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Improvement can be successful if participants' needs are met

Existing practices, alternatives

By Alan T. Seagren and Keith Solomon

Staff development has been defined in many ways. One of the most widely quoted definitions is that of Edelfelt and Johnson.

"In-service education of teachers (or staff development, continuing education, professional development), is defined as any professional development activity that a teacher undertakes singly; or with other teachers after receiving his or her initial teaching certificate, and after beginning professional practice."¹

Despite the research evidence that has accumulated over the past decade on the characteristics of effective in-service, programs continue to be designed and developed, often with the best intentions by innovative teachers, department chairpersons, curriculum developers, school administrators and college and university professors, which disregard this body of knowledge. Unfortunately the investment of time, money and energy under these circumstances bring less than anticipated returns in increased skills, greater commitment and improved learning practices in the classroom.

Successful staff development programs must include three essential dimensions:

1. Effective leadership
2. A statement of purpose

3. Appropriate design and delivery system

Other articles in this journal emphasize the contribution of various individuals and organizations to staff development programs. The role of leadership is to orchestrate these contributions into a meaningful program of staff development.

Stogdill confirmed the importance of good leadership:

"The survival of a group is dependent upon a type of leadership able to keep members and subgroups working together toward a common purpose, maintain productivity at a level sufficient to sustain the group or to justify its existence, and satisfy member expectations regarding leader and group."²

Thus, the leader must possess the ability to see problems at any level within the system and more important to have the skills to assemble resources and plan and coordinate strategies to attempt solutions of these problems. The ability to evaluate the effectiveness of the problem solving methods used is also essential. In-service requires individualized methods and processes to establish needs, determine existing levels of skills, and sensitization of individuals who may not recognize deficiencies in their own skill bank. It requires of the program developer the capacity to weld the needs of individuals and groups into a problem solving mode designed to strengthen the organizations' capacity to satisfy both personal and institutional goals.

Purposes

Most staff development programs are based on the rationale that in order for schools to respond to the changing demands of society teachers must be continually involved in a process of renewal. Hart captures this view when he states:

"The modern in-service design is based on the principle that schools cannot change unless educators change. In-service Education is the key to whether or not schools can meet the demands upon education. A revitalization of our schools requires a commitment to self-renewal through continuing individual growth and participation in those activities that prepare today's teachers to cope with the changing needs of today's society."³

Numerous authorities have outlined the purposes of in-service education. Johnston (1973) and Howey and Corrigan (1978) have espoused complimentary views on the purposes of in-service education that support the above philosophical view. In-service education should develop according to Johnson.⁴

- (i) the extension consolidation and reaffirmation and regular acquisition of new knowledge.
- (ii) the acquaintance with curricular and/or psychological developments.
- (iii) the extension of pre-service preparation.
- (iv) the acquaintance with new methods and materials.
- (v) the acquaintance with and participation in educational research.
- (vi) the encouragement of international understanding and exchange.

Howey and Corrigan have indicated the applied purposes to which in-service can contribute.⁵

- (vii) improving adult cognitive, intra and interpersonal development relating to teaching effectiveness
- (viii) altering environmental (school) conditions as they relate to teaching effectiveness
- (ix) improving teacher effectiveness directly, especially focusing upon teaching instructional behavior in situation

Once the purposes have been established the instructional design and delivery system has to be conceptualized and implemented.

Design/Delivery System

Decisions have to be made concerning the design of the in-service program and in particular the strategies and methods to be employed. Common problems associated with this dimension of in-service planning and practice include strategies that fail to recognize the need for teacher commitment and involvement, strategies which are inflexible, fail to provide for teachers practice and appropriate feedback on the acquisition of new skills or knowledge and most important, lack a clear design or conceptual model. Too many programs are typified by packaged, one-shot, first remedies which fail to recognize the complexity of the teaching learning process.

A conceptual model has been developed which minimizes the effects of problems identified above. Labeled the "Theory to Practice Change Model," it utilizes five basic sequential stages in the development of an institutional in-service program.⁶

Theory to Practice Change Model: Philosophical Rationale

The model conceptualizes the belief that staff development is a "whole system" activity which involves personnel at all administrative levels in changes in behavior consequent to influencing desirable educational outcomes.

