

CAROLINA CONFERENCE TEACHER-STUDY GROUPS

The more we get together, the happier we'll be!" could be a theme song for Adventist educators. One pervasive characteristic of Adventist educators around the world is the *widespread professional isolation* experienced by teachers at all levels.

A study group can help break down the artificial barriers that separate professionals and get them excited about work-

ing as colleagues. A study group provides support, empowers its members, and helps them develop the courage to implement change within their busy classrooms.

A study group is a team of three to six teachers who meet regularly to try innovative methods of improving classroom instruction. These groups plan, share successes, watch each other model the ideas, try out new ideas, and celebrate those things that seem to work.

Study groups typically meet once a week for approximately an hour each time. Leaders may drive for several hours to attend.

The Carolina Conference established study groups on a voluntary basis. The first group consisted of two teachers from one-room schools and four teachers from a larger school who met with Dr. Rita Henriquez-Green, who was then the associate superintendent of education for the conference. Instead of meeting for an

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Educators from one-room schools across the Carolina Conference participate in a teacher-study group.

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A Carolina Conference teacher-study group does a concept attainment lesson on isosceles triangles.

hour once each week, they met one Sunday a month for four hours. Several of the members had to drive several hours to the meeting, but all the teachers became energized and confident about what they were attempting to do.

From this humble beginning, the study-group idea has grown into an integral part of staff development in the Carolina Conference. At one point, a teacher drove all the way from the Washington, D.C., area to participate in a regular monthly study group in Carolina!

The study group helps ensure that the teachers will implement new strategies throughout the year, rather than just during the few days or weeks immediately following beginning-of-the-year training. Here is what some Carolina teachers say about their teacher study groups:

“I’ve attended many breakout sessions

during teacher in-service meetings and have been inspired to try certain innovations in my classroom, only to give up in frustration because of lack of feedback support and unresolved questions. But being a member of a study group has given me opportunities each month to experiment in my classroom, report my progress to my colleagues, and then receive help from them with the challenges I encounter when trying something new.”

“I believe that continuing education is vital for all professionals. Teachers should avail themselves of opportunities to better their skills. The study group format combines the study of educational theory with actual practice of new instructional ideas. Meeting together is the way for teachers to provide much-needed affirmation in a lonely, high-stress profession.”

“Teacher study groups have been ex-

tremely helpful to me as a teacher. The idea is especially good for the isolated teacher of one- and two-teacher schools. Study groups offer a professionally safe environment to share teaching strategies, discuss problems, and fine-tune new methods. Teacher study groups have been like a research lab where all the teachers are valuable contributors to the process of helping establish new and better ways of teaching because they bring out the very best in every teacher.”

The study-group concept was one of several ideas that has made the Carolina Conference a pace-setter in Adventist education. The conference was cited in a national survey of Adventist educational leaders as one of the most progressive conferences involved in the improvement of Adventist education in North America. ☞