

The Emperor Would Rather Get it Over With

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WHY IS IT CALLED INSERVICE EDUCATION?

My premise here is that the Emperor—our profession—knows that all isn't well with our programs of inservice education for teachers. You and I know it and, indeed, some of us would even welcome the opportunity to be able to discuss this serious problem openly and not too defensively. Of course, if my premise is terribly wrong, you will surely hate this paper. You may dislike this paper for other reasons, but if my premise is correct you may be relieved to learn how many of you there are who feel we have yet to accomplish something truly worthwhile in the way of helping teachers learn, teach, and live better.

I have been reading a good deal about inservice education and, as near as I can make out, the movement has created a whole new set of significant educational issues connecting labor unions, the schools, and higher education. Weaknesses of our current system have been exposed, and people are actually doing something about a few problems which we agree are significant, such as the need teachers have for richer clinical opportunities. More or less, a "common sense" definition has even emerged: Inservice education refers to an attempt to *help* people who *already work* in the *schools* do *better work*. But, possibly not so strangely, we've surely created a genuine fuss: insofar as where inservice education is best delivered, at the university or in the community; insofar as who controls such programs; insofar as who should enroll, and when, and under whose auspices, and for what rewards; and insofar as whether such education should be mandatory, encouraged, permitted, or avoided. I start off with making a minor contribution to the fuss by asking why is it called inservice education?

The term "inservice education" is without precedent insofar as the context in which it is used. That is, it is non-idiomatic, not definable by comparing it to related usages of the term. Elevators are "in service" or "out of service." Military personnel are "in the service." Ministers and other servants "serve." But elsewhere, where is "inservice" used to denote what we mean, "on the job?" Then there's that word, "education." Notice the word "training" isn't used instead, despite the fact that training is a more accurate label of what's going on. Emphasizing the Latin origin of the word "education"—to lead forth, to draw forth, to bring out, to elicit—may I heat up this polemic with the claim that little *education* is accomplished during inservice education programs for teachers. And as I had already indicated, because I don't quite comprehend what its inventors were getting at with the term "inservice," I conclude that "inservice education" is an unfortunate label for what's happening in the name of teacher development and what's expected to occur. As I sense it, the primary problem is the need to get a lifetime of effective teaching out of someone, which means that the real question is how to enhance and sustain the well-being of a teacher. Consequently, what we have here is not "inservice education," but rest and rehabilitation, sustenance and restoration, motivation and stimulation. What needs to be done is to help people to see that life is worth living, help people to stay alive, help people to enjoy their lives, and help people to want to make the world a better place and to leave it a little better for having been here. I don't have a term which embraces all of what we're really up to, but that doesn't deter me from the conviction that "inservice education" is the wrong term regardless of the absence of a right term.

What Teachers Need to Know

We once attempted to examine what teachers want, what they get, and what they need (Blatt, Biklen, & Bogdan, *An Alternative Textbook in Special Education*, 1977, Chapters 14, 15). We concluded that teachers want to know how best to handle specific classroom situations. When they were undergraduates, teachers felt their preparation was deficient because it did not focus on the realities of the situations in which they were to go. And after placement as teachers, their cries for specificity continued, resting on the assumption that there *are* answers to specific pedagogical questions but for inexplicable reasons their supervisors, as once their professors, were not willing to share such information with them. Consequently, we have many "turned off" college students, and, even more, teachers disenchanted because they were never given much help with their concrete pedagogical problems. But ironically, thoughtful school teachers seem to believe that the most important thing they can teach *their* students is how to learn. For example, no student can know every map, but most students can learn about reading maps and, thus, most students can learn how to read virtually every map. The only way to develop this kind of transfer of learning is to teach at an abstract enough level so that what is learned can be applied to many situations. Consequently, while most teachers want unnecessary specificity in their preparation (so as to be prepared to deal with "real" problems in the field), those same teachers know enough to avoid teaching their own pupils in such a concretized training-like fashion.

In the face of the ambivalent teachers' demands to be taught practical and relevant subjects, and in the face of the failure of schools of education to sufficiently enhance transference capability, most teacher preparation—whether it is of the undergraduate kind or for people who are already teachers—is fairly concrete, quite controlled, and with emphasis on information acquisition through lectures, discussion, and textbooks. Hence, there is striking homogeneity of teacher preparation programs in the United States, irrespective of locations of those programs, the types of colleges

sponsoring them, or the types of students receiving the training.

What teachers need is something quite different. We may profitably view teacher preparation in the same way we view the child learning situation, essentially as a problem-solving opportunity where the most important resources available are those within the teacher and child. These resources have to be drawn out, encouraged and nurtured. The difference between the educational technician—ostensibly the teacher's aide, but all too often the teacher herself—and the creator of educational environments is in some measure the difference between a person who has accumulated a lot of information about pedagogy and the person who has the wherewithal to create new information, to interpret current information, or at least transfer such knowledge to new demanding situations.

