Helping Teachers Grow Professionally

James L. Olivero

Two cornerstones to professional growth may be the right of educators to say, "I don't know how," and their use of the appropriate planning tools for learning new skills and knowledge.

Setting: Local school faculty resource center

Subject: Staff development

Miscellaneous Comments of Teachers:

"Well, wonder what they have decided we need this time!"

"We'll have another in-service consultant who will blow-in, blow-off, and blow-out!"

"Just once I wish our staff development days could be used to meet some of *my* needs; there are so many areas where I need help."

"Is there credit on the salary schedule for this in-service?"

These comments aren't fictitious; they were recorded very recently. How unfortunate that the preceding scenario is more typical than atypical—especially at a time when so many potent forces (for example, decreasing enrollments, teacher activism, reduced fiscal resources, and future shock) are converging upon us—all demanding improvements in the ways we fulfill our personal and professional responsibilities.

Historically, staff development, in my estimation, has too often been undertaken for the wrong incentive, that is, advancement on the salary schedule. While many educators genuinely qualify for increases in take-home pay, staff development can and should emerge from at least two motivational dimensions: fiscal improvement *plus* increased competency. Staff development simply has not been a top priority in many districts; at least the following indicators would lead one to believe that a case for top billing would be difficult to establish:

- In-service has been scheduled for the masses in the school district rather than attempting to individualize and personalize professional growth plans;
- In-service too often takes place at the close of the busy (and tiring) school day when creative and imaginative thinking is nearly impossible;
- In-service has too often been taught at the college level by professors who have neglected to cross the school-site threshold in recent years;
- In-service has too often been designed to supply instantaneous solutions to complex problems (complex problems require complex solutions);
- In-service has too often assumed a "cut-first" position when budget limitations inevitably occur.

One U.S. Office of Education study concluded that school districts invest less than one-half percent in staff development; successful businesses plan to invest six percent annually for staff development and renewal. Obviously, we in education have a long way to go.

Okay, so a few constraints stand in our way (and anyone close to the scene can add more hurdles without really trying); what can be done about them? To use the "in" educational jargon, we have both *affective* and *cognitive* constraints to overcome—and they can be overcome!

Dealing with Attitudes

I suspect the first thing we must deal with is attitudes. Simplified, this means we must reserve the right of educators to think and say, "I don't know how!" With the demands of the times, educators are being called upon to do more and more things they were never taught. Teacher education, administrative preparation, and previous in-service education programs may have been helpful for coping with what was, but they won't suffice for what is or what will be. For instance, nearly every school these days has some statement written somewhere advocating and expounding on the virtues of individualized learning. To individualize learning, teachers must possess the competency to identify the entry level of given students on a specified learning continuum. I would estimate (based upon a series of random selections at workshops, presentations, and seminars) that fewer than five percent of the elementary teachers and probably less than one percent of the secondary teachers have ever been taught the skills to accomplish this noble purpose—even when diagnosing the entry level of the learner is an absolute prerequisite for individualizing learning.

Furthermore, nearly every teacher I know, in an effort to meet the unique needs of youngsters, is being driven up the proverbial wall by the classroom management problems associated with individualized learning (for example, developing diagnostic tests, establishing student learning profiles, completing mastery evaluations, and arranging learning centers). Although teachers are criticized and blamed for their inability to cope in this situation, it isn't their fault; they were never taught the strategies for setting up the classroom to accommodate each child. We need to help educators realize it is legitimate to continue learning; there is nothing wrong in admitting, "I don't know how!"

Gathering Information

Some educators don't know where to begin, but these educators can be helped to assess their own personal and professional needs by gathering appropriate information. (Many tools are available for this purpose; while the length of this article precludes listing them here, interested



readers are encouraged to write directly to the author.) Even without a variety of sophisticated instruments, current and usable suggestions for staff development can be obtained by requesting information from parents, students, and staff. Responses to the following questions can assist in establishing priorities:

- What are we doing now that we really do well—and that we ought to continue? (This question is important for getting positive strokes; most of us work more effectively when we know we do some things pretty well.)
- What are we doing now that we do pretty well even though certain further refinements are necessary to assure desired results?
- What are we doing now that ought to be terminated? That is, what are we doing that doesn't make any difference anyway?

• What are we not doing that needs our immediate attention?

