

# Meeting Teachers' needs: Evaluation of in-service courses run by the Faculty of Education

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Since the beginning of 1982 the Faculty of Education has fostered a growth in commitment to in-service education courses for teachers (INSET). The programme of INSET activities is being accelerated throughout the year (1983). This growth has raised a series of questions about the evaluation of INSET.

Evaluation usually stems from two major concerns. First there is the concern of accountability. Are the courses offering value for the money spent to provide human and material resources for INSET? Secondly there is the concern for the quality of courses. Is the quality of the in-service programme meeting the participants' needs?

Ideally, sponsors, course providers, co-ordinators and all those concerned with in-service work would like substantial information about the effects of a particular INSET programme or teacher performance. In practice it is not easy to provide such information about the outcome of in-service courses. For example Henderson<sup>1</sup> states that he found little evidence to support self-support changes in teacher behaviour following an in-service course in reading improvement. One assumes that it is technically impossible to obtain reliable data about the effectiveness of a course if some form of teaching competence measurement approach is not adopted. Borick<sup>2</sup> in 1978 outlined scientific long-term evaluation models based upon a definition of competence which is based on a validated and confirmed relationship between a teaching behaviour, after a course, and on pupils' learning outcomes. These models have been adopted in Europe for some time. However it was found that they involved use of sophisticated evaluation designs which demanded time-consuming efforts by a team of investigators. Even so Bolam<sup>3</sup> argues that experience in Europe indicated that such evaluation is not feasible because change in a teacher's competence does not necessarily depend on a particular course programme and because information on

programme improvement is both easier to obtain by other methods such as formative evaluation through discussions and questionnaires which are simpler and more highly valued.

The Faculty of Education has adopted a procedure to conduct judgement about the impact of courses. Evaluations were made either during the course or immediately at the end of it or in some cases, a few weeks after its end. In each case a questionnaire prepared by the course tutor asked participants to report about the course. The questionnaire was dictated by context of the particular course, the dependence upon available resources, the duration and timing, the other commitments of the course participants and of the course providers and, of course, by the objectives of the course. The policy shaping this evaluation was also dictated by the importance of information obtained during a course (formative process evaluation) which indicated the ways in which a programme was implemented and provided data on which to take decisions about course improvement even while the course is in progress. It was also essential to obtain summative product information about the effectiveness and outcomes of a programme and to take decisions about whether or not to continue with such INSET activity in future. The reports have been analysed independently by the co-ordinators who were aware that the reliability of the data must not be taken for granted. Questions were asked on the courses' division, balance, modes of activities, supplementary reading material, duration and timing and on whether the course met the expectations of the participants. The individual course tutors then collected the data from the questionnaires and prepared a report about their course. The reports were then independently analysed by the writer. The rest of this article is based on the analysis of the reports prepared by the tutors of English, History, Maltese, P.E., French and Italian courses.

## Division and Balance

The general opinion on the 'division' was that

they were appropriate, while opinion on 'balance' of the course varied. Only 30% of the participants on the English course suggested that more than half of the course should be devoted to methodology, while as many as 96% of those on the Maltese course voiced the same opinion. All the P.E. course participants suggested more "emphasis on practical work". Half of the participants on the History course said that methodology had been "too much". The majority of the rest of the participants on the other courses (French, Italian...) reported that the 'balance' was appropriate.

### **Modes of INSET activities**

Asked to comment on the modes of the INSET activities, 81% of the teachers on the English course suggested a balance of lectures and seminars, 19% suggested "a whole course based on seminars". Nearly all the participants on all the other courses showed no predominant preference for either lecture, seminar or discussion-based courses. All agreed that a mixture of these modes was appropriate. History teachers suggested that more fieldwork should be included. Of particular note is the participants reaction to the Video Micro teaching sessions. Those on the Italian course all enthused over the video-recording of lessons for self-appraisal and/or group discussion. They expressed the desire to have more such sessions in future courses. 69% of the French course participants found it "very useful" but the rest of the group described it as somewhat "threatening. It only exaggerates the teacher's weaknesses". Others, especially those on the Maltese course, suggested "more use of the language laboratory and more use on video sessions".

### **Supplementary literature**

Where supplementary literature such as handouts, reference sheets, and others was supplied it was considered as "just right" (Eng. 75%); 'useful/very useful' History 100%); "too extensive for such a short course", (Eng. 19%); "too limited" (Eng. 6%) and some suggested that reading reference and supplementary literature"... should have been forwarded weeks in advance" (Eng. 11%).

### **Duration and Timing**

Comments on the duration of the course varied tremendously. For the English course, 37% found the arrangement suitable, 25% "unsuitable", while 12% "found the duration suitable but the extension over a period of 11 weeks unsuitable". The History group reports that 78% stated "just right"; 22% "too long"; 44% must be shorter and concentrated on a shorter period". One suggested "The course should be held on ten consecutive days for cohesion and unity", another... "three times a week for the sake of continuity" and yet another "... one

full-day week during the holiday". The participants, on all the other courses (i.e. Italian, French and P.E.) all opined that the duration was appropriate. The Italian group's general opinion was that the spread was good but more than one weekly session is required.

Questions on the timing of the course provided a general opinion that courses run in the early months of the scholastic year would be more beneficial. P.E. course participants, in particular, pointed out that they preferred the course to be at the start of the year to avoid P.E. functions at school which take place at the end of the scholastic year. The majority of all the participants on all the courses stated that their five-day duties were concentrated over a four day time-table. This compressed full-teaching load together with the commitments of the refresher courses on one day proved tiring and very demanding. However all agreed that the launching of the INSET programme was a good thing which should be fostered and fully developed to meet the needs of teachers and schools.

