

# I never expect a soldier to think

**David Killick** explores themes related to staff training and development. He argues for devolution and seeks to establish criteria for a meaningful staff development policy. This article is based on a talk delivered at the IATEFL Conference in York in April 1996.

#### Overview

The presentation looked at a number of questions relating to staff development - drawing upon my own experience and ideas, as well as those of participants. The central questions which we considered were:

- Why "do" staff development at all?
- What activities can be considered to be staff development?
- What are the prerequisites for effective staff development to take place?

These questions raised issues of:

- · ownership
- empowerment
- objectives
- policy
- evaluation

Participants were drawn from a number of institutional contexts, but the central themes and issues appeared to be relevant across the board, though the application would clearly be different depending, for example, on the size and/or complexity of the institution. What follows is the gist of my talk, informed by the views expressed by other participants.

#### Introduction

I'd like to begin by considering how the title quotation, from Candida by George Bernard Shaw, could be interpreted (and suggest that "teacher" - or any

other worker - could be substituted for soldier). Five initial interpretations could be:

- Soldiers should not be expected to make decisions.
- Soldiers should not be allowed to make decisions.
- Soldiers do not make decisions.
- Soldiers are incapable of making decisions.
- Decisions are best made by commanders.

Staff development is both an objective in itself and an essential tool in enabling an organisation to meet its wider strategic goals

However, I suggest a more useful reinterpretation would be:

 Soldiers are not given the tools with which to make decisions.

If we want professionals and not cannon fodder, however, those tools must be made available - and I suggest the tools necessary fall into three categories:

- Objectives should be known and communicated
- Information on one's own role, on opportunities, and on expectations

 Authority /empowerment over one's own development

## How, then, does this relate to staff development?

It seems clear to me that staff development is both an objective in itself and an essential tool in enabling an organisation to meet its wider strategic goals. Leave it entirely to the generals, and we end up with illinformed campaigns, ill-used resources, a conscript army, and platoons charging up dead-end valleys, and then wonder why we have low morale, high absenteeism, and desertion, and, consequently, why we are losing our competitive edge. I feel it is important that we are honest and clear in this. though - staff development is an organisational tool; it has a strategic function, and, to be effective, should not be viewed as something which is done for or to people for their own sakes alone. If we present it as such, we deny its status and it becomes devalued.

## Training and development

No general argues against training - so does this mean they are supportive of development, indeed is there a distinction between the two? This is a subject which has been much debated in the arena of teacher training versus teacher development. Without

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reiterating the debate - I'd just like to say that for me there are crucial differences - and the, now rather extended, soldier metaphor illustrates the point quite succinctly - soldiers have traditionally been trained, but not expected to think - and, to me, development is precisely about thinking, where training is, often, precisely about not thinking.

## Why "do" staff development?

There are, of course, a whole range of "micro" rationales. Staff development may be "done":

- · to increase motivation
- · to extend abilities
- to extend knowledge
- to increase loyalty
- to impress stakeholders
- · as a Trojan horse
- as a palliative

But there are more fundamental reasons, of which the above are features:

"Staff development in its broadest sense is about change... Staff development is about helping individuals to learn. It is about helping groups to learn and it is about helping institutions to learn." Angela Brew 1995 (p16)

And, I believe, the real goal of staff development relates to the institutional dimension.

## What activities constitute staff development?

Of course, this list could be very wide indeed, but the major aspects of activity which are essentially staff developmental would include:

- conferences/seminars/workshops
- external courses (eg MA)
- · reading/desk research
- "top-down" lesson observation & feedback
- peer observation & feedback
- action research
- reflective practitioner
- curriculum/materials design

- posts/areas of responsibility
- quality circles/quality teams
- · local teacher groups

## What is needed to "do" staff development?

I think it is helpful to divide the prerequisites for successful staff development into two areas - the Personal and the Organisational.

#### Personal

- a will to develop
- ⇒ the motivation of "reward" / "recognition"
- ⇒ integral motivation
- ⇒ view of self as professional
- ⇒ view of self as learner

Effective professional development must rely on the willingness of staff to engage in it. Angela Brew 1995 (P9)

#### Organisational

- the facilities to enable that development
- ⇒ funds
- ⇒ organisation
- ⇒ information
- ⇒ managerial commitment
- opportunity for staff to identify their developmental needs
- opportunity for the organisation to identify its developmental needs

The above are, of course, essential. However, before we can arrive at these - let's say "operational" requirements - we must establish two fundamentals.

