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Title:

FACILITATING TEACHER DEVELOPMENT THROUGH SCHOOL-BASED INSET

Submitted by:

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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that the work in this thesis is my own work except for quotations and summaries which have been duly acknowledged.

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ABSTRACT

This study examines how school-based in-service education and training (INSET) can facilitate sustained teacher professional development in Malaysia. It addresses a problem of practice arising from the limitations of one-shot, transmission-oriented courses, particularly their weak connection to teachers' classroom contexts, limited follow-up support and restricted opportunities for teacher agency. The study adopts a practitioner-oriented, conceptually informed approach that combines critical engagement with the literature, reflection on Malaysian INSET practice, and an exploratory questionnaire survey involving 12 Malaysian educators. The survey is used illustratively to examine teachers' perceptions and expectations of INSET rather than to make population-level claims. Drawing on reflective practice, exploratory practice, action research, collaborative learning and school-based professional development, the thesis develops a blueprint for an ongoing practitioner-centred INSET programme. The proposed model positions teachers as active agents who identify professional priorities, investigate classroom practice, collaborate with colleagues and use evidence from practice to inform improvement. A preparatory course and school-based facilitation structure are proposed to support implementation. The study argues that sustainable teacher development depends not only on programme content but also on leadership support, protected time, trust, collaboration, contextual responsiveness and continuing facilitation. Its principal contribution is a practice-oriented framework that connects teacher agency and classroom inquiry with school improvement while recognising the organisational conditions required for implementation. The thesis concludes that school-based INSET should complement, rather than simply reproduce, centrally organised training, and recommends future empirical piloting and evaluation of the proposed model across varied Malaysian school contexts.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

INSET	In-service education and training
KBSM	Acronym for the Malaysian Integrated Secondary School Syllabus in the Malay language
MOE	Ministry of Education, Malaysia
TST	Teacher Support Team
SCP	Schools Curriculum Project
PETEP	Primary English Teacher Education Project
PLC	Professional Learning Communities
TROT	Training of Trainers Project

INTRODUCTION

ONE MUST LEARN BY DOING THINGS; FOR THOUGH YOU THINK YOU KNOW IT YOU HAVE NO CERTAINTY, UNTIL YOU TRY.

SOCRATES 495 – 406 B.C.

In recent years, there has been a shift in the general orientation to in-service education and training (INSET) in Malaysia. Traditionally, the focus of INSET has been on training rather than teacher development. Current research has revealed that the teacher is the key to educational change and the school is the major initiator and focus for that change. This study is an attempt to argue that course-based INSET is an inadequate means of bringing educational change to schools and providing continuing professional growth for teachers. Stenhouse (1975) argued that "there can be no curriculum development without teacher development." Contemporary scholarship continues to support this view, emphasizing that curriculum making is dependent upon teacher agency and that teacher agency is strengthened through active participation in curriculum development (Priestley, Alvunger, Philippou, & Soini, 2022) and that change is more effective with bottom-up initiatives within school settings. It is in schools that teaching and learning take place and where teachers are more aware of their needs and priorities, the school's circumstances and its stage of growth. Thus teacher development in INSET is seen as a process of professional growth of teachers in an environment that brings out their full potential. At the outset, current INSET practices in Malaysia are examined and an alternative approach to INSET that builds on supportive and collaborative teacher cultures is proposed. It then suggests that exploratory practice may be a form of professional teacher development and that critical reflection is a tool towards this development. A proposal for an on-going school-based INSET programme for teacher development is justifiably made. Within the programme, options for teacher development are offered and teachers may choose any one of them based on their priorities and circumstances. This study concludes by considering the implications for implementing the programme in a school.

Chapter 1 outlines the background to the study and examines the current provision of (INSET) in Malaysia by working through an example from a teacher's perspective. It then discusses the limited impact of the course-based Cascade model of INSET and concludes with an account of national initiatives at reconciling top-down priorities and bottom-up needs of encouraging school-based professional teacher development through a teacher support programme.

Chapter 2 examines the nature and scope of INSET as a means of providing teacher development and educational change to schools. Clear distinctions between training and development and education are made. Definitions of teacher development and INSET are given to pave the way for a discussion of the role of INSET as a means of effecting teachers' professional development. Findings from an informal survey to uncover the perceptions of a small sample of Malaysian teachers to INSET are examined necessitating a discussion of what constitutes effective INSET. It ends by amplifying the crucial need for developing teachers in schools and provides a conceptual framework of practitioner-centred school-based INSET.

Chapter 3 examines the rationale for INSET work in schools and outlines the features of school-based INSET and its possible constraints. The role of reflection is discussed as it is seen as an important means of promoting adult learning, fostering enquiry and contributing to teacher development. It then proposes exploratory practice as a fresh perspective for teachers to examine their classroom habits and routines. With exploratory practice, teachers themselves decide on which aspect(s) of teaching they wish to explore and which procedures they prefer to follow. Thus a number of alternative approaches to explore classroom practice is suggested. The chapter ends with implications that for school-based INSET to work there is a vital need for creating collaborative school cultures in the school.

Chapter 4 proposes a school-based INSET programme that generates reflective, 'critical' and enquiring practitioners. The nature of the programme will be context specific taking into consideration the content, methodology and training

philosophies for bringing about attitudinal and behavioural change to the concept of school-based work. An introduction to reflective and exploratory practice is seen as essential to familiarize teachers to new skills and knowledge pertaining to it. Thus a preparatory course to initiate the programme is considered essential. The outline of the programme is provided together with a detailed design of a preparatory course for teachers in a school. It concludes with a brief discussion of ways to evaluate the success of the course.

Chapter 5 concludes by suggesting that to achieve Malaysia's vision for education in the new millennium, we need to have empowered, autonomous teachers in schools. School-based INSET that encourages teachers to explore their classrooms is one of the ways of making teachers empowered individuals. For effective implementation of the programme important factors such as institutional motivation, programme implementation strategies, institutional leadership and teacher characteristics have to be considered. The role of a school-based INSET facilitator is seen as crucial and facilitator training is deemed necessary. The chapter ends with a reiteration of the need for support from all sectors involved in educational change and teacher development.

PURPOSE AND PROBLEM OF PRACTICE

The central problem addressed in this thesis is the gap between attendance at INSET and sustained professional learning in teachers' everyday work. Course-based provision can disseminate policy, curriculum and pedagogical information efficiently, but attendance alone does not ensure that teachers understand, adapt, apply and sustain new practices in their own classrooms. The study therefore asks how professional development can be located closer to practice, give teachers a stronger role in identifying and investigating their needs, and provide the collegial and organisational support required for continuing improvement. The purpose is not to reject centrally organised INSET, but to develop a complementary school-based model that strengthens transfer, reflection, inquiry and professional agency.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The thesis is guided by four questions: (1) What limitations of conventional course-based and cascade INSET constrain sustained teacher development? (2) What characteristics of effective INSET are supported by the literature and by the perceptions of the Malaysian educators consulted in this study? (3) How can reflective practice, exploratory practice, observation and action research be organised within an ongoing school-based INSET programme? (4) What leadership, cultural, facilitation, time and organisational conditions are necessary for such a programme to be implemented and sustained in Malaysian schools?

SCOPE AND METHODOLOGICAL ORIENTATION

This is primarily a professional-practice and programme-development study rather than an impact evaluation of an implemented intervention. Its evidence base comprises a critical review and synthesis of literature, practitioner reflection on Malaysian INSET structures and experiences, documentary and policy discussion, and a small exploratory questionnaire survey of 12 educators described in Chapter 2. The survey provides contextual insight into teachers' experiences and expectations; because of its small, non-random and professionally connected sample, it is treated as illustrative evidence and is not used to claim statistical representativeness. The programme developed in Chapter 4 is therefore a theoretically and contextually grounded proposal whose effectiveness should subsequently be tested through systematic implementation research.

SIGNIFICANCE AND CONTRIBUTION OF THE STUDY

The study contributes to educational leadership and professional practice by translating established principles of adult learning, reflection, teacher inquiry and collaboration into an implementable school-based framework. Its practical significance lies in linking teacher development to the classroom while making explicit the enabling role of school leadership, facilitators, professional trust, time and follow-up support. For the Malaysian context, the model offers a way to reconcile system-level priorities with teacher-identified needs: central

initiatives can provide direction and resources, while school-based inquiry allows teachers to interpret and adapt those priorities responsibly within local contexts. The proposed framework also provides a basis for future piloting, evaluation and refinement using evidence on teacher learning, changes in classroom practice and school-level professional culture.

CHAPTER 1 IN-SERVICE PROVISION IN MALAYSIA

OVERVIEW

This chapter provides a background to in-service education and training (INSET) provision in Malaysia. It sets out to examine current INSET practices and discusses their level of impact in equipping teachers not only with new techniques and methods but with corresponding attitudes and beliefs that go with their changing roles and tasks. A description of the centre-periphery top-down model, commonly known as the Cascade, the mechanism used for delivering INSET, is made and its effects identified. It then examines a school-based initiative as another model of INSET aimed at promoting teacher development. The chapter ends by suggesting that INSET has a greater impact of enhancing the personal and professional growth of teachers when it is school-based.

1.1 BACKGROUND

Escalating change in education in Malaysia particularly in the area of English language teaching (ELT) has put increasingly complex demands on teachers. What is apparent is that "people [are] always wanting teachers to change" and "more and more changes are imposed and the timelines for their implementation are truncated" (Hargreaves 1994:4-5). As INSET represents "an attempt to implement some form of change" (Kennedy 1987:163), teachers are required at some point in their careers to attend INSET courses to keep abreast with new curriculum, new skills, methodology and strategies. Traditionally, INSET in Malaysia has been course based, externally imposed and integrally related to curriculum change and development. In the one-shot INSET courses, professional development of teachers is merely incidental. There is little opportunity for "genuine professional development [in INSET] given its narrow focus on identifiable needs at the school level which are to be tackled in the most expedient way. 'Quick fix' in-service does not develop teachers" (Hopkins 1989:86).

However in Malaysia in the 70s and 80s, large-scale training of teachers in a relatively short time was needed to implement firstly the Communicative Syllabus and then the KBSM (acronym for the 'Integrated Syllabus' in the Malay language) Syllabus. The Cascade model was adopted because of time and cost factors.

The administrative machinery for INSET works at 4 hierarchical levels namely the Federal (Central), State, District or Zonal and school levels. The Ministry of Education formulates the policies and provides guidelines for planning, coordinating and implementing programmes at federal level. The policies and programmes are implemented in schools through the coordination and supervision of the State Education Offices (Ibrahim N A 1991: 95). Various divisions of the Ministry of Education (MOE), teacher training colleges, state education departments and universities are currently engaged in INSET and courses are organised at national, state and district levels. Planning, administration and financial control of INSET are the responsibility of two main committees. The INSET Education Planning Committee with the Teacher Training Division as its Secretariat caters for short-term courses and also one-year specialist courses at teacher training colleges. The Staff Training Committee caters for post- graduate, advanced-diploma and higher degree courses. The Secretariat for this committee is the Scholarship Division of the MOE. Some international agencies provide assistance in the form of technical expertise and material aid for its INSET programmes. Although this multi-level administrative structure continues to provide the foundation for the planning and delivery of teacher professional development in Malaysia, contemporary research emphasises that effective professional learning requires greater collaboration, teacher autonomy, and active participation in decision-making processes. Recent OECD reports highlight the importance of balancing central policy direction with professional flexibility at school level to support sustainable curriculum implementation and educational improvement.

To implement any new curriculum, new methodology or skills, orientation courses for teachers are provided and "the nature, scope and content of the course[s] [are] determined centrally" (Hayes 1995:254). Transmitting new knowledge and skills by the Cascade mechanism means that selected individuals are given centralized training and then "required to pass on their newly acquired skills and information

to others in their own region, district or school" (Brown 1989:128). The Cascade is based on "one group [training] further groups who go on to train others. Trainers in successive tiers are drawn from the ranks of the participants at the level above" (Gilpin 1997:185). In order to reach a wider audience, the key personnel system of teacher orientation is employed. Key personnel act as "link agents in the dissemination and implementation" process of the new curriculum (Ibrahim NA 1991: 100) and therefore play the "multiplier role of ensuring positive snowballing of the new programme" (Samah 1984:203). They are teachers appointed by the State or District Education Officers on the basis of their performance in schools and their positive work ethics.

While the cascade model has historically enabled large-scale dissemination of curriculum reforms and professional development initiatives, contemporary studies have identified several limitations, including inconsistencies in knowledge transfer, dilution of training content, and insufficient follow-up support for teachers. Harper, Gore and Harris (2024) argue that effective large-scale professional development should focus not only on the delivery of content but also on the structural and relational dimensions that support implementation.

Furthermore, current perspectives on teacher professional development extend beyond the traditional transmission model. Consistent with Stenhouse's (1975) assertion that curriculum development cannot be separated from teacher development, recent research highlights the central role of teacher agency in curriculum implementation. Teachers are increasingly recognised as active curriculum makers whose professional growth and participation in decision-making contribute significantly to the success of educational reforms (Priestley et al., 2023).

Similarly, UNESCO (2024) advocates continuous, practice-based professional learning that is embedded within teachers' professional work rather than confined to isolated training programmes. This contemporary perspective positions teachers as key agents of educational transformation and underscores the importance of sustained professional learning, collaboration, and leadership development in achieving long-term school improvement.

1.2 AN EXAMPLE OF HOW THE CASCADE WORKS

1.2.1 One teacher's perspective of INSET via the Cascade model

This section is meant to be anecdotal, as to understand the Cascade model of INSET it is necessary to work through an example. Some years ago I attended a course for key personnel conducted by a division in the Ministry of Education (MOE). It was a six-day course to introduce changes in the reading curriculum. The project undertaken by the division was based on findings that there was a dwindling reading interest amongst students and an increasing apathy about the influx of information from texts which they read. The reading strategy was meant to sensitize students to the various kinds of information available in a text and to the various ways they interact with the information for various purposes and in various situations. The key personnel were to return to their respective states and train teachers to understand and develop the programme for their students in their respective schools.

1.2.2 Training the Key Personnel

The course I was on comprised 20 key personnel from two states in Malaysia. The course was held for six days in a centrally located institute. During the first two days of the course the key personnel were exposed to the theoretical aspects of the new reading methodology. The third and fourth days of the course were spent producing worksheets based on the newly learnt theories. On the fifth day, the work produced was piloted in a nearby school and on the last day there was a plenary session to highlight the participants' experiences of trialling the work. Another five-day workshop with key personnel from other states was held and at this workshop there was more materials writing to produce working folders for trainers consisting of reading texts and activity sheets for future try-outs in their respective states. At state level, a three-day course was conducted to familiarize the teachers with the new concept which was to be implemented in schools. At this course, one teacher from each of the secondary schools in my state was present and many of them were Heads of the English Department in their schools. The participants at this course

were expected to return to their schools and carry out in-house training sessions to pass on the information and skills gained during the course. In schools, due to time constraints, in-house sessions might have run for four hours or less. The "trainer" in the school would use her discretion and only impart what she saw as relevant to school needs. Schools were also expected to fill a feedback form to ascertain that the in-house sessions were run and responses of the teachers to the course were elicited. The entire INSET mechanism of the project for one state is represented in the diagram on the next page

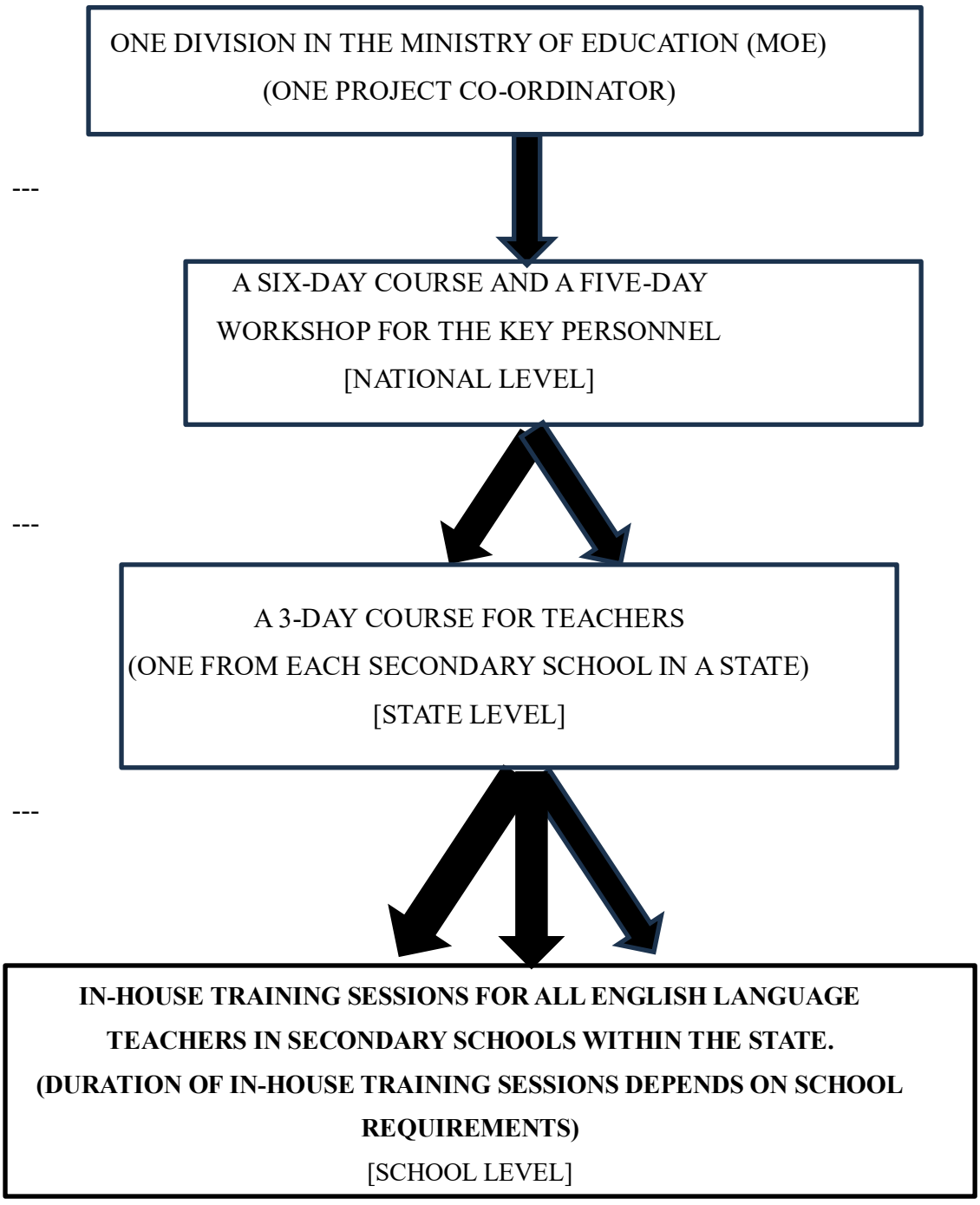


Fig. 1.1 Organisation chart of INSET (One example)

1.3 INSIGHTS GAINED AT THIS COURSE

1.3.1 The issue of dilution

In view of the fact that a considerable amount of time, money and energy was invested in the course, it was apparent that the Cascade method of delivering INSET did not achieve the level of impact because of dilution. This was inevitable as expertise was only available at the top of the Cascade and "the greatest amount of time and resources [were] expended" there (Gilpin 1997:192). At the lower levels the time allotted for training at state level and in-house sessions in schools were reduced implying differing lengths of training. As such, "subsequent training at state, district or school levels [was] usually a pale shadow of the courses conducted at national level" (Ali G et al 1995:5). Therefore in terms of impact, the Cascade model did not appear to be the most effective means of bringing about curricular change of this nature.

