Part 3

Taking Up the Task
Changing Schools Through Staff Development

"I'm sick and tired of these professors that Don brings in every year to 'inspire' us on our in-service days," George said. "The next day I feel like I've been involved in a hit-and-run accident. They breeze in here and then just as quickly breeze out. It's the same thing at the teachers' conventions. We have these wonderfully inspirational keynotes with little relevance to what I do in the classroom, and then lots of workshops on classroom strategies. Even if I do get excited about an idea, I often don't really knew how to put it into practice."

"I know what you mean," said Lisa. "I did get excited about cooperative learning several years ago, and I tried it for a few weeks, but it seemed to take so much more energy to set it up that I sort of ran out of steam. It didn't seem like anyone else was trying it, so I had no one to talk to."

"Did you really? I tried it myself and I thought I was the only one doing it. We could have talked about it together. Maybe we would still be using it!"

"Come on, George, when do we ever talk about that sort of thing around here? We rarely discuss classroom activities as a staff."

"But, Lisa, maybe we could try it again. Maybe some other teachers would be interested. Perhaps we could set up a group to talk about it, sort of like a study group. We used to have something like that about fifteen years ago. I wonder what happened to the practice?"

"Well, do you think Don would support us in this? He seems to be a bit keener lately on us trying out some new things. Maybe he would support our efforts?"

If Christian schools are to improve teachers will need to develop opportunities to engage in learning themselves. If a Christian school is to be a vital, enriching community of learning, it ought to expect and honor the growth of its teachers and principals. Certainly, the school exists not for the teachers but for the students. But the students will derive the most benefit when the working environment is not only congenial but also stimulating for the teachers. It is not possible "to create the conditions for productive learning when those conditions do not exist for education personnel" (Sarason 1999, I3).  

Perhaps the principal's response to George and Lisa would be something like this:

"I've been hoping for this for same time," said Don. "I'd be happy to support you. But I'd rather see a slightly larger group working together. What about Mary Anne and Sheryl? Would they be interested in joining you? See if you can find a time in the week when two or three of you are not teaching. Then I'll cover an additional period adjoining that one by getting in substitutes, and maybe teaching one of the classes myself. I would like to get back in the classroom a bit more anyway. I think I've become out of touch in many ways. I've talked to several other principals recently who have described the benefits they've experienced in teaching classes for some of their teachers so that they could work together planning an integral unit. Why don't you get a group together and then jot down a short proposal so I can share what's happening with the board?"

Our argument throughout the book has been that community is central to the faithful flourishing of the Christian school as an agent of God's grace. In the professional development of teachers, we believe that personal and communal growth are essential for staff development. Teachers must continue to learn personally and communally in order for them to encourage learning in students. In this chapter, we will argue that, in addition to a teacher's personal growth, collegiality -- professional communal relationships -- is essential to communal staff development. Two approaches, collegial study groups and collaborative action research, are presented as avenues that schools can employ to enhance learning for teachers and consequently for students.
Personal Professional Growth

Teachers are called to a life of discipleship, to proclaim the creative and redemptive work of Jesus Christ in their teaching. As teachers allow their hearts and minds to be transformed by the Spirit of truth, they will experience a renewal that provides them with grace and courage to fulfill their calling. It is because we are sought and known and loved by Jesus Christ that we become capable of seeking and knowing and loving students and colleagues in our teaching and learning (Palmer 1983, 113).

Teachers must look for and be provided with opportunities for developing their own gifts. We do not fully know what our gifts are when we first begin to teach. In our interactions with students and colleagues we gradually became aware of our strengths and weaknesses. As we learn to teach we must continue to expand our ways of knowing about teaching. We must set goals for our own development and look for and design learning experiences that will stimulate our own professional growth.

Teachers can use various professional opportunities to develop their gifts. Participating in professional conferences in one's area of specialization (both inside and outside the Christian community) brings teachers into contact with colleagues facing similar challenges and difficulties. Visiting other schools provides teachers with different approaches to teaching particular courses or topics. Becoming involved with government or institution-sponsored task forces enriches teachers with opportunities to reflect on their own framework and deepen their convictions. Personal growth also occurs as teachers commit themselves to revising units that they currently teach or reexamining the content and approaches used in one or more courses.

The school is often conceived as a technical delivery system. Neither the teacher nor the student is expected to exercise much judgment in the process. The curriculum is seen as setting the boundaries to teachers' interest in their students, who are measured in terms "of their relative success or failure in assimilating the lesson plan" (Schön 1983, 331).