#### Firstly:

 an understanding of the goals/objectives of the organisation

And in this respect staff developers need to ask themselves -

What are the goals and objectives

of your institution?

- Does it have/do you know its mission statement?
- What are the means through which it seeks to achieve that mission?
- If you do know does everybody who works there share that knowledge?
- How is it communicated?
- Is it a shared understanding or do individuals gloss it with their own agendas? (how do you know?)

Having established and communicated its goals and objectives, an institution also needs to establish and communicate its approach to staff development. It needs a policy:

Clearly, institutional managers have a responsibility to decide on broad areas of policy and to provide appropriate resources for staff development.

Decisions about priorities depend in the first place on the development of a staff development policy. Angela Brew 1995

The first question to ask in terms of a policy is not what, exactly, it should say, but what are the features it must embrace. I would suggest, as a minimum, the following need to be articulated:

- ⇒ it should encompass all staff (not only teachers - but administrators, cleaners and senior management)
- ⇒ relate to the institutional goals & objectives
- ⇒ identify the funding (& time) available
- ⇒ define responsibility for its delivery
- ⇒ define ownership
- ⇒ articulate SD objectives

So - in summary - there are two prerequisites to staff development which rely on a senior management and/or institutional approach:

- an understanding of the goals/objectives of the organisation
- a clear (articulated) staff development policy

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## An empowered person is someone who has a clear understanding of how their performance contributes to the success of the organisation.

The importance of articulating the SD objectives lies not only in the planning of SD strategy, but also in the review and evaluation of the effectiveness of that strategy:

Staff development is often talked about and written about without any evidence of its effectiveness. There is no good in having models and theories of staff development if they do not bring about the desired changes. Angela Brew 1995 (p161)

The review processes which often are in place, focus on individual events - usually through an evaluation questionnaire to participants, asking if they found it useful/enjoyable, etc. This is important, of course. But it is also inadequate. A review needs to look not only at the effectiveness of individual presenters or the relevance of a particular conference, but at the accumulated effect of all staff development activities over the year - and the effect should be defined in terms of stated objectives and strategies derived from the policy.

## Ownership of staff development

It may seem from my earlier links between staff development and the goals and objectives of the institution that I am arguing for ownership at managerial/institutional level. This is not, however, the case. There is a difference between ownership of personal professional development and the setting of the context within which that development should take place. This is similar to the distinction made within a TQM setting between authority (which lies within a defined line management structure) and empowerment (which is a devolution of the legitimacy of decision making). Both depend upon clarity in the communication of objectives and people's roles:

An empowered person is someone who has a clear understanding of how their performance contributes to the success of the organisation. John Seddon 1992 (p117)

and upon management releasing their exclusivity on the right to think - the echoes with the title of this workshop are clear:

For empowerment to work, managers have to give up the idea that they are there to do the thinking while staff are there to do the doing. John Seddon 1992 (p116)

Staff and educational development are concerned with empowerment. This means assisting in the development of individuals, groups and institutions, so they can achieve more and are enabled to develop greater capability and competence. Brew 1995 (p15)

Of course, non-managerial staff have a responsibility too - empowerment depends upon their own commitment to the goals and objectives. The bottom line argument here, is that if you cannot commit to the institution which employs you, then you cannot expect that institution to commit to you. Staff development cannot take place if staff do not identify with the goals and objectives towards which development is geared. There is, of course, work to be done in achieving that commitment - and this work is part of the process towards staff development - but true staff development begins at the point at which commitment is established.

#### Review

In summary, then, I am arguing that:

- staff development exists to enable people to maximise their potential within their institution;
- staff development requires a policy;

- policy needs a strategy and an infrastructure to work;
- staff development requires the understanding of the goals and objectives of the organisation and of the roles we each play in achieving those goals and objectives;
- staff development must be evaluated against its goals;
- in this context, individuals must be empowered to drive their own development.

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