

## Staff Development Eighty-Second Yearbook of the National Society for the Study of Education

Gary A. Griffin, ed.

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—Reviewed by Elizabeth Dillon-Peterson,  
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The 1983 NSSE yearbook is particularly timely in view of the current interest in educational excellence. The chapter authors present a balanced view of theory and practice, supported by illustrative case studies.

In the first chapter, Norman Sprinthall and Lois Thies-Sprinthall identify key traits of cognitive developmental theory as applied to adult learners. They present evidence that people who have reached higher cognitive levels behave in more flexible ways, process alternatives more easily, and generate and test different hypotheses. Research in this area is new and relatively limited, but the concept of continuous adult capacity for growth, change, and flexibility gives staff development practitioners reason for enthusiasm.

John Goodlad's chapter supports his position that the individual school is the most logical unit for improvement. He insists that on-site staff development should deal with the "real" problems of the school—absenteeism, drugs and alcohol, parental dissatisfaction. He also points out what most staff developers know: few districts support site-based staff development focused on instructional matters, much less other problems identified as significant by a faculty group. His chapter has much appeal from an empirical point of view, but in these days when the economic and philosophical tide is running in a nearly diametrically opposed direction, it is hard not to shake one's head and mutter, "I agree completely, but . . ."

Phillip Schlechty and Betty Lou Whitford continue to deal with the organizational context and functions of staff development, but from a somewhat different perspective than Goodlad. The factors that facilitate learning for adults, they claim, oppose the primary goal of

improving learning for students. For example, released time for teachers for staff development may take away from student learning time. And because continuing education is not directly linked to a "legitimizing" goal, such as student learning, resources are "highly problematic and subject to continual negotiation." Thus, the responsibility for continuing adult education is frequently delegated to higher education institutions, which *do* have legitimate authority, but which are nearly immune from influence by schools. The authors conclude that schools and universities must join to form a new type of organization that unifies delivery of services to students, conducts research and development activities, and collaborates in the professional preparation of teachers.

Schlechty and Whitford warn that staff development can enhance latent sources of conflict in schools; activate competitive actions between and among school buildings, departments, and administrative units; "drive an even deeper wedge between groups in schools; and create negative as well as positive effect." This is not welcome information to those who perceive staff development as a way of improving and enhancing human relationships and organizational functioning. However, recognizing the potential for negative effect may help to maximize the positive effect.

The authors accurately point out that staff development supports both stability and change. This is a thought-provoking perspective since most staff development people see themselves as change agents and are much more attuned to issues of change than they are to maintaining stability. Staff development should establish, enhance, and maintain.

In their chapter, Kenneth Howey and Joseph Vaughan conclude their review of the history of staff development by stating, "What emerges then is a not so pleasant picture of a potentially well-supported (in terms of resources) enterprise that is fragmented, not frequently engaged in on a continuing basis by practitioners, not regarded very highly as it is practiced, and rarely assessed in terms of teacher behavior and student learning outcomes."

Following this gloomy assessment, the authors identify and describe six evolving principles of effective staff development: (1) interactivity, (2) comprehensiveness, (3) continuity, (4) potency, relevance, and practicality, (5) support structures and personnel, (6) documentation, planning, and implementation.

"Tensions in Teaching Teachers the Skills of Pedagogy" by Judith Lanier presents a detailed case study of a concerted university-public schools effort at collaboration designed to improve their "respective teaching abilities." She objectively chronicles events, problems, and tensions—both good and bad. Her description gives the reader some perspective on how difficult an effective total restructuring would be. She suggests that the teacher educator's desire to avoid close interaction with practical experience and the classroom teacher's desire to avoid serious interaction with more formal intellectual activity may simply be attempts to escape from what is perceived as an unpleasant form of tension. However, her evidence indicates that this kind of tension is basically healthy and generates productive staff development.

"Curriculum Implementation and Staff Development as Cultural Change" by Thomas Romberg and Gary Price reminds us that we have traditionally made changes by adopting new curricula. They recommend that curriculum development be more broadly considered as an effort to change the *culture* of the school, including the belief structures and work habits of the school staff. They describe change as "ameliorative" (making practice better or more efficient, without changing or challenging values and school traditions) or "radical" (challenging the cultural tradition of the school). They provide a sophisticated and comprehensive look at successful and unsuccessful innovation attempts.

R. Linden Courter and Beatrice Ward recommend four strategies that contribute to successful continuing education of teachers: (1) guided reflection about changes to be introduced and integration of changes into staff members' repertoires; (2) personal support as well as challenge; (3) provision of oppor-

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tunities to try out the necessary new roles; and (+) continuity of emphasis on a particular improvement, set of goals, or focus on desired change in teacher behavior.

