

Other materials

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Research and evaluation

Teacher educator training in research skills should not only aim to introduce basic quantitative research procedures, but should also include substantial 'action type' research training, employing interpretive and other qualitative methods in collecting, observing, comparing and analysing data in schools and classrooms. Identification of the relevant research problems in primary education and selection of the most appropriate research methods for use in solving the problems are skills which a teacher educator needs to have and be able to pass on to her trainees.

(Policy and practice in initial teacher training, 1993, Commonwealth Secretariat, p. 15)

The workshop was planned to address several issues during group discussion and a final plenary session. These included the nature of research training, the problem of developing research capacity and the need to evaluate the process of teacher education in part or in total. The main objective of the workshop was to gather thoughts as a sounding board for a number of blueprints concerned with one or more of the following areas:

- Initial teacher education (ITE) and in-service programmes (INSET)
- Development of research capacity amongst teachers and teacher educators
- Development of a plan for evaluating teacher education.

A number of key questions were posed to assist the various groups in the discussion of issues. Groups were encouraged to choose one or two of the questions for discussion or to modify any of the questions as they wished.

1 Possible programmes for trainees

- What has been accomplished in ITE and INSET previously in the region as far as research training is concerned and how effective has it been?
- Why is it necessary to have research training?
- What type of research problems should be studied?
- What should be included in a training course?
- How should the training take place in the programme?
- When should it take place in the course?
- What follow up, if any, should take place?
- How would ITE differ from INSET as far as research training is concerned?

2 Developing research capacity

- Why is it necessary to build up this capacity?
- Who should be trained?
- When should it take place?
- What type of training is required most?
- Who will be the trainers?
- What would be the aims and objectives of building up this type of capacity?
- How should capacity building be organised?
- What about further training?

3 Evaluation and teacher education

- What needs evaluating and why?
- Who would be the evaluators?
- What models of evaluation could be considered?
- Who would be ultimately responsible for making decisions?
- What type of training is required for the personnel?

4 Main reactions of the working groups

There was no lead paper presented for this seminar, as most of the participants had sufficient expertise to know what the key problems are concerning research and evaluation. However, the above workshop guide was disseminated between group members to act as a catalyst for discussion between participants. Several of the underlying issues reflected in the guide raised questions which appeared in the comments of the various groups, as can be seen from a perusal of the main reactions of the groups. What follows is a summary of the main points that arose from the various group discussions.

1 The need to demystify the notion of research was a call from most group members.

One way suggested was to get teachers to talk to each other about intra and extra-classroom problems. To do this, focus groups need to be set up in school clusters, and arrangements should be made for regular meetings amongst teachers and teacher educators to discuss ways in which problems relating to learning, teaching, management and other perceived classroom situations can be addressed. The emphasis should be on promoting action research underlining particularly the use of simple research methods. Training in observation, recording, problem identification and ways of trying out new methods and solutions without jeopardising pupil achievement are basic prerequisites in a demystification process.

The role of well-trained teacher educators is crucial here, which raises the issue of providing sound research expertise and therefore research capacity at the training college or university faculty level. The training which this cadre of educators receives should have a strong grounding in action research applied to in-class and out-of-class situations with which teachers often have problems. Any demystification process must make it clear that engaging in research is a necessary, natural and rewarding activity which should be an essential part of a teacher's role.

2 *The nature of research training programmes was another area which all groups discussed.*

OTHER MATERIALS

Basic research skills and methods were generally not treated in any detail in many teacher training (PRESET or INSET) programmes. While it is unlikely that there would be much space in the curriculum of teacher preparation for a course on basic research skills to be added to the already crowded period of training, opportunities should be accorded for research training in INSET. However, there have been instances in other Commonwealth countries where some simple research techniques have been introduced for trainees during their initial training at the practicum level and this could also be done in the Caribbean. What is crucial is the need to develop a research attitude not only amongst teachers but amongst teacher educators, headteachers and administrators as well. This could only be accomplished if there was a higher profile given to research training during INSET. There is an important task of drawing up a detailed curriculum, which would identify appropriate research skills and types of research needed by those wishing to engage in researching various aspects of teacher education.

3 *Possible research areas were discussed by all groups.*

They put forward a number of subjects which they thought could be a focus of research activity for many Caribbean countries. These included assessment of teacher effectiveness in the light of self-directed learning; medium and long-term effects of training; developing better teacher selection criteria; assessing the effects of multi-grade teaching and implications for teacher training; effects of using media in the classroom; and, the status of reflective techniques in training. Research which examined the interaction of culture with the use of computer technology in teaching and learning was also put forward. At the macro-level, research is needed into the restructuring of teacher education programmes to meet changing demands of technology and educational change in general. A sound attempt at evaluating present teacher education programmes in the region, with special reference to certification and accreditation, was also cited as a possibility.

4 *Resourcing and support for research into teacher education was another subject that was discussed in several groups.*

There was a wish expressed to develop a journal or newsletter which would be a means of communication between professionals on subjects of mutual interest relating to classroom research. Research which is being carried out as well as that being planned could be the subject of such a newsletter. The sharing of potential research problems affecting classroom learning and teaching could be another example of a subject being included in a newsletter. Providing support for greater interaction between professionals was also voiced during the group meetings. The need for more regional seminars on research training and priorities, as well as follow-up activities from such meetings could be part of a coherent plan for professionals interested or already engaged in educational research. Training in writing up research reports both short and more extensive, could form the subject of a series of workshops which would be an essential part of any support for all professionals.