Team Training

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Who makes a good team trainer and what should a training team do?

Not so long ago, training sessions for teachers and other school staff mem-

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bers were set up like traditional elementary- and secondary-school classrooms, with an individual speaker performing for a group. As teachers, trainees were accustomed to performing solo in the so-called "self-contained classroom," so the arrangement seemed natural enough and was probably considered effective.

But in the last 25 years, the slow-but-steady trend in public education has been away from self-containment. Words such as cooperation and collaboration have come to represent an excellent framework within which students can learn while teachers and other professionals can pursue their roles. Studies of learning show that children and adults find that interactive and collaborative arrangements stimulate their understanding and productivity. In the last five or six years, sup-

ees who have attended sessions by teams of trainers. To fill that void, we developed a pilot instrument for use with educators in Florida and Minnesota (primarily principals and central-office supervisors and administrators) whom we recently trained in the program, Managing Productive Schools.

The work of the training team

As in the case of public-school team teaching, team training calls for training-team members to share in planning, actual work with trainees, and subsequent reflection and replanning.

The training team should allow plenty of time for advance preparation. That may involve producing materials, marshalling resources, making organizational and other decisions, agreeing on individual and joint responsibilities, and sharing information about intended relationships between perceived trainee needs and planned educational activities. Trainees will never see the work that goes into most of those activities, but they will experience its effects (for better or for worse) during the training sessions that follow, and will probably make their own inferences about the nature and quality of team preparation.

During the training session, trainees' attention will be directed at times to a single source of input or stimulation: a speaker or discussion leader, audio or video presentation, panel discussion, or similar "watch and listen" experience. During such activities, some members of the training team may not always be involved. Possibilities include

■ taking turns as presenters, with the non-presenter either observing (as part of a peer-coaching arrangement) or assisting by distributing materials, recording ideas on the easel pad, operating equipment, or taking notes on audience responses;

port has become widespread for team learning, cooperative teaching, and other ways of studying and working as partners. Whether as an effect of that trend or as a contributing factor, the experts who provide staff-development services to teachers have also begun to work as teams.

As far as we know, no research or survey instruments have been designed to collect reactions from train-

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Successful Team Trainers

The following is a tentative list of characteristics that may be related to successful team training. The list is in random order and is no doubt incomplete. When it is included in a study of team training, it may be possible to prioritize the items; some characteristics will be more valued by trainers than others.

Successful team trainers:

■ possess compatible but somewhat different personalities.

■ are obviously knowledgeable about the program material.

■ possess different skills, knowledge, and viewpoints that complement each other and add breadth or depth to the training.

■ function together efficiently and effectively.

■ capture and maintain the attention of the audience.

■ show mutual respect, courtesy toward each other, and acceptance of each other's contributions.

■ avoid "ego trips" at the expense of partners.

■ show strong evidence of advance planning (for example, content of presentation, charts, transparencies, and other resources is valid, up to date, relevant, and well-organized; materials, equipment and other reference resources are sufficient, readily available, and efficiently distributed; logistical arrangements dealing with such subjects as time, space, and furniture reflect good anticipation and adaptation).

■ relate well to trainees.

■ appear to be comfortable in their team-planning roles.

■ cause trainees to "stretch" intellectually and professionally.

■ equip trainees with useful, practical skills.

■ appear to find professional pleasure in training-team membership.

■ provide for a good flow of activity (time is effectively used; events follow each other in a smooth manner; energy level of trainees is well maintained; group needs, such as breaks, are recognized and respected; and progress toward goals is made in an orderly manner).

■ show strong management skills while directing the program (provide good instruction and task clarification, handle training activities efficiently, encourage and enable active participation, reinforce desired behaviors, handle negative responses effectively, provide feedback and correctives, and keep the group on task).

■ model behavior related to the aims of the training program.

■ managing events such as showing a film or videotape, administering a questionnaire, or monitoring small-group work or discussions.

After the session, the training team needs to "wrap up" what has happened and make plans for any further sessions. Here, the behaviors that are appropriate in the final stage of a clinical supervision cycle come into play. Goldhammer, Anderson, and Krajewski (*Clinical Supervision: Special Methods for the Supervision of Teachers*) described possible post-session activities:

■ sharing data and impressions concerning the events just experienced;

■ criticizing candidly and constructively the activities and behavior of team members;

■ discussing lessons learned about the trainees and their needs, responses, and contributions;

■ evaluating procedures and materials;

■ reshaping plans for the future.