As a result of the survey, I believe we will find that educators need to learn a variety of skills, attitudes, and knowledge. I have mentioned earlier a few skills pertinent for some teachers; for other teachers there may be a need to:

• Learn new skills for conducting student/teacher/parent conferences;

• Learn skills for positive, interpersonal communication;

• Learn skills to motivate students;

• Learn skills for developing competency-based curricula.

This abbreviated list is inadequate, but indicative.

Improving Human Relations and School Climate

Two major areas of focus come quickly to mind when attitude needs are considered; one has to do with human relations (sometimes misnamed multicultural education) and the other—the school climate—is an offshoot of the same issue. There are many human relations programs today to help educators learn about chicano, black, and Asian American children; such programs are essential! If I were a teacher in Santa Fe, New Mexico, and I failed to understand the similarities and differences between Spanish American and Mexican American cultures, I would need to be able to say, "I don't understand all I should, but I want to learn."

Of course, human relations skills work two ways. I believe considerable work is also required to help minorities learn about the stereotyped, white middle class. Not all whites are enemies of minorities! I don't know of any school districts that deal with the white-stereotype issue; Travis Air Force Base, where black officers are taught to work with white enlisted men, has one of the few formal staff development programs on this matter.

School climate factors have been studied by a group of associates funded by CFK, Ltd., an educational foundation supported initially by Charles F. Kettering, III. The investigations took place in some 60 school districts, representing a vast array of school types (nearly 500 schools). Educators in the schools tried to find ways to make the schools more productive and satisfying for staff and students. Invariably those involved in the effort found that positive solutions to problems resulted when:

• Specific problem areas were identified;

• Specific professional growth opportunities were opened up for those who wanted to learn new ways to overcome the problems;

• Specific planned action was taken.

Striving for Personal Growth

Professional growth is also possible when individuals add to their personal knowledge. Seldom do harried educators have an opportunity to read for their own growth—and how important that is today with the quantum knowledge explosion. Our obligations to help meet the challenges of future shock require us to add regularly to our knowledge bank.

When educators are able to emerge from the trees long enough to see the forest, they don't call for the *status quo* (contrary to the opinion of some critics); they recognize the need for improvements.

Fundamentally, there are two types of staff development alternatives. One is designed for the individual and the other is designed for the institution; both are a part of the same whole. Both require an initial assessment and a plan for action; staff development doesn't happen by chance! Indeed, professional educators want to grow, not simply survive. If assessment occurs with no opportunity to take action, teachers experience anxiety, guilt, and concomitant avoidance behavior.

The most powerful staff development, in my opinion, is a development plan prescribed by the individual educator, a growth plan unique to personal needs. Institutional growth, obviously, can take place in the same manner, the differences between the two approaches being in numbers of participants and in focus. For the latter alternatives there is usually a catalytic, change-team that both identifies school problems and implements constructive action; the people on the change-team work together as a collegial unit.

Self Performance Achievement Record (SPAR)

Name: *James L. Olivero, Executive Director, Nueva Day School and Learning Center, Hillsborough, California*

Date: *September, 1972*

Based on the total improvement needs of your school or yourself, this project represents:

X a high-priority need.

_____ a low-priority need.

I What is your institutional or personal GOAL statement?

(See pages 5-7 *)

To learn as much as possible about shared decision making and the processes that make shared decision making effective and efficient. (Personal and Institutional)

II What are the ACTIVITIES?

(See pages 7-9)

1. *Review available literature.*
2. *Identify factors that affect shared decision making.*
3. *Review factors of shared decision making with selected school administrators.*
4. *Design training programs where needed.*
5. *Write a position paper on the topic of how shared decision making might be conducted for effectiveness and efficiency.*

III What are the OBJECTIVES?

(See pages 9-17)

1. *Given the need to become aware of available information, review the materials available through the ERIC system as well as at least 40 other books on the topic of organizational development.*
2. *Given the need to identify the variables that affect shared decision making, construct a matrix board that covers a synthesis of current literature, a cross reference of various training programs, and a listing of available human resources.*
3. *Given the need to obtain feedback from the field, at least two seminars will be held with practicing school administrators to obtain feedback on the project. In addition, at least one questionnaire will be completed by school personnel on the topic of shared decision making.*
4. *Given the need to design training programs for administrators and school staff members interested in implementing shared decision making, write and develop four learning programs that include objectives, materials, strategies for use, and evaluation criteria.*
5. *Given the need to evaluate the effectiveness and efficiency of decision-making models, identify assessment criteria.*

IV What are the EVIDENCES OF SUCCESS?

