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Staff Development and Teacher Change

The most significant changes in teacher attitudes and beliefs come *after* they begin using a new practice successfully and see changes in student learning.

Despite differences in context and format, most staff development programs share a common purpose: to bring about *change*. Educators generally agree that the three major outcomes of effective staff development programs are changes in (1) teachers' beliefs and attitudes, (2)

Larry Allen



teachers' instructional practices, and (3) students' learning outcomes (Griffin, 1983). The sequence in which these changes occur has important implications for staff development.

Traditionally, staff development has focused first on initiating change in the beliefs, attitudes, and perceptions of teachers. It was generally assumed that these changes would lead to other specific changes in their classroom behaviors and practices, which, in turn, would result in improved student learning. This traditional model has evolved in large part from the work of early change theorists such as Lewin (1935), who derived many of his ideas from psychotherapeutic models. Current research indicates, however, that the assumptions of this traditional model are inaccurate, at least under the special conditions of staff development for experienced teachers. Therefore, a new model that reexamines the process of teacher change under these special conditions is needed if staff development programs are to become more effective.

A New Model

Staff development efforts concerning new programs or innovations typically set out to gain acceptance, enthusiasm, and commitment from teachers "up front," *prior* to the implementation of a new program or innovation. Often this is done by seeking teachers' input during planning sessions or in some cases, by surveying teachers to ensure that the program is aligned with their needs (Joyce and others, 1976). Certainly teachers should have input in the planning and development of new programs. But, unfortunately, these activities seldom change teachers' attitudes significantly or elicit strong commitment from them (Jones and Hayes, 1980).

An alternative approach is shown in Figure 1. According to this model, significant change in teachers' beliefs and attitudes takes place only *after* student learning outcomes have changed. These changes in student learning result, of course, from specific changes teachers have made in their classroom practices. For example, they might be the result of a new instructional approach, the use of new materials or curriculums, or simply some

modification in teaching procedures or classroom format. Whatever the case, this model indicates that significant change in the beliefs and attitudes of teachers is contingent upon evidence of change in the learning outcomes of their students.

It is important to keep in mind that "learning outcomes" in this model are broadly defined to include not only cognitive and achievement indexes, but also the wide range of student affective variables, such as, involvement in class sessions; motivation for learning; and students' attitudes toward school, toward the class, and toward themselves. In other words, learning outcomes include whatever evidence teachers use to judge the effectiveness of their teaching. According to the model, when teachers see that a new program or innovation enhances the learning outcomes of their students, then, and perhaps only then, is significant change in their beliefs and attitudes likely to occur.

Supporting Evidence

Support for this new model of teacher change comes from a variety of sources. For example, recent ethnographic studies show that new ideas and principles about teaching are believed to be true by teachers only "when they give rise to actions that 'work'" (Bolster, 1983, p. 298). This research indicates that experienced teachers seldom become committed to a new program or innovation until they have seen that the new practices work well in *their* classrooms with *their* students.

Similar results have come from studies on efforts to disseminate new projects and programs. In an investigation that examined 61 innovative programs in schools and classrooms in 146 districts nationwide, Crandall and associates (1982) found that attempts to alter teachers' attitudes and foster

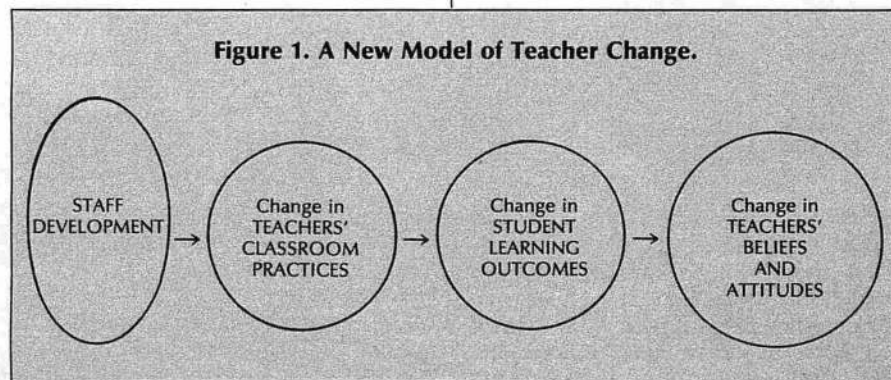
commitment to new practices prior to implementation were generally unsuccessful. In most cases, teachers became committed to the new practices only *after* they had actively engaged in using them in their classrooms (Crandall, 1983).

