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Teacher training an eye opener

By RON GARDNER

When it comes to dealing with students, a teacher never learns enough. So to help teachers cope with different students, new methods and changing educational environments, the Farmington School District provides an innovative approach for offering professional growth to teachers while they remain in the classroom.

"At one time, district administrators decided what topics would be covered at the in-service sessions," says Larry Freedman, assistant superintendent of elementary education for the Farmington district. "The entire district gathered to listen to someone talk about recent developments in a certain area of education. These presentations were informative, but only a handful of teachers may have needed to know about that specific topic."

"Now we have gotten away from that approach and let teachers decide what in-service sessions they want to attend on the basis of which topic will benefit them the most," he explains.

"It is an innovative approach in our district and we offer teachers a choice of professional growth sessions on the elementary level, at least, which they can attend. They only register for sessions they are interested in and don't have to sit through sessions that don't appeal to their teaching interests," he continues.

Each school year, the district reserves two days for special in-service, professional growth sessions—one early in the year and one later during the school calendar.

These in-service days expose teachers to new techniques and changing methods in education on the elementary and secondary levels.

The district tries to develop the sessions around improving curricula and programs, while helping teachers to understand students better.

"But the key to the program is having teachers recognize their needs and take ad-

vantage of the opportunity to learn during these in-service sessions," Freedman says. "If a teacher doesn't recognize a need for the in-service learning experience, then it doesn't mean a darn thing," he continues.

In-service sessions that teachers remain in classroom situations in the school district while they learn new ideas they didn't know about when they received their teaching training.

DURING THE in-service program, teachers attend special sessions on a variety of topics ranging from art and science to learning disabilities and minority education.

In the Farmington district, the two days are separated into individual school activities in the morning and districtwide programs in the afternoon.

During the recent districtwide in-service day, teachers were able to choose from six programs on the elementary level and 11 seminars on the secondary level.

The district brought in specialists in several educational fields who discussed recent developments in teaching.

These experts talked with teachers in workshop sessions about new materials for classroom use and how to incorporate innovative ideas in their lesson plans.

All teachers attended the in-service sessions and must have seen the district evaluations saying they liked the way the district handled the sessions this year.

Most teachers who attended the sessions said they enjoyed the in-service day programs because experts weren't telling them what to do in their classrooms, Freedman says.

"The experts who gave the presentations didn't just lecture, but they discussed with teachers new concepts in teaching."

"And they liked that. I can remember back to the days when I attended in-service days and would fall asleep listening to some of those lectures," he continues.

"YOU DON'T hear that comment anymore because of the different approach the district now takes to in-service days."

On the individual school level, in-service is where teachers and school administrators plan and study what special instructional areas need help.

At each elementary school there is an in-service committee that deals with identifying special educational needs.

When needs are recognized, teachers and administrators work together to decide what can be done to help teachers cope with the lack of experience or training.

"It is an error for teachers to just sit back and rely on old methods of teaching they learned in college," Freedman says. "To do a good job as a teacher, he constantly must be alert to what is going on in the world of education. As society changes, so does teaching methods and classroom techniques."

"And that is what in-service is all about—to learn about those new methods and techniques," Freedman explains.

The assistant superintendent says teachers need in-service training because they are dealing with human beings in the classroom and not just an educational product.

"Teaching is one of the most important jobs there is," he says. "We learn more and more about people everyday and their expectations of them change whenever society changes."


"As SOCIETY changes, educational programs and methods also must change to meet the change in students' lives and needs. Our major responsibility as teachers is to prepare students to understand the world they live in and what it is like with other persons away from the home environment," he continues.

"Our job is to help train students to do the best they can when it is their time to run the world."

In order to do that, teachers must be kept abreast of what is going on in other classrooms in the nation. That is where our in-service programs are used to help meet the need for continued teacher education outside the university environment, Freedman says.

One example he uses is making students more worldly in television. Students get a

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Phyllis Rush, a second grade teacher at Larkshire Elementary school (left), Dr. Nora Martin and Lloyd Smith, band teacher at Larkshire discuss recent developments in learning styles and practical techniques as part of an in-service seminar for Farmington teachers. (Staff photo by Harry Mauthe)

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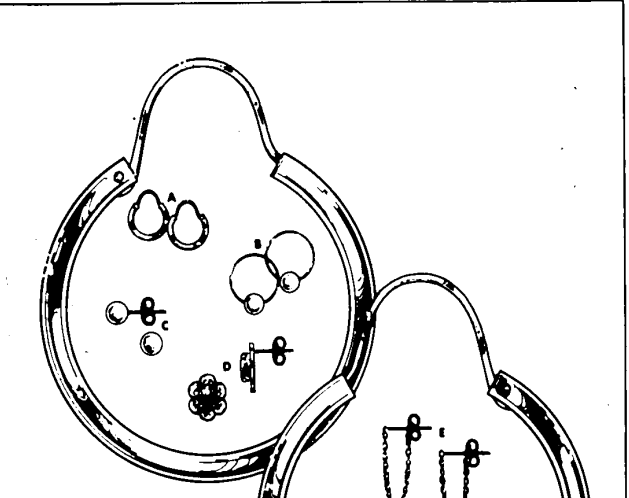
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