William Tikunoff and John Mergendoller disagree with the idea that rigorous, detached scientific research should "inform and direct" instructional processes in classrooms. Rather, they suggest that involving teachers in conducting research is the most likely way to ensure its application. They describe how research done by teachers can in itself be a rich and powerful form of staff development.

The yearbook includes a final chapter, appropriately called "A View from the Schools," in which Stuart Rankin accurately states the position of the practitioner: "The point is that school people have the problems now; they cannot wait for certainty; they must go forward with the best hunch, using available information." This note of reality adds to the sense of urgency for further, better collaboration because it emphasizes that the problems *will* be dealt with, correctly or incorrectly, on a daily basis. Problems will not wait while we ponder and brainstorm and plan, however important and valuable these methods may be.

Staff development is a trying and complex business. Because it involves human beings, it can never be treated as an exact science. The yearbook authors and the editor continuously deal with the importance of *context*. The editor dignifies and adds respect to the importance of human perceptions and craft knowledge as well as funded knowledge in the improvement of schools and the people who work in them. It is, in many ways, an affirming and hopeful publication, although it clearly and accurately points out the many problems facing staff development personnel.

One is left with the comforting feeling that the long-needed and eagerly awaited marriage of practical theory and theory-based practice may, in fact, be close to reality, and, more important, that successful learning for *all* our future citizens can result.

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## BRAIN GROWTH SPURTS DISCREDITED

It's surprising—nearly a year after I thought all parties interested in Herman Epstein's findings and hypotheses had been alerted to the fallacies in his work and to the undependable nature of what he was telling public school people—to find an article (May 1983, "Cognitive Levels Matching") respectfully citing Epstein's work.

Although I'm surprised that the authors would advance such a citation and that the editors would publish it, I realize that other educational literature of the past several years has predominantly paid attention to Epstein's views and that not a great deal has appeared to contradict them.

This whole business of brain growth periodization is the most irresponsible use of "scientific findings" I have run across in over 20 years of work in the public schools. In lengthy research into Epstein's claims and in conversations with dozens of participants, I found that very few of the people who are making speeches and writing about Epstein's notions have done any research on his work or even understand it very well. And the scientists and other researchers whose findings Epstein himself cites either know almost nothing about his ideas, or discredit them when they have the opportunity. Few of them have taken such an opportunity because they do not find Epstein's findings sufficiently important.<sup>1</sup> They are, however, aghast at the importance being placed on them by public school people.

I'm sorry that I and others such as John Arnold of North Carolina State University, Barbara Hutson of Virginia Tech, Joseph Novak of Cornell University, Kurt Fischer of the University of Denver, and Martin Hahn of William Patterson College, who have found it to be so poorly based, have not communicated this to you. Our case is essentially a negative one, and it is hard to invest one's time in this kind of venture.

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<sup>1</sup>The following scientists/researchers have

either published such views or communicated them directly to me: Jay Gould (*The Mismeasure of Man*); Dorothy Eichorn (Berkeley Data); Barbel Inhelder and Kurt Fischer (EEG/learning spurts); Gerhart Nellhaus (Nellhaus Charts); Quinn McNemar (Stanford-Binet tests); Marian Diamond and Harry Jerison (brain weight changes); J. McVicar Hunt (early childhood studies); Howard Gardner, Sheldon White, Anton Larson, and Robert Karplus (Piagetian stages).

**Editor's note:** We have invited Richard McQueen to prepare an article elaborating on this letter. We will publish his article, with appropriate responses, in a future issue.

## HOPE FOR THE FUTURE

As a past contributor and reviewer of manuscripts for *Educational Leadership* in the areas of teacher stress and job dissatisfaction, I wish to commend you on the September 1983 issue.

That issue provides support for what many of us have been emphasizing and confirms the conflicts and pressures currently experienced by many educators. We are being asked to solve the complex problems of the present and an unknown future with solutions from the past. Although anxiety over the unknown is understandable, answers from the past, while comforting for the moment, are unlikely to be our best solutions.

Solutions recently grasped for, such as the back-to-basics, minimum competency, and creationism movements, have been based on past societal needs. Perhaps the "New Basics" recommended by the National Commission on Excellence in Education offers hope for the near future.

In order to prepare our students for a changing world, and the necessity of lifelong learning, we will need to re-examine our curricula at all levels—inquiry, problem solving, integrating, and valuing must be emphasized, as the September issue suggests.

Thank you for providing support for those of us trying to promote education for the future.

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