

A State Department's Role in In-Service Education

Seeking ways of meeting teachers' needs is the continuing task of in-service education.

ANY activity toward self-education in which one engages after becoming a teacher is "in-service" education. Attendance at summer terms at college, extension classes from a college and special classes organized at the local level are all in-service education. Another kind—the kind to which this article is addressed—is that which is done locally, not for the avowed purpose of "education of the teacher on the job" but for the purpose of school improvement.

Ways of Meeting Teachers' Needs

In-service education takes place as people on the job work on problems about which they are concerned. The focus should be on finding some satisfactory solution to a problem, some better way of doing something, some improvement of a less-than-perfect situation. Through working at the trouble-

spot in a problem-solving manner, in-service education naturally and almost automatically results. This is particularly true if the leadership is conscious of teacher education as a secondary goal. In-service education of teachers is a by-product of activities undertaken for school improvement when there is a scientific approach to the problem.

Example 1: Local Summer Workshops. Teachers do have concern for improving their skills and understandings. They have proved this in Georgia the past two summers by their response to workshops in local communities organized and staffed by the State Department of Education at local request. During the summer of 1958 the State Department of Education offered to local school systems noncredit workshops of two weeks' duration to attack problems of program and organization for grades seven, eight, and nine. During that summer, 13 workshops were held in local school systems with teams of teachers and principals from surrounding schools joining the host system. In the local workshops, certain plans for each school were developed by the teachers and principals in attendance. Because of the way in which they worked there was "in-service education," although the primary objective was the development of plans.

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Similar workshops were offered by the Department of Education for the summer of 1959 for all teachers, grades one through eight. The problem areas in which work was possible were determined by the availability of staff with special competencies, since these workshops differed from the ones of the previous summer in that they utilized only Department of Education personnel. Again there was demonstrated the fact that professional people are sufficiently concerned to give of their own time to work at their own problems. In local workshops, teachers and principals worked at developing a sequential science program, grades one to eight; unifying the language arts program; understanding behavior of children; and utilizing test results to plan for children's activities. In the workshops certain plans were developed for each school, and in so doing in-service education was a concomitant.

Each of these two summer programs took study on everybody's part. It took reading; it took experimenting with materials and equipment; it took previewing of many films; it took studying of charts and graphs and the preparation of data from local sources; and it took a lot of sharpening wits against wits. Teachers were better educated after the experience although the immediate purpose was finding better ways of doing a job. Superficial jumping to conclusions will not do it, but a sound plan for arriving at conclusions will result in in-service education.

Example II: Regional Clinics. The Northeast Georgia Teacher Education Council, an independent organization of teachers, school leaders and college personnel, is constantly sensitive to needs of teachers. This Council works in a

different way from the summer workshops just described. Its efforts toward meeting teachers' needs are usually in the direction of one-day clinics. Through the feelers which the Council puts out some of the most immediate concerns are determined, and clinics are arranged accordingly. Sometimes the "feelers" are in the nature of a questionnaire; sometimes it is a matter of keeping an ear to the ground. The current nation-wide concern over science, mathematics and modern foreign languages has been the impetus of a number of one-day clinics. The clinics were held at points within easy driving distance of any teacher in a given vicinity. A vast amount of planning is done for each clinic—planning which seeks to determine just the questions on which the teachers need and want help, planning to match resource people to the expressed needs, planning for adequate and appropriate space, planning for meaningful exhibits and time for their use—planning, planning, planning! As a result of careful planning, teachers' expressed needs for information and guidance are being met and in-service education is taking place.

Example III: Local Initiative. Another activity which brings about in-service education occurs during the school year, usually with local leadership and using local and outside resource people as they are needed to bring information and know-how concerning local problems. This type of activity is increasing in the southeastern states. One of the stimulations for this increase is the Cooperative Program in Elementary Education of the Southern Association of Colleges and Secondary Schools. One of the obligations which a school assumes when it becomes a member of the Cooperative Program is to engage in some effort toward school improvement.

This has served as a spur to some schools to look critically at themselves and see where improvements might be needed and to search for ways to bring about improvement. Plans for attacking a problem are developed by a school, usually under the leadership of the principal with the cooperation of the instructional supervisor. The plan of attack usually includes such items as time set aside for group work, resources and materials to be used in the study, and data which will be needed for evaluation. In Georgia, as in many other states, a copy of these plans is sent to a person in the State Department of Education who is responsible for the plans. At this level the plans are reviewed and further help is given in locating and using resources or in suggesting possible improvement in the plan of attack.

Changes in Practice

In-service activities which justify the time result in changes in the classroom. Sometimes the results are immediate and easily observed; sometimes they are longer in becoming evident and are more subtle.

Example I: Improving Skills in Art. When a group of teachers agree among themselves to meet on Saturdays twice a month throughout a school year to increase their skills in providing opportunities for children to experience art, for example, one would expect to see a difference in the classrooms. In Coweta County, a group of teachers were conscious of their inadequacies in art education and asked their instructional supervisor, Norma Oliver, to provide some in-service opportunities for them. Miss Oliver helped them plan and was instrumental in getting Miss Olleen Williams, art education consultant, State

Department of Education, to work with them throughout the year.

Almost immediately changes were noted in classrooms. Problems that were encountered in the classrooms were brought back to the teacher group for further work. There is no college credit involved in this experience. A statement of the fact that these teachers participated in this voluntary activity is recorded in their certification file as a post-dated check against the day when "earned increments" take their rightful place on the salary schedule. Other than that and the satisfaction the teachers get from the experience, there is no credit.

