

## **In-Service Teacher Education: Some Suggestions for Improvement**

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### **Abstract**

*A new school curriculum was introduced in South Africa in 1994. The successful implementation and sustaining of any new school curriculum depends to a large extent on how readily and rapidly teachers accept and adapt to it. To do this, teachers have to be retrained in both thinking and doing, or in the epistemology and methodology of the new curriculum. This paper therefore examines teacher education, especially in-service teacher education and how it has been practised elsewhere. It is hoped that education policy makers will take note of some of the issues raised in this paper as the one day workshop which has hitherto been the most used strategy of in-service teacher education has been found to be totally inadequate and wanting. Suggestions are also given about what steps should be taken to have an efficient and effective in-service teacher education programme.*

**Keywords:** *Teacher Education; Teacher Training; In-service Teacher Education*

### **Introduction**

Teacher education can be considered in three phases: pre-service, induction and in-service. While the education of professionals like medical doctors, engineers and agronomists, is to a great extent basically similar all over the world, the nature of teacher education, often limited to teacher training, is strongly dependent on the level of economic development of a country and its social context. Furthermore, it is deeply influenced by the local culture and history. This explains why one can find in the contemporary world the full range of institutional teacher-education schemes or programmes that developed throughout the history of humankind, from no specific preparation at all to sophisticated university education (Alexander, 1979).

### **In-Service Teacher Education (INSET)**

The abbreviation INSET is widely used to refer to the in-service education and training of teachers. Two types of definition are in common use: official and functional. The official definition comprises all activities supported by INSET budgets. In practice, this can mislead even the officials who use it, because the budget rarely accounts for the total cost. The teaching may be conducted by teacher educators, inspectors or teachers whose salaries are paid by other budgets. Thus, financial arrangements often reflect the somewhat marginal role allocated to INSET by educational planners and policy makers.

The most widely used functional definition of INSET is the definition developed by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) project. INSET is characterised as:

Those education and training activities engaged in by primary and secondary school teachers and principals,

following their professional knowledge, skills and attitudes in order that they can educate children more effectively (Bolam, 1982:3)

This definition includes activities which are not courses and which are not officially funded, but still requires that INSET is the main intention. However, teachers also learn a great deal from participation in activities such as curriculum development which would not be classified under INSET. Participation in these activities will be accommodated under the heading “staff development”, in other words, that dimension of school life which concerns the professional learning of staff.

Greenland (1983) divides INSET into the following four categories:

- INSET for unqualified teachers (mainly certification courses);
- INSET to upgrade teachers;
- INSET to prepare for new roles, such as principal or teacher educator;
- Curriculum-related INSET (mainly courses linked to planned curriculum change or ad hoc refresher courses).

All the four categories indicated above are applicable to the South African situation. For instance, there are so many unqualified teachers (Walters, 1998) who thus need INSET for certification and upgrading purposes. All teachers also have to be retrained because of the new curriculum (see COTEP, 1996 and Klu, 1997). It must be pointed out, however, that from experience as a former high school teacher and this has also been confirmed by colleagues from the Institute for Curriculum and Learning Development at UNISA, that in South Africa INSET courses are usually held over a short period, e.g. 1 - 3 days. This period is grossly inadequate especially when a new curriculum is involved. With Outcomes-based Education teachers are not only expected to learn new ways of teaching but also new ways of thinking. Policy makers have to bear in mind that ‘it is hard to teach an old dog new tricks’ when planning INSET programmes. Besides the discontinuous nature of such INSET programmes, there is also the issue of improper organisation, hence the non-attendance of many teachers and more importantly the competence of the course presenters is also very questionable (see Klu, 1997).

### **The Identification and Prioritization of Inset Needs**

The prevailing view that INSET planning should be based on assessment of needs raises more questions than it provides answers. Whose needs are to be addressed - those of a particular group of pupils, an individual teacher, a department within a school, the school itself, the district or even the nation? Moreover, who will be making the assessment? One clear finding of research is that, if INSET participants do not recognise a need as having sufficient priority for them, activities aimed at meeting that need would be judged irrelevant. Yet it would be undemocratic if teachers were to be regarded as the sole definers of INSET needs without considering the views of other members of society. This suggests two possible strategies for INSET managers: (a) considerable effort is devoted before or during INSET to convince participants of the importance of certain needs, or (b) the needs assessment process is decentralized so that schools and teachers define their own needs, with some safeguards to ensure that views of other groups are taken into account.

Devolution of the needs assessment process, however, is no guarantee that it will be properly conducted. Logically, to define a need implies: (a) some views of the current situation, and (b) aspirations for or expectations of, a future situation that is different. The quality of the needs assessment will depend on these factors. For example, a person’s view of the current situation will comprise:

- (a) Information about content, conditions, process activities, intentions and outcomes;
- (b) Standards, values and criteria by which these are judged; and
- (c) Frameworks and perspectives which determine how it is interpreted and understood (Eraut, 1989a).

Such a view may be constructed from existing perceptions with little further inquiry or reflection. On the other hand, there may be considerable effort to go beyond first thoughts by collecting new information and becoming more aware of the perspectives and interpretations, and reflecting more on this evidence and underpinning educational values. This process would itself be a process of staff development.

