

Teacher Training: An Essential Factor in UMSEP Course Implementation

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Introduction

The process of course design does not stop (as it often does) at the point when the materials produced are assembled in their final form and distributed for use. The crucial factor which determines the success of a course is **how** it is used in the classroom and this issue is far too often treated in a cosmetic manner or ignored altogether. It is important to bear in mind that materials are but classroom tools used by learners and teachers. The term 'tool' is used because materials do not in and of themselves cause learning to take place. They are devices which, if used appropriately by learners and, especially by teachers (who manage the learning process) may cause learning to take place.

One very important premise of UMSEP is that the production of new courses which imply new classroom behaviour (as UMSEP courses do) should be accompanied by a detailed analysis of the demands that these courses make on the teacher in terms of the knowledge, skills and attitudes which are required if the learning aims of the course are to be realised. And that a teacher training or orientation programme should be developed to provide teachers with guidance in the critical areas identified.

Identifying Demands On Teachers And Priority Training Areas

The model that was used was one which was proposed and worked out for UMSEP by David Warren Piper, our consultant from the Teaching Methods Unit of the University of London, during his consultancy visit in December 1981.

The basic idea is this. new materials imply the staff using them in particular ways which require knowledge, skills and certain attitudes such as belief in the value of the materials and confidence in them. These requirements may coincide or contrast with the existing knowledge, skills and attitudes of the staff. If a 'gap' should exist, it would have to be described and then possible ways of closing it specified. Once the ways of closing the gap are described, they can be rated in terms of technical soundness, feasibility (convenience, cost) and acceptability (from the parties involved — teaching staff, administrators, etc.). Then an appropriate strategy can be decided upon.

The starting point was, therefore, to identify the salient features of UMSEP materials from which can be derived salient demands on staff expressed in terms of knowledge, skills and attitudes. The following are the salient features of UMSEP materials which were identified.

- (i) Picture of the course and unit structure is given and each item is placed in the picture.
- (ii) Objectives (course, unit, activity) are made explicit to staff, students.
- (iii) Criteria of success are made clear to staff, students (what, by when, how well, under what conditions).

- (iv) Complex learning items are broken down into separately practised and assessed parts.
- (v) Materials are so written that the best results will be obtained if the teacher can perceive problems quickly, diagnose their cause, and then prescribe appropriate treatment.
- (vi) Materials are designed to accommodate students with a wide range of ability. It is assumed that there will be considerable diversity in a class at any one time on a number of parameters: competence, interest, commitment, etc.
- (vii) Variety of activities with different management features and involving different criteria of assessment is used.
- (viii) Variety of activities with different criteria of assessment is used.
- (ix) Variety of experiences, modes of expression (words, diagrams) is provided.
- (x) Students are actively involved. They do most of the talking and engage in peer-teaching.
- (xi) Topics and settings used in activities are realistic and professionally relevant.

The salient features were then translated into the following salient demands on teachers.

- (i) understanding of course objectives and rationale
- (ii) familiarity with course and unit structure
- (iii) familiarity with specific objectives and design of the main activity types and ability to relate former to meta (course) - objectives
- (iv) familiarity with methodology of course
- (v) understanding of professional content
- (vi) classroom and activity management skills (particularly the skills of setting up, monitoring, evaluation and giving feedback)
- (vii) relating language skills taught in the unit to professional needs
- (viii) ensuring high student involvement
- (ix) coping with diversity
- (x) diagnosing and treating problems
- (xi) selective error correction

The first five in the list above can be regarded as knowledge objectives the rest as skill objectives for training.

The next step was to identify in the list of things which teachers must do — if the objectives of the course are to be achieved — those for which guidance and training would be needed. To do this it was essential to know the existing level of the staff with regard to the required knowledge, skills and attitudes for each salient feature. For instance, one of the salient features of the materials is that students monitor each other and themselves, act upon their observation and help each other. Therefore, we would need to know with respect to:

Knowledge

How much teachers know about group dynamics, friendship patterns and personalities of students.

