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New Approaches to The Improvement of Instruction*

Improving teaching has been like the weather — everyone talks about it but few have done anything about it. But all that is changing now. New concepts of instructional improvement are being advanced, and new programs and organizations are being established to aid faculty members in their teaching roles.

Academic tradition decrees that good teaching results from hiring good people and getting out of their way; this represents a “do nothing” approach of dubious merit, because even “good people” need institutional support. The conventional kinds of resources which support the development of faculty have been to help professors upgrade and up-date their knowledge of their academic specializations. Sabbatical leaves, travel to meetings of disciplinary associations, and research support have been typical mechanisms to achieve this purpose. It has been an article of faith among academics that just as training to conduct research in one’s academic discipline, certified by a Ph.D. degree, prepares one to teach, the acquisition of additional knowledge and the conduct of research improves teaching. It is obvious that an instructor must know what he is talking about, but it is equally clear that scholarly competence does not automatically translate into teaching effectiveness. Other common approaches to instructional improvement emanating from academic folklore include reducing the teaching load, reducing class size, providing more assistants, and in general making the faculty member’s job easier. These efforts to make the professor’s job easier may be desirable, but there is little reason to think they will make his instruction any better. None of these traditional concepts enjoys much support from leaders of higher education today.

*A more extended discussion of this topic may be found in the author’s forthcoming book, *Toward Faculty Renewal: Advances in Faculty, Instructional, and Organizational Development*, to be published by Jossey-Boss this fall.

On-going reports can also be found in the *Newsletter* from the McGill Centre for Learning and Development. — *Ed.*

The new view of instructional improvement focuses attention directly on the instructional roles of faculty members. New programs seek to help faculty members achieve such diverse objectives as clarify values, increase knowledge, improve skills, enhance sensitivities, redesign courses, improve relationships, use new methods, and acquire competencies as they relate to teaching, their central professional role. In-service programs consisting of seminars, workshops, instructional experiences, individual and group projects, and consultations are helping faculty members enhance and extend their instructional competencies and increase their satisfaction with their work.

But working directly on the improvement of instruction is not enough. Because professional and personal concerns are closely intertwined, the attitudes, values, and life styles of individuals affect their work; and the accomplishments, satisfactions, and frustrations of work affect other aspects of their lives. Thus, the concept of instructional improvement embraces the personal arena and implies assisting faculty members to understand and cope with the various other parts of their lives.

Instructional improvement also includes organizational components. Individuals who seek to improve their teaching may need understanding, acceptance, and assistance from their colleagues; some changes in courses require a supportive departmental and institutional environment; self-development efforts need to be recognized with rewards in the advancement system; and faculty growth depends on administrative leadership and institutional resources. So the concept of instructional improvement also implies organizational development and renewal.

New organizations are being created at many colleges and universities to implement this contemporary concept of instructional improvement. They take many forms. They often involve the creation of centers, offices, divisions, programs or projects which provide services variously referred to as Instructional Development, Faculty Development, Professional Development, Educational Development, Organizational Development, Learning Resources, or Teaching Improvement. Such offices include both large and small scale efforts; they range from rather informal to highly formal programs; and they engage in a wide diversity of specific activities. What is more, they are obtaining a good deal of faculty support. One director of an instructional resource center reflected, "It would have been heresy a few years ago to suggest to the faculty that they could be helped to teach better. But now that suggestion is accepted more easily."

The contemporary approach to instructional improvement may be better understood by an examination of the assumptions that underlie the work of new programs. A close reading of the documents — proposals, reports, brochures, evaluations — emanating from these pro-

grams reveals many widely held assumptions. Although no program necessarily holds all of these assumptions and many fail to make their assumptions explicit, the following list contains most of the important components of the new concept.

