

# VTR: In-Service Tool for Improving Instruction

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**T**HE video tape recorder made its appearance on the educational scene several years ago. Since then educators have been attempting to find ways in which it might be used to make an impact on what happens to children in the classroom. In August of 1968, the Wilmette Public Schools implemented a program which is attempting to utilize the VTR as a meaningful in-service tool for the improvement of instruction. "The Program for Beginning Teachers" which is funded under Title III of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act provides a variety of individualized in-service activities for teachers during their first three years in the profession.

## Program Objectives

Experience has shown that teachers, as they enter the profession, desire guidance in the selection of materials, content, and methodology; opportunities to express and evaluate their individual abilities; assistance in the classroom; and opportunities to observe and interact with other teachers. Traditionally, teachers are given a schedule or a class, textbooks, and a room assignment, and are then placed on their own. This procedure has caused anxiety for many beginning teachers. Unfortunately, this anxiety has been transferred into the classroom and, in some in-

stances, has had a detrimental effect on children.

Because of this, many teachers also leave the profession in pursuit of a position which will provide more support or "security." In other words, a beginning teacher finds himself beset with a new way of life overnight, a way of life on which the growth and development of many children depend, a way of life in which there are few pat answers. This way of life is a far cry from the protected college classrooms and the theory expounded therein.

It was in answer to these concerns that the staff of the Wilmette Public Schools developed "The Program for Beginning Teachers." Specifically, the program is intended to provide beginning teachers with:

1. A better understanding of the interests and needs of pupils
2. Opportunities for interacting among themselves, discussing their successes and failures
3. Opportunities to be more creative, capitalizing on the strengths which they already possess and can identify
4. Greater motivation because of the skills and techniques which they acquire from observing themselves and others

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5. A better perception of themselves as they observe and evaluate their strengths and weaknesses.

## Components of the Program

The program has four major components which are centered on having the beginning teachers look at themselves and their teaching processes. The entire program is based on the concept of self-assessment and the procurement of assistance to correct areas of weakness. Beginning teachers are told and practice reinforces the premise that weaknesses are not a sign of a poor teacher but that the inability to recognize weaknesses is. Weaknesses can be corrected only after they are identified.

To assist teachers in the process of self-improvement, they are provided:

1. A one-week summer workshop during which they are oriented to the schools, community, and educational program. During this time, they also are introduced to the concept of self-assessment.

2. Individualized in-service activities throughout the three years. Teachers generally spend two half-days per month in small groups to discuss or be involved in areas of their choice.

3. The assistance of helping teachers during the first year. These are master teachers to whom the beginning teacher can turn for help in any area, whether it be the development of lesson plans or the assessment of a teaching-learning situation.

4. The assistance of advisor-consultants from area colleges and universities during the second and third years. These resource persons spend about one half-day per month in the schools. They fulfill a variety of functions such as being catalysts for change, advisors for graduate programs, or assessors of teaching performance. Their role is usually dictated by the teachers with whom they are interacting.

## Self-Assessment: The Key

The program was designed on two assumptions:

1. That teachers, as professionals, had needs which were not being met

2. That teachers, provided the tools, could meet many of the needs through their own initiative.

If these assumptions were valid, the program had to provide a technique for identifying the needs and the mechanism for meeting them. The technique chosen was self-assessment; the mechanism, a wide variety of resources to zero in on the needs identified through self-assessment.

Two tools are provided to teachers to assist in their self-assessment. One is a questionnaire which helps teachers focus on specific areas related to the learning processes of children. The second is the video tape recorder.

## Micro-Teaching and Micro-Learning Techniques

From the program's inception, the VTR was used as a tool through which teachers could analyze their classroom behavior *via* the micro-teaching technique. This technique has a teacher present a brief lesson to a small group of students for from five to ten minutes, concentrating on the implementation of a specified teaching skill such as questioning. After teaching the abbreviated sequence, the teaching process is evaluated as the teacher views the video tape on his own or with the students, helping teacher, adviser-consultant, principal, or other staff member.

