

# Staff Development: Band-Aid or Treatment?

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**E**VERY large school district has a "staff development" office, and every school usually has a "staff development" program. This function is always present in educational planning and, more than ever, particularly in urban areas, a need exists to train, to retool, and to support teachers. With large numbers of low achievers, a dearth of funds for resources, continuing budget cuts often resulting in large class size—teachers are feeling increasingly troubled. However, what is often done is to merely apply band-aids to problems.

Unfortunately, staff development is sometimes still a faculty meeting speech—a person who can bring some expertise to a 45-minute slot. The audience is amused, stimulated, and acquires an idea or two (while watching the clock), but what remains?

For the past two years, the author has been involved in an in-service project, a combined effort of Temple University and the School District of Philadelphia. Initially funded federally through the Educational Personnel Development Act, the project in its second year was locally supported since it was acknowledged that in one year little significant change can occur. These dollars were spent for minimum amounts of materials and services of some parent aides.

The purpose of the project was the enhancement of reading performance of children through the training of teachers. It was hypothesized that if teachers exhibited

certain behaviors that implemented the basic tenets of the program, increased pupil achievement would result. The vehicle for staff development was a university course, offered for graduate credit, tuition free, for these teachers. Part-time parent aides also worked in their classrooms. Of even greater importance was the way the course was given—during the school day—despite unions, teaching schedules, and varied dismissal times. Short group sessions were held at lunchtime on the day the university instructor came to the school, and the emphasis was on utilizing the learned techniques in the classroom. These seminars generally consisted of a demonstration involving the group and a problem-centered discussion. Follow-up involved the instructor visiting each classroom on a weekly basis to observe the level of implementation and to make suggestions.

While the content of the course might be outlined here and the statistically significant differences cited (It was the .01 level), the process was more critical. What is staff development? What makes it work? What can a school do that does not have university affiliation, tuition-free courses, some funding, or some "experts"? Growing out of these concerns, the following guidelines evolved from our project so that our ideas might be generalized to other settings.

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Goal	Objectives	Strategies	Resources
To improve teachers' understanding of the value of children's literature	To present teachers with a literature program at four consecutive faculty meetings	To show films about books To demonstrate book bulletin boards To disseminate booklists To present research findings from reading—literature projects	Films—"The Red Balloon," "The Little Prince" Catalogs Booklists Librarian Language arts supervisor Posters

Figure 1. Model of Content Organization for Staff Development

1. First of all, begin by asking, not telling. Carry out a needs assessment of your group to discover the areas of weakness; inquire as to its strengths for future use as resources.

2. From the responses, develop a theme. This will usually be process oriented. For instance, if teachers need help with classroom organization, schedule consecutive sessions for demonstrations and discussions using content areas to highlight organizational techniques.

3. Organize an advisory board representing varied approaches or levels in your unit. Plan with them and commit your ideas to writing. By charting the proposed suggestions, you will all know where you are and what is yet to be resolved. Use operational terms—the more explicit, the more likelihood of reaching fruition.

4. Develop an overall agenda with continuity that will assure a unified program. Vary the sessions—school visitations, speakers, small group meetings, etc.; but construct the program in a logical sequence. Rather than worry about industry encroaching upon the educational establishment, let's borrow some of its usable tools. Make a time line, use milestone or PERT charts. Let's work to make educating efficient as well as effective.

5. Set frequent realistic expectations. Research shows that when expectations are stated clearly, the chance of reaching them is enhanced. After you decide on your emphases with your staff, let the group take responsibility for implementation. For example, if a book fair is slated as part of literature staff development, in what ways can each class participate? While the contributions should be individual and self-initiated, the obligation to respond will be assured if the staff is part of decision making.

6. Any novice teacher can tell you to "begin with the child," to "go from the concrete to the abstract." Apply these maxims to your school. Ask the teachers to bring in one idea each on a given topic for the next meeting—one

successful practice. In addition, have your staff members tour each other's rooms. (We were amazed to discover that some first floor teachers did not know the names of their colleagues two floors above!) Getting specific activities from one another is not only ego satisfying but builds esprit de corps.

7. Appreciate individual differences. We all subscribe to the cliché, but do we mean it? If a teacher can convince you that he can find a more worthwhile enterprise than the staff session planned, why not let him follow his inclinations? On the other hand, if your sessions are really relevant, there will be a few dissenters.

8. Use positive reinforcement. When you observe a worthwhile practice, acknowledge it; mention it at a group meeting. Rather than offend the person ignored, you will instead encourage innovation. By reinforcing desired behaviors you increase the possibility of their reoccurring.

9. Before you begin your program, you should organize the content in terms of goals, objectives, strategies, and resources (Figure 1). A goal is a global statement, general in nature. Supporting a goal may be several objectives—specific statements that are behavioral, that is, that contain behaviors or "doing" words. Strategies tell how these objectives will be reached, and resources indicate what means (for example, people, materials) will be used in performing these strategies.

In thinking through all the aspects of the program, you will be able to see gaps and will also be setting a model for teachers to follow in planning their instructional sequences.

A staff development planner should be as accountable for his task as a teacher is for pupils' performance. Let's be accountable to our teachers, demonstrating for them that good group process enriches the product. Treatment is indicated, not band-aids!

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