### **Other comments**

Responses for general recommendations and further suggestions provided valuable information. One of the teachers on the English course suggested "more methodology in the teaching of phonetics". Teachers on the History course were the most collaborative in providing personal remarks "We could do with more time for work at the Resource Centre", "We need a reference list of the latest articles, books, etc on Maltese History"; "Only those truly qualified in History should teach History"; and, on recruitment for in-service courses, one participant stated "Only those truly interested in in-service courses should attend...". The latter remark is in accordance with the opinion of most course tutors and lecturers. The case was more evident in the Maltese course. The majority of the course participants have been teaching Maltese for more than ten years (some for 25 years) - Analysis of the report indicated that the participants believed that their teaching experience makes INSET courses redundant. 90% of these participants reported that they benefitted more from the linguistics than any other area because this subject was new to them. However in each of all the other courses a high percentage reported that they benefitted from the course - "It was a good experience", or more emphatically "It met needs and expectations".

### **General conclusions**

The co-ordinators of the in-service course and all the lecturers involved are earnestly concerned in evaluating INSET activities. The material provided in the reports is important data for further

discussions, analysis and decision-making. It is not easy to analyse collectively because the perspectives of participants on the same course vary and obviously will be different from those of the course tutors. The comments of the latter on the behaviour and attitude of the teachers on in-service training, presented a two-sided view which coincides with the view presented in the reports made in 1971 by Rosen<sup>4</sup> and by Stibbs and Munt<sup>5</sup>. The first view is that teachers on an in-service course (especially those on workshop sessions).

'... behaved in much the same way as certain types of children in the classroom. Some felt threatened, avoided becoming involved, and thus remained with what they knew. Some began a task, found they could not do it, and perturbed by the apparent expertise of others and were defeated by a perfectionist attitude. Only a proportion took stock of the materials and resources provided, made up their minds what they wanted to do, and became absorbed in a task.'

The second view is more positive in nature. Most tutors observe that under careful guidance and given clear working guidelines, the majority of the teachers become absorbed in work in Language/Science laboratory, micro-teaching, productions and evaluation of educational material, discussions, seminar work, field work and all other forms of practical work. Their attitude becomes professional and outstandingly effective and successful. The writer, like the majority of the tutors, subscribes to this view. Most teachers want to have a clear understanding of their professional aims and it is also evident that they enjoy satisfaction in their work.

In concluding, it is encouraging to note that the majority of the participants said that they benefitted from the experience because it provided an opportunity to meet and work with other people from other schools, who share the same problems and have the same interests. They were able to discuss matters without fear of criticism. The experience helped them to understand their work.

The reports submitted provided immediate feedback but most important it provided the teachers on these INSET activities with the opportunity to participate in evaluation decisions<sup>6</sup>. The exercise promoted a fruitful dialogue between the in-service courses policy makers, the programme designers, the evaluators and the teachers. The contribution of the latter is of course the most important factor of the whole exercise, because as Henerson<sup>7</sup> states:

'Evaluation cannot be learned from a book: the evaluator's skills, as any skills, are

*(continued on bottom of p.30 )*

## in-service courses

After the successful completion of in-service courses for teachers of English, History, French, Maltese, Italian and Physical Education in the Secondary Schools as well as a short course for Primary School teachers in Private Schools, the Faculty of Education widened the scope of its programme of in-service training by offering courses in the teaching of Infant classes, the teaching of Physics and an initial course in Pedagogy for Trade School Instructors. These courses were organized in close collaboration with the Department of Education and Education Officers were closely involved in the planning of both the Infants and Physics courses.

For these courses, the Infants teachers and the Trade School Instructors were released for one whole day a week from their respective schools. In the case of the Physics course, sessions were held on one afternoon a week. However, all three courses, as other similar courses, were of sixty hours duration. On successful completion of the course participants were awarded a certificate of attendance.

### Course for Teachers of Infant Classes

Each session of this course was divided into three activities. Participants were first given a lecture by a member of the faculty staff on topics such as: Child Development with Special Reference to the First Period of Growth; Introducing a Second Language; Music, Movement and the Developing Child. The second activity consisted of a lecture by Mr Hans Paul Joachim Liebschner from the Froebel Institute, London, on activities in the Infant School. Topics such as: Children in the Home Corner, Activities with Bricks and Puzzles, the Water Tray and Sand Tray, and Painting and Drawing were discussed.

The afternoon activity then consisted of a seminar led by the Education Officer for infant teaching and staff from the Faculty of Education.

### Course for Physics Teachers

The primary aim of this course was the widening of the teachers own understanding of Physics topics relevant to the Secondary School syllabuses. However, the participants were also invited to consider and discuss professional issues of relevance to the teaching of Physics.

The Physics areas emphasised during the course were: Wave Theory, Electricity and Magnetism, and Atomic Physics. Several methods of instruction were used including lectures, demonstration, seminars and discussion but individual practical work in the laboratory predominated. The following professional issues and their implications for science teaching were discussed during the course: the Nature of Science, the Psychological Development of Children, the Language Aspect of Learning Science, and the Role of Assessment and Education in Science.

### Course in Pedagogy for Trade School Instructors

The main aim of this course was to introduce instructors to theoretical background and, specially, the practical requirements of modern methods of teaching. It consisted of lectures on Educational Psychology and Socio-Cultural Aspects in Education but the primary emphasis was on Instructional Design, Microteaching and Educational Technology. In these latter areas, the participants engaged in seminars and discussions as well as in teaching experiences and the production of a range of resources for teaching their own trade.

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