

# Toward Better In-Service Education

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What features make or break an in-service education program? This article reports important findings in one such state-wide program.

**D**URING the 1951-52 academic year, Yale University and the Bureau for Intercultural Education conducted a research project in public schools in the State of Connecticut. The principal activity involved in the project was a program of in-service education for teachers. Since the results of the project were satisfying, it seems appropriate to report on the techniques, the approach and the general conditions of the in-service program.

A primary goal of the program was to help teachers meet the emotional needs of the children in their classrooms. Teachers met once a week for two hours with an educational consultant. At these fifteen meetings, the theory of emotional needs developed by Rath<sup>1</sup> for use by classroom teachers was presented and discussed. Also at these meetings individual problems were brought up and discussed, and each teacher obtained suggestions from colleagues and reported progress, or lack of it, to the group.

While there was no "text," the program utilized two booklets put out by Modern Education Service, Bronxville, New York: *An Application to Education of the Needs Theory*, by Louis E.

Raths, and *Dos and Don'ts of the Needs Theory*, by Louis E. Rath and Anna P. Burrell. The former booklet acted as a guide for teachers in recognizing or diagnosing unmet emotional needs in children. The latter served as a jumping-off point for the teachers in planning programs to meet the diagnosed unmet needs.

In addition, some paper-and-pencil tests were used as aids in diagnosis of needs. Films—largely the New York University Human Relations Series—formed a basis for discussion, particularly in the early stages of work. Some attention-focusing forms were employed from time to time to facilitate the concentration on particular phases of each teacher's work.

Although results of the program have been partially reported elsewhere (*Clearing House*, Vol. 26, No. 9) and will be more fully discussed in other articles, it seems important to mention that of the 169 teachers involved in the project, eighty-five per cent reported that their "problem child" (one child chosen for special study) had responded to "needs theory" treatment by changing in behavior toward the "better"—defined in needs theory terms as changing from very aggressive to less aggressive; from very submissive to less submissive; from very withdrawn to less

<sup>1</sup> Rath, Louis E. *An Application to Education of the Needs Theory*. Bronxville, New York: Modern Education Service, 1949.

withdrawn; or from having frequent, intense spells of psychosomatic illnesses to having fewer, less intense attacks. Furthermore, over eighty per cent of the teachers indicated changes in the total classroom atmosphere toward a more desirable and more nearly wholesome situation. All of the reports were carefully documented but for purposes of brevity the documentation will not be discussed here.

Results of the type described above are heartening, indeed, to proponents of in-service education. When changes take place in more than eighty per cent of the classrooms and more than eighty per cent of the teachers, a closer examination of the unique or unusual features of the in-service program is in order.

### **What Are the Important Characteristics?**

What are some features of this program which are seldom—if ever—found in in-service education programs? Since a description of all such features may not be included in such a brief account as this, only those features believed responsible for the extra measure of success will be considered.

#### *Establishing Receptivity*

The groups included beginning teachers, experienced teachers, and "old-timers." The beginning teachers, fresh from teachers colleges or emergency training programs, were largely "fed up" with education courses—good and bad. Old-timers were generally suspicious of "new ideas," and this wariness was a barrier in itself. Through words and actions, the consultant then established these concepts:

a. Teachers could participate or not as they chose.

b. The project promoted no new ways of teaching—rather an examination of some students in light of a theory.

c. Whether a teacher accepted the theory or not depended on whether it worked for him.

d. No examinations and no term papers were required although Yale University credits were offered to participants in the project. It was understood, however, that each teacher would be willing to study one "problem child" during the course of the semester.

#### *The Physical Setting*

Wherever possible—and this turned out to be the case in all groups except one—the courses were given in one of the schools in which some of the group were teaching. In this way, further differentiation from the usual college class was achieved. One other advantage to meeting in the schools was that classrooms could be visited whenever the group desired for purposes of observing examples of arrangement, utilization of space, and the like. Of course, when teachers met in their own schools or in schools nearby, they were more comfortable, more at ease, and closer to their homes.

In many of the situations, coffee and cookies were served prior to the meetings, thus helping the socialization process and speeding relaxation at the close of the school sessions.

