

HOW TO USE THE CONSULTANT

THOMAS P. RUFF*

Historically, in-service education was to provide classroom teachers with information, knowledge, and usable skills concerning some current educational innovation or process. School districts, which would supply the money for the consultant and the "in-service days" allowing the teachers to participate, believed that these sessions would provide the district staff with a perpetual refresher course that would continually upgrade the level of instruction. It was assumed that the staff would attend, listen, understand, and then implement what they learned into their respective classrooms. The plan, as stated, is a masterpiece of simplicity and, at least on paper, seemed functional enough to satisfy the varying educational needs of staff and district.

Traditionally, however, in-service education has been neither functional nor useful and most certainly has had little impact on the classroom teacher. For anyone who has been a participant in an in-service program, and I believe that includes every educator, can attest to the rather negative attitude felt

toward these sessions and the often overt hostility evidenced by persons forced to attend. Generally, participants in an "in-service workshop" either resent being forced to participate or are thinking quietly about being out of that classroom for a day. In either event, it makes up an audience that is not intellectually involved with the "visiting expert." Consequently, the captive audience will, as best it can, sit politely and as patiently as possible waiting for coffee breaks and dreaming of lunch. Worst of all, they will return to their respective classrooms and continue with what they had been doing, remembering little and caring less about the speaker or workshop.

Why Teachers Hate In-Service

If doubt lingers over the validity of what I say then ask yourself these questions: (a)

* Thomas P. Ruff, Visiting Associate Professor, University of Victoria, Victoria, British Columbia, Canada

Positive suggestions for the consultant can help in-service programs relate more effectively to teachers' needs and interests.

Why do classroom teachers resent, ridicule, or, when possible, dissociate themselves from workshops? (b) Why does all the research compiled on in-service education show that there is virtually no impact or change in teacher behavior as evidenced in classroom instruction? and (c) Why has it become necessary for many school districts to make in-service attendance for teachers mandatory, even threatening reduction of salary for failure to participate?

The great tragedy, of course, is that in-service education can and should be a very essential aspect of a school district's educational program; not only for the immediate aid it can give to teachers but, more important, the eventual benefits involved for the children in those classes. But under present circumstances, it benefits absolutely no one. Not even the paid consultant who must work under those ungratifying circumstances.

What has caused this untenable state of affairs? The answers are tragically simple. The blame, if that is the correct word, must be shouldered by the administrators in a school district. Well meaning as they may be, they are responsible for both establishing times and securing consultants for in-service education. In fairness, oftentimes these individuals are told that some money is available and that they should put together an in-service "package" quickly so that the money would be accounted for and not cause any problems regarding bookkeeping. Occasionally, money which might revert back to the state is quickly thrown into the in-service education fund and as quickly spent. This haste and lack of organization lead to obvious disaster as described earlier.

Another aspect which causes problems is that oftentimes the hired consultant is an old friend or colleague who may or may not have the necessary skills or information needed to work successfully with teachers.

The "buddy system" is prevalent in in-service education programs. A third and equally disastrous aspect is not informing the consultant of his specific task or responsibility. Too often, this visitor is given vague instructions about his part of the program and told that upon his arrival, time will be allowed to formulate his plan of attack. Those sessions are normally over rancid coffee ten minutes before the program is to begin.

Using the Consultant

Unlike many critics and prophets of educational doom, I will not end this discussion pointing my finger, jeering, and walking away. Rather, I will, instead, propose a few suggestions that I believe to be positive but, more important, to give validity to an in-service program. I suggest these not as an expert but as an individual who, as a public school teacher, found in-service education wanting and as a consultant who has worked both successfully and unsuccessfully in the United States and Canada. These suggestions offered here are not, by any means, to be taken as the only formula for successful in-service programs. They are, however, suggestions I have made to school districts and apply to conditions I have worked under in my several consultancies. The suggestions are as follows:

1. The school district's teachers should not only be consulted as to their needs but should also take an active part in scheduling in-service programs. As a group, they can be solicited to offer names of consultants, programs they are interested in, and with what regularity these programs should be offered during the school year. The consultant(s) employed should be the individual who can meet the teacher's needs regardless of where he/she is and what it costs to bring that consultant into the district. Allowing the teachers to make suggestions or the final decisions—it then becomes their program and one to which they, rather than the district, have made a commitment.

