

● From the Executive Secretary

IN-SERVICE EDUCATION:

BALANCE AND THRUST

FOR years now, the pressure has been on to experiment, to innovate, to adapt and implement. While the rate of change has not pleased the impatient, many significant modifications have occurred or are in the wings awaiting their cue.

The early curriculum packages that were developed avoided in many cases the participants who should have been most involved—teachers, pupils, principals and supervisors. These were the days of the “teacher-proof” developments. Innovative imports tended to become curriculum dropouts because without in-service support and teacher commitment there were inadequate forces to continue.

Hardware was bought without an adequate support system of resources and personnel. Also, in too many cases, there was too little effort to assist teachers to develop the significant and necessary competency to manage the import. Without special funding the mortality rate ran high. Often the innovation that sold a school quickly became a requirement, a feature of that school and one that the patrons and professionals felt obliged to maintain, to build in, to rigidify. This meant that it lost its newness, its flexibility, the possibility of change and the necessary objectivity for evaluation.

Decision making in curriculum matters is changing rapidly. Improvements are likely to be imported from outside the system. They are likely to result from adaptation, not from “scratch.” They may come in the form of reconsidered concepts in a discipline that are developed by scholars in the field, psychologists, teachers and curriculum consultants; they may come as media or as organizationally induced changes that significantly modify the learning situation; they may come as packages of content, procedures, media and evaluation; they may come as political imperatives that penetrate to the heart of the learning enterprise. In any case, more and more curriculum decisions are larger, more complex, more expensive, more consequential and require more significant teacher modification in the package and in the performance of both the teacher and the learner.

It has been suggested as a procedural consideration that the cost of an improvement should at least be matched by educational reinforcement and commitment at the local level. Curriculum that is behaving and dynamic requires new and

special skills, new resources and materials, new perceptions regarding student and teacher roles and supervisory support, both in terms of leadership and continuing understanding and support.

The Growing Edge

Virtually every new curricular modification requires new teaching and learning strategies. These have been important ingredients of the new developments. Most of the methods required run contrary to the experiencing of the teacher, and most have not had adequate treatment in the development of the new curriculum scheme. Discovery, inductive teaching, inquiry, student generalizing and the rest are both critical to the success of the new developments and fragile in their own right. New procedures are needed for student evaluation, for teacher evaluation and even for the routines that surround the classroom enterprise at all levels. Without classroom resources, building modifications and supervisory support, most of the new endeavors in curriculum cannot culminate in effective student behavior.

Teacher militancy and the spreading effects of the negotiation process will seriously modify the procedures and patterns for in-service education. Teachers are insisting that they be considered full-fledged members of the educational team. They are seeking to revise and in some cases upset the traditional hierarchies of supervision and administration to the effect that these persons become supportive rather than directive. This is not a textbook revolution but a real change in the way supervisory and administrative staffs are perceived and will affect the ways in which they can and must operate. It is not the function of supervision to change people; it is very much its function to help people to change in ways that will make their performance more professional, more effective and more enhancing of the curriculum objectives and the goals of the school as an enterprise in society.

The support system must not only be more effective, it must be collegial in nature. It must not only include knowledge of what is new and better, it must also include means to improvement and support for that development.

The most significant changes will result from the improvements in teacher perceptions, in commitments and in competencies. As these affect the classroom situation, we are back to the crux of the matter for which the improvement was instituted. We have been prodded by sources to change. To make the changes effective for learners and teachers is the responsibility of the profession. These changes in fact become the significant element in innovation and curriculum improvement. It is at this point that in-service education represents not an adaptation of an outside product, but the creation of a significantly improved development within a system and within the classroom. This thrust is indeed a needed one and should be viewed as a significant function in the present concern for improvements in education. Just as evaluation should be used for feedback and guide, so in-service education should be used for adaptation and innovation.

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