

Attitudes for Growth

AT present many forces seek to shape educational practice. Knowing that these influences are focusing upon school personnel and programs, we would do well to review and to strengthen our own convictions concerning educational practice. For example, it is important for us to recognize that aims in any educational enterprise must become personal in the lives and thinking of the participants if such aims are to be effectively implemented.

Supervisors and administrators, therefore, need to reaffirm their commitment to practices that will foster individuality in teachers, develop self-understanding, allow for self-fulfillment, and provide for growth in ability to live and to work harmoniously with one's self and with others. Education for teacher growth must be of a kind that best fulfills individual dignity; that helps each teacher develop as a reasoning, responsible, sensitive human being; that enables each teacher to learn the skills of intelligent

decision making; that encourages each to assume responsibility for changes needed to implement new decisions. The task of in-service education is not to impart specific methods or approaches that tend to make of the teacher a conditioned, robot-like individual in the classroom. Rather its major task is to help set the conditions for continuing growth and to discover ways of releasing each teacher's creative energies.

Programs of teacher growth must themselves be both infectious and inspiring examples of educational objectives and goals at work. It is disturbing to us to think of a faculty whose idealism for learning is damaged or destroyed by restrictive and controlling behavior on the part of administration; yet such examples are observed in many school situations today. We can see in local districts tremendous differences in setting up the working arrangements for teachers in the different schools. Teachers, too, vary in kind and in role; in customs, habits, levels of competence, and in ways of working.

These characteristics and conditions are desirable and realistic, and we recognize that, to help teachers grow, we should always move in the direction of helping them improve and develop in diverse ways as individuals. This places tremendous responsibility on a staff for continuing study of how children grow and learn, what demands society places upon the schools and what research and evaluation of present practices imply for future action. An important aspect of supervision and of programs devised for teacher growth is to facilitate such study by teachers toward the improvement of instruction.

A program of in-service education is basically no different from programs of

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education at other levels or in other areas of concern. The same psychological principles are operative and the manner in which these principles are applied will largely determine the degree of success achieved by the program. Concerns about the essential elements of the learning process are just as important when working with teachers as with groups of children in classrooms. One essential consideration that is frequently ignored by initiators of in-service programs is the role of attitudes and their relationship to changes in teacher behavior.

There is great need for experimentation in the area of psychological knowledge concerned with attitude development. Much of the available research is descriptive in nature, and knowledge of attitude learning is inadequate in many ways. However, since any effort geared toward change in teacher behavior is dependent upon desirable teacher attitudes, careful attention must be given to what is known.

Many psychologists have tended to follow Allport's definition of attitude as a . . . mental and neural state of readiness, organized through experience, exerting a directive or dynamic influence upon the individual's response to all objects and situations with which it is related.¹

It is seen that attitudes play an important role in motivation, probably the most basic element of learning. Every program for teacher growth should be geared to developing in teachers motivation that leads to goals which will become self-initiating and independent of extrinsic factors. This is essential if real change in classroom behavior is to result. The close relationship between self motivation and teacher attitude is obvious.

¹Gordon W. Allport. "Attitudes." *A Handbook of Social Psychology*. Carl A. Murchison, editor. Worcester, Massachusetts: Clark University Press, 1935. p. 810.

It is likely that there will be a difference between a teacher's attitudes as a person and as a member of the profession. The influence of the various groups in which he has membership has an increasing effect on the attitudes he holds. In any new learning situation, a person's observations and recollections are greatly influenced by his antecedent attitudes. The reinforcement of some elements of attitudes and the elimination of others account for the differentiation of broad, primitive attitudes into specifics and the integration of related specific attitudes into general attitudes. These general attitudes are among the relatively stable aspects of personality which give integrity of character to the person.

It is important to recognize that formalized instruction has little direct influence on attitude change. An understanding of this concept should bring about some basic changes in the nature and content of in-service experiences. It means, simply, that older attitude patterns are not altered appreciably by presenting new facts and information to teachers. Rather, there seems to be general agreement that enrichment or diversification of the interests of the teacher—especially interests which result in pleasure to him and to others and which provide a more constructive basis for human relations—affords the greatest potential for changing attitudes. Therefore, programs of teacher improvement must become much more individual-oriented. The teacher must have the opportunity to help set his goals and plan the activities in which he is to participate, for all behavior is goal-centered.

Students of the process of change suggest that people's involvement and participation in the growth and productivity of an enterprise are directly related to the opportunity which they have to affect

the alternate courses of action open to them. The evidence seems to point to the conclusion that teachers do tackle the problems that appear important to them. Therefore, all decisions cannot be made in the district office apart from the expectations and feelings of those who will be involved, if in-service work is to change behavior toward desired ends. The teacher must identify with the program in a deeply personal way.

Goethe wrote, "A fact in our lives is valuable not so far as it is true, but as it is significant." Formal programs of instruction can extend and clarify attitudes that have not yet come to have significance in the lives and thinking of teachers. As members of a cultural subgroup, they are likely to act in a manner that is acceptable to other members of that group. Such conformity to accepted norms provides opportunity for a program of teacher growth to emphasize those attitudes and behaviors that have or will come to have deep significance for members of the teaching profession.

Opportunities should be created wherein the teacher may broaden his scope and understanding of the reality of his professional role and expectation through the utilization of varied and diverse sources of information and activity. But in the long run, attitudes are established by living in and being a meaningful part of an enterprise that enables one to feel a sense of satisfaction of personal needs. Therefore, in-service education cannot stop with the formalized, structured activity. The in-service program must extend into the day by day contacts the teacher has with children and youth in the classroom and with his co-workers in the school environment. The following emphasizes this point:

... one's opinions or attitudes serve as mediators between the inner demands of

the person and the outer environment—the material, social and, most immediately, the informational environment of the person. . . . [Opinions or attitudes are] his major equipment for dealing with reality. This equipment is not a product solely of basic needs and defenses nor is it fashioned directly according to the blueprint of the world in which the person finds himself. Nor is it simply borrowed ready-made from the groups to which he belongs or aspires. Something of all of these but not quite any one of them, it is, essentially, an apparatus for balancing the demands of inner functioning and the demands of the environment.³

The key to the problem of teacher growth is not lack of knowledge, rather it is inadequate application of available knowledge to the problems relating to in-service programs. The well-conceived program will make the learning process the focus of organizational effort. The leadership problem, then, is one of organizational development custom-made to serve the needs and purposes of individual teachers and, at the same time, to take advantage of the indigenous character of the situation in which the school operates. We must cherish the right and responsibility of the teaching staff on an individual school basis to propose growth experiences and the methods to be employed in achieving such growth. Teacher emotions and attitudes must be considered. Behavioral changes become a part of a person as they are reinforced through use. The more and better the participation by the teacher, the more and better the learning likely to result. Recognition of these psychological principles will make in-service education more effective and contribute to significant individual growth on the part of teachers.

³ M. Brewster Smith, Jerome S. Bruner and Robert W. White. *Opinions and Personality*. New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 1956. p. 39.

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