Two heads are better than one

When two or more people collaborate in presenting and managing a training session, the frequent transfer of responsibility for up-front tasks—such as speaking and leading discussions—must happen in a natural, fluid, and graceful manner. Some groups have referred to that transfer as "baton-passing," using a track-meet metaphor that calls for a smooth, continuous flow of activity. Reluctance or the inability to give up the baton, unwillingness or apprehension about receiving it, awkward movements at the contact moment, or inappropriate adjustments of speed can lead to failure.

One of the chief advantages of training by teams is that colleagues can often supplement, emphasize, redirect, clarify, or enrich the contributions being made by the "up-front" team member, either during a pause or in the form of a graceful interruption. Interruptions probably occur less frequently, and appropriately so, in teams whose members are new to each other and have not yet developed a team spirit and sense of each other's tolerance levels. Interruptions are more acceptable, and more useful, after team members have become comfortable

with each other. Experienced team trainers value extending and enriching the content being presented more than they value their control of center stage.

Sometimes, team members feel compelled to interrupt when a lesson, demonstration, or activity has gone off-course or is not succeeding. It may be possible to wait until a natural or scheduled break to regroup and replan. But in some cases, they may find it necessary to interrupt the session to address the problem. Depending on the extent to which the up-front member seems to be aware of the problem, the other members must use tact and high-level communication skills while making the necessary interruption.
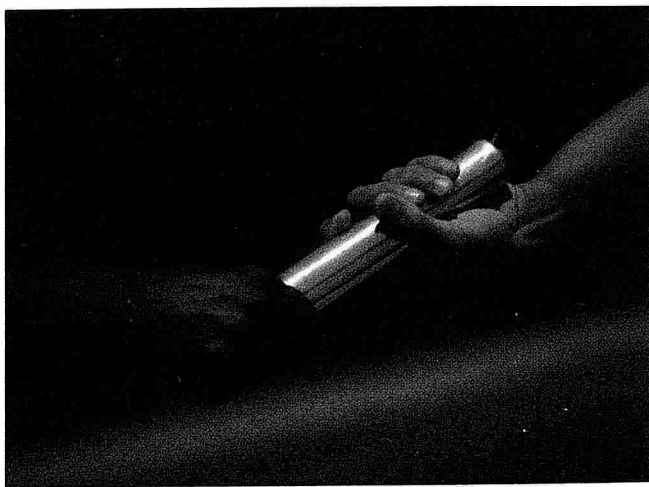
One advantage of team training is that two people can deal with problems with the clock, environment, materials, or substance more surely and easily than a "lone-wolf" trainer or consultant who is trying to master-mind and control the entire situation. Team members or observers should measure and examine such problem-solving skills as an aspect of team effectiveness.

Quite likely a major benefit to team trainers is the intellectual stimulation that accompanies sharing with and playing off of each other. Synergetic learning is at work: two can learn more together than the sum of what two can learn separately. And, the involvement of a talented colleague often causes each team member to perform at a high level. High-performance trainers lead to high-quality learning. Pfeiffer and Jones were among the first to comment on that advantage, and they concluded (in the *1975 Handbook for Group Facilitators*) that "co-facilitating a group is superior to working alone."

A bonus for trainees, and probably also for trainers, is that team training keeps the pace and overall flavor of the experience at a stimulating level. Trainers can generate more energy by introducing occasional light touches through bantering and good-humored asides (useful if a presenter gets too intense), and otherwise helping to break down barriers to learning.

Partners in learning

According to an old saying, a teacher who has been on the job for 30 years has simply repeated the first year's pedagogical behaviors 29 times. While generally untrue and unfair, the saying remind us of how easy and perhaps tempting it can be for educators to stick with the familiar and avoid taking risks. Many staff-development programs across the country fail to convince teachers to make the extraordinary effort required to keep pace with the ever-expanding professional knowledge base. And teachers have few opportunities to think critically about their own performances while encapsulated in self-contained classrooms.

Similarly, trainers, consultants, and others who work alone have less opportunity to keep themselves "up to speed" and to reflect creatively about their performances, day after day and year after year, than trainers who work on teams. The comparison between teachers and trainers is not altogether parallel, because trainers—as entrepreneurs whose survival depends on trainee response—receive a fair amount of praise, criticism, and suggestions from their clients. All the same, private introspection about one's performance is not likely to be as thorough as introspection fueled and enriched by dialogue with colleagues. In other words, a trainer is almost certain to learn more about effective training when his or her own skills, critical observations, and perceptions are combined with a colleague's.

