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Teaching teachers is not equal to telling teachers

Alternatives for a better program

By Royal W. Van Horn and Thomas C. Healy

Introduction

Traditionally, in-service teacher education in most districts has been synonymous with telling teachers how to teach. This paper is **not** about this process which typically proceeds as follows. A school administrator with staff development responsibilities contacts a nearby university and requests that a workshop be conducted on a particular "in-service training day." The same few topics, e.g., discipline, teaching techniques, and time management tend to be requested over and over. The college administrator passes the request on to a faculty member who either accepts or rejects it. Often professors who accept such requests already have such a "dog and pony show" ready to go and in the box. On the in-service training day, the professor arrives at the school thirty minutes in advance, sets up, and teaches teachers. Under optimal conditions, the district sent the professor an understandable set of objectives to accomplish, the professor was entertaining and humorous, did something other than lecture, used several attractive audio-visual aids, had clearly printed handouts and may even have "modeled" a specific technique or two. Under normal conditions, few of the above happened and the professor gave a boring lecture.

No matter how much effort is expended to improve the above process and no matter how it is altered, it will still center around telling teachers with little involvement

on their part. Admittedly, the workshop leader can use any number of different approaches such as inquiry, discussion groups, brainstorming, or protocol materials, but, the process is still largely consultant centered. The consultant sets the agenda, picks the techniques to be used, and usually lectures most of the time.

The remainder of this paper will describe staff development processes which are alternatives to, and not simply modifications of the above process. These processes are valuable because they add some much needed variety and involvement to the in-service development efforts of schools. Several of the processes have the added advantage of providing permanent on-going staff development opportunities as compared to the one-shot workshop which has little long range impact.

Alternative Process One—The Model Classroom

Real estate agents and residential home builders have found it advantageous to their sales efforts to put exemplary or model homes on display to the public. Often, a group of realtors will advertise together and create a "parade of homes" which offers the buying public the opportunity of going from place to place to inspect as many as 10 to 20 such model homes. Even people who are not actively considering purchasing a new home are drawn to inspect these models. It seems reasonable to assume that if school districts created "model classrooms" teachers might well be drawn to them. A "model classroom," like a model home, should be a well designed physical environment which integrates the latest technology and methods into creating an educationally sound and economically feasible model.

Considerable attention should be given to even the smallest detail of the model classroom because it should represent the very best the profession can offer. The physical environment might well be designed by a team composed of an interior decorator, an environmental psychologist, a teacher, a principal, a parent and a student. This team should work within a restricted budget so their efforts can have some degree of "transferability" to other classrooms in the region. The curricular makeup of the classroom should be equally well designed by another team of people. Again, certain constraints should be imposed on this effort to maintain, among other things, a collection of instructional materials which would be available within the average school. The physical environment team and the curricular team would need to work closely with one another and with the methods team. The methods team's charge would be to aid the master teacher who used the room in selecting and using various "models of teaching" (Joyce and Weil, 1972). After initial design, implementation and pilot testing by all involved teams, the "model classroom" should function on a day-to-day basis with a typical group of students so visitors could observe the finished product in operation.

Districts might well design several model classrooms each with a different emphasis. It is even feasible to envision a "Model Classroom Tour" much like the model home tour of realtors. Competition could be organized across districts or states to compete for the title of "Classroom of the Year."

There are a myriad of advantages to this staff development process. First, creating the classroom would constitute a learning experience for all members of the various teams. Second, the "model classroom" would be a resource for educators in the region who could learn by visiting and observing within it. Third, the model

classroom would be a "lamppost" which might well influence the future of education within the district or region. The model classroom process would be even more beneficial if implemented in conjunction with alternative process number two, "teacher visitations."

Alternative Process Two—Teacher Visitations

Giving teachers two or three days of released time each year to visit other classrooms in other schools is a staff development process worthy of renewed attention by educators. Teacher visitation days can give the classroom instructor a much needed "magic feather."

Everyone remembers the fable of Dumbo, the baby circus elephant. A little mouse convinced Dumbo to use his large ears as wings by giving him a feather, a magic feather, that would enable him to fly. Dumbo trusted his friend and so could fly, even without the feather, as he soon discovered. At last he had self-confidence.

This fable tells something important about principals and teachers as well, and it suggests a critical question for educational researchers. (Bentzen, 1974, Bookjacket) How can teachers be given a "magic feather" which will convince them they can change, innovate, and improve their teaching methods on their own? Visiting another classroom where a peer is using an innovative technique with a typical group of students might just provide the "magic feather." College professors who act as idea merchants and attempt to get teachers to change by simply telling them what to do would seem less likely to provide the "magic feather."

The logistics of implementing teacher visitation days are handled differently in various districts. Some prefer to release teachers a few at a time, others prefer to have a student holiday so the whole staff can be released for visitation. Releasing a few teachers at a time so visitations can be arranged in the same school or the same system seems quite workable. Some schools prefer to trust teacher judgment as to which classroom a teacher should visit while others prefer to influence or screen the choices of their teachers. This staff development process is advantageous primarily because it allows teachers to watch their peers teach (something they seldom have the luxury of doing), because it allows them to visit the same grade level and/or subjects they teach, and because it can be a relaxing and refreshing experience simply to carpool to another school with fellow teachers. The discussion on the way home in the car is often vigorous and insightful.

A third staff development process involving travel is "teacher participation in professional organizations." This outreaching process can have the same renewing effects as teacher visitations.