1.3.2 The Training Methodology

It was also assumed that the key personnel used for training others were themselves equipped with an understanding of the underlying training philosophies and training methods for disseminating the new knowledge and skills down the successive tiers of the Cascade. During the state level training sessions and the in-house sessions in schools the trainers would normally follow the methodology of training they were involved in as trainees in their previous training sessions. What it really amounted to was that they replicated what they had experienced in terms of content and methodology. There was also a naïve assumption that the key personnel selected on the basis of being good and experienced teachers also made good trainers. Good and experienced teachers do not necessarily make good trainers unless they have been provided with proper training. Moreover, in most training courses, the issue of how to train others at the lower levels of the Cascade is never discussed so it led to a diversity of interpretation by the key personnel depending on their personalities, their creativity and their initiative. So at courses

at state and school levels training sessions may have a combination of the following:

- Formal lectures
- Pair and group work
- Plenary sessions
- Workshops or hands-on sessions
- Demonstrations
- Problem-solving sessions

Moreover, at the course, the key personnel tend to dominate the sessions as on such a short course, time was limited and they felt that they had so much information to deliver or convey to the teachers. This implies that at most training sessions run by the key personnel, the sessions were not participant-centred.

1.3.3 Transfer Of Learning

The training methodology of the course was based mostly on theory. Theory was seen to play a more central role as the participants on the course were exposed to theoretical concepts. Participants were not enabled to conceptualize their own practices to raise their theoretical awareness as a basis for articulating and examining the new concept due to time constraints (Ramani 1987). Plunging the teachers into materials writing without a firm understanding of the rationale behind the practice raises doubts about the quality of the materials produced. The whole course relied heavily on procedures which were the activities, tasks, materials and techniques to be used by the teachers. The missing element was in Widdowson's terms "the development of a spirit of enquiry among teachers" (1984:86) for teachers to understand the "relationship between theoretical principle and practical technique" (Ramani 1987:3). According to Fullan "people apparently understand new conceptions by first trying out practices and then reflecting on and discussing the underlying assumptions… [and] it helps to explain why most workshops which introduce a new programme by dwelling on objectives, theory and rationale fail to have an impact" (1985:200-201). There has to be an understanding of the principles and rationale behind the change before teachers are to implement it. Without understanding, they would be unable to deal effectively with critical questioning

from colleagues back in their schools. “Understanding is a basic component of theory” (ibid: 201). Cullen also argues that teachers who return to schools after attending courses fail to “effect any discernible or positive change in what they do in the classroom or how they approach their work” (1997:22) as they are normally left to interpret the needs of their schools and to feed back the outcome of their courses as best they can. In similar vein, Waters and Vilches (1998) also emphasize the difficulty of transfer because the norms that operate in the training room and the classroom are different. In the training room there could be evidence of understanding and mastery of the new innovations but sometimes teachers are unable to deploy them in classrooms because of “different pressures, expectations and values in schools” (1998:1).

Latest studies on teacher professional development continue to support the view that training programmes dominated by theoretical transmission are unlikely to produce sustained changes in classroom practice. Current research emphasises that effective professional learning requires active teacher engagement, opportunities for reflection, contextual application, and ongoing professional support. Rather than positioning teachers as passive recipients of expert knowledge, contemporary approaches advocate practice-based and job-embedded learning that enables teachers to connect theoretical concepts with authentic classroom experiences. Studies have shown that professional development is more effective when teachers are given opportunities to experiment with new approaches, collaborate with colleagues, receive feedback, and reflect critically on the impact of instructional changes on student learning.

Furthermore, recent discussions on teacher agency suggest that meaningful professional learning occurs when teachers are empowered to interpret, adapt, and shape educational innovations within their own contexts rather than merely implement externally prescribed practices. From this perspective, understanding is not developed solely through exposure to theoretical concepts but through the interaction between theory, professional judgement, and classroom enactment. Consequently, professional development initiatives that incorporate collaborative inquiry, reflective practice, coaching, and Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) are increasingly viewed as more effective mechanisms for supporting

curriculum implementation and instructional improvement than one-off training courses.

Recent evidence has also raised concerns about large-scale training models that prioritise dissemination over deep learning. While cascade and train-the-trainer approaches remain widely used because of their scalability and cost-effectiveness, their effectiveness often depends on the quality of follow-up support, opportunities for contextual adaptation, and the professional relationships that sustain implementation after formal training has concluded. This suggests that successful educational change requires not only an understanding of new concepts and practices but also organisational conditions that support teachers in translating professional learning into sustained classroom practice.

1.3.4 The Importance Of Time For Assimilation

Time on the course was inadequate for teachers to assimilate the concepts thoroughly enough to then apply them in their classrooms. Implementing curriculum change also involves changing teachers' attitudes, values and beliefs. As Gilpin states, the co-trainers (in this case the key personnel on the course) in the Cascade "need not only to have understood the content of the change but also to have internalized and contextualized the principles informing it" (1997:186). This suggests that time is needed and space should be created for them to process the new ideas. Contemporary literature continues to support this view, emphasising that meaningful professional learning requires sufficient time for teachers to engage with new knowledge, reflect critically on its relevance, and adapt it to their own professional contexts. Effective curriculum implementation therefore depends not only on teachers' understanding of policy intentions but also on their ability to contextualise reforms to meet the needs of their learners and school environments.

At the moment, key personnel are more in the role of information givers and the participants at courses are passive receivers. Participants are often required to:

meet specifications laid down by policy makers who neither know them or their contexts in which they work ... and implement these imposed changes [which] means that their professional freedom and autonomy is further curtailed (Sikes, 1992:36-37).

Latest studies on teacher agency reinforce these concerns regarding professional autonomy. Teachers are increasingly recognised as active curriculum makers rather than passive implementers of externally mandated reforms. From this perspective, educational change is more likely to succeed when teachers are given opportunities to exercise professional judgement, participate meaningfully in decision-making processes, and adapt innovations to local needs and circumstances. Curriculum implementation is therefore viewed as a collaborative and developmental process rather than a simple act of compliance with centrally prescribed directives.

Within a span of three days to a week of the IRS course, it would be difficult to ensure that teachers had indeed internalised the new concepts for transfer into classroom practice. I feel that to effectively apply the knowledge and skills acquired through training, teachers need time to fully comprehend the new ideas and be convinced of their practicality before they can actively engage in the change process. This view is supported by recent research on large-scale professional development, which indicates that the transmission of information alone is insufficient to produce sustained changes in practice. Instead, successful professional learning requires ongoing follow-up support, collaborative inquiry, professional dialogue, feedback mechanisms, and opportunities for teachers to experiment with and reflect upon new practices over time. Furthermore, effective professional development is increasingly characterised by strong professional relationships, continuous learning, and organisational support that enable teachers to translate training into sustained classroom implementation.

1.3.5 Meeting Teachers' and School Needs

Most INSET courses I have attended, including the course under investigation, appeared to operate on the assumption that schools share similar contexts and that teachers constitute a homogeneous professional group. Such a top-down approach

often overlooks the diversity of school environments, student populations, resource availability, and teachers' professional needs. Consequently, teachers are seldom consulted or given sufficient opportunities to exercise professional judgement regarding the relevance of training programmes to their classroom realities. As a result, participation in professional development is frequently experienced on a hit-or-miss basis, with teachers attending courses without a clear understanding of how the content aligns with their instructional challenges or professional goals.

This concern remains highly relevant within the Malaysian education system, where recent reforms have introduced a range of initiatives, including the strengthening of CEFR-aligned English language education, the expanded use of the Digital Educational Learning Initiative Malaysia (DELIMa), the implementation of differentiated teaching approaches, and the growing emphasis on digital and AI literacy in schools. While these reforms seek to enhance teaching quality and student learning outcomes, they also place additional demands on teachers who already face diverse classroom conditions, administrative responsibilities, and increasing accountability requirements.

In the case of the reading course, teachers needed to be convinced that the newly introduced concepts would generate tangible benefits for their students and school communities. However, practical realities such as large class sizes, mixed-proficiency learners, examination pressures, limited instructional time, teacher workload, and uneven access to technological and material resources often received insufficient attention. As Waters and Vilches (1998:3) observed, such contextual challenges are frequently "glossed over or side-stepped" during professional development initiatives. This disconnect between training content and classroom realities may reduce teachers' willingness and ability to implement newly acquired knowledge.

Furthermore, contemporary educational trends in Malaysia increasingly emphasise teacher agency, personalised professional learning, and evidence-informed practice. National efforts to promote digital transformation and AI-enhanced learning have highlighted the need for teachers to make context-sensitive pedagogical decisions rather than merely implement externally prescribed

innovations. For English language teachers, particularly those working in linguistically and socioeconomically diverse settings, effective professional development must therefore acknowledge local classroom realities, support reflective practice, and provide adaptable strategies that can be tailored to students' varying needs. Without such contextualisation, professional development risks becoming a compliance exercise rather than a meaningful process of professional growth and instructional improvement.

Therefore, the effectiveness of any INSET programme should not be evaluated solely in terms of policy intentions or course content but also in relation to the extent to which it recognises teachers as active professionals capable of exercising informed judgement within their unique institutional and classroom contexts. Such an approach is more consistent with current understandings of teacher professionalism and the evolving demands placed on English language teachers in Malaysia's rapidly changing educational environment.

1.3.6 The Absence Of Follow-up Support

If there is no follow-up or sustained support after teachers attend professional development courses, there is little assurance that curriculum innovations will be implemented effectively or maintained over time. While orientation courses may introduce new policies, pedagogical approaches, or curricular reforms, teachers often require opportunities to translate theoretical concepts into classroom practice. Meaningful understanding of new approaches develops not during the training itself but through the process of implementing, reflecting upon, and adapting them within actual teaching contexts. Consequently, one-off training sessions are insufficient to promote lasting educational change.

In the course I attended, detailed specifications were provided and clarifications were made regarding the new reading concepts being introduced. However, a full appreciation of these concepts could only emerge once teachers began applying them in their classrooms and encountered the practical challenges associated with implementation. This suggests that if professional development consists solely of an initial orientation course without subsequent follow-up, opportunities for

teachers to deepen their understanding, address difficulties, and refine their practice are severely limited.

Furthermore, administrative mechanisms such as course evaluation forms or reports submitted to the State Education Department serve primarily as accountability measures rather than indicators of effective classroom implementation. Although such documentation may demonstrate that training has been conducted, it does not provide evidence that curriculum change has been understood, adopted, or sustained in practice. Sustainable educational reform requires more than compliance; it requires ongoing professional engagement.

This issue is particularly relevant in the contemporary Malaysian educational landscape, where English language teachers are expected to implement CEFR-aligned curricula, integrate digital technologies through platforms such as DELIMa, employ differentiated pedagogical strategies, and increasingly respond to emerging expectations concerning AI literacy and digitally enhanced learning. These reforms require continuous professional learning rather than isolated training events. Without sustained support, teachers may struggle to reconcile policy expectations with classroom realities such as large class sizes, mixed-proficiency learners, heavy workloads, and limited resources.

What is needed, therefore, is a systematic model of follow-up support in which INSET providers continue to engage teachers beyond the initial training phase. Such support could include professional learning communities, mentoring, coaching, peer observation, collaborative reflection sessions, and classroom-based monitoring. These structures would create opportunities for dialogue among teachers, enabling them to share experiences, discuss challenges, and collectively construct solutions. Professional dialogue is a critical component of teacher learning because it allows teachers to make sense of educational innovations within their own contexts and promotes a sense of ownership over the change process.

From this perspective, effective professional development should be viewed as an ongoing process rather than a single event. Curriculum change is more likely to be sustained when teachers receive continuous guidance, opportunities for reflection,

and practical support during implementation. The role of INSET providers should therefore extend beyond delivering courses to facilitating long-term professional learning partnerships that support teachers as they navigate the complexities of educational reform. Such an approach recognises teachers not merely as recipients of policy directives but as active agents whose professional knowledge and experiences are central to successful and sustainable curriculum change.

1.3.7 The Emergence of an INSET Culture

There is a prevailing INSET culture in courses I experienced where teachers expect to attend one-shot courses and leave with ideas and materials of immediate, direct, or practical relevance to their classroom work. Such courses are often viewed as an end in themselves rather than a means to an end. This situation has developed largely because teachers have historically been expected to "take on board new initiatives and curriculum developments with little understanding or ownership of them and without due regard to available knowledge, experience or resources to support their implementation in schools" (Morley, 1994, p. 3).

Although Morley made this observation more than three decades ago, the issue continues to resonate in contemporary educational contexts. Recent studies on professional development for English language teachers in Malaysia suggest that many training initiatives remain largely policy-driven and transmitted through cascade models in which teachers are positioned as recipients rather than co-constructors of professional knowledge. As a result, the focus is often placed on compliance with reform agendas rather than meaningful engagement with the realities of classroom implementation. Research conducted on Malaysian English language teachers' continuous professional development found that significant gaps still exist between national policy intentions and teachers' actual professional needs, with many teachers reporting that professional development activities do not always translate into meaningful changes in practice. The study further highlighted the persistence of top-down approaches and called for more teacher-centred and transformative professional learning models.

My own experience reflects this tension. Teachers frequently attend courses with the expectation of acquiring ready-made teaching materials, techniques, or solutions that can be immediately applied in their classrooms. Such expectations are understandable given the increasing demands placed on teachers, including curriculum implementation, assessment responsibilities, administrative tasks, and the need to respond to diverse learner needs. In these circumstances, professional development can become reduced to the acquisition of practical tips rather than an ongoing process of professional inquiry and growth. While practical classroom support is important, an overreliance on one-off solutions may inadvertently discourage deeper professional reflection and limit opportunities for teachers to develop a sense of ownership over educational change.

It has increasingly emphasised the importance of teacher agency in professional development. Teacher agency refers to teachers' capacity to make informed professional decisions, adapt innovations to local contexts, and actively shape educational change rather than merely implement externally prescribed initiatives. A 2024 review of continuous professional development in Malaysia argues that effective professional learning must be tailored to teachers' differing needs, experiences, and school contexts rather than adopting a "one-size-fits-all" approach. The authors contend that professional development is most effective when teachers are provided with opportunities to exercise professional judgement and participate actively in shaping their learning experiences.

This issue has become even more significant in the context of recent reforms in English language education. The implementation of the CEFR-aligned curriculum, the expansion of digital learning environments through DELIMa, and the growing emphasis on digital and AI-related competencies require teachers to engage in sustained learning and continual adaptation. Emerging research on CEFR implementation in Malaysia indicates that teachers are more likely to embrace innovation when they have opportunities to contextualise reform initiatives, collaborate with colleagues, and adapt materials to suit their learners. Conversely, teachers who experience reforms as externally imposed often report feelings of disempowerment, particularly when training programmes fail to acknowledge

contextual constraints such as workload, assessment pressures, student proficiency differences, and resource limitations.

Furthermore, recent discussions surrounding Malaysian Teachers Standard 2.0 (SGM 2.0), introduced in 2023, place greater emphasis on teachers' continuous self-development, professional competence, and capacity for lifelong learning. The framework encourages teachers to identify their own professional needs and engage in ongoing professional growth rather than relying solely on centrally determined training programmes. This shift reflects a growing recognition within Malaysian education that effective professional development cannot be achieved through isolated workshops alone, but requires a culture in which teachers are trusted as professionals capable of making informed pedagogical decisions.

Consequently, while one-shot INSET courses may satisfy immediate demands for classroom resources and teaching ideas, they rarely provide sufficient opportunities for critical reflection, collaborative learning, or sustained professional growth. Professional development is most meaningful when teachers are involved in identifying their own learning needs, examining the relevance of innovations to their specific contexts, and engaging in ongoing dialogue with colleagues and trainers. Without these elements, there is a risk that INSET programmes become short-term events designed to disseminate policy directives rather than long-term processes that support genuine professional learning and sustainable educational change.

