

Elements of Effective In-Service Education

**Who needs in-service education? What is in-service education?
What are characteristics of an effective program?**

DO MEMBERS of a school staff need in-service education? Which persons of our public school system can profit from a program for on-the-job growth in professional skill? Is this program for members of a selected group? If so, who selects them? Or, should such a program be voluntary? Does the quality of planned in-service programs affect the status of teaching as a profession?

Need for In-Service Education

When liberal arts professors of a leading university are heard discussing the values of student participation in class discussions as compared with the lecture method, is there an indication of a need for shared efforts toward change and growth to make their work more effective?

When high school teachers lament the lack of preparation of each incoming class and remain unaware of the normal range of reading abilities that will be found in any high school group, is there a need for some form of in-service education to help teachers recognize realistically the sources of their frustrations, thereby contributing to a better education for children?

When teachers, transferred from one- or two-room buildings to consolidated

schools, find it difficult to manage their relationships with a larger staff, does some study program dealing with these new problems help them take advantage early of the educational resources for children that can come from the larger school unit?

When young teachers with talent for the profession and a good understanding of working with children face discouragement due to conflicting philosophies of a large city staff of subject supervisors, can a planned in-service education program lead to better coordination of efforts for the benefit of children?

When overzealous school boards in small communities change policies so frequently that teachers are disturbed to the detriment of children, and when parent groups, eager to help their children, use meetings to discuss policies which should be the concern of school administration, is there a need for a planned program for all persons who are in any way responsible for helping children learn to participate actively and constructively in a changing society?

Examples such as the above along with many others can be noted in school system after school system throughout our country. Common to all such examples is the evidence of basic problems in self-understanding, understanding of others,

and the inability to use problem solving techniques in potentially emotional situations. Learning theory for teacher education constantly points us toward using the "let's find out together" technique as a means of controlling the human relations element in teaching and in stimulating in others the desire to learn. We who teach would do well to participate often in programs which give us practice in using this technique.

What Is In-Service Education?

Do all school systems have planned in-service education programs? Does the presence of a supervisory staff indicate an effective in-service education program? What is planned in-service education?

In any school system we can assume that the major goal is to provide those learning experiences which may help each child attain greatest possible social, emotional and mental growth. When the schools seem not to be achieving this goal, it becomes necessary to look to the causes. Neither the causes nor the solutions can lie in any one individual or group.

Our public school system is the institution established by a democratic government to provide educational services for a society which, because it is democratic, is constantly changing and seeking ways for self-improvement. The educational needs for any one community do not remain constant. The school population changes in its structure and size. The school staff changes. School committees or boards of education change. Evidence of parent interest in the schools of a community varies. Social change makes curriculum change necessary. Whenever there is change in any one major aspect of a school program, pressures for a cor-

responding change in other areas may arise.

Those communities of our country which take the education of our population seriously make a constant study of these pressures. There is frequent re-examination of the goals of education for the particular school system and a re-evaluation of the means for achieving the desired goals before steps are taken to make needed adjustments. For this process to be effective, all persons concerned must participate in it. Its success is to a large degree dependent upon the leadership of a trained administrative staff, yet its strength lies in the fact that creative ideas for the solution of any of the problems may come from any staff member or participating citizen. This shared problem-solving process of working for the improvement of an educational program is in-service education.

What Characterizes an Effective Program?

Perhaps a weakness of in-service education programs to date has been a narrowly conceived idea that single changes in teaching methods, materials, or some other help to the teacher in the classroom would result in an improvement of the total educational system. Since the teaching role is the most vital of any of the school staff responsibilities, should we not look to teachers for help in planning a program for on-the-job professional growth? Watch any classroom under a skillful teacher for the first few weeks or months of school, and you can observe in action those elements which characterize an effective in-service education program, local, state or national. The superior classroom teacher, or the

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leadership staff of a good in-service program, seeks to maintain the following conditions:

- *Creates an atmosphere of warmth and acceptance.*

Boys and girls are helped to become acquainted in a friendly and encouraging atmosphere. Routines affecting the whole school are explained and reasons for such routines explored.

An experienced teacher related her reactions. She told how she had progressed from a school system which opened with a formal meeting for administrative routine to one which opened with a social gathering followed by meetings for routine; to still others which opened with a three or five day program of study and preparation for the new school year and some which ran camping workshops for teachers. Her enthusiasm for those situations which helped the staff become a unified working group through shared responsibilities was wholehearted.

- *Generates feelings of acceptance and value of the individual by authority figures as well as by peers.*

Each member of the class group gets the feeling early that he is accepted as a person of worth. Services to each class member and requests made of each make it clear that the class and the teacher work on the same team.

It was a delight at a national conference on curriculum to watch three teachers sitting at the same banquet table with their superintendent of schools. They elaborated upon the many fine ideas emphasized at the conference and were enthusiastic in pointing out that many of these ideas were already in practice where they worked. It was obvious that their entire staff worked on the same team.

The maturing effects of acceptance

were evidenced when a state department of education member, newly from the classroom, made noticeable professional growth with this first experience at having her ideas considered and where pertinent used.

