

Inservice education is a process of growth and development aimed at producing change in the individual teacher. A comprehensive inservice model designed to address the specific needs of the isolated rural special education teacher must be devised.

A Comprehensive Inservice Model for Rural Special Education

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The isolation of special education teachers in rural areas restricts the delivery of effective inservice programs. For special education teachers to remain abreast of current developments, alternative types of inservice education must be explored. This paper will: (1) discuss the importance of inservice education; (2) explore the difficulties associated with inservice education in rural areas; and, (3) present a comprehensive inservice education model based on the theories of adult development and planned change.

Because inservice education has been in existence since the 1800s, a vast body of literature exists regarding this topic. However, as Wood and Kleine (1988) discovered, there is a lack of data specifically devoted to inservice education in rural areas. The majority of the existing works review the literature, give opinions, or describe existing programs. What research does exist is usually done locally, lacks external validity, and is rarely disseminated (Hutson, 1981).

Hutson (1981) views the current state of inservice practice as deplorable. The term itself and the meager body of hard research present major obstacles in providing effective inservice education. The lack of hard research may result from the complex nature of inservice education.

A broad scheme and clear concept of inservice education with appropriate policies, commitment and fixed responsibility has never existed (Dillon-Peterson, 1981). Without a clear concept of the nature and function of inservice education, it is not surprising that inservice education is viewed negatively by many educators. If inservice is to be

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effective, a coherent theory and systematic framework are essential. Thus, an overview of the basic principles and assumptions underlying inservice education will be delineated. Planned change and androgogy, two theories that relate to quality inservice education, will also be described.

Basic Principles Underlying Inservice Education

Inservice education is an integral part of teacher education. Inservice enables professional growth by providing teachers with quality training that: creates an awareness of new knowledge, techniques, and technology; develops skills; and, provides a means for teachers to exchange ideas (Peters, 1975). Inservice also provides a means for remediating the skills of teachers who either lack adequate pre-service training or who have been away from formalized training for an extended period of time (Rubin, 1971).

Sher (1978) believes that in rural areas the need to re-vitalize and upgrade the skills of teachers is intensified due to the difficulty obtaining qualified staff and the vast difference between the theory taught in teacher training programs and the application of these theories to the rural classroom. For special educators, inservice training is critical as over one-third of the teachers serving handicapped students in rural areas have no special education training and lack proper certification (Rehmann and Latini, 1979).

Assumptions

Inservice education is based on a variety of assumptions. The following assumptions are essential for an effective inservice program.

- All personnel to stay current and effective must be involved in inservice education.
- Staff can and will grow beyond the minimum competencies expected of initial employees.
- People learn best the things perceived as meaningful, purposeful, and satisfying.
- Adults learn best when they feel they have control over the situation and a supportive emotional climate free from fear of failure is provided.
- Learning experiences are viewed as appropriate or not based on the individual's internal frame of reference.
- Educators differ in their competencies, readiness and approach to learning.
- People can and will learn on the job. However, feedback is necessary to aid in using the learning effectively.
- Intrinsic satisfaction will help teachers grow.
- Learning does not satisfy all needs.
- People must learn for long term survival but can cope, resist or endure in the short run.
- People work individually or as members of a group on problems they view as significant.
- Change in educational practice is the result of systematic, long range, staff development.
- Professional growth requires commitment.
- Schools need to provide resources and leadership for inservice education.
- Inservice education should be based on research, theory and best practices models.

Inservice education is essential if our schools and educational personnel are to remain effective in a changing society. Teachers differ in many ways including initial training, developmental level, frame of reference, and learning style. To effectively meet the needs of all rural special educators, a range of inservice opportunities must be provided.

Theories Related to Inservice Education

The need for a conceptual and theoretical framework for inservice education is apparent. Two theories, planned change and androgogy, emerge as relevant to the inservice endeavor.