(See pages 18-21)

1. *Have at least 150 written excerpts from available selected readings.*
2. *Have a board with cards, brackets, and specific categories of information.*
3. *Have a written report based on feedback from practicing administrators and have a synthesis report prepared from the questionnaire.*
4. *Design and write four training formats that include objectives, training materials, suggested teaching approaches, and evaluation criteria.*
5. *Write a paper on assessment and identify at least five instruments for assessing shared decision-making variables that seem to make a difference.*

V INDIVIDUALIZED CONTINUING EDUCATION PROGRAM

(See pages 21-22)

What new abilities do *you* need to achieve this project?

What new skills, attitudes, or knowledge do you need?

1. *Learn to use ERIC information catalogs; learn procedures for getting print-out.*
2. *(a) Learn how to use key-sort cards. (b) Determine ways to cross-reference materials in a matrix.*
3. *Determine ways to construct questionnaire so appropriate information is received.*
4. *(a) Determine ways to write specific objectives. (b) Participate in mini-simulation before writing exercises into the training package.*
5. *(a) Search literature for appropriate evaluation instruments. (b) Have others read rough draft of working paper.*

How will you obtain each new need?

1. *Contact San Mateo County Office for assistance.*
2. *Review ideas with others.*
3. *(a) Study text on questionnaire construction. (b) Get administrators to volunteer feedback communication.*
4. *(a) Use guide for objective writing in SPAR document. (b) Work with others on simulated activities.*
5. *Review* Measuring Human Behavior *and talk with others.*

VI What are the STARTING AND COMPLETION DATES?

(See page 23)

1. *S—September, 1972*
   C—October, 1972
2. *S—September, 1972*
   C—October, 1973
3. *S—October, 1972*
   C—November, 1972
4. *S—November, 1972*
   C—April, 1973
5. *S—December, 1972*
   C—June, 1973

VII LOG OF PROGRESS REPORTS

(See page 23)

* Page numbers refer to sections of the *Self-Performance Achievement Record.* A CFK, Ltd., Occasional Paper.

Self-Performance Achievement Record (SPAR)

Name: *Vivian Geddes, Curriculum Specialist, San Juan, California, United School District*

Date: *November 20, 1973*

Based on the total improvement needs of your school or yourself, this project represents:

X a high-priority need.

___ a low-priority need.

I What is your institutional or personal GOAL statement?
(See pages 5-7 *)

As a curriculum specialist, I will improve my ability to communicate with administrators and teachers about the development of curriculum.

II What are the ACTIVITIES?
(See pages 7-9)

1. I will conduct an assessment determining strengths and weaknesses of communication.

2. I will attend special workshops.

3. I will practice new skills obtained.

4. I will complete extensive readings on the topic of communication.

III What are the OBJECTIVES?
(See pages 9-17)

1. I will develop or adapt an instrument to assess how administrators and staff perceive our mutual communications.

2. I will attend two special workshops on communication and self-awareness and gain new concepts for use and evaluation.

3. I will develop and conduct a mini-course on communication and this will be attended by other administrators.

4. I will submit a list of completed readings.

IV What are the EVIDENCES OF SUCCESS?
(See pages 18-21)

1. Completion of assessment instrument by 50% of people in the total group.

2. Learn, use, and evaluate four new skills.

3. Completion of an information sheet listing:
- *a. Date of meeting.*
- *b. List of skills presented.*
- *c. Names of those attending.*

4. Completion of a list of materials read.

V INDIVIDUALIZED CONTINUING EDUCATION PROGRAM
(See pages 21-22)

What new abilities do *you* need to achieve this project?

What new skills, attitudes, or knowledge do you need?

Skills:

1. *Listening skills*
2. *Brainstorming*
3. *Delphi*
4. *Time management*

Attitudes:

1. Understanding of the levels of communication.

2. Developing ability to put rhetoric into action.

Knowledge:

1. Learn about new assessment instruments.

2. Review bibliography of appropriate readings.

How will you obtain each new need?