Stage 1—Sensitization

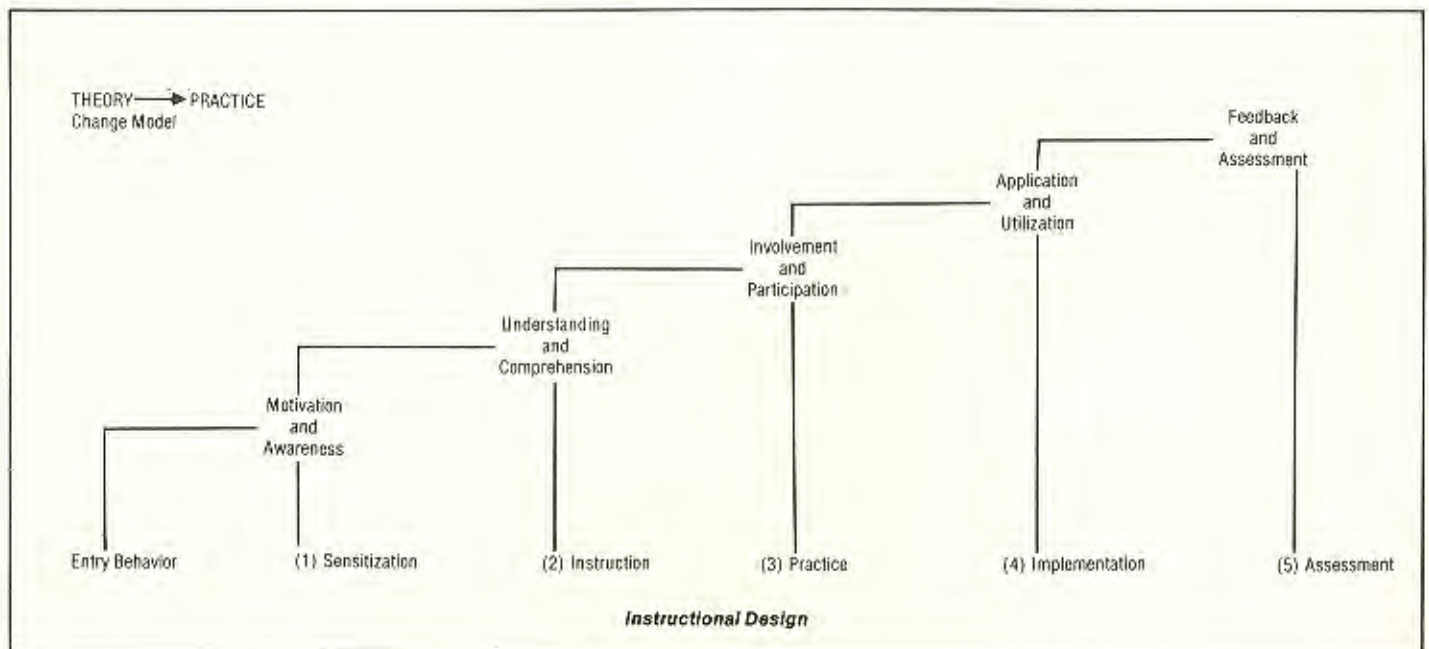
In this stage the teacher becomes aware of specific behaviors or skills utilized in the teaching learning process, related to the particular focus of the staff development thrust. Emphasis is given to alternative strategies that can be employed by the teacher in a given teaching-learning situation and the kinds of behaviors and skills which might be appropriate within these strategies. The intent here is to motivate teachers and to stimulate and expand their thinking. The role of outside educational specialists in providing information or needs assessment techniques, new methods, research data on specific issues under consideration and support for school staff as they attempt to define the problem and develop appropriate strategies to implement is a good example of the blending of theory and practice, implicit in the model.

Stage 2—Instruction

Emphasis in this stage is placed on particular skills or behaviors that have been identified as being appropriate in the teaching-learning situation and are the specific focus of the program. Although the most structured step in the overall design, teachers need to be exposed to videotaped or actual demonstrations of the desired skills or behaviors. In this way in-service course leaders can receive direct feedback from participants as to the suitability or feasibility of implementing the new strategies. Careful consideration needs to be given to the participant's readiness to undertake the program, and continual feedback must be given to the participant on the difficulties perceived as well as progress and performance in acquiring the new skills or knowledge.

Stage 3—Practice

Teachers need an opportunity to practice the new skills and behaviors they are learning in the controlled environment. Behavior modification can always engender frustration and failure; however, micro teaching has been found to be of use, particularly where the sessions involve small groups of students with whom the teacher is familiar.