#### *Assuaging Guilt Feelings*

Naturally in the course of investigation of the needs theory—especially with regard to a particular child—each

teacher went through a period of discovering that many of his practices with regard to a "problem child" and with respect to his entire class were inconsistent with new knowledge in light of the needs theory. The group situation helped teachers find their way through such guilt periods by allowing for the impersonal discovery of better practices and by providing remedy through classroom practices suggested by the consultant and the other teachers.

### *Establishing Common Backgrounds*

An immediate concern of any group engaged in learning activities is the disparity in the backgrounds, preparation and problems of its members. Extensive use of films during the first several weeks provided problem situations and gave illustrations of theoretical material for each discussion. Naturally the effect of providing such a common background was cumulative. Such experiences helped teachers find areas of mutual interest. Furthermore each teacher could abstract from any discussion of film material what he needed for his situation. Use of the films in this manner offered opportunities for each teacher to discuss impersonally—that is, as it applied to the film situations—his own problem situations. Thus the films helped "save face" and ease guilt feelings.

### *Practicability*

More than any other one factor, the practicality and practicability of the needs theory were commended by the teachers in a later survey. In other words, the material had been organized with an eye toward what would help the teachers with their problems and

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what should be eliminated as too theoretical. The underlying principle of the organization was, "don't include it if it isn't useful." The inference is not to be drawn that all theoretical material was eliminated. Actually, wherever possible, theory was introduced *after* the practice had been demonstrated as helpful to teachers. Seldom was the discussion allowed to take paths which all too often lead a group into escape from facing up to its own problems.

### *Consultant Services*

Accompanying the in-service education program was the offer of the consultant to visit any classroom and to help the teacher observe the behavior of a particular child in order to diagnose unmet needs or to plan a program for meeting the needs already diagnosed. In other words, the consultant did not work directly with children, but rather lent his aid to any teacher working with a "problem child." Services of this type, taken with the practical nature of the work, were a large factor in the success of the program.

### *Focusing Attention*

The program made use of several techniques to focus teachers' attention on the application of the needs theory. Probably the most important of these techniques was that of requesting each teacher to choose one child for special study. The child was to be a problem by virtue of his behavior: aggressive, submissive, withdrawn or psychosomatically ill. Actually, success with the one child singled out was not the goal of the

weeks of helping the teacher. Rather, it was hoped that the development of techniques and practices by the teacher would become part of his relationship with all his children. This aspiration in many instances became fact. Many of the teachers absorbed the new principles largely because they had had "supervised practice" in using them.

The annual report of the Bureau for Intercultural Education for the 1951-52 academic year gave several findings related to the experimental phase of the project dealing with the size and composition of the group. The report indicated that best results were achieved in

groups of not less than fifteen and not more than twenty-five; in groups that were entirely from one school and which comprised the total faculty of that school; and in groups which did not mix elementary and secondary school personnel.

While many in-service programs certainly consider many of the conditions and situational factors outlined above, there is a tendency for this consideration to be almost incidental. The results obtained by a program which deliberately concentrated on those factors should encourage the adoption of a similar guide for any future programs.

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## *Arkansas Experiment in Teacher Education*

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New and controversial, the Arkansas program for inducting liberal arts graduates into the teaching profession is described in this article.

**D**EVELOPMENT or improvement of teacher education is, in any instance, a process of cooperation. This fact is demonstrated with particular vividness in the Arkansas Experiment in Teacher Education, begun in 1952 with the assistance of the Fund for the Advancement of Education. The Experiment is a state-wide effort to develop and evaluate a unique five-year program of teacher education, in which four years will be devoted to general education and specialized preparation, and the fifth year spent entirely in professional learning. The entire project probably will require at least eight

years for both development and evaluation. During this time it will serve as a testing-ground for almost every type of cooperative action conceivable in teacher education.

Several dimensions of the problem of cooperation in teacher education will appear sharply outlined as the Experiment takes shape. The first dimension—that of the number of persons involved—is found in the fact that this is a joint enterprise being developed by all fifteen of the state's four-year teacher education institutions, the State Department of Education, and representatives of the organized teaching

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