

How Do We Maintain New Practices in Staff Development?

BY WILLIAM H. GREEN

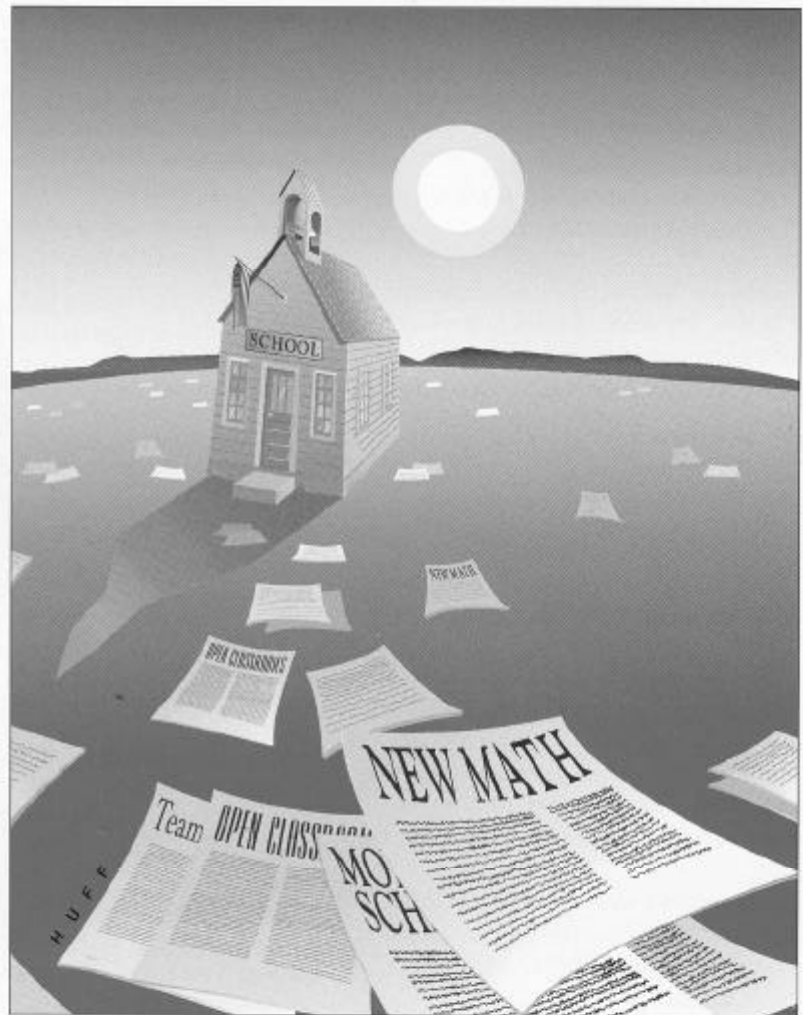
A Morgue of Good Ideas

The educational landscape is littered with the corpses of instructional innovations. New math. Team teaching. Open classrooms. Modular scheduling. Where are they today? What caused the demise of these and many other good ideas? What could we have done to save them? And how can we ensure that the same fate doesn't befall the effective strategies that are currently being introduced?

History shows that most innovations fail not because of something we are doing, but because of something we are *not* doing. Simply put, most educational innovations collapse because they lack a strong staff-development process.

The issue is not whether we know how to prepare teachers to use cooperative or conceptual learning strategies or other innovations. The root of the problem is our failure to understand how intense the initial training needs to be, as well as the amount of follow-up needed to maintain newly learned skills.

Fullan¹ discusses three levels of change in schools: materials, skills, and attitudes (or beliefs). Usually, the new materials make sense when a workshop presenter demonstrates their use, but later, without on-site expert guidance, teachers feel overwhelmed at the prospect of using them in a real classroom. Then, to further sabotage implementation, colleagues often don't seem enthusiastic about the new technique, and students resist new ways of learning. When this



happens, teachers begin to question or even abandon the new strategies.

According to Fullan,² adapting new material is the easiest change to make; it requires less time and effort than the other two levels—changing skills and attitudes. Yet, to be effective, we must make inroads at all three levels. For this to happen, educators must employ strategies that empower them and change their beliefs while enabling their students to alter their capabilities to learn. Do such strategies exist? Yes—and their potential is significant.³

This article will describe how, using research-based methods,⁴ we should direct our staff-development efforts. We can design effective training to accomplish Fullan's two more-difficult changes—altering teacher skills and attitudes.

The Four-Step Plan

Joyce and Showers⁵ describe four primary components of most successful training programs: (1) presenting the theory or content of the practice; (2) modeling or demonstrating the new practice; (3) practicing the new strategy; and (4) receiving expert feedback. Many of our staff-development programs include only the first component—presentation of the new practice. A few also incorporate some modeling. The best that one can expect from such an abbreviated training format is knowledge about the topic, material, or activity. Certainly, teachers will not gain any degree of skill from such a program. To gain the necessary skills and resulting confidence to do things differently in the classroom, modeling and practice—combined with technical feedback—must be added.

