

# Staff Development: Selected Comments

*Staff development is an exciting topic for ASCD'ers, as evidenced by the large number of manuscripts considered by Educational Leadership for inclusion in this issue. Following are excerpts from a few of the very many thoughtful and creative papers submitted.*

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## *A Program for Improved Communications*

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At the Institute for Child Study at the University of Maryland, teachers constantly report that their most satisfying moments are when they experience a congenial relationship with a child, a colleague, or a parent. Their most disillusioning and frustrating moments are when they experience a breakdown in interpersonal relationships, when the quality of their interaction with others deteriorates to anger and hostility and becomes an adversary relationship. As one teacher stated, "I'm just amazed at how often our relationships become a desperate game of winners and losers. In a way, no matter what the outcome is, to some degree everyone involved feels a degrading sense of loss and defeat and humiliation. It's such a vicious circle. In the final analysis no one ever really wins."

The thrust of the staff development program at the Institute for Child Study is improved communications. The Institute's program represents a joint effort between teachers and administrators to help teachers develop strategies that result in the kind of congenial interpersonal relationships they so eagerly want and need. The program:

- Incorporates experiences and materials directly tied to teachers' actual professional experiences;
- Is a semester-long process;
- Encourages teachers to actively delineate their own areas of concern and their own solutions to problems;

- Is a group experience based on mutual trust, support, and assistance,
- Is led by a trained peer and colleague of the group members.

As a beginning and non-threatening experience for the group members, an audio tape of actual interpersonal communications which teachers have experienced with students, colleagues, and parents is used. Based upon extensive observational data, the audio tape consists of 27 communication situations. The format presents stimulus statements with a variety of response alternatives for teacher analysis, and, subsequently, stimulus statements that call for group members to write their own response alternatives for group analysis. Typical stimulus statements are: (a) an elementary student balking at his reading program; (b) a father upset about drugs at the sports banquet; (c) a colleague enthusiastic about a new teaching tool; (d) an administrator concerned about teacher evaluations; (e) a mother concerned about the impact of mainstreaming on her child's education, and (f) a high school boy upset about missing the varsity team.

Next, group members work in dyads or triads, sharing school experiences and providing feedback to one another in terms of their increasing analytical skills.

The analytic skills and sensitivities gained from work with the tape and groups are then applied to the teachers' personal written record of interpersonal communications. Records typi-

cally contain two teacher-student anecdotes per week, one colleague anecdote per week, and one parent-teacher anecdote every two weeks. Pseudonyms are used in the records to protect the anonymity of all persons. Anecdotes are analyzed in terms of: (a) one's own response style, that is, supporting, judging, moralizing, questioning, lecturing; (b) the feelings expressed in the communication; (c) the communication's impact upon the self-concept and on the behavior of others, and (d) the status of the relationship after the communication is completed. Teachers write about, and discuss with the group, outcomes they would have wished from the communication. Where there is discrepancy between the actual and desired outcomes, the group assists the teacher in developing alternative ways of responding that might be more effective in the future.

Finally, teachers summarize their communication modes and outcomes and define for them-

selves an area in which they wish to improve their communications.

Group members are asked to conclude the in-service program with a written summary that includes: (a) a synthesis of their present philosophy about the human relations component of their work, and (b) the articulation of at least one area which they plan to pursue to improve their interpersonal relations and communications as teachers. They share these summary activities with other group members from whom they receive feedback, suggestions, and support.



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### *Work-Study Teams*

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In an effort to overcome the shortcomings of conventional in-service programs, Stanford University's Graduate School of Education has joined with Herbert Hoover Junior High School (San Jose Unified School District) to develop a new in-service model. Supported by a two-year Teacher Corps grant, the Hoover-Stanford Teacher Corps Project currently is approaching the completion of its first year of operation.

Herbert Hoover Junior High School had identified the following major problem areas long before contact was made with Stanford.

1. The district had ordered the school to move from its non-earthquake-proof building to a new open-space facility.

2. As a result of population changes, Hoover found itself with a student body that was almost half chicano, while its teaching staff included only one Mexican American teacher.