1.3.8 The Focus is usually on Training

Course-based INSET in Malaysia, including the course examined in this study, has traditionally been characterised by a training-oriented approach. Such programmes are primarily “concerned with necessary knowledge of the topic taught and the methodology for teaching it. The emphasis is on classroom skills and techniques and on using materials and resources that are currently considered helpful to learning” (Underhill, 1988, p. 4). While this approach serves an important purpose in introducing new curricular initiatives and pedagogical practices, its focus tends to be on short-term acquisition of knowledge and skills rather than longer-term

professional growth. Consequently, teachers are often positioned as recipients of expertise rather than active participants in the construction of professional knowledge.

As Head and Taylor (1997) argue, “it is more useful to see training and development as two complementary components of a fully rounded teacher education” (p. 9). This distinction remains highly relevant in the contemporary Malaysian educational context. Recent educational reforms, including the continued implementation of the CEFR-aligned English language curriculum, the expansion of digital learning platforms through DELIMa, and the increasing emphasis on AI literacy and digital competencies, have highlighted the limitations of relying solely on training-based models of professional learning. These reforms require teachers not only to acquire new knowledge and techniques but also to interpret, adapt, and apply them within diverse and often challenging classroom contexts. Research on Malaysian teacher professional development increasingly suggests that professional learning is most effective when it is responsive to teachers' individual needs, contexts, and professional aspirations rather than delivered through standardised, one-size-fits-all programmes.

The concept of training therefore needs to be expanded into one of professional development. Such an expansion can occur when professional learning moves beyond the transmission of prescribed knowledge and enters “the intimate world of the practitioner” (Walker, 1988, p. 4). In practical terms, this means creating opportunities for teachers to engage in self-observation, critical reflection, classroom inquiry, and collaborative professional dialogue. Walker's argument remains particularly significant because professional growth is not solely a matter of learning new teaching techniques; it also involves developing deeper awareness of one's beliefs, assumptions, behaviours, and decision-making processes. Through self-observation and self-reflection, teachers become more aware of “personal behaviours and attitudes which can be conducive to the pedagogic process” (Walker, 1988, p. 4).

Latest research has reinforced the importance of teacher agency within professional development. Rather than viewing teachers as passive implementers of externally

mandated reforms, contemporary perspectives emphasise teachers' capacity to exercise professional judgement, adapt innovations to local circumstances, and shape educational change from within their own classrooms. A review of continuous professional development in Malaysia found that teacher agency should be a central outcome of professional learning and argued that CPD programmes need to be tailored to the diverse needs and characteristics of teachers in different educational contexts. Such findings challenge traditional INSET models that focus primarily on transmitting information and instead support developmental approaches that encourage teachers to become reflective and autonomous practitioners.

This shift is particularly important for English language teachers. Recent studies examining CEFR implementation in Malaysia indicate that teachers often encounter tensions between policy expectations and classroom realities. Teachers are expected to implement new pedagogical approaches while simultaneously responding to issues such as mixed-ability classes, examination pressures, workload demands, limited instructional time, and varying levels of resource availability. Research has shown that teachers exercise greater agency and demonstrate stronger commitment to reform when they are given opportunities to contextualise policy initiatives, collaborate with colleagues, and participate in sustained professional learning rather than isolated training sessions.

Furthermore, the introduction of Malaysian Teacher Standard 2.0 in 2023 reflects a growing recognition that teachers should assume greater responsibility for their own professional growth. The framework encourages teachers to engage in continuous self-assessment, identify their developmental needs, and plan ongoing professional learning throughout their careers. This emphasis represents a move away from viewing professional development as attendance at courses and towards understanding it as a continuous, reflective, and self-directed process.

Therefore, while training remains an important component of teacher education, it is insufficient on its own to sustain meaningful educational change. Development requires teachers to engage critically with their practice, reflect on their experiences, and construct professional knowledge through ongoing interaction

with colleagues, learners, and educational contexts. Professional learning should not be viewed merely as the acquisition of new techniques but as a process of personal and professional transformation. It is through this developmental perspective that teachers can move beyond implementation towards ownership of innovation and change. In the following chapter, I will define the respective roles of training and development in greater detail and examine how the relationship between the two contributes to effective teacher learning and educational improvement.

1.4 TOWARDS SCHOOL-BASED TEACHER DEVELOPMENT

The example provided earlier of how the Cascade Model works is intended to highlight the limited impact of the model in bringing about meaningful curricular change in schools. This limitation was recognised at the Ministry level, leading to the introduction of an alternative approach in 1991. School-based INSET was subsequently implemented through the Teacher Support Team (TST) concept. The idea was initiated by the then Director-General of Education, Dato' Asiah Abu Samah, who was concerned about the declining standards of English among Malaysian students, particularly as reflected in public examination performance.

TST was implemented through the Schools Curriculum Project (SCP) under the Schools Division of the Ministry of Education (MOE). The SCP was an INSET programme for both primary and secondary schools and received financial assistance from the British Government through the Overseas Development Administration. The TST initiative can be regarded as a national effort to address some of the shortcomings associated with course-based INSET by focusing on school-level support and by "assisting teachers to develop their classroom practices" (Ali G. et al., 1995, p. 3). Since its inception, approximately 1,200 TST members had been trained nationwide (TST Consultancy Report, 1996), and the concept became established across all states in Malaysia.

The significance of TST lies not merely in its organisational structure but in its underlying philosophy. Unlike the traditional Cascade Model, which relied heavily on the transmission of information from one level of the system to another, TST

sought to bring professional support closer to teachers' everyday classroom realities. The model recognised that teacher learning is most meaningful when it is connected to actual classroom practice and when support is available within the school environment. In many ways, TST represented an early attempt to promote collaborative professional learning and peer support among teachers.

Interestingly, many of the principles underlying TST continue to resonate with contemporary understandings of teacher professional development. Current research increasingly suggests that professional learning is more effective when it is sustained, collaborative, context-sensitive, and embedded within teachers' daily work rather than delivered through isolated workshops or one-off training courses. Recent Malaysian studies have highlighted the importance of teacher agency, collaboration, and continuous professional development that responds to the specific needs of teachers and schools rather than adopting a uniform approach for all teachers. Such findings suggest that teachers are more likely to embrace and sustain educational innovations when they are actively involved in the learning process and are given opportunities to adapt new ideas to their own contexts.

The continuing relevance of school-based professional development can also be seen in more recent educational reforms. The implementation of CEFR-aligned English language education, the expansion of digital learning through DELIMa, and the introduction of Malaysian Teachers Standard 2.0 (SGM 2.0) have all emphasised the importance of continuous professional growth, reflective practice, and self-directed learning among teachers. SGM 2.0 in particular encourages teachers to identify their own professional learning needs and engage in ongoing professional development throughout their careers.

Viewed from this perspective, the TST initiative may be seen as an important milestone in the evolution of teacher development in Malaysia. Although developed more than three decades ago, its emphasis on collegial support, classroom-based learning, and continuous professional growth anticipated many of the characteristics now associated with effective professional development. The movement towards school-based teacher development reflects a growing recognition that sustainable educational change is most likely to occur when

teachers are supported within their own professional contexts and are empowered to participate actively in their own learning and development.

1.4.1 The TST Concept

The TST concept is based on the principle of teachers helping and supporting one another in their professional practice. The programme offers "school-based INSET in the context, culture and climate of the teacher's own school" and "support[s] and strengthen[s] an individual school by offering the professional services of a small group of advisers [who are] practising teachers of English ... for a period of one week on the school premises, together with follow-up visits by the State Language Officer" (Ali G. & Randles, 1995, p. 43). In essence, it is a scheme that brings professional development opportunities directly to teachers within their own schools rather than requiring them to attend courses at external venues.

Generally, schools selected for TST visits are those experiencing declining performance in English language examinations. However, the primary focus of TST extends beyond examination achievement and centres on improving classroom practice. The needs of both teachers and students are prioritised, and support is tailored to the particular context of each school. The programme is founded on the belief that effective in-service education begins by "helping teachers to identify needs within their teaching context" (Consultancy Report, 1993). In this respect, TST differs from more traditional training models that often assume that the same solutions can be applied uniformly across different schools and teaching situations.

A distinctive feature of the TST approach is its emphasis on collegiality and professional support. Rather than positioning teachers as passive recipients of expert knowledge, the programme encourages collaboration among teachers and promotes professional dialogue about classroom practices. Through classroom observation, discussion, demonstration lessons, and follow-up support, teachers are provided with opportunities to reflect on their teaching and to explore possible improvements within a supportive environment. Such an approach recognises that

professional learning is often most effective when it is closely connected to teachers' daily experiences and immediate classroom concerns.

The principles underpinning TST remain relevant today. Contemporary research on teacher professional development increasingly emphasises the importance of school-based learning, teacher agency, collaborative professional cultures, and continuous support rather than isolated training events. Recent studies in the Malaysian context have argued that professional development is more meaningful when it is responsive to teachers' individual contexts and when teachers are actively involved in identifying their own professional learning needs. Such findings echo the philosophy that informed the TST initiative more than three decades ago.

Furthermore, current educational reforms require teachers to respond to increasingly complex demands, including CEFR-aligned English language instruction, the integration of digital technologies, differentiated learning approaches, and the development of AI-related competencies. These developments highlight the continuing importance of school-based professional support systems that enable teachers to discuss challenges, share experiences, and adapt innovations to their particular classroom contexts. Recent research on English language teacher development in Malaysia has similarly stressed the importance of sustained, collaborative, and context-sensitive professional learning rather than reliance on one-off training programmes.

Viewed from this perspective, the TST initiative may be regarded as an early example of a school-based teacher development model that anticipated many of the characteristics now associated with effective professional learning. Its focus on contextualised support, peer collaboration, classroom practice, and follow-up assistance reflects principles that continue to be recognised as important for promoting meaningful and sustainable professional growth among teachers. As such, TST can be seen as an important contributor to the continuing professional development of teachers in Malaysia and a significant step towards fostering a culture of reflective and collaborative practice within schools.

1.4.2 TST Training: Content and Methodology

The Consultancy Report (1994) outlined the training procedures for TST as involving "experiential work, reflection and the establishment of basic training principles". Between 1993 and 1996, a gradual shift occurred in the orientation of the programme, moving from TST visits towards a broader concept of school-based teacher development. At the outset, TST training focused on the underlying principles of TST as a vehicle for continuing professional development, facilitating educational change, and promoting the role of teachers as researchers. As the programme evolved, additional training was provided to TST teams in areas such as interpersonal communication, team-building, counselling, assertiveness, motivation, problem-solving, and stress management. These areas reflected an increasing recognition that teacher development extends beyond pedagogical knowledge and requires attention to the interpersonal and organisational dimensions of teaching.

By the end of the consultancy period in 1996, TST had developed from a model centred on school visits into one that emphasised school-based in-service provision. This shift represented an important departure from traditional transmission-oriented models of professional development. Rather than viewing teachers merely as recipients of information, the programme sought to empower them to become reflective practitioners capable of identifying and responding to issues within their own classrooms and schools.

One of the significant tools introduced through the TST programme was action research. Teachers were encouraged to undertake "small-scale research into their own teaching situation" (Situation Report MOE, 1992/1993, p. 9). The inclusion of action research reflected the belief that valuable professional knowledge can emerge from systematic inquiry into one's own practice. Through identifying classroom problems, implementing interventions, and evaluating outcomes, teachers were expected to become more critical and reflective about their teaching.

Despite this positive intention, action research did not become widely embedded in school practice. One reason was that a clear framework for implementation did not

sufficiently reach schools, leaving many teachers uncertain about how to conduct and sustain research activities. Consequently, action research often remained dependent on the interest and initiative of individual TST members rather than becoming an integral component of school culture. As a result, the potential of action research as a mechanism for school-wide professional learning was not fully realised.

Interestingly, many of the principles embedded within TST training continue to be reflected in contemporary discussions of teacher professional development in Malaysia. It is emphasized that effective professional learning should move beyond skill acquisition towards reflective practice, teacher inquiry, collaboration, and professional agency. A review of continuous professional development in Malaysia argues that teachers should be empowered to exercise professional judgement and engage in learning experiences that are responsive to their individual contexts and needs. Such an approach aligns closely with the original intentions of TST training, particularly its emphasis on reflection, teacher-led inquiry, and continuous learning.

Similarly, recent research on English language teacher development and CEFR implementation has highlighted the importance of sustained professional learning, collaborative support, and opportunities for teachers to adapt innovations to their own classroom contexts. Teachers who engage in reflective dialogue, classroom investigation, and collaborative problem-solving are more likely to develop a sense of ownership over educational reforms than those who merely attend one-off training courses.

From a contemporary perspective, the inclusion of action research within the TST framework can be viewed as particularly forward-looking. Current educational reforms increasingly encourage evidence-informed practice, reflective teaching, and ongoing professional inquiry. The introduction of Malaysian Teachers Standard 2.0 in 2023 further reinforces the importance of continuous self-assessment, professional reflection, and lifelong learning as key dimensions of teacher professionalism. In many respects, the emphasis placed by TST on reflection, teacher inquiry, and school-based professional learning anticipated many of the

features that are now regarded as essential components of effective professional development.

Viewed as a whole, the content and methodology of TST training represented an attempt to move beyond a narrow conception of training towards a broader and more developmental view of teacher learning. Its focus on experiential learning, reflection, interpersonal growth, collaborative support, and action research sought to position teachers as active participants in their own professional development. Although some aspects, particularly action research, were not fully institutionalised within schools, the principles underpinning the programme remain relevant to contemporary efforts to promote sustainable and meaningful teacher development in Malaysia.

1.4.3 School-based TST as a tool for teacher development

In my experience as a member of the TST team, one particularly positive feature of TST was its responsiveness to teachers' and schools' needs. Unlike many centrally organised INSET programmes where content is predetermined, teachers in the schools visited by TST were encouraged to set their own agenda. Together with TST personnel, they identified areas in which they required assistance and support. This process recognised that teachers were best placed to understand the realities and challenges of their own classrooms. In order to identify these needs, teachers had to reflect on their daily classroom experiences, and this reflection became, in many cases, the starting point for further professional growth. Looking back, this was one of the strengths of the TST model because it acknowledged teachers as active participants in their own learning rather than passive recipients of externally generated solutions.

One important requirement for TST personnel undertaking school visits was prior training, particularly in interpersonal and counselling skills that would enable effective negotiation and communication with teachers. Such preparation was important because each school presented different challenges, personalities, expectations, and professional concerns. TST personnel were expected not only to share expertise but also to listen carefully, build trust, and encourage professional

dialogue. In many instances, the success of a school visit depended as much on the quality of relationships established as on the professional knowledge shared. This people-centred aspect of the programme anticipated current views that effective professional development requires supportive professional relationships and collaborative learning rather than simple knowledge transmission.

The training methodology employed during TST visits drew heavily upon Kolb's (1984) experiential learning cycle. Most sessions began with teachers discussing their own experiences because different schools operated within different contexts and what worked effectively in one setting could not necessarily be transferred directly to another. Starting with teachers' experiences enabled TST personnel to develop a better understanding of classroom realities and to offer support that was relevant to the teachers' immediate needs. Equally important, the process of articulating experiences and discussing classroom challenges encouraged teachers to become more conscious of their own professional beliefs, practices, and concerns. For some teachers, this represented an important first step towards becoming more reflective practitioners.

As the focus of TST was on improving classroom practice, TST personnel incorporated reflective activities into their training sessions to promote a deeper understanding of teaching and learning processes. On several visits in which I participated, it became clear that teachers were primarily interested in obtaining practical ideas and teaching materials that could be readily implemented in their classrooms. This was understandable given the multiple responsibilities teachers were expected to shoulder in addition to their teaching duties. Nevertheless, their desire for practical solutions should not be interpreted as resistance to professional growth. Rather, it reflected a genuine commitment to improving classroom practice within the constraints of time, workload, and available resources.

This observation remains relevant today. Contemporary studies of teacher professional development in Malaysia suggest that teachers continue to value professional learning that directly addresses classroom challenges while also providing opportunities for reflection, collaboration, and professional autonomy. Recent research has highlighted the importance of teacher agency, arguing that

professional development is most effective when teachers have opportunities to identify their own learning needs and adapt new knowledge to their specific teaching contexts. Such findings reinforce the philosophy that informed TST, namely that professional development should begin with teachers' experiences and be grounded in the realities of classroom practice.

The services offered by TST personnel involved the sharing of ideas, experiences, and expertise. This expectation also placed professional demands on TST members themselves. To provide meaningful support to schools, TST personnel had to remain informed about developments in education and English language teaching and learning. Preparation for school visits often required reading widely, updating professional knowledge, and reflecting on one's own classroom practices. Consequently, the professional learning that occurred through TST was not limited to the recipient schools; TST members themselves also benefited through continuous learning and professional growth.

From a contemporary perspective, this reciprocal nature of learning reflects current understandings of professional development as a collaborative rather than hierarchical process. Latest studies and research on teacher development emphasises that professional learning is most sustainable when teachers learn with and from one another through dialogue, mentoring, collaborative inquiry, and professional learning communities. In this respect, the TST model was ahead of its time. Its emphasis on contextualised support, reflective practice, collegial learning, and shared expertise anticipated many of the principles now associated with effective school-based professional development.

Reflecting on my experiences with TST, I believe one of its most significant contributions was its recognition that meaningful teacher development begins with teachers' own experiences, concerns, and professional aspirations. Rather than imposing predetermined solutions, the model sought to work with teachers in identifying issues, exploring alternatives, and developing practical responses suited to their specific contexts. This approach not only supported immediate improvements in classroom practice but also encouraged a culture of reflection and professional learning which remains highly relevant in today's educational

environment, particularly as teachers navigate ongoing reforms in English language education, digital learning, and evolving professional standards.

