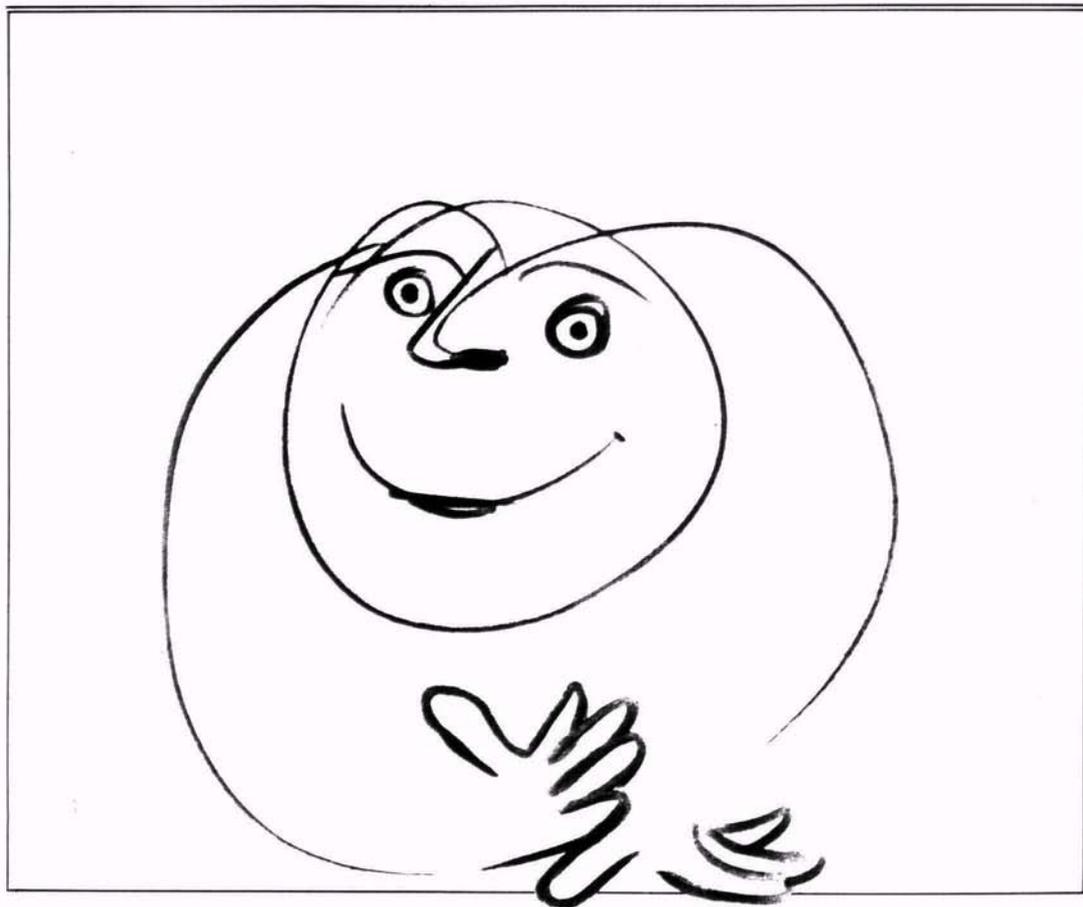


PRE-CONDITIONS FOR STAFF DEVELOPMENT

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The ARC workshop develops the qualities needed for
successful change: awareness, readiness, and
commitment.

There is a flaw in initiating change efforts, whether in curriculum or staff development, with some form of needs assessment. Such an assessment ignores what Hersh and Yarger (1972) refer to as the prerequisites for change—what we prefer to call the *pre-conditions* for effective curriculum change or staff development.

"Pre-conditions" are certain factors which if present at the outset increase the likelihood that the change effort will succeed. If, on the other hand, those factors are absent when the change effort is initiated, one could expect the effort to have little effect.

The nature of these preconditions, we believe, is found in the complex dynamics involved in the interaction of what Sarason (1971) called behavioral and programmatic regularities and the organizational and psychological forces that support those regularities.

The Nature of Pre-Conditions

We have found three clusters of identifiable factors that have some utility for effective change, and have labeled these pre-conditions Awareness, Readiness, and Commitment.

The first cluster of factors, Awareness, is (a) the shared understanding among the staff of a school regarding the range of alternatives in school policies, curriculum, and instructional practices; and (b) the factors influencing student learning that are subject to control by school staffs and that show significant promise for improving learning.

Our second cluster of factors, Readiness, refers to the internal state of and the characteristic ways a school works—what Berman and McLaughlin (1975) call organizational climate. This cluster is a composite of the feelings, opinions, beliefs, and attitudes that the staff of a school has about that school, about other staff members, and about their own roles in that school. Drawing on the work of Alexander (1977,

1978) we have identified seven characteristics of school life, which, when taken together, provide a profile of those norms of life in a school that bear directly on change efforts.

These characteristics are:

1. Organizational/personal pride—the feelings of identity with the school and satisfaction with work there among staff members
2. Performance/excellence—the stance of staff members regarding improvement over past performance
3. Colleague/associate relations—the nature of interaction among staff members
4. Leadership and supervision—the perceptions of staff members regarding the levels of trust and support expressed toward them by building administrators
5. Creativity/innovation—the posture of the staff regarding new ideas and practices
6. Teamwork/communication—the pattern among staff members regarding shared goals, collaborative problem solving, and information sharing
7. Training/development—the prevailing view among staff members regarding organized efforts to bring about positive changes in the school.