Planned change. Patel (1968) asserts that inservice education is a change process based on the assumptions that: education is a life-long process; preservice education is inadequate for a lifelong teaching career; inservice improves the quality of education; and, change is imperative to improve teacher competencies. As Harris and Bessent (1969) believe, the intent of inservice education is to change instructional practices by changing people. Because inservice education is an instrument for organizational change, if the principles of planned change were used, inservice education would become part of a districts' standard operating procedures.

Planned change is a process by which change is created, implemented, evaluated, maintained, and resisted. Planned change may be defined as a "conscious, deliberate and collaborative effort to improve the operations of a human system" (Bennis, Benne, Chin, and Corey, 1976, p. 4). For the change process to "produce a maximum effect . . . the client system must feel it, rather than a change agent, has taken responsibility for the first step" (Lippitt, Watson, and Westley, 1958, p. 75). This is important because "people resist change even of a king they basically agree with, if they are not significantly involved in the planning" (Bennis et. al., p. 227).

Bennis et. al. (1976) delineate five steps in the planned change process: establishing a defined set of goals; delineating alternatives for attaining the goals; evaluating each plan of action; selecting the alternative that most nearly optimizes the set of goals; and assessing the action after it has been implemented. The process of learning and changing should be: experimental; collaborative; oriented toward situational requirements; educational for all involved; respectful of personal and group uniqueness; self evaluative; self correcting; and self-renewing. Inservice education is therefore a voluntary, cooperative, relevant, well-planned, developmental process whose effectiveness is evaluated to ensure that the desired change occurs.

Androgogy. Knowles (1973) developed a theory of adult education based on the principles of adult development. Knowles believes that as a person matures his/her self-concept moves from dependency to self-direction. The person gains a reservoir of experiences to which new experiences are related. At this stage, adults are motivated to learn as they experience the "need." Adult education must be an experience-based, self-directing process that accounts for individual differences and allows the person to apply tomorrow what he/she has learned today.

The androgogical model provides procedures to help learners acquire information and skills. Knowles (1973, p. 104) provides seven elements that are relevant for inservice education. These are: "1.) establishing a climate that is conducive to learning; 2.) creating a mechanism for mutual planning; 3.) diagnosing the needs for learning; 4.) formulating program objectives . . . which will satisfy these needs; 5.) designing a pattern of learning experiences; 6.) conducting these learning experiences with suitable techniques and materials; and 7.) evaluating the learning outcome and re-diagnosing the need."

The theories of planned change and androgogy complement each other. Change arises out of a need perceived by the teacher. Teacher involvement, a supportive environment and program evaluation are crucial components of the change/learning process. This is a cyclical process with the

evaluation component serving as the catalyst for re-examining needs and re-initiating the change/learning process. Together these theories lay the foundation on which to build a conceptual and theoretical framework for inservice education.

Difficulties Providing Inservice Education in Rural Areas

The literature reveals several major difficulties associated with providing inservice education in rural areas. Funding continues to be a major problem. With declining enrollments and the faith in the public educational system waning, school district budgets are under close scrutiny and severe constraints. In the allocation of resources, inservice expenditures appear disproportionately large and there is great pressure to justify expenditures (King, 1988). Moreover, inservice programs are often more expensive in rural areas due to the low number of teachers and the expense of bringing experts to remote areas (Burdin and Poliakoff, 1973).

Inservice programs are often not seen as relevant to educators' needs. This occurs because these programs are often devised with little or no input from the teachers they are designed to serve. Furthermore, rural teachers tend to be individualistic and consider their problems unique. They tend to view change as a personal rather than a group experience. They prefer to work alone or seek help from their fellow teachers rather than from experts. Given these parameters, rural teachers often see current inservice programs as ineffective. (King, 1988).

The main incentive for participation in inservice programs is certification renewal credit. College credit which is usually necessary for pay increases is generally offered only when the program is sponsored by a university. However, rural educators are usually isolated from a university and do not pursue extensive graduate study. Even when college credit is available, the cost may be prohibitive.