The curriculum distinguishes the school from other settings in which education occurs. It is a systematic and dynamic program of instruction, and ongoing reflection on it is crucial to the professional growth of teachers. It should not constrain teachers' relationships with their students, because it is the curriculum rather than the students that is being tested as to whether it most effectively promotes learning for responsive discipleship. It will be in this curriculum-testing that the judgment of the teacher will be realized, refined, and developed. Christian Schools geared to responsive discipleship will enable teachers and principals to be actively engaged in learning to teaching as a continuous process.

Schön (1983,39-40) suggests that teaching is often thought of as a process of problem-solving: decisions are made by selecting the means thought to be best suited to achieving ends that have already been established. But there is really a prior step, that of problem-setting, in which we define the decision to be made, the ends to be achieved, the means that may be chosen. In planning, teachers merge their varying concerns in the curriculum, deciding what will count as meaningful in teaching and learning, and what will and will not count as progress.

In the Christian school, teachers will have the primary goal of setting biblically-inspired problems. To be in the world but not of it always implies a disjunction: we continually face the question of how we should feel uncomfortable in contexts where we are most tempted to feel at home. We are called to question the accepted patterns and beliefs in the light of Scriptures. By the very nature of teaching, teachers are called to articulate what many others may leave implicit. We are called to actively shape knowledge where others may be tempted to take it for granted. It is in this very problem-posing that Christian teachers have constant opportunities for spiritual growth, which must be at the heart of our professional growth.

Communal Staff Development

Staff development involves more that personal professional growth. The failure of individual teachers to sustain innovations verifies the need to go beyond individual growth. Similarly, the failure of curriculum dissemination models alerts us to the inadequacy of a merely structural approach. Growth will need to be both personal and communal in nature. Although often professionally isolated from one another, teachers in Christian schools differ from other teachers in one important respect: they share a common faith, they acknowledge one Lord. Their common faith provides a basis for working out goals for learning that direct their teaching. The challenge that Christian schools face is to allow a common confessional bond to grow into collegiality. The spiritual bond that unites teachers personally will then become the basis
for mutually supportive collaboration in day-to-day teaching and learning. Collegiality does not imply uniformity of practice. Rather, it consists of teachers communally working out what it means to be faithful to the Lord’s purposes for learning.

Research into effective professional development programs has identified a number of significant features (Fullan 1982, 286-87; Australia 1988). The focus of staff development should be on the day-to-day tasks faced by teachers. The school setting has a pivotal role in the development and application of ideas, the practice and sharpening of skills, and the critical appraisal of curriculum. Teachers need to relate new knowledge to their career and classroom experiences and to apply and critically evaluate new practices in their own contexts. They should be involved in planning and control of the program. Teachers have significant roles as resource persons at both the one-to-one level and the formal level of workshops or courses.

A program of staff development should include the following components: theory, demonstration, practice, feedback, and application with coaching (Joyce and Showers 1981). A variety of formal and informal elements should be coordinated: training workshops and sharing workshops, teacher-teacher interaction, one-to-one assistance and meetings. If staff development is to be successful, follow-through is crucial. A series of sessions, with intervals in which teachers have the chance to try things out, is much more powerful than even the most spectacular “hit-and-run” workshop. In this process, teachers should be provided with ready access to relevant internal and external support services.

Teacher commitment to staff development should be supported by creating deliberate opportunities and incentives for career-long participation in professional learning. The interest and support of principals is vital to maintaining a healthy climate for staff development. In many ways the principal is the head learner -- experiencing, displaying, modeling, and celebrating what is hoped and expected of teachers and students (Barth 1990, 46).

Institutional change and professional development are closely related. Both should be part of the ongoing growth of schools. Boards, schools, principals, and teachers need to commit themselves to the pursuit of personal and collective professional learning. Because the goal of professional development is to improve student learning, the impact of the program on students (as well as on teachers and on the broader school context) should be conscientiously evaluated.

Fullan (1982, 87) suggests that two of these points are crucial. First, "the absence of follow-up work after workshops is without doubt the greatest single problem in contemporary professional development." This is intimately connected with his second observation: professional development will require the involvement of far more than just those people responsible for organizing the program. What is required is "systems of peer-based interaction and feedback among teachers combined with external assistance." In other words, it is only when collegial relations between teachers become a normal part of the school culture that effective change will be possible.

