

**S**TUDENT LEARNING and development do not occur without teacher learning and development. Not any teacher development will do, though. The old flaws of weak and wayward staff development are well-known — no staff development, in which trial and error are assumed to be enough; staff development that’s all ideas and no implementation, i.e. the professor’s prerogative; staff development that is offered only off-site and is disconnected from practice; staff development that is excessively individual and has no follow-through with the team; and staff development that’s overly instrumental — all training and tricks with no purpose or reflection.

If these are the old enemies of staff development, today’s staff development has at least five new foes and flaws.

**1. PRESENTISM.** In some school and system cultures, staff development occurs largely to achieve short-term goals. Raising test scores and meeting Adequate Yearly Progress are the objectives. Students are reduced to numbers, cells, and charts. Teachers are so busy putting out fires, there’s no time to see what’s starting them. Long-term planning is a luxury, personal development an indulgent ideal. In this culture, the only things worth learning are those that deliver instant results: teaching to the test, practice and repetition, literacy and math to the exclusion of everything

else. Parents, politicians, and bureaucrats want results — and educators are prepared to mortgage their own and children’s futures to deliver them.

**2. AUTHORITARIANISM.** In authoritarian staff development systems, the underlying belief is that those with positional authority know what’s best, and they are going to make sure teachers comply with it. Authoritarian staff development takes place in cultures of certainty where authority figures determine what works and who says so. Professional learning is delivered, not developed. Staff developers become overbearing supernannies — they watch over every aspect of teachers’ performance, they use literacy coaching to ensure compliance with prescribed programs, and they put any teacher who questions or criticizes the scripted programs or test-driven environments on the “naughty chair” of unsatisfactory performance. Learning is reduced to training, walk-throughs become walkovers, and initiative accompanies integrity through the exit door of professional withdrawal.

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## THOUGHT LEADER

**Andy Hargreaves**



# Five flaws of staff development and the future beyond

**3. COMMERCIALISM.** Brian Rowan (2001) reminds us of a stark reality: School improvement is a multimillion-dollar business. So, too, is staff development. Textbooks and videos, hardware and software, training guides and consultancy support — these provide a lucrative living for many people, not all of them educators. In principle and often in practice, there is nothing wrong with making a profit. But more and more curriculum change is textbook-driven. When staff development and training sessions are contracted out to private organizations and speakers’ bureaus, education can become overcommercialized. When educators are asked to buy into something, it can easily mean they are selling out of something else — often values, integrity, and professionalism. Profit-driven publishers press hard for staff development authors to write only short and easy books with bullet points and big print that dilute substance and demean readers’ intelligence. Some private organizations too easily put profit before purpose.

**4. EVANGELISM.** Some staff development is taken over by evangelist staff developers who appeal to the emotional dependency of their followers. These evangelists are knowledgeable, articulate, personable, and charismatic. People call them gurus, and the gurus are able to find many disciples who believe in them and want to follow their path. But in *Feet of Clay* (Free Press, 1997), Anthony Storr warns us that gurus merely awaken the child that is latent in us all. Staff development should develop interdependence and critical engagement, not cult-like dependency on other people's ideas. When one person says he has a way to help all children learn, when he makes other educators feel they lack required skills and qualities, when the deficiencies are defined so broadly that everyone feels inadequate, and when the evangelist promises expensive training to fix everyone's failings, the system is falling prey to one of the five fundamental flaws of staff development.

**5. NARCISSISM.** Secondary teachers love their subjects, elementary teachers love their students, but staff developers, like professors, can be inclined to mainly love themselves. Some systems can fall prey to narcissistic staff developers who put glitzy

processes and glamorous performances before worthwhile and substantive products. In narcissistic staff development, style outstrips substance. Networks similarly attract those who enjoy the pleasure of interacting far more than exchanging and using ideas and

insights that really benefit kids. Indeed, energetic networkers can be out of their buildings so much that they never really bring the benefits of their networking home.

Successful staff development is

purposeful and sustainable. For the future, staff developers must avoid falling afoul of the five flaws of modern staff development. We would do well to follow outgoing NSDC Executive Director Dennis Sparks, who regards teachers as intelligent professionals who should be critically engaged in improving teaching, not blind followers of others' ideas. Sparks brings big ideas into the world of teaching and engages teachers, demanding and developing their professionalism, beginning with himself, in the interest of all students that staff developers ultimately serve.

If staff development in the future is to fulfill Sparks' dreams for the field, then:

- All teaching will become staff development, rather than staff development being appended to the end of an exhausting week or day. Teachers will learn from other teachers as they teach together instead of coping alone. They will learn from their students as they engage them in conversation about learning, and they will learn from evidence and data in real time, processing learning goals and targets for individuals and groups on handheld computers as they move around the class.

- Good teaching will once again become something that teachers create themselves, developing more of their own curriculum in their schools and districts, as the Finns already do in their municipalities and as the Chinese have made a national reform priority rather than implementing or delivering it according to the pace and prescriptions of governments or gurus.

- As in Finland — the world's highest performer in literacy at age 15 — teaching will become the country's most admired profession and the one that high school students most want to enter, not because of how much it is paid (though it is important to be paid enough), but because teachers

experience greater professional discretion, respect, and autonomy in superbly led schools that benefit from superior working conditions and smaller class sizes in a more highly taxed society that is persuaded to invest in the public good of its future society.

- Teachers will be the drivers, not the driven — using objective evidence to help them improve, but never undervaluing their own experiential knowledge because of it. Professional learning communities will not be places for devising quick-fix solutions to disturbing data exposed by test-score results, but places where wise and critical teachers engage with each other over their accumulated (though not unquestioned) knowledge using a wide range of data (not just test scores) to devise more powerful strategies that help all children learn.

- Improvement will be secured mainly by teachers helping teachers, districts helping districts, and schools helping schools, rather than through abundant opportunities being offered only to the affluent while intrusive interventions are inflicted upon the poor.

At its best, the future of staff development will be one of integrity, equity, innovation, and interdependence. Otherwise, domination, dependency, and divisiveness are all that beckon. The choices are vital — and critical, committed, courageous staff developers must strive to make the right ones.

#### REFERENCE

**Rowan, B. (2001).** The ecology of school improvement: Notes on the school improvement industry in the United States. *Journal of Educational Change*, 3(3/4), 283-314. ■

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