Preface

Written to seal a proverbial crack in contemporary professional development of educators, this book provides staff developers with the tools, methods, and insight to facilitate individualized teacher learning centered around school and student achievement goals in a group setting. This model is based upon self-directed learning and principles of action research. The primary staff development program can be taken in its entirety and implemented step by step as described, or it can be adapted to meet the unique needs of differing organizations. Overhead costs are very low, as local personnel can facilitate planning and delivery of training sessions.

INTENDED AUDIENCE

The book is written for those who implement professional learning programs for educators: district- and school-level administrators, staff developers, teacher-leaders, instructional coaches, university instructors. Staff development programs derived from this model are meant to be led by a competent, local facilitator as opposed to an outside expert or content-based instructor. Facilitators will gain a foundational understanding of the conceptual ideas behind the program as well as the academic and affective skill sets necessary to lead program activities.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Action research as described by Calhoun (1994) and self-directed learning as advocated by Knowles (1975; Knowles, Holton, & Swanson, 1998; Long & Associates, 1993) were combined to create the infrastructure of the model. Both share several characteristics. They draw on the benefit of addressing learning within a group setting while permitting individual pursuits. Each provides adults an opportunity to pursue learning consistent with their specific needs and interests. Each is problem or life based, an important need for adults. Unlike pure self-directed learning, though, action research inherently provides for evaluation of learning. The benefit of using principles of action research in self-directed learning in staff development, as opposed to utilizing pure action research, is the opportunity for

learning in formats other than a research design. By combining action research with self-directed methods, individual needs and preferences of teachers can be met while addressing organizational demands for accountability and improved student achievement.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The framework of the individualized professional development model was drawn from several concepts. Adult learning theory provided the rationale. Self-directed learning dictated the format. Action research presented a method of accountability. Cognitive processing generated by reflection offered a vehicle for deepening participant learning. And a group format created opportunities for professional dialogue and peer support. When implemented in concert, the activities derived from these component pieces work quite well in developing educators' professional knowledge and skill.

ORGANIZATION OF TEXT

Chapter 1 provides the rationale for the model. Chapter 2 lays the foundation for structuring the model's basic professional development program. Chapter 3 explains the guiding structure for individualizing learning—the learning plan. Chapters 4 through 7 delve comprehensively into facilitating the basic professional development program, with a focus on aligning teacher learning with student achievement goals. Chapters 8 and 9 describe procedures for incorporating the self-directed model into a larger school reform program or tailoring it to address organizational needs. Chapter 10 relates typical participant responses, and Chapter 11 reviews a concluding set of "do's and do nots" for program success.

SPECIAL FEATURES

Because the book was designed as a "How To" manual, several instructional components are included:

1. Step-by-step directions for designing and implementing a program, with hints for success

2. Detailed agendas for implementing the basic staff development program

3. Mini-lesson directions and materials

4. Participant examples of learning plans

5. Reproducible learning plan template

6. Reproducible materials for use in a larger reform model professional development program

7. Typical teacher commentary in response to the program

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

A project that reaches the magnitude of becoming a book is never completely nurtured by a single mind. And this book, in its various incarnations, has grown from the support and pruning of a wide variety of individuals. University professors, administrators, teachers, peer reviewers, friends—all have made critical contributions that led to publication of this work.

Jo Blase encouraged me to pursue doctoral work in educational leadership at the University of Georgia. The first spark of inspiration for this model was born in her class as I sought a way to tie what we know about adult learning and effective staff development to a practical delivery model. Through her guidance, and that of Joseph Blase, I delved deeply into the theoretical background and research base necessary to build the model and study teachers' experiences with it. Lew Allen, Laura Bierema, Karen Watkins, and Sally Zepeda, all of the University of Georgia and members of my doctoral committee, provided invaluable support in developing the model's conceptual components.

After its development, teachers' experiences with the program had to be studied. I am grateful to the teachers and administrators at Richards Middle School for their willingness to participate in the inaugural run of the program. As my supervisors in the roles of university professor, assistant principal, curriculum coordinator, and instructional coach, I am grateful to the following for the free rein allowed me in implementing versions of the model: the University of Georgia Department of Education Leadership, Steve Miletto, Tommy Richardson, Harvey Franklin, Carole Hicks, and Jimmy Stokes. Without their trust and support, there would have been no further development of the model's applications.

The multitude of teachers who participated in various runs of the model offered a highly critical contribution to the professional development programs—feedback and reflections on their experiences, what worked and what did not, and how to improve the program to better serve them. As well, anonymous peer reviewers from across the country, coordinated by Corwin Press, contributed to refinement of the book and its focus on education's ultimate goal: student achievement. Without this broad input, the book would have fallen short in its potential usefulness, application, and effectiveness.

Finally, I would like to thank my friends and family for sharing in this journey with me. Angela Patrick and Lamont Pearson both spent late