

Staff Development and the Process of Teacher Change

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ABSTRACT: *This article presents a model that describes the process of teacher change, particularly through staff development programs. The model suggests a temporal sequence of events that is hypothesized to typify the process from staff development to enduring change in teachers' perceptions and attitudes. Research evidence supporting the model is summarized and the conditions under which change might be facilitated are described. Several principles for enhancing the change process to improve staff development efforts are also outlined.*

High quality staff development is a central component in nearly every proposal for improving education. Because teachers today remain in their positions for longer periods of time, and fewer new teachers enter the field, improvements in our schools will clearly require enhancement of the professional skills of present staff members.

The proposed staff development programs vary widely in context and format, yet they generally share a common purpose. Specifically, staff development programs are designed to "alter the professional practices, beliefs, and understanding of school persons toward an articulated end" (Griffin, 1983, p. 2). In most cases, that end is the improvement of student learning. In other words, staff development programs are a systematic attempt to bring about change—change in the classroom practices of teachers, change in their beliefs and attitudes, and change in the learning outcomes of students.

This article presents a perspective on the nature of these three

areas of change and the conditions under which they take place. It examines the order of occurrence of these change events and how specific types of change might be facilitated and sustained. A model for viewing change in teachers is proposed in hopes of clarifying aspects of that change process. In addition, the implications of this model for the practice of staff development are considered in light of current research.

Historical Context

Staff development efforts in American schools can be traced to the initiation of the Teacher Institutes in the early 19th century (Richey, 1957). But instead of a history characterized by steady progress based on advances in our knowledge and understanding, the history of staff development is characterized primarily by disorder, conflict, and criticism.

Nearly every major work on the topic of staff development has emphasized the failings of these efforts. For example, Corey (1957) stressed that while there was strong evidence of a growing need for continuing professional development among school persons, it was also apparent that "much of what goes for inservice education is uninspiring and ineffective" (p. 1). Davies (1967) offered an even stron-

ger condemnation in his testimony before the Senate Subcommittee on Education. He concluded, "Inservice education is the slum of American education—disadvantaged, poverty stricken, neglected, psychologically isolated, riddled with exploitation, broken promises, and conflict" (cited in Rubin, 1971, p. 38).

In recent years, advances in research on effective schools and the variables that contribute to instructional effectiveness have increased attention on the need for high quality staff development programs (see, e.g., Bloom, 1976; Brophy, 1979; McDonald & Elias, 1976; Medley, 1977). However, relatively few such programs have been forthcoming. In fact, as recently as 1983, Howey and Vaughan described the current practice of staff development as

... 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 (p. 97).

Other reports by Flanders (1980), Harris, Bessent, and McIntyre (1969), Howey and Joyce (1978), Lawrence (1974), McLaughlin and Marsh (1978), Rubin (1978), Wagstaff and McCullough (1973), and

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