1.4.4 Constraints encountered on TST visits

The visits were generally well received because the team comprised practising teachers who were willing to share their experiences and offer support. Teachers appeared more comfortable discussing their concerns with fellow practitioners who were familiar with classroom realities and the challenges of teaching English. Nevertheless, because the visits were externally initiated and often triggered by poor student performance in public examinations, there remained an underlying perception among some teachers that their schools had been identified as needing help because they were somehow deficient. This stigma occasionally created barriers to open participation and may have influenced the way teachers responded to the support provided.

A three- or five-day visit by a TST team cannot be expected to bring about substantial or immediate change. Educational change is a gradual process and meaningful improvements in classroom practice often take time to develop. However, what these visits were able to provide was a valuable opportunity for professional dialogue among teachers. Through discussion, reflection, and the sharing of experiences, teachers were encouraged to consider alternative approaches to their teaching and to identify areas for further growth. In many cases, the most significant outcome of a TST visit was not the implementation of specific techniques but the generation of ideas among teachers themselves regarding how their classroom practices might be improved.

Experience also showed that many classroom problems did not originate solely from the classroom itself but were frequently linked to broader issues within the culture and management of the school. Teacher motivation, collaboration, workload, leadership support, and school priorities all influenced the effectiveness of classroom teaching. As Maclure (1989) observed, if teachers suffer from the "D

syndrome" of being "devalued, deskilled and disaffected by the ... widening net of accountability [and] the deluge of innovations" (p. 76), then the climate is unlikely to encourage professional autonomy or commitment to development. These observations remain relevant today. Contemporary studies of teacher professional development in Malaysia continue to highlight tensions between accountability requirements, administrative workload, and teachers' capacity to engage meaningfully in professional learning. Researchers have argued that teachers are more likely to embrace change when they are given opportunities to exercise professional judgement and when reforms are implemented in ways that acknowledge their professional expertise rather than merely requiring compliance.

For this reason, TST visits needed to avoid reinforcing the impression that teachers were simply recipients of externally generated directives. Teachers should not feel that they are "inundated with directives from outside, moving like flotsam at the whim of a passing current" (Bradley et al., 1994, p. 234). Instead, professional development should create opportunities for teachers to question, adapt, and contextualise new ideas in ways that are meaningful within their own teaching environments. This is particularly important in the current educational landscape, where English language teachers are expected to respond to continuing curriculum reforms, CEFR implementation, digital learning initiatives, and evolving professional standards. Such demands require teachers to exercise agency and professional judgement rather than merely follow prescribed procedures.

Another issue that became apparent during school visits was teachers' reluctance to invite TST members into their classrooms. This reluctance appeared to stem largely from concerns that classroom observation would result in judgements about their competence or effectiveness as teachers. For many teachers, classroom observation had traditionally been associated with supervision, appraisal, and institutional accountability rather than professional learning. Consequently, observations were often viewed with caution or anxiety. Yet classroom observation has considerable potential as a developmental tool when conducted within a supportive and non-evaluative framework. When teachers view observation as an opportunity for reflection, dialogue, and mutual learning, it can become a powerful mechanism for professional growth. Contemporary approaches to professional development

similarly stress the importance of peer observation, coaching, mentoring, and collaborative inquiry as means of improving classroom practice through trust and collegial support rather than inspection and evaluation.

The secondment of TST personnel from their own schools for specified periods also created practical difficulties. The release time needed for TST personnel to support teachers in other schools often meant that their colleagues were required to assume additional responsibilities during their absence. Upon returning to their own schools, TST personnel frequently faced a backlog of administrative and teaching-related work. Although the rationale behind TST was widely recognised as worthwhile, the arrangement sometimes generated tensions within schools. It was not uncommon for principals to express the view that TST personnel should first utilise their expertise to assist teachers within their own schools before being deployed elsewhere.

This tension highlights a broader challenge that continues to affect school-based professional development initiatives. While educational systems benefit from teachers sharing expertise across schools, the sustainability of such initiatives depends on sufficient institutional support, workload management, and recognition of teachers' professional contributions. Recent discussions on teacher development in Malaysia have similarly emphasised that effective professional learning requires systemic support from school leadership, adequate time for collaboration, and structures that enable teachers to engage in professional learning without increasing work-related stress.

Reflecting on these experiences, it became apparent that the success of TST depended not only on the quality of the support provided but also on the extent to which teachers felt respected, trusted, and involved in the development process. Where professional dialogue, collaboration, and mutual understanding were established, teachers were generally more receptive to new ideas and more willing to reflect on their classroom practices. In this sense, the most enduring contribution of TST may not have been the specific strategies introduced during school visits, but the opportunities it created for collegial learning, reflective practice, and teacher-led professional growth. These principles continue to underpin

contemporary conceptions of effective school-based teacher development and remain highly relevant in today's educational environment.

1.4.5 Insights gained from TST visits

I agree wholeheartedly with Ur (1996) when she argues that teachers should continue to advance their professional expertise and knowledge without depending solely on external input or formal courses. She writes:

"*You have within your own teaching routine the main tools for personal progress: your own experience and your reflections on it, interaction with other teachers in your institution. Teacher development takes place when teachers working as individuals or in a group, consciously take advantage of such resources to forward their own professional learning*"
(Ur, 1996, p. 318).

This was one of the most significant insights I gained from my involvement in TST visits. As I worked alongside teachers in different schools, I became increasingly aware of the wealth of experience, practical knowledge, and professional wisdom that already existed within schools. I also realised that teachers often possessed solutions to many of the challenges they faced, but what was frequently lacking were the opportunities, structures, and supportive conditions that would allow professional learning and development to flourish. When teachers were given time to discuss their classroom experiences, share ideas, and reflect on their practices, valuable professional learning occurred naturally.

Looking back, it became evident that teacher development is not necessarily dependent on formal training programmes. Rather, development is often embedded within the daily work of teaching itself. Every lesson taught, every classroom challenge encountered, and every conversation with colleagues provides an opportunity for professional learning. What is required is a culture in which teachers feel supported to engage in reflection, collaboration, experimentation, and continuous improvement. In this respect, the TST model highlighted the

considerable potential for teacher development to occur within schools when the conditions are conducive.

This insight remains relevant in the contemporary Malaysian educational context. Recent studies on teacher professional development have increasingly emphasised teacher agency, self-directed learning, and collaborative professional growth. Teachers are now viewed not merely as implementers of educational policies but as professionals who actively construct knowledge, make informed pedagogical decisions, and adapt innovations to suit their contexts. Research has shown that professional development is more likely to be effective when teachers are encouraged to identify their own learning needs and participate actively in shaping their professional learning experiences.

The recognition of teachers as active learners is also reflected in recent national initiatives. The implementation of Standard Guru Malaysia 2.0 in 2023 places greater emphasis on teachers' responsibility for their own professional growth through self-assessment, reflective practice, and continuous professional learning. Rather than viewing professional development as attendance at courses alone, the framework promotes lifelong learning and encourages teachers to take ownership of their professional development throughout their careers.

Another useful insight gained through TST was the recognition that there were approximately 1,200 trained TST personnel throughout the country. This represented a significant pool of professional expertise that could potentially be utilised more effectively within schools. Rather than relying exclusively on external courses or periodic school visits, these trained personnel could serve as facilitators, mentors, and sources of professional support for their colleagues.

Their presence within schools could help create conditions in which professional dialogue and collaborative learning become part of everyday practice rather than occasional events.

The ideal situation, of course, would be to have a trained TST member in every school to coordinate INSET and teacher development activities, as advocated in the 1996 Consultancy Report on Teacher Support Teams. Viewed from a contemporary

perspective, this proposal closely resembles current approaches based on Professional Learning Communities (PLCs), mentoring, coaching, and school-based professional learning. Recent research on English language teacher development in Malaysia has highlighted the importance of sustained support, collaborative learning, and context-sensitive professional development rather than reliance on one-off training programmes. Teachers appear more willing to embrace change when support is available within their own schools and when professional learning is connected to the realities of their classrooms.

Reflecting on my experiences, I believe that one of the most enduring lessons from TST was the realisation that meaningful teacher development is fundamentally a school-based process. External expertise undoubtedly has a role to play, but lasting professional growth occurs when teachers themselves become active learners, reflective practitioners, and supportive colleagues within their own professional communities. The challenge, therefore, is not merely to provide more courses but to create the conditions within schools that enable teachers to learn from their experiences, from one another, and from the everyday realities of their work. It is these conditions that, in my view, form the foundation of sustainable teacher development and educational improvement.

SUMMARY

In this chapter I have looked at INSET provision in Malaysia and how a perception of the less successful aspects of the Cascade course-based model has led to national initiatives to introduce school-based INSET as an alternative for continuing teacher development. This discussion has highlighted the limitations of externally driven training and the need for professional development that is more responsive to teachers' classroom realities and school contexts

As this innovative model based on the concept of “teacher supporting teacher” (TST) emphasizes a long-term view of teacher development, I foresee a need for teachers themselves within their own schools to collectively appraise important issues to bring improvements in their own professionality and in the effectiveness of their schools. My experiences with TST have reinforced the belief that

meaningful professional development is most likely to occur when teachers actively identify their own needs, learn from their experiences, and collaborate with colleagues in seeking solutions to shared concerns. They should only seek assistance from TST personnel voluntarily when they need consultation. As Morant ideally puts it, teachers should "retain responsibility for their own in-service education and through this, for their personal career development. … until all professional needs can be met by the teacher taking action [herself], it may not be possible for [her] to attain [her] full professional potential" (1981:6). This view remains highly relevant today, as increasing attention is being given to teacher agency, reflective practice, collaborative learning, and continuous professional growth within schools. The next chapter will look at INSET needs of teachers and what constitutes effective INSET

CHAPTER 2 EFFECTIVE INSET FOR TEACHER DEVELOPMENT AND EDUCATIONAL CHANGE

OVERVIEW

In the opening chapter, I examined the limited impact in Malaysia of INSET provision via the Cascade model and considered building on the strengths of the school-based TST model for continuing professional education of teachers in schools. This chapter looks into the underlying theories of the nature and scope of INSET as a means of perpetuating personal development of teachers with the ultimate aim of improving their professionalism to meet the changing demands of society. It starts with definitions to make clear distinctions of terms used in this study, such as training, education, teacher development and INSET. The findings based on a survey to uncover the perceptions of some Malaysian teachers to INSET are then examined. It continues with a discussion of teacher development and change that are seen as the two main purposes of INSET. It then outlines reasons for school-based initiatives for directing professional development efforts towards the identified needs of teachers and their schools to improve the quality of life within classrooms. This chapter concludes with suggestions for a model of school-initiated INSET which encourages reflective and exploratory teaching as a bridge between theory and the practical realities of and concerns in the classroom.

2.1 DEFINITION OF TERMS

2.1.1 Training versus Education

As the acronym INSET stands for in-service education and training, it is necessary to make distinctions between these two elements and clarify whether both education and training have an equal partnership in in-service provision. If INSET is seen by the providing bodies as training then it will be "concerned with the acquisition of skills and techniques using standardised learning procedures and sequences" (Morant 1981:3). From the point of view of professional development and school improvement, training alone is inadequate as INSET is undertaken as short experiences, usually on a one-shot basis, with an emphasis on skill or knowledge acquisition. Moreover as Day states

> The professional learning opportunities [are] curriculum led and based on implicit and problematic assumptions of economy and immediacy. They [are] in effect exemplifying a view of teacher as technician/employee. (Day, 1993)

But we need to acknowledge that training is important as it

> can be beneficial when improvements in specific skills and competencies are sought, or for awareness raising when large number of teachers need to learn about some new initiatives. (Bradley et al 1994:236)

However, Bradley et al (1994) argue that training is of limited value and deals with surface concerns. They feel that training limits teacher development as teachers may become dependent if they always feel the need for retraining to keep abreast with innovations and developments in the area of ELT. The focus of training is to produce competent teachers in knowledge of content areas and strategies of effective classroom practice. The transfer of the training content to the classroom is also seen as the sole responsibility of the teacher.

Education means something more than training or the acquisition of practical skills. The distinction between training and education is succinctly made by Widdowson:

> **Training** seeks to impose a conformity to certain established problems of knowledge and behaviour, usually in order to carry out a set of clearly defined tasks, where the problem is recognizably a token of a formula type. Education, however, seeks to provide for creativity whereby what is learned is a set of schemata and procedures for adapting them to cope with problems which do not have a ready-made formulaic solution. In this sense, we may say that training tends to convergence and a reliance on established technique, whereas education tends towards divergence and a readiness to break from the confinement of

prescribed practices. (Widdowson 1983:19)

Education then is concerned with encouraging teachers to be creative, autonomous thinkers and independent analysts constantly examining their classroom practices in a critical manner leading to their development. Thus teachers need to widen and deepen their knowledge, understanding and expertise in respect of their professional work. I feel that education has a long-term perspective and encompasses both training and development in the initial-induction and in-service continuum of the teacher's career. Training is a part of the total framework of in-service education and as such INSET has to provide for training and a continual process of bringing about teachers' professional, academic and personal development.

2.1.2 Teacher development

Development can "mean many different things and take many forms as teachers find ways of responding to the inner desire that motivates them to learn" (Head and Taylor 1997: 5). Underhill's definition offers some useful insights into development,

> Development means … keeping myself on the same side of the learning fence as my students. This is the only way that I can keep alive a sense of challenge and adventure in my career, and avoid getting in a rut. If I am in a rut, then so is my teaching, and then so are my students, and learning from a rut is tedious, slow and uninspiring. (Underhill 1988:4)

This implies that for teachers to develop, they need to learn constantly to become better teachers through a more profound understanding and awareness of their roles as teachers and that of their learners. In other words,

> in learning, the teachers [are] developing their beliefs and ideas, developing their classroom practice and attending to their feelings, associated with changing…Learning in the teacher development process can be viewed as purposeful enquiry. The teachers [are] enquiring into

> an aspect of their teaching – an aspect that they [see] as problematic and [wish] to change.
> (Bell and Gilbert 1994:493)

In defining teacher development Eraut (1977) emphasized the importance of teachers having ownership of their development in the:

> natural process of professional growth in which a teacher gradually acquires confidence, gains new perspectives, increases in knowledge, discovers new methods and takes on new roles. (1977:10)

In similar vein Easen feels that

> You cannot really change other people, nor can they change you; people can only change themselves. The best that anyone can do is to provide a structure which helps others to change, if that is what they want to do. (1985:71)

Teachers need to develop because as teachers they hope that their students learn how to learn and take initiative and to inquire; and that they will adapt to changing situations. But can teachers expect to achieve it unless they are also engaged in continuous enquiry and taking new initiatives? (Eraut 1977:10). What is implied is that teachers must be personally aware of the possibilities for change and how it will affect the way they teach and become "the best kind[s] of teacher[s] that [they] personally can be" (Underhill 1986:1). Teacher development has to do with individual needs of teachers based on "their desired direction for development" (Head and Taylor 1997:4). Teachers have to make choices about their own development which means that teacher development has a personal agenda.

Lange (1990) sums it up concisely when he describes teacher development as a process of continual intellectual, experiential and attitudinal growth of teachers. But for that growth to happen, there has to be a favourable context for learning, accessibility to resources, managerial and collegial support and recognition to motivate teachers to want to develop.

2.1.3 In-Service Education and Training (INSET)

INSET usually means short or long courses, either at the teachers' place of work or elsewhere, which are focused around particular subjects or themes. The aim is to impart information, raise awareness and understanding, encourage critical analysis, develop skills and evaluate outcomes (Munby et al 1987:20). INSET may take a variety of forms ranging from one-day seminars, conferences or workshops to full-time courses such as Masters or diplomas arranged in-country or overseas. Generally, INSET is "intended primarily or exclusively to improve [teachers'] professional knowledge, skills and attitudes in order that they can educate children more effectively" (Bolam 1986:18). An extension to this definition is given in the James Report (1972) which defines INSET as:

> … the whole range of activities by which teachers can extend their personal education, develop their professional competence and improve their understanding of educational principles and techniques. (Quoted in Hopkins: 1986:19)

The assumptions that underpin this definition are that the personal growth and the development of the professional knowledge and understanding of teachers are built into the activities of INSET. Alexander (1980) offers a useful framework for analysing INSET. He identifies four critical aspects of INSET:

- Focus represents what the INSET activity is about, the problems, issues or needs it is concerned with. The focus of any INSET is to strike a balance between the individual needs of teachers and the needs of the institutions in which they serve.

- Control has to do with the people with viewpoints and degrees of influence who decide on the professional development of teachers. They make decisions on what the teacher needs and what form of INSET is required to meet these needs. Control can be exercised by individuals like the teacher herself or by groups.

- Mode will cover both the traditional course and non-course that includes conferences, seminars and workshops. They can be long/short, award bearing or non-award bearing, advanced or non- advanced courses.

- Location signifies the place in which an INSET activity is carried out. There are generally two locations: school-based and agency-based which means that INSET takes place in the school premises or outside the school setting respectively.

There are also two ways of looking at INSET according to McLaughlin and Berman (1977).
They are the deficit model and the developmental model.

- The deficit model assumes that problems in schools have to do with inadequate information, inadequate skills and that information and skills imparted to the teacher would make them more effective in the classroom. INSET programmes based on this model are usually 'top-down' and 'outsiders' make decisions about teachers' needs and "subscribe a regimen for the deficient"

(Gough 1995:35).

- The developmental model focuses on problem solving methodology and implies "teacher participation in the determination of issues, and accepts the status quo as the starting point of growth" (ibid:35).

Before I proceed in proposing a school-based developmental model of INSET, it would be pertinent to uncover the perceptions of some Malaysian teachers to current INSET practices in Malaysia. How they perceive INSET and whether INSET meets their expectations will help me explore the question of whether present INSET provision meets the teachers' developmental needs.