2. The consultant should be made to understand the precise nature of the task

ASCD Audio Cassettes

Audio cassette recordings of renowned educators speaking on some of the controversies in which schools and society are currently embroiled are available from the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

Addresses were recorded "live" at ASCD conferences. The cassettes may be used with any cassette player. Each is packaged in a plastic case for convenient storage.

William M. Alexander, "Curriculum Planning as It Should Be," 1971. 62 min. **\$6.00.**

Jerome S. Bruner, "The Process of Education Reconsidered," 1971. 50 min. **\$5.00.**

Price M. Cobbs, "Dare To Care / Dare To Act," 1971. 46 min. **\$5.00.**

Arthur W. Combs, "Accountability for Humanism," 1973. 50 min. **\$6.00.**

Dan W. Dodson, "Action for the Seventies: What Is Our Unfinished Agenda?" 1972. 44 min. **\$6.00.**

Richard L. Foster, "Accountability: Social and Political Influence," 1973. 56 min. **\$6.00.**

Richard L. Foster, "Educational Supervision: Dead or Alive?" 1969. 38 min. **\$5.00.**

Alexander Frazier, "Open Schools in Perspective," 1973. 54 min. **\$6.00.**

Alexander Frazier and Doctoral Students, "Questions About Open Schools," 1972. 60 min. **\$5.00.**

Jack R. Frymier, "Curriculum for Individuality," 1973. 48 min. **\$6.00.**

Jack R. Frymier, "A Curriculum Manifesto," 1972. 60 min. **\$6.00.**

Charles M. Galloway, "Personalized Teaching for Individualized Learning," 1973. 50 min. **\$6.00.**

Ruth Love Holloway, "Reading and the Individual," 1973. 45 min. **\$6.00.**

Alvin D. Loving, Sr., "One America by the Year 2000," 1972. 45 min. **\$6.00.**

Hugh J. Scott, "Financing and Supporting an Education To Insure Individual Development," 1973. 48 min. **\$6.00.**

Charles E. Silberman, "Crisis in the Classroom—A Diagnosis with Suggestions for Remedy," 1971. 33 min. **\$6.00.**

Neil V. Sullivan, "Crisis in Values," 1971. 37 min. **\$6.00.**

Neil V. Sullivan, "Forces Affecting Educational Decisions," 1973. 50 min. **\$6.00.**

All audio cassette orders must be accompanied by payment—no billed purchase orders, and no discounts on quantity orders of cassettes.

Order from:

Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development
1701 K Street, N.W., Suite 1100, Washington, D.C. 20006

and, if accepting, then be held accountable for completing that task. In essence, if the task is not completed then the honorarium should be withheld.

3. In-service education should be an ongoing program. It is ridiculous to assume that a consultant can have any impact on teachers or curriculum if that consultant is limited to just a few hours. The most successful programs employ a consultant not only to instruct staff but also to spend a great deal of time in the classroom with the staff member. The consultant can give honest as well as meaningful aid to the teacher while, by his presence, stimulating the instructor to put into practice what he/she has learned in the formal instructional setting. Frequent unannounced visits keep the level of instruction higher for a longer period of time.

4. A consultant should be employed also as a resource person. That is, he should be responsible for aiding the staff in both getting and preparing materials to be used in the classroom. In many instances, teachers simply do not have time to secure this information and material on their own and this service is always well received by the staff.

5. School districts can also utilize a consultant solely for the purpose of grantsmanship. There is always money available for educational programs but too often school districts do not have the personnel to write and do not have the contacts to secure this money. The knowledgeable consultant can write these grants and may even know the people in the funding office.

6. Once a consultant has been selected and employed, let that individual proceed with the task he/she was employed to do. Many times in-service education is impeded by administrative personnel who want to keep abreast of what's "going on." Again, make the selection carefully, pay the consultant well, and expect a tangible return on the investment.

To reiterate, this will not solve all of the problems but I contend it will eliminate substantially many of those traditional difficulties ever present in in-service education. □

Copyright © 1974 by the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development. All rights reserved.