Scheduling is a major difficulty in providing inservice programs. Burdin and Poliakoff (1973) assert that teachers are most receptive to new ideas during the school day. This requires release time for teachers. Schools may be unwilling to provide this release time because of the need to hire substitute teachers which adds to the cost and may decrease the quality of the education that the students obtain in the teachers' absence.

Distance, road and weather conditions compound the scheduling problems. With a single special education teacher in a district, bringing the programs to the teachers may be difficult. Providing travel reimbursement, car pool routes, and refreshments could help alleviate these difficulties.

Because of the problems mentioned above, teachers are often not motivated to attend inservice programs. It is therefore essential to base programs on teachers' perceived needs and provide incentives for participation. It is also essential to eliminate feelings of threat that may be experienced by participants who feel that their job may be threatened should they disagree with ideas presented or be unable to implement these ideas in their classrooms.

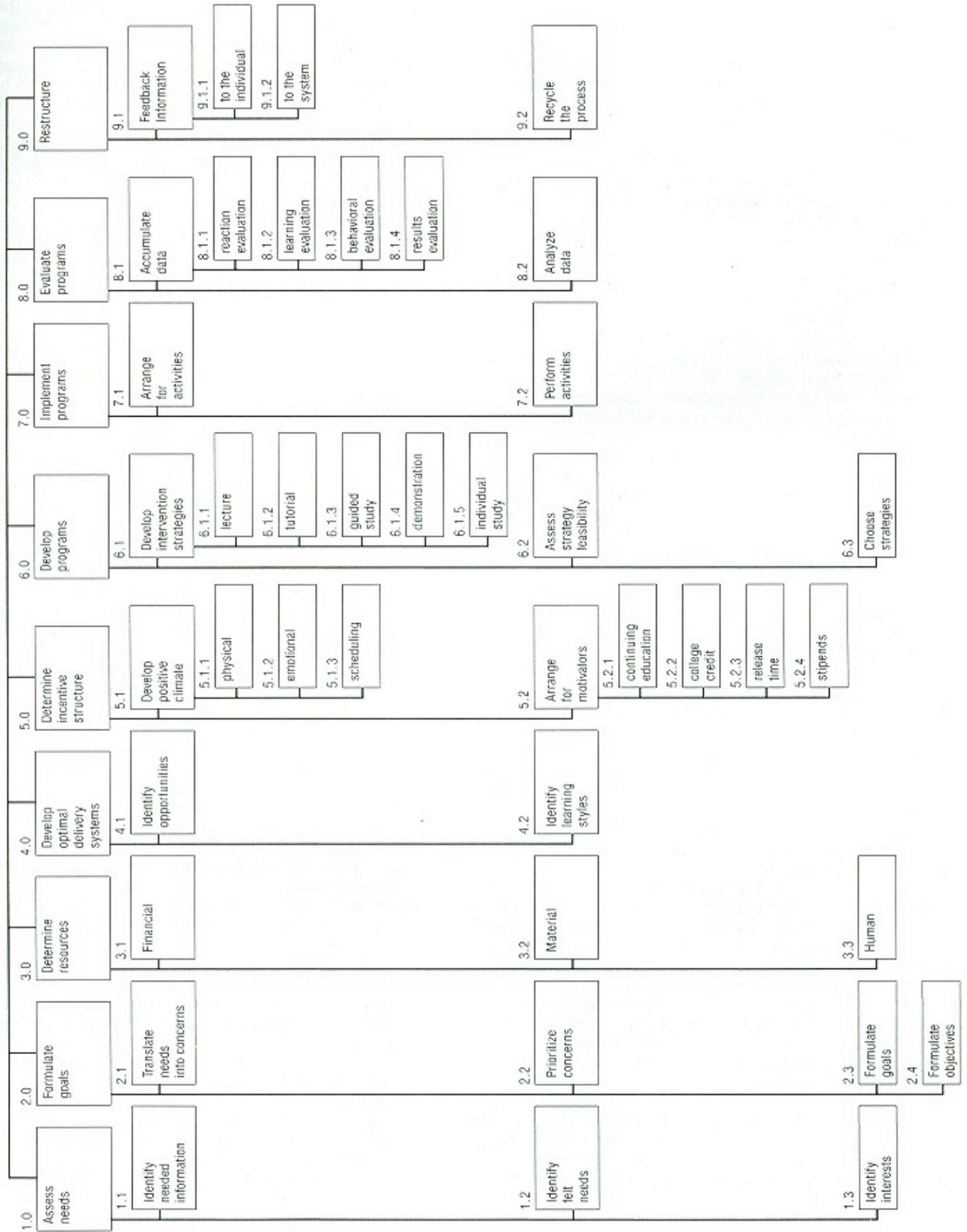
Finally, follow-up would allow inservice presenters and participants to evaluate the program's effectiveness and applicability. This information would then aid in the planning of future inservice endeavors.

