

A great deal of time and money is spent on in-service programmes in the South Pacific region and it is clearly important that the most effective use is made of these opportunities. As in other developing regions, some programmes have an information-delivery format, i.e. a talk or lecture given by an expert such as a person from the tertiary sector or a ministry person. This often results in a lack of engagement of participants, with the speaker inviting only a few random questions from the participants. In this situation, teachers may not feel challenged to think and can *switch off* because they do not have to consider any decisions with respect to the curriculum. Consequently, at the end of the programme, teachers may not feel inclined to implement any new ideas or initiatives when they return to school.

We argue that this style of in-service may be unproductive as it is unlikely to have any real impact on the curriculum.

As in-service programmes are costly, it is worth planning them well. The in-service scenario described above is quite common but with a little planning it can easily be improved. It is also important to acknowledge that teachers should be making some of the decisions about what they teach and how they teach. This is true even when there are syllabus guidelines. It is, therefore, logical that the design of an in-service programme involves teachers making decisions in relation to their students and how they facilitate learning. Ideally, teachers should leave the workshop with a clear picture of something they are going to put into practice in their own classrooms.

Broadly speaking, there are two types of in-service programmes. The first type is generic, relating to broad issues across the curriculum, while the second type is specifically related to subjects.

In-service on Generic Issues

Examples of generic issues are: learning difficulties, using audio-visual aids, using the library, developing good projects, planning assessment, parental involvement and improving student behaviour. The issues are

broadly based and can be considered in the context of all subjects in the curriculum.

In-service on Specific Issues

The specific issues include subject areas such as mathematics, science, English, and social studies. Clearly, within each subject, it is possible to be even more specific, i.e. in science you could look at health, nutrition, safety, scientific method, processes of investigation and audio-visual resources. It is important that the programme has a clear focus.

Some Guidelines for Effective In-service Planning

Kings (1996:129) has summarised some features of a good in-service workshop:

From a teacher's point of view the primary aim of a good workshop should be to improve the learning of their students. However, an equally important secondary aim should be to contribute to the personal development of teachers. To meet these aims a workshop should be appropriately pitched to meet the needs of teachers, be contextually relevant and develop teachers' ideas, skills and horizons.

To fulfill these requirements a workshop should have a preparatory phase: ascertaining teachers' needs and marketing the workshop. The workshop itself should comprise a well-integrated series of activities. In addition there should be a follow-up phase to facilitate the appropriate integration of ideas and skills into classroom practice. The workshop should result in enhancement of teachers' knowledge, skills and abilities.

What follows is a series of ideas and suggestions that may help educators develop some of these features and make informed decisions about the design and implementation of in-service workshops.

1. The Preparatory Phase

Programme Preparation

Thoughtful preparation of the programme essentially underscores its success.

In-service programmes can be considered as part of action learning (Revans 1982; Kember and Kelly 1993), i.e. outlining a curriculum problem, designing ways of solving that problem, implementing and testing these strategies, evaluating the effectiveness of the strategies, drawing conclusions and identifying new strategies. One cycle can lead to another, resulting in an improvement in practice in each case.

We would argue that a needs assessment is a crucial foundation for the development of good in-service programmes. It may not be possible to conduct this in-depth on all occasions, but some attempt should be made to address teachers' concerns and issues relevant to the school, the students, the local environment and the education system as a whole. It should build on teachers' prior knowledge and experiences.

As Graham and Kings (1992) have pointed out, it is important to evaluate teachers' needs against a backdrop of the internal and external environments. The needs of the curriculum dictated by such things as the changing environment, hygiene and health issues may not be felt by participants to be significant and so it may be important to sell these prior to the programme. We believe that general needs may have to be sold to participants before ascertaining their specific needs, i.e. they may not know about some particular issues such as new environmental laws, prevention of disease or changes in syllabus. Once potential participants are aware of the issues they may then be able to highlight their specific concerns.

One approach is to discuss with a group of teachers their perceptions about what they need to know about *environmental issues, cooperative learning, chromatography* or whatever the topic is. Use of a structured discussion involving nominal group techniques can be a very productive way to go about this task.

A further method of determining useful topics and strategies might be to evaluate the

assessment procedures: review how students record practical work, write up projects, and so forth; analysis of student notebooks; and analysis of students' examination scripts.

Ensuring Teacher Control

Over-dependence on outside expertise can result in the development of a narrowly focussed in-service programme unrelated to the teachers' needs. The more control teachers have of the programme and the more they contribute to it, the more effective the in-service programme will be. Essentially, an in-service programme is about innovation, a new theme, a new or better way of learning, or the use of new technology. By having some control over the programme, teachers feel they have some *ownership* of the innovation.

Objectives of the In-service Programme

Once the needs of the participants have been assessed, it should be possible to draw up a series of objectives which attempt to address these. The objectives should also provide the basis for selection of the workshop activities.

