

Getting Clues to Teachers' Values

JOHN HOLDEN

IN-SERVICE EDUCATION is bidding fair to become another one of those educational shibboleths like project method, child-centered curriculum, and community school. While, like these, in-service has a germ of potentially great educational significance, the mere name devoid of the essential spirit is all too likely to be tossed around vainly by unthinking persons in the hope that it will work some kind of magic.

Is something wrong with the reading of the high school pupils? The answer is an in-service program for their teachers. Does the social studies course in the elementary school need improvement? An in-service program is indicated. Does the superintendent yearn to draw more fully on community educational resources? He calls together teachers, supervisors, and principals and organizes study groups. These "educational" enterprises are all too often undertaken in utter violation of well-established educational principles—that the purpose must be the learner's and the program must start from where the learner is. It should not be surprising, then, if in-service education should come to be regarded by teachers as just another tribulation imposed by the administration.

The frequently used workshop technique of organizing study around questions or problems stated by participants is usually helpful toward keeping content and approach within mind's reach of the teachers concerned. But these formulations, though coming from each individual teacher, are all too

likely to be fitted into pre-existent cubby-holes by program committee, director, or whoever shapes the actual activities of the whole group. The subtleties of individual scales of values are ignored or taken for granted. It is here—in his scale of values—that the most important growth of the teacher should be looked for.

Informality Keynotes the Program

As superintendent of schools in a rural district in Vermont during the development of a program of in-service education, the writer had an unusually favorable opportunity to observe values developing in the minds of teachers at work. The fact that he served, in usual New England fashion, as classroom supervisor as well as administrative official gave occasion for a variety of functional contacts with teachers. The informality characteristic of country living, coupled with generally friendly personal relations already developing before the program began, favored a frank interchange of ideas and feelings between teacher and superintendent. Beyond this, participation in the Cooperative Study of the Commission on Teacher Education spurred development of the program and made available consultative services which sharpened observation of the in-service process.

During the early months of the program a letter was sent to all teachers:

Dear Fellow-Worker:

This letter is a request for a bit of help which I feel confident that you will be interested to give. In connection with our cooperation with the Commission on Teacher Education, it has seemed to me that it might be worthwhile for each of us to think over what there is in his background and preparation which tends to make him a good teacher. It might also be worthwhile to think about the experiences we lack, or wish we had had.

This request carries with it no authority, and you may be sure that any reply you may see fit to give will not be used in any way detrimental or embarrassing to you.

It might be thought of in this way. "What is

Every now and then education thinks it has found a cure-all. Some would thrust this dubious honor upon in-service education. But the author of this article believes that in-service education deserves a better fate. It deserves to be appraised and practiced realistically, letting it spring naturally from the needs of the teachers, as they themselves see their needs. John Holden, associate professor of education at Middlebury College, Middlebury, Vt., describes for us how a school system went about establishing in-service education on these principles.

there in my past which has turned out to be helping me most to become the kind of teacher I want to be? What lacks do I feel?" Your answer might be in the form of a brief paragraph or short list. Don't be fussy about its appearance as long as it is legible. I hope I can collect responses from many of you (via your folder) soon after November 12.

Thanking you for any cooperation you see fit to give,

I am
Yours cordially,
(Superintendent)

It was felt that an indirect approach would guard against stereotyped replies and that the responses would reveal a certain amount of clearcut evidence on values held by the teachers.

What the Teachers Say

One of the teachers longest in service, whose outstanding characteristic is character, spelled in large caps, gave the laconic return:

Hard work
Ability to get along well with children

Another seasoned teacher, of limited education but active intellectual curiosity and strong leadership qualities, wrote:

On the credit side

1. I am from a large family and was brought up to be unselfish and to consider the other members of the family.
2. I have taught in a rural school with eight grades and different types of children.
3. I am married and a mother, which helps a lot in understanding the behaviour of children.
4. I have lived in a city as well as the country.
5. I like to be with children.
6. I can see both sides of their arguments.

Debits

1. I have always wished that I could have had more training.
2. I also feel that if I could travel, see things, and get in contact with other people, it would enrich my knowledge to be imparted to the children other than what we get through books.
3. Lack of finances.

From an alert young teacher of four or five years of service, working in an underprivileged community, came this statement:

Things that have helped

1. An interest and real liking for children.

2. A real desire to teach.
3. A desire to try new ideas.
4. Plenty of energy.
5. An interest in children's activities and recreations and desire to participate.

Some things I lack

1. Time to prepare and do all the things I'd like.
2. General information of free help and material to make better living conditions and better health for pupils.
3. Sometimes I feel I take too much of a personal interest which drives me to want to do too much in what little time I have. (This is a good point but rather discouraging when you find time in your way.)

One beginning teacher replied:

I feel that one of the things which has aided me in becoming the type of teacher I most want to be is my real enjoyment and understanding of children. Other than this I feel that a sense of humor with an occasional good laugh has done much for me. My weakness lies in the fact that I am apt to be too lenient in discipline matters, as I don't believe in bodily punishment or severe discipline.

From the Teacher's Viewpoint

The most obvious use of replies such as these was as aids in understanding the individual teachers: whether they conceived their work as being primarily a matter of human relations, what things they held most important in their work and in their preparation, and areas of special pride. A few returns gave clear clues to interpersonal relations among teachers in the group: "I often wonder if other people think as I do, that many teachers are insincere, superficial, and full of bluff. (I would like to get rid of this feeling, or perhaps I should cultivate those traits!)" Others revealed motivations to teaching: "Doing other work such as working in a store or summer work, then you realize that teaching is most satisfying."

A few instances of smug self-satisfaction came to light and many cases of lack of confidence: "I, also, much to my amazement began to realize that there are no perfect teachers as I supposed the whole profession was composed of, with the exception of myself, and my so-called faults are common problems, not something against me but an opportunity to do something about it if I care to."

