Making Decisions About the Content of Staff-Development Programs

How do teachers learn to be more effective in the classroom? The processes involved in this transformation are usually the focus of attention. In fact, this issue of the JOURNAL deals with processes such as teacher study groups, mentoring, and university courses that are intended to improve teachers' skills. Good training and follow-up can make the difference between implementing or losing valuable skills. But just as important as the processes—if not more so—is the content of such training.


Listed below are three criteria for making decisions about the content of staff-development programs. Although not exhaustive, they will help to direct the decision-making processes:

1. What does current research recommend?
2. Does the content fit our goals? and
3. Do the methods and content reflect our Christian values?

by William H. Green
A major concern in staff development is its effect on what students know and are able to do.

Research-Based Staff-Development Practices

Several changes in staff development have been produced by results-driven education, systems thinking, and constructivism. Sparks identifies 11 that he believes are the most important. (In Figure 1, I have organized these into categories.)

If our decisions about staff development were informed by research, what would we see and hear? Based upon the findings reported above, what should our organizations promote in their staff-development programs? What are the implications for practice? Can we, for example, justify implementing a staff-development program if its content does not ensure a high level of student learning?
Meeting Our Goals

What do we want our students to know and be able to do? I have asked that question of groups of public- and private-school educators around the world. Everywhere, I have found that the lists are similar. Indeed, with one exception, their goals fit nicely into the four categories suggested by research by Goodlad, Sirotnik, and their colleagues: (1) academic, (2) social/civic, (3) personal, and (4) career. However, what is obviously missing here is the most important category for Christian educators, the spiritual/moral component. Since his original study, Goodlad has acknowledged this lack and has written about the moral dimensions of teaching.

In general, teachers and parents believe that when students graduate, they should be able to do the following (some of the skills fit into more than one category):

**Academic**
- Think critically
- Understand written material
- Think creatively
- Be self-directed learners
- Be lifelong learners
- Read and compute

**Social/Civic**
- Interact constructively in groups of adults or peers
- Be productive citizens
- Be actively involved in their churches and communities
- Appreciate other cultures

**Personal**
- Display healthy self-concepts

**Career**
- Be lifelong learners
- Get and keep jobs

**Spiritual**
- Know and understand God
- Love Jesus

The list is, of course, incomplete. Furthermore, it is difficult to satisfy these requirements in the traditional classroom. During 92 percent of the time that Goodlad, Sirotnik, and their colleagues spent observing K-12 classrooms across the United States, they saw what they termed lecture/recitation/management. Which of the above goals are we achieving if lecture, recitation, and management consume most of our classroom time? Almost none.

---

### Learning Outcomes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Old Focus</th>
<th>New Focus</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Adult needs</td>
<td>Student needs and learning</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Training Issues

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Old Focus</th>
<th>New Focus</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Staff-development training that one attends away from the job</td>
<td>Multiple forms of job-embedded learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experts transmit knowledge and skills to teachers</td>
<td>Teachers study instruction and learning processes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Generic instructional skills</td>
<td>A combination of generic and content-specific skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staff developers function primarily as trainers</td>
<td>Staff developers provide consultation, planning, and facilitation services, as well as training</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Systems/Organizational Issues

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Old Focus</th>
<th>New Focus</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Individual development</td>
<td>Individual development plus organizational development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fragmented, piecemeal improvement efforts</td>
<td>Staff development driven by a clear, coherent strategic plan for the school district, each school, and the departments that serve schools</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>District-focused approaches to staff development</td>
<td>School-focused approaches to staff development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staff development provided by one or two departments</td>
<td>Staff development as a critical function and major responsibility performed by all administrators and teacher leaders</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers as the primary recipients of staff development</td>
<td>Continuous improvement in performance for everyone who affects student learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staff development seen as a &quot;frill&quot; that can be cut during difficult financial times</td>
<td>Staff development seen as an essential and indispensable process without which schools cannot hope to prepare young people for citizenship and productive employment</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Let's look at the problem from another angle, this time in terms of Bloom's levels of learning: knowledge, comprehension, application, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation. If 92 percent of their time is spent in lecture and recitation, then students are not moving past Bloom's first and second levels, which ask only that they be able to name, recall, summarize, or paraphrase information. As a result, they gain only a superficial understanding of the information. Certainly, the lecture-and-recitation method does not teach students to apply the new information to other situations or to analyze it, integrate it with previous knowledge, or evaluate it.

What is going on in Adventist classrooms? New teaching methods? New ways of organizing information? New approaches to problem solving and making decisions? Attention given to developing life skills as well as to accumulating facts?

What we are likely to see is teachers and students relying on textbooks and other textual materials. One study concluded that more than 90 percent of the questions asked in economics textbooks deal with Bloom's two lowest levels—knowledge and comprehension. This is often true of other textbooks as well. As a result, how many of our stated goals are being met? Not many. Our methods and materials do not match our goals. We need strong staff-development programs, combined with supporting materials that enable us to teach differently.

What materials are needed to support this kind of teaching? Price Pritchett, in his little book The Employee Handbook of New Work Habits for a Radically Changing World: Thirteen Ground Rules for Job Success in the Information Age makes several points that we need to heed:

- Work is going global as we enter the Information Age. Industrial countries' economies are shifting more toward services and knowledge transformation. Consider, for example, just a few facts from Pritchett's book that illustrate the impact of the Information Age on American society:
  - More information has been produced in the past 30 years than during the previous 5,000.
  - A weekday edition of the New York Times contains more information than the average person was likely to come across in a lifetime in 17th century England.
  - The supply of information available to us doubles at least every five years.

The picture is clear. So how should we teach? What should go on in schools? What goals do we need to adopt? What staff-development practices will help us to achieve those goals? The answers should also be clear.

**Christian Values**

Our young people are our greatest resource and the only reason our church schools exist. Therefore, we constantly need to ask ourselves the following questions: How would Christ have taught this concept? What would it look and sound like in His “classroom”? What do my teaching methods reveal about God to my students?

When we look at Christ’s teaching methods, we find that He frequently used metaphorical methods such as parables and stories. Keeping this in mind, do we emphasize metaphorical thought in our curricula? In our teaching? In our staff-development programs? Can we discover specific methods that enable us to do this kind of teaching?

Perhaps we can learn to teach metaphorically if we study Christ’s teaching from a methodological viewpoint. Let’s take the episode of the lawyer who tried to trap Jesus by asking two questions: “What shall I do to gain eternal life?” and “Who is my neighbor?” In answering him, Jesus used a number of teaching methods that we think of as modern inventions. For example, He employed effective questioning techniques, an advance organizer, and inductive thought processes.

Learning to use Christ’s techniques can be enjoyable and productive for teachers. But these approaches do not
We need to adopt division-wide, union-wide, and conference-wide staff-development programs.

Doing so relates directly to our goals, and follows Christ’s methods.

The future is incredibly exciting. We know that God will be with us as we ask Him for guidance, remembering the way in which we have been led in the past. ”

Dr. William H. Green is Professor of Teacher Education and Chair of the Department of Teaching and Learning in the School of Education at Andrews University, Berrien Springs, Michigan, and Coordinator for this issue of the Journal.

REFERENCES

7. Sirotini.
24. See the Journal’s theme issue on inclusive education, December 1995/January 1996; information about other materials that the Journal has printed about special education and dyslexia is available upon request from the Journal office.