

Criteria for the Creation of In-Service Education Programs

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Cet article présente un examen approfondi des programmes de formation professionnelle "in-service" au Canada. Il dégage les critères à retenir en vue de l'organisation et de la mise en pratique des activités de stage les plus fructueuses. Les critères souhaitables sont: une meilleure compréhension, de la part des professeurs, de ce qui se passe dans leurs classes, le libre échange des points de vue, le secours mutuel à l'intérieur de la profession enseignante.

Les auteurs présentent des modèles répondant aux critères retenus, ainsi qu'ils tracent les implications de ces modèles et de ces critères pour les commissaires scolaires, les fonctionnaires des commissions scolaires et le personnel universitaires responsables de l'organisation et du déroulement des programmes "in-service".

INTRODUCTION

It takes no great power of foresight to predict that the next few years, if not the next decade, of education in Canada will be marked by a retrenchment in budgets, size of staffs, and investments in new materials and facilities. In such a situation, what will probably take on much greater significance is the in-service education of those teachers presently employed by school boards. It seems timely then to examine the process of in-service education.

While in-service programs have long been a part of most teachers' professional activities, the history of such programs is not shrouded in an aura of success. I propose a fresh look at in-service education programs, my orientation being for teachers to take a dominant role in the design and implementation of in-service programs.

BACKGROUND AND RATIONALE

I

The view taken here is that each teacher, each administrator, each resource person is not only a product of the external reality within which s/he operates, but is also a creator of that reality (1,2,3,4). Because of the uniqueness we all possess, we stress or ignore certain aspects of any particular situation, stressing those which at the time seem most useful and powerful for our continued growth, ignoring those which do not seem relevant. Just as we could not possibly take account of every sound that reaches our ears, or every photon of energy that strikes our eyes, choosing instead to ignore some sounds or sights and to stress others, we function similarly in learning situations.

Because the process of stressing and ignoring is fundamental to each of us (5), it follows that we do in fact create the reality which surrounds us. If I choose to stress the beauty and power of automobiles, their speed, elegance, and sex appeal, while ignoring the detrimental effects such machines may have on the environment, then I will perceive the reality of the current outcry about the pollution hazards of cars in one way. If, on the other hand, I choose to stress the effect that dirty, smelly cars have in consuming non-renewable fossil fuels, and ignore the usefulness of cars and trucks for the efficient movement and distribution of goods and people for the perpetuation of our society, then I will view pollution concerns in an entirely different manner. Each orientation will lead to a different view of reality. Each orientation is created by the person who selects certain aspects of the situation for direct attention, while ignoring others.

What has this got to do with in-service education? In-service education activities which are imposed on teachers from above, whether by well-intentioned school board officials or through the auspices of a university, are destined for failure if they do not take into account the teachers' perception of reality. If some group external to the people for whom the in-service training is designed decides *a priori* what teachers need, without taking account of the teachers' own view of what is relevant to them, then the chances are extremely good that teachers will ignore the in-service activity. They may attend. They may even get involved to a certain degree, but if the activities do not deal directly with the teachers' perceived reality the activities will have little permanent effect on the teachers. Yet that has been the nature of a great deal of in-service functions.

Teachers have been directed to attend such-and-such workshop or short course where they are given the latest word, the latest panacea for the ills of education. One does not need to read very widely to find documentation that a very large number of the innovations introduced in the past twenty years, aided and abetted by vast and expensive in-service education programs, have not produced significant improvements in the quality of education (6). In the present writer's own field (mathematics education) millions of dollars and people-hours have been devoted to upgrading the curriculum and the teachers over the past 20 years, yet the general consensus of opinion is that the so-called "new math" has failed. I contend that this result is due in large part to the fact that curriculum revisions and in-service education were imposed on teachers without account taken of teacher perceptions of the reality of the situation.

