

Are We Doing Things Backwards?

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WHEN ONLY two schools out of 247 report that it is a good idea to have faculty meetings planned by principals, there would seem to be justification for following some other practice. Yet in three-fourths of these schools it is still the principal who does the planning.

This and many other interesting facts came to light as a part of a study of techniques used in North Central Association Secondary Schools.¹ The survey was made by the Sub-committee on In-service Education² and based on descriptions of the methods of conducting general faculty meetings in 247 selected schools.

Ninety-seven per cent of the schools included in the study reported that general faculty meetings were held for the purpose of promoting growth of teachers in service. This percentage varied less than one point for each size group of schools. Small schools, medium-sized schools, large schools, and private schools all agreed that such meetings were used as a part of their programs to educate teachers in service.

In 82.5 per cent of the schools, the principal stated that he presided over faculty meetings on all occasions; in

14.9 per cent of the cases teachers usually presided; and in 2.6 per cent of the schools a teacher always presided.

Accurate minutes are kept of faculty meetings in one school out of four, and the principal plans the general faculty meetings in three out of four schools. In one-fourth of the schools, teachers were given the right to share in the planning of faculty meetings, and, interestingly enough, in 92.4 per cent of the cases where teachers had a part in such planning, accurate minutes were kept of general meetings of the staff. When teachers plan, they apparently like to keep a record of their acts. When principals plan the meetings, no one seems to take the time to record what action, if any, was taken by the teachers.

Techniques with Promise

When asked to list the most promising practices with respect to planning general faculty meetings, 169 schools,

The success of a school program depends more on the spirit with which we undertake our tasks than upon the structural plan by which we work. Yet a change of form is valuable in that it may facilitate better ways of working. An interesting survey of secondary schools reveals that many teachers feel that faculty meetings are not being conducted in ways most beneficial to them. The findings of this study and conclusions growing out of it are presented on these pages by C. A. Weber, Superintendent of Schools in Galva, Ill.

¹ Weber, C. A.: "Techniques Employed in a Selected Group of Secondary Schools of the North Central Association for Educating Teachers in Service," Doctoral Dissertation, Northwestern University, August, 1942, 498 pp.

² The author is research assistant for the Sub-committee on In-service Education of the North Central Association.

or 68.5 per cent, listed none, and 96.3 per cent of those listing no promising practices were schools in which the principal himself did all the planning! In thirty-nine schools, or 15.8 per cent, having committees elected by the staff or appointed by the principal to plan faculty meetings was considered the most promising technique. In twenty-two schools, or 6.9 per cent, the most promising practice was to have faculty meetings planned by a committee of teachers working with the principal.

Other techniques considered of value in planning general staff meetings and the number of schools favoring them were as follows: (1) in small schools, having the entire staff plan succeeding meetings (eight schools); (2) having the principal plan meetings (two schools); and (3) having the superintendent and principal plan meetings (two schools).

Sometimes They Won't Work

Often times considerable light is shed upon the value of a given technique or pattern of techniques by examining a list of the obstacles encountered in attempting to use the technique or pattern in question. The selected secondary schools were requested to list the difficulties in using general staff meetings for educating teachers in service. These ranged from "lack of interest on part of teacher" to "teacher turnover" and included inability to find time when teachers could attend due to demands of extra-curricular activities, heavy class load and lack of time for study and planning, teachers too tired by end of day, and teachers talking too much about personalities.

It was found by careful study of the

data that the correlation between the number of principal-dominated techniques and the number of obstacles reported was $+0.31$, while the correlation between the number of techniques used which involved teacher participation and the number of obstacles listed was -0.16 . These two relationships would indicate that, in the experience of common action, shared decisions, and teacher participation, the obstacles tend to melt away.

How Effective Are Our Ways?

A list of ten methods of conducting faculty meetings was submitted to the schools, and each school was requested to indicate how frequently each technique had been used. Table I is a list of the techniques together with the percentage of schools using each technique to some extent.

The schools were also requested to evaluate these ten methods. Table II is a summary of their evaluations. When the schools were asked to evaluate talks by individuals from the point of view of promoting teacher growth, talks by parents were listed first, with those by teachers, pupils, and principals following in the order named.

