

METHODS OF WORK

The need for teaching methods similar to those the candidates will use

It is a commonplace that young teachers, when in doubt, tend to revert to the methods which they themselves experienced as pupils and students. For this reason, careful thought needs to be given to the methods of teaching and learning to be employed on in-service courses. No course concerned to encourage a more active, enquiry-based, approach to learning is likely to be effective if it is conducted very largely through a series of formal lectures.

Most in-service courses aim at bringing about some change in what the teacher does and how he does it. For this to happen, teachers need not only to know about the suggested new materials or approaches, but also to have the experience of seeing and using them in such a way that they will feel a personal commitment to trying them in their own school situation in face of the inevitable difficulties.

Characteristics of suitable methods for in-service training

What then, can be said about the most suitable methods of work to be employed over a widening range of types and levels of in-service training?

Perhaps the following main points might be made:

Varied

1. The methods used should be varied. This variety should be evident not only in the course as a whole but in the daily sessions. This hardly needs arguing. A week's course consisting of a daily morning round of four lectures followed by an afternoon session devoted to a series of routine exercises is not very likely to provide the desired stimulus to fresh thinking and improved performance.

Related to the nature and purpose of each course

2. The methods should be suited to the nature and purpose of the course. The short environmental studies course for primary school teachers referred to at the end of the section on Needs and Priorities in In-service Training should obviously take a very practical and professional form, and might well include:

- (a) Introductory discussion with the whole group on the new school syllabus and the purpose and plan of the course.
- (b) Planning the project to be undertaken, including map study and discussion of techniques and resources.
- (c) Small group investigations in the local environment.
- (d) Recording findings in a variety of forms - in writing, diagrams, graphs, maps, photographs, tape recordings etc.
- (e) Display and presentation of work done to the whole group with discussion of difficulties encountered and those likely to be encountered in the primary school.
- (f) Individual, or small group, preparation of schemes of work for use in teachers' own schools.

In such a situation, the methods chosen would thus hopefully provide the teachers with both an experience of, and preparation for, an environmental studies project in their own school areas.

In contrast, a long-term upgrading programme which is concerned to improve both the personal education as well as the professional competence of those involved, is likely to make use of a very wide range of methods including those of a more formal kind.

Related to the level, experience and needs of the participants

3. The methods used should also be suited to the teachers taking part in the course. They should take account of their education, whatever professional training they may have received and their teaching experience; also to the circumstances in which they carry out their work in the schools.

A project like the Uganda Grade 1 upgrading course described in Case Study 5 found it necessary, for example, to concentrate effort in its first year of operation almost entirely on improving the teachers' own English. Consequently, and because of the particular needs of this group of teachers, much time and attention was given to practise in correct spoken English.

Courses in modern mathematics for teachers have to take account of the fact that almost all those concerned have themselves been taught through a very traditional approach to the subject. The same is true in the case of courses aimed at introducing teachers to social studies through an integrated approach. In both cases the situation demands methods which will give teachers themselves a first-hand and vivid experience of the new approach.

The more active, enquiry based, methods used on in-service courses may, however, run into the difficulty that the teachers' pre-service professional training was of a very formal kind; one in which little was done to develop the student's personal study skills, with the result that their conception of education as something to be "received" was re-inforced rather than the concept of it as something to be developed by a process of personal enquiry. Thus the teacher's whole academic and professional background may be such as to make a more modern, student-centred, approach on in-service courses not at all easy of achievement, at least at first.

Related to the working conditions of the participants

It must also be the case that the actual conditions in which teachers often work in their schools are constraints which cannot be ignored. The pattern of school organization and authority may be such that it will be very difficult for one teacher, however keen and able, emerging from an in-service programme, to put his ideas into practice. This supports the argument for priority for in-service work to be with headteachers or indeed with whole school staffs as suggested in Case Study 1. The physical facilities of the schools such as furniture, equipment, teaching and learning materials and the size of the classes teachers have to manage, must be very much in the minds of in-service staff when planning their courses. How much individual attention or group work is possible with classes of over 50 which are a far from uncommon experience in the primary schools of many countries? Can the preparation, perhaps on a course, of sets of graded work-cards in mathematics, science or language help the teacher in such a situation?

