Portland's In-Service Involves All Professional Personnel

VERA M. LARSON*

Portland Public Schools have a new sense of direction in the in-service program. More and more people are involved in planning, and a major emphasis is upon purposeful learning for all boys and girls.

TRADITIONALLY, the education profession has seemed to accept three basic notions: first, that the education of a teacher is in two parts, that which comes before he receives his first certificate (preservice), and that which comes afterward (in-service); second, that each of these two experiences is different in nature, the first essentially theoretical, the second practical; and third, that other professionals know best what the individual teacher needs. Therefore, influenced by certification regulations, NCATE standards, college requirements, federal and state legislation, and community pressure, the future teacher's education is planned for him first by college personnel and later by school administrators.

Fortunately, the pressures now being exerted on our schools are forcing us to change our approach to teacher education. If teachers are to be able to cope with the complexities of today, then more than lip service must be given to the concept that a teacher is always in the process of "becoming." The education of a teacher is a continuing process and not one which ought to be divided into two distinct parts. But more than that, the focus must be on the real issue, "What will be the payoff for children?" What value is education for the teacher if it does not result in purposeful, relevant learning for students?

What follows is a brief description of how one school district is attempting to involve the entire staff in an in-service program designed to help the teacher individually and the district as a whole in the process of self-renewal.

For many years, the Portland public schools have supported an extensive in-service program for teachers. In the past, the program was developed and implemented by a central office staff of curriculum specialists. Now, the District has underway a program which seeks to involve all personnel in the planning and implementing of in-service projects which respond to the identified needs of schools and teachers. The survival of the system itself may very well depend on the degree to which this approach succeeds.

* *Vera M. Larson, Personnel Specialist, Portland Public Schools, Portland, Oregon*



Because the most effective in-service activities are those planned and implemented by learners, projects developed by faculties and groups of teachers are encouraged.

Five Elements Are Needed

The feasibility of such an approach to teacher education depends on at least five basic elements. They are: (a) an administrative staff and a board of education which view in-service education as a top priority; (b) an organizational plan which makes it possible for in-service projects to develop "on site"; (c) coordination in planning so that in-service activities are focused on identified goals; (d) available resources such as institutions of higher learning, and support from business and professional organizations; (e) a quality professional staff. Each of these elements and how it affects the plan for total involvement of the staff in the continuing education of the teacher will be considered separately.

1. *For many years, in-service education has had top priority in Portland.*

The board of education and the administrative staff have consistently allocated a generous portion of each year's budget for in-service education. The interest of the board members in teacher education can be underscored by mentioning that in 1968 they initiated a Professional Growth Incentive Salary Program which makes it possible for teachers to move from one salary level to another by working within a planned program of study. Relevance to the improvement of the teacher's classroom instruction is the criterion on which applicability of credits for salary purposes is based.

During the period from 1966 to 1970, substantial allocations of the staff development budget were given to schools as discretionary money to be utilized as each staff saw fit in terms of curriculum development and improvement of instruction. Although a comprehensive district-wide in-service program was planned and implemented by the supervisory staff, encouragement was given to projects developed by faculties, by groups of teachers, and by individuals. This emphasis was based on the premise that the most effective in-service activities are those which are planned and implemented by the learners.

In 1970, Robert Blanchard, Superintendent of Schools, moved the district closer to total involvement of personnel in all aspects of education by decentralizing the district. The major purpose was to place decision making as near as possible to those affected by the decisions. This, combined with a

program planning and budgeting system, has had an impact on planning for change in curriculum and instruction and the attendant in-service needs for all personnel.

2. *The present organizational plan of the district encourages involvement.*

The district is divided into three areas, each of which serves approximately 22,000 students. Each area is headed by an administrative team, one of whom has the major responsibility for curriculum and instruction as well as staff development. He coordinates the work of committees of teachers and administrators which make recommendations for the area as a whole. In turn, each building staff is encouraged to develop curriculum, plan for its implementation, and identify in-service activities which respond to the unique needs of the students and faculty of that school. Buildings with large staffs, such as high schools, have identified one teacher who serves as building coordinator for planning and implementing building in-service projects.

This mode of operation sounds simple, clear-cut, and functional, as described here; but the frustrations, discomfort, discouragement, and misunderstandings are indescribable. The redefining of roles and relationships is a painful process, and we have not been spared the pain. One major problem which soon became apparent was the lack of coordination, continuity, and purpose of planning.