3. The district had voiced its commitment to bilingual and multicultural education, though these terms still lacked clarity in the minds of Hoover teachers and administrators.

4. Like many other schools, Hoover was facing increased discipline problems, decreased student achievement, and demands for greater community involvement in school decision making.

It was obvious to Hoover personnel and Stanford professors that the school's problems did not exist independent of each other. Student achievement could not be improved without working on learning and behavioral problems. The move to an open-space school had relevance for both achievement and discipline, as well as teacher interaction and communication. Similarly, student achievement was related to the issues underlying calls for bilingual and multicultural education and for community participation. Here was an opportunity to develop a comprehensive program for in-service education and school improvement. But, what would be the most appropriate organizational mechanism for initiating and sustaining the effort? Clearly, faculty meetings were too large and departmental gatherings too parochial.

Work-study teams may be the answer. Con-

sisting of Hoover teachers, teacher aides, and administrators—plus Stanford University professors (faculty advisors) and graduate students (research assistants)—each work-study team attacks a particular area of concern. These areas include language arts, social studies, physical education, mathematics, open space, bilingual education, multicultural education, and community participation. Overlapping teacher membership, frequent sharing of findings at regular faculty meetings, and a project-wide steering committee assure that the eight teams do not function in isolation.

Each work-study team has a budget and is responsible for setting its objectives and developing its own bi-weekly agenda. A Hoover teacher serves as chairperson of each team, and teachers determine the direction in which the team will go. Stanford faculty advisers and research assistants act as resource persons and facilitators. They condense and report on existing research relevant to the team's concerns, help conceptualize problems to be attacked, and offer practical tips on conducting local research. A major hope of the Hoover-Stanford Project is that training teachers to conduct their own local research will:

- Lead to improvement in the quality of local education;
- Improve faculty morale and interaction;
- Make practitioners more receptive to educational research in general; and
- Encourage university researchers to spend more time on practical problems.

Unlike visiting consultants, weekend workshops, and extension courses, the work-study team continues to meet and solve problems on a regular basis. The district provides released time every Tuesday afternoon so that teachers can work in their teams. Every Tuesday (and often at other times), approximately ten resource persons from Stanford visit Hoover Junior High School and work with teachers, aides, and administrators.

*Dealing with Open Space:* The Open Space Work-Study Team has the most pressing concern of any of the eight teams, since it must lay the groundwork for a smooth transition to the new open-space school sometime in 1976. Having taught almost exclusively in self-contained

classrooms, Hoover teachers and aides are anxious about the change. Working bi-weekly as a team and in subcommittees, members of the group have undertaken the following projects designed to minimize the trauma of the move:

1. Development of a set of rules to govern student behavior, noise, traffic, and use of the media center.
2. Securing teacher agreement to enforce the rules consistently.
3. Identification and visitation of exemplary open-space and team-teaching programs in the vicinity of San Jose.
4. Planning how space in the new building will be allotted and utilized. (A shop teacher built a scale model of the new school to facilitate this process.)
5. Ordering furniture and instructional materials.
6. Exploration of strategies for team planning and team teaching.
7. Planning for gradual student orientation to open space.

As the team develops rules and guidelines for the new school, it submits them to the entire faculty for approval. The procedure so far has worked well, and teacher anxiety levels show definite signs of abatement. Even after the move to open space, the team will continue to function, monitoring progress, assessing the effectiveness of the new rules and guidelines, and stimulating increased teamwork.

*Improving Math Instruction:* The Mathematics Work-Study Team chose to focus more on research than on development. Concerned with students' forgetting math over the summer, the team designed a research project and pre-tested and post-tested students in the spring and autumn. Since tests of mathematics achievement have proven unreliable for chicano students, the Stanford members of the team used the opportunity to check on this finding. Mathematics students received pretest preparation in the spring. The "prep" sessions were intended to increase test scores. As a result of the research project, students were found to remember much more over the summer than had been anticipated. In addition, giving chicano students pretest

preparation was found to increase their test scores.

