, develop strategies to reach the intended results, and then take action. Specifically, Fritz advises that we conceive results (as schools do through their mission statements and goals), know what currently exists (by examining data and making certain that all perspectives are heard), and implement the plan.

Like many buzz words, systems thinking has come to mean different things to different people. Michael Holzman (1993) argues that when applied to education, the term means working every aspect of the school system (e.g., schools, district bureaucracies, state departments of education), working with every school in a system, and approaching reform systematically for the purpose of producing fundamental change:

If teaching and learning are to improve for all students, we need change: fundamental change affecting every aspect of our schools and every school in our school systems, change from the statehouse to the classroom. In other words, we need systemic change (p. 18).

Systems thinking has two important implications for staff development. First, staff development must help install systems thinking at all
levels within the organization so that school board members, superintendents and other central office administrators, principals, teachers, and students understand the nature and power of systems to shape events. Second, educational leaders must understand the limitations of staff development that is divorced from a systems perspective and appreciate the central role of staff development within systemic change efforts.

**Constructivism**

The third powerful educational idea is constructivism. Constructivists believe that learners create their own knowledge structures rather than merely receive them from others. In this view, knowledge is not simply transmitted from teacher to student, but instead is constructed in the mind of the learner. In *The Case for Constructivist Classrooms*, Jacqueline Grennon Brooks and Martin Brooks base their case for constructivism on a simple premise: “We construct our own understandings of the world in which we live” (1993, p. 4). In her preface to the book, Catherine Twomey Fosnot observes that constructivism is not a theory about instruction, but rather one about knowledge and learning in which the student is a “thinker, creator, and constructor” (p. viii).

Just as young people create their cognitive structures based on their interactions with the world, so, too, do adults construct reality based on “schemes”—categories, theories, ways of knowing that provide maps of the world (Clinchy 1995). According to Clinchy, learning occurs when events require some adaptive changes in these schemes. Constructivist theory, then, holds that the learning of both students and adults is promoted when there is a partial discrepancy between existing cognitive structures and the new experience.

From a constructivist perspective, it is critical that teachers model appropriate behavior, guide student activities, and provide various forms of examples rather than use common instructional practices that emphasize telling and directing. “[T]eachers must become constructivist,” Barbara Talbert Jackson argues in her foreword to *The Case for Constructivist Classrooms*. “[T]hey must provide a learning environment where students search for meaning, appreciate uncertainty, and inquire responsibly” (p. v).
The use of excessive teacher talk and textbooks comes from a "transmittal" view of learning—information is simply passed from teachers or textbooks to learners via lectures, reading, and so on. According to this view, learners receive this information in exactly the same form in which it was sent by the teacher.

On the other hand, according to Brooks and Brooks, constructivist teachers encourage and accept student autonomy and initiative; use raw data and primary sources, along with manipulative, interactive, and physical materials; allow student responses to drive lessons, shift instructional strategies, and alter content; inquire about students' understandings of concepts before sharing their own understanding of those concepts; encourage students to engage in dialogue, both with the teacher and with one another; foster student inquiry by asking thoughtful, open-ended questions and encouraging students to formulate and ask their own questions; seek elaboration of students' initial responses; engage students in experiences that might engender contradictions to their initial hypotheses and then encourage discussion; provide time for students to construct relationships and create metaphors; and nurture students' natural curiosity. Teachers must also learn to understand students' points of view as instructional entry points—which means that teachers must be good listeners as well as talkers.

If the instructional goal is to help students become better problem posers and problem solvers, the classroom environment and adult modeling are critical to this success, according to Brooks and Brooks:

When students work with adults who continue to view themselves as learners, who ask questions with which they themselves still grapple, who are willing and able to alter both content and practice in the pursuit of meaning, and who treat students and their endeavors as works in progress, not finished products, students are more likely to demonstrate these characteristics themselves (p. 9).

While many teachers agree with constructivist goals of active, mind-engaging learning and deeper understanding, the path to becoming a constructivist teacher is not easy, Brooks and Brooks admit. It "meanders through our own memories of school as students, our most cherished beliefs, and our private versions of truth and visions for the future" (p. 13). To counter these memories, they suggest that teachers study the research of Piaget, Vygotsky, Elkind, Dewey, and Gardner. Teachers
should also consider programs that are based on a constructivist framework—whole-language, manipulative mathematics programs, hands-on science, and cooperative learning techniques. They suggest that resources be focused on teachers’ professional development rather than on textbooks and workbooks, that school-based study groups focus on principles of human development, and that administrators and school board members regularly attend staff development programs on teaching and learning. Brooks and Brooks warn that without this kind of commitment of resources and energy, constructivist approaches to instruction may yield disappointing results:

Unless teachers are given ample opportunities to learn in constructivist settings and construct for themselves educational visions through which they can reflect on educational practices, the instructional programs will be trivialized into “cookbook” approaches (pp. 121-122).