I was one of those teachers herded to in-service workshops conducted in conjunction with the arrival of the "new math." The workshop provided me with nothing new in either mathematics or methodology. More damning in my view, however, was the fact that the workshop leaders, authors of the newly prescribed textbook, had no idea of my teaching situation, and of how what they were proposing could be implemented for the benefit of the children in my classes. This and subsequent experiences

with in-service programs has brought me to the following conclusion: *Any in-service program imposed on teachers, which does not confront teachers at their own level of perception of reality, is destined to failure. In-service education, to be successful, to have permanent lasting effects on teachers and subsequently on their students, has to be generated dynamically by the teachers themselves, from their view of classroom reality.*

II

Denial of the view that man is a creator of his own reality leads to the conclusion that man is a passive receiver of an external reality, that one's function in life is to be filled with knowledge from an external source. If the nature of man is to receive or perceive the world as a passive being, then the goal of education and in particular in-service education is to create a man who accepts the world as passively as possible. Indeed, this seems to be the thrust of many in-service education activities where teachers are gathered together for a day, or for several days over a period of weeks, to be filled with the latest knowledge as put forth by experts in the field. Yet we "know" activities of this form have had no lasting impressions on the vast majority of teachers.

I argue that the failure of such in-service functions is due to the basic dehumanization of teachers which such a process implies, an implication which may or may not be recognized consciously by teachers, but which nevertheless causes them to disregard as irrelevant these kinds of in-service functions. Teachers are dehumanized because they are not taken into account in the design and execution of the activities, their reality is not considered except perhaps very superficially. The expectation which pervades in-service activities is one of docile acceptance, that is, teachers are expected to docilely accept the word as it is being put to them. It seems that teachers do just that. Closer examination reveals, however, that teachers justifiably "tune-out and turn-off." It is not surprising, since only the speaker's reality is being dealt with, not that of the teachers involved. So we continue to have in-service days to present to teachers the "new math," the "new social studies," the "new science," to fill teachers with the new ways and new panaceas, and to right the wrongs of the past; and still we do not deal with these in terms of the teachers' frame of reference, because we never seek to find out what that frame of reference includes. We assume we know, when in fact we cannot know unless and until we begin a long-term dialogue *with* teachers, not *at* teachers; not *for* teachers, but intimately, energetically, and critically *with* them. Until we seek ways of establishing such a dialogue, and actually commence and carry on this dialogue with teachers, our in-service activities will continue to be dehumanizing and ineffectual. We will rightly be rejected by teachers, for so long as we persist in talking *at* and *to* teachers, rather than talking *with* teachers, we perpetuate the perception of teachers as empty vessels to be filled, computers to be programmed, or errant persons in need of

correction. It is a dehumanizing approach, which teachers, aware of their ability to analyze and act upon their own reality, reject out of hand.

In the most blatant example I have witnessed of this approach to in-service education teachers were literally told which session to attend and when to change sessions (directed from “one cattle pen to another,” one disgruntled teacher said), and in each session were subjected to the latest insights by the propounding expert. Little or no dialogue between teachers and leaders was possible. Moreover, it appeared to me that the leaders were as dehumanized by the process as were the teachers.

Any in-service education model which perpetuates the dehumanization of teachers, which views teachers as docile, passive recipients of reality (someone else's reality), will be rejected by teachers. A potentially more powerful model for in-service education will include the means for teachers and resource personnel to engage in dialogue with each other as equals, without teachers being subordinated to the leader or vice versa.

For such dialogue to develop and to endure, longer periods of time are required than seem to be presently available. A one-shot, one-time-only in-service day or half-day will not suffice, and constitutes a waste of both time and money by teachers, school boards, and resource personnel. As the first step in a continuing process of in-service education, such one-day sessions can be of value as a means of initiating the dialogue. But in training sessions as with love affairs, one-night encounters do not bring lasting fulfilment, and are essentially degrading and dehumanizing for all the participants; and a series of one-night stands only multiplies the degradation and dehumanization. Yet in-service activities in the past have too often had the essential character of one-night stands.

III

If teachers participating in in-service education activities are to have dialogue with their colleagues, then a number of prerequisites are desirable for that discussion to be fruitful. Not the least of these is time, but time alone will not guarantee that critical discussion and dialogue will occur. It is a necessary but not a sufficient condition. (One has only to note the enormous number of hours teachers devote to in-service functions in any school year, with minimal payoffs, to realize that time alone does not necessarily produce significant results.)

