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Nicholas P. Criscuolo  
*New Haven, Connecticut Public Schools*

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# IN-SERVICE READING PROGRAMS: ARE THEY RELEVANT?

*Nicholas P. Criscuolo*

*NEW HAVEN (CONN.) PUBLIC SCHOOLS*

Colleges and universities are presently launching a broad-based attack on improving their pre-service programs in the teaching of reading. The need for such an attack was evidenced by the first Harvard-Carnegie Study (1) which disclosed inadequacies in pre-service reading courses. This report also revealed the failure of colleges to provide for practical approaches to the teaching of reading by prospective teachers.

More and more school systems are realizing the need for designing effective in-service reading programs. They have launched a variety of activities: guest lectures, workshops, preschool orientation meetings, demonstrations, and faculty meetings. Unfortunately, many of these activities have been revealed to be sporadic, unplanned, and unrelated to the specific needs of the teachers involved (2).

The major objective of in-service education is to improve the quality of classroom instruction. Yet very few in-service programs are evaluated to determine whether any change has been effected. Some school systems have found the cost of such an evaluation to be prohibitive while others have not been able to resolve the humanistic and technical problems associated with the evaluation.

The financial aspect not only enters into the evaluation of the in-service program, but the implementation of the program itself. Some school systems are, due to fiscal problems, unable to offer in-service programs on a released-time or paid basis. Braun (3) and Robinson and Rauch (6) cite the desirability of these two approaches to in-service reading programs. Braun states that the key to making the reading program work is a paid in-service training program, starting one year in advance of proposed implementation while Robinson and Rauch cite the matter of released-time as a needed ingredient for a successful program.

Perhaps an examination of three actual in-service reading programs will serve as illustrations of some of the additional ingredients needed for a relevant in-service program. Articles by Cleland and DiCarlo (4), Herber (5), and Witmer (7) describe in-service reading programs which appear to have been successful ones.

Cleland and DiCarlo discuss an in-service program with 12 teachers

and their classes from four districts in Pennsylvania. Participating teachers were randomized into two groups—one experimental and one control. Both groups were involved in a week's pre-school in-service program on a local college campus.

There were, however, on-going activities for the teachers in the experimental group. These activities consisted of bi-weekly seminars which permitted in-depth study of specific areas requested by the teachers and visitations at three-week intervals for one hour or more by the program consultant. Conferences were held after each visitation.

The experimental teachers, by means of completed records, indicated general satisfaction in this type of in-service program feeling that it had been relevant and resulted in positive change in classroom performance.

Herber describes a program with thirty teachers in grades 4-12 from the Spring Valley, New York, school system. Each teacher involved in the program was released from classroom duties, by a substitute hired to take his place, for a total of seven full days.

The content of this program consisted of a series of seminars on methods for teaching reading and study skills as part of the regular science and social studies programs. The entire program was held at the district reading center. After the completion of the program, a consultant was made available to the schools for follow-up work with the teachers.

Completed questionnaires indicated that the program had been successful. In his article, Herber concluded that the program's success was due to the fact that it was not held after school and that more desired change is effected by means of a program of full-day seminars and follow-up dissemination of ideas.

Witmer writes of a program in Hanover, Pennsylvania, which involved the production of 40 video tapes of pertinent reading topics. The tapes ranged in length from 12 to 46 minutes.

A Teacher's Handbook listing important information on each tape, a summary of each tape, and pre- and post-discussion questions was prepared for the program. Cooperating school districts receiving the tapes appoint building principals or staff members to lead the pre-telecast and post-telecast discussions using suggestions offered in the Teacher's Handbook.

From the analyses offered by the authors of these articles, the programs described were relevant, effected desirable changes in teacher performance, and received enthusiastic response from the teachers involved.

It is evident that there are ingredients which make up a successful in-service recipe. Robinson and Rauch (6) list ten elements needed in conducting an important aspect of in-service education—the workshop:

1. Give credit to individuals contributing to the workshop.
2. Secure released-time for teachers to attend the workshop.
3. Begin and end sessions promptly.
4. Deal with a specific problem or area.
5. Let attendance be voluntary.
6. Use attractive room and serve refreshments.
7. Relate techniques to everyday teaching by using regular school materials.
8. Follow up workshop sessions by distributing a brief summary of the proceedings.
9. Incorporate audio-visual techniques at every opportunity.
10. Provide for teacher evaluation of the sessions and incorporate their suggestions into the planning of future workshops.

These ten elements, of course, can be applied to the more general issue of in-service programs in reading. From the author's experience, one element or ingredient particularly crucial is the involvement and participation of teachers in the planning and implementation of the in-service reading program.

In the New Haven public school system, individual schools have formed In-Service Planning Teams, consisting of teachers, administrators, and parents, to design the specific content of future programs desired by the staff. A particular school, for instance, may be interested in learning more about ways to motivate the problem reader. This is communicated to the author who meets with the team to discuss the specific approach for the program.

As part of the city's K-3 Focus program, four experienced teachers have been released full-time from their assignments, to design and to conduct in-service programs for the instructional staff. Many of the requests made by the schools have been for discussions on effective reading materials and the sharing of specific reading devices and games which can be used to reinforce reading skills.

Under this plan, each school is treated individually. During the course of the year, however, there are programs which are offered on a city-wide basis. Two popular programs have been the Reading Share-In and the Reading Exposition. The Reading Share-In is a program whereby classroom teachers who have been using innovative reading materials and programs assemble to discuss the outcomes and their

observations. The Reading Exposition is an event at which 35 sales representatives set up exhibits of their latest supplementary materials for teachers to examine first-hand. It is held in April, just before teachers order their materials for the following school year.

In a capsule statement, it seems safe to say that the consumer will buy the in-service package if it zeroes in on a specific need he has, if he has had some input into its construction, if he has an opportunity to evaluate it, and if he is part of the follow-up procedures after he has bought it.

#### CONCLUDING REMARKS

Effective in-service programs can do a great deal to improve the quality of the reading program. Some in-service reading programs have met with enthusiastic response from teachers while others have been dismal failures. It is obvious that caution and care must go into the design and implementation of in-service programs.

This article has cited specific examples of successful in-service reading programs in order to pinpoint some of the common ingredients which were used to design them. If school systems follow some of the procedures outlined in this article, the chances for meeting the needs of teachers for viable in-service education will be increased to a substantial degree.

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