If it's a "Problem in Living," to Institutionalize the Solution is to do Nothing

It was the morning of the worst storm of the year. All of the town was covered with a sheet of glistening ice. A man arrived at work an hour late. "You won't believe how slippery it is out there," he remarked. "It was impossible to make any headway walking. For every step I took forward, I slipped two steps backward."

"So how did you get here?" asked his fellow worker.

"Well, I gave up and turned around to go back home. And here I am."

It's possible that, if the truth were told, the process of "inservice education" as a means of improving schools has been slipping backward more than striding forward. The dominant cultural myth of this age is of "The Little Engine That Could," and so we doggedly struggle forward to deliver more and more inservice education. But it's also possible that, if we turned around to go home, we would get where we genuinely want to go. That is, given our premises concerning inservice education and our expectations of teachers, what we're doing now may merely appear to be the best way to improve teaching in the schools. But suppose it's not inservice education that's

the culprit; suppose the system it serves is the failure? And suppose, if the school system were on a right track, inservice education could keep it on the right track. But maybe it isn't on the right track, and maybe that's why both the school system and the inservice program fails. Recent reports indicate that 50% of our pupils leave school as functional illiterates. What's wrong? The way we "inservice" our teachers, what we expect from the schools, or what we expect from our pupils? If inservice education is designed to make the schools we really want, then we have and will continue to have a serious problem with making inservice education work. Let me put it still another way. If we didn't have a war, we would never have needed a USO. And conversely, to end war you don't get anywhere by merely increasing the services of the USO. If we didn't have a war, we wouldn't need Bob Hope running around the world giving benefit performances, but Bob Hope has nothing to do with the size or scope or the quality of the war. Another analogue to the mess we have here is the energy crisis. There's a lot of concentration these days on making smaller cars that guzzle less gas. That's all to the good. However, there are some who think a better solution to the energy crisis would be to re-examine our basic systems of transportation. Another analogue obtains from the recent furor over the SST. Is the SST safer than conventional aircraft? Noisier? Less or more polluting? Too expensive? Those were questions debated in the newspapers and on the platform. But the essential question was rarely, if ever, asked: "How many people in the world need to go from New York to Paris in three hours?"

What I am getting at refers again to what teachers need. Do teachers need to acquire more and more competencies, more and more facts, more and more methods? Or is the teacher—not the curriculum, neither the hardware nor the software, and not the procedures—the most significant "method"? I believe that good methods are good teachers and poor methods are poor teachers, notwithstanding competency-based teacher education. If nothing else, by definition good teachers have good—i.e. workable—methods (whatever their methods), else they wouldn't be good teachers. I don't believe

that learning is more efficiently and effectively promoted when it occurs in the context of small definable operations and tasks as on a factory assembly line, and when the order of difficulty increases in some lawful manner. I don't believe that evidence to sustain that model is available. Nor do I believe that we will see such evidence during the years ahead. Rather, I believe teachers need what professors need, an awakening interest in learning for its own sake, scholarship for the thrills and enjoyment it provides, and encouragement to create rather than implement educational environments. Not only in the university, but the public schools too should be places for people who are sent there not only to teach but also to learn. If, as in the university, teachers were expected to *remain* learners in order to remain teachers, they would behave less as technicians, memorizers, cultists, and thoughtless applicators, and more as alive and inquisitive, interesting human beings, which seems to me to be the real point of inservice education. Institutionalizing the mature teachers' education is little different from institutionalizing friendliness. The required unwanted course is as transparent as the forced smile, and both are joyless episodes for all concerned.

What a School of Education Can Do About the Education of Teachers

Let's face it, there haven't been all that many new discoveries in education to keep up with. The real purpose of what we call inservice education should not be to deliver the latest bulletin on how to teach reading better, or how to teach the mentally retarded better, or how to teach teachers better. In that regard, there isn't all that much to be updated, no matter what the journals say and no matter how things appear at the convention palace when all the gimmicks and gadgets are laid out by the hucksters who represent America's big and small businesses.

Then what can a school of education do to promote the education of teachers? For one thing, it can be honest with itself and with its customers. For example, we should take a less self-serving look at the "Economy of Scale Principle," the wide-

spread belief that bigger is better, that a certain critical mass is necessary to provide adequate education. We should also re-examine the idea we have been pushing for generations that teaching is so specialized and professional that ordinary citizens should not only be barred from engaging in its practice but that they cannot even be expected to understand what we do or why. If there is any profession that an ordinary citizen should be able to understand, and in some fashion practice, it's teaching. Professors of education and school teachers might serve education better if we were more receptive to the idea that, in at least one respect, education is different from all other professions: it requires virtually everyone's participation throughout our lives. Children go to school, and some of those children eventually become teachers and stay in school forever. But other adults become parents, doctors, lawyers, managers, and next-door-neighbors, and all of those people are, to some degree, teachers. Everyone doesn't go to school forever. But everyone goes to school and teaches at some time, and therefore everyone should know something about the process of learning and teaching.