2.2 SOME MALAYSIAN TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF INSET

2.2.1 Nature of research

In order to find out the views of Malaysian teachers of INSET, I decided to carry out an informal survey among a small sample of teachers (12 respondents). I was acquainted with all the respondents either as colleagues or as a result of their attendance at INSET courses. The underlying thrust of my enquiry was to discover the extent to which INSET met or did not meet the hopes and perceived needs of teachers. I chose the questionnaire survey as the tool for my research as it seemed the most convenient method of collecting data from Malaysian teachers.(See Appendix I) The questions, six in all, are listed below:

1. What is in-service (INSET) to you?
2. What do you hope to gain by attending INSET courses?
3. Have the INSET courses you attended met your expectations?
4. If they have not, what are the reasons?
5. Do any INSET courses stand out in your mind as being interesting and helpful?
   If so, can you say why they were interesting and helpful.
6. In your view, what are the features of good INSET courses?

The questions were sent to the teachers via electronic mail (e-mail) because of time and distance factors. The 12 respondents comprised two teacher trainers and ten secondary school teachers (See Appendix II). They had teaching experience ranging from 1 year to 31 years. The questionnaire was an open-ended one as it was felt that the teachers would not find it too difficult to answer the six questions. The answers received via e-mail provided sufficient information to explore the perceived INSET needs of the teachers in this small sample. It was also apparent that the open-ended questionnaire via e-mail (which is an interface between the written and spoken form) allowed respondents to answer the questions with greater depth than would have been possible with the usual structured questionnaire. Rather than try to group the comments and information gathered from the teachers under particular headings it seemed appropriate to look at the insights which emerged from the teachers' responses to each of the questions. The

responses of the teachers to each of the six questions found in the following tables are extracts of salient comments found in their e-mail replies. Reservations about the generalisability of the respondents' views need to be borne in mind as the sample was small but the teachers' responses offered some useful insights of what they perceived to be their needs on INSET. Recent Malaysian studies suggest that teachers continue to perceive INSET, commonly referred to today as Continuous Professional Development (CPD), as an important avenue for enhancing pedagogical knowledge, instructional effectiveness, professional competence, and adaptability to educational reforms. Research indicates that teachers value professional development opportunities that are relevant to their classroom contexts, responsive to their professional needs, and supportive of reflective practice and collaborative learning. Furthermore, contemporary studies emphasise that effective professional development is most successful when teachers are actively involved in identifying their learning needs and are treated as partners in the learning process rather than passive recipients of information. Although the present study utilised a small sample, recent Malaysian research similarly recognises the value of investigating teachers' perceptions to understand the effectiveness of professional development initiatives. Studies have shown that qualitative feedback from teachers provides important insights into how professional development programmes can be improved to meet classroom realities and address emerging educational challenges. Teachers consistently report a preference for professional development that is practical, context-specific, collaborative, and immediately applicable to teaching and learning.

Moreover, contemporary research suggests that open-ended responses allow teachers greater opportunities to express concerns regarding relevance, implementation, workload, support structures, and professional growth. Such approaches provide richer data than highly structured questionnaires and contribute to a deeper understanding of teachers' professional development experiences.

Methodologically, this enquiry is exploratory and descriptive. The 12 respondents were selected through the researcher's professional network and therefore constitute a purposive/convenience sample rather than a representative sample of Malaysian teachers. Responses to the six open questions were reviewed for recurring ideas concerning the meaning of INSET, expectations, perceived usefulness, unmet needs and

features of effective provision; these recurring ideas were then organised descriptively in the tables that follow. The analysis is intended to illuminate the problem of practice and to inform the design of the proposed programme, not to establish causal relationships or national prevalence estimates. The small sample size, reliance on self-reported perceptions, variation in respondents' experience, and the researcher's prior acquaintance with participants are important limitations and create the possibility of selection and response bias. Accordingly, the findings should be read alongside the literature and practitioner evidence developed across the thesis, and future studies should test the emerging propositions with larger, more diverse samples and with classroom-based evidence.

2.2.2 The Results

- **Question 1**

As far as the term INSET was concerned, no definition was given as I felt that each respondent would have her own definition. For the purposes of this research, I believe that the teachers needed the freedom to express their views without being confined to someone else's definition. The teachers' responses to question 1 are summarized in Table 1 and they fall into 3 categories: definitions, personal and professional needs. From the comments and views given by the teachers it was apparent that the teachers valued INSET as an opportunity for learning, reflection and a break from routine. As Hedge states some teachers may look to INSET as "an opportunity to escape the clutter of the classroom for a period of reflection on teaching and learning" (1987:100). From the perspective of these teachers' personal needs, INSET offers teachers some breathing space, time-off from the demands of principals, parents and students, the pressures of marking, school assessment routines and extracurricular activities. For some others it is time away from family. Other than as a means of escape it was perceived that INSET has much to offer in terms of the range and variety of teachers' needs. From the standpoint of professional needs, the teachers hope to get an update of techniques, approaches, practical ideas to improve teaching and learning.

These findings remain highly relevant within the current Malaysian educational context. Recent studies report that teachers continue to associate professional development with opportunities to update their professional knowledge, improve instructional practices,

acquire new technological competencies, and strengthen their professional identities. In particular, teachers increasingly expect professional development programmes to provide practical solutions that can be directly implemented in the classroom.

The respondents' view of INSET as an opportunity for reflection is also consistent with recent findings that identify reflective practice as a critical component of teacher learning and professional growth. Through reflection, teachers are able to evaluate classroom experiences, refine instructional approaches, and make informed decisions to improve student learning outcomes.

Likewise, the importance attached to meeting teachers from other schools supports contemporary evidence highlighting the positive role of professional learning communities, networking, and collaborative professional development in promoting teacher engagement and sustained professional learning.

Table 1: Teachers' views of INSET

Question 1 : What is in-service (INSET) to you?

RESPONSES
Definitions
Form of training after initial training
Courses to upgrade present knowledge or skills
Debriefing done by a teacher who has gone on a course
Professional training sessions to develop knowledge, skills and experience
Rough guideline on how to teach effectively
A professional development course
Courses/seminars /briefings to inform teachers of the latest programmes / changes in the
curriculum by the Ministry
Training provided by the school, LEA or any teachers' union or organisation for the professional and personal development of the school staff
Personal needs
Take time to be away from daily routine
Getting away from the family

Course and holiday

Positive injection of 'life'

Professional needs

Professional update

Practical ideas/Possible solutions

Bring about change

To improve teaching and learning

Time to reflect on practice

Refresher

To keep abreast of developments in education

Chance to meet teachers from other schools

Introduction of new syllabus/ new approaches to teaching of language

It's the only way, the best way many teachers can be exposed to new methods etc

|Aim to help teachers reflect on their own practice in the light of their beliefs.

- **Question 2**

In Question 2, the teachers were asked to state what they expected to gain from INSET. Their responses were quite similar to the first question and are summarized in Table 2. In general terms, the teachers wanted to be more effective and knowledgeable teachers and from INSET they hoped to gain new insights, knowledge and skills. Moreover at INSET courses, teachers expect to learn from experts and meet other teachers "to expand their views of what is desirable for their classrooms" (Dadds 1997:33).

The expectations expressed by the respondents are strongly supported by contemporary Malaysian research. Teachers continue to attend professional development activities with the expectation of acquiring practical teaching strategies, current pedagogical knowledge, and professional skills that can enhance classroom effectiveness. Teachers generally perceive professional development as valuable when it contributes directly to improvements in student learning and teaching practice.

An important contemporary development is the growing expectation that professional development should equip teachers with digital competencies and technology-enhanced pedagogical skills. Following the rapid expansion of online and blended learning

environments, Malaysian teachers increasingly seek training related to ICT integration, digital learning platforms, online teaching strategies, and emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence.

Furthermore, while teachers continue to value learning from experts, recent research suggests that professional development is most effective when expert input is combined with opportunities for active participation, collaboration, reflection, and adaptation to local classroom contexts

Table 2 : Teachers' expectations of INSET

Question 2 : What do you hope to gain by attending INSET courses?

RESPONSES
<u>INSET to improve classroom practice</u> • Hope to be more effective classroom practitioner/administrator • Be a more effective and knowledgeable teacher • Innovations, changes etc which are important for effective teaching • Raise awareness regarding issues about current ideas about teaching/learning **<u>INSET for the acquisition of knowledge and skills</u>** • More knowledge, new ideas • Keep abreast of the latest developments • Gain more information • Something related to profession and practical to implement • New insights and skills, resources from workshops, some interesting approaches to language Teaching • New knowledge and skills to help me develop professionally as well as personally • Expand my knowledge and skills / to be more professional • I hope to acquire knowledge that is useful for teaching. This way I'll not stagnate in my career but go on improving.

INSET for learning

• Learn from experts

• Play different role (as a student)

INSET for a break from routine

• To get away for a breather with others to look at issues more objectively/creatively

• Recharge my batteries

INSET for change

• Prepare myself for changes

- **Questions 3 and 4**

In Table 3, the figures show that 10 out of the 12 respondents felt that INSET did not fully meet their expectations. Responses from Question 4 found in Table 4 are categorised under the following headings – management of the course, content, methodology and the developmental angle of INSET. In terms of management, the teachers felt that the courses could be better organised and the trainers or presenters better prepared and equipped for the tasks. The respondents' main concern about content was that it was too prescriptive suggesting that teachers should have a say in the content. There are implications that respondents attend INSET for new ideas and not repetitive stuff. One respondent felt that INSET should not be too theory oriented confirming Kouraogo's suggestion that "teachers appear to be allergic to theory" (1987:173). The idea of dilution emerges in their responses when one respondent states that the content is on a reduced scale (referring to the Cascade) as "INSET in schools are short and done only to submit a report to the Department." Another argues that the courses are too short and rushed implying that time is needed for assimilation of ideas. One teacher felt that "teachers who attend courses also have ideas" suggesting that INSET courses did not "respect [teachers'] ideas and experiences and see them as central to the course" (Bolitho and Wright 1997:23). It also indicates that the courses were not participant-centred and "trainees [were] viewed as empty vessels to be filled with information" (Burns 1992:19). This suggests that the courses only give and the teachers receive. If teachers attend INSET with a view of taking time off for reflection then opportunities

must be built into INSET for teachers to "reflect on what occurs in their own classrooms" (ibid: 19). This was supported by another respondent who stated that "experience works better than theories so have speakers who are experienced in teaching." From a developmental angle, three areas which a number of teachers saw as crucial, were the provision of professional development, the absence of follow-up to courses and relevance of INSET to teachers' needs.

The finding that most respondents felt that INSET did not fully meet their expectations is consistent with more recent Malaysian studies. Contemporary research continues to highlight teachers' dissatisfaction with professional development programmes that are overly theoretical, centrally prescribed, or insufficiently aligned with teachers' classroom realities and professional needs.

Several recent studies have concluded that teachers demonstrate higher levels of engagement and satisfaction when professional development is personalised, differentiated, and responsive to their individual teaching contexts. Programmes that overlook teachers' interests, experience levels, and classroom challenges are less likely to achieve meaningful professional growth or sustained changes in practice.

The respondents' concern regarding the lack of follow-up support also remains a significant issue in contemporary teacher professional development. Recent evidence suggests that professional learning should be viewed as a continuous process involving mentoring, coaching, collaborative inquiry, classroom-based experimentation, and ongoing feedback rather than isolated training events.

Similarly, the respondents' desire for greater involvement in determining course content reflects current perspectives on teacher agency. Contemporary scholars argue that teachers are more likely to adopt and sustain new practices when they participate actively in identifying professional learning goals and shaping the content of professional development programmes.

Table 3 : Have teachers' expectations been met?

Question 3: Have the INSET courses you attended met your expectations?

RESPONSES	**n=12**
Not often	(1)
Not all of them	(3)
Yes	(1)
Some of them	(1)
Not really	(2)
Yes but with contribution	(2)
No response	(1)

Table 4 : Reasons why INSET has not met teachers' expectations

Question 4: If they have not met, what are the reasons?

RESPONSES
Management
Not fully prepared by the organiser
Poorly planned and managed
Content
Sheer waste of time – A lot of talk shop
INSET course should be less prescriptive
What is presented is a reduced scale
Some mere repetitions, nothing new
Courses which were aimed at developing skills were too theory oriented, not pedagogically enriching
Many are mere repetitions of what I did in university or things that I already know
Method
Too short and rushing to finish most of the time
Methods are vague. Presenters themselves are vague
INSET in schools are short and done only to submit a report to the Department
Sometimes there is too much to digest in a short time frame
Some speakers were ill prepared
More effective if the facilitators are experts in the subjects themselves
Sometimes the people conducting are lousy at communicating their stuff.

Discussion rather than lecture style Teachers who attend courses also have ideas Experience works better than theories so have speakers who are experienced in teaching **Developmental angle** No professional development Usually it is boring and not related to what I need No follow-up Sometimes they are conducted to fill up free time without relevance to needs and personnel

- **Question 5**

Responses of teachers to question 5 indicate that INSET was interesting and helpful when they were practical, relevant, participant centred and informative. Examples of some of these courses are found in the table below.

Table 5 : Examples of interesting and useful INSET courses.

Question 5: Do any INSET courses stand out in your mind as being interesting and helpful?

If so, can you say why they were interesting and helpful.

RESPONSES
Hands on activities Relevant, Motivating Well presented Well presented and systematically organised. New insights, not the old repeated stuff Must involve the participants, informative TST, Grammar, Lit courses conducted by practitioners who share clearly and interestingly their beliefs and knowledge about theory and practice. TST course presenters were practitioners themselves, willing to share and learn from others

IRS – the Kps handled the course knew their stuff, had workshops and involved the participants actively
Cooperative learning and shared experiences, instead of being top-down
Interesting literature workshop by the British Council. I learned something new
Preparing a model SPM paper in 1997 organised by JPWP
Stress management course
Computer course
New Curriculum 2027 organised by JPWP

- **Question 6**

Responses to Question 6 have been categorized under the headings: management, content, method, developmental angle and collaborative exchange. Under management, respondents felt that good INSET courses should be well-organised, well-planned and managed. In terms of content, the respondents felt that INSET should meet their needs. The main concerns of the respondents seem to lie in the area of method of delivery and the developmental possibilities of INSET. Respondents prefer participant-centred, interactive, lively courses without "too much lecture style deliveries." The trainer's role is also seen as important because as one respondent argues that INSET must be conducted by "those ...enthusiastic about the subject" suggesting that trainers must be "convincing, confident and committed." Time is also seen an important factor as INSET must not be "too stressful and rushed." From a developmental angle, respondents felt that INSET should not be a waste of time, be relevant and related to effective methods of teaching suggesting that teachers hope to gain new insights and be exposed to current ideas at INSET. Follow-up to courses was also seen as important. One other issue raised by two respondents suggests that opportunities should be provided on INSET for sharing and collaborative exchange. The responses of the teachers are given in Table 6 below.

Table 6: Features of good INSET courses

Question 6: In your view what are the features of good INSET courses?

RESPONSES
Management
Well organised, should be well planned and managed
Nice venue / Suitable environment
Content
Meet my professional needs / Should meet the needs of its participants,
Good presenters/ Good facilitators/ well –qualified lecturers
Method
Two way communication, lively, active, lots of participation from participants and to be able to go away feeling that there are some things worth trying with our own students.
Must be conducted by those who teach what they preach and are enthusiastic about the subject. The materials must be presented in interesting and varied ways.
Not too stressful /rushed
There shouldn't be too much lecture style deliveries. It should not drag too long
Convincing, confident and informative speakers
Developmental angle
The feeling that the time together was well spent instead of being wasted
Must be relevant to make it worth their time to attend
Related to the latest methods of effective teaching
New insights and current issues/development
With follow-up
Collaborative exchange
Course participants who are open and willing to share
An open rather than a closed attitude towards what is to be shared

2.2.3 Summary of research findings

Based on this informal survey of a small sample of Malaysian teachers some insights of their perceptions of INSET were gained. There is an indication that the teachers would like a more developmental approach to INSET indicated by the characteristics of their responses listed below:

INSET should improve teaching and learning

There should be time and opportunity on INSET to reflect on their practice

There should be room for personal and professional development

It should update their knowledge and skills

INSET should prepare teachers for change, innovations which are important for effective teaching

Teachers should gain new insights during INSET

INSET should remove any fear of stagnation and provide teachers with a desire to improve

It should acknowledge the importance of teachers' experience

INSET has to be practical and relevant to their needs

INSET has to raise teachers' awareness of the need to change

INSET should have some form of follow-up.

From the point of view of these teachers, their most pressing concern seems to be on improving teaching and learning, becoming better teachers and developing professionally. This implies that INSET should assist in developing teachers in their classrooms. The question of interest is not whether INSET provision can deliver what is expected but how it can be made more effective to facilitate changes in classrooms to improve teaching and learning. In order to do that, we need to explore and understand the mechanisms that direct the intended changes.

2.3 WHAT IS EFFECTIVE INSET?

2.3.1 INSET should be an effective medium for change and development

INSET has been an important means by which change is mediated and research into the processes of change is an important source of insight for studies of classroom practice. In theory at least, improvements and changes in classroom practice is through INSET, the key mediation vehicle (Kinder and Harland 1994:33). Dadds thinks likewise when she states that "research-based INSET claims to be oriented towards the cause of classroom improvement and through the professional development of teachers" (1994:117).