The implications of constructivism for staff development are thus profound and quite direct: constructivist classrooms cannot be created through transmittal forms of staff development. Staff development must model constructivist practices for teachers if those teachers are expected to be convinced of the validity of those practices and to understand them sufficiently well to make them an integrated part of their classroom repertoires. Rather than receiving “knowledge” from “experts” in training sessions, teachers and administrators will collaborate with peers, researchers, and their own students to make sense of the teaching/learning process in their own contexts. Staff development from a constructivist perspective will include activities such as action research, conversations with peers about the beliefs and assumptions that guide their instruction, and reflective practices such as journal keeping—activities that many educators may not even view as staff development.

Results-driven education, systems thinking, and constructivism are producing profound changes in how staff development is conceived and implemented. Some of the most important of these changes are described in the next section.
Major Shifts in Staff Development

Although the following "shifts" represent a change in focus in the nature of staff development, the use of newer processes does not necessarily exclude the application of more traditional approaches. In essence, the shifts describe a change in practice in which certain processes are used more and others less. What is most critical is the match between learning processes and the goals of the staff development effort. The paradigm shifts briefly presented below are described in greater detail in subsequent chapters.

- From individual development to individual development and organization development. Too often we have expected dramatic changes in schools based solely on staff development programs intended to help individual teachers and administrators do their jobs more effectively. An important lesson from the past few years, however, has been that improvements in individual performance alone are insufficient to produce the results we desire.

It is now clear that success for all students depends upon both the learning of individual school employees and improvements in the capacity of the organization to solve problems and renew itself. While the knowledge, skills, and attitudes of individuals must continually be addressed, quality improvement expert W. Edwards Deming (1986) estimated that 94 percent of the barriers to improvement reside in the organization's structure and processes, not in the performance of individuals. For instance, asking teachers to hold higher expectations for students in a school that tracks students pits teachers against the system in which they work. As systems thinking has taught us, unless individual learning and organizational changes are addressed simultaneously and support one another, the gains made in one area may be canceled by continuing problems in the other.

- From fragmented, piecemeal improvement efforts to staff development driven by a clear, coherent strategic plan for the school district, each school, and the departments that serve schools. Educational experts such as Seymour Sarason (1991) and Michael Fullan (1991) have criticized schools for their fragmented approach to change. School improvement too often has been based on fad rather than a clear, compelling vision of the school system's future. This, in turn, has led to one-shot staff development workshops
with no thought given to follow-up or how a technique fits in with those that were taught in previous years. At its worst, staff development asks teachers to implement poorly understood innovations with little support and assistance; and before they are able to approach mastery, the school has moved on to another area.

An orientation to outcomes and systems thinking has led to strategic planning at the district, school, and department levels. Clear, compelling mission statements and measurable objectives expressed in terms of student outcomes guide the type of staff development activities that would best serve district and school goals. In turn, district offices for staff development and curriculum see themselves as service agencies for schools. This comprehensive approach to change makes certain that all aspects of the system (e.g., assessment, curriculum, instruction, parent involvement) are working in tandem toward a manageable set of outcomes that are valued throughout the system.

- **From district-focused to school-focused approaches to staff development.** Although districtwide awareness and skill-building programs sometimes have their place, more attention today is aimed at helping schools meet their improvement goals. Schools set their goals both to help the school system achieve its long-term objectives and to address challenges unique to their students’ needs.

  School improvement efforts in which the entire staff seeks incremental annual improvement related to a set of common objectives (e.g., helping all students become better problem solvers, increasing the number of students who participate in a voluntary community service program to 100 percent) over a three- to five-year span are viewed as the key to significant reform. As a result, more learning activities are designed and implemented by school faculties, with the district’s staff development department providing technical assistance and functioning as a service center to support the work of the schools.

- **From a focus on adult needs and satisfaction to a focus on student needs and learning outcomes, and changes in on-the-job behaviors.** Rather than basing staff development solely upon the perceptions of educators regarding what they need (e.g., to learn about classroom management), staff development planning processes are more often beginning by determining the things students need to know and be able to do and
working backward to the knowledge, skills, and attitudes educators must have if those student outcomes are to be realized. This shift does not negate the value of teachers' perceptions regarding their needs, but rather places those needs within a larger context.

