

North Carolina's K-3 Staff Development Program

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WITH THE beginning of public school kindergartens in North Carolina, educators were called upon to plan and implement a statewide staff development program unlike anything this state had ever attempted to do. State Department of Public Instruction personnel, public school teachers and administrators, college and university professors, and the Learning Institute of North Carolina joined forces to meet the challenge. Just as the implementation of kindergartens has purposefully been a gradual one so that a "spread effect" over the state could ensure quality, so has the staff development program systematically expanded developing leadership all along the way.

The first state-supported kindergartens in North Carolina began in 1969 and became known as the K-3 continuous progress early childhood program. At that time kindergartens were established in eight schools or early childhood centers located in each of the state's educational districts. Just over 300 children were enrolled. During 1970-71 ten additional centers were added, totaling 18 state-supported centers. In 1971-72 support

A comprehensive team effort has given effective impetus to this state's introduction of a K-3 continuous progress early childhood program. Special features are indicated by these writers.

of the program increased and 36 new schools were added totaling 54 early childhood centers; in 1972-73 another 20 were added; and by 1973-74 approximately 700 K-3 centers were in operation.

As these centers opened throughout the state with each of the education districts acquiring its proportionate number, staff development opportunities for teachers, assistant teachers, special education personnel, administrators, and supervisors were provided. The staff development program was planned in relationship to the guidelines adopted by the North Carolina State Board

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of Education. These guidelines stated that the early childhood program would (a) establish kindergartens as an integral part of the primary school, (b) provide teacher improvement, (c) involve parents, (d) coordinate with other agencies, (e) evaluate the instructional program, and (f) disseminate information concerning the project.

With the expansion of the early childhood program, a regional staff development center was established in each of the state educational districts. Regional early childhood coordinators were employed to coordinate summer training institutes in each region and to provide follow-up assistance throughout the year to the early childhood schools or centers within each district. In addition, an early childhood state steering committee representative of the State Department of Public Instruction, the Learning Institute of North Carolina, the Regional Early Childhood Staff Development Centers, public school teachers and administrators, colleges and universities, and parent groups was organized. Reviewing and critiquing the programmatic, instructional, and staff devel-



opment aspects of the early childhood program have been a major responsibility of this committee.

A major emphasis of the early childhood staff development program in North Carolina has been summer institutes held each year since the program began. These institutes have been characterized by the involvement of participants in relevant modes of learning and instruction through the process of inquiry and discovery. This involvement in a real school environment made possible the application of theoretical ideas which often must be "tried out" or practiced in order to be understood. The program sought to link theory and practice, knowing and doing, and concept and skill.

Theoretical knowledge was by no means forgotten in the North Carolina program. Of equal importance, however, was the application of significant concepts to actual school and classroom situations. This practical experience or field experience was carefully planned and systematically analyzed. It was the intent of all concerned to deal with what "is" as well as what "can be."

Features of the North Carolina Staff Development Program

1. *A team approach*—Principals, K-3 teachers, special education teachers, assistant teachers (aides), and supervisors from the same school districts participated in the summer program together, thus enhancing the chances of successfully effecting change in their schools during the academic school year. Principals and supervisors were involved with children in K-3 multi-aged open classroom settings during the summer institutes just as were the teachers and assistant teachers (aides). This team approach was further enhanced through an emphasis on group process and special sessions including the development of human relationships and value clarification.

2. *Practical experiences, a variety of open classrooms*—Team members were involved in setting up and working in a variety of "model" open classrooms. Some of the classrooms were self-contained open classrooms, while others were designed for open spaced schools and team teaching situations. These options were viewed as fundamental since openness is not always



dictated by physical facilities and team members were representative of a variety of school districts with differing needs, possibilities, and building designs.

3. *Teacher resource centers*—Resource areas were established in the institutes where team members could create and make their own informal materials, such as laminated learning task cards, reading or math games, tri-wall dividers and book shelves, and transparencies for overhead projectors. There were samples of many different kinds of teacher-made materials available, and staff members were there to assist and answer questions. The center also provided many study resources, including professional books and journals, a wide range of audio and visual media, and collections of commercial materials—many of which were produced by outstanding curriculum projects.

4. *Special resource personnel to conduct workshops in curriculum areas*—Consultants (including college and university professors, supervisors, principals, and teachers) conducted a variety of workshops emphasizing skill development, new materials in curricular areas (both commercial and teacher-made), and creative ways to help children learn. Of particular importance was the addition to the staff develop-

ment team of British educators who have been involved each summer in institutes, and one, a former British Infant School Headmistress and teacher educator, who has remained in North Carolina as a full time consultant to the program.

5. *Informal special interest workshops*—Outdoor learning, block building, tie dying, dulcimer making, macrame, and movement were examples. Special interest workshops and workshops in curricular areas were concerned with helping participants understand and become enthusiastic about an "integrated" approach to learning.

