Partnership In School-Based Teacher Development
In Kiribati

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Introduction

This article focuses on partnership for school-based teacher development in Kiribati. The article starts off by looking at the need for ongoing teacher development and partnership between the Government and school communities. Next, it examines the constraints of teacher development in the country. Finally, it is argued that the Government should enter into active partnership with teachers in realising the latter’s development needs at the school-level. This is premised on both the economic and human resource development argument that if teachers as human resources are developed at the school level, the benefits would be spread out among more teachers, students and schools, and the country stands to benefit in the end. Most of the materials are taken from a recent study carried out in King George V and Elaine Bernacchi School (KGV/EBS) in Kiribati. However, some of the concerns raised here may be relevant to other countries in Oceania.

The merits of partnership in education between Government, Non-Governmental organisations, higher institutions of learning, schools and the community have been very well articulated and demonstrated in recent times. Partnership is particularly critical in Kiribati and the small island states of Oceania where most schools are managed by Non-Governmental organisations, resources are scarce and clientele demands are high.

Partnership in Staff Development

It is generally accepted that schools no longer exist as “secret gardens”. Stakeholders in education like parents, teachers and other members of the school community have become more aware of their legitimate rights, as well as their roles. This has led to increasing demands for transparency, accountability, responsiveness and efficiency in schools and teachers. Schools exist to serve the needs of the society within which they are located and, by the same token, that society is obligated to ensure that appropriate assistance is afforded to the school to help it achieve its aims and objectives. All these point to the need for closer partnership between the Government, Non-governmental organisations, the school and the community to help achieve its goals.

Teachers have central and crucial roles to perform in the formal education process and particularly in bringing about desirable reforms (Beeby, 1966; Atchoarena, 1993; Fullan, 1993). Because of this, it is considered vital to create factors and conditions which facilitate and enhance staff development. Newton’s (1988:89) definition of the term staff development programme is useful for our purpose. To him, the term means

... a planned process of development which enhances the quality of pupil learning by identifying, clarifying and meeting the individual needs of the staff within the context of the institution as a whole. The programme has three strands relating to the individual, interest groups and the whole school.

He further proposes a professional development programme which is focused on the school “because it moves professional development from being something ‘in addition’, to a part of the life of every teacher and every school” (Hewton, 1989:89). This, he argues, provides a focus for the programme relating to the needs of individual teachers and particular school’s needs. It also provides opportunities for continuity, innovation and shared responsibility and governance. He recognises that teacher development needs to be undertaken systematically.

Staff development consists of the development of teachers in the service both as professionals and as persons. William Rogers (1992:93) puts it more explicitly. To him,

Staff development is about getting the best out of the team that resides at your school. That ‘best’ involves the range of
skills, repertoires, backgrounds, attitudes, beliefs and practices held by that staff.

Professional development, on the other hand, involves

... the process of growth in competence and maturity through which teachers add range, depth and quality to the performance of their professional tasks.

Baba (1998) has argued that accountability and the professional development are important aspects of teachers' professionalism. On the same note, Ingvarson and Chadbourne (1994) have provided two justifications for continual development. Firstly, that the nature of teaching and the subject matter are continually changing. Secondly, that teachers' professional performances are subject to the natural human weaknesses which often culminate in the progressive declining of standards. In Kiribati, serious concerns have been raised about the quality of education (Singh, 1993; Talu, 1993) at various levels. Most of these directly relate to teacher quality. Teachers, the Ministry of Education, Training and Technology (METT) and members of the public in Kiribati have indicated an awareness of the need for teachers to undergo professional development (Teaero, 1997). Furthermore, the Government recognises the crucial role that teachers play in the process of education, but has taken the narrow view of concentrating on overseas training (Tito, 1994:5; Kiribati, 1997) without paying attention to in-country, school-based teacher development programmes.

Teacher Development in Kiribati: Constraints

As outlined above, there is a need for teacher development programmes in Kiribati. However, this has been hindered by several factors. The major constraints are discussed below.