Teachers of experience have had long years of dependence upon administrators who assumed responsibility for all decisions. They can be helped to acquire skill in making valid decisions in their peer group as their fears of losing approval are allayed.

- *Involves entire group in self-selected aspects of common problems.*

Children become involved in the solution of common problems, participating sometimes as individuals and often as members of a group. Whatever the participation, the task must have purpose for each individual. This means that there are opportunities for choice as to areas of participation which apply to the task at hand.

One group of teachers, during their first experience in an in-service education program, often raised questions about discipline. Children were found frequently placed in hallways apart from the class group. Reasons for children's difficulties were explained in terms of laziness, poor attitude, or of their being just like their parents. A workshop on discipline, individual conferences, testing, and some courses in psychology began to change the situation to one in which teachers were found seeking causes of behavior which hindered a good learning situation.

Many school systems involve staff and in some cases selected lay persons in revision of curriculum areas such as the language arts, science, or social studies, each staff member choosing to work on

that phase of the study which is of greatest interest to him.

- *Orients new members.*

There is a plan for helping children who come into an already established class group to gain the feeling that they belong.

The major orientation of new school staff members takes place at the beginning of a school year. Many a school administrator requests all new staff members to report for duty several days before the rest of the staff arrives. Volunteer classroom teachers, principals, and supervisors work with the group in workshop manner going over all aspects of school policy and the school program so that, when school begins, no one feels "brand new." A less elaborate plan is followed for orientation during the year, should the occasion arise.

- *Values differences of individuals, thus encouraging each to develop his unique skills and abilities.*

Each child is helped to enjoy the accomplishments of others and to discover the ways in which he can make his own special contributions as he acquires new skills or displays capacities that are peculiarly his own.

One teacher, encouraged by an administrator's promise of freedom from his disapproval, experimented with a technique new to her. The result was that she became more sensitive to the needs of children and gained a better understanding of the teaching process.

Another teacher, who showed originality in using the local area as a means of developing almost any topic being studied, was highly commended. From then on she appeared less shy in meetings and willingly shared with others her knowledge of making learning real to children.

Due to his enthusiasm for good educational practice, a young principal used the prestige of his position to bring pressure for curriculum change in his school. Encouraged by an understanding superintendent to attend more regional and national professional meetings to compare his approach with that of others, he came to see his need for further study of human relations. He thus became a more effective member of the school staff.

- *Shares all plans for change and new development.*

The teacher and the class together make plans for the proceedings for each day. Each individual participates in decisions which affect him.

One administrator made it clear to his staff that status is only an administrative device. He held periodic staff meetings to keep his group informed of proposed changes and to get suggestions from the staff. Literally he kept his door open at his office and in his home for all staff members so they would feel free to discuss any professional or personal topic or problem. When he felt that a certain person could well assume a particular responsibility, the individual concerned was consulted. If this person rejected the offer, this in no way altered his worth in the eyes of leadership.

- *Encourages interaction with other individuals and groups.*

Interclass experiences, excursions outside the school, and the use of resource persons in the classroom are part of the regular program.

Citizens' committees quite commonly share in the study of school problems. Whether or not the lay participants serve a constructive purpose depends upon the guidance given by the administrative staff of the schools involved. In

one small city, parents seemed ready to participate in a study for change of the reporting system. Their first inclination was to collect sample cards, evaluate them, and choose one as a model. With guidance this was avoided. The committee of parents and teachers was persuaded to do a several months' study of the purposes of reporting and to set up some criteria for evaluating progress reports. The new card was finally ready and was put into use in preliminary form so that further changes could be made if desired.

In a small community parents who were kept informed by letter of a curriculum study in progress were receptive and ready to participate in plans for change when the study report was made some months later.

One curriculum staff made resource persons available to teachers on a voluntary basis by arranging for a series of presentations of background information for the social studies. Such topics as anthropology, children's prejudices, and how we change our attitudes were included in the series.

Experience shows that both the classroom teacher and the leadership staff of a school system may often encounter diverse complications in creating and maintaining the conditions suggested above. There are the extremes of personality in a classroom as well as among

those who influence the school program for children. For example, there are those with excessive fears and suspicions who withdraw or lash out and in so doing bury their talents. These challenge the teacher or the administrator and sometimes even all the specialized help available. The school administrator is acquainted with the teacher who seems to lack professional zeal, and he himself sometimes falls victim to fears of sharing his responsibilities and resorts to manipulation. The teaching profession has long wrestled with problems of integrity in human relations. In-service education has evolved as one means of solving such problems.

There can be no one pattern for a good in-service education program. Constant re-evaluation, new planning, and action must go on. Yet, fundamental to all situations is the skill with which the interpersonal relations are guided. Those who guide are also learning. Human relations research is by no means complete. It remains a challenge to the teaching profession to keep abreast of the research that exists and to be alert constantly to new developments in this field. The process of shared problem solving for curriculum change may, in time, alleviate the discouragements that often beset our profession and may help us make our practices more consistent with our knowledge of human growth and learning.

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