

A Strategy in Curricular Change

WE have come to that point where the future appears to be running away from the present. The curriculum is changing more abruptly and definitively, and is being shaped by a greater constellation of forces than it perhaps has in its total history. In short, the classic dilemma of the hiatus between theory and practice is freshly thrust upon us in circumstances which are almost overwhelming.

The problem, distilled to its essence, is simply that the routine devices of in-service education—the workshops, the one-session inspirational meetings, the district committees—have in the main had limited effect upon the teaching body politic. Moreover, unless we can arrange for a functional give and take between the practitioner in the classroom and the external designer, the new curriculum will either be a paper one or a bad rendering of a good design, and, in any event, something less than it might be.

Teacher Retraining

What is needed is a strategy of in-service education which can overcome the chronic obstacles and which, concomitantly, can offer at least some direction to inevitable change. The chief

hurdles are familiar themes: in-service education is no different from education elsewhere and the learner is subject to the usual elements of attitude, incentive and purpose; the curriculum has always shifted in piecemeal fashion and the immediate future gives promise of even greater fragmentation and disjointedness; and, we cannot conceive of the classroom teacher in any one image or mold, but must cope with an almost infinite variety of professional profiles differing in both degree and kind. It follows, therefore, that any strategy of merit must concern itself with the matter of motivation, with provisions for overcoming the harms of fragmentation, and with procedures which afford an individualization of teacher retraining.

At first blush the tasks seem prohibitive. What follows, however, is a hopeful assumption that in-service education is not merely something which is done to teachers, but can be also something which teachers do to and for themselves. On this basis, a solution is more within reach. If we can answer the demands of motivation and purpose and provide the substantive wherewithal for self-directed development, we can perhaps achieve

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the larger objectives of in-service growth and in concert aid and abet curriculum development. Most importantly, we can exploit the teacher's capacity for uniqueness, for initiative, and for the joys which derive from cooking one's own soup. This is not to say that traditional in-service techniques ought to be abandoned, or that growth cannot be nurtured through a group process. It is rather to suggest that such efforts can be amplified with stratagems that supply connective tissue to the individual teacher, to his private strengths and weaknesses, and to the specific sorts of resistance he sets forth.

A period of prolonged innovation, as the present will likely be, imposes an obligation to update continuously—so much so, that the quality of a school system may soon come to depend largely upon the quality of its in-service provisions. It is worth noting also that in the current period of flux the classroom teacher must mediate between curricular revisions which stem from national programs—those, for example, which have recently had an impact on mathematics and the sciences—and revisions which stem from efforts to meet the exigencies of the local condition. Much of what is now under way will prove in the long run to be useless, and the ultimate test must come from the harsh trial of workability at the critical case in point—the classroom.

The inescapable fact is that realistically the curriculum is what takes place after the teacher closes the door and starts to teach. The abiding danger is that we shall forget that technique and content ought to direct each other and in-service training will become a matter of putting new material in the teacher's briefcase. At the heart of our strategy there must be a profound concern for things which give rise to an intensely

motivated effort, a personalized preoccupation with the yet unattained, a continuing quarrel with the senseless and ineffectual, and an unfettered inventiveness in style and approach.

Incentive for Growth

From a tactical standpoint several observations are appropriate. We shall not get far unless someone in the school unit is given responsibility for a significant program of staff growth, and unless, as well, he is an imaginative and skilled entrepreneur. Moreover, we cannot indefinitely continue to beg the question with respect to incentive. We are asking, after all, for a giving up of the easy for the better, for a yielding of the familiar for the unknown, and for the plain exertion of effort that is not always necessary for professional survival. We must in turn give something—whether monetary compensation, or prestige, or the simple freedom to erect one's own challenges. Beyond this, we must give time. So long as the accomplishment of our purpose must be subsidized by time from the teacher's golf game, his stamp collection, or his literary browsing, progress will be slow. Our profession is not without its dedicated souls, but even dedication is nourished by a helping gesture.

Finally, we would do well to clarify the fuzziness surrounding our notions of democratic curriculum development. To respect the principle that all who are affected by a policy ought to have a voice in its acceptance is not to contend that all must participate equally in its making. The democratic ideal involves cooperative endorsement rather than an actual hand in turning the loaf. The vicissitudes of ability and training and questions of practicality and efficiency mitigate against every teacher in Amer-

ica's becoming a curriculum designer. Matters of interpretation and implementation, of artistic embellishment, however, are another thing. There is a place for the architect and the engineer, and a place for private intellectual acceptance of their product.

In its simplest sense, in-service education seeks three ends: the extension of learning in general and pertinent subject-matter knowledge in particular; the acquisition of new techniques of teaching; and a shaping of attitude and purpose. The ends are neither mutually exclusive nor alien to the crux of curriculum improvement. An in-service program for a chemistry teacher, for example, should add to his knowledge of the world as well as of chemistry. Such a program should familiarize him with methods and materials to which he has not previously been exposed, and, ultimately, it should help define his perception of the important and his sense of mission. Toward these ends, as in love and war, so to speak, all is fair. Their potential realization lies in the things he reads, in the meetings he attends, in the conversations he has with colleagues and experts, in his testing of the methods of others, in the searching of his own brain and in the careful analysis of his product.

The suggestions for an operational scheme which follow are the same for a district of one school or a district of fifty schools. The question of size establishes problems of organizational hierarchy and procedure rather than of operational strategy. Too, they are intended as a tentative model rather than as a fixed prescription—administrative leadership can profit as much from the benefits of imagination and ingenuity as can the teacher. The principal components of the strategy are as follows:

1. Each teacher must be made to rec-

ognize that he plays a crucial role in curriculum development; namely, to assess the shortcomings of the existing program, to better it through his own experimentation, and to measure the value of improvements suggested by the research of others.

2. Each teacher may need help to part from his sense of complacency, to manage his own artistry, to be governed by his own insights, and to draw systematically from the aggregate resources whatever will improve his performance.

3. Each teacher must have the requisites in time and materials to be consistently informed about what is going on and to select intelligently from alternatives, and each must be consistently challenged as to the adequacy of his purpose and his method.

4. Each teacher must have recourse to the kinds of technical assistance which he himself specifies, whether in the shape of expert consultation, cooperative endeavor, opportunity to master skills, or provisions for theoretical study.

5. The task of leadership is to set forth expected in-service accomplishment, to provide the realistic wherewithal for its achievement, to unshackle the individual teacher from those aspects of group work that are binding, and to evaluate the end results.

The substance of the strategy lies in its emphasis on the individual, matching idiosyncratic preparation with what is a most idiosyncratic art, in its systematic provision for overcoming the pitfalls of fragmentation, and in its demand that the nature of in-service activity be determined by the teacher's particular objective at the particular time. The shift from a base of mass operation is admittedly difficult, but the end gives promise of justifying the means.

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