In addition, this shift recognizes that the ultimate criterion against which systemic change efforts must be judged is their effect on student learning. It is no longer sufficient to judge the value of staff development efforts by gathering information on participants' satisfaction with those efforts. On the other hand, it will no longer be acceptable to hold staff development solely responsible for improvement in student outcomes. Systems theory makes it clear that student outcomes are the result of complex interactions of the various parts of the system (e.g., district and school leadership, curriculum, assessment, parental involvement), and that all these parts must be critically examined to determine their influence on one another and on student learning.

• From training conducted away from the job as the primary delivery system for staff development to multiple forms of job-embedded learning. Critics have long argued that too much of what passes as staff development is "sit and get," in which educators are passive recipients of received wisdom. Likewise, a great deal of staff development could be thought of as "go and get" because "learning" has typically meant leaving the job to attend a workshop or other event.

Although well-designed training programs followed by coaching will continue to be the preferred method for the development of certain skills, school employees will also learn through such diverse means as action research, participation in study groups or small-group problem solving, observation of peers, journal writing, and involvement in improvement processes (e.g., participation in curriculum development and school improvement planning).

• From an orientation toward the transmission of knowledge and skills to teachers by "experts" to the study by teachers of the teaching and learning processes. Teachers will develop their own expertise by spending an increasingly larger portion of their work day in various processes that will help them continually improve their understanding of the teaching and learning process. Teachers will regularly use action research, study groups, and the joint planning of lessons, among other processes, to refine their instructional knowledge and skills.
• From a focus on generic instructional skills to a combination of generic and content-specific skills. Although staff development related to cooperative learning, mastery learning, and mastery teaching, among other topics, will continue to have its place, more staff development of various forms will focus on specific content areas such as mathematics, science, language arts, and social studies. Recent studies have revealed the importance of teachers' possessing a deeper understanding of both their academic disciplines and of specific pedagogical approaches tailored to those areas.

• From staff developers who function primarily as trainers to those who provide consultation, planning, and facilitation services as well as training. Staff developers are more frequently called on today to facilitate meetings or to assist various work groups (e.g., a school faculty, the superintendent’s cabinet, a school improvement team) solve problems or develop long-range plans. While staff developers will continue to provide training in instructional areas, results-driven education and systems thinking have placed teachers, administrators, and school employees in new roles (e.g., team leader, strategic planning team member). Successful performance in these roles requires training in such areas as conducting effective meetings.

• From staff development provided by one or two departments to staff development as a critical function and major responsibility performed by all administrators and teacher leaders. Job-embedded staff development means that superintendents, assistant superintendents, curriculum supervisors, principals, and teacher leaders, among others, must see themselves as teachers of adults and view the development of others as one of their most important responsibilities. Individuals who perform these roles are increasingly being held accountable for their performance as planners and implementers of various forms of staff development.

As responsibility for staff development has been spread throughout the school system, the role of the staff development department has become even more important. Staff development departments are assisting teachers and administrators by offering training and ongoing support in acquiring the necessary knowledge and skills to assume their new responsibilities, by providing one-to-one coaching of these individuals in their new roles, and by facilitating meetings that are best led by individuals who are outside that particular group.
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- From staff development directed toward teachers as the primary recipients to continuous improvement in performance for everyone who affects student learning. To meet the educational challenges of the 21st century, everyone who affects student learning must continually upgrade his or her skills—school board trustees, superintendents and other central office administrators, principals, teachers, the various categories of support staff (e.g., aides, secretaries, bus drivers, custodians), and parents and community members who serve on policy-making boards and planning committees.

- From staff development as a "frill" that can be cut during difficult financial times to staff development as an indispensable process without which schools cannot hope to prepare young people for citizenship and productive employment. Both the professional development of school employees and significant changes in the organizations in which they work are required if schools are to adequately prepare students for life in a world that is becoming increasingly complex. Fortunately, results-driven education and systems thinking provide us with the intellectual understanding and the means to create the necessary reforms.

What Implementation Will Bring
The shifts described above are significant and powerful. They are essential to the creation of learning communities in which everyone—students, teachers, principals, and support staff—are both learners and teachers. All of the things described above will serve to unleash the most powerful source of success for all students—the daily presence of adults who are passionately committed to their own lifelong learning within organizations that are continually renewing themselves.