Considerable modeling and practice are needed to hone a new skill. Most people need to see a new practice modeled 15 to 20 times and to practice it themselves 20 to 30 times—and that's just to reach a basic level of skill!

Teachers can observe the modeling of a strategy in several ways:

- Observing an on-site consultant using the strategy.
- Watching a videotape of an expert using the strategy.

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- Visiting classrooms in which their colleagues use the strategy.
- Using a combination of the above methods.

Practicing the strategy should combine micro-teaching sessions with peers, practice teaching with small groups of students, and the use of the strategy in the teacher's own classroom—in combination with expert

feedback.

Peer teaching, instructing small groups, and teaching large classes are all new learning settings, and at first the new strategy will seem awkward in each situation. This discomfort is normal, but the more teachers practice, the more comfortable they will feel with the strategy in the various settings. Figure 1⁶ presents a graphic look at levels of performance in learning a new strategy.

The Support System

No matter how many times teachers see a strategy modeled or practice it themselves, they will not sustain the skill unless a support system is built into the workplace.⁷ Without such assistance, the skill will not transfer from the training environment to the classroom or be implemented for any significant length of time after the training sessions.

Can we restructure the training and the workplace so that instruction can be transferred successfully to classroom practice—and do so for almost all teachers who learn a new instructional

Figure 1
Levels of Use of the Innovation

	Levels of Use	Typical Behaviors
USER	VI. Renewal	Seeks more-effective alternatives to the established use of the innovation.
	VI. Integration	Makes deliberate efforts to coordinate with others in using the innovation.
	IVB. Refinement	Assesses impact and makes changes to increase it.
	IVA. Routine	Has established a pattern of use and is making few if any changes.
NONUSER	III. Mechanical Use	Is poorly coordinated, making changes to better organize use of the innovation.
	II. Preparation	Prepares to use the innovation.
	I. Orientation	Seeks information about the innovation.
	O. Nonuse	Takes no action with respect to the innovation.

strategy? Happily, the answer is "Yes."

The basic moves (step-by-step procedures) and cognitions (understanding the rationale and philosophy) can be incorporated into the teaching of each new strategy. However, we need to include coaching, mentoring, and study groups, and to train teachers and administrators together in order to sustain the effort.

A Training Scenario

As stated earlier, Joyce and Showers⁴ have proposed a training model for staff development that synthesizes the best practices. It consists of four components: (1) presenting the theory and content of the new practice; (2) modeling or demonstrating the new practice; (3) practicing the new strategy; and (4) receiving expert feedback. (This model assumes that teachers need to add a new strategy to their current repertoire, not simply to fine-tune a skill they already possess.)

To look more closely at each of the components in Joyce and Showers'



training model, let's imagine a scenario. One hundred SDA teachers are interested in learning a new teaching prac-

tice. They have all read the Seltzer Daley Report,⁵ the Valuegenesis reports,¹⁰ and Brantley's *Profile '87* through *Profile '95* reports.¹¹ They're convinced that educational reform is needed in the Adventist system, and want to learn, say, a jigsaw technique in cooperative learning or the sequence of inductive thought processes in concept attainment or concept formation. What would have to happen (1) for the teachers to be able to transfer their newly acquired skills from the workshop to the classroom; and (2) to ensure that they continue to use the skills successfully for a year or longer?

One of the questions that we immediately face is this: What outcomes do we want from our staff-development or in-service programs? Fullan¹² believes that cognitive knowledge of an important innovation is crucial to its implementation. Indeed, lack of knowledge about the rationale and theory behind new practices is one major reason why many educational innovations fail.

But once recognition and recall are achieved, then what? To go beyond this level, we must provide something more than the typical one- to three-day staff-development programs. Such workshops raise awareness but do little

Figure 2
Effects of Staff Development
Classroom Application

		Knowledge	Demonstration of Behavior	Transfer to Work Setting
T R A I N I N G • S T R A T E G Y	Presentation of Concepts and Theory	80% or better	5% to 15%	5% to 15%
	Demonstration of Behavior	80% or better	5% to 15%	5% to 15%
	Low-Risk Practice With Feedback (Microteaching)	80% or better	80% or better	5% to 15%
	Coaching in Work Setting Re: Behavior and Decisions	90%	90%	90%

Adapted from Bruce Joyce and Beverly Showers, *Student Achievement Through Staff Development* (New York: Longman, 1995), p. 112.

to develop the skills necessary to transfer them to the classroom.

Back to the SDA teachers. We already know that they want to learn the new skill, and let's assume that the conditions are favorable for their doing so. What has to happen before the teachers can use the new content? Referring to the components of the training model, we must ask whether teachers can learn content and theory by lecture/recitation and discussion. Teachers are good learners when conditions are comfortable and their needs are being met, so if we only want them to acquire cognitive knowledge, most of them—in fact, about 80 percent—will learn content and theory by that method. (See Figure 2.)