Similarly, thinking about the future must necessarily involve the following:

- (a) Some awareness of alternatives to current policy and practice,
- (b) Some assessment of the feasibility of these options, and
- (c) Some evaluation of the desirability of options and their anticipated outcomes (Eraut, 1989a)

Once again, such thinking is enhanced by INSET, particularly by the kind of intelligence gathering mentioned above. The dangers are that awareness of alternatives will remain rather superficial and that significant changes will be prematurely dismissed as impractical without serious study.

### **Inset for Teacher Development**

Fullan (1987) identifies four factors as crucial for successful staff development:

- (a) redefining staff development as a process of learning,
- (b) the role of leadership at the school level,
- (c) organizational culture at the school level,
- (d) the role of external agencies especially at the local or regional level.

To understand the significance of these factors it is useful to distinguish between three facets of INSET/teacher development:

- (a) its management (that is, decisions about what to do, for what purpose and with what support; the provision of support; and the evaluation of INSET programmes and policies);
- (b) its design and conduct; and
- (c) its on-going interaction with the life of schools and the behaviour and intentions of individual teachers.

All those involved need to have some understanding of each of these factors if the process of professional learning is to be understood and if the purposes of programme are to have a positive rather than negative influence on development. INSET is an integral part of that development. However, rather than regarding effective leadership and a positive organizational culture as preconditions for successful INSET, it is perhaps more constructive to ask how INSET can help to create the necessary leadership and culture. There is a strong argument that, while the role of principal will always be the most important, the function of leadership should be quite widely distributed for a school to be effectively run. Thus, management development programmes should be an important component of INSET planning. In addition, the staff development role is important at every level of management. The person best placed to support a teacher's development is usually the senior teacher in his or her subject or grade-level group. Many schools have also evolved roles such as mentor, professional tutor, appraiser, or INSET co-ordinator whose major concern is teacher development. All these people need training to strengthen their roles.

At a practical level, schools have to create time for INSET and teacher development, while still preserving

continuity of teaching (Hewton and Jolley 1991). In many countries teacher development days are set aside for this purpose, though schools do not always have the expertise to make good use of them (Ekholm 1988). However, time is still needed for functional groups to meet in schools and teachers to attend courses and meetings outside school. The former can be time tabled and teachers can be replaced when away; both require careful advance planning by a capable and committed principal.

### **Conditions for Effective Implementation of Inset**

As indicated already, INSET is geared to update and improve the knowledge, skills and attitudes of teachers and in so doing contribute to the improvement of education. Thus INSET should promote and develop a positive culture of on-going, self-motivated professional development amongst the body of teachers (Gray 1991). To achieve this, the four basic questions which need to be addressed are: what, how, when and where?

What? refers not only to subject content and methodology, but also to level. With the vast majority of South African teachers being under trained and under qualified, one might assume that further content is required, but to what level? Alternatively, another approach would place emphasis on the school curriculum and how to deliver it more effectively. Van Maarseveen (1995) provides a useful summary of current thinking on effective INSET which helps answer the questions how and where:

- the one day-workshop away from school is totally inadequate and ineffective;
- there is an increasing trend towards school-based INSET;
- there is now general agreement with the model proposed by Joyce and Showers (1988) that theory, demonstration, practice, feedback and coaching are essential elements in any INSET course. Despite this, they too often have the traditional “chalk and talk” lecture mode of delivery which is known to be ineffective.
- even the best designed INSET will fail unless the teachers, their departments and the school administrations are receptive to the initiative - indeed the importance of teachers in designing their own programmes is stressed (Kahn, 1993);
- the trend is away from individual teacher in-service to departmental or even whole school development - the rationale here is that the whole work environment itself needs developing as well as the individuals themselves;
- regular ‘modest’ in-service activities over a number of years - a cycle of workshops - may achieve more than intense and shorter programmes (progressive innovation - Verspoor, 1987). This is in line with the ‘life-long learning’ concept which South Africa’s new school curriculum is all about - our education does not stop at say, degree level but continues throughout life with in-service or re-training courses.

Inevitably, the how question also relates to numbers and the logistics of reaching the many teachers in South Africa. Since experienced INSET trainers are in short supply, a cascade model where, for instance, trainers would teach school advisers who then carry out the in-service activities, is often the only solution. Such an approach has been tried and adopted in Namibia and Zimbabwe (Engels and Ncube, 1995).

When? the last question should be answered “as soon as possible, but not too soon”. - despite political pressures, since a poorly planned programme achieves nothing and may alienate the teaching force. The best time most teacher trainers agree is when a new curriculum is introduced and teachers are seeking ways of implementing this.

### **Conclusion**

This paper has attempted to look at INSET in South Africa and also how it is practised elsewhere. It is clear that teachers, like all other professionals, need regular in-service training to keep them abreast with developments within the field. The need for INSET becomes even more pressing when a new school curriculum is introduced as is the situation in South Africa. However, the one day workshop which in most instances is the preferred method of delivering INSET programmes has proved to be not only inadequate but also counterproductive. Therefore, taking other issues raised in this paper and also discussed elsewhere into account, the following are suggested:

- A needs analysis be carried out and input from teachers have to be taken into consideration before embarking on any INSET activity,
- INSET programmes should be well planned, organised and facilitated,
- Certificates and other incentives such as salary notches should be used as inducements for teachers to attend wholeheartedly,
- Adequate time should be allocated for INSET activities and it must be continuous,
- There must be mechanisms in place to evaluate all INSET activities regularly and changes made promptly, and
- Courses presenters should be very knowledgeable in their subject areas and they should also possess credible presentation skills

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