Finally, *innovation-focused* and *action research* modes of professional development are complementary approaches and both should be employed in the school. *Innovation-focused* professional development is a program to facilitate the introduction of a new approach to teaching (such as cooperative learning) or a new program (such as Philosophy for Children). *Action research* staff development is an approach that takes the classroom concerns of the teacher as a starting point and focus. The former involves bringing in an idea from the outside, the latter works from the inside out. Neither one excludes the other; indeed, both would encourage two-way movement across the boundary between the school and the outside world.

If these two approaches are conceived as means of building collegiality, with a focus on concerns that teachers have about their daily practice, they can become a significant part of the school culture and a powerful force for its ongoing reformation.

We have previously discussed peer associates (chap. 4) and teacher planning teams (chaps. 8 and 10) as important practices for teachers working together in a school. Here we will first discuss collegial study groups as a way of learning about particular innovations and of becoming more reflective about classrooms. Second, we will consider ways in which a school can organize for collaborative action research.

Collegial study groups and action research will enable teachers to begin to practice collaborative procedures and to do so over an extended period. These approaches are considered as models of how teachers may work jointly in the resolution of educational problems and as incentives for more pervasive institutional change. Successful implementation of these staff development practices will provide the impetus for an ongoing revitalization of the culture of a school.

**Collegial Study Groups**
"Well, Lisa, how do you think our group is going? We've managed to look at quite a bit of material on cooperative learning now, and I feel much more confident about it."

"So do I, but I'm wondering whether it might not be time to go a step further. There's been the five of us involved, but I think we could do a great deal for the life of the school if we could get more people interested."

George agreed, but he remembered all too well his last few years of feeling depressed about teaching to think that there was any point in coercing teachers into a study group. He knew that the study group had been a great help to him in helping to refresh his vision, but he knew also that he had been ready to take the step. "Tell you what, Lisa, why don't we identify a few time slots before school on one or two days of the week, and see how many people would be interested in signing up to meet once a month."

As it turned out, George and Lisa were surprised by the enthusiasm of their colleagues. Within a few days, more than twenty (out of ninety) teachers had volunteered. Because time was the selecting factor, the groups were quite varied in their composition. Each contained teachers from a wide range of disciplinary backgrounds, teaching levels, and experience.

"I'm really excited about what's happening," Don said to them. "But I think we have to make sure we get off to a good start. I want us to delay until after our next professional development day, and I'd like to spend the whole day focusing on some team-building, process-oriented activities. I don't want to co-opt the study groups by any means, but I want to show that you have my full support. I'm sure that's important. I would like to see us develop a coordinated, long-term plan, but I'm willing to allow the groups themselves to take a large part of the initiative for this. Congratulations!"

The initial day was a great success, giving the teachers a sense of being supported by the administration at the same time as they had the chance to sort out some basic issues and approaches to their work as groups. Over the months that followed, each of the four groups took on its own identity, developing particular concerns about the life of the school.

These were not only study groups but also peer support groups. As well as exploring particular concepts and materials, each teacher developed a professional growth plan. But most importantly, they learned to be able to talk with each other about teaching (Paquette 1987, 39). Rather than focusing on personalities, whether teachers or students, they became accustomed to talking about their teaching practice. This was a habit that carried over into the staff room, so that over the months there was a subtle but steady shift in conversation, away from gripes, sports, and recipes.

"You know, Lisa," George commented, "how we started out talking about cooperative learning and the value of support when you're trying out a new approach? Don't you think there's something of an irony in what's happening now? People haven't just influenced each other in the way they teach and what they teach within the same subject areas, there's been a cross-fertilization across subjects. We started out trying to get the kids to work more cooperatively, and now we find we're the ones cooperating!"

Don had noticed this too. A few years ago, he had looked at the integral units being developed by some Christian schools, and thought how impossible that would be to achieve at his own school, except of course in the elementary school, where at least some teachers had developed several unit studies. But now he wondered. Perhaps the next step would be to get his teachers into interdisciplinary teams; the correlation that was becoming more apparent in their teaching could then maybe give way to some real integrated units and who knows, maybe real integrality somewhere down the road (Meichtry 1990, 11-12).

**Collaborative Action Research**

Staff development can also occur through incorporating collaborative action research into one's teaching. This is an approach that is compatible with a biblical view of knowing in many respects. It has three main features. First, it is collaborative, a communal approach that recognizes the contribution that can be made to understanding a situation by a group of people with different gifts and insights. It involves teachers working together and provides a practical strategy for helping teachers to break out of the isolation of their classrooms. In the Christian school, such interaction about the actual task in which teachers are engaged should be a central feature.