The following chapters describe how schools and school systems across North America are implementing these shifts. Because an organization may be implementing more than one shift simultaneously or because some staff development efforts fit into more than one category, the activities described may sometimes fit appropriately into several chapters. The final section of this book provides information that will enable readers to contact the persons who describe their work in the following chapters.
Individual Development and Organization Development

Systems thinking teaches us that individual learning and organizational changes must occur simultaneously and support one another if the gains made in one area are not to be eliminated by continuing problems in another. Too often we have harbored unrealistic hopes that dramatic changes would occur in schools as a result of staff development programs designed to help individual teachers and administrators. These programs are built on the assumption that improved performance will be achieved when individuals learn how to do their jobs better. For instance, teachers attend workshops on instructional skills such as cooperative learning that are intended to change their practice and subsequently improve the learning of students. Principals attend workshops on supervisory skills so they can provide more effective feedback to teachers so that they, in turn, will improve their teaching.

The flaw in this assumption is the failure to recognize that too often organizational constraints make it difficult for individuals to consistently apply over time the understandings and skills they have acquired. Teachers may learn a new instructional skill but find that their use of it gradually diminishes because no one else in the school is using it or because their principals do not support the practice.
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The past few years have taught us that the results we desire require more than just improvements in the performance of individual school employees. Success for all students also requires improvements in the capacity of the organization to solve problems and continuously renew itself. This means that school systems must continually examine their policies, procedures, job descriptions, communication patterns, and decision-making processes to determine whether they are coherent and support the system's mission and goals.

To illustrate, a teacher may attend a Teacher Expectation, Student Achievement (TESA) workshop and deeply desire to apply the insights and skills acquired, only to find that the school system's long history of tracking students has so negatively affected students' attitudes about themselves and learning that the new techniques have little likelihood of success. In this case, staff development has the effect of pitting teachers against the system in which they work.

While individual learning and organization development are both essential, it is important to remember that organization development ultimately depends upon the knowledge, skills, and attitudes of individuals. For instance, district leaders—whether they work in the central office or in schools—must acquire the knowledge and skills related to systems thinking. They must also be skillful in diagnosing organizational strengths and weaknesses and in designing appropriate interventions.

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Organization development can take many forms in school systems. It may be the teaching of special skills to school employees who will facilitate meetings and assist in conflict resolution. It may involve the training of process observers who attend meetings to provide feedback to participants on the group's performance. It may include the use of outside consultants who diagnose and design interventions around common organizational problems, such as communication problems, interpersonal conflicts, and fragmented improvement efforts. Profiled in this chapter are two school systems—the Adams 12 Five Star Schools in Northglenn, Colorado, and the Northeast Independent School District in Texas—that are applying organization development practices to school reform.
Adams 12 Five Star Schools

According to Joellen Killion, a staff development trainer for the Adams 12 Five Star Schools, the school system has had a long history of training in both content-specific and generic instructional skills. With the hiring of Jim Mitchell as superintendent in the early 1980s, the district quickly moved to site-based management, and a new need emerged. “We soon recognized,” Killion recalls, “that we needed to do a whole new type of work in staff development if our new shared decision-making and decentralization efforts were to be successful.” Mitchell left the district in 1994. Judith Margrath-Huge, his successor, has focused on improving student learning, viewing collaboration and shared decision making as means to that end.

Killion remembers that as the district became involved in designing new training programs in areas such as team building, conflict management, and consensus decision making, they became aware that they were no longer just doing skill-building for individuals, but were changing the capacity of the organization to do its work:

> In the past our programs were job specific, so we would offer something for teachers in their classrooms. As we started to do more process skills, we realized that those skills weren't necessarily job specific. When we did training we were also simultaneously putting into the field people who had the capacity to participate in the school improvement effort and to do the facilitation, no matter what their job title. We wanted to make certain that every employee had this capacity—bus drivers, custodians, food service workers, and secretaries. Not everyone participated in formal training, but those who didn't learned the skills by actually engaging in the processes themselves. This process helped shift our staff development emphasis from the individual to the organization.

Killion reports a growing awareness that staff development had to focus on the individual and the organization simultaneously and that more needed to be learned about systemic change. “We knew that we had to think more closely and deeply about how things were interrelated,” Killion says. “We needed to better understand the primary and secondary effects of actions that were taken.”

Over several years, Killion notes, the result was an increased focus on the organization as a whole. The central office was restructured into
circles of influence rather than a pyramid of authority. Positions and responsibilities were realigned so that services could be provided to schools in a better manner. Policy and contractual language was revised to reflect the move away from centralized control.

Killion points out another result: the superintendent's cabinet—called the District Coordinating Team—models shared decision making and the importance of continuous learning for all employees. Representatives of all departments and units serve on the cabinet, including the presidents of the parent organization and the support staff union. In addition, rather than replace an assistant superintendent whose job had included supervision over the departments of curriculum, staff development, and school improvement, a coleadership process was initiated among the three department heads. This eliminated a layer of management and coordinated the work of the three departments. The three individuals now make decisions about their departments by consensus.