If the overall objectives of INSET are to …

stimulate the professional competence and development of teachers.

improve school practice

implement politically agreed upon innovations in schools

(Veenman et al 1994:303)

then an examination of the above objectives shows a relationship among all three aims. Fullan and Hargreaves suggest that effective implementation of innovations consists of "alterations in curriculum materials, instructional practices and behaviour and beliefs and understandings on the part of teachers involved in given innovations" (1992:1). Thus to improve school practice, it is necessary to promote teacher development if the ultimate goal is to bring change in classrooms as illustrated in the simple diagram below. (Fig.2.1)

INSET → Teacher development → Change in practice(classroom and school)

Fig. 2.1 Relationship between teacher development and change through INSET

Recent studies conducted within the Malaysian context continue to support the view that professional development represents a critical mechanism for educational improvement (Ambon,J et al, 2024). Evidence drawn from the primary school setting indicates that teachers who engage actively in continuous professional learning tend to exhibit stronger collaborative practices, heightened awareness of contemporary educational developments, and a greater commitment to enhancing classroom practice (Ambon,J et al, 2024). In a similar vein, research points to school-based professional learning structures, particularly Professional Learning Communities (PLCs), as providing meaningful avenues for reflection, knowledge sharing, and collective problem-solving among teachers (Ambon,J et al, 2024). This is consistent with the broader literature on teacher professional learning, which similarly emphasises the value of collaborative, school-embedded structures in supporting sustained pedagogical growth.

However, several scholars caution that the effectiveness of professional development is contingent upon its design. Specifically, professional development activities have been found to yield greater impact when they extend beyond the transmission of information

to incorporate opportunities for reflection, experimentation, and feedback (Ambon,J et al, 2024). This distinction is significant, as it underscores a shift in the literature away from viewing professional development as a purely transmissive process and towards recognising it as an iterative, reflective practice.

Taken together, these findings lend support to the argument that sustained professional development functions not merely as a vehicle for disseminating educational reforms, but also as a substantive catalyst for teacher growth and school improvement within the Malaysian education system. This positions professional development as central to ongoing discussions surrounding teacher quality and school effectiveness in the Malaysian context, and warrants further empirical attention, particularly with respect to how such initiatives are implemented and sustained at the school level.

Teacher development has to do with the teachers' awareness of and commitment to growth and change. According to Fullan and Hargreaves (1992) more attention is now paid to [teacher] development because the importance of the teacher in bringing about change has been acknowledged. In a climate of rapid educational change, new knowledge and skills are required to implement centrally directed curriculum initiatives and educational reforms. Recent evaluations of professional development initiatives in Malaysia indicate that although teachers generally participate in CPD activities, concerns remain regarding programme relevance, implementation quality and responsiveness to teachers' actual needs. Studies suggest that more teacher-centred approaches, greater professional agency and context-sensitive learning opportunities may be needed to maximise the impact of professional development on classroom practice. These observations highlight the importance of viewing INSET as a developmental process rather than a one-off training event.

Moreover, a teaching force committed to personal and professional development is crucial as emphasis is placed on raising standards and greater public accountability. The 'total teacher' has to be taken into account as teacher development is also a process of personal development and that the teacher as a person progresses through different stages. Huberman's teacher career cycle based on his consideration of Swiss teachers suggests that teachers go through successive stages in their career and at different points "have characteristically different orientations to change and improvement as well as

different needs in terms of professional development" (Hargreaves and Fullan 1992:8). (See fig. 2.2)

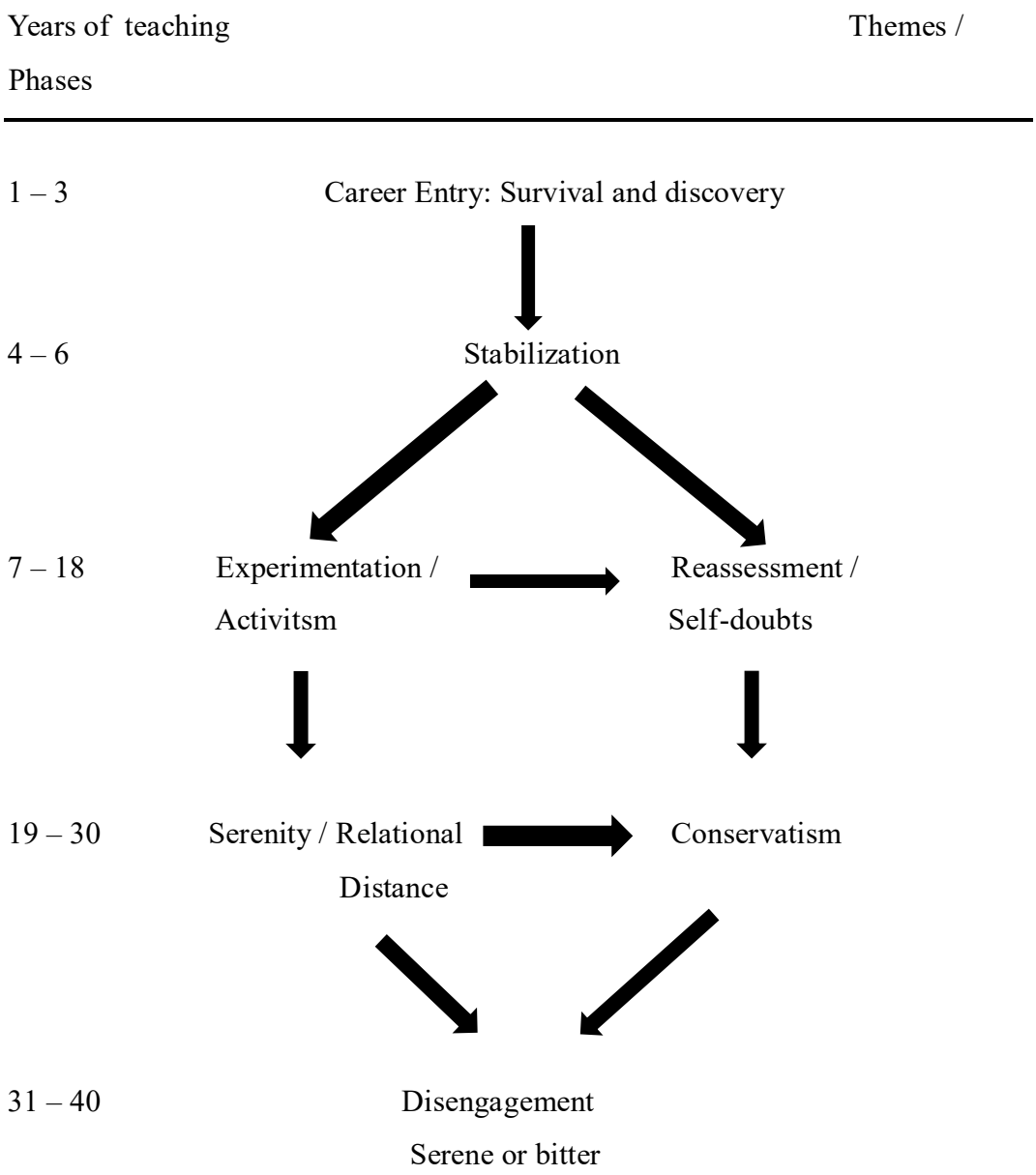


Fig. 2.2 Successive themes of the teacher career cycle: schematic model (Huberman 1992: 127)

Thus to understand "teacher development… and tailor it accordingly, we need to know a great deal more about teachers' priorities" (Goodson 1992:111) and the ways these priorities might change as their careers develop. This implies that for INSET to have a greater impact we have to start from where teachers are at. As

Leithwood states, “development is an incremental process that builds on teachers’ existing stock of attitudes, knowledge and skill: they are at the same time the objects of and the instruments for development” (1992:98).

2.3.2 INSET should recognise the central role of teachers to change

In the first chapter, I mentioned that the linear way of delivering INSET from the centre to teachers for implementation in classrooms has a limited impact. One of the reasons for this is that “expertise in judgement and decision making seem to reside outside the school, to be conferred in a hierarchical way to those inside schools” (Dadds 1997:31). If INSET programmes with the aim of initiating change are designed and imposed from elsewhere, they are “less likely to lead to change in skill, attitude and practice” (Underhill 1988:1). Fullan and Hargreaves argue that there is an “unseen pool of existing expertise in schools…one of great untapped reservoirs of talent…[that] can fuel improvement efforts” (1992:18). This pool of expertise (the teachers) is central towards change. Underhill feels that “significant change is only likely when teachers actively and willingly participate in the control, direction and the process of the change effort” (1988:1).

Recent evaluations of professional development programmes in Malaysia provide further support for this view. Although professional development remains a key policy priority, researchers have reported that teachers often experience centrally organised programmes differently depending on their professional needs, teaching contexts and opportunities for participation. Studies have noted that professional development initiatives tend to be more effective when teachers are involved in decision-making processes, have opportunities for collaborative learning and are able to connect professional learning directly with challenges encountered in their own classrooms. These findings reflect an increasing shift towards more teacher-centred models of professional development within the Malaysian education landscape. (Kabilan, M K et al, 2025).

Contemporary research in Malaysia points to a growing shift away from transmission-oriented models of professional development, moving instead towards approaches that value teacher agency, collaborative learning, and

contextualised professional decision-making. This shift reflects a broader recognition that teachers are key agents of change, not simply implementers of reforms handed down from elsewhere.

2.3.3 INSET should provide opportunities for teachers to reflect

For teachers to be committed to change, there has to be a readiness on their part to "reflect on their own practice and be prepared to change their attitudes and behaviour in the light of reflection" (Thomas 1996: 139). Teachers need to adopt a critical and reflective stance on their own understanding of their work, their practices and their working situation. (Kemmis 1987:75) There is not only the need for teachers to develop the professional skills and competences of teaching but also to develop a rationale for understanding why they do what they do. Christopher Day cited in Shanklin and Thurrell (1996) puts it succinctly:

> Good teachers (like other professionals) continue to develop throughout their career. They do this by observing their own and their colleagues' classrooms, trying to find out 'what's really going on,' and 'why', and reflecting on what they have observed and discovered. If possible, they report on what they have done so as to share it with other members of the profession. (1996:78)

Contemporary Malaysian studies on teacher professional development similarly point to the role of reflection in helping teachers connect professional learning with the realities of the classroom. Research suggests that collaborative structures such as Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) give teachers the chance to engage in professional dialogue, reflect on their instructional practices, and learn from one another's experiences. These reflective processes support continuous improvement and contribute to more meaningful professional growth.

2.3.4 INSET should acknowledge the importance of context

A proposed change in the "developmental site" and "partners" (Cohen 1997:155) suggests a change in control and partnership. As the TST programme (see section 1.4) involved a move to the school as the setting for INSET it offered an alternative

pathway for teachers to develop "which did not involve them in expert-dependent roles but offered the possibilities of development through new collaborative-reflective partnerships with colleagues in the workplace" (Cohen 1997:153). Eraut (1977) suggests that an ideal context for teacher development is one which has person-oriented and task-oriented management, participative decision making and flexible policies which allow for open discussions. In my experience I have seen teachers working within constraints like large classes, fixed furniture, lack of materials/resources, very individualistic teacher cultures, bureaucratic administration and a heavy workload. No school has the same circumstances as each is unique is its own way. To promote teacher development is to consider the educational issues that these conditions present.

More recent Malaysian literature adds another dimension: teachers themselves should have a voice in shaping professional learning. Studies suggest that when teachers can influence the focus, content and implementation of professional development, transfer to classroom practice is more meaningful and sustainable

Recent Malaysian research has reached a similar conclusion. Studies on CPD and teacher agency report that professional development programmes are more effective when they are adapted to teachers' specific professional needs, school characteristics and teaching contexts rather than being delivered uniformly across all schools. Researchers argue that professional development should be differentiated and responsive to local realities

As Fullan and Hargreaves argue, "the skills in which teachers are trained are all too often implemented out of context – their appropriateness for the teacher – as a person, for the teacher's purpose, or for the particular classroom setting in which the teacher works, being overlooked" (1992:6). They further add that the "process and success of teacher development depends very much on the context in which it takes place. The nature of the context can make or break teacher development efforts" (Blake,D, 1985). The teacher's working environment provides conditions in which teacher development initiatives succeed or fail. All too often teachers transfer new training from INSET into the classroom without the sustainable

support of effective leadership and collaborative teacher cultures that do not facilitate the new initiatives.

A particularly important recent study examining the Malaysia Education Blueprint (2013-2025) found that teachers' experiences of CPD vary considerably across contexts. While many teachers viewed CPD positively, researchers reported continuing challenges related to implementation, monitoring, programme management and relevance to actual classroom needs. The study calls for more flexible, context-responsive and teacher-centred models of professional development.

2.3.5 INSET should consider the significance of a school ethos

The culture or ethos of the school plays a key role in any change in classroom practice (Dalton 1994:60). According to Fullan, “at school level, principals and teachers [should] work together in establishing instructionally focused collaborative work cultures which would put them in a position to be critical consumers of the considerable professional development resources available to them” (1991:343).

Recent studies continue to show that leadership support remains one of the strongest school-level factors influencing the success of teacher professional development. Schools with stronger leadership support are more likely to sustain collaboration, professional dialogue and teacher learning, while weak leadership support can limit the impact of professional development activities

Commitment, motivation and effectiveness may be reduced when teachers spend many years in their classrooms without substantial outside stimulus. “Good ideas and innovations developed by individual teachers are often inaccessible to others in the profession” (Hargreaves and Fullan 1992:19).

Recent Malaysian research continues to highlight the importance of collaborative professional networks. Studies found that teachers participating actively in school-based PLCs reported stronger professional learning opportunities and greater

confidence in implementing new practices, while workload and insufficient collaboration remain barriers to meaningful professional interaction.

If we return to Huberman's cycle it is apparent that somewhere in that cycle teachers "may reach out to peers or even to professional trainers"(1992:136). Thomas argues that "professionalization should afford teachers the means to share their knowledge and skills with other teachers in order to improve their professionalism and professionality (1996:138).

Research conducted in Malaysia during 2024 increasingly emphasises teacher agency, suggesting that professional learning is more effective when teachers are empowered to contribute ideas, influence professional learning activities and participate in collaborative decision-making processes within their schools.

Dadds suggests that from the professional interaction at INSET courses teachers "hope to formulate their thinking a little more coherently…to feel empowered to develop practices with more confidence, insight and commitment " (1997:33). She goes on further to say that learning is a social experience "so professional growth is usually fostered through exchange, critique, exploration and formulation of new ideas. Interaction in supportive and collaborative contexts is often indispensable" (1997 : 36).

Recent Malaysian studies identify Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) as one of the most effective school-based structures for supporting collaboration, professional dialogue, collective reflection and knowledge sharing among teachers. Researchers found that collaborative cultures encourage teachers to learn from one another and improve classroom practice through ongoing professional interaction.

This then leads us to the question of increasing "the number and quality of colleagues to whom teachers turn spontaneously in the course of the private tinkerings and experimentation in their classrooms" (Huberman 1992:137). It also suggests that a network of people to whom teachers can turn to share ideas is imperative.

A recent evaluation of CPD implementation under the Malaysian Education Blueprint reported that teachers' experiences of professional development are strongly influenced by school-level factors, including support structures, collaboration opportunities and organisational culture. The researchers argued that professional development is more effective when embedded within supportive school environments rather than being treated as isolated training events.

2.4 THE WAY FORWARD – TEACHERS AS ENQUIRING PRACTITIONERS.

2.4.1 Key questions on the purposes of Teacher development

There are many developmental approaches to INSET. Higgins and Leat argue that all the models of teacher development "represent different perspectives, generated by different contexts and insights" and that "conceptualizations of teacher development can be categorized as to their intent"(1997:306-307). The central questions arising from the purposes of teacher development that they put forward are simple and convincing. They are:

- What develops?
- How does development happen? (descriptive)
- Why does development occur? (explanatory)
- Where does the development occur? (context)

These questions are linked to the change agenda as we also need to ask critical questions such as:

- Who changes?
- What changes are we seeking?
- How might the changes be effected?
- What are the likely consequences of choosing different models of teacher development?

This can be seen diagrammatically in Fig. 2.3

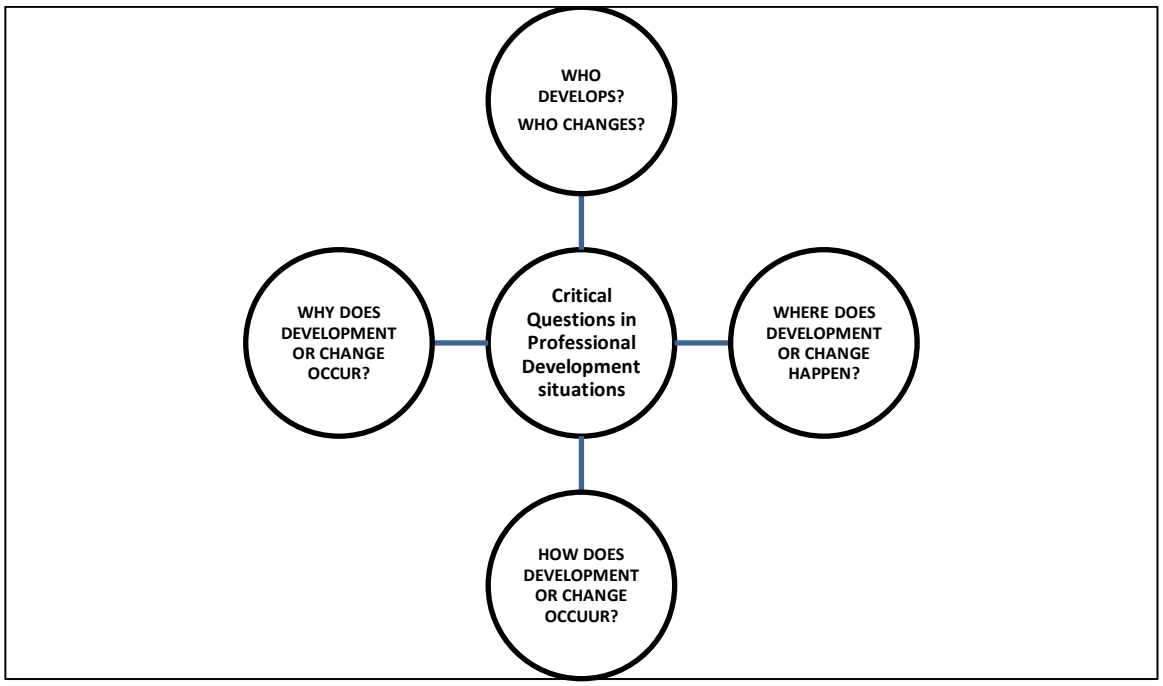


Fig. 2.3 Critical questions in professional development situations
Adapted from Higgins and Leat (1997:307)

In Fig. 2.3, the teacher emerges as the centre piece of this diagram (WHO?) as she is the person seeking development that will contribute to change or improvement of school practice. For the change or development process to take place, all the literature points to the school (WHERE?) as the main locality for initiating and sustaining development or change efforts. The reasons why development or change occurs depend on the professional development routes taken and this will be a decisive factor in the kind of INSET provided.

