

Ten Issues on Staff Development

Gerald R. Firth

Noted and discussed are ten issues critical in implementing any staff development enterprise. Unless these issues are responded to appropriately, teachers and administrators may simply become "increasingly proficient in tasks in which they should never have been engaged in the first place."

The end of the teacher shortage simultaneously with the reduction in funding for the encouragement of innovation returns the burden of program improvement squarely to local school districts throughout the nation. Although assistance will continue from intermediate units, state education departments and, to some extent, federal agencies and philanthropic foundations, a much greater effort must be generated at the local level. The major vehicle for meeting this challenge appears to be assuming the form of staff development programs.

Deprived of the influx of new teachers to motivate change in the existing patterns of operation and limited in outside finances to support pilot projects, local school leaders must draw the major stimulation for programmatic progress from members of the regular teaching staff. Fewer replacements and opportunities for personnel to attend externally planned workshops place greater responsibility on the local district for renewal of its own teaching force.

Staff development is well established as a positive force in the improvement of education. The current manifestation differs in its increased breadth of purpose, scope of activities, and accountability for results. Experience during the past several years has led the public to expect improvement in educational affairs, and over periods

of time, even the most reluctant of school staffs has been caught up in the impetus generated in the post-Sputnik era as new curriculum projects became the order of the day.

The current enthusiasm is for staff development, but before many school systems embrace staff development programs as a possible panacea, ten issues deserve careful examination. This examination demands attention now even if fuller answers must be postponed until a later date when additional experience is available.

Each of the ten issues is presented to reflect the respective perceptions of school administrators and teachers. This distinction is not to suggest that conflict will necessarily exist between the different points of view. However, it is intended to indicate that even in the same situation, administrators and teachers are subject to different pressures and therefore do not necessarily consider the same challenge in precisely the same way.

Such a comparison emphasizes the different views of staff development held by the administrators charged with the responsibility of planning such programs and by the teachers assumed to have the obligation of participating in them. Unless these differences are recognized and agreements reached, it is unlikely that staff development programs stand much chance of success.

The possible and probable responses by both administrators and teachers are presented on each of ten critical issues in regard to staff development programs. These responses address (1) concept, (2) basic purposes, (3) common priorities, (4) strategies, (5) inducements, (6) participation, (7) progress, (8) incorporation, (9) alternatives, and (10) assessment.

1. *Concept*—The first issue focuses on the extent to which the concept of continuous staff development can be integrated into education. Too often administrators view change in limited

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perspective, taking comfort in changes that occur one step at a time. Each change is intended to bring faculty members into line with current practice, to emulate neighboring schools, or perhaps to eliminate the most obvious weaknesses. Teachers currently are developing a strong philosophical commitment to change as a professional credo. They also share the same tendency to consider change in small doses. Teachers tend to move down a particular path to a specific point or, in more graphic terms, to jump from rock to rock. Administrators must create an environment with long-range perspective that assumes that a change is merely a plateau enroute to another. In like manner, if teachers aspire to attain status as professionals, they must accept the fact that their circumstances have changed, are changing, and will continue to change.

Both administrators and teachers must expect to revise their procedures directly, continuously, and almost momentarily. Anticipation offers the key to appropriate response to educational change, and this ingredient is noticeably absent from staff development programs.

2. *Basic purpose*—A second issue concerns the degree to which agreement can be reached on basic purposes for staff development. Administrators expect conformation to program requirements

and situational responsibilities. Their belief persists that staff development is something that is done to and for teachers. Many administrators attempt to set the standards that they consider acceptable and, with more candidates available than teaching vacancies to fill, attempt to enforce these standards upon teachers. Teachers desire improvement of their own particular capabilities and professional careers. In many states, teachers have taken responsibility for staff development into their own hands in the belief that such programs should be controlled by the teachers themselves. Through contract negotiation, litigation, and other means, teachers have demonstrated the intention to exert a stronger influence in shaping their own destiny. Administrators must recognize the collision course that is inevitable and perhaps imminent if they press to impose their demands upon teachers. The latter must recognize the need to temper their demands with the realization that the school is making a substantial investment in the program. If staff development is to be successful, administrators and teachers must collaborate to establish purposes that encourage teachers to improve their skills within a program that concurrently advances the school enterprise compatible with the intentions of the administration.