A Comprehensive Inservice Model

Inservice education is part of a learning continuum. It is a process of growth and development aimed at producing change in the individual teacher so that his/her effectiveness in the classroom will be increased. Because a single

Figure 1

A COMPREHENSIVE INSERVICE MODEL



inservice offering is unable to meet the needs of all teachers, a comprehensive inservice model designed to address the specific needs of the isolated rural special education teacher has been devised (see Figure 1). In their review of the literature, Wood and Kleine (1988) reveal a set of effective practices that can be used to design rural staff development. These include: the development of participant ownership; staff development and training programs based on careful systematic needs assessments; guided practice and experiential learning; the use of peer instructors with expertise as staff development leaders; follow-up assistance when participants return to their classrooms and begin to implement what they have learned during training programs to promote implementation and transfer of learning; and the ability for inservice participants to control part of what or how they learn. Thus, for inservice to be effective, a variety of offerings using different techniques must continually be made available to all educators.

The model has nine major components. These are:

- assess needs by identifying needed information, felt needs and interests;
- formulate goals by translating needs into concerns, prioritizing the concerns, and formulating goals and objectives;
- determine financial, material and human resources;
- develop optimal delivery systems by identifying opportunities and learning styles;
- determine incentives by developing a positive physical and emotional climate and arranging for motivators such as college credit, release time and stipends;
- develop programs including intervention strategies and timetables;
- implement the program;
- evaluate the program by collecting and analyzing formative and summative data; and
- restructure by feeding information back to individuals and the system and recycling the process.

The model is both circular and cyclical. It remains flexible to meet the diverse needs of all rural special educators. This model provides a framework with the specifics delineated according to situational demands. Each component is necessary for the development of a comprehensive inservice model. Needs assessment allows individuals to be involved in the planning process. It assures that learner needs will be met. Formulating goals provides the necessary direction for the inservice programs. Determining resources insures the programs designed will be provided. Developing optimal delivery systems allows the integration of available resources and learner needs into inservice programs that will meet the needs of the proposed teachers. Incentive structures build interest and motivation.

After the above components have been addressed, it is time to develop the program. Once the program has been developed and the timetable set, the program is implemented. Once the program is enacted, data collection begins. The data can measure learner reactions to both material and presentation, material learned, behavior changes resulting from the program, and the results of the inservice program. Once the data has been collected it must be analyzed. The information must then be disseminated to program participants as well as the system. At this point, the process is recycled.

The circular and cyclical nature of the model allows the restructuring components to move back to any of the earlier stages. It may not be necessary to start with a needs assessment. There may be additional concerns that were identified that can be addressed at this point. Perhaps originally identified resources that were not used can be incorporated into the restructuring process. Adequate incentive structures may have been designated and this stage can be omitted during the restructuring phase. However, any program developed and implemented during the restructuring phase must be evaluated and the restructuring component must complete all subsequent inservice endeavors. Omitting even one of the designated components during the initial implementation cycle will diminish the effectiveness of the ensuing inservice program. The implementation of this model in its entirety will create relevant, effective inservice programs that meet the needs of all rural special education personnel.

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