

Evaluation in an In-Service Education Program

In order to improve the effectiveness of their classroom instruction, teachers in this in-service education program planned ways for dynamic participation in and evaluation of their own learning experiences.

DO UNTO teachers as you would have them do unto children" has been the underlying philosophy of the Bristol Township, Pennsylvania, Schools' in-service education program since 1955. This program has attempted to increase the effectiveness of learning experiences offered teachers in their continuing education by making available to these learners the opportunity to assume responsibility for their own in-service education experiences.

An analysis of the earlier plan for in-service education seemed to indicate that it was failing to affect the experiences teachers were providing children because the program itself was set up along a pattern not consistent with modern educational thought. We were lecturing to teachers and not giving teachers an opportunity for genuine dynamic participation in the program.

If our program of in-service education was to be of real worth we believed it should embody these principles: (a) The program should help each individual person to acquire skills or solve problems that are of importance to him; (b) The program should be presented in a way that would enable the participant to work at his own level of understanding; (c) The program should provide help to the participant in constantly evaluating his

need for experiences of a particular type. (d) The program should provide for continuing evaluation by the learner of the value of his own learning experiences in terms of his objectives; (e) The program should be periodically evaluated in terms of its value to the level of educational efficiency within a district.

Using these general premises as a basis, a type of in-service education program was instigated for Bristol Township that we felt would hold more promise for increased effectiveness of the professional staff in the execution of their duties. Since three of the five principles underlying the program involve evaluation in one aspect or another it becomes evident that evaluative processes form the backbone of this program.

Steps in Evaluation

Bristol Township's in-service education plan was organized with a committee of representative teachers as a nucleus for the development of the various types of evaluation that are required in a program of this kind as well as for the promotion of communication between the various schools.

The first step requiring evaluative techniques was the determination by each teacher of that area in which he felt a need and saw the necessity for asking

help. Evaluation is not at all a necessarily final or summary step in the development of any operation. It can be an on-going dynamic process through which goals are set for an individual or a group. It is in this sense of goal determination that the term evaluation is used in asking the participant to assess his own need for a particular experience. Their genuine areas of need, however, are usually well hidden behind a complex of defensive, ego-supporting devices. In addition the techniques for self-evaluation are generally rusty and inoperative. Our education system has seldom required the learner to be responsible for his own education. He is told what he needs and what he will study. The first problem, then, in an in-service education program in which each participant is provided with help in an area of his own choice is to help the participants to evaluate their own needs.

In Bristol Township we believed there were two steps in helping participants in the in-service education program to determine areas in which they felt a desire to work. The first step was to set up a mechanical procedure by which the participants could indicate a specific area for investigation. We felt the main purpose of this first step was to give the participants a feeling of freedom and confidence that this program would make every effort to provide resources with which they could work toward solutions to individual problems. The second, and more complex, step was to provide an atmosphere in which the participants could use free discussion as an instrument for helping each other to explore effectively their areas of need and possible ways of satisfying these needs.

It seemed rather naive to expect participants to raise themselves by their introspective bootstraps to a point where

they felt enough confidence in themselves and in the entire setting to feel free to examine their needs. The average person is likely to feel more confident in a new situation if he is in it with others. The key to this movement was the in-service education committee. This committee was to be the main instrument for the development of the necessary atmosphere and the most important instrument for the evaluation of the readiness of groups and individuals for movement from step one to step two. Since really frank discussion and self evaluation is ordinarily more easily accomplished in peer groups than with status leaders the members of the in-service education committee were called upon to promote this process of self-evaluation in their own buildings. They were helped in this task by graduate students from the Institute for Group Development, of Teachers College, Columbia University.

The initial step in helping the committee members to promote this atmosphere in their own facilities was to establish the desired atmosphere within the committee itself, using its own learning experiences to develop insight into the process for bringing about a climate that would enable individual faculty members to feel free to express their genuine needs and to discuss the pursuit of these aims with one another. Our educational system and our culture in general are opposed to identifying our real needs and revealing these needs to others. The development of this desired atmosphere and of the ability to identify one's own needs is not something that proceeds on an unbroken front but rather is a highly individual matter in which persons are found at all points along the road.

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The evaluation by a participant of the value of his own learning experience is also a dynamic and moving type of evaluation. It is a process determining type of evaluation. It is the point in the program at which continuity for the individual is determined. Continuity in an individualized program is ideally conceived not as an ordered sequence of subject matter but rather as an internally ordered progress toward the individual participants' goals. For example, a participant who had identified his goal as having a more orderly atmosphere within his room might not necessarily elect to work in a succession of groups dealing with "classroom management" but might rather see his problem first as one of providing adequate independent work for reading groups. In a second workshop he might elect to work in a group examining the emotional growth of children since he had seen this need in the first workshop. In a third workshop he might be with a group concerned with examining a good social studies program since he saw this as a means of implementing concepts developed in the workshop dealing with emotional growth.

To an outside observer this participant might appear to be very much of a dilettante. To such an observer there may appear to be an almost total lack of continuity. To the participant, however, his learning experiences have a very real continuity. All these experiences have brought him nearer his goal of control within his classroom. The steps on the way to his goal may not all necessarily have been identified at the time the goal was set, but rather may have grown from the evaluation of the worth of each experience. This evaluation then points the way to the next experience that probably would be of value.

