

TEACHERS' SUPPORT SERVICES

The needs of
lifelong
education for
teachers

The courses and short term attachments that are able to meet the specific objectives of in-service teacher training are not well suited to the continuous process of renewal that is implicit in lifelong education. For this, additional resources are required, so that the teacher can be supplied with:

- (a) Intellectual nourishment and stimulation.
- (b) Practical and material support for his day to day teaching.

Long established resources cater for some aspects of these needs and it is a matter of encouraging teachers to make the fullest use of them. For other aspects, the resources are still under development and teachers have an opportunity of influencing and shaping them.

Intellectual
needs

Teachers are accused, sometimes justifiably, of not reading educational research and not keeping in touch with trends through educational publications. The problem is understandable in that teaching can be an absorbing occupation in itself and completely satisfying. Nevertheless, a valuable dimension in teaching is lost by those who choose to ignore the literature.

Educational
publications

Textbooks are for study and do not come into the category of resources for lifelong education considered here. Teachers' journals and educational research publications, on the other hand, provide the kind of news and information of which each teacher should be aware if he is to make the claim to be professional. Such publications can help to stimulate new ideas

and bring about positive change in the way the teacher does his work. They can also encourage him to reflect upon what he is trying to do, so leading to that rewarding experience of inspiration in which new ideas are born and new experiments attempted. Teachers should therefore discipline themselves to the inclusion of such resources in their intellectual diet.

Correspondence education

The economics of education is such that governments can afford only a very small proportion of their teachers to be involved in courses of in-service training at any one time if that training should take them out of the classroom and make their replacement necessary. But they look more favourably on systems such as correspondence education that enable teachers to further their education while remaining on the job.

Correspondence courses, aimed simply at the intellectual enrichment of teachers do not at present exist. As yet, all courses are designed to help teachers pass specific examinations in the furtherance of their careers. But the growing number of institutions which offer correspondence courses and the increasing variety of subjects covered by these courses, make correspondence education a resource that the teacher should not ignore. It offers a means of advancing his knowledge, deepening his understanding and broadening his interests; and the Commonwealth Secretariat has brought out a publication * giving details of correspondence institutions and the courses they offer in order to provide precise information to people in all walks of life who want to further their education by correspondence.

* Correspondence Institutions in the Commonwealth 1976
Commonwealth Secretariat

Educational broadcasting

Broadcasting organizations in developing countries regard education as a major element in their total schedule of programmes. Broadcasts to schools and teachers' colleges represent only a part of this service and so teachers can derive benefit from the many other programmes that carry information about educational developments or which discuss educational issues.

Today, teachers in a number of countries are being invited to share in programme production so that matters that really concern the profession can be tackled in ways that are relevant to them. Also, outside broadcasting performed in schools together with phone-in techniques and such like, are offering teachers the opportunity to share constructively in their own continuing education.

New dimensions of communication have been demonstrated in the Pacific region by the use of the artificial satellite PEACESAT. This has been used by educationists and others in the island communities to converse with each other on professional matters and to hold radio conferences. The full potential of educational broadcasting in all its varied aspects is yet to be fully grasped by teachers.

Practical and material support

Teachers often complain of the lack in their schools of adequate resources for learning and teaching, and how this lack hinders lesson preparation and innovation. The cost of providing such resources, at least in the case of primary schools in developing countries, has been prohibitive. Consequently, in the normal course of events, teachers have been denied any share in devising and producing teaching materials other than those which they could make by hand from local materials.

As a counter to this problem, countries have been taking up the idea of resource centres and media production units. For example, the Tivoli resource centre in Grenada was

developed as part of the Caribbean Mathematics Projects to help with the production of teaching materials, today offers teachers the services of a small staff of skilled personnel and a certain amount of technical equipment such as typewriters, photocopier, offset litho printing machine, collator, sticher, and guillotine for producing materials which teachers or their classes have devised; and it does so at cost price.

In Fiji, a rather different support service for teachers is provided by a Ministry of Education textbook production unit at Nasinu Teachers College. This unit works closely with the country's curriculum unit where its staff of forty five curriculum writers double as school advisers to devise and implement new curricula in the schools. A rather similar relationship exists between the Jomo Kenyatta Foundation and the Kenya Institute of Education where the latter acts as the developer and distributor of new curricula while the former provides all the technical resources for printing and publishing.

Resource centres at institutional level, are essentially multi-media lending libraries with low priority given to production. At regional and national levels, the priorities are reversed because of communication difficulties so that in place of lending, greater emphasis is paid to production.