Skills

How well teachers can exercise the following:

- (a) skill in monitoring ability of large numbers of small groups
- (b) skill in promoting the right balance of guidance and freedom
- (c) skill in keeping students focused on the learning objective
- (d) flexibility and skill in dealing with the unforeseen while still keeping on the trail of the learning objective
- (e) keeping reasonable control over the time taken for the various activities

Attitudes

To what degree teachers believe in the following:

- (a) students have responsibility for their own learning
- (b) students learn from teacher, materials and from each other

A number of investigative modes were considered and the following were adopted.

- (i) self-evaluation questionnaires completed by teachers after each unit has been taught
- (ii) feedback and debriefing sessions after lessons

The self-evaluation questionnaire listed the teaching skills that the analysis of salient features in the materials identified as required of the staff. Teachers were requested to fill in the questionnaire after teaching each unit of the course during the academic session 1983/84 when the UMSEP courses were taught for the first time. The first question in the questionnaire attempts to find out what types of activity teachers found difficulty in handling. The second question is an attempt to find out if teachers could:

- identify the problems that students face
- do something about them

The third question attempts to identify aspects of classroom management that teachers found difficult to handle. The fourth question forms the main-body of the questionnaire and requires the teacher to rate herself on a scale of 1-5 (1 = excellent, 5 = inadequate) on the various teaching skills listed.

Information obtained from the questionnaire was supplemented by feedback obtained from observation of lessons during trialling of the courses. Another procedure used to identify teaching difficulties was the holding regular feedback or debriefing sessions after each block of units (numbering 3-4) was taught. Student evaluation of teachers at the end of the course also contributed some information on teacher skills. Students were asked to

write comments using questions such as these as guidelines. How has your teacher helped you to learn this year? What kind of help would you like to have received from your teacher but didn't get? What do you think your teacher should do to help next year's students learn more effectively?

The information obtained from the questionnaires and supplementary procedures on staff's level of competence in the required teaching skills was matched against the stated requirements. From this the following priority training areas were identified (a rating below 3 suggests lack of confidence and indicates that guidance would probably be needed):

Note: Percentages below refer to the percentage of responses which gives a rating below 3.

- 1 Setting up of interactive activities (53%)
- 2 Error correction (what to correct, when to correct, how to correct) (75%)
- 3 Monitoring
 - (a) interactive activities (79%)
 - (b) functional activities (42%)
 - (c) evaluative activities (85%)
4. Checking
 - (a) structural/formal concepts (63%)
 - (b) functional concepts (47%)
 - (c) lexical concepts (53%)
 - (d) procedure (63%)
- 5 Eliciting
 - (a) ideas (47%)
 - (b) information (53%)
6. Giving feedback
 - (a) positive feedback (63%)
 - (b) negative feedback (68%)
 - (c) selecting areas where feedback is needed (47%)
- 7 Sensitizing students to meaning and communicative potential of language (45%)
8. Providing models of correct sounds, stress and intonation (68%)

It must be emphasized that the information from the questionnaires was checked against feedback obtained from observation of lessons and meetings with teachers.

Developing a training programme

This section describes the development of a training programme to provide training for teachers in course implementation and also in evaluating students' progress.

Training Strategies

The next step after identifying the priority areas for training was to choose training strategies. It was decided that a two-pronged approach be adopted.

- 1 Off-the-job training, involving:
 - (a) introductory sessions

This would take the form of talks, lectures, video films to familiarize teachers with the principles underlying course design, the identifying features of the different types of activities, etc.

(b) skill development workshop/seminars

The emphasis here is on exposing teachers to specific teaching techniques, providing opportunities for teachers to try these out and also to share ideas they may have developed themselves in teaching the course.

2. On-the-job training, involving:

- (a) team-teaching with UMSEP team members or an experienced teacher in each team
- (b) regular problem clinics
- (c) pre-teaching briefing sessions on key points about the next lot of units to be taught

Training Methods

The range of training methods considered include expositions, demonstrations, workshops, seminars, buzz groups, syndicated exercises, etc. The actual training procedure or vehicle employed would be determined by its suitability for achieving the training objective in question. Following the classification of training objectives into knowledge, skill and attitudinal objectives, it is possible to identify the procedures which are particularly suitable for a certain class of objectives. The following is an outline of the model of training that are felt to lend themselves well to realising the three types of training objectives.

