

## Meeting Barriers to In-Service Education

*In-service programs  
become effective  
when barriers  
are recognized and removed.*

THE need for in-service programs for teachers is recognized by all who are concerned with improvement of school practice. A successful in-service program involves many different kinds of activities. This article deals with one type of in-service activity—university connected courses for academic credit. Some of the barriers to successful credit programs will be discussed and some solutions that seem to work, at least in one situation, will be indicated.

### Academic Barrier

There is constant pressure from teachers to have college credit, and frequently graduate credit, associated with the in-service program. This is especially true in school systems where salary schedules are based, in part at least, on academic credits earned. Many institutions have, however, set up policies to protect the academic integrity of their work, espe-

cially work for graduate credit, which limit the types of activities for which credit can be granted.

It is not uncommon for the needs of the in-service program to be in apparent conflict with these academic policies as laid down by admissions officers, curriculum committees, and graduate committees. The interests of the in-service program may indicate that all teachers in a certain group participate in a special class; the institutional admissions office may be committed to careful screening and selective admissions and so object to blanket admissions. The organizers of in-service programs may be interested in problem-centered experiences; the curriculum committees may demand established courses that have successfully passed through the various levels of academic approval and achieved the sanctity of the printed catalog. The in-service program may call for experiences that are designed to result in immediate and observable improvement in school practice; the graduate committee may be interested in a systematic se-

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quence of approved courses aimed at development of scholarship, with modification of school practice a desirable but long-range and indirect by-product.

As indicated, the academic barrier sometimes operates in requiring that only established campus courses may be offered off-campus. Such a regulation may result in in-service credit courses that are quite valid from the point of view of a graduate program but that are not directly aimed at improvement of some specific phase of the school program. This situation is likely to exist when the institution holds that its purpose is to develop scholarship in the study of education and believes that in the long run this is the best way to improve school practice. The organizer of in-service programs may take the stand that the master's degree is a practitioner's degree, that its immediate purpose is to improve school practice, and that the institution should admit all licensed teachers into programs centered around practical school problems.

The academic barrier could be removed by completely disassociating academic credit from the in-service program. Unfortunately this might also reduce most of the incentive for participation in the programs.

The barrier to flexibility in the in-service program due to the academic requirement of prior course approval is handled in a variety of ways, though usually through some catch-all designation as "field course" or "workshop." At the University of Miami the term "practicum" has been used for this purpose. According to the *Bulletin*, a practicum is defined as follows:

A cooperative field study of some practical phase of education. Usually conducted by a staff member of the School of Education for and with the faculty of a school

which wishes to work on a particular educational problem in its own program.

This course designation is available for a variety of field courses. During the present year, for example, it is being used for school self-studies by the faculties of 13 elementary schools, by four junior high schools, and by two senior high schools; a leadership training program for invited candidates for principalships; a seminar in interpretation of tests and measurements for test chairmen, counselors, and personnel deans; a study of problems of teaching speech by a group of high school speech and English teachers; special work in audiology and lip reading for selected teachers of special education; and work in conversational Spanish for elementary teachers with no training in Spanish but who nevertheless are expected to use the Spanish lessons brought into the classroom via radio broadcasts.

The admissions phase of the academic barrier remains one of the great unresolved issues in the continuing education of teachers. At the University of Miami any employed and certified teacher is admitted to a practicum for undergraduate credit without question and with a minimum of red tape. Teachers wishing graduate credit, however, must follow the regular admissions and screening procedures. Graduate credit earned in practicums can be included in work toward an advanced degree, but the amount of such work that can be so used is limited.

### Financial Barrier

When the cost of the in-service program is taken care of by the school system and when this program is generously supported, finances present no special problem. But when the in-service pro-

gram is supported by tuition payments from teachers enrolled in courses for credit, the cost factor may become a distinct barrier to a good in-service program.

When an in-service program is supported solely by enrollment fees, there are serious problems both for the cooperating institution and for the school system. For its financial protection the institution will probably want some minimum enrollment income to make a start toward meeting salary and other expenses of providing the consultant or instructor for the course. If, as may easily be the case, the number of enrollments is not known until the session begins, this leaves the institution with a question about the teaching load of the instructor. Does he or does he not have a class? Is he available for another assignment, or, sometimes, does another assignment have to be dug up to round out his teaching load?

The school system has equally unhappy problems with this arrangement. It is frustrating to try to plan a systematic in-service program if one is never sure when a class will be cancelled for lack of enrollments. Also undesirable pressures may be exerted on individual teachers to enroll for credit because "one more enrollment will give us enough to have the class." Sometimes a course should include all the teachers in a certain group, such as the faculty of one school or all the test chairmen in the system, but there may be an understandable reluctance to require all the teachers in the group to participate if such participation requires the payment by the teacher of tuition to the cooperating institution.

One simple solution to this financial barrier would be for the school system to assume full costs of the program, in-

cluding any tuition payments to the cooperating institution. Where this is not feasible, either because of total cost or because of reluctance to pay tuition for credits for individual teachers, a compromise such as that worked out between the Dade County schools and the University of Miami might be acceptable.

When an in-service course that might involve credit for individual teachers is agreed on by the joint County-University committee on in-service education, the County guarantees the University a minimum of enrollments for credit. Teachers participating in the course may enroll for credit, or not, as they please. If the number enrolling for credit, and paying the required tuition, is less than the guaranteed minimum, the school system makes up the difference from its in-service budget.