Teachers' centres

In recent years the rapid development of Teachers' Centres * in Britain has attracted widespread interest, not least in a number of developing countries. Initially these Centres were established to provide in-service and study facilities for teachers involved in new

* Teachers' Centres

Edited by R.E. Thornbury, Darton,
Longman and Todd, 1973.

curriculum work, particularly in mathematics. In more recent years they have widened the range of their activities and facilities considerably and provide not only a variety of in-service courses to meet local needs, but also

- cater for teachers' curriculum study groups (for the production of materials for use in local schools);
- provide a library service, usually of a reference nature;
- have a range of educational equipment and apparatus (including films and tapes) for demonstration, practice and often loan to schools;
- provide workshop facilities (wood, metal, clay etc.) for teachers;
- act as a meeting place and social centre for teachers with a common room and limited catering facilities.

The variety of teachers' centre

Teachers' Centres vary in size, facilities and function. Some are large, with lavish accommodation. Others are merely a room or two within some institution. Some offer first class photographic, recording and reprographic facilities and a good range of basic materials from which teachers can produce their own teaching aids. Some also have printing equipment that rivals that of commercial firms. At the other end of the scale, there are teachers' centres that can boast little but a friendly and willing part-time warden.

In areas with a high density of schools, there has been a tendency for teachers' centres to specialize in particular fields of education. Some have become Mathematics Centres, others Social Studies Centres, and so forth. But, where they have to serve an extensive geographical area, they have generally tended to be comprehensive in the service they offer.

The permanent staff of a teachers' centre

The staffing and management of a teachers' centre is important if it is to function effectively. Usually a Warden is put in charge of the Centre and he is given secretarial and possibly technician help to assist in running it. The Warden is generally an experienced teacher with good organizing ability and a pleasant welcoming manner, for public relations play an important part in his job. He must also be a person who understands the need for and the techniques of curriculum development. Additional staff members consisting of experienced teachers, may be seconded for limited periods to help build up resource materials and carry out in-service training, but every effort is made to keep the permanent staff as small as possible so that the programme can be kept flexible.

The management committee of a teachers' centre

The management committee usually consists of a representative of the Ministry of Education or Local Education Authority, depending on which of these is responsible for the Centre, together with representatives of local primary and secondary schools, teachers colleges and any Institute of Education that may be in the area. This committee plans the programme of courses and other activities held at the Centre. The school teachers' representatives ensure that the programme responds to local teachers' needs while the higher institutional representatives are able, through their knowledge of experts, to suggest suitable people to lead the activities.

The programme of a teachers' centre

The pattern of the programme that emerges from such a committee will naturally vary, but the options are not unlimited, and so there are usually elements of the following:

- (a) Lectures and very short seminars held after school.
- (b) Conferences lasting a whole day or even a weekend.

- (c) Workshops covering a series of after school sessions either on successive days or on the same week-day for several weeks.
- (d) Exhibitions of new books, teaching materials and technical equipment.
- (e) Exhibitions of children's work in local schools to illustrate the implementation of new curricula.
- (f) Exhibitions or demonstrations of local teachers' bright ideas and innovations to stimulate and inspire other teachers.

In addition, the Teachers' Centre will provide teachers with information on current events likely to be of interest and relevance to them.

Teachers' centres and communication

Maintenance of effective communication links between teachers and the Centre are vital. This is only partly achieved by the teacher representatives on the management committee. Better links result if a teacher in each local school is appointed as the Teachers' Centre representative. This teacher can keep the Warden informed of the wishes and reactions of his colleagues with regard to the Centre's programme and, at the same time, keep his school informed of its current activities. In addition, however, most Centres' have found it useful to publish a regular newsletter giving information about the programme, lists of recent acquisitions of books, materials or equipment, and any educational news of local interest.

The location of a teachers' centre

The whole concept of a Teachers' Centre is based on the necessity for its being a place to which the teachers it serves have easy access. Consequently great care has to be given to the choice of location. As a rough guide, no school should be said to be served by the Centre if the form of transport normally used

by teachers involves more than two hours travel to get there.

Alternative
forms of
teachers'
centre

If no site fulfills this requirement of access, it is best to think of alternatives such as motorized mobile units containing film projection and exhibition materials together with some of the technical equipment that a Teachers' Centre would normally possess. Units of this kind already exist and are generally staffed by crews of two or three trained personnel who travel from place to place within the area served and "camp" at school sites. Teachers are invited to make intensive use of a unit while it is with them. Another alternative is to make temporary Teachers' Centres by providing and equipping a room or two in a school for a term or so at a time. Such centres can achieve greater results because of the longer time they are open to teachers, but it is difficult to find staff willing to keep up the nomadic life imposed by either these or the mobile units.