More important is the psychological climate within which the dialogue takes place — what Sarason has called the *psychological sense of community*, a sense which I contend is lacking in many school settings (7,8,9). Most of us have experienced the feeling of being alone while in the midst of a crowd of people. Nowhere is this more true than for teachers in schools. It is a rare school that has developed the *esprit de corps* that fosters and organizes the in-service education of its own teachers. This is not meant as a criticism of those schools which have not developed a sense of community. It does recognize that many varied demands are placed

upon teachers, by themselves and others, which drain a teacher's energy and time, leaving precious little opportunity for critical dialogue to occur. Recesses and lunch hours do not usually afford teachers the opportunity for such discussions, at least not unless a mind-set generally accepted by a school staff has been established which deems such encounters as appropriate behavior. The creation by a staff of such a mind-set is evidence that the dialogue has already commenced. Most school staffs do not have such an orientation. But the fact that there are exceptions to this generalization leaves a way open for exploring the means of developing a psychological sense of community among school staffs.

Teachers, of course, are not the only group within society who lack a psychological sense of community. It can be and has been argued that a major difficulty people experience in modern suburbia is akin to this sense of not belonging, of estrangement, non-involvement, and powerlessness.

That teachers in schools experience such feelings may account for what at first glance seems to be contradictory behavior on their part when they meet colleagues at in-service functions. During breaks between sessions, teachers can be observed in animated conversation about educational issues, whereas similar discussions might never occur in their own schools, even though they may be talking to exactly the *same* people in both cases. What occurs, I conjecture, is that for a brief time teachers do experience, and with enjoyment, a sense of being part of a thriving, powerful, educational community. Sadly, the feelings do not seem to last, for when teachers return to the formal sessions, they find that the leaders do not meet them at the teachers' perception of reality, a behavior which fosters the turning-off reaction. If the leaders do manage to strike at the teachers' level of reality, and begin to examine and critically analyze that reality, teachers again tend to back off, because their psychological sense of community, a sense which provides the security to take risks and examine one's own view of reality, has not developed sufficiently to allow them to critically examine their self-created realities. The leader then becomes a threat to the teachers; in many instances, letters and phone calls are made to the organizers of the in-service function, the primary message being that such-and-such leader was no good, was irrelevant, was rude, was mean, and so on — the same sort of comments received when the leader has *in fact* failed to meet the teachers where they are in their ways of perceiving reality.

The distinction between the two cases is crucially important, but is seldom recognized by those organizing in-service programs. On the one hand, the leader who does not or cannot gain access to the reality of the teachers' lives in classrooms should not be invited back. On the other hand, the leader who does and can gain such access and in doing so creates constructive tension which will lead to a critical dialogue with the participants, deserves to be supported in his efforts. A fundamental element of that support must come in the form of the provision of time and long-range commitment to development within participants of a sense of

involvement in examining and creating their individual reality.

In only a few instances have I experienced this psychological sense of community among a group of professional educators. One instance is that of Projects: SUBTLE, an amalgam of in-service education activities organized around a number of curricular areas (mathematics, reading, and foreign languages, including ESL), and involving teachers, student teachers, and university personnel in an on-going study of fundamental issues in teaching and learning.¹ The projects have operated for over three years in the Vancouver region, actively involving more than 300 people each year. One goal of Projects: SUBTLE is the assumption by participants of responsibility for their own in-service education, a process which nonetheless takes place in an environment of mutual support and respect. The success of these projects leads me to conclude that: *In-service programs which neglect to provide for the development of a sense of commitment to and mutual support for the activities undertaken by the participants will not have long-term effects. In-service programs have to develop a psychological sense of community among participants, and this requires a commitment by participants and organizers to a relatively long-term involvement with the program.*

Resource personnel or leaders of in-service programs which strive to achieve a psychological sense of community, which treat teachers humanely, are co-partners in the dialogue which occurs. The leader's function is not to pass on his accumulated knowledge, to fill the teachers up (cleansing of the soul included with each fill-up), but to engage with the participants in discussions and experiences which have the potential for critical examination of the reality of both leader and teachers. The leader subordinates his teaching to the learning of the teachers, and the leader is one of the participants (5).

In a sense, the goal of the leader is to become dispensable as a leader, though not necessarily as a participant. The locus of responsibility for the focus and direction of the in-service program gradually shifts from the leader to the participants. As this shift occurs, various participants will at one time or another *lead* the group, and ultimately the leadership at any particular moment will arise dynamically, governed by the concerns of the participants.

