How Do Teachers Feel About In-Service Education?

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If continuing professional growth is to be taken seriously, administrators and teachers must pool their knowledge and resources and seek to make in-service programs more responsive to the needs and interests of practicing classroom teachers.

IN-SERVICE education has long been recognized as a vital part of the educational process for the classroom teacher. A perusal of the literature, however, reveals that few research efforts have been undertaken to determine the types of in-service programs which would be most beneficial to teachers as they carry out their daily classroom duties.

The professional preparation of teachers is a continuing process, and self-renewal must occur if teachers are to stay in tune with the changing educational landscape.

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with the changing needs of their students. Effective in-service programs should help the teacher meet these changing needs.

Problem. A statewide research study in Tennessee yielded the data presented in this article. The purposes of the study were (a) to identify the types of in-service education programs currently in use throughout the state and (b) to ascertain teacher attitudes toward in-service education programs. This discussion will focus upon the latter area of concern.

Sample and Methodology. A stratified proportional sampling procedure was used to identify teachers for this study to include two percent of the teachers from each of the state's school districts. Usable returns were received from 646 teachers, or 65 percent of

![Figure 1. Tennessee Teachers' Responses to "Teacher Attitude Toward In-Service Education Inventory" in Rank Order (N = 646)]](image-url)
the sample. Teachers from each of the 147 school districts in the state were included.

Teacher opinions were obtained by means of the "Teacher Attitude Toward In-Service Education Inventory." The inventory included a series of 34 statements regarding in-service education programs. Using a Likert-type scale, respondents were asked to react to each statement. Response categories were strongly agree, agree, uncertain, disagree, and strongly disagree. Values of 2, 1, 0, −1, and −2 were assigned to these respective response categories. A mean value was determined for each item of the inventory.

Findings. Figure 1 presents Tennessee teachers' responses to the "Teacher Attitude Toward In-Service Education Inventory" in rank order according to mean values. Of the 34 items included in the inventory, the one which received the strongest endorsement by teachers was, "The teacher should have the opportunity to select the kind of in-service activities which he feels will strengthen his professional competence." Eighty-nine percent of the teachers in the sample either agreed or strongly agreed with this statement, while only four percent disagreed. This suggests that an overwhelming majority of teachers prefer some sort of individualized in-service education program.

Teachers' desire for individualization of in-service education is further indicated by their responses to the statement, "In-service programs must include activities which allow for the different interests which exist among individual teachers." Although this statement ranked fourth according to mean value, 96 percent of the teachers surveyed indicated their agreement with it, less than one percent disagreed. This suggests that an overwhelming majority of teachers prefer some sort of individualized in-service education program.

Teachers indicated that in-service programs should include special orientation activities for the new classroom teacher. While 95 percent of the teachers felt that such activities should be included in in-service education programs, only 21 percent of the teachers felt that present orientation activities for new teachers were adequate.

Classroom teachers felt strongly (90%) that one of the primary purposes of in-service programs should be to help the teacher upgrade his classroom performance. Eighty-seven percent of the teachers indicated their approval of in-service activities which provide the opportunity to become acquainted with new teaching practices and innovative programs. In fact, respondents (90%) indicated that one of the important ways to judge the effectiveness of an in-service program is its usefulness in helping teachers to cope more successfully with their professional tasks.

A majority of the teachers surveyed (73%) said that too often in-service activities do not appear relevant to any felt needs of the teacher. Among the activities which teachers apparently judged to be more relevant are participation in university classes, original research, and professional reading, traveling, and writing.

Forty-four percent of the teachers thought that generally their in-service programs were not well-planned. Only 34 percent of the teachers believed that in-service programs usually arise from a study of the needs and problems of teachers, and only 27 percent found that the objectives of in-
service programs in their local system were specific. It is not surprising, therefore, that barely a majority (56%) of the teachers disagreed with the statement that, “Most in-service programs are virtually useless,” and that 63 percent of the teachers agreed with the statement that, “Most teachers do not like to attend in-service activities.”

Interestingly enough, however, the weaknesses of in-service education described by teachers apparently are not due to lack of financial support. Only 29 percent of the teachers responded positively to the statement, “Our in-service programs seem to suffer from a lack of financial support needed to carry them out.”

