DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 068 436 SP 005 723

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TITLE Utilization of Consultants in Inservice Training.
PUB DATE Apr 72
NOTE 18p.; Paper presented at the American Educational Research Assn., Chicago, Ill., April 1972

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.65 HC-$3.29
DESCRIPTORS *Consultants; *Consultation Programs; *Inservice Programs; *Inservice Teacher Education; Models; *Talent Utilization

ABSTRACT

The misuse of outside consultants by most school districts has led to a disenchantment with inservice training in general. By using careful planning and evaluation techniques, the problems which have been caused by the inappropriate use of consultants and the unreal expectations of local school district personnel can be avoided. The process model described delineates the following steps needed to overcome this problem: specification of goals by local school districts, planning with school personnel regarding expected outcomes and work required, careful outlines of activities by the outside consultants, and well-planned evaluations of teacher and consultant behaviors. (Author)

Utilization of Consultants in Inservice Training

by

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A paper presented to the
American Educational Research Association
Chicago, Illinois
April 6, 1972

Utilization of Consultants in Inservice Training

In the book, Educational Evaluation and Decision Making (Stufflebeam, et. al, 1971), the authors devote a section in the last chapter to a topic they label, "Therapy." The paragraph that follows from that chapter was the genesis of this report. It states:

> . . . we need to devise a strategy to reach the consultants that are now working with practitioners on evaluation problems. These consultants, we have asserted, have been guilty of giving bad advice; indeed, they have frequently been unable to generate evaluations that even minimally meet their own standards for inquiry. Since these consultants are in the main university professors, some pattern of national institutes or seminars in which these problems can be discussed and some training in new approaches offered seems to be in order. (p. 345)

The Laboratory of Educational Research, University of the Pacific has frequently been asked to perform evaluations, many of which unfortunately, were "patch-up" jobs of evaluations begun by others who were not competent to complete them. The problem became very apparent, however, when the Laboratory received a grant from the State in 1970 to write some dissemination documents based on evaluative reports, frequently written by college or university professors.

After working with the state officials for a very short time, it was apparent that the great majority of the professors who had taken on the evaluative role in the various projects

within the Bureau's jurisdiction were (a) either unable to carry out a proper evaluation for lack of skills, or (b) had taken a task which was inadequately funded and were doing only enough to justify the money which they were being paid, or (c) found the guidelines published by the State to be too general to be helpful. It also became apparent that many of the local school evaluators were doing a minimal job of evaluating because (a) they were over-loaded with work, (b) they were unable to interpret the directives coming from the State, or (c) they lacked the skills necessary to perform an evaluation.

In any case the project evaluations were being sorely neglected or poorly done. In addition to the work with this State Bureau, on two occasions the Laboratory was called in to complete Title III evaluations which had been begun by a person or group of persons who passed themselves off as evaluators but who were unable to perform the tasks properly. The "patch-up" type of evaluation which the Laboratory was able to perform was not up to the standards which were generally adhered to, although the local districts were generally quite grateful to simply have someone who could help them complete the evaluation requirements of their grants.

Faced with this situation, the need for a strategy to overcome this problem was evident. Since the time frame in which the Laboratory was working was a tight one, it was imperative that whatever training that could be provided be done as expeditiously as possible, and that only a minimal amount of skill could be expected from many of the evaluators.

Betz (1969), Tuttle and Ciccone (1969) and the American Association of Junior Colleges (1967) have indicated that the role of a consultant requires more than simply appearing for a day and talking from the "top of the head" or accepting data unquestioningly and submitting it to a canned computer program, interpreting the data in a mechanical fashion and writing a report. It was apparent from the reports made available by the State that these were the main uses being made of consultants by the local districts, however.

Since the Laboratory was faced with deadlines and little or no information upon which to base the dissemination reports, a dual problem faced the staff. One was to obtain enough data from the previous projects to enable them to write the reports for the 1969-70 year, and the second, to ensure that the reports based on the data collected during 1970-71 would be collected, analyzed and reported properly.

The strategy devised to accomplish these goals was two-fold: first, as consultants for the State Bureau, the staff arranged to make on-site visits to each project, discuss the needs of the Bureau for documented information in written form; and second, as consultants for the local districts, to help prepare an outline and give advice which would enable them to provide all the necessary information to complete the dissemination reports for 1970-71 in their written documents. As simple as it sounds, the outline was the conventional one shown here:

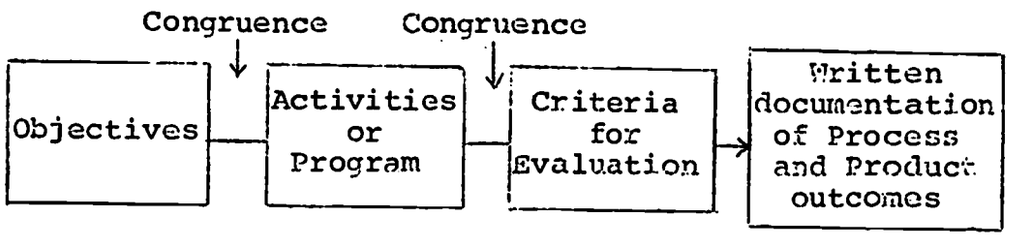

Figure 1. Sequence of events in preparing evaluation reports.

