IMPACT II: A Teacher-to-Teacher Networking Program

ELLEN DEMPSEY



John Cole

In an age in which everything is "megasize," IMPACT II dares to think small. This teacher-to-teacher network recognizes individual teachers and brings them together with other teachers. It awards small grants to teachers who have developed a single idea into a classroom program that may be an activity or a unit. Other teachers are supported "to take an idea and go creative."

The concept of IMPACT II is based on a previous project titled IMPACT, a college and university program that was funded and administered by the Exxon Education Foundation. The program is based on the philosophy that success starts in the classroom and that teachers working with teachers is a most effective way of improving instruction. The design for the pilot program was developed by Exxon in conjunction with the New York City Board of Education. A second pilot program, also Exxon-supported, was begun in Houston, Texas, in 1981.

IMPACT II is now operating in New York City; Houston, Texas; Boston, Massachusetts; Chapel Hill, North Carolina; and Rockland County, New York. Programs based on the IMPACT II model are presently being developed at additional sites around the country. Many are planned, funded, and administered by school systems in conjunction with local education foundations. The Los Angeles Educational Partnership and the San Francisco Education Fund are excellent examples of education foundations working in conjunction with their school systems to adapt the IMPACT II model to serve staff development needs.

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A practical way to promote teacher creativity and commitment is to offer small grants for exemplary projects.

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Participants at IMPACT II's 1983 convention exchanged information with colleagues in Houston at a telecommunications demonstration.

The goal of the program is to set up a system whereby teachers who have developed exemplary programs can receive grants and join a network to disseminate their programs to interested teachers. It is a staff development program that enables master teachers to instruct other teachers and provides teachers with the opportunity to exchange and adapt ideas.

Design of the Model

IMPACT II HANDBOOK, a how-to manual, describes the activities that form the substance of the program:

- *Developer Grants.* Developer teachers are awarded grants of $300 each, in recognition of their creativity and commitment to classroom teaching. The monies are used to purchase classroom materials and/or to support teachers in their professional development.
- *Adaptor Grants.* Adaptor teachers are awarded grants of $200 each to adopt or adapt a developer teacher's program.
- *Review Committee.* The IMPACT II Review Committee, composed of a majority of teachers, reviews developer programs annually and selects those appropriate for support.
- *Grant Awards Ceremony.* Held at the end of the school year to honor developer and adaptor teachers, all of whom receive certificates, the awards ceremony and reception often result in an informal exchange of ideas and programs.
- *IMPACT II Catalog of Teacher-Developed Programs.* The annual catalog contains individual program pro-

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files, contact information, and a description of support services.

- *Workshops.* IMPACT II teacher-led workshops disseminate information about the teacher-developed programs and encourage their adaptation by other teachers. Workshops are held after school and on weekends; teacher leaders are paid for the preparation and presentation time.
- *Interschool Visits.* IMPACT II provides funding for substitute teachers so that classroom teachers can visit other schools in order to see programs firsthand or to demonstrate programs and help with their adaptation.
- *Publicity.* One of our goals is to inform the public about the quality of teaching in our schools. To do this, we encourage press coverage of IMPACT II events; we also place articles about teacher-developed programs in community newspapers. This type of publicity serves as additional recognition for committed teachers.

Other networking activities include a newsletter, a television and videotape series, and a "Workshop on Workshops," which instructs teachers in how to lead workshops.

Adaptations of the Model

Since New York City is the largest school system in the country—with over 900,000 students and over 50,000 teachers—its program sponsors all the activities listed above during the program year. A smaller school system or region might use only the most important activities or produce activities of its own that support the development of a teacher network.

The Chapel Hill-Carrboro, North Carolina, school district adapted the IMPACT II model to the needs of the school system and region. Superintendent Pamela S. Mayer said that the IMPACT II model was selected "based on IMPACT II's proven success, its strong emphasis on dissemination and teacher-to-teacher networking, and the demonstrated quality of its products."

During its first year, the program set up a teacher review and advisory committee, gave developer grants to teachers to support exemplary existing programs, scheduled workshops led by IMPACT II teachers, and published a catalog of teacher-developed programs. At the end of the first year teachers demonstrated their programs at a district-sponsored fair and exchanged information with other teachers who wished to adapt the programs for their own classrooms. During the second year, the school district awarded adaptor grants to teachers. The program is presently expanding to include other school systems in the region. This expansion will increase the pool of effective teachers available to join the network and to participate in staff development activities.

Another geographical variation of the IMPACT II model is the regional program. A number of school districts may form a consortium in order to realize a pool of at least 2,000 teachers—the critical mass of teachers necessary to create a viable teacher network. This variation was instituted last year in surburban Rockland County, near New York City.

Planning for another regional program is currently under way in Westchester County, another suburban county near New York City. IMPACT II New York City teachers will introduce teachers and adminstrators in the county to the program at an all-day conference on Election Day 1984. The reaching-out by teachers from one IMPACT II site to another continues to develop.

In their recent adaptation of IMPACT II, the Boston public schools designed the grant portion of the program to meet local needs: a third grant category was created because specific critical areas were designated targets for development through IMPACT II grants. The Houston schools have also added a third type of grant. Teachers interested in adapting another teacher's program may opt to apply for an adaptor grant of $200 or for an instructional materials grant. Whereas the former type awards money for materials, the latter supplies the actual package of classroom materials needed to adapt the program.

In New York City, where IMPACT II is in its sixth year, more than 1,200 teachers have received developer or adaptor grants, and thousands of others have joined the network by attending workshops and informally adapting programs. The New York City experience shows that the effects of the grants persist over time. Teachers who have been in the program four, five, and six years are still leading workshops and disseminating their ideas.

Speaking at the first national IMPACT II convention in New York City in November 1983, Ernest Boyer, President of the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, said:

> We recommend in our report [*High School, A Report of Secondary Education in America*] that every school should have a teacher excellence fund—a discretionary grant to make available to teachers to support them to pursue precisely the kinds of projects that have been sparked by IMPACT II. I think we have not learned the lesson that the issue here is not large amounts of money, it's large amounts of trust. . . It's impressive to me that grants—$300, $400, $500—are more important because of the statement they make than the amount of resources they provide.

We invite all interested school systems to contact us for more information. The *IMPACT II Handbook* is available by writing to IMPACT II, 15 E. 26th St., New York, NY 10010, or by calling (212) 340-2990.□

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