

Identifying Needs for In-Service Growth

*The supervisor
must specialize
in ascertaining needs
and fostering growth.*

AN OFTEN cited characteristic of a profession is that it possesses a constantly evolving body of knowledge and techniques about which its members must keep themselves informed through reading, organized study, and conferences. For the profession of education, fields such as biology, anthropology and psychiatry are contributors to the "constantly evolving body of knowledge," along with psychology, sociology, child development, and education itself. The need for knowing relevant research in these fields and for drawing classroom implications therefrom constitutes a prime basis for a continuing program of in-service education.

Another important characteristic of a profession is that the members band together for stimulation and sharing of ideas and for the development of solidarity of interests and purposes. Here is a second basis for on-going activities which in turn are educative for all who

participate. These two enduring bases in the professional nature of education cause supervisors to have a continuing concern for in-service education, their own as well as that of other school personnel.

The responsibility for helping plan and carry out programs of in-service education is an important part of the work of almost every supervisor, curriculum director, department head, or principal and calls for great creativity, insight, and sensitivity to people and situations. For new supervisors and experienced supervisors in new positions, this responsibility is especially challenging, for there is the added urgency of becoming acquainted quickly and more than superficially with the new situation. Perhaps three phases of the new supervisor's concern can be identified for discussion: (a) becoming sensitive to the areas of special need in the system, (b) planning for making cooperative action possible, and (c) facilitating efforts to grow or change.

Ascertaining Professional Needs

Finding out what problems teachers are concerned about is obviously an imperative step for the new supervisor. Also imperative, but sometimes not as clearly realized, is a need to know what previous steps have been taken and what

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efforts are currently under way. There are few quicker ways to alienate co-workers and affront new colleagues than for the new supervisor to assume, or appear to assume, that the situation has been static until *his* arrival.

Ways of learning about the instructional program and the concerns of teachers can often be rather informal yet systematic, as:

—Listening to daily talk among teachers in the hallway, in the lounge, over the lunch table and abstracting from such comments the professional concerns reflected in the problems, thwartings and small triumphs mentioned, together with a noting on cards later of the concerns identified.

—Doing more listening than talking while conferring with building principals about the instructional program in progress and the aspirations of the faculty and parents for the immediate and more distant future.

—Conducting a post card survey to learn from teachers their wishes regarding topics for newsletters and bulletins and as subjects for professional meetings.

—Searching available records such as the requests for extension classes, workshops and individual assistance in order to note areas of frequent or intense concern. A look back over several years of such requests often reveals persistent concerns and recurrent emphases.

—Skimming minutes of meetings of the Board of Public Instruction and of the P.T.A. to learn of community concerns over former years, as well as those for the current one.

—Consulting with local representatives of professional organizations in city, county and state, such as the Department of Elementary School Prin-

cipals, Association for Childhood Education International, and the National Council of Teachers of English, to learn the nature of the concerns their members have identified and the scope and direction of present efforts.

—Joining faculties in evaluation studies in which the faculty is examining the entire program of the school.

—Teaming up with individual teachers and principals or with groups in carrying on action research, or sometimes short studies bearing on immediate problems.

—Helping beginning teachers look at their initial efforts and detect the conditions in themselves and in the situation that help and hinder.

Expediting Cooperative Action

A second phase of a supervisor's responsibility for in-service education may be described as expediting cooperative action. At the county-wide, city-wide, or school-wide level, in-service education activities typically involve committees, groups and organizations, whose members, in turn, are often in interaction with other individuals and organizations. Hence there is tremendous need for clear communication, coordination and foresight regarding means of carrying through on commitments. There is also great need for sensitivity to semantic problems in conveying meanings on the part of all concerned and to the potential misunderstandings, unnecessary anxieties, and hurt feelings that arise from inadequate communication.

Working closely with existing committees, councils and organizations is of course one important phase of expediting cooperative action. Helping organize new committees to meet detected needs is another phase. Also important

is serving personally on committees in a shoulder-to-shoulder working relationship. Representing schools as a liaison person in other groups concerned with children, such as health and welfare agencies, is still another aspect of cooperative work.

What do supervisors themselves say as to the problems of identifying professional needs and setting up programs of in-service education? Several supervisors who are new in their present positions or who looked back analytically on their beginning experiences offer these several suggestions¹:

"The main problem I faced as I came into the system as a new supervisor was getting acquainted with the teachers as well as the different school systems. Now, I'm trying to identify their wishes as to what they would like to study on a county-wide basis in in-service training. I am doing this by sending out questionnaires and consulting with the principals and teachers in meetings. Several county-wide committees have been started."

