

Principals and Their Inservice Needs

Principals are not receiving inservice in areas they need the most—school climate, personnel evaluation, team building, internal communications, and program supervision.



JAMES L. OLIVERO

Many thanks to Beverly Peterson, Principal; Reggie Romaine, Assistant Principal; and Jane White, Music Teacher, Stratford Landing Elementary School, Fairfax County, Virginia, for posing for the photos in this article.

Nearly all educators agree that court orders, new legislation, community demands, reduced resources, and problems associated with declining enrollments demand creativity and imagination from the people who must deal with these issues. Of all educators, principals may have greater needs for renewal than anyone else. For better or ill, the bulk of educational improvements rests on the shoulders of the principal, the very person who has been neglected for so long.

It is incredible that inservice opportunities for most principals are so deficient. Bilingual teacher aides, in fact, typically receive more inservice than most principals, even though the principal's responsibilities far exceed the scope of influence of the aide. This criticism shouldn't be interpreted as a slap at bilingual education; the point is presented simply to show how one piece of our so-called comprehensive inservice program has been neglected.

If there is any chance at all that we can help a good educational system become even better, attention directed to leadership development is imperative. Administrative (principal) staff development is a first step on this long march.

Why a Principal Development Program?

The primary purpose of any administrator development effort is to increase professional and personal effectiveness while simultaneously increasing organizational effectiveness. Some inservice programs aim almost exclusively at personal growth, while others aim primarily at organizational development. Both contexts are important.

The true bottom line of any inservice ought to be tied to "desired student outcomes." Unfortunately, while it is possible for principals to learn how to do their jobs better, that does not guarantee that students will learn more or better. Our aim should be to help principals do those things that are both effective and efficient—things that benefit students. Case in point:

Recently I was in a high school in which the principal had evolved arena scheduling to such a high level of efficiency that nearly 1,200 youngsters were scheduled for their second semester classes in slightly less than three hours. The efficiency of the staff was a major achievement—even if the lack of

guidance and counseling regarding course selections was a horror story for students, who deserved more counseling than they were receiving. Heaven forbid that the principals and teachers in this school learn better ways to implement a more efficient arena schedule process. Faster doesn't necessarily mean better!

A reasonable question to ask about the purpose of any inservice activity is: What benefit to students might (could, will, should) this inservice program accomplish? If there aren't some reasonable possibilities that students will gain from an activity (even if the gain is delayed or achieved in an indirect manner), don't do it. Our resources are scarce; they cannot be expended frivolously.

Real vs. Ideal—Remedial vs. Developmental

Over the past few years, a number of studies have attempted to discover what

"The true bottom line of any inservice ought to be tied to 'desired student outcomes.'"

characteristics can be found in quality staff development programs. The Rand Corporation study and the work of Bruce Joyce and his colleagues at Stanford University have contributed significantly to our understanding. Each study, in its own way, has helped clarify the "ideal" inservice program. Among other things, the research efforts revealed effective inservice programs:

- Have support from the superintendent as well as the board of education. Support is shown by having the decision makers allocate both time and money to inservice plans. The superintendent, moreover, demonstrates support by actually attending staff development activities—as often as possible, personally modeling behavior that says in effect, "It is legitimate for other educators in this district to continue learning because the superintendent is willing to admit s/he has more to learn."

- Are those defined primarily by the learners; that is, inservice options are

not "laid on" by district office personnel. Learners are likely to gain most from programs they have had an opportunity to select and design.

- Offer participants opportunities to experience and to reality-check new behaviors (with feedback) in a safe environment. Observing another skilled person demonstrating a particular process does not necessarily mean a learner has internalized the process.

- Are continuous and holistic. Instantaneous solutions to complex problems may offer exciting fantasies, but they are seldom real. Too many so-called inservice programs are constructed as if they can fit snugly into a three-hour study module. These experiences, however, tend only to suggest narrow focus and short-range awareness episodes. Single-shot episodes are often difficult for the learner to transfer to daily use. When a narrow-focus experience is taken out of context, the test for holistic integration is flunked. For instance, an administrator may learn how to use brainstorming processes with advisory council members, but may not be able to use that same process in faculty meetings, cabinet meetings, and so forth. Generalizing and transferring are key concepts to keep in mind when promoting holistic learning.

- Offer reasonable rewards to participants. Most people tend to continue doing those things for which they are rewarded; they terminate activities for which they are punished. Inservice programs that can reward participants by illustrating a recognizable tie between newly learned behavior and student achievement are exceptionally satisfying; inservice activities that are time-consuming and esoteric are usually very punishing. Although intrinsic rewards are often most beneficial, extrinsic rewards are useful as well. Newspaper articles about an individual's involvement in staff development, certificates of achievement, notations in personnel files, fiscal incentives, special recognitions at board of education meetings can all be valid, external rewards.

The preceding program factors can help ensure a quality program, a program some would consider "ideal." The world, unfortunately, isn't perfect and the ideal isn't always attainable. For example, some superintendents (especially those in very large districts) realistically can't possibly attend each district-sponsored inservice function.