The final type of evaluation identified

for the Bristol Township program was the evaluation of the total worth of this type of in-service education program. We were interested in assessing the value teachers attached to the program and, of course, its ultimate effect on the experiences offered to children. Since all of the types of evaluation mentioned so far are inextricably intertwined this final evaluation is also an evaluation of all of these various types.

One of the first things we wanted to know was the attitude of teachers toward the program. Did they have a sense of satisfaction with their learning experiences? The assumption here is that those learning experiences which are most satisfying to the learner are most likely to change the learner's behavior. The satisfaction of teachers with the program was measured first by instruments devised for this purpose and secondly through the analysis of the interaction of the in-service education committee and their faculties. The instrument used to measure the satisfaction of individuals with the program was a rather unusual questionnaire bearing at the top a line marked from one to one hundred. Above one appeared the words, "no value"; above twenty, the words "so-so"; above fifty, the words "just average"; above eighty, the words "very good"; and above one hundred, the words "couldn't be better." The participants were then asked to indicate their feeling of satisfaction with a mark at the appropriate place on the scale. Below the satisfaction scale were three questions. They were: (a) Specifically, how could the sessions you attended have been better? (b) What did you like best about this meeting? and (c) Any other suggestions. This instrument was distributed at the close of each in-service education day.

Committee members at their next

meeting; compared the reactions they sensed in their groups with the reactions indicated on the instruments. Their conclusions were that, in general, the reactions indicated by the instruments were in agreement with their own probings so far as a degree of satisfaction was concerned. The elements making up the satisfactions and dissatisfactions of the program were more reliably ferreted out through the personal contacts of the committee. This conclusion was reached by trying to see the ratio of agreement that seemed to exist between the views reflected by the instrument and those sensed by the committee members. Where disagreement existed it was assumed for the purposes of operation that the committee view was the correct one.

This feeling of satisfaction was also tested with an end of the year evaluation instrument. In this instrument, the participants were asked in one question whether they preferred the type of program in effect now or the type previously used. They were also asked to list the reasons for their choice. The reasons given seemed to indicate that the educational rationale behind the program was being recognized by a larger group than had seemed evident at the beginning. The majority of responses are typified by statements of why they liked the program, such as, "Different people have different needs at different times," or "It is more interesting if you attend meetings of your choice," or "I would rather select an area for which I feel some need."

The worth of the program to improved educational practice in the classroom was judged in light of teacher response, observation and community reaction. Teacher response was solicited in the final evaluation instrument. One of the questions was, "List two specific ways the workshops have helped you in the

classroom." Here the responses were as varied as the number of teachers who answered. Among the responses were, "I learned a variety of solutions to problems and thereby achieved a feeling of security," and "I was able to gain new techniques in reading, art and arithmetic." There were also, of course, some responses such as "I do not feel that workshops helped me in the classroom this year."

Observation was accomplished through the eyes of the committee and administrators. Each listed those changes he felt fairly certain had grown out of the in-service education program. A building principal might notice that teachers were beginning to make considerably more use of the autoharps in their building or to ask for more manipulative materials for arithmetic. If the teachers asking for these materials had been working with these materials in workshops this was considered an indication of the effectiveness of the workshop. A comment by a teacher to a committee member to the effect that she had experimented with creative writing after becoming interested in that area as an outgrowth of a workshop attended for the purpose of finding how to teach punctuation better was considered a sign of workshop influence.

Community reaction was a record of comments and observations by members of the community, mainly parents, on some aspect of the curriculum that seemed to have been directly related to in-service education. One of the administrators, for instance, had a parent say to him that her child in Miss X's room was doing such interesting things in art recently. Since the administrator knew Miss X had been working in art this was then counted as evidence of the effectiveness of the workshop experience.

Evaluation in the Bristol Township plan of individualized in-service education was thus both a vehicle for advancement and a milestone by which progress could be measured. To any district interested in trying a similar plan I can only say that the direction seems a good one. The dynamic forms of self-evaluation and direction required are not easily

achieved nor are the mileposts as neat indications of progress as are their highway counterparts.

To determine direction is probably the best we can do until a human calculus has been devised that will enable us to examine and analyze a fluid and dynamic human enterprise with mathematical exactness.

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Approaches to In-Service Education in New Mexico

Several practices in a state-wide in-service education program are reported by these authors.

EDUCATION in New Mexico has made much progress in recent years. Among the specific accomplishments worthy of mention are: (a) the establishment of a State Board of Educational Finance which has done much to help coordinate programs, budget requests, and allocation of money related to the institutions of higher education in the state; (b) a public school instructional staff salary schedule which ranks sixth in the nation, despite a per capita income in the state which ranks only thirty-fifth among the states; (c) a doctoral program in education which, though administered at the University of New Mexico in Albuquerque, was cooperatively developed by all the colleges and universities in the state which prepare teachers and school administrators; (d) a revision

of the state teacher certification regulations which gives added emphasis and strength to the professional aspects of the preparation programs and which provides for issuing certificates only upon the recommendation of the director of teacher education at the institution where the applicant completed his degree program; (e) a very vigorous four-year program which is being supported by the W. K. Kellogg Foundation, developed under the auspices of the New Mexico State Department of Education, and designed to improve the quality of educational administration in the state's schools; (f) a very active and highly respected state educational association which is proud of the fact that 99.4% of New Mexico's teachers are members of this state association and that 94% of

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