2.4.2 The Exploratory Route to Teacher development

I believe that there is the potential for critical examination of practice to contribute to teacher development and to effect changes in classroom practice. To reflect critically on one's practice is to create "the possibility of reform" (Kemmis 1987: 81). Since there is a shift in INSET towards school-based curriculum reform and localised initiatives which identify particular needs of the teachers and their schools, it is fitting to also shift the emphasis of teachers from being teachers to

critical evaluators of their own practice. This is because it is important to understand the thinking which underlies teachers' classroom practice. Schon's (1983) reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action and Eliot's (1981) practical theory suggest that theories are not "validated independently and then applied to practice, they are validated through practice" (1981:1).

2.4.3 Towards a conceptual framework of practitioner centred INSET for teacher development

Thus I would like to propose a model of INSET that is practitioner-centred with exploratory practice as the focus for change and development. I would go a step further and suggest that collaborative efforts between colleagues should be encouraged to facilitate exchange of ideas as McNiff says "right across the in-service field there is a need for dialogue aimed at identifying and attempting to resolve problems of practice" (1988:144). The model (see Fig. 2.4) is based on Alexander's (1980) framework for analysing INSET based on 4 critical aspects of focus, control, mode and location. It is also based on the belief that effective teacher development should include the reflective paradigm in which critical enquiry is fundamental.

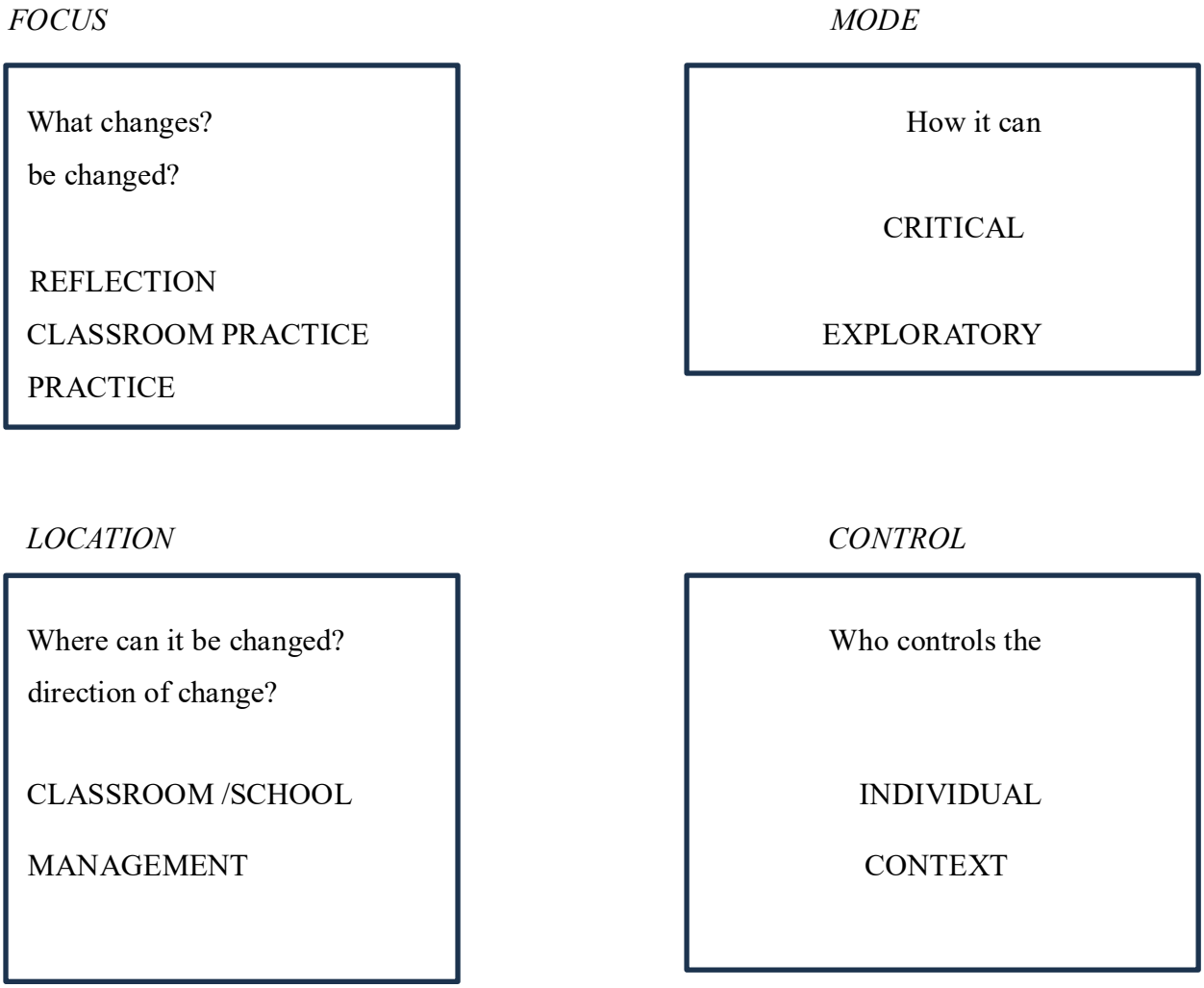


Fig. 2.4 Conceptual framework of a practitioner-centred model of teacher development of INSET

SUMMARY

In this chapter I have looked at some teachers' perceptions of current INSET practices in Malaysia based on an informal survey carried out on a small sample of teachers. The data reveal the teachers' views of what they regard as effective INSET which they feel needs a developmental focus. For this reason I am proposing a practitioner-centred model of school-based INSET that has the potential of developing "teachers' confidence and ability to take action both within and beyond their own classroom" (Vulliamy and Webb 1994:146). In the next chapter I will look into ways of developing teachers' exploratory capacity through INSET. Before that can be done it will be necessary to "demystify much of the aura" (Thomas

1996:145) which surrounds carrying out investigative work in classrooms in order that teachers are not discouraged to be actively engaged in it.

CHAPTER 3 PRACTITIONER-CENTRED SCHOOL-BASED INSET

OVERVIEW

In the previous chapter, the findings of an informal survey of some Malaysian teachers' perceptions of INSET reveal that personal and professional development is needed from INSET. This chapter argues that since the teacher holds the key to school improvement and curriculum change, teacher development has to come before any reform. One of the ways is to develop teachers in their own classrooms. It begins by providing the rationale for having INSET work in schools. It continues by looking at some features and constraints of school-based INSET. This leads to a discussion of reasons for promoting critical enquiry among teachers as a basis for teacher development. Suggestions on using reflection and exploratory practice as tools for promoting critical enquiry and teacher development are made with suggestions that collaboration is crucial to the process. It concludes by proposing some possible alternatives for a school-based INSET programme for promoting teacher development in secondary schools.

3.1 RATIONALE FOR INSET WORK IN SCHOOLS

3.1.1 The importance of focusing on teachers and their classrooms

There has been in recent years an emergence of a body of literature which acknowledges the central role of teachers in school improvement as "the most effective vehicles and focus for improving the educational process" (Bolam 1982: 219). Fullan and Hargreaves argue that "the heavy burden of responsibility for change and improvement in schools ultimately rests on the shoulders of the teachers" (1991:22). However, Wideen not only acknowledges the importance of the teacher's role in school change but recognises "the teachers' own development as an on going feature of that change" (1992: 123).

This view continues to be supported by more recent studies of teacher professional development in Malaysia. Research on English language teachers' continuous professional development has shown that improvements in educational quality are closely linked to teacher agency, that is, teachers' capacity to exercise professional

judgement, adapt innovations to their own contexts, and take ownership of their professional learning. Recent studies also suggest that top-down professional development initiatives are less effective when teachers are not actively involved in shaping their learning experiences. Instead, meaningful change is more likely to occur when teachers are positioned as active contributors rather than passive recipients of reform initiatives.

According to Kinder and Harland (1994) justification for most INSET activity, lies in its contribution to effective classroom practice. The responsibility for making it effective lies with teachers. Teachers therefore need to improve on their professional effectiveness in their classroom by making a conscious effort to develop themselves. Much of what teachers do in classrooms depends on their beliefs and "attitudes towards the learning task and the role of knowledge" (Wright 1987:64). Often teachers work in the isolation of their classrooms forming intuitive, automatic judgements and actions. As teachers grow in experience, they develop their own methods of handling their everyday situations that Easen (1985:6) calls "theories of action". He suggests that if these theories are deeply entrenched, it will be difficult for teachers to accept change. Only in reflecting on their practices and bringing them to the surface once in a while to see whether changes are needed, teachers are making their craft knowledge explicit. Teachers need to question their existing beliefs and practices to try out alternative ideas and in accepting to make changes for the improvement in classroom practice, teachers are taking a step forward in their development.

Recent Malaysian research examining the implementation of educational reforms has similarly found that teachers are more likely to embrace change when they are given opportunities to critically examine their own practice, collaborate with colleagues, and evaluate the relevance of innovations to their classrooms. Such findings reinforce the argument that teacher development is not merely a process of acquiring new techniques but one of constructing professional understanding through reflection, inquiry, and experience.

Since the classroom is the teachers' "natural habitat," it is where 'their experiences are based and where their growth will take effect" (Wajnryb 1992: 13). The

importance of the classroom as the primary site of professional learning has gained renewed significance in recent years. English language teachers in Malaysia are currently expected to implement CEFR-aligned curricula, integrate digital technologies, respond to increasingly diverse learner needs, and, more recently, engage with emerging forms of AI-assisted learning. These developments require teachers to make context-sensitive decisions that cannot always be adequately addressed through external training alone. As a result, the classroom remains the most important setting in which teachers interpret policy, experiment with practice, and develop professionally.

It is in classrooms that teachers practice their art and craft of teaching. By art and craft of teaching, I shall borrow Lange's (1990) definition. The craft of teaching according to him includes the teachers' specific knowledge of the subject matter and the knowledge of teaching the subject matter and knowledge of teaching in general. The art of teaching involves the combination of knowledge and experience in the many decisions that teachers make as they interact with their learners. It is in practising their art and craft that teachers develop their own philosophies of effective teaching and learning. Thus it would seem pertinent that the focus of INSET work should shift to teachers in their familiar territory – their classrooms.

Contemporary studies of English language teacher development in Malaysia appear to support this view. Recent evidence indicates that professional development is most effective when it is sustained, collaborative, and embedded within teachers' daily work rather than delivered through isolated training events. Research has also highlighted continuing concerns regarding cascade-type approaches to professional development, with teachers calling for greater relevance, flexibility, follow-up support, and opportunities to address challenges arising from their own classroom contexts. These findings suggest that school-based professional development remains a highly relevant strategy for improving both teacher learning and classroom practice

3.1.2 Joint responsibility of school and staff in co-operative problem solving

Teachers, "the frontline people who make [educational] reform work" (Wideen 1992:124) have to take responsibility in identifying problems in their own schools and seeking solutions to them. The concept of school-based INSET is based on the belief that "teachers are most likely to attach importance to issues that they themselves have identified and in their perception are worthy of examination (Keast 1981:93). This suggests that teachers play an important role in their own and their colleagues' professional development as they engage on a co-operative basis in the continuing process of problem solving within their schools. Principals in schools also play an important role in "creating an image of teaching as a collaborative enterprise" (Leithwood 1992:100) in establishing a culture of collaboration in schools and fostering teacher development. Thus, they need to create a school ethos that is conducive to change within the school and to professional development of teachers as well. In their leadership capacity, they are in a better position to see it through. This perspective remains highly relevant in contemporary school improvement efforts. Recent research in Malaysia suggests that teacher development is more likely to occur when school leaders create conditions that encourage collaboration, shared decision-making, professional dialogue, and collective responsibility for learning. Such environments enable teachers to exercise professional agency and to engage actively in identifying and addressing issues emerging from their own classrooms and schools. Studies of English language teachers have further shown that sustained professional growth is often supported through collaborative structures such as Professional Learning Communities (PLCs), mentoring relationships, and peer networks, all of which encourage teachers to learn with and from one another rather than working in professional isolation.

However, if a school only draws on its own resources for its development over a period of time, there is a danger that it may lead to parochialism as you soon exhaust all the possibilities that the teachers can provide. So I suggest that the joint responsibility should also include external specialists who are drawn in to assist in the process of educational change and professional development. They may be

foreign or local consultants who can provide the necessary training for the facilitators of the in-service work in school.

3.1.3 Features of practitioner centred school-based INSET

It is pertinent at this juncture to outline some features of school-based INSET to highlight its role in the personal and professional development of teachers.

- School-based INSET is essentially provided to meet teachers' needs within the school context. Teachers will have opportunities to initiate, plan, implement and evaluate their efforts.
- It is cost effective as it takes place on school premises and teachers can utilize the school's physical resources thus reducing the cost of conducting INSET.
- It provides follow-up support for any curriculum change.
- Teachers may be committed to participate based on a desire for school improvements.
- School-based INSET is more organic and integral to the daily lives of teachers.
- It is a process and not an event and is built into the rhythm of the school.
- It may contribute to four levels of impact given by Joyce and Showers (1980) as awareness, the acquisition of concepts and organised knowledge, the learning of principles and skills, and finally their application to problem-solving in the classroom.
- It provides opportunities for teachers to see different possibilities to help them change their perspectives of things as implied in R.D. Laing's poem cited in Easen (1985:69)

  He does not think there is anything the matter with him
  because
  one of the things that is
  the matter with him
  is that he does not think there is anything the matter with
  him
  therefore

we have to help him realize that
the fact that he does not think there is anything
the matter with him
is one of the things that is
the matter with him.

The classroom is the "means and end to teacher development" (Thiessen 1992: 88) thus within classrooms, teachers can form partnerships with their colleagues and their students to generate critical insights into and improvements of classroom practice and help each other in their separate and shared improvement. As Bradley et al (1994) suggest, professional learning takes place through everyday experiences, through interactions with colleagues, peer teaching, researching and evaluating their work together.

3.1.4 Constraints of school-based INSET

As I mentioned in Section 3.1.2 schools cannot depend on their own resources to improve for long periods of time. They may become insular thus there is a need for externally derived ideas to the curriculum. Continuous school-based development will not occur "without the active presence at some time of outside the school stimulation, resources, support or pressure" (Fullan 1987:216).

This observation remains highly relevant in contemporary discussions of teacher professional development. While school-based learning provides opportunities for context-specific growth, recent studies suggest that teachers benefit from interactions beyond their immediate school environment. Research involving Malaysian English language teachers indicates that professional learning is strengthened when school-based initiatives are complemented by external expertise, professional networks, mentoring opportunities, and engagement with wider educational communities. Such forms of external support expose teachers to alternative perspectives, challenge established assumptions, and encourage the adaptation of new ideas to local classroom contexts.

Furthermore, recent research has highlighted the importance of balancing internally generated professional learning with access to broader sources of knowledge and innovation. Teachers who participate in wider professional communities appear more likely to exercise professional agency, experiment with new practices, and sustain professional growth over time. External support therefore should not be viewed as replacing school-based development but rather as enriching and extending it.

As can be seen from the research findings in Chapter 2 teachers need to have a break from the monotony and routine of school at times.

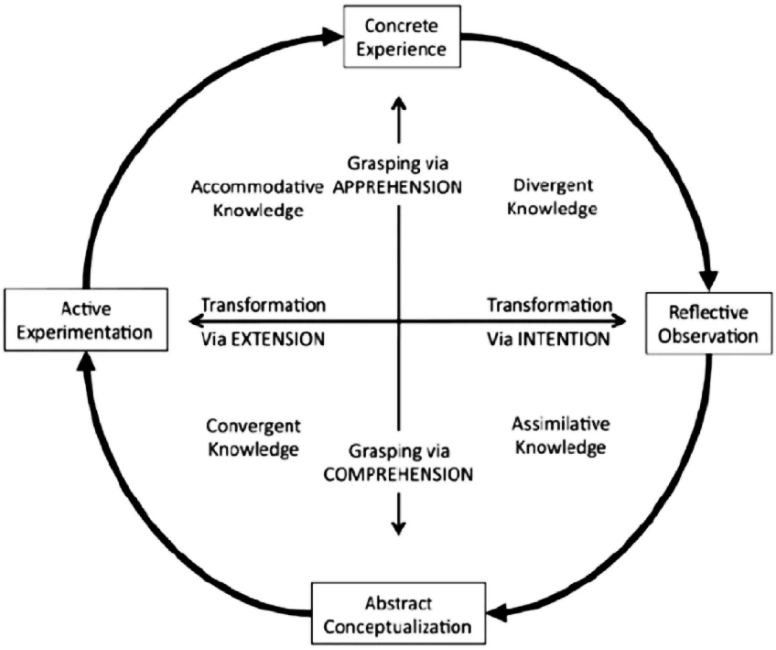
3.2 PROMOTING CRITICAL ENQUIRY AMONG PRACTITIONERS

3.2.1 Encouraging reflection in classroom practice: Turning experience into learning

There is an old adage that one learns from experience and for most teachers it is the well-known maxim that practice makes perfect. Some may have the opinion that development comes with experience but "experience alone is not the key to learning" (Boud et al 1988:7). Experience may be the starting point for teacher development but for growth to take place experience has to combine with reflection. Eraut's (1977) plea for teachers to be engaged in continuous enquiry and Underhill's (1988) idea of teacher development as being "on the same side of the learning fence as [the] students" implies that teachers need to add a spirit of enquiry to their experiences both as teachers and as learners. Teachers need to have as Russell (1993) suggests on-going 'mulling over' and acting on hunches. It means finding time to step back and reflect on experience. The act of reflecting "might be seen as the missing link between experiencing and learning from that experience" (Jaworski 1993:38). Whitaker (1993) has made a distinction between two types of learning from experience.

