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CHANGING FORCES IN STAFF DEVELOPMENT: IMPLICATIONS FOR READING

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"Trust in the Force, Luke," was Ben Kenobi's admonition to the youthful hero of *Star Wars*. This was to be repeated throughout the adventure, for the Force was not easily defined. Nor was it.observable, except for its occasional manifestation in the form of a light-saber.

Some words which are used frequently in school-related contexts are almost as nebulous as the Force. The words "staff development" of "in-service," for example, are easily recognized by educators. Nevertheless, these terms are used in so many different contexts that they represent a challenge to define. There are "in-service meetings," "staff development programs," "in-service released time," "staff workshops," "professional days," etc., etc., etc.

An attempt at a thorough definition should provide a fairly comprehensive explanation of the concept of staff development (used interchangeably with in-service). This writer (in press) interviewed six recognized reading experts in order to synthesize a general aim or purpose of staff development in reading. The results of these interviews suggest that staff development in reading may be viewed as

> . . . a continuous involvement process of developing and utilizing local (and non-local) talent to identify and facilitate responses to local needs.

The above definition covers most conceivable situations. It is also useful as a foundation for discussions about staff development in reading today, or in the future. One of its shortcomings may be that the definition does not appear to include any links to past attempts at, or the history of, staff development in education generally or reading specifically. What forces have contributed to the growth of staff development, resulting in changes in its very nature?

Staff Development In Retrospect

The 1950's witnessed the advent of the National Science Foundation (which emphasized science and math curricula), the National Defense Education Act (foreign languages and guidance services), and the cooperative Education Act (educational innovation), extended in the 1960's by Title IV of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act. The climate for staff development had turned favorable "with the convergence of the

dreams of the New Frontier and Great Society and the demands of the Civil Rights Revolution (Boyan, 1968, p. 24)."

By the mid-1960's, the emphasis was on contributions to improving educational practice. Research and development centers were established; the E.S.E.A. included the training of personnel as one provision for strengthening education at many levels. According to Harris (1969, p. 4), "The in-service education program is not only a tool of progress; it is also a symbol of faith in the improvability of the individual." Moffitt (1963) continued in this vain, comparing a school system's interests in staff development with its quality.

Prominent educators in the fields of reading and the language arts documented the need for continued professional training beyond the baccalaureate, and welcomed the benefits such training would provide. Frequently, their statements of need were coupled with reports of general dissatisfaction with existing staff development programs.

Indrisano (1969) pointed out that both the Conant and Harvard-Carnegie studies in reading found the undergraduate training of teachers inadequate preparation in the skills necessary to teach reading. Conant had documented that out of thirty-five institutions' sampled, only nineteen required a specific course in the teaching of reading (1963, p. 156). Austin (1968) extended Conant's work on the state of the pre-service training of teachers. She reported that "completion of a course in the teaching of reading as a prerequisite for secondary school certification is virtually non-existent (p. 360)."

However, it is important to note that in a recent follow-up to their original study of teacher preparatory programs in reading, Morrison and Austin (1977) noted that post-secondary schools now require at least one course in reading. "Yet, despite advances, little progress appears to have been made in some areas . . .;" student teaching programs expend little effort to attract quality cooperating teachers (p. VIII). Recommending that persons who supervise student teaching be better informed, these authors called for colleges to appoint liaison persons to work directly with the local school system to recruit and train cooperating teachers.

The literature reported on staff development in reading has been infrequently based on empirical research. Studies cited have experienced problems that are common to investigations which measure teacher growth: the presence of uncontrolled or intervening variables over time (Moburg, 1972, p. 34). A question yet to be resolved is whether the typical in-service program in reading is amenable to study through an experimental or quasi-experimental design.

In a study of staff development in central New York State, Cunningham (1972) noted a general lack of significance on tests of content acquisition (of teachers) and classroom application. His initial investigation included a treatment condition with Stage Number One aimed at developing a group commitment to change among the participating teachers. A student attitude change favoring the Stage One group of teachers was reported. These findings should not be interpreted to mean that staff development is

significant in affecting change; rather, that the credibility of staff development was not advanced.

Four studies described data gathered primarily through questionnaires which were used to survey teacher groups *involved in pre and/or in service programs.* Adams (1964) identified twenty-eight aspects of reading instruction as areas of greatest need; these became a pool from which to select topics for staff development. Smith, Otto and Harty (1970) surveyed over three hundred teachers, discovering that programs which differentiated among teachers at different grade levels and with different terms of experience were desirable.

The 1973 survey results reported by Estes and Piercey added to the knowledge about the present status of professional teacher preparation in reading. Four states required training in reading for certification of all secondary teachers, four required training in reading for teachers in particular subject areas, and eight states were in the process of considering requirements (pp. 20-24). As a viable alternative to this condition, the authors suggested professional development by the teachers in practice (p. 21).

Few educators have examined staff development in reading through an investigation of key personnel best suited to do the job of effectively developing these programs. Indrisano (1969) attributed the continuity and cooperation she observed as a consultant in a district to the active involvement of principals, assistant superintendent and superintendent, along with teachers. Liette (1969) cited ability to work with groups, knowledge of the reading process and "almost innate" ability for organization, as qualifications necessary to lead a program. It may very well be that much hinges on the personnel who assume leadership roles in actual programs.

Implications

Past attempts to enhance professional development in reading have resulted in some changes, but have in general lacked a conceptual framework of the staff development process. Efforts at development have not fully considered the means by which the desired objectives for professional growth are to be achieved.

In-service or staff development processes are needed that promote change in programs commensurate with present and future education directions. Reading personnel involved in various leadership roles can no longer operate in a vacuum. Rather they must have training designed to help them function in a *dynamic situation.*

Several implications related to staff development process warrant the attention of reading consultants and directors who may be contemplating future staff development programs. These implications represent a synthesis of present opinion and research on staff development (Vacca, 1978). A consideration of them may make the difference between the merely "adequate" and the very "successful" program:

1. The personnel responsible for the development of staff in reading need

access to the administrators in key decision-making positions.

2. Staff development is best accomplished when persons likely to be affected by impending change are brought into the process as soon as possible.

3. Successful staff development is not likely to occur following the single application of any technique.

4. Typing development to program adoption and implementation is vital to insuring success.

5. Interactions between teachers and staff developers should emphasize the effect of process on product.

6. Quality analyses of district problems and available personnel should *precede* the selection of the staff developer.

Although not nearly as intriguing as the fictional Kenobi's "FORCE," the delineation of changing forces and their implications can move us closer to a better understanding of staff development. Change, as illustrated here, doesn't erupt, but emerges gradually from a perspective that is definitive, historical, and practical.

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