1. Faculty members are the most important educational resource of a college or university, and just as material resources must be given special care and attention to enhance their value, so must the talents, interests, and skills of faculty be systematically cultivated.
2. Teaching is the primary, though by no means the only, professional activity of most faculty members. A major reason why instructors choose to work in a college or university is their commitment to teaching, and most faculty members are interested in excelling in this primary professional activity.
3. Scholarship and research — another major professional activity of many faculty members — need not be antithetical to effective teaching. Ways can and should be found by which research enriches and complements teaching.
4. Teaching is much neglected by academic tradition. In most schools this neglect is not due to the lack of interest in teaching among individual faculty members. Rather, the neglect can be traced to factors pervading the general academic culture, such as the lack of preparation for teaching roles during graduate education, the relative absence of in-service education which is found in other professions, and the paucity of academic policies (e.g. promotion, salary, tenure) which provide positive support and reward for effective teaching.
5. Although there is little systematic evidence about how good the quality of teaching and learning actually are in most institutions, there is a general feeling, shared by many within and outside academia, that it may be improved.
6. Improving the quality of instruction requires working with administrators and students — perhaps even members of the larger community — as well as with faculty members. All of these groups have legitimate interest in and responsibility for making the instructional program work well.
7. Just as faculty members receive little preparation for their instructional roles, administrators have little training for the leadership, policy formulation, administrative, and managerial roles of their work. Department chairpeople, deans, vice presidents, and presidents — no less than faculty members — need to develop and, furthermore, they need to encourage and support the growth of the individuals in their charge.
8. Teaching is a complex set of attitudes, knowledge, skills, motivations, and values. The improvement of instruction and learning requires an awareness of the complexities involved in faculty,

students, and institutions and hence the avoidance of simplistic solutions.

9. Effective teaching results in effective learning.
10. There is no single model of effective teaching or learning, and proposals advanced as panaceas with a doctrinaire approach are suspect and to be avoided.
11. There is great diversity among students. Their various learning styles are based on differences in ability, interest, educational background, future aspirations, and personality orientations, and these different learning styles call for different kinds of learning experiences.
12. Faculty members, too, are a diverse lot. They vary on such key factors as age, field of specialization, teaching experience, and educational philosophy. Because diversity is one of the greatest strengths of any faculty, every effort should be made to assist individual faculty members in ways which are consistent with their diverse values, needs, and personal styles and which are consistent with student needs and institutional goals.
13. Efforts to improve teaching by imposing unreasonable restrictions or demands on faculty members are not productive. Rather, lasting change can only be brought about by supporting and reinforcing positive efforts of faculty members. Intrinsic interest rather than extrinsic demand is what leads individuals to seek improvement. When external motivation is used by faculty development programs, the carrot — not the stick — is the preferred form of incentive.
14. Participation in faculty development activities is on a voluntary basis. The willing involvement of faculty members and others in the various programs is seen as a necessity if enduring improvement is to be obtained.
15. Every institution contains many persons with expertise and experience which may be included in teaching improvement programs. Faculty members with the ability to assist their colleagues are generally willing, often eager, to do so. These people may be utilized to develop a rich pool of readily available talent which may be tapped by individuals with various needs.

These several assumptions give the flavor of most faculty and instructional development programs. Some of these assumptions have empirical aspects, but few permit clear cut scientific testing. They rather provide the intellectual substratum upon which many testable hypotheses and action programs rest. And they do point the way toward a variety of specific activities that are found in professional development programs.

Although all instructional improvement programs are designed to improve the quality of teaching and learning, there is considerable diversity among them. Different kinds of programs have different

foci, draw from different intellectual traditions, make different analyses of what ails teaching and learning, and prescribe different solutions. The major variations may be labeled *instructional development*, *faculty development*, and *organizational development*, each of which will be discussed briefly below.

instructional development

The focus of this program is on the development of conditions of learning, usually courses and curricula. The intellectual roots for the program lie in systems theory, educational psychology, curriculum theory, learning theory, media and technology, and evaluation and statistics.

The instructional developer assists a faculty member, or a team of teaching faculty, to specify measurable cognitive and affective objectives of student learning; design learning activities and materials relevant to the objectives; measure student accomplishment; and modify the instructional sequences in light of the evaluation.

One of the major strengths of this approach is that it enables the faculty to focus on the outcomes of instruction, providing objective data concerning students' learning. In addition, the objectives, learning experiences, and evaluation of students' attainment of objectives are more systematically related thus increasing the probability that the objectives will be attained.

Because it is easier to apply these concepts and techniques to a structured discipline, instructional development tends to be more readily accepted by faculty members in the natural sciences, professional fields, and the more structured of the social sciences. Although the faculty in the humanities and the softer social sciences generally are less attracted to the systematization of their courses, there are numerous cases where this approach has been profitably used in those fields as well.