It should not be construed from the foregoing that I am advocating self-training by teachers using only their own resources. Nothing is further from the truth. What I am arguing for is the co-operative development by teachers, university personnel, and school district officials of in-service programs which are founded on the teachers' view of the reality of their classrooms; which engage the participants and leaders in a discussion *with* each other so that the learning of both groups may be humanely developed; and which by their organizational climate foster the growth of a psychological sense of community.

MODELS FOR IN-SERVICE EDUCATION PROGRAMS

There is obviously no *one* best model for in-service education programs. Within the set of criteria outlined above and summarized below, formats for particular in-service activities can be developed, so long as the in-service program (a) is generated dynamically from the teachers' perceptions of the realities they find in their classrooms; (b) is structured as a dialogue between resource personnel and participants with neither being subordinated to the other; and (c) provides opportunity over a relatively long period of time for the leaders and participants to develop a psychological sense of community.

The four formats briefly outlined below are examples of how in-service programs can be administratively organized in order to meet the stated criteria; it is left to the reader to design other possible examples.

Study Groups. Teachers and resource personnel involved in study groups meet weekly or biweekly to study and examine issues and problems of interest to participants. Such groups tend to be initiated by groups of teachers who have identified a concern peculiar to the group. The organization is relatively informal, yet the study group may exist for a year or more. Resource personnel may be utilized throughout the duration of the group, or the group may invite certain resource people to join their study for a limited number of sessions, thereby ensuring that resource people are indeed committed to an ongoing and genuine dialogue with them. Participants tend to provide support and encouragement for each other in entering the unknown, as well as in keeping under control the critical tension which accompanies dialogue about fundamental issues.

One- or 2-Week Intensive Workshops. One- or 2-week intensive workshops tend to be developed by local teacher organizations, universities, or community service organizations, though groups of teachers are not precluded from being the organizational force. Because of the time involved, in-service programs in this format usually take place during Christmas and Easter breaks and summer vacation months. However, school boards have recently supported the use of this in-service format during school time, particularly for administrators and consultants.

Even though the initial organizational impetus for intensive workshops may come from sources external to teachers, organizers must ensure that once the workshop is under way its direction is provided by the participants. One of the strong points of this format is that sufficient time is available for the sense of community and critical dialogue to develop. These two criteria can be met in study sessions, but because of the spaced out nature of that format more time is required for their achievement. Such is not the case with the intensive workshop format, in which the sense of community and critical dialogue are usually achieved in a matter of hours or a few days.

Weekend Workshops with Follow-up. The format of weekend workshops with follow-up has many of the features of a weeklong workshop and is

perhaps more available to classroom teachers since it does not require time off from school. Dialogue and a sense of community can develop, since a couple of 8-hour days and an evening provide sufficient time for issues to be confronted and examination of them begun. Such workshops can be extremely tiring, however, sandwiched as they are between full weeks of teaching. If they are arranged to coincide with a Friday or Monday in-service day — thus leaving one day of the weekend for rest — the format may prove attractive to teachers.

The follow-up sessions to a weekend workshop are extremely important, for without them the initiatives made can quickly be lost. The organization of workshops in this format should therefore build-in provisions for participants to carry on their studies in some regular fashion.

One-Shot Sessions and Follow-up. As argued earlier, one-shot sessions of a day or less in duration are in themselves of little value. The only situation where such sessions can be justified is where they are the kickoff for an on-going program of in-service training in which participants will have the opportunity to meet again and again to build and expand on the thrusts provided during the one-shot session. If this is the basis for a short session, then it can be the catalyst for further study and work. Otherwise one-time-only sessions are probably worse than useless for they tend to support the stereotype of in-service activities as being irrelevant and dehumanizing.

All of the above formats have been successfully used in Projects: SUBTLE. Indeed, in the past school year alone, six weekend workshops were held, enrolling over 200 teachers in an on-going manner. Four of the workshops were devoted to foreign languages, while two focused on mathematics and reading.

Two additional points can be made with respect to these formats. First, once the participants have established themselves as a viable in-service group, once they have developed a psychological sense of community and the critical dialogue generated thereby, once they have the control to guide the programs based on their collective view of reality, then a whole range of formats for carrying out the group's activities become possible. If, for example, the participants happen to be all from one school, then lunch hours and recesses can become in-service times. Where the participants are from many schools, casual social encounters can be as effective a setting for study and dialogue as can a 1-day workshop. The range of possibilities is almost unlimited, provided that the initial groundwork has been completed.

