A "Floating Faculty"—An Intensive In-Service Technique

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Creation of a "floating faculty" has helped one school system begin to develop, maintain, and elaborate an instructional program that meets the needs of children by marshaling the competencies of entire school staffs.

SINCE the federal government became involved in local education, the upgrading of the individual teacher's ability to instruct has been a major goal in school districts throughout the nation. The primary means of effecting this upgrading has been in-service education. Vast sums, in parts of overall grants, have been allocated to this goal, and yet, on the whole, the needs persist.

Part of the problem, especially in large school districts, has been the turnover in staff. Yet, there should have been carryover from trained staff to new staff if the in-service really was influential in making change.

Another aspect of the failure to make change, it appears, has been an overemphasis on individual teachers, rather than on *individual teachers in a program.* In-service should help the instructional program while it develops the implementors of the program.

Has in-service education met the continuing needs of the American students and teachers? Many professional educators think not. Many feel that money, time, and effort have been wasted. Unfortunately, criticism without alternatives is rather standard procedure.

The thesis of this article is that a plan of action is available that will bring about change in a school as a whole and in the teachers in that school. Unfortunately, it is a plan best suited for funding capabilities, whether local or federal, of large systems. In terms of impact and inclusion, however, the advantages to a small district will be obvious.

The program was conceived as a "Floating Faculty." In essence, it is a highly trained group of teachers and an appropriate administrator—a faculty without a school. They, in fact, "float" from school to school to provide overall in-service. The program as it is discussed in this article grew out of a request for federal funds under the Emergency School Aid Act (ESAA).

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The Floating Faculty is a highly trained group of teachers and an administrator—a faculty without a school. They "float" from school to school to provide overall in-service education.

The Idea of a "Floating Faculty"

Since children and teachers profit best from consistency, overall goals had to be understood and developed. This became the general program that would be presented in all schools. To meet individual needs, varied techniques had to be explained, demonstrated, and evaluated. This required a group of teachers talented and flexible enough to meet these responsibilities. Finally, the school program and teacher techniques had to be correlated as a workable, understandable concept of education. This required in-service education for the floating faculty itself and was the responsibility of the developer of the concept.

A detailed step-by-step procedure was developed for the floating faculty. Specific responsibilities for the floating faculty, school faculty, aides, school administration, and floating faculty administrator were spelled out. With this plan as a guide, an administrator was recruited. The principal chosen felt that most of the obstacles to successful implementation would be in the human relations area, and this interpersonal aspect remains the concept's most critical one. From this perspective the selection of teachers for the "floating faculty" was the most important single task in the implementation process, and the principal was granted sole responsibility for the screening and selection of the applicants.

The advertisement for the positions itself was a screening tool because of the concise nature of the job description, the fact that the project would be pioneering unexplored ground, and the emphasis placed on the willingness to be observed in the teaching situation. From among many excellent candidates, a group of articulate, personable, enthusiastic, and dedicated individuals was formed, heterogeneous in terms of race, sex, age, and experience. During two weeks of summer workshop, the social and academic merging of these many highly qualified individuals was accomplished by the initiative the group brought to the task, with the input and guidance of the concept's originator.

A crucial aspect of the floating faculty concept is the time allowed for its members to achieve true academic consensus, both philosophical and practical, and to review and renew that consensus and their commitment to it periodically. It is this consensus which must serve as the "message" to be explained and demonstrated during a visit to a school, and, as such, it must be inclusive enough to meet the widest possible range of school, teacher, and student needs.

During the summer months the floating faculty principal met with the individual principals of the selected schools to build enthusiasm and understanding for the upcoming visit. Thus they, in turn, would be knowledgeable and hopefully supportive of the concept in initial meetings with their respective staffs and communities. The system had identified the schools by comparing

reading comprehension results with expected achievement and by analyzing student turnover during desegregation, the basis for the availability of federal funding in this instance.

Most receiving school principals were receptive to the concept, especially in terms of the time it provided and the fact that each of their teachers would be sharing in the opportunity. A visit to a school would involve a seven day period and each of the receiving school's teachers would be paired with a professional from the floating faculty. The first three days of the visit, the teachers would be freed by their floating faculty partners to attend a presentation of the floating faculty's academic consensus, with the remaining four days spent by the teaching partners in each classroom implementing the ideas presented.

Logistically, this first contact with the principal of a receiving school is followed by a meeting of the floating faculty principal with the school staff, usually about a month previous to the scheduled visit, an opportunity to get acquainted, explain the concept, and reduce apprehension.