Debriefing sessions play an important part in this step by emphasizing successful teaching performance and clarifying concerns through questioning, and re-practice of skills with which difficulty has been experienced. The practice stage while time-consuming, is essential in the classroom laboratory where methods are tried and evaluated. The use of graduate students and staff from nearby educational institutions is an excellent method of integrating knowledge and experience of both school personnel and professional educators.

Stage 4—Implementation

The focus at this stage is on putting into operation the skills or behavior in the normal classroom setting. Teachers should be able to incorporate the new skills into their existing range of classroom teaching strategies, thus expanding their repertoire of skills and behaviors. The teacher is also encouraged to assess the effect on student learning of different classroom strategies. This stage is dependent on the processes which have occurred in three earlier stages. The identification of needs—the gap between what is desired and what actually exists, determining the exact needs that are to become the focus of the in-service activity and breaking these down into component parts that can be addressed in a logical sequential systematic way is vital to a successful outcome. A strategy for problem solving must be adopted that proceeds from the simple to complex, through stages of subsequent skill and knowledge acquisition, practice, reinforcement and feedback on performance, and thus paves the way for a successful transition into the application and utilization phases of Stage 4.

Stage 5—Assessment

Much has been written on assessment and evaluation of in-service enterprises. It is sufficient to say that the model incorporates several levels and types of evaluation strategies. Obviously one type of assessment must be related to the suitability of the skill and behavior the teacher selects in a classroom setting to achieve a particular intended goal. The second type of assessment relates to the effectiveness of the teacher in controlling behavior or utilizing the skills.

The collection of data for assessment to take place should occur throughout the first four stages of the program and continue for a time after the major phases of the in-service program have concluded. Data collection and assessment should cease when the final decisions on continuance of the system or modification have been completed.

A variety of assessment techniques including teacher and student classroom performance data retrieval systems, tests, questionnaires, or performance as well as attitudes and other data gathering methods. Emphasis in particular should be placed in teachers developing skills in the process of self-assessment as part of the evaluation process.

Summary

School leadership is a vital component in determining the in-service needs and the strategies that will be employed to meet these needs. Harris and Bessent (1969) clearly identified the responsibilities and the difficulties involved.

"Changing people in significant ways is a complex leadership task involving many difficulties for professional leaders such as principals, supervisors and superintendents."⁷

There is an immediate need to act decisively to halt continuation of ill-conceived, poorly planned and ineffective in-service programs. While "one-shot" programs are useful in that they identify needs and give short-term assistance for the teacher, there is a need to marshal, coordinate and integrate the experience, expertise and assistance available in schools, universities and state or federal agencies. The theory to practice model provides a design for a continuing problem-oriented approach to our staff development programs rather than a hastily applied bandage. Furey (1968) captured the essence of this approach when he stated:

"Whether staff development is focused on improving instructional or managerial skills or providing opportunities for personal growth it must be viewed as an essential part of the education process rather than a remedial frill for the ineffective or the ill-prepared. Providing attractive, significant opportunities for educators to continue their professional growth is a crucial issue in education today."⁸

Footnotes

1. Roy A. Edelfelt and Margo Johnson (Eds) **Rethinking In-service Education**. (Washington, D.C.: National Education Association, 1975), p. 5.
2. Ralph M. Stogdill, **Handbook for Leadership: A Survey of Theory and Research** (New York: The Free Press, 1974), p. 419.
3. Helen A. Hart, "Self-Renewal: A Model," **Educational Leadership**, 31 (March, 1974), 501.
4. David Johnston, "Has Voluntary In-service Education Become an Outdated Luxury?" **Journal of Teacher Education**, 24 (April, 1973), 569.
5. Kenneth R. Howey and Dean C. Corrigan, **The School Based Teacher Educator**, unpublished manuscript, (mimeograph), Minneapolis, 1979, p. 17.
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7. Ben Harris and Warland Bessent, **In-service Education: A Guide to Better Practice** (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice Hall Inc., 1969), p. 30.
8. Ambrose J. Furey, Jr., "Participation and Personal Growth: Keys to Staff Development," **The In-service Education of Teachers: Trends, Processes and Procedures**. ed Louis Ruben (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, Inc., 1978), p. 195.