

A Research-Based Staff Development Model That Works

The Research in Teacher Education program increases a district's capacity for school improvement by identifying effective teaching and leadership strategies.

Staff development programs are moving away from one-shot workshops and large-group enlightenment by visiting gurus toward models of alternative practices. While there is much value in the newer approaches, experience suggests that workshops and gurus still have something to offer.

The success of the one-shot workshop often depends on who gets shot with what, and the success of the visiting guru on the nature and degree of the expertise provided. At their best, both are time-saving and cost-efficient. The success of long-term, locally based and directed change efforts depends on the local change facilitators. At their best, these newer methods provide ongoing inservice programs that reflect the expanding knowledge base about teaching and schooling created by 15 years of educational research activity.

The Research and Development Center for Teacher Education at The University of Texas has combined the strengths of both the "old" and the "new" approaches. The result is the Research in Teacher Education (RITE) program, which is proving to be both cost-effective and highly successful in providing opportunity and impetus for the continuing professional development of teachers.

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This article was written pursuant to a grant from the National Institute of Education, Department of Education. The opinions expressed herein do not necessarily reflect the position or policy of the National Institute of Education, and no official endorsement by NIE should be inferred.



Teacher Nancy Trudo models effective teaching behavior with the 2nd grade class, Central Elementary School, San Diego City Schools.

The RITE Model

The RITE model was the core of an experimental study of teaching behaviors and staff development practices, which found that research-based knowledge could be used effectively in improving teaching practice.

To implement the model, RITE staff members meet with school district staff developers in workshops that focus on research findings from change studies (Edwards, 1981) and effective teaching (Barnes, 1981). The goal is to help staff developers use those findings to make informed decisions and plans for staff development activities.

They need to consider the teachers with whom they work, the context of their interactions with those teachers, and the research-based knowledge about effective teaching and staff development practices. With technical support from the RITE staff members, workshop participants plan and carry out specific activities and interactions in their own staff development programs. RITE staff members do not work directly with teachers.

The RITE model lists 115 specific teaching behaviors that focus on the learning environment, management of student behavior, classroom instruc-

tion, and teaching style. Because the behaviors are not situation-specific, they are readily applicable to a variety of classrooms. Taken together, the behaviors present a working profile of a teacher who is most likely to assist students toward greater academic achievement. For example:

1. In presenting content, the teacher uses concrete examples, makes comparisons, and points out patterns.

2. In classroom interactions, the teacher waits for students to respond to questions and explains how or why an answer was obtained.

3. In establishing classroom rules and procedures, the teacher communicates to students the desired behavior, explains associated cues, has students practice rules and procedures, and provides feedback on student performance.

From the successful strategies identified in change studies, specific leader behaviors were sharply defined in a list of desired staff developer behaviors. For example, effective leaders:

1. Provide teachers with opportunities to interact with one another about teaching and schooling.

2. Provide teachers with feedback that is objective, concrete, and focused.

3. Demonstrate knowledge of effective teaching as revealed by research.

4. Diagnose and respond to teachers' stages of concern.

By starting with school leaders, the RITE model reaches more people than would be possible working only with teachers. The model is conceptually and practically linked to continuing processes and expectations in the school setting. Using the procedures and data sources of the RITE model, staff developers are guided in analyzing their own situations, including goals and objectives, and then encour-

aged to make decisions and act upon their analyses. Therefore, the model increases a district's capacity for school improvement by increasing the knowledge and enhancing the skills of its leadership cadre. The intent is to promote informed choice and action, based on research-derived knowledge about teaching and change, by offering a set of options and focusing on the need to make reasoned and rational selections from that set. In addition, it includes factors found by the Network Study (Loucks, 1983) to contribute to the success of change programs:

1. Commitment of teachers.
2. Carefully developed, well-defined, and effective instructional practices.
3. Training and follow-up by credible persons.
4. Assistance and support by other teachers, principals, district staff, and external trainers and linkers.

The model's only "demand" is that users consider and act upon the match between school/classroom character-

istics and the options for leadership and teaching practice. This is in marked contrast to improvement strategies that demand fidelity to a set of ideas or practices.

Research Bases

The list of teaching behaviors used in the RITE model was developed from a review of large-scale, classroom-based studies (Barnes, 1981). The selected behaviors were those associated with student achievement gains in math and reading. Teachers in these studies displayed common practices. They established a work-orientation and emphasized classroom management in order to use class time productively. During class they stayed actively involved with students to prevent misbehavior and acted promptly to stop misbehavior when it did occur. These teachers used a systematic instruction plan in presenting new material so that they were able to:



District staff developer reviews RITE materials with site staff developers. Left to right: Emilee Watts, Carol Leighty, Carolyn Juarez, and Polly Gillette.

“By starting with school leaders, the RITE model reaches more people than would be possible working only with teachers.”

1. Gain student attention before beginning the lesson.
2. Make clear presentations.
3. Provide students with practice in new skills.
4. Monitor and provide feedback.
5. Assign individual seatwork.
6. Evaluate students' responses.

Practices associated with successful implementation of effective teaching behaviors were identified through careful examination of change study literature (Edwards, 1981). These practices include:

1. Providing opportunities for teachers to discuss professional issues and concerns.
2. Providing technical assistance to teachers.
3. Adapting ideas and programs toward a “fit” with school and classroom regularities.
4. Providing opportunities for guided reflection.
5. Providing focused and precise (in contrast to general) attention to important school issues.

The Field Test

The RITE staff introduced this research-based information into a large urban school district where staff developers used these change practices to make primary, situation-specific decisions about their work with teachers. The intervention was presented to school leaders, principals, and resource teachers over a five-day period prior to the opening of school. The staff developers selected from the list of teaching behaviors those most appropriate for their specific situations, and the RITE staff guided them in their work with the teachers. Participants then worked directly with classroom teachers before and during the school year.

During the intervention, for example, the RITE staff presented findings from the classroom management studies conducted by the Research and Development Center. The presentation included lectures, videotapes of teachers modeling effective behaviors, and practical suggestions for organizing and managing elementary classrooms. During the planning portion of the intervention, three of the five staff developers decided to use the research and accompanying materials specific to planning for the beginning of school. They combined these resources with strategies such as providing objective feedback to the teachers and providing teachers with resources.

Local Adoption

The RITE program was introduced in San Diego, California, a district that wanted to facilitate more effective teaching and provide more effective supervision of teachers. Classroom teachers and site administrators wanted to “fine tune” their skills. The teachers needed evidence that they could “make a difference” in the classroom, and the district needed a program that would be cost-effective.

The San Diego district found the RITE model to be effective in focusing on teaching behavior, providing teachers with practical research findings and materials to make their jobs easier and more successful, providing occasions for personnel to share concerns, and making resources available to meet specific needs at various sites (Leighty and Courter, 1984).

For the 1984–85 school year the program is being expanded in San Diego with increased emphasis on training in the use of the change-strategies represented by the list of staff developer behaviors.

Effects

The research-derived list of specific teaching behaviors has been a useful tool for teachers and staff developers in focusing attention, improving communication, and providing direction. The research-derived list of specific staff development practices helped instructional leaders assist teachers in improving classroom practice.

Like the old one-shot workshop and the visiting guru approaches, the RITE strategy for staff development is time-saving and cost-effective in linking teachers to strong, useful, research-derived knowledge. And, like new approaches, it is long-term and locally based, supporting teachers in the continuing improvement of classroom practice.

Most important: it works! □

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