Killion recognizes the intertwining of individual and organization development. "How do we develop the capacities of individuals who are the organization so that the organization will do what we want it to do?" she asks rhetorically. She continues:

The image that we have is that the organization is its individuals, and the individuals must exhibit the values, skills, and knowledge that we want the organization to be known for. Those two things must work simultaneously. However, we also have thought about the structure of the organization—the reporting mechanisms, policies, communication patterns, the formation of cross-departmental project teams. For instance, when the staff development department creates its budget, we call in a cadre of people who access staff development and ask them what we should be doing.

Northeast Independent School District

The Northeast Independent School District (Northeast ISD) is one of 13 school systems in Bexar County, Texas, that serve the city of San Antonio. It is an urban/suburban district with 50,000 students in 45 schools. Director of Staff Development Linda O'Neal reports to the supervisor for curriculum and development. The department consists of the director, a part-time program director, and a secretary.
According to O’Neal, the district has spent nearly a decade focusing on instructional improvement. More recently, the district has added a focus on school and organization development to its commitment to the development of individual employees.

O’Neal reports that a districtwide steering committee creates a broad framework for using the six days of the school calendar set aside specifically for staff development. For the 1995–1996 school year the calendar included one-half day for a whole-district gathering, a day for districtwide curriculum meetings, one-half day for cluster/feeder system schools, and four days for site-based staff development. Each school submits a plan for staff development, including an evaluation component that links the effort to student achievement.

A major instructional improvement initiative has been the implementation of a program that combines models of teaching and 4-MAT, O’Neal notes. 4-MAT is a system for instructional design that integrates four learning styles and brain hemisphere research. Fourteen campuses are taking part. Each school has formed study groups and has provided for ongoing coaching.

The district began the process with principals by building their knowledge base and leadership capacity for the initiative. Next, a training-of-trainers model facilitated districtwide implementation. “The district has experienced great success with this empowerment model,” O’Neal says. Five to 10 teachers provide annual updates and work with the campus improvement committees to help design and facilitate the staff development for the next year. Individual schools collect student data to determine the effectiveness of their efforts, with two of the campuses using the Concerns-Based Adoption Model to track teachers’ application of the new practices.

Additional individual development support for administrators is provided by the Human Side of Change, a program developed by the International Training and Development Consortium that prepares people to function more effectively in organizations no matter what their role. The program provides participants with leadership profiles accompanied by customized coaching for each participant.

According to O’Neal, the district’s commitment to school-based improvement is evident in its approach to helping schools plan effective
staff development. The district provides training sessions for school committees on how to write a school improvement plan that meets district requirements. After a school drafts its initial plan, a coach meets with the committee to critique and edit the plan. The school then submits the plan to the central office, where it is evaluated by the staff development and curriculum staff, who look specifically at the student achievement data and whether the intended interventions will lead to the kinds of changes outlined in the plan. "If they are not up to district standards, the committee is invited in for additional assistance," O'Neal reports. The process ensures a consistent quality product across the district. "Qualitative measures indicate the plans are getting stronger and the clients feel more supported," she says.

In addition to its attention to individual and school-based learning, the staff development department is being used more and more to provide organizational support for a variety of district initiatives, O'Neal reports. For instance, the department assists the superintendent and school board president in the superintendent's evaluation process, which includes the writing of annual action plans. "Another exciting initiative is the new process for hiring campus administrators," O'Neal says. "Focus groups are used to solicit input from parents, teachers, and others to identify the leadership characteristics of the administrator they want to hire."

According to O'Neal, at the superintendent's request, principals' meetings have also changed in the Northeast ISD to include a dialogue process before the regular business meeting. In addition, all the district's principals have been trained in the Dupont Leadership Process to enhance their management skills for committee meetings related to campus improvement. Additionally study teams of administrators and consultants have been formed to explore leadership issues as well as new ways to boost student achievement.

In the summer of 1995 the district held a technology summit planned and conducted by the staff development department. The desired result was a district vision for technology and an outline of the components necessary to achieve the vision. To demonstrate the level of success of the summit, a bond proposal was subsequently approved by voters.
The department is working hard to change the district's belief system regarding staff development. "There are still those who believe if it's not a workshop it is not staff development," O'Neal says. But such views don't deter the department, as she makes clear:

Our commitment to student success and the intensity of our work keep us busy. We continue to learn from other districts who are as committed and focused on staff development that leads to individual and organizational improvements for children.