

HOW CAN IN-SERVICE TEACHER EDUCATION BE MADE EFFECTIVE?

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Clear Objectives as a Feature of Effective In-Service Teacher Education

In-service teacher education is intended to change the behaviour of practising school teachers in desirable ways. The first logical requirement in attempting an answer to the question "How can it be made effective?" is therefore to reach a definition of the changes looked for among teachers. This is essentially the same question as "What makes a good teacher?" and to that question there is, of course, no simple answer.

Research into teacher-effectiveness is voluminous. It has been going on for a long time, and is notoriously inconclusive and contradictory in its findings. But schooling, teaching, teacher training and in-service education of teachers will not wait until research produces definite answers to these difficult questions. Our communities demand action and we must do the best we can. I propose to make some suggestions in this paper about what seems to me worth considering in setting up systems of in-service teacher education. I hope this will provide some basis for discussion and perhaps help the workshop to formulate proposals for development.

Effective in-service teacher education is that which helps teachers to be more effective in their schools and classrooms. It will give them what is in the curriculum. If that curriculum leads to examinations the good, effective teacher will be able to get his pupils to pass them. If it leads to "better citizens" or "patriotic humanists" or "critical democrats" or "socially-sensitive community developers who work well on village farms" - the good teacher will be able to help his pupils to achieve such ends. Effective in-service teacher education will help teachers to do these things. It will, therefore, be concerned with understanding broad curriculum objectives as well as with techniques for achieving them.

Recent years have seen a forbidding quantity and variety of new approaches to school curricula. Many of the publications are expressed in difficult language which sometimes descends to impenetrable jargon. Simple terms are often used with a bewildering variety of meanings. "Basic Education" is a good example of this. In-service teacher education programmes are obviously called for to transmit to teachers those parts of these publications which are thought to be worth understanding. If a school system has objectives in curriculum reform expressed in language which teachers cannot understand, then either they must be helped to understand it or the statements must be translated into simpler terms. This is one way in which the "authorities" may gain from the training provided for the teachers. These matters are all isolated pedagogical issues.

Those who provide in-service teacher education must try to take account of this complex context. The approaches they come up with will almost certainly not be universally applicable or even "regionally". Perhaps not even nationally. National objectives for education can be expected to have some coherence - especially in a country trying to build a sense of nationhood -

but even in one nation, account must be taken of social, ethnic and neighbourhood groupings within the nation. New approaches to schooling are very likely to seek to change the existing structure of opportunities. A laudable and increasingly popular concern of planners is the increase of "equity". Schemes to achieve this will certainly disturb people - even the people they are designed to help. It is clear that such plans should be explained as fully as possible. Teachers will have the task of implementing such plans and in-service teacher education programmes are an important avenue for expounding them.

Motivation as a Feature of Effective In-Service Teacher Education

Teachers are people. They are just as much individuals as the pupils on whom they have for long been exhorted to centre their attention. People will not change their behaviour simply because they are told to do so. In-service teacher education must try to take account of what seems to motivate the teachers to change.

One very important motivator we are all aware of is the teacher's own career aspirations. In-service teacher education need not always lead to promotion but pursuit of certificates, diplomas and degrees is not necessarily inimical to improvement of the quality of education - as is sometimes quite unrealistically suggested. If improved salaries and status do in fact go with the acquisition of such qualifications, it is at least unrealistic (if not silly and hypocritical) to expect teachers to be above such considerations.

In deciding the kind of in-service teacher education that teachers will accept, experience in England in recent years points clearly to the importance of consultation. Teachers respond better to in-service teacher education which takes account of their own expressed wishes, of their own assessment of their own daily problems in the classroom and of their evaluations of the courses of training that are provided for them. It is, of course, questionable whether very young, poorly educated and untrained teachers in service are able to decide what training they need. But it is part of the important process of building confidence, independence and self-respect to consult people even at the lower end of the scale of professional qualifications. It has been wisely noted that such teachers - unqualified though they are - often give service as good as, or better than that given by those who hold the best formal qualifications. Their views must be respected in arranging in-service programmes. These considerations suggest that effective in-service teacher education will be individualized, local, relevant and above all practical.

From their in-service training, teachers should get materials, ideas, methods and techniques which will help them to do their job in the classroom better. And this must take account of their own perceptions of the job they have to do. There may well be some tension between what teachers themselves want and what their employers or the government think they need. Such a case calls for a lot of discussion and negotiation and these may themselves be crucial elements in an effective in-service teacher education programme. If teachers are not adequately informed and properly persuaded concerning the nature of the training provided for them it seems obvious they will not benefit from it as they should.