Our third cluster of factors, Commitment, refers to the willingness or agreement of staff members to participate in curriculum change or staff development (Berman and McLaughlin, 1975). Drawing on Locke (1968), we have focused on two components of commitment. The first component is the level of intensity of involvement that is acceptable among the staff of a school. The second component is the participation of school staffs in specifying plans for curriculum change or staff development.

The ARC Workshop

The three pre-conditions for curriculum change or staff development—Awareness, Readiness, and Commitment—have been useful for us in coming to grips with some of the dynamics of school life that we believe are crucial for programs of educational change. We view these three notions as a constellation of important factors, rather than as elements in an ordered developmental sequence. We have used these con-



cepts as the basis for designing a short-term intervention program, called the ARC workshop,¹ that provides the opportunity for school staffs to explore and enhance their Awareness, to examine and build their Readiness, and to establish and raise their levels of Commitment.

The procedures and structures employed in this two-day, 12-hour workshop were selected to develop a high level of psychological ownership of the workshop outcomes on the part of participants. An important dimension of the ARC workshop is the nature of the group structures

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that are established. These structures play a key role in the implementation of the workshop, whether it is conducted within the total staff of a school or whether it is conducted with teams of teachers and administrators from several schools.

The activities and experiences of the workshop are arranged so that incremental risk-taking occurs. Substantive elements are dealt with first by individuals, then by pairs, and then by teams of participants from the same school. This process permits participants to deal with the content on an individual basis first, with the highest degree of safety and lowest risk. When sharing with a partner the level of risk is raised slightly as participants try out or rehearse ideas before interacting with the larger and more risky school team setting. If the workshop is conducted with the total staff of a school, the final stages take on the character of a staff meeting.

Although we believe the workshop is most successful when implemented with the total staff of a school, workshops can be conducted for multi-school groups.² In this case, teams of no less than five persons consisting of teachers and administrators from the same school are required. These school teams are integral working units within the format of the ARC workshop. At the outset, "partnerships" (participant pairs) are formed so that one's workshop partner is not from the same school.

Photo: Joe DiDio, NEA



The workshop begins with an activity that helps close the gap between what the facilitators expect and what participants expect as workshop outcomes. This session allows participants to reveal perceptions about the workshop which could be at odds with the intent of the design. At this point facilitators make clear what will and will not happen.

This session is followed by the Readiness component which is approached through an instrument, Characteristics of School Life (COSL), based on the seven characteristics of school life identified earlier. Each participant completes the instrument. Then, with their partners, they score it and interpret their individual perceptions of their school lives on seven scales. This shared interpretation provides the background for participation in a school-team discussion, first about what the climate of the school might realistically become, and what it is currently like (as perceived by the team collectively). The school teams thus develop a picture of their school climate as the basis for determining the level of readiness for systematic inservice training and/or staff development. During the final segment of Readiness, participants in their school teams project possible next steps to consider vis-à-vis their readiness profile.

Awareness is approached in two separate sessions. The first session focuses attention on recent research on learning and teaching. Participants deal with the awareness content first individually, then in school teams. Their task is to rank order statements drawn from research on teaching and learning and to consider the implications of these research findings for classroom instruction. The second segment of Awareness uses role playing and directed observation to explore the relationship between student characteristics of aptitude and motivation and teacher style.

The primary message of the awareness component is that professional educators must keep up with recent developments in educational theory and research in their efforts to improve the student learning. This segment may be designed to concentrate on specific areas such as bilingual education or special education, or to

focus on a specific subject matter field.

The final session of the ARC workshop calls for participants to make a public (at least at the level of their school team) declaration of their willingness to become actively involved in programs of staff development and their level of commitment to specific actions leading to staff inservice training and development. This declaration is initiated through a short checklist of possible actions an individual might engage in to support staff development. Each participant responds to the checklist in terms of their willingness or lack of willingness to do them. These individual responses become the basis for an analysis of commitment in the school team and for consideration of these commitments in light of the previously established state of readiness.

When the school teams have worked through their analysis, they are asked to identify actions to be taken in the immediate future relative to inservice training and staff development, consistent with the commitments determined earlier. The

workshop concludes when teams submit a copy of their written action plans to the workshop facilitators.

In summary, the workshop begins with a systematic analysis of the school climate, the school's level of readiness for training and development. Second, the participants' awareness of current theory and research in learning and teaching is explored for possible directions in training and development programs. Action planning is the last stage of the workshop as teams assess their Readiness, consider their Awareness, and make a public declaration of their collective Commitment to specific activities in professional training and development. ■

¹ Requests for further information regarding the ARC workshop should be addressed to: David M. Pendergast, Associate Professor, Administrative and Organizational Studies, 398 Education Building, Wayne State University, Detroit, MI 48202.

² The effectiveness of the ARC workshop is limited with multi-school groups, in that a team of teachers and administrators from a given school cannot make even tentative commitments for

their absent colleagues. Thus the action plans developed by the school team require follow-up review and revision by the total staff of the school represented by the team.

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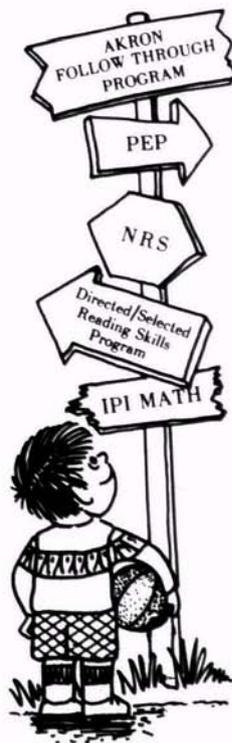


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