



The Odds Are on BET

MILDRED J. FISCHLE*
BRYNA R. COOPERMAN

BET (Beginning and Experienced Teachers) is an in-service program for inner city teachers. The basic assumption of BET is that beginning teachers in inner city schools need support during the first and most difficult year. The program was developed with the belief that nonthreatening support during the beginning years of teaching would lessen the attrition rate in urban schools.

Over a period of four years, 250 teachers have participated in BET. Eighty-five percent of these teachers are still teaching in inner city schools.

In addition to support for beginning teachers, there is a need for all teachers to be aware of new approaches and new materials which might have particular relevance for inner city schools. BET also provides this opportunity.

The BET model consists of teams of teachers. Each team has two first or second year teachers and one more experienced teacher. The more experienced teacher serves in a helping role, being "on the spot" and available to make suggestions, to offer assistance and, most important, to listen. The teams function as 20 units within the total program. One school may have several teams. The teams meet during the week to

discuss concerns, needs, and ways to implement ideas gained from Saturday sessions.

The principals and supervisors of BET schools automatically become members of the BET program. As the program has progressed there has been greater involvement and support by principals and supervisors.

Ideally a workshop for helping teachers is held the week before the opening of school to acquaint them with the goals of the program, clarify their role, and provide opportunities for them to meet the new teachers before the first day of school.

All BET teachers come together Saturday mornings for three hours. During this time they are able to interact with consultants, participate in workshops, and observe demonstrations involving their children. These sessions also provide the teachers time to meet other beginning teachers, share common concerns, and get to know other teachers from their schools. One consultant remarked that we have the longest coffee breaks. This informal time also gives the BET staff a

** Mildred J. Fischle, Professor of Education, State University College at Buffalo, New York; and Bryna R. Cooperman, Clinical Professor, State University College at Buffalo and Buffalo School System, Buffalo, New York*

chance to meet teachers and "take the pulse" of the group.

Separate meetings are held with principals and supervisors of BET schools to keep them informed of BET sessions. The BET staff members share concerns the teachers have, problems the teachers perceive in attempting to implement ideas gained at BET, and in general try to develop better lines of communication. As the program has developed, so has the support of principals and supervisors.

The final BET meeting is a dinner when teams, principals, supervisors, and college faculty members have an opportunity to enjoy each other in a social, relaxed atmosphere. In the past Gerald Weinstein, Sam Shepard, and Mario Fantini have been speakers at this affair.

Better Communication

BET has been able to attract quality consultants from various parts of the country. Programs reflect a reading-language arts emphasis. Other sessions which have been important to teachers have been science, art, music, the teacher, and discipline. A cracker barrel session with Joseph Manch, Superintendent of Buffalo Schools, has always been a worthwhile Saturday for teachers. Some questions raised by teachers relating to school policy have received his immediate attention.

For three years the program was funded by the State Education Department. The fourth year there was no external funding. Through efforts of the Buffalo Schools, State University College at Buffalo, and volunteer

service by a number of SUCB faculty and other consultants, BET was again able to serve inner city teachers.

Over 100 teachers applied to BET this year. Already there is a list of schools requesting participation in the program.

Teachers' reactions and evaluation have indicated an appreciation for workshops and demonstrations with their children coupled with lecture and discussion. A most valuable session is with a psychologist with whom they can talk about their concerns and frustrations.

Building a climate of trust between teachers and the BET staff has allowed for an open relationship. Teachers have felt free to share their views of the program, both positive and negative. A "Rap Session" was held between teachers, principals, and supervisors at the home of one of the supervisors. This kind of informal sharing appears to have possibilities for future programs.

To promote greater communication between teachers and administrators, teams have been encouraged to develop a strategy for change in their school and to work with the administration to accomplish this task.

What is the greatest frustration of BET? The greatest frustration for the staff is helping to get "batteries charged up" on Saturday. But for real or imagined reasons, some teachers think that they cannot implement new ideas.

What is the joy of BET? The joy of BET is working with young, exciting, high quality, competent teachers who care about "kids" and are willing to give the time and effort to help children grow and make sense from this "thing" called school. □

Future ASCD Annual Conferences

1973	March 17-21	Minneapolis	<i>Minneapolis Auditorium</i>
1974	March 9-13	Anaheim	<i>Anaheim Convention Center</i>
1975	March 15-19	New Orleans	<i>Rivergate</i>
1976	March 14-17	Miami Beach	<i>Convention Center</i>
1977	March 5-9	Detroit	<i>Cobo Hall</i>

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