It was surprising to find some project directors did not even know what their objectives were and others had seen little reason to keep documented records of their program activities since "they knew what they were doing." Many had not thought to check for congruence between objectives, program activities and evaluative criteria, and several had written many objectives for which there was no program element which

would insure its being reached nor a criterion against which to measure it. One recommendation which grew out of these findings was that Stake's model (1967), which emphasizes congruence, should be included in any inservice training given to evaluators.

The criteria by which the Laboratory was to be judged for the work of preparing the 1969-70 reports was the degree to which the essential information needed to write the dissemination documents could be elicited post hoc and reduced to written form. Although not happy with the minimal amount of data collected from some projects, and the questionable validity of some of that which was received, the Laboratory staff was able to complete the project and the 1969-70 reports were accepted for printing and dissemination.

The second, and most important part of the strategy for inservice training was to insure that the costly on-site visits to collect post hoc information of questionable validity would be avoided in 1970-71. To accomplish this task, the following strategy was adopted, using the techniques and ideas which seemed most appropriate in the papers cited earlier and others (Stufflebeam, 1966; Provus, 1969).

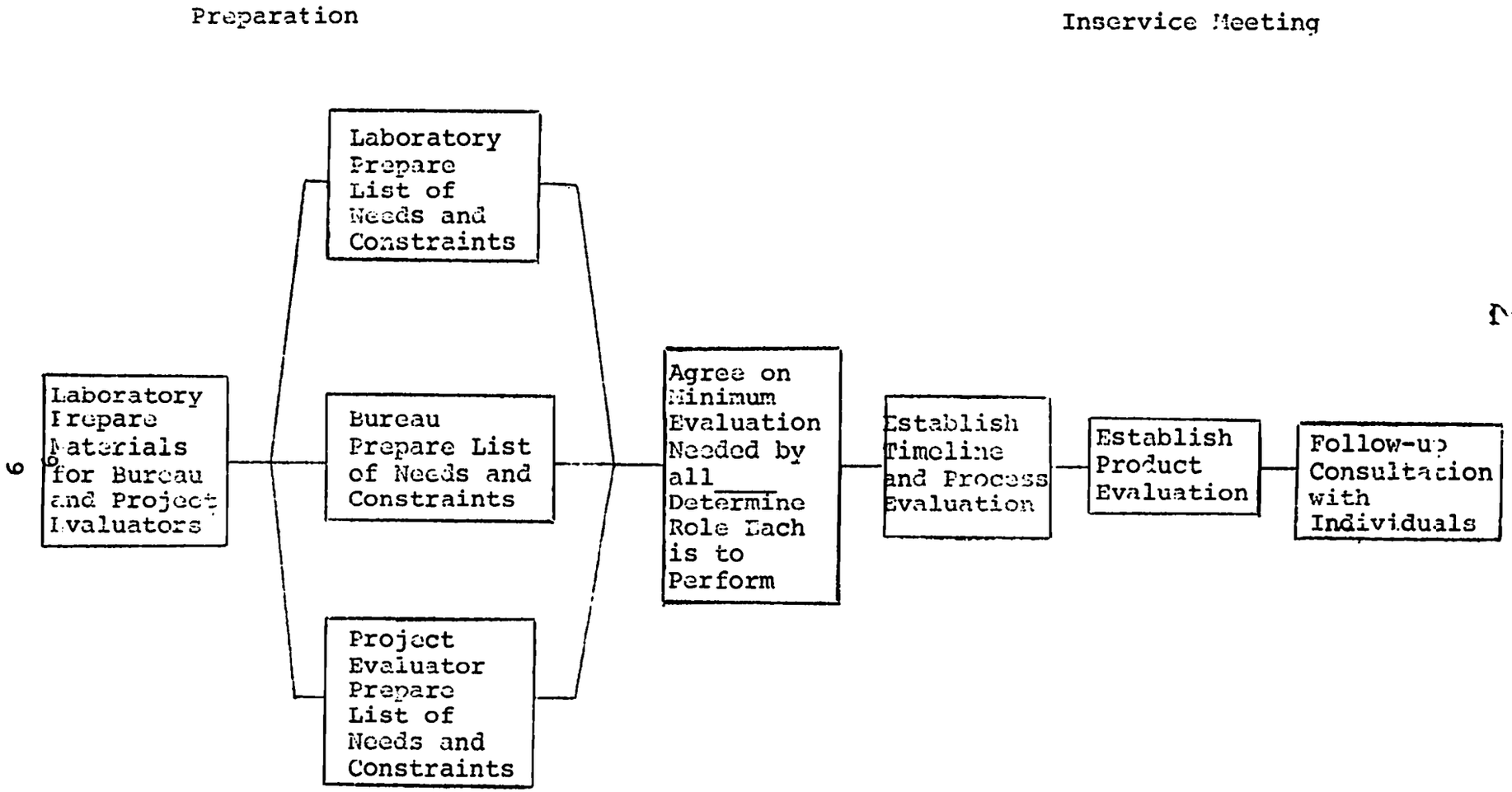

Figure 2. Flow chart of activities to accomplish inservice training needed to provide adequate evaluation materials.

This strategy required on the part of both the consultant and the person requesting consultative help a commitment to prepare before the actual inservice training (since we consider each consultation as an inservice training activity), a recommendation made in the American Junior Colleges paper. Also the strategy requires that a clear explanation of what is to be expected of each party be made prior to the training session. In many cases during 1969-70 consultants had been called to particular jobs by project directors and arrived on the day that they were to perform their activities with a general outline of what they were to present but with no preparation required of the teachers who were to be involved. In these cases it is not at all surprising that the results were less than expected.

One other factor that all consultants have not considered in the past is the fact that every consulting job should involve both preparation prior to the consultation and a follow up in a form of written reports of what was accomplished and/or additional training sessions. This follow-up activity element is an essential part of the training strategy devised by the Laboratory, and "one-shot" training sessions are not accepted since they violate good learning theory and practice.

The preparation that was done by the Laboratory was the writing and printing of materials to be sent to each project director/evaluator indicating the kinds of evaluation that would be considered minimal. The concept of congruence was emphasized in terms of examining the objectives, program activities, criteria for evaluating the success or failure of the project and the actual outcomes of the project itself. To be certain these elements were related logically and that the objectives were not only measureable but being measured by instruments which actually measured what was being proposed in the objective, several examples of good