Systematic staff development programmes in Kiribati are largely limited to overseas in-service training. There has long been a tendency to conduct teacher development programmes outside the country, in universities and other overseas institutions. In a country with severely limited resources and only minimal prospects of significant economic growth (Fairbain, 1992), the percentage of teachers who benefit from these programmes is minuscule. Effective overseas training is expensive and would require substantial investment of the country's scarce resources and foreign aid money on a minute percentage of the teacher population. The move towards partnership in in-school staff development initiatives proposed in this paper would, therefore, be a significant shift for Kiribati that may prove to have immense potential in the future.

Individual teachers have been bearing the burden of developing their own professional competencies mainly through courses offered by distance by the University of the South Pacific (USP). However, this is a slow and expensive undertaking for the teachers concerned. They can only enrol in a limited number of courses per semester due to work, family and communal commitments. The payment of course fees is a heavy burden for teachers, whose salaries are relatively low compared with their counterparts elsewhere. Furthermore, heavy demands are invariably made on teachers' earnings from families, village or island groups and religious organisations. The Ministry of Education has recently commenced an initiative in which several people are sponsored to take courses at the local USP Centre. In 1998, about a quarter of these were teachers working at the primary and tertiary levels. It is not clear on what basis they were selected. However, this is one useful initiative in the right direction.

In a study on teacher development conducted at KGV/EBS in Kiribati recently (Teaero, 1997), it was found that:

- teachers have a limited perception of possible staff development strategies, largely equating it with in-service training overseas only;
- there were no Government policies about school-based staff development;
- schools were not in a position to organise school-based staff development programmes because of the lack of competence at the school level and overburdening of teachers with non-professional duties, and
- there was a big demand for Government's systematic assistance for
teachers pursuing professional development undertakings on their own.

It has been stated that "education and human resource development are priorities within the current Government policies" (Kiribati, 1997:31). However, there is no policy that specifically sets out Government's position on the in-service school-based development programmes for teachers. In the absence of such policies, teachers are left without any clear directions and little hope for extensive assistance. These factors have contributed directly to many teachers' decisions to leave teaching, especially those who have been missing out on overseas training.

Talu (1993) has argued that Government has not been doing enough to assist religious organisations in the provision of education. In addition, secondary teachers do not have an organised representative body to collectively articulate their views. Individual teachers are, therefore, left on their own to deal directly with the METT and the Public Service Division which deal with pre-service and in-service training respectively.

Teacher development programmes in Kiribati are funded mainly by overseas aid donors. For example, seven of the twenty-seven Bachelor of Education students at the USP in 1998 are funded by the Kiribati Government while the rest are funded by Australia or New Zealand (USP, 1998). The nature and the place of training are therefore aid-driven, giving little room for local authorities to explore alternative forms and avenues of teacher development programmes that may be more appropriate and relevant for local needs and conditions.

Baba (1988:3) has pointed out that

... the current level of professionalism of the teaching profession in ... the Pacific is a direct result of a number of factors which include ... the limited framework that has been offered to enhance professionalism and the overall lack of support from stakeholders in education to mould greater professionalism among teachers.

This observation is particularly valid for Kiribati where the Government controls the selection to pre-service and in-service training programmes, teacher registration, discipline and employment. The National Conditions of Service, workloads in the school and regulations are not conducive to the development of professionalism in teaching. Lastly, secondary school teachers, head teachers and principals do not have organisations representing and articulating their views. A former Secretary for the METT has argued that he was reluctant to encourage the activities of the Kiribati Union of Teachers (KUT) and the establishment of its counterpart for secondary school teachers due to the pre-occupation of the former with industrial issues at the expense of attention to professional issues (Bauro, 1994). This lack of effective representation has virtually reduced the aspirations of secondary school teachers to negligible levels. The public's lack of effective participation in policy development is also a factor that hinders partnership.