Example II: Developing a Science Guide. Curriculum development is usually a long-term process. When there are top-level decisions that certain curriculum changes are to be made, differences in actual classroom practices are slow in coming about. When curriculum changes originate in the classroom, the process is slow, but usually the differences stand a better chance of being real. Curriculum development in Georgia, even when initiated at the state level, comes about through grassroots activity. Take, for example, the recent development of a curriculum bulletin, *Science for Georgia Schools*.

The curriculum director, State Department of Education, sensed that the time was right for some concerted action in this curriculum area. In a workshop financed by the State Board of Education, a tentative draft of a guide was developed by a selected group of public school teachers and supervisors, under the guidance of two special resource people engaged for this purpose. The following year, selected schools and school systems were given the tentative materials developed at the workshop, with the understanding that the pro-

posed program would be implemented in the classrooms through in-service study and further development of the materials. Through the work of several experimental centers and a second workshop, *Science for Georgia Schools*, Vols. I and II evolved.

Some of the local systems that used the tentative materials also developed science guides peculiarly suited to their needs. These guides evolved as a written record of what was actually done in the classrooms. What was done in the classroom grew out of the in-service work of the teachers as together they studied their children, the science education needs of the children, and the suggestions made in the materials.

Policies and Opportunities

Local school superintendents and boards of education are within their rights to include in contracts of their professional personnel, a requirement that they participate in in-service education activities. These rights, however, also carry responsibilities.

In some states, as in Georgia, unless there is a local requirement to the contrary, a young teacher can graduate from a four-year college at 22 years of age, get a professional teaching certificate, have five years "successful" teaching experience, convert the certificate to a life certificate and retire at the age of 70 with never a day's further study. Ridiculous? Of course—but it is possible.

It takes the kind of cooperative study of school problems described in the preceding sections to insure good schools for children. Superintendents and boards of education are the people and agencies charged with local responsibility for providing good schools. Theirs is a responsibility for seeing that conditions exist which insure good schools.

Teachers and all school personnel who will be involved in the activities should have a voice in deciding which activities will be most meaningful, but when one accepts a position, it should be a part of the contract that there shall be participation in whatever curriculum improvement project has been or will be planned.

In addition to expecting teachers to take part in during-the-year activities such as these, many local boards of education require periodic summer study. In order not to put undue hardship on some who would find it difficult to leave home and family for an extended period of time, and possibly to make the study as directly applicable to local problems as possible, some of these same systems provide learning opportunities at home.

Example 1: Chatham County. Notable as an example of this kind of provision is that made by the Chatham County School System in Savannah, Georgia. Each summer, Chatham County teachers are offered opportunities to choose from among several topics the one which most interests them, and through working on this topic under the guidance of their own supervisory staff, meet the requirement for summer study. Three of these two-weeks experiences may be substituted for the local requirement of a quarter's work at a college. In the summer of 1959, study-planning opportunities were offered in several subject areas and on the topic of the "Ungraded Primary Unit."

Beginning in one school several years ago, interest in the ungraded primary school had spread and there was a climate of readiness for an experience of this kind in the schools of Chatham County. Mrs. Jewel Askew, elementary supervisor for Chatham County was responsible for helping teachers get ready for the workshop. She marshaled collec-

tions of professional literature, textbooks and teaching aids, and she invited teachers to bring materials of their own to add to the collection. She suggested some problems to work on and invited teachers to bring additional problems which they and their coworkers had recognized. Such advance planning is typical of procedures which make a good working situation.

Example II: Cherokee County. Another example of a requirement for periodic study being undergirded by opportunities for meeting the requirement locally is an arrangement made in Cherokee County. Under the guidance of their instructional supervisor, Mrs. Elizabeth Bailey, this school system had long had effective in-service work on a voluntary basis. Teachers had come to accept such work as a way of professional growth and were eager to raise their professional standards. It was through recommendation of the teacher group that the board of education adopted periodic study as a general policy for all. As their summer in-service program stands at present, all teachers who are not in summer school are expected to participate in a local workshop each third year—primary teachers one year, middle grade teachers the next, and high school teachers the third. After considerable exploration during the spring they agree upon a limited number of problems for concentrated study for two weeks in the summer. Competent resource people and adequate resource materials are supplied. One year the elementary schools were getting ready to move into new buildings with a library in each—an arrangement they had not had heretofore. The problem they posed for study that year was setting up, operating and using a library.

Skills in problem solving through group processes can and should be developed. Very few problems encountered in school situations are peculiar to any one classroom. Most of them are either school-wide or common to a number of teachers. The occasional bogging down of efforts toward group problem solving can often be laid to one of two causes. First of these is ignorance of, or failure to heed, basic principles of group dynamics. The second is ignorance of, or an attempt to short circuit, the processes of problem solving. Unless the group is thoroughly skillful in solving problems through group processes, these two factors should become a conscious part of the in-service activity.

Recognizing and stating a problem is not easy, particularly for persons whose undergraduate work, as well as that of their high school and elementary days, has been of the "read or listen, then repeat" type.

And how many of us have not seen a group or an individual accept the first conclusion that presents itself without exploring many possibilities?

And how seldom do we see any real plans made for evaluating the effectiveness of a decision through collection of pertinent data?

And yet problem solving is a skill which all are saying children should acquire. How can one teach a skill which one does not have? In-service activities which engage teachers who lack this skill should be consciously directed toward developing problem-solving abilities.

In summary, in-service education of teachers takes place as they work on problems of concern to themselves. When they do this, changes occur in the classrooms.

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