1 Knowledge objectives

These are probably best attained through:

- (a) exposition accompanied by the use of graphics, video film
- (b) demonstration followed by discussion
- (c) teachers in groups trying out different types of activities in the course, followed by post-mortem discussion; discussion on management of activity tried
- (d) seeing a unit taught, then trying it
- (e) practical exercises to develop understanding/awareness, for example, rewriting instructions to make them easier to understand (the assumption is that if they can do that they must understand them)

2. Skill objectives

Though the emphasis here is on skills, the approach favoured in skill development is one in which the skill area is tackled at the level of skill and principle. This is to discourage rigid adherence to specific teaching techniques through familiarity without understanding that a specific technique should be used on grounds of its suitability for achieving a particular learning aim.

David Warren Piper suggested a sequence of procedures (a-e below) as suitable for attaining skill objectives.

- (a) explanation
 - (b) demonstration, a video tape of a teacher failing and succeeding in each skill
 - (c) discrimination teacher participants classify taped examples as success or failure
 - (i) skill training, first with taped students on trigger-film basis, then with role-play (video is used here as in micro-teaching for analysis and post-mortem discussion) then with real classes
 - (e) practical exercises to supplement above
- 3 Attitudinal objectives
- These are best obtained through:
- (a) publicity films
 - (b) providing opportunities for staff to discuss their experience (both positive and negative) in using the materials
 - (c) careful on-the-job monitoring of teachers to help staff see outcomes and ensure that they experience success (the latter — the experiencing of success — is vital if a positive attitude to materials is to be encouraged)

Training Materials

UMSEP recognises the need to build up a bank of support activities to be package as possible so that training in future can be conducted as and when the need arises. Training materials currently being worked on are:

1 Practical exercises

Practical exercises with accompanying worksheets and handouts for developing specific skills are currently being worked on. Some of these exercises are specially designed and some compiled from teacher training manuals.

2. Audio cassettes and video films

Audio and video materials for training purposes would include the following:

Audio cassettes

- (a) audio recordings of student talk for error correction practical exercises
- (b) audio recordings of students at different levels of proficiency for training teachers to rate students using the rating scale devised by UMSEP which describes performance on a scale of 1-6 (teacher - assessor has to be able to say if he places a student at a particular band, what the student's performance in terms of fluency, effectiveness, accuracy or range is like)

Video films

- (a) films which give teachers an overview of each of the three courses, course and unit structure, types of activities in a unit and their key characteristics
- (b) video recordings of lessons for analysis and discussion on handling of problems

3 Training seminars and workshops conducted

To date three series of workshops/seminars have been conducted by UMSEP for teachers at Pusat Bahasa:

- (a) from 15th March — 2nd April 1982 - during Janet McAlpin's consultancy visit
- (b) from 5th—22th January 1983 - during Chris Kennedy's consultancy visit
- (c) from 6th—14th June 1983 - conducted by the UMSEP team members themselves

The workshops (a) and (c) concentrated on helping teachers to understand the aims and approaches of the three courses and to familiarize them with the design and content of each course. They also familiarized teachers with the main activity types and worked out with them effective ways of handling these activities in class

Conclusion

Various consultants to the Project have pointed out that UMSEP courses demand more of the teacher than other courses. UMSEP sees the teacher as the 'mediator' between the materials and the students and allows the teacher a certain amount of discretion especially with regard to procedures, to adapt them when necessary to ensure that the learning objectives of the course are attained in the most efficient and economical way possible in terms of time taken, effort, anxiety, etc. We also recognise that there are different teaching styles. Therefore, the guiding principle in training is to help teachers perceive skill options available, extend their repertoire of skills and, by familiarizing them with the principles underlying the courses, improve their ability to select appropriately from these skill options.