and bad objectives and criteria were presented. In many cases it was found that objectives had been written which did not in any way correspond to the program and that the evaluation used was totally invalid. Project directors and evaluators were shown the discrepancies during on-site visits. Most of them indicated that they thought that they had to use the state-mandated tests even though they realized that they were frequently not really measuring the objectives of the program. Many were excited and relieved to know that the choice of the criterion was one in which they had a choice. When it was pointed out that the success or the failure of the project was going to hinge on the evaluation based on these instruments, the necessity for careful selection of criteria was

very obvious to them. This initial preparation on the part of the Laboratory, then was preparation of a statement indicating the need for clearly stated and congruent objectives, program activities, criteria and outcomes.

Following the preparation and dissemination of this statement the Laboratory prepared a list of the needs and constraints which it faced. The Bureau also prepared a list of its needs and constraints, and the local project evaluators were asked to prepare a list of their needs and constraints. In this case the Bureau, working with the Laboratory, prepared a new application blank in which the objectives, program description and evaluation plans were very carefully delineated, and each element related to the budget.

Each one of the three groups of participants were then asked to come to one or two inservice meetings lasting for a full day. At this meeting the Bureau and the Laboratory stated as clearly and precisely as possible the reason for and the use to be made of each of the particular kinds of information requested in the evaluation forms. Local project directors stated many valid reasons for not being able to comply with some requests made by the State and/or Laboratory. The local project directors and evaluators stated

on several occasions that they had had no idea of why the Bureau or Laboratory needed certain kinds of information, and that they had considered the collecting of much of the information as "busy work" until they saw the reason for it. Once they understood the need, they all indicated their willingness to cooperate in providing the essential information.

In turn, both the Bureau and Laboratory re-examined their needs and constraints to utilize existing data collection procedures and data being generated in the local districts wherever possible to minimize the amount of paper work and man hours needed to produce the information needed by these agencies. After three days of hard work, a form for collecting all the essential data needed by the Bureau and which would require a minimal amount of additional effort on the part of the local project directors was devised. The form also made the work of the Bureau staff, which was undermanned, much easier by requiring much shorter and more easily read interim reports. This savings in time was accomplished by using a modification of the discrepancy model for process evaluation (Provus, 1969). This allowed for a very quick examination by the Bureau staff of each of the projects in each quarterly report and allowed them to determine which programs were in difficulty and which were progressing on schedule so that

they could concentrate their efforts in those areas where they were most needed. When evaluation problems were noted by the Bureau staff, they were referred to the Laboratory staff who provided the project evaluator with help on the problems which he encountered.