How this process of negotiation is conducted will be largely determined by the attitudes held towards each other by the various parties involved. If the officers of an employing authority which provides in-service teacher education look upon teachers generally as ignorant, idle and irresponsible,

they may well see their function in terms of directing, watching, inspecting, rewarding and punishing the teachers in their charge. On the other hand, if the teachers are generally thought to be willing, responsible, conscientious and independent, then the authorities providing the training are likely to see their own functions more in terms of assisting, supporting, encouraging and - most importantly - of collaborating and participating.

The Content and Modes of Effective In-service Teacher Education

In-service teacher education should be practical. This does not mean that there is no room at all for the study of theoretical aspects of education. It is worthwhile for practitioners of any trade or vocation to consider as deeply as possible the philosophical, psychological, sociological and other aspects of their work. For example, without some attempt to grapple with the meaning of political or ideological statements of educational purposes it is unlikely that teachers will understand their implications for their practice of teaching. But experience and research suggest that such theoretical study tends to be more highly valued by professionals after they had had some practical experience and perhaps when they are older rather than younger.

An effective system of in-service teacher education will exploit many different modes: various institutions, various types of staff, various kinds of programme - workshops, seminars, conferences and even on occasion lectures. But the most important agents will often be the teachers themselves. They can both plan and conduct their own training activities. Hierarchy is a fact, however, and the appropriate stimulus and encouragement for teacher-directed activity in this field will almost certainly have to come from the top. In a centralized system - the commonest kind - the people at the centre (which is also the "top"!) have the power and responsibility to provide this kind of stimulus. The most important locations for in-service training are teachers' own schools. Not only the ones the trainees themselves are working in but also those of their colleagues.

Since there is no single "correct" solution to the problems that in-service teacher education should seek to solve, the more varied the approaches that teachers can observe, study and discuss the better. Teachers are isolated in their daily work - even when they share the same classroom at the same time! It is a common experience for teachers in all countries to find themselves alone with 40-odd pupils for the whole of their career, apart from inspections, troops of visitors and the stream of petty interruptions to their teaching that plague most of them. Teachers do not often see other teachers at work with opportunity to discuss techniques and strategies in order to try and discover why some succeed and others don't.

In-service teacher education should provide for such experiences. Like many other aspects of this work this one is a sensitive matter. Perhaps only the most confident extroverts can be relied upon to welcome such observation though it is commonplace for surgeons, actors and hairdressers. Most teachers feel vulnerable under observation and appropriate allowances must be made for their anxieties. Even experienced and qualified teachers are often reluctant to admit student teachers to their classrooms to see how they teach. Tutors in pre-service colleges are well aware of the need to handle the teaching-practice situation with tact and courtesy. Such care is even more necessary when persuading teachers to allow their colleagues to see them at work. And especially so when the purpose of the observation is to discover how that way of working might be improved. It can however be a fruitful experience and should figure in training schemes. It is the basis of the "workshop" approach which has rightly become popular in recent years. In a

workshop teachers, trainers, advisers, administrators and head teachers can come together to discuss, prepare and try out materials that they will actually use in their own classes as soon as possible.

I have mentioned the need for discussion. It seems to me that talk - exchange of words - many words - with a concomitant struggle to understand each others' meanings deserves an important place at all stages of the process of in-service education. All this talk takes time. While it must not be allowed to drag on until people are bored with "mere chat", it must not be so rushed that they are left feeling they have not had enough chance to put their own points of view or to question others. The conduct of such extended discussion demands skills. Skill in this will be especially necessary if, for example, the participants hold different ranks in the hierarchy or if local custom prohibits comment by young men in the presence of their elders or by women in the presence of men. The encouragement of frank and courteous expression of honest opinions an important element of effective in-service teacher education.

Co-operation as a Feature of Effective In-service Teacher Education

These considerations indicate the importance of involving many agencies other than just the teachers in the process of in-service education. By "involving" is meant bringing together teachers, head-teachers, supervisors, inspectors, administrators and trainers of all sorts in meetings at the planning stage, to design courses, to decide methods of evaluation and so forth. In particular, universities, colleges and ministries must be more closely involved together than is usually the case. Perhaps one should add also that the school pupils themselves - especially if they are adults - might reasonably claim to have a point of view worth considering how their teachers should be prepared for the task of teaching them.

The agencies that can provide training are many and varied. They have been fully listed and their functions described at previous conferences and workshops in this series and in publications of the Commonwealth Secretariat. I shall comment on one or two of them.

The universities are one important source despite the severe criticisms made of their supposed baleful influence on such a "practical" sphere of activity as teacher-training. They remain the chief agency for affording opportunities for deep study and reflection on the theory of education. Here above all is the place for the relatively leisured consideration of the biggest and broadest issues of this sort. At least some teachers should have the chance to attend universities to pursue in depth such issues as values, theories of learning, politics, culture and ideology which were mentioned earlier as defining the complex context of education.