Some examples of objectives for different workshops might include:

To enhance the ability of teachers:

- *to identify barriers to students learning English.*
- *to develop higher order multiple-choice items.*
- *to use teaching strategies to help students learn process skills.*
- *to design discussion group strategies that are more productive.*

Marketing the Programme

In the lead-up time, potential participants need to receive information about the programme, enough to allow them to decide how relevant it is and whether it is likely to fulfill at least some of their needs. *It is of little value to give them only the title of the programme.* The participants need to see in advance that the programme has some intrinsic worth, and that they can contribute to it. They also need to see that it will benefit their students' learning.

Prior Involvement of Teachers

As far as possible, the prior involvement of workshop participants should be sought. This could involve ascertaining teachers' particular concerns about the issue, as has already been discussed, or it could involve requesting teachers to bring some materials they are using, or asking teachers to engage in a manageable task, e.g. drafting some materials or questions to share with other participants. On other occasions it may be appropriate to ask participants to read something beforehand. Whatever teachers are asked to do should assist their orientation to the in-service programme, thereby improving the chances of it being a worthwhile experience.

2. Workshop Activities

As far as possible, the activities of the workshop should:

- *be based on information collected from participants,*
- *relate to the prescribed aims and objectives,*
- *involve practical hands-on activities,*
- *include a variety of types of activities.*

There are many ways to finish a workshop, but three important actions are highlighted: receiving feedback from participants, identifying ongoing tasks and setting up support groups.

- a) Get some quick feedback from participants with questions such as:
 - *What are three things you found useful and three things you would like to learn more about?*
 - *What do you intend to do with these ideas in your classroom?*

Note: It is of little consequence asking questions that yield information that cannot be used or asking questions about things that cannot be changed.

- b) Negotiate ongoing tasks with participants.
- c) In addition, where possible, support groups should be established.

Before completing the workshop, it is important to discuss the workshop follow-up phase, and to

develop some support groups. This can apply within a school and/or between schools. The support groups can fulfil a number of functions:

- *giving moral and professional mutual support,*
- *sharing experiences, identifying strengths and ways of improvement,*
- *dealing with special cases - children with learning disabilities,*
- *scrutinising new materials,*
- *sharing resources,*
- *observing classes.*

3. The Follow-up Phase

Usually the in-service programme will have some spin off for classroom activities so it is useful to consider how the workshop will be followed up, whether it should be an extension of the previous workshop with new material, or whether to build on the previous workshop and the work of the support groups. Such a follow-up phase encourages teachers and it shows more concern for teachers than would be the case if the workshop theme were never mentioned again. It also shows genuine belief in the innovation and an understanding of the reality that there are no quick fixes. Such an approach is more likely to engender a higher level of teacher commitment in ensuring the effective implementation of any innovation.

An actual example of in-service workshop planning

The section above has dealt in very general terms with important aspects of designing a successful in-service workshop. The final segment of this article will look at how some of these suggestions were used to design and implement an actual workshop which took place in Kiribati a few years ago. The workshop was a curriculum writing workshop intended to develop teaching resources for the primary Environmental Studies Course in Kiribati.

Needs Assessment

An initial needs assessment in regard to the Environmental Studies Course was conducted by an outside consultant. The consultant visited a number of primary schools in Kiribati and interviewed teachers to obtain their views on the course and how they taught it. The same consultant also interviewed officials from the Ministry of Education and the Curriculum Office.

The needs assessment revealed that many teachers avoided teaching Environmental Studies because at the time they had only a curriculum outline to guide them, and most lacked the resources and in some cases the background knowledge to teach the subject effectively.

Preparation

The information from the needs assessment was used to design a series of writing workshops involving local teachers, in which teachers' guides and pupil books were developed for the course. The teachers were divided into groups and asked to research and bring information on a specific topic for which they would prepare a unit of work. Additional materials were provided by the consultant.

Ensuring Teacher Control

The teachers were given some preliminary instruction on writing the units and provided with a common format to follow which included the following characteristics:

- ❖ objectives
- ❖ background information
- ❖ pupil activities
- ❖ elements of pupil assessment
- ❖ extension activities.

While the teachers followed this prescribed format, it was they who selected the material for inclusion and they who did the actual writing, often drawing on their local knowledge. This gave the teachers a strong sense of ownership, particularly as their work was acknowledged in writing when the new materials were finally published.

Follow-up Activities

As a follow-up, the materials were trialed and evaluated before finally being printed and distributed to all Kiribati Primary schools. Teachers involved in the writing workshop were also involved in this process.

Because of the rather specialised nature of these in-service workshops, which involve curriculum writing, not all of the suggested procedures applied. However, a thorough needs assessment, effective preparation and a high degree of active teacher participation and ownership ensured that workshop outcomes were achieved and a series of resource materials was produced to help improve the delivery of Environmental Studies in Kiribati primary schools.

References

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