

2. THE MONTSERRAT TEACHER VACATION COURSE IN MATHEMATICS, 1973

Background

The 1973 Montserrat Teacher Vacation Course in Mathematics was organized on a model developed using the planning and execution of three similar courses for teachers in Grenada and Carriacou. The course model was based on the following assumptions:

- (a) that in-service training of teachers is an ongoing process.
- (b) that the nature of such courses should reflect a fusion of relevant content and methodology.
- (c) that specific courses should recognise specific needs of the participants, both as a group and as individuals.
- (d) that in-service courses acknowledge their limitations, and focus attention on the implementation in the classroom of the ideas and suggestions passed on to participants.

Aims

The course aimed at providing training for a group of teachers responsible for junior classes of all-age primary schools, in the teaching of mathematics.

The specific objectives were:

- (a) to discuss the main features of "New Mathematics".
- (b) to describe the mathematics needs of junior pupils.

(c) to define in broad outline the Scope and Sequence of Mathematics for Juniors I to IV.

(d) to design instructional strategies which will facilitate the teaching and learning of mathematics, at the Junior level.

Participants

Twenty teachers were selected by the Ministry of Education to attend the course. Eighteen attended, though the attendance varied each day from 17 to 15.

Content of the course

The lectures and discussions were based on the following topics:

- (a) broad aims and objectives of new mathematics.
- (b) the nature of the Junior school child, and the nature of mathematics.
- (c) learning and teaching mathematics.
- (d) organizing a mathematics programme.
- (e) evaluating the mathematics programme.

The main content areas covered were:

- (a) whole numbers
- (b) fractions and decimals
- (c) shapes
- (d) measurement
- (e) graphs

Models and methods of training

The course was non-residential and lasted for 13 days. Classes commenced each day at 9.00 a.m., and ended at 1.00 p.m. There was a 15 minute recess at 10.30 to 10.45 a.m.

Four sessions were conducted each day and a total of fifty were completed for the period.

Teachers' assignments included:

- (a) writing units of work, based on the main content areas
- (b) writing lesson plans
- (c) writing pupil work sheets
- (d) writing test items
- (e) developing enrichment activities
- (f) making teaching aids.

Generally the teachers showed very keen interest in all aspects of the work attempted. A rather businesslike atmosphere prevailed throughout, and on several occasions they worked beyond the stipulated times.

However it was felt that too much was done in too little time, and that the follow-up sessions were essential.

Training was provided by means of:

- (a) lectures supplemented by resource materials.
- (b) group discussions based on the lectures.
- (c) group assignments.
- (d) content lessons sessions.
- (e) content review assignments.
- (f) literature review assignments.
- (g) practical work sessions.

Follow-up and
evaluation

Plans were made for immediate and frequent follow-up by:

- (a) the teachers in their teaching.
- (b) some responsible person, assisting the teachers in their efforts.

Most of the teachers, in the questionnaire given to them at the end, indicated that the course had helped them most with the planning of their mathematics lessons.

No micro-teaching was done, as it was difficult to get pupils from the schools as the course was conducted during vacation time.

Special
features

This was a carefully planned, short, "one-off" course for a small group of teachers from one island. It was non-residential, as indicated by the timetable and held during the school holidays.

A commonly experienced consequence of the last point was that practical work with children was seldom possible.

Although the organizers were clearly aware of the danger of attempting too much in the time available, in fact this appears to have happened. Consequently it was decided to have follow-up sessions.

The supervision of the teachers in their school work was the responsibility of the appropriate Ministry officer. Fortunately, this officer was also the Course Director - assisted by a local primary school headmistress and a visiting college of education tutor.

Reference

1. Course Report - kindly made available by Isaiah Thomas Esq., Grenada Teachers' College.