3. *Common priorities*—A third issue involves the extent to which direction can be set on common priorities for staff development. Administrators expect to determine the desired changes to be sought in members of the faculty. They seem to provide leadership in installing changes that are deemed appropriate to a particular school situation. The setting of even general priorities to which all schools can subscribe is extremely difficult because, even in a district of moderate size, vast differences often exist among the school units to be served. Teachers expect to determine their own personal needs for improvement. Preferences often are set on the basis of general needs or frequency of requests. Differences in preparation and experience tend to be perpetuated by the single salary schedule, but far more significant differences—in intelligence, personality, interests and similar factors that affect responses to student behavior and learning styles—are not taken into account. Priorities often are set on the basis of general factors or the frequency of requests. Considering a teaching force en masse will not

give the best information for planning the development program. Perhaps qualitative rather than quantitative indices should be examined.

4. *Strategies*—A fourth issue involves the extent to which appropriate strategies or activities for staff development can be selected. Administrators seeking change in the school program utilize strategies that modify the environment in which the teachers function. Some introduce an element or a change agent from outside the system into the existing situation. Others retrain a task force or team typically composed of individuals demonstrating potential for leadership by brief immersion in a different situation before returning to operate in the target system. Still others concentrate personnel supportive of the change by redeployment, transfer, or removal from a particular school. Teachers who initiate change, by whatever strategy, at best experience altered relationships with peers and at worst are alienated by them. Approval of the innovative teacher's actions too often comes only from a different reference group with norms that anticipate different behavior patterns. They may earn the esteem of their new colleagues by successful performance in the new arena. Teachers also may be conferred status in the organization structure as a reward for innovation. The significance lies not in the choice of strategy, but in the fact that those most appropriate for the administration to employ in changing the school program are not the same as those for the teachers who seek to introduce innovations in their classes. Resolution of this issue requires that the strategy selected maximize the purposes of staff development for individual teachers while contributing to the goals and objectives of the school enterprise.

5. *Inducements*—A fifth issue is concerned with the extent to which adequate inducements can be marshaled to sustain staff development. Administrators encourage teachers to qualify for remuneration provided by the district board of education, usually in the form of salary increases, and often are held responsible for monitoring renewal of certification required by the State Board of Education. However, the salary increases often are insufficient to justify obtaining certification beyond the level of the master's degree. Perhaps even more critical than lack of monetary reward is the tendency to discriminate in hiring practices

against teachers who pursue advanced study. It is actually more difficult for experienced teachers to be employed at the higher salary levels (M.A. or Ed.S.). They literally have priced themselves "out of the market." Preference for employment is given to inexperienced teachers who have only the baccalaureate degree.

Teachers, on the other hand, desire to be employed in the field of major preparation and/or at the appropriate level of certification. Yet they consider themselves place-bound with the result that they accept positions that do not remain in a particular area of study. Such teachers actually block individuals with appropriate qualifications

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from positions when they offer to teach in fields outside their strongest preparation and in assignments requiring lesser certification. This is accomplished in the name of democratic choice. Personal motivations, a local tie, political patronage, or cronyism frequently are of greater significance than any professional criterion. Moreover, the cost of additional education is measured in terms other than money. Absence from home and family, particularly for summer sessions, convenience of car pools to evening classes, and other such peripheral factors far outrank the additional salary involved.

Obviously administrators have the obligation to encourage teachers to improve themselves. However, there is something inherently wrong in the concept of "buying" teacher acceptance even if it were possible to do so. It is at best poor psychology, and at worst a form of bribery. At the heart of the inducement issue is the degree of honesty by which both administrators and teachers are willing to broker change. If fair play is to dominate, other alternatives merit exploration. One possibility is a career ladder based on performance criteria. The opportunity for assignment from teacher ranks to leadership positions or to

an instructional team may, for many, be the appropriate professional inducement. Such an approach surely would be preferable to the current practice of teachers ignoring their immediate staff development needs to prepare themselves for non-instructional positions in other school systems.

6. *Participation*—A sixth issue focuses on the extent to which participation can be obtained in staff development activities. Administrators expect all faculty members to engage in most activities that those leaders conduct or approve. In attempting to involve as many teachers as possible in a brief time period, leaders invariably sacrifice quality. The obsession to involve the faculty in the same program ignores the fact that one program, no matter how comprehensive or flexible, cannot serve the needs of all teachers simultaneously. Even a highly efficient operation is unable to bring all teachers to the same level of competence. Staff losses due to resignation, retirement, or new teaching assignments, and new entrants as replacements or additions make "single treatment" staff development programs impractical. Unless a range of activities is available,

those who cannot benefit from one program must bide their time until the next phase can be created.