6. *Live-in residence experience*—Where possible, team members were asked to remain on campus or in residence at the particular location of the institutes themselves. These experiences provided for continuous sharing of information for in-depth group communication. This allowed for more time and, therefore, many more options for the participants. Often, there were workshops planned in the evenings and participants had the opportunity to select those of particular interest. The teacher resource rooms with instructional materials for making teacher-made items were open in the evenings, along with group sessions, such as candle making and pottery, volley ball, folk dancing; group singing was also available in some of the institutes' evening sessions.

7. *Semi-formal session on fundamental topics*—Experts in areas of particular concern



and interest were sought out to address topics such as: Observing and Assessing Individual Needs of Children; Organizing for Effective Learning in a K-3 Open Classroom; Designing Long and Short Range Curriculum Plans Based on the Developmental Levels, Interests, and Needs of Young Children; and Mainstreaming Exceptional Children in the Open Classroom.

8. *An integrated day approach for participants*—Teams of participants from the same school were assigned certain activities together as a team for part of each day, and they had a choice of workshops or other activities daily. This approach was intended to help each participant see the importance of specific planning of daily activities for team members as well as to help them learn to select and initiate some of their own learning activities.

9. *Daily staff meetings and evaluations*—In order for institute staff members to work together as a team, planning and evaluation sessions were held daily. During these meetings a critique of the day took place and adjustments were made to meet the needs of participants and staff. In addition, participants evaluated activities daily and completed an overall evaluation at the end of each institute.

10. *Total commitment*—The North Carolina early childhood staff development programs combined the team efforts of colleges and universities, public schools, the State Department of Education, other state and private agencies, communities, and the federal government. The need to consider educational manpower in broad terms was essential in building a total commitment on the part of all concerned with introducing kindergartens as an integral part of public schools in North Carolina.

11. *Micro-teaching clinics*—Opportunity was provided for participants to be videotaped if they so desired. Once the participant's teaching was taped, a small group of peers and team leaders was available to help each person analyze the techniques used and suggest ways to improve. Participants were then able to re-teach the same lesson, utilizing suggestions obtained through the critique, or develop new lessons depending on individual interests. The micro-teaching clinic was open throughout the institutes, and technicians (often undergraduate or graduate interns) were available to assist with the equipment and taping if needed.

12. *Follow-up activities in each school or center*—As a part of the summer institutes,

teams of teachers, administrators, and supervisors returned to their respective schools or school systems to work directly in the classroom settings where they would be involved during the academic school year. When desired, support leadership personnel or consultants from the staff development institutes accompanied the various teams to the schools to offer direct help and support. Time was spent in preparing meaningful environments for children, team planning and organizing, making materials, and generally getting ready for the children.

13. *In-service throughout the school year*—With employment for teachers in North Carolina recently extended to ten months, a welcomed opportunity to participate in on-going staff development throughout the year has been made possible. Teachers now have days planned and devoted to staff development activities including workshops by the Early Childhood Regional Staff Development Centers, in-service courses offered by colleges and universities, statewide early childhood seminars or special interest sessions, and opportunity to travel both within and out of the state to observe and sometimes participate in other programs. Many teachers, administrative, supervisory, college, and university personnel have traveled to and studied in the British Infant Schools for both short and extended periods of time.

A Special Relationship

The "esprit de corps" that has developed and extended across the state among those interested in high quality programs for young children is a continuing unprecedented major goal. Not only have parents and community agencies been involved, but a special relationship has developed among participating school systems, colleges and universities, the State Department of Public Instruction, and the Learning Institute of North Carolina. Universities have given course credit for the summer programs, housed participants, and provided consultants, student teachers, and interns. The State Department of Public Instruction and LINC have provided coordination, secured funding, provided personnel for summer institute staffs, and provided technical assistance throughout the year. Schools, also, have developed teams including principals, supervisors, and teachers. Teachers plan to-

gether, visit other schools, attend workshops, and bring back new ideas for the entire staff.

All of this has been done with a desire to have the best possible program for all children, ages 5 through 8, in North Carolina. With the many accomplishments there are still challenges ahead. Among them are: (a) an expanded emphasis on helping teachers "get ready" for mainstreaming exceptional children into a learning environment which allows each child to progress at his or her own pace and in his or her own unique way of learning; (b) freeing supervisors, administrators, and other support personnel of many current responsibilities, thus enabling them to spend more time as a "helping teacher" within the team; (c) continuing to expand and develop quality programs so that by 1978 or sooner all five-year-olds in the state may be enrolled in the program; and (d) bridging the gap from early childhood education to the intermediate educational program.

These programs are further characterized by an informal, open approach to learning, in which teachers assume the role of facilitators of learning, in which assisting rather than directing is emphasized, and in which tasks include providing an atmosphere that encourages investigation and exploration through the use of many concrete and sensory materials. Team teaching is also a part of many of the programs in which individual teacher strengths are capitalized upon and in which teams of teachers guide children to assume responsibility for initiating and evaluating some of their own learning. The children are grouped heterogeneously by ability and often by age. In this multi-aged setting children learn from each other and are motivated by a learning environment which encourages independent and small group learning utilizing a variety of learning and interest centers.

Granted, such a program for young children as described here necessitates a well planned on-going staff development program—one that requires skillful leadership, dedicated participants, continuous evaluation, and a total team commitment. The challenges continue to be far-reaching. □

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