Schools of education can also do something about the education of teachers if they try harder to conduct their affairs as if people are people, that professional aloofness unnecessarily separates teachers from their students, their students' families, and the communities where they do their work. And lastly, it would be good for schools of education to emphasize in their curricula the idea that the goal of teaching is not to make a decision whether a child can or can't learn but to make it come true that the child will learn. A concept of human educability is shortchanged in our academic marketplaces, and that's a very unfortunate state of affairs.

As a modest example of what a school of education can do about the education of teachers, I want to get at how we might create a more honest representation of what we are and, thus, how we might truly teach about something which we are now merely selling. I want to elaborate on "Truth in Selling" Education.

Academicians should try harder not to lie to our customers. I know that most

business people lie but we mustn't, for lots of good reasons and also because colleges and universities aren't businesses. Telling the truth must be one of the important differences between us and those who sell cars or houses. Telling the truth is what permits us to do business but not be in business. Sure, our schools of education have customers and we should run our affairs like a business; but we should run our affairs even more like a church, or what a church is supposed to be like when it's not like a business. We shouldn't sell our stuff to make money but rather to make the uneducated educated, and to reveal the unknown, and to pay for the work of scholars whose products will pay for the work of more scholars, on and on for a thousand years. That's why we have customers and sell things. That's why we court donors and write proposals, but not to take only for ourselves, rather to redistribute to scholars and students.

So we must be careful about what we say in our catalogues and other bulletins from the field. Sure, you and I know that garbage is sold everyday by appealing to the best impulse of the consumer. That's why error-ridden encyclopedias and dictionaries are gobbled up. That's why people who want to feel patriotic buy rhinestone flags for their lapels. But isn't it time that something that's actually good be sold by appealing to the same sort of impulse? A school's catalogue is the chance to try that suggestion out. There is the question whether there are enough people who would respond to such a serious and honest appeal. I think there are, yet I'm not as sure that schools of education have serious and honest goods to deliver to them. But I am sure that it's important to answer both of those questions the right way, else we might substitute the future lie for the present hypocrisy. Still, while it is important to answer both questions, we should not hold up doing something about being more honest while we find out whether we are good enough to be good. To some extent, a more noble recruitment effort will lead to a more noble school of education and would probably be worth instituting even if no changes were wrought internally. So let's check out a few things.

What philosophy of education would we want the bulletin to exemplify? The

claim is made that education is not only in the classroom but everywhere. Well then, if that is the case it should also be in our bulletins. One should learn something by looking through them, something other than the stuff that makes those of us in our schools feel important and satisfied. Yes, I know that the Socratic pitch isn't much good for recruitment purposes: "Come study with the man who doesn't know anything except that he doesn't know anything." Hardly anyone would come because, on the face of it, they have been told not to. Therefore, somehow they have to be told that the *way* Socrates is ignorant constitutes valuable knowledge. And that brings it back to the public relations paradox: How do we brag about humility? How do we make virtue more exciting than vice? How do we tell the customers that we've found the happy man without getting them depressed that he has no shirt?

But maybe there is something that can be checked out. The way the blurbs read now, there are no uncertainties, no puzzles or doubts, no paradoxes. It should be made evident that not only are unsolved problems present but it is in facing them and grappling with them that the excitement begins. The way the blurbs read now, each program holds out the promise of mastery and comfortable competence to the student; the student will find the answers and skills for the job he wants to hold. Our promise seems to guarantee competency. Most of our programs even include the term "competency based." Well, we ought to let the cat out of the bag. We ought to advise our customers that there are few answers and fewer skills, that what a student can hope to acquire is the ability to cope with muddles and novelty, to be responsible for decisions where no general laws are clear, to have a sense of goals separate from the means of obtaining goals. We ought to advise the customers that, if all goes well, they will be able to achieve for awhile the balancing act that constitutes intelligent behavior in any field. Something like this should be learned from our bulletins because it is something like this that characterizes the successful graduate.

What I have tried to say is that schools should spend more time learning than knowing, and that our bulletins should

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reflect that occupation. Such an admission means that we will appear somewhat incompetent. And you know how difficult such admissions are in the university, especially in university bulletins. We're much too quick to claim that we understand, and we're very reluctant to admit that we don't understand. Our bulletins especially make us seem confident that we know what's going on and that our ideas can be adequately expressed briefly. But such feelings lead us in the direction of the trivial and superficial. Probably that's why college bulletins are infamous for calling things by new names but saying little that's new. A friend of mine has felt for a long time that biology could be taught much more effectively by presenting what is not known, if for no other reason than because those are the things that are so interesting. Perhaps something of that kind could be worked into program descriptions. Perhaps we should remember how much more eager we are to read today's headline than the review of the week. Perhaps we should seek out potential customers who prefer puzzles to reviews. Perhaps our bulletins should not only be invitations but tests.

The point of this paper has been that, perhaps, our inservice programs should not only be tests but invitations to learn.

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