Second, many combinations of the formats suggested here could be used. For example, when a group has identified an area of concern upon which they wish to focus an in-service program, the program can be started with a 2-week summer workshop followed up by biweekly study sessions during the fall and spring terms, which may be punctuated by a 1- or 2-day weekend workshop each term, and perhaps culminate in a 2-week summer session. The teachers involved should select and arrange the formats.

IMPLICATIONS FOR THE UNIVERSITY

The traditional task of universities is to act or touch upon fundamentals, no matter what field is being explored. If the university is to be involved with the in-service education of various professional groups, then here too the traditional role of the university must be fulfilled.

Should the university involve itself with in-service programs? If so, what ways might be fruitful? The recent impetus by both universities and governments to "take the universities to the people" answers the first question. The desirable degree of involvement is however not so clear.

It is my contention that the faculties of education of the various universities can and should be heavily committed to an in-service education function. This implies that the majority of professors in a faculty of education should have a commitment to and involvement with in-service programs. In my view, even the graduate programs of faculties of education should have a distinctive in-service focus, whether such programs are for administrators, counsellors, or practising teachers. Programs developed by or now extant in education faculties should be structured so as to provide for the synergistic interaction of in-service and pre-service functions whether students are graduates or undergraduates.

I

A university's involvement with in-service programs should of course be so designed as to meet the criteria set out above. This implies a minimization of the one-shot speech-lecture format which has typified so much of a professor's involvement with in-service programs in the past. One-shot presentations should be restricted to those circumstances where they have the potential of forming an integral part of an on-going or predetermined in-service program.

Any of the formats described could be used by university personnel in designing in-service programs, although they have not been traditionally used by university personnel. Usually, university involvement with in-service activities has been characterized by semester-long courses or summer short courses. While these arrangements can be potentially powerful, they suffer from a lack of long-range commitment on the part of the participants, and seldom develop a psychological sense of community. Traditional course structures with some modification *can* meet the criteria; for example, several weekly course meetings can be combined into one weekend session held early in the term to be followed by shorter weekly sessions (two hours in duration, say, instead of the usual four hours) combined with professional involvement with the participants in their classrooms.

In addition, greater use could be made of 1- and 2-week sessions held between semesters and during the summer months. On the basis of a 5- or 6-hour day for 10 to 12 days, such sessions are roughly equivalent in time commitment to regular semester courses. If combined with weekly or biweekly follow-up activities, in-service programs organized along these

lines could carry university credit. In fact, many courses now offered by faculties of education could be molded into this format without requiring any major administrative reorganization or approval, and could lead to the granting of university credit for significant in-service activities. Courses which teachers now normally take during summer months or evenings each fall and spring could become fruitful vehicles for in-service activities, instead of functioning primarily as courses designed to meet the degree completion and salary advancement requirements for teachers.

II

The difficulty with many of the courses and in-service programs developed by university personnel and offered to teachers is that they tend to focus on what the originators of the program or course perceive is *needed* by teachers, whether the need is perceived as knowledge, new skills, or more practice. Such courses and programs are seldom developed with the teachers' perceptions of their own reality as the central focus, but are built instead on the professor's perception of the teachers' reality. Even when the two perceptions are relatively similar, the usual formats for courses and in-service programs have not allowed for dialogue to occur and a sense of community to develop. At least two things need to happen to rectify this situation. First, university personnel need to reconsider the organization of courses and in-service programs they offer so that these are more likely to meet the criteria noted earlier. Second, university personnel need to initiate dialogue with school trustees, school board administrative officers, local teacher organizations, and interested groups of teachers, in order to gain a clearer idea of the in-service needs and desires of teachers. The goal of all such discussions is to bring teachers into direct contact with those who will, at least initially, direct the in-service program, and thereby to give leaders first-hand acquaintanceship with the participants and their view of reality, their needs, and their desires.