Still further support comes from recent studies of the separate effects of inservice training, use of new instructional practices, and evidence of improved student learning on teachers' beliefs and attitudes (Guskey, 1979, 1982, 1984). In the most recent of these investigations (Guskey, 1984), a large group of teachers was trained in the use of mastery learning procedures (Bloom, 1968, 1971). Following the training, most of these teachers used the procedures in their classes and saw improvements in their students' learning. However, a few teachers used the new procedures and noted no improvements, while some never tried them out. Those teachers who did see improvement became more positive in their attitudes toward teaching and expressed increased personal responsibility for their students' learning. They liked teaching more and felt they had a more powerful influence on learning outcomes. These changes did not occur among the teachers who used the new procedures but saw no strong improvement, nor among those who were trained but never attempted implementation. Thus, neither training alone nor training followed by implementation were sufficient conditions for change. These particular belief and attitude changes occurred only when training and implementation were combined with evidence of improved student learning.

Implications for Staff Development

Based on this new model, there are three important principles to consider

Figure 1. A New Model of Teacher Change.



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when planning and implementing effective staff development programs.

1. *Change is a slow, difficult, and gradual process for teachers.* Although teachers generally want to do all they can to improve student learning, most oppose innovations that require radical alterations in their instructional procedures. The likelihood of their implementing a new program or innovation depends largely on their judgment of the magnitude of the required change. Programs or innovations that are dramatically different from current practices or that require teachers to make major revisions in the way they presently teach are unlikely to be implemented well, if at all (Doyle and Ponder, 1977). To be successful, staff development must clearly illustrate how the new practices can be implemented without too much disruption or extra work (Sparks, 1983). Changes required of teachers should be organized and presented in small, incremental steps, and they should be described clearly and explicitly with emphasis on efficiency and practicality. Furthermore, it is best to begin with changes that are relatively modest but that can result in demonstrable student improvements in a fairly short period of time.

2. *Teachers need to receive regular feedback on student learning outcomes.* Practices that are new and unfamiliar will be readily abandoned unless evidence of their positive effects can be seen. Therefore, procedures by which teachers can receive evidence of their efforts must be planned. In programs involving the implementation of mastery learning, teachers receive feedback through the regular administration of "formative tests"

(Bloom, Madaus, and Hastings, 1981). These tests give students detailed information on their learning progress and, when paired with corrective activities, help students remedy their learning errors. But they also give teachers specific feedback on the effectiveness of their use of the mastery learning process by clearly illustrating improvements in student achievement. Formative tests can be used to guide instructional revisions as well (Gaskey, 1985).

Stallings (1980) found that providing teachers with regular and precise feedback on student involvement during class sessions can also be powerful in facilitating new instructional practices. Evidence on students' feelings of confidence or self-worth can also serve this purpose (Dolan, 1980). Thus it is critically important that change efforts include some procedure for giving teachers regular feedback on learning outcomes. When teachers see that a new program or innovation works well in their classrooms, change in their beliefs and attitudes can and will follow.

3. *Continued support and follow-up are necessary after initial training.* Few teachers can move from a staff development program directly into the classroom and begin implementing a new program or innovation with success. In most cases, some time and experimentation are necessary for teachers to fit the new practices to their unique classroom conditions (Joyce and Showers, 1982). This fitting process is referred to as "mutual adaptation" (Berman and McLaughlin, 1978) and is essential for successful implementation. Support during this

period of trial and experimentation is critical. Teachers need continuous guidance and direction in order to make adaptations while maintaining program fidelity. Furthermore, they need to know that assistance is readily available if problems or unexpected difficulties develop and that occasional failures are tolerable (Cogan, 1975).

This crucial support for teachers can be offered in a variety of ways. Joyce and Showers (1982) suggest using "coaching" to provide teachers with technical feedback, guide them in adapting new practices to the needs of their students, and help them analyze the effects on students. Coaching is personal, hands-on, in-classroom assistance that can be provided by administrators, curriculum supervisors, college professors, or fellow teachers.

In addition, new programs and innovations have been found to be most successful when teachers have regular opportunities to meet to discuss their experiences in an atmosphere of collegiality and experimentation (Little, 1981). For most teachers, having a chance to share perspectives and seek solutions to common problems is extremely beneficial. In fact, what teachers like best about inservice workshops is the opportunity to share ideas with other teachers (Holly, 1982).

Follow-up procedures incorporating coaching and collegial sharing may seem simplistic, particularly in light of the complex nature of the change process. Still, as the new model suggests, careful attention to these types of support is crucial.

Conclusion

The new model for teacher change offers a variety of opportunities for future research in each of its components and in the transition between them. For example, we need to find more creative ways of prompting teachers to initiate changes in their classroom practices. Better and more efficient methods of providing teachers with regular feedback on the learning progress of their students also need to be identified. The specific teacher beliefs and attitudes most crucial to their professional growth and development need to be explored and better ways of measuring these variables need to be found. Studies on these issues offer exciting possibilities. In addition, their findings are likely to have implications for staff development efforts at all levels of education.



Most important, the new model offers a very optimistic perspective on the potential of staff development. It illustrates that the process of teacher change is orderly and that such change can be facilitated. By carefully considering the critical aspects of the change process, staff development programs can become far more effective and far more powerful. □

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