Second, this approach incorporates action. Action is not an implication or an outcome of research, it is part and parcel of it. Almost the first step taken after identifying a problem is to ask, "What action will I take to remedy it?" It thus reflects the biblical view that knowledge entails responsible action, and that it grows out of concrete experience. After
implementing this action step and having set in place some procedures for observing its impact, the collaborative group provides an opportunity to reflect on the effects of that action. Reflection is used not to reach a definitive conclusion but to decide what action to take next. In other words, action research is not a commitment to one act but rather to ongoing acting.

Third, this strategy is a means of research. This is not the abstract, theoretical, quantitative research so often found in academic journals of education, but it is research all the same. This type of research method gets teachers involved in finding out in a careful and systematic way about what is going on in their school. It asks them not to take things for granted but to look critically at the life of their school, to frame questions about the day-to-day actions of teaching and learning. It enables them to look for answers to their questions that are not mere assertions, opinions, or prejudices but are supported by evidence and argumentation. White coats are not required; calculators and computers may come in handy but are not mandatory.

Collaborative action research is an ongoing process designed and carried out by practicing teachers. It is an approach that accepts "the wisdom of practice" (Shulman 1987). It credits the teacher with a craftsman's understanding, a knowledge gained on the job. It says that this knowledge counts for something, that it is not only the knowledge of general principles and scientific laws that is of value but also the knowledge of particular situations, of how to act appropriately in response to concrete problems.

The first meeting of a group of teachers beginning a process of collaborative action research might look something like this:

Mike: Thanks for being willing to work with me in this group. I'm not quite sure what's going to come out of it but I was at this in-service the other day and they had a group demonstrate this approach to us and I thought, why not, it looks to me as though I could learn some useful things about my teaching. And who knows, it might be good for all of us. Anyway, let's open in prayer. [He commits the time to the Lord, asking for wisdom and a readiness to be guided by the Word and the Spirit.]

Jean: Well, Mike, where do we start? Is there any specific problem you wished us to talk about?

Mike: Well, it's important that we find a theme that we feel comfortable about exploring together. Before we actually get started on the steps that are talked about on the sheet I gave you, we need to do some preplanning. Some of the material I've got gives us some clues about deciding what we should work on but I thought we might just as well start by talking about something that we've been looking at as a staff anyway and not making much progress on.

Tom: You mean grade eight? What can we do about them? It's just the stage of life they're at. The best we can do is wait until they grow out of it. I reckon school at this stage is mainly designed to keep them off the streets. Isn't there research that suggests they're brain dead at this stage, anyway?

Sue: Very funny, Tom -- that's a plateau in brain growth, which is not quite the same thing. I must say that you've got a pretty negative attitude. I know they've been giving you a rough time in math but I must say I expected a bit more of you.

Mike: There are a few boys in that class who are so powerful, they just seem to lead everyone into mischief. The peer pressure is incredible. Plus they speak a different language from normal people -- I can't understand them most of the time. And the music they listen to -- I don't know how any Christian kids could get away with the sort of rubbish they play. And they're just not interested in the important things in life, you knave, Shakespeare and that. Sure, some of them pray in devotions and there are a few kids who are really spiritual in same areas of their lives. But wow! It certainly doesn't seem to carry over into the rest of what they do.

Sue: I think we have to challenge them more about being in the world but not of it. They have to learn that being a Christian means standing up for what you believe and not just going along with the group.

Jean: Well, that's a concrete suggestion, Sue. The sheet that Mike gave us said that the first thing we have to do is to plan an action that will improve the situation. So, what do we actually do to put Sue's idea into effect?

Frank: I think before we do that, we have to clarify the problem a bit more. There is no point in taking any action until we have decided what is the nature of the problem we are trying to address. We have to focus in, somehow. And I think we have to think carefully about any ideas or values we have here that might not reflect a biblical way of looking at the world. Otherwise we're going to be off on the wrong track right from the start.
Mike: Well, you know, I think you've got a point. I was reading a little book by Fowler (1988) the other day about the school as a community. One of the things it talks about at the start is whether our largely negative view of the peer group might not be rather mixed up. The argument is that we are too individualistic in Western culture, and so we emphasize the importance of the individual breaking away from the peer group, taking a stand. It talked about how the Bible sees community as an equally basic dimension of life as individuality, and that we should think of turning the peer group to positive ends rather than trying to dismantle it or confront it head on.

