THE NDN TRAINING MODEL

In the early years of teacher training, emphasis was placed on quantity. Under Title IV-C grants from the government, it was possible to offer year long, 28-30 weeks, training sessions, 2 1/2 hours per week, plus considerable follow-up activity including classroom modeling and observation. The luxury of this model ended with the demise of Title IV-C, though for a few years private grants made up the difference. This "ideal" model is still listed in IAPC literature, but obviously, without the enticement of graduate credit, tuition waivers and on-site training, there has been virtually no interest.

Three years ago, with Philosophy for children's nomination to the National Diffusion Network, of the U.S. Department of Education, a new era of teacher training was made possible. What is staggeringly different from the ideal model is the enormous reduction in training time, from approximately 75 to 15 hours for initial training. The main reason for this reduction has been the government's insistence that NDN programs be delivered to adopting districts in the most cost efficient manner. Bluntly put, the government is not interested in supporting the ideal model, and even so, training time for Philosophy for Children exceeds most programs of the Network. In part we have tried to made up the difference by mightily encouraging follow-up activity, whereby the initial three-day training would be followed by two three-day modeling and observing supplements. Usually, late afternoon and evening sessions for teachers for further training are also included. As I reported in the last bulletin, without such follow-up activity the continuation of the program is much in doubt, except perhaps, for a few dedicated teachers.

As might be suspected, the problem which has provoked the most concern by certified trainers has been the reduction of training time, whether the compressed NDN model will work. At first blush one might be tempted to believe that in no way can the NDN model be adequate, for three days are simply insufficient to build a community, much less a community of inquiry, cover the material and pedagogy. Without week-to-week monitoring of teacher performance both in workshop and classroom there can be no hope of successful implementation. This suspicion, of course, assumes that utilization of the respective models by teacher trainers will be comparable, that with the exception of the time variable, trainers will proceed according to acceptable standards. A trainer could surely play havoc with a group of teachers in a year as well as in three days. Imagine a charismatic trainer so mesmerizing a group of teachers, never mind the length of training, that virtually nothing acceptable is translated into practice in the classroom. Moreover, how can we guage how much training is adequate? Can questionable practices assiduously instilled in pre-service training be overcome by any particular timetable? Also, in Philosophy for Children training, both quantity of time and quality of facilitation are more often than not concomitant concerns. A session can be a bore or a joy depending on how the two are handled. I shudder to think of my slavish allegiance to "plain vanilla", as Tom Jackson calls it, during those years under Title IV-C. Whole years went by in this fashion. Therefore, I am inclined to think that the time factor has been escalated out of proportion to other factors and variables which can make or break a workshop.

Nonetheless, I have my doubts and concerns regarding the NDN model, as I am compelled to continue using it. Here are three major doubts and concerns and how I have gone about, sometimes blindly, meeting them. First, we all pay lip service to and hopefully expend effort in turning a group into a community of inquiry. As you might imagine, there is little hope of accomplishing much along these lines in three days. What I try to do in the time alloted is at least to impress members of the group

of the necessity to turn their classrooms into such communities. The idea of the community is therefore addressed at the end of the first day, after having done a couple of chapters of the novels, and again at the end of the third. On the third day, especially, I try to draw from the group both strategies they would employ to bring the community about, and the criteria by which they might identify such a community in their classrooms. Of course this does not mean that we are total strangers on day three, only that I have often felt the need for more time for community building. Returning for follow-ups has helped tremendously in this regard.

Second, the ideal model affords time not allotted to the NDN model to cover material. With the NDN model we now talk about the logical spine of Harry Stottlemeier's Discovery, or that at least we will cover similarities and differences, relations and analogies in Pixie. The restraints placed on the NDN model make coverage of the material problematic to say the least. However, whether in depth exposure to all the material as afforded by the ideal model, will later translate into effective implementation in the classroom seems to be an article of faith, one which I personally think should be questioned. After all, the format calls for discussion, not taking lecture notes, and whether there will be adequate retention of discussion products to be used subsequently in the classroom is an open question. At any rate, what I have found is that in depth coverage of less material can at least give teachers the confident feeling that they can handle the material skipped or otherwise adumbrated. Consequently, I cover fewer chapters in a novel, but I do not attempt to bracket sessions in terms of time.

Third, finally, this feeling confident that one can implement the program successfully is all important. At no time is this brought home more forcefully than at the end of a three-day workshop. Invariably, the reservation about the program most often encountered on evaluation forms is this lack of feeling confident about one's ability to implement properly. I am not sure the ideal model, insofar as workshop activity is concerned, is better prepared to meet this reservation. What I have found is that feeling confident about oneself is really a function of follow-up activity, and that without follow-ups, teachers will all too often not even attempt to try. Modeling in the classroom with a teachers's own children--"Here are my children actually doing Harry" is an important breakthrough. Giving that same teacher constructive and encouraging feedback after a subsequent observation is further proof that the program can be successfully implemented in the classroom. Obviously, the NDN model is woefully inadequate in meeting this demand for follow-ups. Since only initial training figures in the tally of adoptions, the final line as far as the government is concerned, follow-ups are left to the discretion of the individual districts. This attitude I find short-sighted in the extreme. After all, what is the point in getting adoption if a program is going to be abruptly dropped?

Philip Guin