The Mathematics Work-Study Team currently is interested in team teaching, testing procedures, and how mathematics students use their time in class. Teachers and aides have been exposed to relevant research in mathematics and encouraged to investigate the literature on their own. Some new ideas in mathematics instruction have been introduced via a Teacher Corps intern's working with one of the Hoover teachers. In fact, the Hoover-Stanford Project is training four interns, and each participates in two work-study teams.

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While the Hoover-Stanford Teacher Corps Project is yet to celebrate its second birthday, a few problems appear to be more than passing concerns. If the model for a comprehensive in-service program is to prove viable, the following obstacles must be overcome:

1. Additional time for meeting, planning, and common preparation must be found or existing time (one and a half hours a week) must be used more efficiently.

2. A positive attitude toward constructive criticism and program evaluation on the part of the faculty must be cultivated. (It will not grow by itself.)

3. In conjunction with the second problem,

new ways must be found to evaluate the effectiveness of in-service programs.

4. Ways must be found to involve more actively teachers of non-core subjects (industrial arts, art, home economics, and others).

5. Confusion over new roles (faculty advisor, on-site coordinator, research assistant, work-study team chairperson) and new faculty interaction patterns must be corrected.

If these problems can be overcome and the program does not require more funds than are currently expended for faculty in-service education, the model being tested at Hoover Junior High School may be exportable to other schools in search of comprehensive, improvement-oriented in-service programs. In any event, it is difficult to imagine much school improvement occurring without attention to faculty re-education and the development of a systematic approach to problem resolution.



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### *A Potpourri of Staff Development Strategies*

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*"Floating Workshop Day":* Elementary teachers visit secondary schools and other elementary schools within and outside of the district and junior and senior high school teachers visit elementary schools. Such visitations can provide staff members with new ideas and approaches, and also contribute to the articulation of the total K-12 instructional program.

*Staff Rotation or Transfer:* Some districts begin merely by rotating the responsibilities of the secondary departmental chairperson or other assignments within a single building. Transfers between buildings under appropriate circum-

stances can also be an effective means for promoting growth and change. Some mature teachers resonate to new climates and environments and welcome "re-potting" as a way to remain "green and growing."

*Student Teaching Center:* Under an arrangement between a school district and a nearby college or university, 12 to 15 student teachers may be assigned to a building center or to the district each quarter. Thus, almost every faculty member who desires would have the opportunity to work closely with a group of aspiring teachers in a training/learning situation. This influx of

"new blood" can bring fresh ideas and have rejuvenating impact on a maturing staff.

*Short-Term Sabbatical or General Leaves:* Although many experienced teachers do not feel that they are in a position to take a full year of sabbatical leave at partial salary, many might be interested in leaves of a single quarter or semester duration. These brief breaks afford a change of pace that can do a great deal to stimulate professional growth on the part of the teacher.

*External Evaluations:* Whether conducted by one of the regional accrediting agencies, state department of education personnel, the Association for the Evaluation of Elementary Schools (AEES), the National Study of School Evaluation (NSSE), or some other agency, outside evaluations can help to draw experienced staff members into a growth situation and alert them to current trends and new approaches.

*Volunteers:* As classroom aides, resource persons, or mini-course teachers, volunteers can offer teachers fresh viewpoints and different techniques that can add to their professional growth and repertoire of skills.



Robert D. Ramsey (left) is Assistant Superintendent and Michael J. Homes is Director of Elementary Education, St. Louis Park Public Schools, Minnesota.

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### *Role of Advisors in Staff Development*

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A major study made by the Rand Corporation of federally funded school improvement programs<sup>1</sup> has presented a sobering picture for school renewal. In most of the projects reviewed, Rand found an almost uniform failure to implement any significant change in schools' effectiveness. Conspicuous in the failures was a tendency toward opportunistic, short-term approaches to problems that typically sought solutions in new accountability systems, expensive educational hardware, or slickly packaged curriculum models.