IMPLICATIONS FOR TRUSTEES, BOARD OFFICERS, AND TEACHER LOCALS

School trustees, school board administrators and consultants, and local teacher associations should be very reluctant to design in-service activities which are imposed on teachers. Whether the particular activity is arranged for district-wide involvement, school-by-school involvement, or even involvement with select groups of teachers, it will fail if the activity is perceived as being imposed on the participants. Sincere statements by board consultants, for example, that teachers *need* a certain in-service program are at best misguided if made from a position that the consultants know best what it is that teachers need. Such statements are dehumanizing, and degrade the personal and professional competence of teachers, fostering in their wake the teachers' rightful rejection of the activity.

More than anything else, what teachers deserve is discussion with the

proponents of in-service programs so that all concerned can ascertain the true needs of the teachers and how these might be met. With this in mind, trustees, board administrators, and teacher local organizations can be effective partners in the design and execution of in-service functions. They are all in a position to facilitate the dialogue between the target population for an in-service activity — some group of teachers — and the resource people chosen to lead the activity. This can be one of two primary roles these three groups play. When dialogue is initiated, teachers are not being dictated to as to the nature, format, or organization of the in-service activity, but rather are being assisted in determining these matters in consultation with the resource people. The three groups are then working *with* each other and *with* teachers in providing in-service training which has the potential for being fruitful and successful in the sense that improved classroom practices will occur.

There is a second role these three groups can play, especially trustees and board administrators, but to an ever increasing degree local teacher organizations as well. Any of the groups, singularly or in concert, may identify what to them *seems* to be a problem, an area of concern, or a desire for modification in some aspect of the school program. It is clearly their responsibility, legally and/or professionally, to identify and seek solutions to matters of concern. In order to deal with a problem, focus awareness on a concern, or implement a modification, they may deem it necessary for teachers to undertake some form of in-service program, programs developed in response to genuine concerns. It is at this point that so many in-service programs falter. It is not that the problems or concerns have arisen from sources other than the teachers; that is not the difficulty. The difficulty arises when solutions are *imposed* on teachers without their being consulted, at the very least. If school trustees and administrators wish to sponsor useful and successful in-service activities (and who does not wish to do so?) then they must take their problems and concerns *to* teachers, discuss them *with* teachers, and *jointly* generate plans of action which may alleviate the problems, lessen the concern, or implement the desired modification. Nor must these discussions foster token participation by teachers, or again the in-service program will ultimately be counter-productive.

University personnel wishing to offer an in-service program must in a similar fashion discuss their proposals with teachers, and be prepared to modify their proposals to take into account the teachers' perceptions of reality. On the other hand, groups of teachers or the professional development committees of teacher organizations should not hesitate to present proposals for in-service activities to trustees, board administrators, or university people and seek their assistance in implementing their proposals. Teachers should be free and feel free to initiate the dialogue. There is no reason whatsoever that the impetus for in-service activities cannot come from the teachers themselves. They must be prepared to engage in dialogue, however, for in this instance, as the initiators of the proposal, they must

become aware of and take into account the reality of those they contact.

If the three criteria set out in the first portion of the paper are to be met, then it is clear that provincially directed in-service programs will not work. Indeed, it is doubtful that district-wide programs will bear fruit either, if the district is very large. The need is evident, I contend, for the particular in-service function to be as close to the teachers as possible, especially in terms of implementation and desirably in terms of origin as well. The more *local* in-service programs are, the greater is the likelihood that they will succeed. Constructive dialogue is unlikely to be achieved except in circumstances where participants can become acquainted with one another, and this suggests that local programs of in-service education have the greatest potential for being useful and justifiable.

The implications of this re-examination of in-service education are perhaps clear. The futility of provincially directed programs should be recognized. Moreover, even at the local level, trustees and board administrators should avoid imposing in-service activities on teachers. Instead, active on-going discussions with teachers should be initiated so as to identify areas of concern amenable to remedy by in-service programs. More importantly, teachers should initiate their own locally based programs. Perhaps then in-service activities will lose their dehumanizing characteristics and will foster not only the teachers' personal and professional growth but the growth of a psychological sense of community among teachers.

NOTE

1. Further information about the *Projects* may be obtained from either A. J. (Sandy) Dawson or John V. Trivett (co-directors of *Projects: SUBTLE*) by writing to Faculty of Education, Simon Fraser University, Burnaby, B.C., V5A 1S6.

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