Alternative Process Three—Teacher Participation in Professional Organizations

An informal survey of junior high school faculty undertaken several years ago by the authors indicated that less than 20 percent of the faculty belonged to a national professional organization. Organizations such as the International Reading Association (IRA), the National Science Teachers Association (NSTA), Music Educators National Conference (MENC), National Council of Social Studies (NCSS), and the like are actively involved in the study of current issues, suggest standards of excellence, regularly publish high quality journals, and hold con-

ventions wherein workshops and seminars are presented on diverse topics. It is reasonable to assume that teachers can grow professionally by becoming active participants in such organizations. The potential for staff development is great enough that districts should encourage, provide release time, and fund such teacher involvement.

It is possible to envision an organized process of involvement in a district where each grade level would have one teacher who was a member of NSTA, one a member of NCTM, and so on. Their attendance at state and national meetings would be funded by the district on a rotating basis where each year several teachers would be sent to attend national meetings. An alternative process to the rotation of attendance mentioned above might be to require teachers to present proposals stating their reasons for attendance and how it might benefit the students of the grade or school. Teacher participation in professional organizations is particularly valuable to districts about to review their curriculum or select new textbooks for adoption.

Teachers who attend national meetings might be requested to make an audio-cassette recording, or, if required, purchase the recorded tapes of each session they attend. These cassettes could then be organized into a "staff development resource bank." The next alternative process involves the creation of just such a "resource bank."

Alternative Process Four—Staff Development Resource Bank

Many school districts presently maintain a professional library, but such libraries are often no more than a few shelves of out-dated books gathering dust in the teachers' lounge. A "staff development resource bank" is a well catalogued and attractively displayed collection of the best cassette tapes available, books, current journals, specimen sets of curriculum materials and aids, films, video-tapes of demonstration lessons catalogued by topic, and other reference material.

An exemplary staff development resource bank would also contain several portable dial-up computer terminals which teachers could use at the school or take home overnight. These terminals would allow teachers access to any one of the several hundred computer-assisted instruction (CAI) programs the district would have available. Such programs are presently available from numerous sources including the Minnesota Educational Computing Consortium (Note 1) and **Conduit** (Note 2). **Conduit**, for example, markets a 21-part CAI program for teachers in classroom discipline. Our experiences with such programs for teachers has usually been positive—teachers enjoy and learn from them.

An integral part of any resource bank should consist of demonstration tapes featuring teachers in the local system. Some of the best experts in the world and the ones whom peers are most willing to model are fellow teachers in the system.

Any district which maintains a staff development resource bank as described above would profit by rewarding teachers who use the resources. Such rewards for professional growth might come in the form of "in-service or master plan points," additional release time for use of the resources, or pay for the time involved. It is even feasible to envision a staff development counselor whose primary role would be to prescribe individually certain resources to teachers based upon their identified needs. For example, first year teachers might profit more from

discipline related resources than materials on the development of higher level cognitive skills.

A major advantage of a staff development resource bank as described herein is its ability to meet the individual needs of teachers and it allows for self-initiated professional growth. The next alternative staff development process is another highly individualized process which could either be an on-going service of the resource bank or offered to teachers on a school-by-school basis.

Alternative Process Five—Video In-service Project

A video-in-service project (VIP) involves, as its name implies, video taping of teachers on a voluntary basis. Teachers who volunteer are usually video-taped several times over the course of the semester. The primary purpose of the initial video-taping session is to familiarize the teacher and students with the equipment and its potential for providing non-judgmental feedback. The teacher can view this initial tape privately or in conjunction with an outside consultant. The teacher is then assisted in setting personal goals for accomplishment which should become evident in future taping sessions. The consultant's role is one of counseling and advising as compared to prescribing. Consultants who do this kind of in-service training need well developed human relations skills and should be well-trained professionals who are not required to evaluate formally the teachers with whom they are working.

This staff development process helps teachers change themselves through personal goal setting and monitoring of their progress over time. It is a proven process that can significantly change the way a person teaches. Many educators believe it is only through such intensive efforts that in-service teacher education can make any difference whatsoever.

Conclusions

The processes outlined above provide several alternatives to the one-shot consultant centered or "teaching teachers by telling them" workshop. When used these processes add some much needed variety to the existing in-service training programs of districts. These processes emphasize **HOW** teachers are taught, not **WHAT** teachers are taught. They can provide on-going, effective, and individualized growth experiences for teachers. There is great potential in staff development if and only if personnel in a district believe teaching teachers is not equal to telling teachers.

Reference Notes

1. The Minnesota Education Computing Consortium, 2520 Broadway Drive, Louderdale, MN 55113, sells a computer tape which contains approximately 100 CAI programs written in the BASIC language. Many of these programs provide individualized "worksheets" for teachers to use as seatwork. The package also contains an excellent "Computerized Historical Simulation" titled "Oregon" which simulates a trip over the Oregon Trail by wagontrain. Programs are on such diverse topics as practice for kindergardeners in their ABC's and a program for high school students on balancing chemical equations.
2. **Conduit**, (The University of Iowa), P.O. Box 388, Iowa City, Iowa, 52240 (Phone 319-353-3170), is an organization supported by the National Science Foundation, whose purpose is to facilitate use of instructional computing at the collegiate level. Conduit publishes a journal on the topic called **PIPELINE** and markets well designed and tested Computer Assisted Instruction (CAI) packages on a variety of subjects.

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