Where the Rand study identified successes in school improvement projects, the focus was more on professional growth, and upon the organizational climate necessary to support such growth. In St. Louis, a consortium of schools called the Educational Confederation has been overseeing staff development programs with a similar concern for people and the organizational climate within which they work. These programs have increasingly focused on the role of an "advisor" to support school staffs that want to grow. Our experience in a variety of school settings<sup>2</sup> suggests that improving the school's

effectiveness is very much a matter of helping staffs develop routines of local problem solving and resource sharing. The catalyst for this approach to staff development has been the on-site advisor.

Advisors<sup>3</sup> are master teachers with strong

<sup>1</sup> Paul Berman and Milbrey W. McLaughlin. *Federal Programs Supporting Educational Change. Vol. IV: The Findings in Review.* Santa Monica, California: The Rand Corporation, 1975.

<sup>2</sup> The Educational Confederation works with public and private, preschool through high school educators; its several current advisory programs involve early childhood schools, urban public primary schools, and primary schools interested in the arts in education.

<sup>3</sup> Three good accounts of the advisor role can be found in: Beth Alberty and Ruth Dropkin, editors. *The Open Education Advisor.* New York: The Workshop Center for Open Education, 1975; and Lilian G. Katz et al. "The Advisory Approach to In-service Training." *The Journal of Teacher Education* 25(2): 154-59; Summer 1974; and Theodore Manolakes. "The Advisory System and Supervision." In: Thomas J. Sergiovanni, editor. *Professional Supervision for Professional Teachers.* Washington, D.C.: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 1975.

human relations skills. They function primarily in the classroom alongside the teacher, as facilitators at group meetings, and as workshop leaders. In the Confederation's "Developmental Learning Program," now beginning its fourth year in the St. Louis Public Schools (with a grant from the Ford Foundation), advisors work with no more than four primary schools at a time.

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Usually visiting each school one day a week, advisors maintain fairly flexible schedules, but try to limit their classroom involvement to about 20 teachers who request their help. Regular contact and a close familiarity with each requesting teacher and his or her class are regarded as essential to meaningful support. Advisors also spend up to two years at each school, respecting the importance of time in the process of change and growth.

In the classroom, the advisor serves mainly to promote and support creative problem solving by the teacher. Advisors may demonstrate a teaching method, bring in new materials, or just offer advice, but always with a mind to the teacher's need to develop his or her own capacity as a problem solver. Where advisors have been successful, teachers have expressed to program evaluators gains in self-confidence and intentions to extend innovations. One kindergarten teacher thanked an advisor for challenging her to break away from some comfortable old habits she had steadfastly clung to despite her better judgment as a teacher.

Principals have valued the advisor's ability to be a school resource, taking part in staff meetings and, in general, assuming several staff development responsibilities within the school (advisors have, for instance, frequently organized "brown bag" workshops and sharing sessions). At each school the advisors try to tie in their own efforts with those of other in-school support personnel. Often the advisors act as "brokers" for such ancillary staff as special education teachers, remedial reading and math teachers, and school social workers and nurses when non-

school perspectives and resources could contribute to a particular problem-solving situation.

The "Developmental Learning Program" employs a diagnostic, case-study approach to staff development, and periodically all school staff participants meet to share insights into specific learning problems of individual children. These meetings, called "staffings," are in fact attempts to implement a group problem-solving process wherein diverse staff, including the principal, can collectively deal with real professional concerns.

The advisor's ability to gain the trust and confidence of school professionals is of course the measure of his or her effectiveness in staff development. Teachers and principals alike were in solid agreement that the advisors should not, therefore, be people who rate teacher performance, or who supervise, since these functions could compromise their capacity to be helpful.

School-based staff development employing the advisor as a catalyst for local problem solving would certainly share the following characteristics, all of which the Rand study found to be common to the few successes in school improvement that it noted:

1. Continuous planning and evaluation, involving school personnel;
2. Training whose objectives are determined by those to be trained and which reflects the real needs and issues of the particular school setting;
3. Training resources that are consistent and ongoing—available over time to support extended growth;
4. Active support of and involvement with school administrators;
5. Local adaptation and experimentation with commercial curricula, along with development of "homemade" approaches to learning materials and activities. [4]



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