Although many small schools, such as the University of Redlands and Azusa Pacific College in Southern California, have instructional development programs, the most renowned programs are found in larger institutions (such as Syracuse, Florida State, Michigan State, Indiana and Brigham Young Universities), that have available specialized technical expertise in educational psychology, media, computer, and evaluation. Many of these schools produce instructional packages, either modules or entire courses, which may be adopted elsewhere.

faculty development

The focus of this type of program is the faculty member, rather than

the courses that he teaches. In this case, the intellectual roots lie in developmental and social psychology and psychiatry. There are two related emphases in most faculty development programs, development as a professional, primarily as a teacher, and development as a person. Because teaching is the primary professional activity of most faculty members and because faculty generally have not been prepared for their teaching roles, the major focus of these programs is development of the faculty member as a teacher.

Many different kinds of activities are carried on with the express purpose of helping faculty improve their teaching. The alternatives depend upon different analyses of what ails teaching and the kind of solution that each calls for, and include the following.

1. *Knowledge about higher education.* It is commonly asserted that faculty members lack knowledge about education and that they need to be exposed to the professional literature and diverse practices of higher education. Some faculty development programs help faculty to acquire this knowledge by inviting lecturers to analyze contemporary educational issues, organizing formal and informal discussion groups among interested faculty members, acquiring a collection of books, articles and reports, publishing a newsletter, or working with interested departments to incorporate substantive educational discussions into their faculty meetings. The content of these sessions varies widely depending on the interests of the participants, but it may include such general topics and themes as the history and philosophy of higher education or the rights and responsibilities of members of the academic profession, as well as topics more directly related to the teaching function of faculty members, such as innovations in instruction, alternative faculty-student relationships, and research findings about factors that do, and do not, have an influence on teaching and learning. Frank Vattano's seminars at Colorado State University and Stanford Ericksen's newsletter, *Memo to the Faculty*, at the University of Michigan are examples of these practices.
2. *Teaching skills.* Some critics maintain that faculty members lack various skills involved in effective teaching both in and out of class, and several programs are directed to assist faculty acquire these skills and sensitivities. Workshops, video-taping of teaching episodes, and classroom visitations have been used to help faculty develop specific communication skills such as listening or questioning; develop sensitivities to such factors as affective tone and interpersonal dynamics in a classroom; improve common instructional strategies such as preparing and delivering lectures and leading discussion groups; and adopt new instructional approaches such

as preparing learning contracts or serving as resource persons. At Harvard University, William Perry and Kiyu Morimoto have taped scores of classes and use the audio recordings in workshops for graduate teaching assistants to generate discussion and enhance awareness about the dynamics of student-teacher interactions.

3. *Feedback about their own teaching behavior.* Most people in any walk of life have only partial knowledge about how they are seen by others, and some faculty believe that they might become better teachers if they had accurate and useful feedback from their students, colleagues and administrators about their classroom behavior. It is not uncommon these days for faculty members to have students rate them on general qualities that are presumed to be indicative of effective teaching. Other techniques have also been used. Faculty members have recorded their classes with either video or audio tapes and have discussed the tapes with students and/or colleagues; rating scale items have been developed by individuals and/or departments which reflect specific concerns of those involved in teaching; and rating forms have been regarded as diagnostic devices which identify areas of strength and weakness and used to specify specific follow-on activities by which faculty members may improve their performance. The work of Robert Wilson and Lynn Wood at the University of California, Berkeley and Donald Hoyt at Kansas State University focus on the evaluation of teaching performance.
4. *Affective development.* Some critics argue that the main problem with teaching is that faculty have not examined their attitudes, values and assumptions with respect to what constitutes effective teaching, desirable relationships with students and productive relationships with their colleagues. Since these attitudes have often been derived from the faculty members' previous training, they may work in opposition to the needs of their current students, and even to their own satisfaction. Several scholars who have researched the academic culture have remarked about how lonely, frustrated, and alienated individual faculty members are. Some institutions, such as those in the Kansas City Regional Council for Higher Education, have held workshops for faculty to explore their attitudes and values about teaching and learning. Various exercises are available for use in task-oriented sensitivity groups. Simulation and games, for example, allow faculty members to enhance their awareness by playing new roles. In addition, having faculty members interview each other is a technique that has been used to help them plunge

into a meaningful dialogue about affectively toned aspects of the teaching-learning process.

5. *Awareness of other disciplines and the community.* A common charge leveled against academics is that they are encapsulated in narrow academic specialization and unaware of important relationships with other fields of knowledge and of the realities of the larger world. In order to promote contact among faculty members from different disciplines, cross disciplinary seminars have been held, various kinds of inter-disciplinary programs have been formed, team teaching has been encouraged, and experimental colleges have been created.