After critiquing the teaching segment, the teacher reteaches the lesson to a different group of students, changing his presentation to overcome the weaknesses identified while analyzing the first videotaped presentation. After the second presentation, the critique procedure is repeated. This process continues, in most cases, until the teacher feels he has mastered the skill on which he is working.

As experience was gained with the VTR, it became evident that the instrument could be used more effectively in improving instruction when it focused on students in micro-learning situations. In this case, emphasis is placed on the learning process rather than the teaching process and teach-

ers find new ways in which they can develop an atmosphere for learning in the classroom. The procedure for changing teacher behavior to improve the learning processes follows the critique pattern presented above.

## Procedure

The helping teacher and the beginning teacher usually are involved in implementing micro-teaching or micro-learning situations in the Wilmette Public Schools. Prior to involvement in either of these techniques, the beginning teachers, helping teachers, and principals participate in workshops on micro-teaching and micro-learning. These workshops provide the participants with the skills necessary to implement both techniques effectively.

The actual implementation of either technique generally follows the following format:

1. The helping teacher and the beginning teacher discuss the teaching skill or learning process on which the teacher plans to focus. Initially, a list of about 20 different teaching skills is made available to the teachers. Other skills and learning processes are identified as the teacher gains a better understanding of the teaching-learning process.

2. About five students are assembled for the micro-teaching or micro-learning activity and are briefed on what will happen. This is usually done by the helping teacher.

3. The lesson is taught.

4. Feedback sheets are passed out to the students by the helping teacher. These sheets delineate the skill or learning process area on which the teacher is focusing. It permits each student to indicate whether he feels the teacher is achieving his goal completely, fairly well, partially, or slightly. The helping teacher also completes a feedback form.

5. The feedback sheets are collected from the students by the helping teacher.

6. The video tape is played back.

7. Questions such as the following are raised by the helping teacher: How do you think the lesson went? What do you think worked especially well? Were there any surprises in the playback?

8. The teacher and the helping teacher review the feedback sheets.

9. The teacher and helping teacher discuss how the lesson might be improved; discuss changes that need to be made when the lesson is retaught.

10. Steps 2 through 9 are repeated.

## Follow-up

As teachers view their behavior, the behavior of students, or general classroom atmosphere, they readily tend to determine the success or lack of success in the teaching-learning situation. If they can identify what was wrong and can correct it on their own, they proceed to do so. However, if they cannot identify what was wrong in the situation, or if they cannot determine what should be done to correct it, they are aware that the resources of the district and neighboring institutions are available to help resolve the problem.

Some resources available to teachers other than those already alluded to include participation at professional conferences, visitations to model programs, and observations of master teachers within or outside the district.

## Other Uses of the VTR

Beginning teachers and others in the Wilmette Public Schools have found the video tape recorder can be used in many other ways to improve instruction. Some of these are the following:

1. Videotaping actual class presentations, focusing on teaching behavior or learning processes of children. The longer video tape provides a better analysis of questioning techniques, student involvement, concept development, etc. It also is a real rather than a contrived situation.

2. Videotaping student learning activities and reviewing these with the students so that they might improve upon their own learning skills.

3. Videotaping student behavior or misbehavior and reviewing this with students while discussing possible influences upon learning in the classroom.

4. Videotaping the progress of an individual child and using it in parent-teacher or professional staffing conferences.
5. Videotaping specific learning situations which are atypical and using the video tape as a focal point for an in-service program for other teachers.
6. Videotaping parts of professional meetings and making them available to other teachers at a more convenient time.
7. Videotaping master teachers in action and using the video tape as an in-service discussion starter.

8. Videotaping model programs in operation so that they can be evaluated and discussed at a later time.
9. Videotaping student productions for later viewing by other students, teachers, or parents. This video tape can also be used for self-critiquing productions.

These are a few of the many ways in which teachers are creatively using the video tape recorder to improve the overall educational setting for children in the Wilmette Public Schools. The potential of the tool is just beginning to be tapped!

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