

Continuing Education: Why and How

TODAY education is faced with an unprecedented challenge: preparing the children and youth of our nation to live effectively in a kind of world impossible to predict, and to maintain high moral, spiritual and intellectual values during rapid cultural change. Schools will discharge their responsibility in meeting this challenge to the extent that practice in classrooms is based upon the best available information from research in education and related disciplines.

Research indicates that one of the most promising developments toward improving instruction is the rapidly increasing nation-wide interest in in-service education. There is now scarcely a school district without some organized plan for professional growth.

We cannot assume, however, that in-service education is a cure-all prescribed by administrators to correct whatever weaknesses may exist in instructional programs. Professional growth activities become dynamic through clarity of purpose, carefully planned procedures, and built-in provision for evaluation. Only as these requirements are met can in-service education serve the broad purpose of upgrading the profession.

An effective in-service program makes up for inadequacies in pre-service training, strengthens public support through increased understanding, and imple-

ments new concepts in the teaching-learning process. Between teachers and pupils such a program fosters empathy conducive to quickened interest and creative activity in the classroom. As a teacher becomes excited about his own learning, he shares the emotional experiences that accompany the learning process and transmits to children an enthusiasm for learning.

The public school is potentially a laboratory in which all children and adults are engaged in the process of inquiry. A teacher who learns about group planning by participating with his fellow teachers in planning for his own professional growth is better able to work with his pupils in group planning activities. By sharpening his skill in evaluating his own learning experiences, he sharpens his skill in evaluating his pupils' learning.

As a program is planned around these objectives, efforts of educators at the state, district and local school levels must be directed cooperatively toward meeting the needs and interests of all teachers. Responsibility for initiative in planning is determined by the nature of the program.

Questions such as these must be explored: What are the goals and purposes of the program? What kind of program encompasses immediate concerns of individual teachers and at the same time

provides opportunity to work on long-range interests and needs? What is the school trying to do for the children and youth of its community?

A basis of action and unification all along the way is acceptance of a common set of beliefs to provide a broad framework for identification of problems and to guide the group in its decisions.

After basic plans have been made, implementing the program is an important consideration. The way this is done has a definite bearing upon classroom instruction. One of the obligations of public schools is to help children learn to function as citizens in a democracy. To accomplish this, procedures in classrooms must be democratic. Democratic procedures function best in classrooms when democracy is practiced throughout the school organization so that teachers and other personnel are themselves participating in a democratic way of life.

This is exemplified as each teacher has a part in planning and implementing the in-service education program, is actively involved in making decisions important to him, and shares responsibility for those decisions. *There can be no pretense in the matter of participation.* At all levels personnel must have such faith in the democratic process that the principle is consistently applied. Total participation results in higher morale, maintenance of interest, and willingness to change. The extent to which changes will improve the educational program is determined by the quality of the problem-solving processes employed.

Leaders capable of holding groups to good problem-solving procedures are necessary to the success of the program. Effectiveness of results, economy of time, and satisfaction of group members are largely dependent upon the quality of

leadership. How can group leaders be identified and trained in such a way that potential status leaders, also, are developed?

Visiting consultants often are expected to assume leadership roles. It is recognized that appropriate use of consultant help is an important part of the program; however, one of the things teachers frequently request but find least helpful is an expert to tell them how to do the job. How can groups deal realistically with the principle that procedures rendering the greatest benefit are frequently slow and require most effort from the learners?

In this effort, the public, too, is involved. In-service education that will produce a sound curriculum acceptable to the community is dependent upon public participation. All socio-economic groups should be represented in such planning. Cooperative effort results in better understanding between parents and teachers, and between schools and the community. A well-balanced program is possible only as the public endorses and supports it, participates in its activities, and undergirds its long-range aims.

Public understanding and approval are particularly needed in the important decision about time allocated to in-service education. How can time be found to carry out the extensive program required? Professional growth requires a great deal of time; after-school meetings once a month are not enough. Can the profession justify reducing classroom time to participate in in-service education programs? Can the total job of teaching and in-service education be done in only nine months of each year?

In the final analysis, success of an in-service program can be measured only in terms of constructive change in class-

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work. They will want to use this observation method in improving their own teaching techniques.

Once an attitude of "I want to evaluate my work and improve my teaching" has been developed, the principal is ready to move in as a coordinator in making this visitation or observation program more effective.

After a teacher has indicated a desire to observe, he should be given a voice in selecting the teacher whose room he wishes to visit. Occasionally the teacher needs further guidance in the selection. The teacher selected for visitation needs to be contacted and a date set for such observation.

Sometimes the observed teacher may want the visitor to know in advance what the class will be trying to develop during the scheduled period. After the observation period is over, it is a "must" that these two teachers have opportunity to talk for a few minutes in order that the observer may understand thoroughly

all the teaching techniques employed and why.

These two in-service techniques have been found to be quite effective. In struggling to meet rapidly changing aims through alterations in our educational system, it is perhaps not surprising that our educational world is in a continual ferment. But this ferment does not necessarily mean chaos. Society from time to time is shocked by events, and sooner or later such events cause us to re-examine our educational procedures.

We cannot change an educational system overnight or suddenly eliminate deficiencies. Our educational system must be kept sound and our educational goals must be clear to everyone, particularly to teachers. We need to be constantly alert for new techniques of teaching that are being developed through educational research. If this is done, we can work for desirable change quite rapidly and our schools will remain strong.

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room procedures and community understanding. It is difficult to evaluate change in these areas; often, observable change resulting from an activity comes long after completion of the activity. In the meantime, the group needs the best evidence available to determine immediate direction. At every stage of the program, in-service education groups face decisions as to how to secure and use evaluative data.

Today's challenge to education places upon educators responsibility to provide opportunity for growth within the profession. The potentialities of this opportunity can be realized through the cooperation and active participation of all concerned. We will solve our problems in education as we continue to search for answers.

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