**Partnership: The Way Forward**

Partnership is premised on inter alia mutual assistance, respect, collegiality, dialogue, cooperation and mutual give-and-take. It ought to be guided ultimately by the collective good of students, stakeholders, teachers and the nation. All these need to be based on shared vision and shared responsibility. Parties involved in any partnership venture ought to be in a position to contribute in certain ways to this process.

The Kiribati economy cannot finance substantial increases in the number of teachers on overseas in-service courses, yet there is a desperate need for on-going teacher development. There is, therefore, a need to seriously consider, formulate and implement a systematic way of developing teachers at the school level as well as a systematic improvement of the current locally-tenable scholarships. These demand commitment and partnership from the METT, management authorities, schools, teachers, the USP and other stakeholders. Each interest group has roles to perform which would complement those performed by others. For example, schools can contribute by re-allocating many of these non-professional responsibilities from teachers to other staff. Teachers can assist by identifying their needs. The METT can use the time created for school-based teacher development programmes mounted with the assistance of the USP. In-country and school-based programmes are better able to meet immediate, real needs of teachers. In-country projects mounted by the
USP such as the Diploma in Educational Administration programmes in Solomon Islands, Kiribati in the late 1980s, through to the early 1990s and the Marshall Islands in the mid-1990s clearly demonstrate that such undertakings can be very useful and responsive to local needs. They are also less costly and more teachers stand to benefit from the resources allocated. Thus the USP as a regional institution of higher learning also has a crucial role to play in this partnership venture.

Teachers, schools, management authorities and the Government need to collaborate closely in the process of identifying teachers’ development needs, formulating appropriate policies and strategies, as well as implementing the same. Close, on-going consultation and co-ordination are essential. The Government is well-placed to play a pivotal role in this partnership by assuming a facilitative role. In addition, it could provide funds from within or from outside the country to sponsor in-country teacher development programmes. The Government can go further and provide an institutional and legislative framework within which this partnership can function effectively.

There is a need to re-vitalise the Education Advisory Board and to make it more fully representational. Baba’s (1998) reasoned arguments for the establishment of a Teacher Education Board and Teacher Registration Board for Fiji have merits for equivalent bodies in the Kiribati context, also if teacher autonomy is to be achieved, as teachers can make the best contributions to this partnership. Given the lack of an organised secondary teachers’ association and the pre-occupation of the primary teachers’ KUT with industrial aspects of teaching (Bauro, 1994), the time is also right for the establishment of a Kiribati Secondary Teachers’ Association and a re-orientation of the KUT’s priorities. The METT would have to accept these organisations as partners in the development of education in the country, rather than assuming an adversarial position. In this way, all teachers would be better represented in collegial dialogue at the highest levels.

There is a need for Government’s intervention to assist teachers in a systematic way to develop at the school level. There have been calls for this from Government teachers (Teaero, 1997) and religious organisations (Talu, 1995). This points to the need to establish an institutional and legislative framework to facilitate on-going school-based teacher development programmes to compliment existing ones currently being undertaken overseas.

All stakeholders need to engage as equal partners in collaborative approaches in the identification of needs, goal-setting, policy formulation, implementation and evaluation on school-based teacher development. This should culminate in more efficient investment of scarce resources and policies and strategies that best reflect and meet the genuine needs of teachers and other stakeholders in education.

Conclusion

Partnership is a concept that is premised on sound philosophical foundations. It is needed now more than ever. The Government of Kiribati has already been helping teachers with in-service training overseas, but it was noted in this article that this was benefiting only a small percentage of teachers. Teachers in Kiribati are aware of the need for on-going, school-based teacher development and have been struggling to undertake this formidable task on their own. As argued earlier, the Government needs to assist teachers, focus its attention on school-based teacher development programmes and work in partnership with other providers of formal education, teachers’ organisations, schools, other stakeholders in education and the USP to ensure that teachers are systematically developed at the school level on an on-going basis. There is definitely a lot of merit in partnership in Kiribati between the Government, non-governmental organisations and teachers, especially in a country where resources are limited and where the economy is not able to sustainably support extensive overseas in-service courses.

Bibliography