I appreciate, of course, that such opportunities make heavy demands on teaching staff and especially so when there is an acute shortage of those with the highest academic qualifications. To urge this kind of training also smacks perhaps dangerously of elitism. The system established for the release of teachers is one of the most difficult aspects of providing in-service teacher education, and not least difficult is its "political" implications with the serious risk of being condemned as unfair - especially by those who are worthy candidates but who do not get the coveted opportunities the system offers. I can only hope that the "right" people are chosen for these courses of study but I am sure that some should be. And, of course, even at a university a course of study is not necessarily simply theoretical! The line between theory and practice is often difficult to draw.

Follow-up as a Feature of Effective In-Service Teacher Education

This brings us to the important matter of follow-up. In-service teacher education should go on for ever! In the past twenty years considerable money has been spent by at least one aid donor in transporting "experts" to other countries to conduct three or four-week seminars or summer schools for teachers. These have been worthwhile ventures so far as they went. But a serious weakness in many of them was the lack of a programme of supervision and further consultation afterwards. Ideas can very valuably be disseminated at short courses and these seminars have always afforded valuable opportunities for teachers to get together informally for discussion which they too rarely have the opportunity for at home. But courses need to be followed up in the participants' schools and classrooms. Teachers need to have the chance to meet again to talk over the implementation of the ideas gathered from the course or seminar.

Evaluation as a Feature of Effective In-service Teacher Education

How can we know if our in-service teacher education is worthwhile? Fundamentally of course this is a question of faith in the human values one seeks to pursue. But we are obliged to consider the cash-benefit relationship, too. Even in these terms it is a difficult and uncertain matter. Obviously these programmes must be designed and conducted with a careful eye on money. Resources are scarce and must be used as economically as possible. In a country where 40% of the primary school children have to sit on the floor because of lack of school furniture it is wrong - perhaps wicked - to spend carelessly on a programme of teacher-training. Only crude measures are available to assess the cost-benefit of, for instance a "sandwich" course of teacher-training as compared with a conventional, continuous two-year course. Such measures must be used, of course, with due regard to their limitations and we need administrators to guide us in the matter. (I write as a teacher.)

But other ways of "evaluating" are available to us to help us try and improve, continue or abandon our in-service teachers' courses. In the first place we must ask the teachers themselves what they think of them. The trainers must also give their opinions, and follow-up visits will also help to give some idea of how the schemes are going. Ultimately the test of this work is in the learning that children achieve as a result of the courses, seminars, etc. Here, too, judgements will usually be matters of faith rather than fact. What actually leads to a particular bit of learning is usually impossible to identify for sure. But attempts ought to be made to discover whether learning by children is occurring "better" after an in-service training experience than it seemed to be before. It would be too much to claim that a mere feeling of enthusiasm among the teachers was sufficient testimony to the value of a course, but it is surely an important feature. Related to this may be a feeling that all the participants were sharing in a worthwhile effort. This too may be a good sign.

Whatever form of evaluation is used it must be acceptable to those involved. Evaluation is another threatening experience. In some countries the mere question of access to in-service teacher education may provoke fears in this connection - training may not even be made available to 25% of the teachers in service because they are judged to be unlikely to benefit from it. If teachers are allowed to have in-service training, then it must be made clear to them what the consequences of evaluation will be. Is it for the purpose of up-grading - and therefore more salary? Or is it, as I have implied in much that I have written here, for the purpose of helping teachers to teach better?

These considerations might well be seen to be in conflict. Teachers might be prepared to be more honest and open in confessing their problems - those that might be improved by an in-service training course - if there was no risk to chances of promotion in doing so. Modes of evaluation carry the same potential dangers and they therefore need to be talked through as fully as possible before they are used.

In-service teacher education is perhaps as much a matter of building confidence as it is of inculcating new pedagogical skills.

Organization as a Feature of Effective In-service Teacher Education

Finally, I wish to emphasise a relatively mundane matter: in-service teacher education must be properly organized. Participants must be clearly informed of such details as where and when they are to attend, and meetings should occur at the times and places arranged. If a course is residential and at some distance from the teachers' homes it is important that proper arrangements for sleeping and feeding are made. There is obviously nothing wrong with teachers and others being expected to fend for themselves in such matters - so long as they know this is expected of them. Such basic matters of administration are very important to the success of training schemes. And they are not so simple and trivial as they might seem to people who have plenty of experience of organizing. Efficient administration is an important part of any teacher's skill and I think it is likely that a good example may be given by the way in-service teacher education is organized which may exert a good influence on the teachers who observe it.

Even the best organized occasions can have their failings, of course! Teachers need to be flexible in their response to such things. As I write I have heard of a well-prepared course involving a variety of expatriate and other expensive resources. They have all spent weeks conscientiously preparing a three-week course for secondary school teachers. The day they assembled for the course they learned that their students would be primary school teachers and that the course would end early because of parliamentary elections. We cannot always avoid such calamities: as I said at the beginning, we must do what we can. There is plenty that we can do and no shortage of ideas about how to do it.