Workshop type courses

4. The methods used should aim at maximum participation by the teachers themselves. This is implicit in much that has been suggested already and is in line with accepted principles of learning at any level. It is even more to the point in the case of serving teachers as they often have as much to give as to receive in an in-service situation. The practical experience, even of the untrained teacher, is something to be drawn on and made maximum use of at every opportunity. Ideally the approach should be a "problem-centred" * rather than a "solution-centred" one in which it is assumed that the tutor has all the answers and it only remains for the teachers to learn, accept and apply.

* Eraut, M.

In-Service Education for Innovation.
National Council for Educational
Technology, 1972.

Dr Beeby warned of the danger of this latter approach when he wrote, "the average teacher has a very great capacity for going on doing the same thing under a different name". Case Study 3, which describes the Caribbean Mathematics Project was one in which "teacher development" and curriculum development were approached as but two sides of the same coin and it illustrates very well how productive and educative a "problem-centred" or "workshop" type approach can be.

Appropriate training activities

The task of the in-service staff, then, is to select and devise methods of work appropriate to the aims and circumstances of their course or project. The following list, by no means exhaustive, may be helpful:

Formal lectures

Research suggests that they have very limited value in the learning process; perhaps their best use is as an introductory stimulus or concluding summing-up.

Lecture-discussions

Because of their greater informality and greater opportunity for questions and comments by participants, these are superior to lectures.

Discussion groups

These are best if the groups are composed of six to twelve participants and are used to discuss specific questions raised in the course.

Study/work groups

These carry out specific tasks such as planning a project, making work cards, designing an experiment, planning an exhibition, or producing a play and offer collaborative involvement for all participants.

Individual work

This might include demonstrations by staff, practice by teachers, (including micro-teaching), correspondence assignments, researching from reference books and materials, craft work, or child study.

Apart from formal lectures these approaches are flexible in that they can be used for a variety of purposes, in and out of class, and allow for the maximum of participation by those concerned. In all cases the use of suitable audio-visual aids to learning and teaching should be standard practice and wherever possible teachers should be involved in preparing and using such aids, especially those relevant to their own classroom work. It may often be an important course objective that teachers should return to their schools with a package of materials which they themselves have prepared and which they plan to use with their pupils.

The need
for services
and resource
materials

Methods of work requiring teachers to be active in practical tasks need services which must be carefully planned well in advance to allow time for arrangements to be made. Where course tutors are brought together from their different places of normal duty, it is helpful to have an "on-the-spot" course organizer, often a member of the staff of a Teachers' College where this is the location for a course. He can co-ordinate the requirements of the tutors, order materials, and be responsible during the course for their issue and for all the regular services needed such as accommodation, food, transport and welfare. An efficient course organizer, preferably with no teaching duties, can be a great help and support to the tutors and indeed contribute considerably to the success of the course.

A college, or in-service centre, has the advantage of a library which can usually be made available for teachers' use, as can craft rooms

and equipment of different kinds. Materials, however, such as paper, card, paint, wood, clay, fabrics and so on, have to be assembled in sufficient quantities and paid for from course funds. In some cases, teachers may be required to bring certain materials with them, or alternatively, schools may be charged for the materials teachers use and take back with them for use.

A short course should be a busy one. When motivation is good, teachers will often be found working away in their spare time to make sure they get the most out of it. Nevertheless, there should be time set aside for recreation, arranged by the teachers themselves and using such facilities as the course centre can offer. Where possible also, one or two educational visits to local places of interest may be well worthwhile, particularly where teachers come from widely scattered and often remote rural areas. Here again is an activity that the course organizer can plan and arrange in advance in consultation with any people in the locality who may be concerned.