Another point: while effective programs are usually defined by partici-

pants, participants can't possibly define inservice programs when they have doubts about implementation procedures or legislative intentions undergirding particular school interventions. PL 94-142 is a prime example of this issue. Ideally site administrators can define what they need to know about individualized educational plans, fair hearings, least restrictive environments, and due process procedures. Realistically, federal and state officials defined what they perceived as appropriate and practically "required" attendance at training sessions. If self-selection had been possible, even fewer people might have participated in the training.

As with most facets of education, we already know better practices regarding inservice than those we use. It is important, however, for us to know optimal characteristics so we can aim at them whenever possible. Perhaps the most often missed *ideal* condition is a part of the remedial vs. developmental oversight. Inservice education should enable principals to anticipate changes and challenges to their job. Apparently it is difficult to anticipate what developmental skills, attitudes, knowledge are necessary to do the job—and that is why inservice is too often a remedial action, after there is an "ouch."

There appear to be two "ouches" in the system right now, and there may be another big one lurking in the wings. The first situation is at least partially verified in the results of a recent study completed by California site administrators.¹ The study asked principals to consider a list of 91 job-related competencies and to indicate which competencies were appropriate for pre-instruction and which were appropriate for inservice. Obviously some of the competencies principals identified fell into both classifications. Interesting, though, was the fact that the actual number of competencies identified by inservice development exceeded those at the preservice level by a ratio of about nine to one. This illustrates, it seems to me, the common-sense notion that most people aren't aware of what they will need until they are in a position where they become cognizant of a void. The ouch that festers from a void causes personal motivation to learn.

Although the current route to an administrative credential is via the institutions of higher education (where one might expect some reasonable projections about what is needed for site administrators), most principals do not believe what they received in preservice

programs gave them the background demanded to function with excellence on the job. That is all the more reason to listen to what they prescribe for inservice programs.

One fly in the treatment ointment is related to the lack of agreement between audiences that influence what is required. We could assume that school board members, superintendents, principals, and professors have reasonably congruent biases about job functions and, as a result, agree on preparation and inservice priorities. Apparently this is not the case.

Principals appear to be concerned about the way people in an organization

work together. Superintendents, though, seem to be more concerned about the areas where they most likely get a lot of heat, such as management of the master contract and public concern about declining achievement scores. Perspectives about the job of the principal as well as education for the principalship depend on who is wearing what hat.

Reasonably, one might expect principals to know better than anyone else what they need to do the job. It is possible, however, that principals look for bandages to cover the ouch rather than for medicine to heal it. Conceivably, superintendents consider the job that



and to evaluate teaching performance.

3. *Team building*—the ability to demonstrate the application of interpersonal relations skills in articulating responses to staff needs, and in developing morale.

4. *Internal communications*—the ability to establish an effective two-way communication system using a variety of procedures that allow for clarification and facilitation of communication among staff members, students, community members, and district level personnel.

5. *Supervision*—the ability to use an effective planning model for developing and implementing curriculum designed to improve and maintain a high quality instructional program.

What Stands In The Way?

If inservice for administrators is needed and desirable, reviewing some of the problems that stand in the way—problems that tend to limit the potential effectiveness of otherwise well-defined programs—may be useful. There are at least six problems of concern (1) networking, (2) holistic vs. topic-specific education, (3) effective trainers, (4) development money, (5) transferring research to practice, and (6) small schools, rural principals.

1. *Networking*. Since resources are so very scarce, care must be taken to make maximum use of whatever is available. One way to gain optimum impact is to establish a network of like-minded people throughout a state (perhaps even on a national basis) to be cognizant of what quality offerings are provided by different individuals and institutions. The state department is an ideal agency to organize a network. In some states a minimum effort is already under way. Leadership at the state level is defensible and desirable.

2. *Holistic vs. Topic Specific*. If there is a systematic inservice program for principals, it is possible to provide an overriding framework for comprehensive personal and professional growth. A comprehensive inservice program builds subsequent activities from a solid foundation constructed earlier. Those who participate in the continuing education program are able to recognize a progressive path from the unknown to the known. Rather than sporadic, fragmented patchwork inservice, a planned program for progress is preferable.

3. *Effective Trainers*. Rather than gaining the benefit of outstanding in-

struction, principals too often have to accept presentations from people who fail to outline specific learning objectives, who use transparencies unreadable three or four rows from the projection screen, who fail to offer opportunities for questions and answers, and so forth. And then, of course, there is the problem of the presenter who is quite capable when performing a particular service on the job, but who cannot teach that job to someone else.

In short, there is a critical need for the development of additional quality instructors. Very little thought, however, is given to this oft-overlooked matter. The trainer of leaders needs credibility and competency. In some way, we need to develop a "farm system" to move rookies into the big leagues—to identify individuals who possess the traits necessary to do and to teach and to then ensure they receive appropriate rewards for helping others.