3. *The need to establish goals and priorities became an overriding issue.*

Accordingly, in February of 1973, committees of teachers, administrators, and laymen began a careful assessment of the most crucial problems facing the district. The board of education had clearly enunciated the philosophy of the district in respect to ending racial isolation in Portland public schools by instituting an administrative transfer policy. As implementation of this policy began, teachers and administrators found there were difficulties in coping with children who come with different value systems from unfamiliar cultural backgrounds. Requests came for help with classroom management and for assistance in how to teach the disadvantaged.

State and federal policies in regard to integration, compensatory education, achieving racial balance of the staff, equal educational opportunities for the handicapped, career education, and graduation requirements were some of the realities with which we were faced.

Repeated loss of tax measures for curriculum and instruction as well as for renovation of antiquated school plants indicated a need for more and better communication with the public, especially on the part of administrators. Expressed concern from teachers, especially those from special disciplines, pointed up the need for development of new skills and knowledge if they were to be able to cope with the reality of today.

Accordingly, at the district level, the following priorities were identified: (a) *desegregation*, which is an umbrella for many components such as human relations, communication skills, teaching the disadvantaged learner, the need for changes in school organization and curriculum content, and methodology for a multi-ethnic society; (b) *administrator effectiveness*, which generates from the need to cope with an entirely new set of circumstances than those for which most administrators have been trained; (c) *retraining* of tenure teachers who, because of declining enrollments and changes in student interests, have no classes; for example, foreign language teachers; (d) *special groups* of teachers whose number is small and who need to combine efforts; for example, music teachers.

Personnel in each of the three areas, having assisted in the identification of district priorities, took these to their respective areas for consideration. Lay advisory committees, teacher advisory committees, and administrator advisory committees studied these priorities in terms of special area concerns and from that point, recommendations for area priorities were made. The area priorities, so established, support those identified by the district, but they focus more definitively on the teaching of basic skills, orientation to instructional media, goal-based instruction, career education as an integral part of the

total instructional program, classroom management, individualizing instruction, and group process skills.

Each building staff is in the process of planning on-site in-service projects in terms of the priorities identified by them for their school, making certain that district and area goals are being met. It is hoped that the individual teacher will do the same kind of analysis of teaching strengths and weaknesses and that he will, either individually or with a group, pursue a program of study which meets his unique needs in relation to building, area, and district priorities.

4. *The availability of resources is a necessary component of any viable in-service program.*

The proximity to the district of 11 colleges and universities provides a wealth of personnel and assistance for cooperative ventures in continuing education. The joint appointment of personnel with Portland State University, for example, has contributed materially to meaningful, functional in-service education for the staff. The Portland Area Complex for Education Program is designed to combine the expertise of Portland State University professors and teachers in the Portland area. The Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory, located in Portland, provides another valuable resource.

Portland public schools have traditionally had the support of the business and professional community. The Multnomah County Dental Association and the Multnomah County Medical Association have played major roles in the development of curriculum materials and in the planning and the teaching of in-service classes. An example of community involvement was the recent coordination by a team of educators of the efforts of resource personnel which included judges, attorneys, police officers, and juvenile court conselors in conducting a class to aid teachers in the effective utilization of a handbook for juveniles, entitled, *Youth Faces the Law*. Leaders in business and industry have provided leadership in developing programs for incorporating career education in the total instructional program.

5. *Portland public schools have long been recognized as having a quality professional staff.*

Grants of money are awarded to districts which have demonstrated educational leadership, and Portland public schools have been the recipient of many such awards from Ford Foundation grants for education of the gifted, to a Carnegie Institute grant for teacher in-service education, to various federal grants for the training of minority teachers as well as for developing programs for teaching the disadvantaged. The most significant indication of quality, however, is that in spite of the various and sundry problems plaguing schools today, including the adversary role of teacher organizations in relation to boards of education, the Portland staff contributes generously of time and energy in a cooperative effort aimed toward dealing positively with critical problems faced by the schools.

Currently, the major thrust of the in-service program, based on identified goals and priorities, is toward renewal. Conflicts and pressures indicate the need for far-reaching changes, all of which have implications for curriculum and instruction. If the teacher is to be able to cope with a rapidly changing set of demands and circumstances, there must be an opportunity for self-renewal. If the school district as an organization is to survive, there must be a plan for renewal.

This demands a staff of highly-trained individuals who know how to function productively as they deal with urgent issues and problems. We believe that we are making progress toward this goal, for we sense a spirit of quiet determination permeating the district which is replacing the discouragement which once was extremely visible. We believe that this is due, in part at least, to the fact that we have a sense of direction, that more and more people are actively involved in planning, that the quality and the scope of the involvement continue to grow, and that the major emphasis is turning toward in-service education directly focused on purposeful learning for boys and girls. □

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