Jean: Well, it seems to me that we have reached a bit of clarity here. We're talking about peer pressure and whether we might be able to think of it in positive and not: only negative terms, in terms of grace as well as of sin. It seems that now the challenge would be to plan a step of action that might begin to turn the peer group in a more positive direction. Maybe we should actually get them working more in groups instead of trying to keep them apart.

Tom: I think we need to know more about how the class actually behaves and what Mike does with them now. There's no way that I would be happy about leaving them on their own to work in groups -- there'd be a riot! I've got a syllabus to get through. It might be okay in English, but there's material that just has to be covered in math.

Frank: I agree, Toni, I'd like to hold back a little before we make any decisions. But perhaps my concern is a little bit different. We really have to be sure that we're not just involved in rational problem-solving here and merely taking lots of things for granted. Are the questions we're asking biblically-informed questions? What's a Christian approach to the issues?

Tom: Yes, you're right, Frank, but there's one other thing I want to say that I think is relevant. I really do have a problem with this whole idea of groups. It seems to me that it takes insufficient account of individual responsibility. I think the Bible is quite clear on this. Changing the structure of an institution doesn't deal with changing hearts. As Jesus said, it's out of the heart that the issues of life arise.

Sue: Okay, so the questions we should be asking ought to revolve around things like our understanding of the nature of Christian community, our view of individual freedom and responsibility in Christ, the way we look at the roles of teacher and student, and the implications of believing that teenagers are also created in the image of God and that they are called to serve him here and now.

Frank: Yeah, we know that we are called to lead kids in responsive discipleship, but we need to work out how much of their teen culture is unfaithful to the gospel and how much of it we just have trouble with because our culture is different. I mean, we also know that they are going to grow out of it. I was standing on the seat screaming at the Beatles when I was thirteen and look at me now -- as solemn and sober as a church mouse.

Tom (facetiously): Now, let's not get carried away, Frank. You can't be sure what long-lasting influence that nasty experience has had on you and besides, some of your behavior does tend to be a little outrageous! But I'll go along with the general point. The challenge still is how do we deal positively with these kids now, so that school isn't a complete waste of time for them and for us.

Jean: All right, so from a biblical point of view, working communally, cooperatively, is an important thing to do. And what we have is a very strong group culture that might go too far toward swallowing up the individual but which we should perhaps harness for good rather than regarding it as an enemy. I mean, we believe that Christ is able to bring "substantial healing" to all areas of life, don't we, so let's see what hope there is for sanctification of the peer group.

Mike: I'll give it to you, Jean, when you get going, there's no stopping you! But I'm ready to suggest an action step that I think might be helpful. Has anyone heard of "jigsaw groups"? It's a cooperative learning strategy. What if we did get them to work on assigned tasks in small groups? We'd be acknowledging that there is validity in the peer group but we'd be introducing them to some strategies that would minimize the negative features and accentuate the positive -- how does that song go?

Tom: I'm afraid I've got to put in my two bits' worth again. I think groups are often a way of kids avoiding their individual responsibilities. They just hide in the crowd. Sometimes they're just lazy and refuse to pull their weight. Sometimes they have their own learning difficulties that need individualized attention. And sometimes - and you've got to admit this -- they're just plain rebellious and need to be disciplined. I don't think we should get too rosy-eyed about any particular method -- we've got to remember that we're dealing with sinners who need to be led very firmly a lot of the time. Kids need to be taught, and not just sit around in groups having a warm, fuzzy time.
Mike: I concede a lot of what you're saying, Tom. Thanks for bringing us back to that. But I certainly don't mean those groups where one or two people do all the work and the others just go along for the ride. I mean carefully planned tasks assigned so that each person in the group has a vital part to play in its completion: each one has to contribute a piece to the jigsaw if the puzzle is to be completed. Individuals are responsible for their actions but are responsible to the other members of the group-and the group as a whole has a responsibility. Teachers have to give a lot of thought to how the task is set up and that the right materials are prepared and they have to keep an eye on what goes on all the way. It can actually put a lot more pressure on teachers to set up the process and require a lot more energy to monitor and guide it along the way.

Frank: I reckon we've had enough to chew on for today. I think we should knock off now and come back to this next week-- my head's spinning! Still, it's been good to get our teeth into something together. What should we do to prepare for that, Mike?