It should be mentioned that in many cases the university professors have been very poorly trained in terms of evaluation processes as Stufflebeam and others (1971) have indicated. Many of them have had little or no statistical training nor any formal training in the evaluative procedures which have developed during the past decade. These people needed consultive help in planning appropriate evaluation for their particular projects. Many did not understand the concept of process evaluation since this concept had developed subsequent to the time they had completed their education. Therefore, at these meetings, the concepts of a timeline and a process evaluation involving quarterly reporting was explained and actually begun.

One of the problems that evaluators have failed to deal with adequately and which is described in Educational Evaluation and Decision Making is public relations. The strategy used to attack this problem by the Laboratory was to actively involve all participants in the planning of the evaluative design, and to emphasize again and again that

the purpose of evaluation was not to prove or disprove, but to improve the respective projects. This approach proved invaluable in getting the cooperation of the participants by changing their perspective from a defensive one to a cooperative one. At these inservice meetings the kinds of product evaluation which would be needed from each of the projects was also established. Additional time was provided where necessary for local project directors/ evaluators to consult with the Laboratory staff for product evaluation. The follow-up consultations and written documentation of them were produced.

The criteria for evaluating the success of the Laboratory in reaching the second goal was in terms of the number of projects which were able to complete their evaluations on schedule and in sufficient detail that dissemination documents could be prepared without having to make on-site visits to obtain additional information. Table I shows the comparison between the first and second years in terms of the percentage of projects which met this criterion.

TABLE I.

Number of Projects which Provided Adequate Information to Prepare Dissemination Documents in 1969-70 and 1970-71

Year	No. of Projects	No. with Adequate Evaluation	Per Cent of Adequate Evaluation
1969-70	18	5	28.3%
1970-71	11	9	81.8%

During the first year, only two projects had been written well enough that reports could be prepared without having to go to the project site and obtain additional information. During the second year, 1970-71, only two projects had to be contacted in order to gather additional information. It should be noted that in these two cases, rather than starting from zero information as we had in 1969-70 the problems were in the nature of interpretation of data and could be handled by telephone. In one instance the experimental design used was a three way analyses of variance with three or four levels for each variable and with a sample size of only 72, which resulted in many empty cells. When this fact was called to the attention of the project evaluator, he reanalyzed the data appropriately and provided useful information. In the second case,

the professor involved relied on the computer program without carefully checking the printout. Our analysis indicated that there was an obvious error in their computer program. The professor, not being sophisticated in statistical techniques, had not caught the error, and both he and his computer people were chagrined to find that their program was in error. The data was reanalyzed on another computer and useful information was obtained.

The figures in Table I, therefore, do not reflect adequately the qualitative difference in the data collected for the two years. The strategy which employed had been remarkably successful in upgrading the evaluations provided to the State. The work, however, was a good beginning but one which requires more refinement.

In summary, the problem is largely one in which trained researchers or evaluators make assumptions that people in the field have the same kind of expertise and the same desire for evaluative data that they do. This is not the case. Project directors are interested in implementing an idea. They are much less interested, and frequently threatened, when someone mentions evaluation. They frequently are convinced that evaluation equals spying, and see no need for an evaluation component in their project.

The poor job done by inadequately trained evaluators, many of whom are highly skilled researchers, has created a bad image for us. As an example the training of auditors for the Title VII evaluations has not been nearly as productive as it should. The training consists of two and one half days of concentrated study, assuming a very low base of knowledge of the participants. No follow-up training is provided and many of those certified are overwhelmed with the concentrated training given with no time for thinking through the process and having an opportunity to raise questions. As Dr. Kenneth Hopkins of the Laboratory of Educational Research, University of Colorado, said to me during the first training session in Washington, D.C. "The concept is good, but the tragedy is that the participants' backgrounds are such that they need such simple, basic training." An auditor with that minimal amount of skill will hardly be able to adequately audit a complex project.

To properly use consultants in evaluation then requires:

1. a careful preparation of the consultant in terms of evaluation strategies as well as research strategies
2. a careful preparation of the consultant in human relations skills to overcome the bad

image evaluation has engendered in the past because of poorly trained and inadequately financed evaluators.

3. a careful preparation of the evaluator to insure that he knows when adequate resources are provided to do a good job of evaluation and the guts to turn down those evaluations which do not provide these resources
4. a recognition that re-training and/or training of most people who will be doing evaluations must be done over a longer period of time rather than the "one-shot" two to five day intensive training programs now in vogue. Learning a new skill, to be really assimilated thoroughly, requires some time for practice and incubation. Follow-up activities must be built into any program for training or using consultants, and the time frame should be over a period of weeks and months rather than days.

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