Under this policy the total cost to the County of the program is reduced. Teachers who want the academic credit may get it by paying the necessary tuition and doing satisfactorily the extra work involved. Teachers who do not want the academic credit may be encouraged, or even required, to participate in the program without embarrassing pressure on them to pay fees. And the University can plan its teaching assignments without the uncertainty as to whether a class will have to be canceled for lack of sufficient credit enrollments.

### Certification Barrier

Certification requirements also may sometimes get in the way of a good in-service program. The shortage of qualified teachers has led to the employment of many teachers who are not fully certified. These teachers are under pres-

sure to make up the certification deficiencies. Nearly every in-service course is regarded as a means of meeting some certification requirement. If a course is planned for experienced English teachers to do advanced work on some special phase of the high school English curriculum, there is immediate request from some unqualified teacher to get into the course and have it designated a basic course in teaching of English for certification purposes. It is not uncommon to have different teachers in an in-service course asking that it be interpreted in almost completely different ways to meet their own individual certification problems.

The solution to this barrier seems to be to have courses offered specifically to meet certification deficiencies in the preparation of emergency teachers. But in most cases there should be a clear differentiation between courses designed to meet these initial certification requirements and those designed for the further development of teachers who have already met the entry level of professional preparation. We do nothing for the quality of our courses and certainly nothing for respect for professional preparation of teachers if we act as though preliminary preparation in the field is of no consequence in doing advanced work in an in-service program.

### Attitude Barrier

The teaching personnel toward whom in-service education is directed often create the greatest barrier to the success of these programs. Indifference, negativism, resistance, lack of interest, apathy, complacency and inertia may be identified as factors which sometimes limit individuals or whole faculties in efforts at growth through in-service tech-

niques. The frank and sometimes critical appraisal of in-service courses by the teachers who are involved in them is helpful in searching for the deep-seated and true causes for the attitudes which teachers hold. Analysis of these expressed attitudes provides insight and guidance to the end that these barriers may be reduced or eliminated.

Teachers often clearly point out that they feel *no personal need* for the activities in which they are engaged. In-service courses which are imposed upon teachers create these attitudes. Faculty action should be concerned with the professional needs which have been identified by that faculty. Educational problems are many within the environment of every school community, and there is little defense for faculty action on topics to which the staff cannot relate its own needs. Good leadership will permit or guide the group to identify such areas as: underachieving pupils, low achievement subject areas, problems in community relations, or curriculum revision needs. When teachers become involved in the study and solution of their own problems, negative attitudes are largely eliminated.

Other attitudes of resistance toward in-service courses may grow out of *disregard for the individual differences* found within the faculty group. Teachers vary in range of ability, background of experience and personal interests. In-service programs which assume that everybody is equally interested in the same problem are doomed to failure. It is usually better for the faculty to list several problems and then take ample time for individuals or groups to choose and organize their course of action. There should be a time for the faculty to work as a group, but there must also be times for small groups and individuals to

tackle problems more closely related to their own needs. Grade level meetings, subject area groups, special interest problems, and the unique abilities of individuals should be considered in faculty organization for work. Recognition of the individual differences and the utilization of these varying abilities will help to reduce participants' attitudes of resistance.

### Time Barrier

Other expressions of attitudes may reflect *insecurity* on the part of teachers as they approach a self-study or in-service course. In-service education usually means self-evaluation and a critical analysis of methods and procedures with resulting modifications and changes. The motives and purposes behind a school evaluation must be clearly understood by the teachers. The leader's role requires deep perception of other people and in like manner the leader must perceive himself as a fellow worker seeking ways to improve the school program. Every individual has much to contribute in group action and both the leader and the participants must feel this. When the principal, supervisor or college resource person uses his position to manipulate, dominate or force others to accept his point of view—then teachers may feel insecure and become defensive about making change of any kind. Status worries place real restrictions on constructive faculty growth.

In-service education does require time. There must be time to plan for a productive group session and there must be time for the group to meet. Many excellent and very conscientious teachers drive themselves too near their work limit with their preparation and instruction of a class of children. When the further re-

sponsibilities of courses are thrust upon them, they are frustrated and disturbed. In-service courses lose their effectiveness when teachers are mentally harassed by the feeling that this means more work and time beyond the already very busy day. Certainly little will be accomplished in less than an hour and, if members of the group participate as they should, two hours will pass very quickly. From the practical point of view, meetings of this length must be held after the students leave school. There is a growing practice to dismiss school early on the days when the faculty engage in educational meetings.

While the students ultimately gain from the faculty study and deliberation, this practice does reduce the already crowded schedule of instruction. If teachers meet weekly or twice monthly on student time, there may be serious and justifiable objections. Where school systems have by policy set aside one afternoon each week after school for faculty meetings, this regular time should be used for in-service education. In this way teachers will realize that their faculty meeting time has been organized and planned by the staff to consider important school problems. Indeed, all faculty meetings should be so organized, and the in-service label should create little threat to the admittedly busy school teachers who will attend.

### Potential

In summary, programs of in-service education have great potential for the professional growth of teachers. They can be a potent force for the improvement of school practice. But there are barriers to successful programs, and these need to be recognized and removed as far as possible.

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