Panel discussions, in which parents, teachers, and pupils participated, were considered most valuable by the schools which reported use of this technique. Second most desirable panel group was that where only teachers participated, and rated almost as high were those made up of teachers and parents and teachers and pupils. Forums conducted by teachers or parents were considered next in value. Ranked as least useful were panel discussions by committees of teachers and by department heads

TABLE I. USE OF TEN SPECIFIC TECHNIQUES FOR CONDUCTING MEETINGS

<i>Technique</i>	<i>Per Cent of Schools Using Technique</i>
Talks by individuals	95.5
General discussion by the staff	84.6
Open discussion of talks	73.1
Committee reports	72.4
Discussion of committee reports	70.1
Exhibiting educational materials	61.2
Showing educational movies	54.4
Panel discussions	54.0
Forums open to parents and teachers ...	31.2
Demonstration teaching	26.6

TABLE II. EVALUATION OF TECHNIQUES LISTED IN TABLE I

<i>Technique</i>	<i>Index of Probable Value</i>
Forums open to parents and teachers89
Open discussion following talks86
General discussion by the staff84
Panel discussions84
Committee reports81
Talks by individuals63
Demonstration teaching48
Exhibiting educational materials39
Showing educational movies26

and forums conducted by the principal, with the principal-conducted forum at the bottom of the list.

When general discussion is planned rather than unplanned, the effects are more conducive to teacher growth, according to the schools included in the study. Planning by a committee of teachers was considered the most valuable practice, with planning by the principal running second, and planning by department heads running third. Unplanned discussion was assigned an index of probable value of only .18 by the participating schools, although 50.7 per cent of the schools admitted that this procedure was very common in their situations.

Let Values Determine Our Practices

The evidence seems to support the assertion that practice in the selected schools is divorced from the valuation of it. In every area, the schools indicated that cooperative techniques were the most valuable for promoting teacher growth in service, but the schools continue to use individualistic, principal-dominated procedures most frequently.

The evidence warrants the assertion

that many of the obstacles exist because of the lack of cooperative planning.

Teachers in many of the selected schools are not free from the dictation of benevolent but authoritative administrators, principals, and supervisors to the point where they can let their minds come to close quarters with problems facing education.

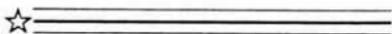
A few schools have departed from traditional procedures and have found cooperative techniques to be much more valuable and effective in promoting teacher growth. These schools find that teacher attitudes are much improved and that more work is being done by teachers.

Finally, these data warrant the assertion that there is considerable nonsense in the programs of in-service education in many of the schools studied. To value techniques of a cooperative nature very highly—and yet refuse to use them frequently—appears to this investigator to be nonsense. It is nonsense to talk of values called cooperation, democratic participation, use of intelligence, mental health, and creative effort, where conditions do not permit cooperation, participation, use of intelligence, or creativity.

The task confronting the principal and the supervisor is to cast aside the fetters of traditional supervisory devices and techniques and let the teachers themselves take charge of their own meetings, planning them around the problems which seem to be of value to them, ever remembering that growth is a slow process and that sudden

changes cannot be expected. Deliberation and use of intelligence are often characterized by slow development and cautious procedure.

The administrator who studies these data should be challenged by the promise of cooperative techniques for planning and conducting general meetings of the staff.



Freedom From Talk

What can adults do to make youngsters' time profitable except clamp them into desks, or otherwise hold them in line for directed activity? How can you send a kid to Kalamazoo, unless you nail him in a crate and ship him by express? It is quite possible to give him a suitcase and a ticket and let him tackle the trip by himself. Children sometimes use as much sense as their elders; and, in matters that interest them, a darn sight more enterprise.

The same applies to learning. Many children with access to the right books and apparatus can teach themselves more than their instructors. This has been demonstrated by the loan of books in the public library. Recently, the toy-loan library or toybrary has shown that educational loan-apparatus also can be made equally instructive. In the Pavilion Institutes, for example, children borrowed guitars, accordions, xylophones, and a portable organ, with a sheet or two of chord-lettered music, and in a happy hour by themselves under the trees, mastered tunes and harmonies that seemed incredible to their friends who heard them in the assembly exhibit that followed.

Similar success was evident with talking-machine songs, dances, and recitations; stereoscopic travelogues; step-by-step craft outfits, and, best of all, intriguing home-made wrinkles. All of these things were fun to borrow and use. But it was even more fun to make and own such items as a plywood guitar, a cowboy outfit—complete with sombrero and swinging lariat—made from tough paper, a woodworking kit with hammer, saw, drill, and miter box all made from costless materials, and so on with scores of other child-centered activity-devices, all decidedly more productive than the empty ruminations of old Professor Belch and the fruitless copybooks of old Miss Blather. Speaking of world freedoms, why not more youthful freedom from talk, chalk, and incinerator fuel?—Frank M. Rich, *Principal, School No. 2, Paterson, N. J.*

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