Teachers, however, expect to have freedom of choice regarding the source from which necessary assistance can be obtained. This other side of the participation issue is a function of the presence of teachers of widely varying abilities and attitudes. Some individuals wish to move ahead rapidly and press to be able to do so. Others are apprehensive and reluctant. The tendency to begin with the more responsive group will intensify the distance between its members and those who are less willing to participate. In such a process, the good become better, but there is little contribution to the consolidation of change. Such action also identifies the movement with the more competent members of the faculty. There is considerable logic that staff development should be initiated for the less competent faculty who are most in need of assistance. However, such action tends to stigmatize the program and enhance the difficulty of subsequently involving the more competent faculty members.

7. *Progress*—A seventh issue is concerned

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with the extent to which progress in staff development can be achieved on a continuous basis. Administrators respond to community mores that tend to direct or restrict change. Occasionally the popularity of certain changes among school patrons encourages rather than discourages change. However, such support may be temporary and infrequent. A national study conducted in 1967 under the auspices of the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools revealed that few schools were considered highly innovative but that these typically moved simultaneously on several fronts. Often early innovators subsequently eliminated such programs and returned to their previous state. Curiously the schools that received considerable publicity as early innovators had difficulty sustaining the operation(s) over time. Other districts motivated by the publicity to follow at a later date were more likely to maintain the innovation. The experience with innovations in curriculum, instruction, and organization offers a lesson for staff development as well. It suggests that a staff development effort mounted in response to popular demand may flourish for a time, but the effort is likely then to atrophy and be discontinued. It would seem most desirable to tie staff development intimately to other activities, particularly changes in curriculum. Long-term progress can be achieved only if such linkage capitalizes upon multiplier effect.

The matter of maintaining progress in staff development is viewed from a different perspective by teachers. Many teachers have psychological limitations that prevent their embracing changes urged on them. Often their attitudes grow out of experiences with staff development activities that have held little value for them. Staff development programs will be accepted readily by teachers as they become convinced that they, through the program of staff development, can gain improved competency to resolve problems of instruction. Such linkage is likely to sustain progress. When one considers the intimate relationship between staff development activities judged meaningful by teachers and the problems of instruction in the classroom, it is interesting to note that students are not considered essential to or even desirable for the staff development process. Indeed, students are considered a nuisance and frequently are sent home from school so teachers

can get on with staff development.

8. *Incorporation*—An eighth issue involves the extent to which skills acquired by teachers through staff development can be utilized and incorporated by the local school system. Administrators must analyze desired changes in terms of the availability of competencies necessary for the program among present members of the faculty. Administrators then are faced with the need to encourage teachers to participate in programs of staff development when members of the faculty do not possess the competencies required for specific assignments.

Experience has demonstrated the reluctance of the local school system or its inability to incorporate the new skills or program expectations wrought in teachers through participation in institutes on science, mathematics, or foreign languages funded under the National Defense Education Act (NDEA). Teachers recruited from small rural schools often returned to find themselves unable to utilize the newly acquired information. Many of these teachers were lured to larger suburban districts where the programs for which they received preparation already were in existence. The innovative teachers clustered in the innovative schools; the schools they left were more barren than before. Administrators must analyze and share with teachers the pace at which it is realistic to incorporate programs that the teachers will insist upon if staff development is successful.

From the teacher's point of view, incorporation is seen somewhat differently. Teachers determine the rate at which any change can occur and, specifically, the speed and ease with which new programs can be adopted. Teacher reactions to proposed new programs are strongly influenced by their perceptions of whether their existing competencies are adequate to implement the programs. Teachers, whether new or veteran, who do not possess and cannot or will not gain the competencies to be utilized by the new program are seldom able to leave. The teachers most willing to change are most marketable for other situations. Those least willing to change will be the ones who remain. In a sense, staff development programs can educate the best staff personnel out of the system. Those who remain will divert, subvert, obstruct, or sabotage attempts to bring in

new programs with which they are unaccustomed and/or to move out old programs with which they have become identified. Teachers are threatened by change and staff development programs will affect them so directly that the threat is likely to be considerable. It is imperative that the threat is not so great that the only appealing course of action for those who must remain is to stop new programs rather than adjust to them.

