

In-Service Education: The University's Role

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IN THIS, as in previous years, many teachers are involved in a variety of staff development programs. From a teacher's viewpoint, some of these programs have direct immediate usefulness for transfer to the classroom. Others may be more vague from such a utilitarian viewpoint. As a result of this seeming discrepancy, teachers frequently and justifiably ask questions concerning the necessity for, and structure and operation of, any and all staff development programs. This is particularly true of programs presented by college personnel.

The typical stereotyped college role in staff development is in providing an inspirational speaker at the beginning of the year or perhaps at midyear. A variation of this role is seen in school districts that provide their staff members with a series of guest lectures throughout the year. This type of continuing relationship with college personnel can be a valuable way for teachers to expand their thinking, particularly when the speakers are chosen from fields outside as well as within education.

Another stereotyped college role is the providing of college courses to in-service teachers. All too frequently we find teachers taking college courses either to complete an advanced degree (many times with little

self-selection of courses due to rigid college requirements) or to earn points in some type of personnel/salary bonus system where only college hours count toward salary increments. An alternative role for colleges is the provision of courses and independent study projects which meet the needs of particular groups of teachers or schools within a district or geographic area rather than the standard courses offered either on campus or in an extension setting.

A continuous needs assessment can provide the information necessary to both the school district and the college in order to establish priority areas for such course and independent study offerings. All too frequently, however, there is no evidence of any needs assessment being done by any of the parties.

A third stereotyped college role in public school staff development is familiar to many of us—that of the “outside” workshop consultant. Reactions from teachers participating in this type of staff development are interesting to note, particularly since the reactions frequently tend to be negative if the

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Published April 1972

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workshop leader makes them work too much or if they cannot see the direct classroom application of the workshop activities. On the other hand, the reactions tend to be overly positive if the workshop leader "massages" them in such a way as to make them "feel good" about him and his workshop. A basic question that each participant needs to ask himself after all workshops is "What will I do differently tomorrow in my classroom as a result of the workshop?" Sometimes, for the reasons alluded to or for other reasons, this question is not easy to answer.

Another difficulty with this third stereotyped role is that the "outside" workshop consultant frequently has no built-in accountability for what happens either in the workshop or in the individual classrooms following the workshop. Often this is because the workshop is conducted on a one-shot basis with no follow-up or subsequent workshops. An alternative to this approach is for school districts to structure a series of workshops with the college consultant on a

continuing basis in order to achieve some continuity of program effort and accountability from both the consultant and the workshop participants. Obviously, this is easier said than done.

The college consultant approach has other problems, also. All too often staff members become too dependent upon solutions to their problems being served up by the consultant. The necessary role to be played by the consultant in this area should be that of an impartial observer or mirror rather than a solutions bank. In other words, the teachers themselves should generate the possible solutions to the problems which they have identified and use the consultant only as a resource person. Unfortunately, we have generally not used consultants effectively in this process.

Thus far we have talked only about people as consultants. And that is usually the way that most school districts have organized their staff development programs, around specific individuals acting as consultants,

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course instructors, etc. There are alternatives in this area also.

"Packages" Can Help

One excellent alternative that we are now starting to see evidences of in the marketplace is the research and development of appropriate "packages" of materials that will either facilitate or provide for a complete workshop. Typically these packages include printed and other materials such as audio cassettes, videotapes (the potential of the video-cassette for this use is staggering), and manipulative materials. Many packages provide not only information but also skills and processes, and it is these latter packages that seem to be the most valuable.

The unique role that colleges can play in staff development is truly great. Since colleges typically have a variety of research efforts as a part of their ongoing program, the research and development of staff development packages as a part of the college program could provide public schools with a wide range of "packaged consultants." And when skills and processes are built in as a part of the package so that we no longer have the role of the college consultant or the package being that of a dispenser of information (although some information is necessary and desirable), we can begin to have a wider use of such packages. As a result, we should see a proliferation of alternatives for individuals as well as schools in the types of packages available to assist in their programs of staff development.

While there are many packages available already that are excellent in their design and actual implementation, and while these have come from colleges, R & D centers, educational laboratories, foundations, and private business, we still do not have a wide enough array to satisfy most of us involved seriously in staff development. In addition,

some of the currently available packages have not undergone enough research and development and may not provide all that is desired or promised. Hopefully, we will continue to move away from the marketing of such untested packages.

It is this last area, that of the research and development of "packages," that seems to hold the real challenge as well as promise to colleges seeking their role in the staff development programs of public schools. Once appropriate packages start to be used (as they are already), these packages become useful not only to in-service teachers and administrators, but also to preservice students of teaching, such as interns and student teachers, as well as graduate students of teaching.

We have the needs for staff development packages for use in public schools, as well as the potential for meeting those needs in colleges. It will be interesting to view the developments over the next several years to see whether these particular needs of the public schools will be met by the colleges, or whether this role will be assumed by private business or perhaps by the public schools themselves. □

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