Proceed with caution

Some teachers in the public schools have reservations or apprehensions about team teaching. Similarly, those who provide in-service staff development to teachers may initially be reluc-

tant to work with one or more partners. Some hesitate because they doubt that other consultants share their own value systems and knowledge bases; others fear that disagreement about fundamentals could create awkward or even damaging situations.

While some in-service programs are intentionally designed to offer contrasting viewpoints, much more often, team trainers should hold values and promote ideas that are compatible. Uncertainty about a fellow trainer's convictions and understandings could be a legitimate reason to proceed with caution. A trainer should select a partner or accept an invitation to join a training team only after becoming well enough acquainted with the other trainer or trainers, socially or professionally, so that concerns about compatibility are minimal.

But social compatibility should not be stressed at the expense of a viable professional relationship. Compatibility with respect to basic values, beliefs, and competencies is much more important in a team-training context than is feeling comfortable with each others' social qualities, personalities, and working styles. The choice of a team colleague for training teachers should be based on shared cherished convictions, especially about matters affecting children in school. Team trainers should possess talents and skills that complement and supplement each other's. That mix of talents and skills can benefit not only the trainees, but the training-team members as well.

Some trainers have problems sharing the limelight with colleagues. They find that performing alone is more satisfying to their egos; it makes them feel as though they'd accomplished more than in a team-training situation.

Such attitudes are similar to the feelings of some of the teachers they are training. Many teachers have known only the self-contained classroom, with total "ownership" of the students and total responsibility for what happens. They may resist getting involved in team teaching because they fear that pupils will not respond to them as warmly or in as many ways. In the early days of elementary-school team teaching, that feeling was sometimes referred to as "fear of fewer valentines," because some teachers were afraid that children would develop more affection and respect for other teachers on the team, especially those who were

younger, more attractive, more vivacious, smarter, more skillful, or more easygoing. Such fears proved to be greatly exaggerated; teachers have seldom felt that teaching as part of a team deprives them of the emotional satisfaction of working with children.

People who train teachers and other school staff members, while surely not concerned about valentines, also want to be appreciated and applauded. Sharing the platform has risk elements for them, too. Future studies of team training need to identify those elements more precisely and learn more about how the rewards and satisfactions of a team trainer compare with those of a soloist.

One possible advantage for the soloist is that in-service programs generally operate with a finite budget. Most programs cannot afford to provide "top dollar" for travel, fees, honoraria, and stipends to more than

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one consultant. When two speakers share an assignment, each may have to settle for half of the amount that a single speaker would have received.

Despite that drawback, many trainers find more professional fulfillment and success when they share the training role. Of course, successful training teams rely on certain attitudes, understandings, commitments, and skills. Many of those qualities will be identified accurately and thoroughly as more researchers examine team training. Such studies will help trainers assess their own strengths and limitations and, through increased self-understanding, learn to function successfully as training-team members.

The other side of the classroom

For the trainees who make up the training team's audience, problems may arise when the team fails either to do its job well or to exhibit behaviors ascribed to successful training teams (see sidebar).

Problems trainees may have:
■ difficulty adjusting to two or more different personalities;
■ difficulty adjusting to two or more different training or teaching styles;

■ trainers who don't have their act put together well;
■ confusing or contradictory messages or beliefs from training-team members;
■ one trainer not carrying his or her full share of the workload or responsibility;
■ "baton-passing" not skillfully handled;
■ interruptions, disagreements, and conflicts not gracefully handled;
■ apparent "power struggle" or competitive behavior between or among team members.

On the other side of the coin, trainees often feel positive about certain aspects of team training:
■ stimulus provided by two or more personalities;
■ stimulus provided by two or more training styles;
■ stimulus provided by observing a successful training team in action;
■ good model of dealing positively with different viewpoints or information;
■ good model of carrying appropriate workloads;
■ good model of "baton-passing";
■ good pacing as presenters alternate and re-energize the group;
■ good model of "graceful interruptions";
■ good model of cooperative behavior.

Working together

In team-training situations, trainers and trainees have experiences that differ from those of traditional, "solo" training presentations. As we learn more about those experiences and the perceived differences, we will be better able to test our tentative conclusion that the team approach is better, at least in many situations. A rich and extensive literature exists on effective work groups. Continuous exposure to and discussion of published materials on team training will be essential if training teams are to attain progressively higher levels of skill and satisfaction.

The self-contained classroom is inherently flawed; it denies opportunities for growth of pupils and teachers. We believe that the same lost opportunities are associated with solo-delivered staff-development programs. Our list of audience positives (above) offers good reasons for advocating team training; however, much more needs to be known. We hope this article will encourage the pursuit of further knowledge of team-training techniques and effectiveness. ▲

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