9. *Alternatives*—A ninth issue involves the extent to which alternatives to developing a program of staff development can be used. Administrators tend to employ individuals who already possess the competencies necessary to initiate or implement programs that already have gained acceptance.

There may be still other appropriate approaches for administrators that constitute alternatives to staff development programs. From their standpoint, administrators will judge that some programs should not be changed. Instead such programs require protection against over zealous teachers who seek to change them. Some programs should be kept, even though they are old, simply because they are successful. It may be essential to move a program from one school to another or to share it with other systems.

By the same token, some teachers are justifiably reluctant to change. Even though progress is achieved by those who pioneer a venture in the face of strenuous opposition of the establishment, the contributions also are significant by those who retain their views in the face of great pressure from reformers. Perhaps those with the courage of their convictions should be entitled to use their skills in a different and more supportive environment rather than pay the price of change to remain in the present one. Perhaps teachers should be extended the option of transfer to other situations where their competencies can be better utilized.

10. *Assessment*—A tenth issue is concerned with the extent to which accurate assessment and/or evaluation of staff development activities can be achieved. Administrators base their claims of successful change on the installation of new programs. They justify expenditures to board members and the public-at-large by assembling data on program changes that have been achieved. Often these become quantitative. The larger the

number of programs, of schools adopting them, of teachers implementing them, and of students participating in them, the greater the significance is assumed to be. A caution is appropriate in regard to the numbers game and that caution extends to the development of programs of staff development. It may become more fashionable to create a new pattern of staff development than to replicate a proven one. It may be less fashionable to assess the results of an existing program than to carry the banner for some new effort. Statistical reporting tends to encourage high numbers so that schools may embark on activities which they otherwise could choose to avoid.

Teachers judge the effectiveness of a staff development program on how successful that program was in leading them to acquire professionally relevant performance as a result of participation in staff development. It must be possible to judge relative gain in proficiency in preparation for various roles. These factors are necessarily qualitative. Perhaps the effect of a teacher is greater when he/she helps a few students make substantial progress in achievement than when he/she helps a large number of students a little. It may be of far greater significance for a single teacher to gain the ability to help a single student learn to read at an acceptable level than to raise the reading scores of many students already reading acceptably a few points on a standardized test.

The increased emphasis on staff development in many areas is supported by the state education department, institutions of higher education, and professional organizations. Such broad based interest influences local school systems to embark upon staff development programs without careful planning. When pressed, school officials and teachers alike tend to make cosmetic reactions and to resort to practices that have proven successful in the past. *Fl*

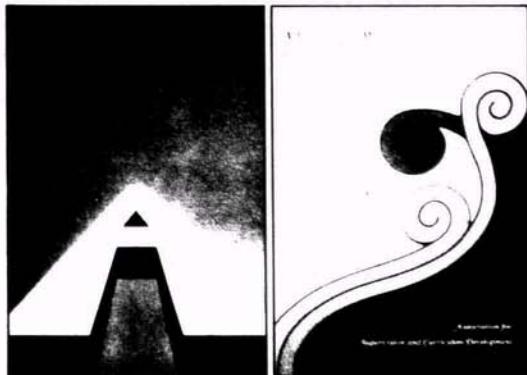


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If staff development programs are to go boldly where others have not gone before, the ten challenges listed below must be considered:

1. The concept of staff development must be accepted as a long term commitment by school officials and as a hallmark of professionalism by teachers.
2. Basic purposes must be reconciled in terms of program for the school and of instruction for teachers.
3. Common priorities must be squared between those expected by the school officials and those accepted by the teachers.
4. Strategies must foster changes in the learning environment as well as relationships among teachers.
5. Inducements must be established in which the school offers suitable rewards for teachers as they increase their skills for assignments judged appropriate by the school and the teachers.
6. Participation must be encouraged in reasonable terms by the school to promote appropriate improvement for individual teachers.
7. Progress must be sustained despite restrictions on school officials and the inertia of some teachers.
8. Incorporation of new programs in the school must be placed to coincide with the acquisition of skills by the teachers who must implement the programs.
9. Alternatives must allow schools to protect appropriate elements of the program and teachers to continue to use proved competencies.
10. Assessment must address both program innovations and teacher successes.

Unless these challenges are responded to and resolved appropriately by guidelines in planning, staff development programs may assist teachers only to become increasingly proficient at performing tasks in which they should never have been engaged in the first place.



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