"One of the first steps for a beginning supervisor is to visit in each school to become familiar with the situation and to discuss with the principal ways in which he may work with his faculty. By this method many in-service study groups have been formed.

"After the request for in-service training has been received, the entire supervisory staff in the regular staff meeting discusses ways in which this service may be most effectively rendered. In this way we create an in-service education program for ourselves."

"To become acquainted with present instructional programs in schools so as to make plans for in-service programs in terms

¹ Six supervisors of instruction or directors of curriculum in Florida counties furnished suggestions: Frances Wakeland, Fletcher Jones, Ivy Hammock, Mabel Jean Morrison, Marion Watson, Lucy Every.

of needs, we visit schools, establishing rapport, listening, observing needs, and planning cooperatively with all persons concerned for in-service growth programs.

"To make a newly organized county-wide curriculum council function effectively in the identification of curriculum needs at the grass roots and to organize programs to meet these needs, we have tried:

"1. Improving communication—including publicizing an agenda in advance

"2. Increasing time between meetings so that problems can be taken to local staff groups for consideration

"3. Setting up in-service programs based on county-wide mandate."

"We helped set up in-service training among faculties in the county by helping principals initiate a faculty study in the schools pertaining to their problems. We hold meetings of beginning teachers in the county to discuss their first teaching experiences."

"Our first and major responsibility is to the beginning teachers. Through regularly scheduled observations and conferences, we are attempting to help these teachers translate their philosophies into practice."

"Know materials and make them available to teachers and principals. Use time wisely, both that of the persons involved and your own."

Facilitating Change

A third phase of a supervisor's responsibility for in-service education relates to facilitating change in practice of individuals. Sensitivity to a need, intellectual acceptance of the reasons for change, and verbal commitment to a plan are usually not enough to bring about change of behavior in an individual (including the supervisor), especially where feelings are involved or changes are needed in a professional life-style which, until the present, had been

regarded as adequate. Hence the goals and plans for achievement, painstakingly worked out by individuals and groups and sincerely entered into, often bear surprisingly meager fruit.

Research of the past two decades on such matters as perception, the inhibiting effect of strong anxiety, and the influence of the self-concept helps us understand much better than formerly something of why and how this resistance to change occurs. Research is helping us realize the role of our previous experiences in slanting our perception of new experience and screening the conditions to which we are sensitive. Such findings help us understand much that earlier was obscure in human motivation and action.

There are at least three things a supervisor can do. One is to make explicit his own friendliness and helpfulness. This making clear of his intentions is not always easy. A new supervisor is, to the school personnel, an uncertain quantity at first. Many persons may perceive the new or ambiguous situation as threatening and anxiety producing. Meanwhile the supervisor's own shyness or hesitancy in a new setting may make him seem reserved. To others he may actually appear cold, unapproachable, or even critical. It is up to the supervisor to take the initiative in showing friendliness and helpfulness so that his intentions are manifest and beyond question. Only in this way will teachers feel free enough from inhibiting anxiety to operate at their best and aspire to still greater accomplishment and creativity.

In a second way supervisors may facilitate an individual's actual change in practice. This is to recognize that the making of changes in behavior involves a degree of venturing and therefore de-

mands of the individual both confidence and the courage to risk himself in a new situation. Sometimes the supervisor can help others engage in role playing or simple dramatizing of the desired behavior in a nonthreatening situation. Some individuals seem to gain enough confidence from the this-has-no-serious-consequences situation to be willing to work at achieving the new behavior in real circumstances. However, some persons who are acutely uncomfortable themselves in role playing may draw their necessary initial confidence from seeing others, in person or in film, carrying out the action, or from vivid discussion of case studies. The point is that supervisors should expect to help initially by more than words if changes in behavior are expected.

A third kind of help comes through recognition of the need for sustained emotional support while change is under way. The supervisor can encourage the teacher to try the new behavior, with both of them fully aware that the trying will be without expertness at first but that from the initial effort refinement of understanding and skill can develop. During the awkwardness and sometimes discouragement of the repeated tryings, the teacher needs the assurance of the supervisor's personal and professional respect if there is to be ultimate growth and if there is to be sustained satisfaction in experimentation.

When professional needs are well identified, there can be a clear sense of direction and purpose, which is itself energizing. The process and products of successful cooperative action engender zest for continued teamwork. For teachers, principals and supervisors alike, the awareness of growth occurring lifts aspiration for still further professional development.

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