But suppose we want them to not only gain cognitive knowledge, but also a skill. What do we need to include in the training program to achieve this goal? Can teachers—or anyone else, for that matter—learn a new skill by just reading or hearing about it? What other training steps or components need to be added once the teachers have been made aware of the skill?

Will watching demonstrations of the skill accomplish the goal? The answer is decidedly "No." People learn new skills only by practicing them and receiving expert feedback on their performance. Administrators and supervisors routinely expect teachers to learn new

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skills by listening to someone talk about them, or, if the teachers are fortunate, by reading and talking about the skills and then seeing a demonstration or two. This method simply does not work. Skill development requires demonstrations combined with expert feedback. With practice and feedback, more than 80 percent of the teachers will be able to display the skill, not just parrot the content and theory.

Now comes an important question: How many of the teachers who can implement a new instructional innovation will successfully transfer that skill from the workshop to the classroom during the next year or two? Surprisingly, very few—probably only five to 15 percent. (See Figure 2.) Can we set up a learning environment that ensures the transfer of the skill? Fortunately, the

answer is "Yes."

Returning to the training model, we can see that coaching is missing. In the Joyce and Showers training model, two elements of coaching coexist: (1) the person learning the skill demonstrates his or her ability to perform the strategy, and (2) the person doing the coaching is an expert in performing the strategy. For these reasons, supervisors, principals, and other administrators must attend training sessions with teachers.

Coaching provides the necessary structure for expert feedback to occur. Although most coaching is done one-on-one, it can also be carried out in groups of three. Research shows that coaching works best when a human support system has been established.¹³

In order for coaching to be successful, faculty members must be organized into teams, or study groups, of four to six teachers and administrators (see the article by Rita Henriquez-Roark and William Green in this issue).

Practical Considerations and Time Needs

Learning a new teaching strategy is a cyclical process. This means that we do not necessarily have to start with the theory and then go to component two, three, and four, etc. The order is not as important as making sure that all the components are present, including enough practice and adequate time.

Expecting teachers to change their skills without an appropriate process and sufficient time is frustrating and, ultimately, counterproductive.

As stated earlier, we routinely underestimate the amount of training and follow-up needed to learn new skills. People typically need to see 15 to 20 demonstrations of a new strategy, then practice it themselves 15 to 30 times before they feel comfortable with the method. Then they need several more practices—up to 15, if the strategy is a complex one—coupled with expert feedback, in order to incorporate it easily into their everyday teaching. That means a total of 30 to 45 practices. And if administrators want their teachers to achieve executive control of the

Figure 3

Level of Implementation by Pattern of Participation and Training Design

Pattern of Participation	Level of Implementation
No peer structure follow-up/ participation by volunteers as individuals	5% to 10% implementation
Participation by peer-coaching teams from a variety of schools	75% implementation or better
Participation by whole-school faculties organized into peer- coaching teams for follow-up	90% implementation or better; can reach 100%

skill, using Levels IVB to VI (see Figure 1), that is, to be able to change lessons "in flight" in appropriate ways while still maintaining the integrity of the strategy, they will need to practice it 15 more times. A teacher often needs two to five years to become proficient in a complex teaching strategy like conceptual thinking. Instead, we typically see teachers trying to use a strategy before they have practiced it enough, then declaring that it doesn't work. But if we include the four components described by Joyce and Showers, allow adequate time for practice with expert feedback, and provide a sound support system in the form of study groups, newly learned skills will successfully transfer from the workshop to the classroom. That is an exciting prospect!

Who should provide staff development? Principals traditionally fill this role, but in his comprehensive reviews of educational change efforts in schools, Fullan¹⁴ states that teachers can initiate change as well or better than principals. He warns, however, that if principals are not intimately involved in the new strategy, the practice is unlikely to be maintained in the school. The principal should attend workshops and learn skills with the teachers. In the SDA system, superintendents and their associates are comparable in many ways to public-school principals, so they should attend staff-development programs with their teachers.

Conclusion

What can we reasonably conclude about staff development? I propose the following:

- Transfer of training is the greatest problem in terms of accountability. Staff development can be designed so that almost all learned skills are transferred. (See Figure 3.)
- Changing teaching skills is more complex than previously thought, so we need to allow more time for teachers to practice new skills.
- Staff development is a process, not an event. It needs to be ongoing and continuous.
- To achieve changes in practice, attitudes, and beliefs, a social support sys-



tem—in the form of coaching and study groups—needs to be part of staff development.

• Superintendents, associate superintendents, and principals need to attend the same training sessions as teachers so that they can provide expert feedback and coaching.

"What you see is what you get." This axiom is as true in staff development as in other areas of life. If in-service programs do not include the four components of the training model, we will indeed get less than we want.

Fortunately, there are examples of effective staff-development programs to use as guides. These programs are presented in the following pages in the hope that they will inspire teachers and administrators to action. For "where there is no vision, the people perish. . ." (Proverbs 29:18). ☛

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