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Using feedback from the interaction at this orientation session and input from the principal, the floating faculty administrator pairs members of his staff with those of the receiving school. Although the attempt is made to emphasize the professional-to-professional aspect of these pairings, it is impossible not to consider personal variables. This is a very subjective, but extremely important, consideration to be dealt with. The original attempt to select a heterogeneous staff and the members' willingness to work at various grade levels allow for a great deal of flexibility in assigning partners.

Approximately two weeks after the orientation meeting of the floating faculty principal with the receiving school's staff, the floating faculty teachers visit the school to meet their partners. This is a brief, get-acquainted meeting and an opportunity for the students to meet their teacher's partner. The floating faculty teachers will then return two days before the scheduled visit to spend more time becoming acquainted with the students, planning for replacing their partners, and familiarizing themselves with the school and classroom routines.

Implementing the Concept

This series of preliminary contacts preceding the actual visit to a school allows for a gradual process of adaptation and orientation to the concept and its specifics, of the partners to each other, and of the students to their floating faculty teachers. Along with additional informal contacts when necessary, the disruptive potential of the sudden influx of an additional staff is considerably lessened.

During the first three days of the scheduled visit, while their partners attend a systematic presentation of the floating faculty academic consensus, the floating faculty teachers have the opportunity to work within their partner's context and get to know the children. Since the in-service presentations occur within the same building, interaction between partners continues. The floating faculty teachers seek to ensure that the normal school operation continues smoothly so that the receiving school staff and administration can relax and concentrate on sharing the insights being presented.

The three day in-service component for the receiving staff is conducted by the floating faculty principal, who serves as the spokesman for his faculty. Various floating faculty members are also called upon to assist with the presentations both to ensure continuity and to demonstrate that the content of the in-service is founded on actual consensus. This allows for a rather exact correlation of the in-service and the



Each Floating Faculty member is paired with a classroom teacher.

demonstration practicum which is to follow, both in terms of articulation (terminology used) and understanding (concepts presented).

The four days subsequent to the in-service are spent in the peer-peer sharing of ideas, with the floating faculty teachers available to demonstrate any aspect of the in-service as it applies to the particular classroom and its students. The floating faculty teachers, while very much involved in a group effort spanning the grades in each school, have the flexible autonomy to adapt to their partner's needs. In some instances, where the receiving school's teacher is particularly apprehensive or uncomfortable with the presence of another adult in the room, efforts will be made to assist the classroom teacher in other, less threatening ways. The group goal, of course, is to end the visit leaving each of the receiving school's staff feeling positive about the concepts offered, so that peer-peer sharing among the school-based teachers will continue and may prove effective at some later date.

Where good relationships are formed, the floating faculty teachers may then serve as a resource to their school-based partners, initiating contact whenever possible. When scheduled at schools with smaller enrollments, the floating faculty teachers not paired with a partner are then assigned to follow-up duty and are free to return on an individual basis to work with past partners.

At the end of each visit, the receiving school's teachers are asked to complete an anonymous questionnaire regarding their perceptions of the experience. Responses to date have been extremely and overwhelmingly positive. In addition, each pair of teaching partners is asked briefly to describe their activity together and to make specific recommendations. Copies of the questionnaire results and the descriptions of activity and recommendations are forwarded to the appropriate central office and area personnel assigned to the particular school, along with copies provided for the entire receiving school's staff. This also forms the basic report to the superintendent.

Also, student input and response to implemented changes are sought by the teaching partners in each classroom on an informal basis. The two administrative partners meet with the parents and community, usually on the sixth day of the visit, to explain the program and any changes which may have taken place. Parents are then given the opportunity to meet with the teaching partners.

Further standardized evaluation (*Iowa Test of Basic Skills*, Reading Comprehension Sub-test) involves a comparison of pre- and post-test results from spring to spring. The project's measurement objective called for 80 percent of the minority students to demonstrate a year's growth for a year in school. The 1600 students tested this year averaged a year's gain for a year in school, with 80 percent of the minority students achieving 1.29 years' growth.

It is hoped that through contact with the floating faculty a school will begin to develop, maintain, and then elaborate an instructional program that meets the needs of the children in that school by using the competencies of the entire staff. It is a concept that can be modified to meet varied situations. Most important, it is a way to provide children with the consistency of approach that they need so desperately but which is so often missing in many schools as they now exist.

We feel that the floating faculty concept is applicable in many situations and is an extremely valuable communication vehicle for a system and its teachers. The concept is beautiful in its on-paper simplicity, but its effective implementation requires a large expenditure of human energy and teachers who are outstanding both as professionals and as people.

Inquiries about the specific proposal, descriptions of activities, and questionnaire results may be directed to the authors. The floating faculty is operating in the Prince George's County Public Schools, Upper Marlboro, Maryland. □



The Floating Faculty constructs learning materials for use in the classroom.

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