Macalester College in Minnesota, for instance, has initiated an Auditor-Consultant program in which two faculty members from related disciplines are brought together in an unusual relationship. One person attends a course of his colleague, suggests ways in which the content and methods of his own discipline could apply to the course and tutors the colleague in some important trends in his own discipline. Then they change roles and concentrate on a course taught by the other person. Efforts to acquaint faculty with realities in the larger community include conversation groups of faculty members and citizens from different walks of life, part-time faculty assignment in community organizations and institutions, and programs to provide career counseling for students with community and faculty involvement. These programs are designed to broaden the talents of faculty members beyond the specialties of their academic disciplines, thereby to enhance their effectiveness in teaching and advising students.

6. *Learning rather than teaching.* Some analysts assert that the problem is not to improve the teaching of faculty members but the learning of students. The implication is that teaching may be improved if faculty become more sensitive to the learning styles and needs of the increasingly diverse student population and employ teaching strategies which are responsive to them. Distribution of written materials, seminars, and workshops which feature cognitive, affective, and skill development components have been devised to acquaint faculty with the needs of students who vary on such factors as intellectual ability, social background, learning style, and personality orientation. Faculty have also been introduced to techniques designed to individualize instruction, including self-paced learning, independent study, curricular contracts, and criterion referenced evaluation. Benjamin Green and his colleagues at Georgetown University's Center

for Personalized Instruction is an example of this kind of program.

It is obvious that the attitudes, values, and life styles of individuals affect their work, and that the accomplishments, satisfactions, and frustrations of work affect other aspects of their lives. The recent concern over alternative life styles and the prevalence of "mid-career crises" suggests that many faculty members might benefit from discussions with each other as well as with men and women from other walks of life about a wide variety of personally relevant topics. The meaning of work, alternative conceptions of the good life, leisure and its opportunities, family dynamics, adult developmental tasks, and emergent life styles are issues which confront all thinking people, and faculty members could share their views and experiences and learn from one another. Although these groups could easily take on a therapeutic flavor and be led by a facilitator, they can also be conducted on a cognitive basis run by and for the benefit of laymen who are searching for ways to improve the quality of their lives.

organizational development

The focus of this approach is the organization within which faculty, students, and administrators work. The intellectual roots for this approach are found primarily in organizational theory and group dynamics, and because the application of organizational development has received its greatest impetus in the worlds of business and primary and secondary education, it has become intertwined with concepts of both management and education.

One aspect of this approach is the development of administrative and interpersonal competencies among leaders of the organization. Central administrators, department chairpersons, and faculty who play leadership roles are seldom prepared to administer or manage organizations, and they can benefit by learning a variety of concepts, skills, and techniques relevant to this professional responsibility. The Office of Staff and Organizational Development at Miami-Dade Community College and the Institute for Research and Training in Higher Education at the University of Cincinnati hold discussions, workshops, and consultations to help those persons responsible for operating the organization a) clarify their attitudes, values, and assumptions regarding the management of the organization, b) identify various leadership styles and develop those consistent with their personalities and the needs of the organization, c) clarify and establish organizational goals, d) design procedures and practices to achieve the goals, e) assess the extent to which the goals are realized, f) plan and conduct meetings effectively and expeditiously, and g) manage conflict among individuals in a creative and productive manner.

Such competencies among campus leaders are expected to foster an environment which is supportive of teaching and learning, and such competencies among faculty members could have transfer value to the management of classroom environments and make them more conducive to learning.

A second aspect of organizational development is the fostering of policies which support teaching improvement. When instructional improvement programs are established, one of the first things that is encountered is the fact that policies within the organization are not entirely supportive of such activities. If any of the above programs are to succeed, institutions must have policies which provide positive support for faculty efforts, since in the long run, these programs will succeed only if faculty and other individuals have the assurance that they may advance themselves through their efforts. What this means for most colleges and universities is that they must make sure their policies — particularly with respect to hiring, promotion, salary, tenure, release time, and leaves — give adequate weight to teaching effectiveness and recognize improvement efforts.

Even this cursory survey indicates that a wide range of new instructional improvement programs is putting the new concept of instructional improvement into practice. The programs have different foci, derive from different intellectual roots, and engage in different activities, but they all seek to improve instruction through in-service programs for faculty members. Although it is too early to expect any kind of rigorous evaluation of their achievements, these programs represent promising new approaches to the improvement of instruction.