Mike: Okay, Frank, fair enough, you're probably right. Well, we need to be more precise about the action step we're going to take. And we need to think about how we're going to monitor it, what sort of observation tools we're going to use. And we need to start keeping a personal journal to help us reflect on what we do in this project-- we should start that right away, it will help us clarify what we've done today. I'll give you those other materials I mentioned; they should help us get clearer about what we're doing and how we should function as a group. They're not written from a Christian perspective, so we'll want to be critical of what is being said. I'll also get together some information on cooperative learning. I don't want us to get swamped with this but it would also be good if we thought a bit more about what the Scriptures have to say about community. And thanks a lot for all your input-- I think we're going to find this a valuable undertaking.

Collaborative action research would provide teachers and principals in Christian schools with an opportunity for exploring different teaching methods and addressing issues that they face in a positive and constructive manner. Instead of placing blame for a problem or weakness on one person, collaborative action research enables the staff to accept mutual responsibility for examining the underlying reasons and together to develop a solution. A Christian community for learning provides the conditions in which collaborative action research can be successful. These conditions include a forum to share findings and frustrations, opportunities to learn and grow both personally and communally, time to reexamine and renew the principles that guide their teaching, collegial support through developing one another's gifts and sharing one another's difficulties, and celebrating the joys of the shalom that comes with recognizing the growth that students and teachers experience in learning.

The following steps of action research (adapted from McKay 1992) provide Christian schools with a way of addressing some of the issues that they face.

Step 1. Identify an issue, area of interest, or idea that some or all of the staff want or need to address. Two examples would be: (a) What do our tests say we value? (b) What gifts do our present program develop in students?

Step 2. Define the problem related to this issue or area of interest. An effective way to clarify the problem is to describe the differences between the current and the desired situation. For example: (a) Our evaluation places too strong an emphasis on recall of information. (b) The program we presently offer our students does not provide sufficient encouragement for the development of a diversity of gifts.

Step 3. Locate and read related information from journal articles, books, or workshops. Using both Christian and non-Christian authors become familiar with various ways of looking at this issue. (a) What should we evaluate? How should we evaluate? (b) Which gifts should our school encourage?

Step 4. Develop the questions to be dealt with in the action research project. Making the questions quite specific helps to narrow the focus for the research. (a) What type of questions do I ask on my test? (b) What gifts are valued in each course that students take?

Step 5. Develop an action plan by which to address the questions. A plan should specify which teachers and students are involved (one grade, several classes, or whole school), how long the project will take, how and when information will be gathered, when the results will be discussed, and when these results will be shared with other teachers and parents.

Step 6. Make recommendations based on the results of the project. Make specific classroom changes, and observe what happens to teaching and learning. Discuss further improvements that should be made.
Collaborative action research helps us continually reform the way in which we view the world of teaching and learning and specifically the way in which we develop ourselves as teachers. We cannot afford to take our present understanding as free of problems. Each stage of reflection leads to the formulation of another plan for action. The process emphasizes the importance of critical questioning and reflection. The contribution of different members of a school is essential, as a manifestation of the body of Christ at work in education. Teachers have to learn to listen to and understand one another. This is an essential part of the process of community-building, in a specifically educational context. It involves defining a common purpose and developing a shared language.

Staff development has the potential of building a momentum for changing Christian schools. As principals and teachers become learners themselves, they will broaden and deepen their understanding and experience of teaching for responsive discipleship. Personal and communal staff development are significant components of developing a school’s vision, strengthening a community for learning, developing integral units, and reflecting on student learning. Principals and teachers involved as learners will provide the impetus for reexamining current practices and introducing new opportunities for student learning.

**Questions for Discussion**

1. Initiate a discussion of the ways in which personal and communal staff development could be stimulated in your school. What are the opportunities for growth for the principal and teachers?

2. Identify issues for particular grade levels and/or subject areas in your school. Determine which of these issues is of most importance and form a collegial study group to explore ways of resolving the issue.

3. Identify issues in your school that cut across grade and/or subject boundaries. Determine which of these issues is of highest priority. Form a collaborative action research group of teachers (and include parents if possible) to investigate one or more of these issues.

4. Using the dialogue about collaborative action research discuss the following:
   
a. What do you think of the way the group tackled the task? What contribution would you have made to their deliberations? Where do you think they went off the rails?

b. How significant is biblical input in helping to define the problem? What principles and procedures were at work in the group? How would you articulate the appropriate principles and procedures?

c. What might happen when the group’s plan is implemented? How would you further refine the action step? What methods of monitoring would you suggest? What problems do you foresee?

**Recommended Reading**