The teachers indicated that there is a remedy for the deficiencies in planning in-service programs. An overwhelming majority (93%) of the respondents stated that teachers need to be involved in the development of purposes, activities, and methods of evaluation for in-service programs. More than three-fourths of the teachers surveyed reported that such involvement would foster greater commitment on the part of their colleagues for in-service education programs.1

There is apparently little or no follow-up of in-service activities to determine if they are effective or if objectives of in-service education have been met. Indicative of this is the fact that just 13 percent of the teachers surveyed stated that there is adequate follow-up to determine the effects of in-service activities in their system.

Discussion. Generally, this study substantiates the notion that in-service programs are poorly planned, inadequately executed, and lacking in proper evaluative procedures. Too often, in-service programs suffer more

1 Although 88% of the school systems in Tennessee make use of in-service planning committees, the membership of these committees is heavily weighted with administrative staff, such as superintendents, principals, and supervisors of instruction.

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1. The manuscript must report data. Included in the article must be some evidence to support the reliability of the measures used in the study.

2. The article should concern itself with the behavior of teachers (or their surrogates) and that of students as dependent variables. Behavior is taken to mean achievement scores, responses to questionnaires, etc.

3. The article should present a discussion of the results in such a manner that the meaning of the research is clear to readers. Some suggestions to meet this criterion include: a discussion of threats to the validity of the study’s conclusion; an unambiguous definition of the independent variable; a distinction between the findings (data) of a study and the conclusion pertaining to the research hypotheses; a distinction between testing research hypotheses grounded in theoretical frameworks and answering research questions for which there exists no known theoretical base; and finally establishment of a basis for qualified conclusions.

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from a lack of direction than from a lack of financial support or time for execution.

New classroom teachers need special orientation activities designed to familiarize them with available curriculum guides as well as materials and instructional aids. They should be helped to understand school regulations, local school board policies, and the school district's system of records and reporting. Teachers should be apprised of ways to enrich or supplement the curriculum such as the community resource file which identifies volunteers from the community who are available for classroom visits and presentations. Finally, the topic of in-service education and its relationship to continued professional growth should be discussed in a thorough and thought-provoking manner.

Teachers need release time for involvement in activities beyond those regularly scheduled during in-service programs. Release time could be spent visiting other schools and classrooms so that teachers could become acquainted with new teaching practices and innovative programs or working in a demonstration teaching or materials center. Such centers have staff who assist teachers in preparing materials or developing new teaching strategies for use in their own classrooms. Additionally, opportunities are provided for teachers to use these teaching strategies with students at the center.

Seldom has our understanding of learning been applied to in-service education. Those who plan in-service education programs continue to rely on traditional activities, such as faculty meetings, courses at the university, system-wide meetings, and regional and state-wide conventions. Usually these in-service programs feature lectures from which teachers are expected to gather data and receive inspiration sufficient for educational reform. Teachers seriously question the relationship between these activities and the improvement of classroom performance.

Teachers recognize the need for continuing improvement and are anxious to participate in conferences and workshops, which offer an opportunity to augment as well as strengthen their abilities and skills. Teachers want and need the opportunity to seek cooperatively answers to problems and questions with which they are faced on a day-to-day basis. For the most part, however, in-service activities are impersonal, unrelated to day-to-day problems faced by the teacher, and developed without input from those most affected by them. The failure to direct the energy and talents of teachers toward a well-planned in-service program, inclusive of formalized objectives, has detrimental effects on the profession.

**Implications.** Many implications relative to in-service education may be drawn from this study. Determination of the needs of the teachers within the school system seems prerequisite to the planning of meaningful in-service education programs. Specific objectives should be developed and follow-up procedures established to determine if these objectives have been realized.

Too often the membership of in-service planning committees is composed largely of school administrators. Such committees should be reconstituted to include a majority of classroom teachers. Those systems which do not have teachers on in-service planning committees should take steps to improve the planning process by including them on such committees.

Most in-service activities should focus on the classroom aspects of teaching. An effort should be made to implement programs which present concepts and develop skills transferable to the problems of daily classroom life and school operations. One of the best ways to accomplish this is to offer in-service training in the schools in which participants are working. Such a plan not only allows teachers to focus upon problems which have personal meaning to them, but fosters the development of a team spirit within the school staff.

Finally, if teachers' professional growth is to be taken seriously, public school administrators and teachers must pool their knowledge and resources and seek to make in-service education more responsive to the needs and interests of practicing classroom teachers.

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