Group Attitudes Come to Light

Aside from offering glimpses into the thoughts and feelings of individual teachers, the replies had further use in furnishing a composite picture of the teaching staff. An attempt was made to characterize the group by compiling from individual returns all statements which yielded any light on the following questions: What evidence was shown of awareness of the social significance of education? What evidence of sensitivity to human values? What evidence of consciousness of the need for study in order to understand children? Did it appear that initiative was recognized as a significant factor in education? The true degree of awareness behind the various responses was difficult to judge because of their brevity. Counted as positive were all that seemed to show any likelihood of suggesting any awareness whatever of the value in question.

With regard to awareness of the social significance of education, responses illustrating the low end of the scale listed these qualities:

Background of geography and history
Personal interest in reading
Travel

Another group of teachers suggested a more specific understanding of the social significance of education in that they assigned positive value to understanding one's community.

My own background in a rural school and a rural community has helped me to understand my pupils and their families better.

I have an interest in the community, church, etc.

I am interested in current events, news, and new books.

Sensitivity to human values was more apparent in the replies than were any of the other three conceptions sought. Earlier quotations indicate this awareness. Interesting, also, in this respect is the statement:

I found that a teacher must live with her pupils while she is with them. She could not merely teach but she must understand them and enjoy a good joke with them.

Few teachers responded in ways which suggested awareness of the need for study in

order to understand children. Examples from those who did are:

I wish I might know the whys and wherefores of their actions and reactions with the power of sympathetic understanding in all cases and at all times.

I seem to have missed some of the important factors of these two phases of teaching (one of which was understanding children).

Examples of the replies which suggested that the writers were conscious of initiative as a significant factor in education are:

Numerous opportunities to lead

Finding there are others with the same or similar problems made me feel a sort of challenge to do something about it.

To summarize, few of the teachers thought of education as a social force, but many were aware that it had relationship to the community and a substantial majority conceived it as a human enterprise. Awareness that education is not confined to the schoolroom was suggested in that only six persons, in commenting on their backgrounds, limited their reports to mention of school experiences. That initiative or growth has much to do with teaching had apparently not become clear to more than a few.

Free responses, of course, have their limitations. They tend to reveal minimum rather than maximum status. We do not know what would have been the result had responses in each of the four categories above been elicited directly. All we know is that this is all that came to the teachers' minds at the moment of replying. But since it came spontaneously rather than by specific prompting it probably represents a genuine foundation for growth.

Certain general trends in the returns gave clues to some guiding principles for a program of in-service education. In the overwhelming majority of returns, personal relationships had a significant place. Two implications were indicated: (1) human relations would be more promising material for the program of in-service education than pedagogical abstractions; (2) satisfying human relations showed conspicuous promise as a means of promoting growth. Another outstanding feature was the simplicity of the

language of the returns; the ideas were close to the ground. This fact, evident also in group discussions, was indicative of the starting point of the program and posed one of its crucial problems: how to raise the conceptual level of the group so that ideas could be more widely shared through effective generalization and professional literature could become more fully available.

Thinking educators have for several years been aware of the evils of the workbook

mind among pupils. Among teachers, increasing burdens of paper work, including that involved in in-service education, are tending to produce as great an evil—the questionnaire mind. If a teacher's work is to grow in significance he needs, rather than formal questionnaires, occasion from time to time to reflect upon and to record his ideas about what things are most important. Thoughtful study of such statements is indispensable to anyone who would guide the teacher's growth.

□ *Cooperation of schools of education strengthens in-service programs*

When Colleges Lend a Hand

VIRGIL M. ROGERS

IS IT UNREASONABLE to hope that the school of education will come to mean to the superintendent and the teacher what the A and M college means to the farmer and the county agent, or what the medical school means to the physician? Some alert departments of education and certain suburban schools already enjoy such a mutually fortunate relationship—it is hoped that similar cordial working relations will soon prevail more generally.

Little more than a year ago the Commission on Teacher Education of the American Council on Education completed an extensive experiment on education in service. The report of this project¹ is replete with de-

¹ Charles E. Prall and C. Leslie Cushman. *Teacher Education in Service*, Washington, D. C.: American Council on Education, 1944.

Wide-awake schools of education are finding work to do far beyond the bounds of college campuses. Their cooperation with school staffs in studying school needs and supplying consultants is a substantial contribution to in-service education. The importance of such programs to both public schools and teacher-training institutions is discussed here by Virgil M. Rogers, superintendent of schools in Battle Creek, Mich. Specific instances of colleges moving toward the kind of program Mr. Rogers writes about are described in succeeding articles on "A College Follows Its Graduate" and "Curriculum for Better Living."

scriptions of in-service programs in large and small communities. The plan called for college participation in the cooperative enterprise, but the write-up of the projects in the experiment places the emphasis on techniques and achievements of the experimentation rather than on the ways by which departments of education and teachers colleges may become a greater force in stimulating school faculties to study their communities and their jobs.

In-Service Philosophy

In considering in-service growth of teachers, it is not intended to give the impression that "self-improvement" is the main objective. It would seem that this aspect of in-service education has been emphasized to the detriment of the cause. The connotation in this connection almost suggests a process of "self-culture." Some are inclined to think of "in-service" as taking more courses with credit-points, which accumulate until another step-up on the salary schedule is attained. Others seem to feel that when faculty discussion groups are inaugurated, or an advisory council established, real "in-service" education has been realized.

Education in service, as used here, contemplates the widest use of the term. In-service growth is a process which should be continuous, all-inclusive, related to specific problems, projects, "areas of disturbance," experimentation, or exploration. It suggests

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