Consultant

Conferences

Publications

A.C.T.I. (district sponsored workshop on awareness)

Other workshops available

Opportunities within the district and scope of position

Parent/Teacher/Administrator Effectiveness Training

VI What are the STARTING AND COMPLETION DATES?
(See page 23)

1. *S—January, 1972*
   C—June, 1973
2. *S—September, 1972*
   C—June, 1973
3. *S—September, 1972*
   C—September, 1973
4. *S—September, 1972*
   C—June, 1973

VII LOG OF PROGRESS REPORTS
(See page 23)

* Page numbers refer to sections of the *Self-Performance Achievement Record*. A CFK, Ltd., Occasional Paper.

Planning Through SPAR

A systematic plan for staff development is useful. While there are many helpful plans for individual and institutional growth (*growth*, not evaluation), I have found the *Self-Performance Achievement Record* [1] (SPAR) a particularly valuable tool (probably because I helped to design it). This plan has directions written in a modified, programmed learning style making it quite easy to use; indeed, it is a plan for action.

The history of the SPAR document is worth noting as it bears directly on the issue of staff development. In the early stages of the development of SPAR, associates (members of the Collegial Association for the Development and Renewal of Educators—CADRE) found nearly everyone agreeing that staff development was important; interestingly, the staff development

[1] Information regarding the SPAR is available from the Nueva Learning Center, 6565 Skyline Boulevard, Hillsborough, California 94010.

each person was promoting was aimed at someone else—not at oneself. Real change begins with self; hence, the need for a planning tool to help bring that about.

Two samples of completed SPAR professional growth plans accompany this article; note that they are designed for either personal or institutional changes.[2] (See pages 198 and 199.)

Taking Final Steps

Even with the right to say, "I don't know how," and even with the availability of appropriate planning tools for learning new skills, attitudes, and knowledge, it is also necessary to reverse the negative indicators mentioned early in this article. As an example, time certainly must be made available if staff development is to take place. One school in dire need of time for new knowledge borrowed time from the school day by initiating the SSR (sustained, silent reading) program. Everyone in school took time to read. In some schools, unfortunately, even when time was offered, many people didn't know how to go about enhancing their own professional improvement. What a shame! Consider the potential of a school with 15 staff members, each learning one new skill, attitude, or area of knowledge each year. Multiply each person's single-growth year achievements over a period of time; the results could be very impressive.

Even if *all* the negative indicators were reversed, one mammoth issue remains: staff development for what? We can't afford to reinvent the Boston Latin Grammar School. Too often, I'm afraid, we figure out better ways to do things we shouldn't be doing in the first place.

To help avoid this, I would suggest an institutional growth plan to meet two objectives:

- Meeting and overcoming current personality difficulties (this usually means providing opportunities for constructive interpersonal confrontations);
- Studying and considering the "future" and its implications for education.

Some useful sources for this latter option include: Cawelti's *Vitalizing the High School* (ASCD, 1974), the report of The President's Commission on Youth, and the *RISE Commission Report* (California State Department of Education).

Funding for staff development is a topic too broad to cover in this article. Suffice it here to say that at least three future trends seem to be in the works:

- Professional organizations are beginning to negotiate through collective bargaining for staff development line-items in the district budget;
- Focus at the federal level (National Teacher Corps as an example) is switching from preservice to in-service emphasis;
- Categorical funding for staff development through the U.S. Office of Education may soon become a reality (the National Institute of Education is beginning to recognize that no curricular materials are teacher-proof; when new curricula are parachuted into a school without appropriate staff preparation the materials are frequently doomed for the discard file).

The professional literature is replete with articles and ideas about staff development; without doubt, we know more about what ought to be done than we are doing. As Pogo once said, "We have met the enemy and he is us!"

[2] Since the actual planning booklet for the SPAR contains rationales and background information for each component of the guide, further elaboration will not be given here—with the exception of two significant items frequently omitted in planning documents. The component that calls for the identification of sources of assistance is one commonly omitted item. The person preparing the growth plan is asked to identify the person or place where help can be obtained, since identifying a professional growth need without ascertaining possible sources of assistance does little good. The other commonly omitted item is built in for busy educators. Experience has shown that little is likely to occur if initiation and completion dates for calendar purposes aren't established. Thus, the time-line helps the person keep priorities in focus.



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