4. *Development Money*. Practical administrative inservice programs, like most problems in education, are hindered because people (1) don't know what to do or how to do it, (2) don't have the time to do it, (3) don't have the money to do it. This last factor may be more of an excuse than a reality in many cases, but there are beginning to be rather clear indications that money may truly be a contributing factor—especially at the present.

Too much administrative inservice has been a result of seat-of-the-pants navigation. Nevertheless, it is a credit to those who have contributed so greatly from their time and talent so that others could benefit. But we need further developmental activities for leadership preparation (both people and materials) and this costs money. If, like the automobile industry, we fail to read the signs of the time, similar destruction is possible in education. Noticeable changes must be made quickly. These changes aren't likely without well-educated leaders.

5. *Research to Practice*. Unfortunately, practitioners frequently believe researchers are so protected from the hassles of everyday life that the ivory-tower types can't possibly understand the real world. On the contrary, theoreticians are confused by and irritated with practitioners who could benefit from learning better ways to function but don't.

What is needed is an intervention to bridge this gap. Lorri Manasse, staff member at NIE, offers a realistic solu-

should be done while principals consider the job as it exists. But if I had to make a choice right now to go with the competencies identified by principals or those identified by superintendents, I'd take my chances with the principals. Based on the survey of California administrators, here are the top five competencies the principals chose:

1. *School climate*—the ability to analyze the relationship of school morale, climate, and policies, and actively work toward the development of a positive school climate.

2. *Personnel evaluation*—the ability to provide leadership in the development of teaching performance standards

Principal Support Groups Develop Planning Skills

Sister Jean Hyland

Over 700 principals have participated in field tests at 40 sites across the country of a new Principals' Inservice Program sponsored by the Institute for Development of Educational Activities (I/D/E/A).

During inservice, principals form a collegial support group within which they design, implement, and evaluate a personal professional development plan and a school improvement strategy. Initially, emphasis is on group process skills, self-awareness strategies, and problem-solving skills. The potential of the group and its processes are demonstrated in the "in-basket problem-solving process," in which each principal brings a problem. The support group brainstorms solutions and synthesizes alternative strategies. The principal whose problem it is retains the right to choose the solution he or she believes is best.

In the second phase, the principals set out to involve others in a planned school improvement project. The emphasis here is on the principal's role, rather than on the skills he or she possesses. Instead of teaching principals how to plan, communicate, provide training, coordinate, and evaluate, attention is focused on the most effective role the principal can play in the specific improvement project. As a result, principals may identify additional needs for themselves, which then become part of their personal professional development efforts.

For more information, write to James C. LaPlant, Department of Educational Leadership, Center for Administrator Inservice Programs, University of Cincinnati, M.L.#2, Cincinnati, Ohio 45221.

Sister Jean Hyland is project assistant with the I/D/E/A Principals' Inservice Program, University of Cincinnati.

tion to the problem. She has initiated a plan that calls for the dissemination of research through training. The idea is to incorporate the very best of what is known about the learning process into training programs for principals and other administrators. This notion is considerably different and potentially far more effective than the typical research paper that seems to be written by one researcher—certainly not for the benefit of the site leader.

We need more people who can inter-

pret research results and then show others how the results make sense for students. This calls for some rather unique people with unique skills, capable of making the link between research and practice and translating user needs into researchable problems. They could help researchers understand principals' lives and problems. They would need to know something about both worlds and have resources and credibility in both.

6. *Small Schools, Rural Principals.* Principals in small, rural schools proba-

bly need more assistance than any other site administrator. They may have to share teaching responsibilities in the school; they have limited funds for traveling to distant inservice programs; and their absence, even if temporary, may mean a loss of leadership not only in their own school, but in nearby schools they may also serve. But the cost benefits of bringing in outside consultants is not particularly attractive, either. Small-school principals are bombarded from all sides it seems.

If these principals are going to get the inservice they need, some creative approaches are called for. One promising possibility is the computer interactive video system—which is now merely a vision for the future, yet an idea whose time has come.

An interactive video system coordinates a small computer (like the Apple II) with a television monitor and a videotape or videodisc player. Working at a computer console, one can observe a master presentation on videotape. At appropriate times, the computer disengages the tape machine and the learner interacts with the computer. The interaction involves a variety of prerecorded questions. When the participant has performed satisfactorily, the videotape is re-engaged and the participant continues with the training package.

There are no inservice programs developed for such a system at the present, but efforts are under way to make this provocative idea a reality. The problems of the rural school administrator offer some special challenges.

In Conclusion

Schools are designed to serve boys and girls—a philosophic principle that has apparently faded away—at least in some districts. But we are not too late to make corrective improvements. If educators don't begin to make necessary changes, those who propose to remove educational efforts to the private sector may well prevail.

Public schools have not yet out-lived their usefulness. Even so, there is an urgent need to make a good system better. I'm optimistic about the future. It is time for us to stop talking and start doing. ■

¹For a complete listing of the competencies and an analysis of their priority order—as identified by principals—write to ACSA, 4020 Birch, Suite 111, Newport Beach, CA 92660. Enclose \$5 for materials and handling.

Copyright © 1982 by the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development. All rights reserved.