The first is incidental learning from experience and the second is a deliberate and planned learning from experience. The former implies a casual process that does not prompt action but the latter is a more conscious process of reflection. As it is planned and deliberate it involves a systematic review of the experiences in order

to bring about improvements. Kolb's experiential learning cycle is based on the concept of reflecting, mulling and making sense of our experiences in order for them to be assimilated into our framework of concepts and constructs. The cycle suggests 4 modes of learning: concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization and active experimentation as illustrated in Fig. 3.1.



[Fig. 3.1 Experiential Learning Cycle (Kolb, 1984)]

For optimal learning the knowledge acquired in one mode needs to be further processed in a recursive cycle (Ur 1996:6) I will illustrate the stages how a teacher may learn by going through the cycle. In the first mode, concrete experience, a teacher may leave a lesson and ponder on why a certain part of her lesson was not successful This could be based on intuitive feelings. She then goes through reflective observation by stepping back, being deliberately thoughtful and questioning her experience and actions. After replaying her experiences, she may try to formulate principles or theories requiring intellectual thought to account for the event thus going through a process of abstract conceptualisation. Finally, she may try a new idea involving active experimentation which necessitates further concrete experience.

Bolitho and Wright (1997) elaborated on the learning cycle to be applied to training. Their cycle includes the process of awareness raising of the experience. This experience is shared in an interactive group thus bringing to the surface the cognitive and affective elements of that experience. The process of reflection

prompts a need for further exploration of ideas to create meaning. The exploration may lead to reading the literature or getting assistance from more informed people. In order to transform the experiences to meaning, language is used to talk about them, to conceptualize them in abstract terms, theorize and formulate principles and their rationale. Once meaning is created and concretized, planned action will lead to a new experience. This is illustrated in the diagram below.

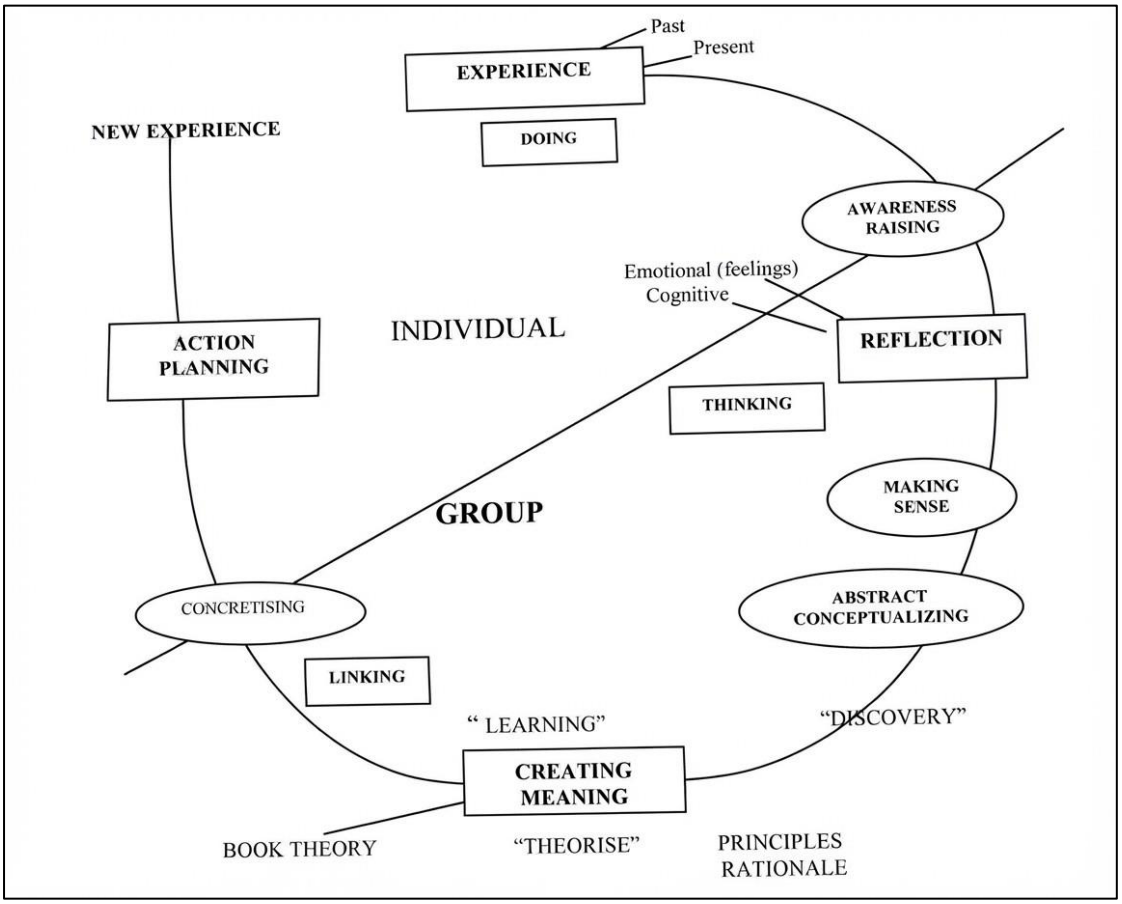


Fig. 3.2 Bolitho and Wright's Elaborated Learning Cycle (1997:33 adapted from Kolb 1984)]

To enhance learning, Boud et al (1988) suggest strengthening the link between the learning experience and the reflective activity which follows it. They suggest that, at the simplest level, to incorporate into the learning activities, a specific allocation of time which can be used for reflection. They suggest having a debriefing period for a support group or setting aside some time for recording one's reactions to events into a diary. Various other techniques can be applied during the period that has been set aside for reflection. Ur's (1996) enriched reflection model includes

external sources of input such as observation, anecdotes, videos and transcripts to enrich the reflection process. According to her the outcome of the reflective learning experience is that it may lead to new learning, a new way of doing things. She sums up by arguing that "the most important basis for learning is personal professional practice; knowledge is most useful when it either derives directly from such practice, or, while deriving originally from other sources, is tested and validated through it" (Ur 1996:7).

Reflection : Its Place in Teacher development

Evidence from research into change and teacher development (Hopkins 1986) and (Fullan and Hargreaves 1992) suggests that a vital element for change to happen is for teachers to become more aware of their practice and the beliefs that underpin them. In the 'dailiness' of teaching, teachers go about their jobs acquiring knowledge through experience in a spontaneous and intuitive way. According to Schon (1983) that knowledge is tacit and he calls it knowing-in-action. What Schon terms as reflection-in-action "hinges on the experience of surprise" (1983:56). It is only through reflection that teachers can examine decisions, consider alternatives before taking action:

When intuitive, spontaneous performance yields nothing more than the results expected from it, then we tend not to think about it. But when intuitive performance leads to surprises, pleasing or promising or unwanted, we may respond by reflecting in action… In such processes, reflection tends to focus intuitively on the outcomes of action, the action itself, and the intuitive knowing implicit in action. (1983:56)

The value of reflection in teacher development according to Jaworski (1993) is that it has the power to provoke action. One of the goals of teacher development therefore is to "facilitate greater awareness and thoughtfulness through reflection" (Moon 1997:60). We may presume then that reflection is a desirable aspect of teaching because if teachers become reflective they will be better teachers as it is through reflection that teachers may have a better understanding of their practice. Schon (1987) in Dennison and Kirk (1990:23) states that there is only one way for

a professional person to achieve growth and self-renewal and that is through systematic reflection. "Thinking back on what we have done in order to discover how our knowing-in-action may have contributed to an unexpected outcome" is in Schon's terms reflection-on-action.

In encouraging reflective practice among teachers some of the following aims are adopted:

- To enable teachers to analyse, discuss, evaluate and change their own practice, adopting an analytical approach towards teaching.
- To foster teachers' appreciation of the social and political contexts in which they work, helping teachers to recognise that teaching is socially and politically situated and that the teacher's task involves an appreciation and analysis of that context.
- To enable teachers to appraise the moral and ethical issues implicit in classroom practices, including the critical examination of their own beliefs about good teaching.
- To encourage teachers to take greater responsibility for their own professional growth and to acquire some degree of professional autonomy.
- To facilitate teachers' development of themselves, educational practices, understanding and developing a principled basis for their own classroom work.
- To empower teachers so that they may better influence further directions in education and take a more active role in educational decision making.

(Calderhead and Gates 1993:2)

The reflective tools such as action research, classroom observation, reflective journals, use of theory and research evidence to interpret practice will be employed depending on which aims are adopted.

Reflection: as a collaborative effort

Reflection does not have to be a solitary activity. I agree with Kemmis (1985) that reflection is not a "purely internal…purely individual process" but "action oriented

and a social process". Teachers already working in the professional isolation of their classrooms need to articulate their thinking to others. Teachers will remain only in the "knowing-in-action" stage if they do not interact with others at the reflection stage. Finding a sounding board, some person(s) to talk to, finding time to study matters of concern and finding answers together makes reflection a collaborative process. Jaworski sees critical reflection as necessary for change in classroom practice. She says:

> Reflecting on a classroom event leads a teacher to give an account of the event which can result in enabling the teacher in some sense to step outside the event, examining questions of what and how. This leads to the 'distancing' which is necessary to critically analyse the event. Critical analysis seems to derive from an attempt to 'account for' the event. This involves exploration of reasons or motivations- the why of the event. Critical analysis leads to more overt knowledge and this can effect choices and decisions in the classroom leading to classroom change.
>
> (Jaworski 1993: 40)

It is difficult for teachers to give an account of the event, explore reasons for it and then to make choices and alternatives for classroom change alone. Working in partnership with colleagues is important in the reflective process. Colleagues can play the role of mirror, supporter, listener or questioner. I believe that in classrooms in my school, for example, conscious attempts by teachers to reflect on their practice can be done effectively through peer observation. Peer observation with an action enquiry stance is a reflective tool for encouraging teachers to attend to issues of common concern. Through critical reflection-in-action, teachers will have a greater control over their practice.

Reflection: its contribution to personal and adult learning

Reflection helps to promote personal and adult learning. Taking into account Knowle's (1983) four assumptions of adult learning and Day's (1987) five

principles of effective personal learning we can establish the value of reflection in promoting learning.

4 Assumptions of adult learning Knowles (1983)	5 Principles for effective personal learning Day (1987)
1. An adult's self concept moves from one of being a dependent personality towards one of being a self-directed human being. 2. Adults accumulate a growing reservoir of experience that becomes an increasing resource for learning. 3. An adult's readiness to learn becomes oriented increasingly to the development tasks of social roles. 4. An adult's time perspective changes from one of postponed application of knowledge to the immediacy of application thus shifting the learning orientation from one of subject centredness to one of the problem.	1. Learning requires opportunities for reflection and self-confrontation. 2. Teacehrs in schools are motivated to learn by the identification of an issue or problem which concerns them. 3. Teachers learn best through active experiencing/participation. 4. Decisions about change should arise from reflection upon and confrontation of ast and present practice. 5. Schools and teachers need support through processes of change.

Adult learners are essentially reflective as they often look back on their "reservoir of experiences" to make decisions about the future. Opportunities for reflection has to be provided for learning to take place. It is through reflection that teachers (adults) are encouraged to "lay open to examination their professional thinking and practice" (Whitaker 1993:54) and become self-directed learners. Teachers become "reflective practitioners" (Schon 1983) when they identify issues and problems within their classroom and take the opportunity to explore the possibilities and plan further action. The process of action, reflection and planning is the basis of professional development as illustrated in Fig. 3.3.

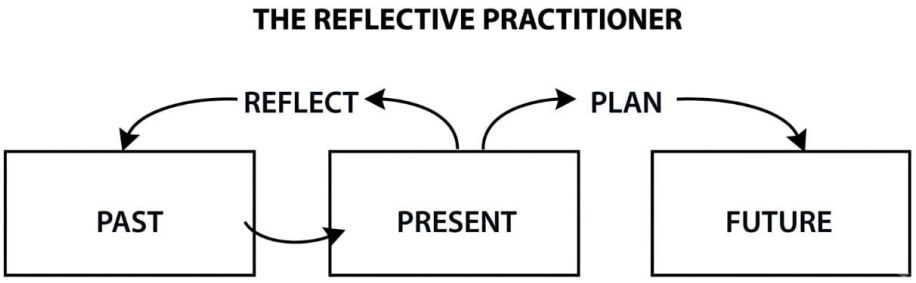


Fig. 3.3 The Reflective Practitioner (Adapted from Whitaker 1993:54)]

- **Reflection as a form of enquiry**

Schools cannot improve by themselves. They require the efforts of a staff committed to change and improvement. One of the ways is to begin by establishing "a critical community of enquirers" in a school and getting them to adopt a critical and reflective stance. Critical reflection according to Kemmis (1987) can be for practitioner enquiry into practitioners' practices or it may involve a form of analysis and challenge of institutional structures in which practitioners work. For the purposes of this study, I would be focusing on critical reflection as a form of enquiry into classroom practice. It has been said that to reflect on one's practice is to reflect on whatever one does in the classroom. It means exploring one's beliefs, attitudes and values of teaching and learning and anything couched in the idea of education. Reflection can arise out of dissatisfaction with a classroom occurrence, or frustration over an unsuccessful lesson, or even positive experiences in the classroom. What is important is that the reflection prompts enquiry into why such things happen and leads to more conscious choice of how to act in future. This is succinctly put by Dewey (in Boud et al 1985) when he says reflection can provoke:

> A state of doubt, hesitation, perplexity, mental difficulty, in which [reflective] thinking originates, and…. an act of searching, hunting, inquiring, to find material that will resolve the doubt, settle and dispose of the perplexity. (Dewey 1933:12)

In retrospectively trying to explain why things happen, teachers are open to new dimensions of the classroom process.

3.2.2 Encouraging enquiry in classroom practice: Turning reflection into action

The teachers' primary function in a classroom is to teach but it is through reflection that we increase our awareness and understanding of the assumptions and principles underlying our practice. Reflection on our teaching can direct, shape or transform our classroom behaviour. If certain aspects of our practice are successful, we will probably replicate them in other situations but if they are not successful,

we need to develop strategies for improvement. To develop these strategies we have to first look objectively at our teaching and reflect critically on it. This can "lead to a richer conceptualization of teaching and a better understanding of teaching and learning processes; and it can serve as a basis for self evaluation and is therefore an important compoenent of professional development" (Richards and Lockhart 1994:2). By adopting an enquiring stance, teachers will be engaged in a process of renewing, reappraising and refining their practice and become more autonomous in their professional judgement. Good and Brophy (1978) suggest that teachers are usually not aware of everything that goes on in classroom and his lack of awareness at times interferes with our effectiveness. The three basic reasons they give for teachers' lack of awareness is that:

> 1. Teacher training programmes spend little time training teachers to perform specific behaviour or to describe specific behaviour.
> 2. Classrooms are busy places, and teachers (and students as well) are so busy responding that they have little time to think about what they are doing.
> 3. Teachers are seldom observed on any systematic basis. Consequently, they seldom get valuable information about ways to increase their effectiveness. (Good and Brophy 1978:31)

In encouraging teachers to explore our teaching, we become aware of the ritualised or principled teaching behaviour. According to Maingay (1988) ritualised teaching behaviour is "teaching that no longer reveal awareness on the teacher's part why he or she should be teaching in a particular way" (1988:119). Principled teaching is "teaching that is informed by principles that the teacher is aware of" (ibid: 119). If teachers are better informed as to the nature of their teaching, we are therefore able to evaluate our stage of professional growth and what aspects of our teaching we need to change.

Teachers are usually concerned about the immediate practicalities of our classrooms. Widdowson argues that "[our] techniques are based on some principles or other which is accountable to theory" (1984 in Ur 1992:59). If these principles are unstated, they will risk the danger of being unexamined (Brumfit 1979). Teachers' underlying practices are based on tacit knowledge. Theories that

teachers claim to be true but are not clearly expressed in practice are espoused theories (Argyris and Schon 1974) while theories in use are the actual beliefs that teachers hold which are not articulated but are seen in our practices. Ur (1992) suggests that through discussion and talking about practice, the theories of use can be consciously articulated into theories of action.

If teacher development has to do with creating conditions for teachers to engage in a process of reflection, examination and change to bring about personal and professional growth, then teachers should be provided with opportunities within INSET to hold critical discussions and to reflect on their classroom routines, raising our "theoretical awareness" by "conceptualising [our] practices and thus narrowing the gap between "theory and practice in [our] everyday lives" (Ramani 1987:3)

3.3 REFLECTIVE AND EXPLORATORY PRACTICE FOR TEACHER DEVELOPMENT

One of the central purposes of teacher education is the raising of teacher awareness to the nature of the endeavour in which they are engaged. Through reflective practice, teachers undergo a process of critical analysis and "develop logical reasoning, and attitudes supportive of reflection" (Villar 1995:178). In engaging in reflective practice, teachers are trying to determine the rationality and justification of ideas and activities in their teaching in order to better understand and appreciate them. Teachers continually 'tinker' in their classrooms to find ways and means of making their teaching more effective and learning more enriching and challenging. Good teachers with tried and tested ideas and methods need to take a step further to find out why and how they work. Exploratory practice is not a matter of trying out new ideas but trying "to learn as much as possible from doing so" (Allwright and Bailey 1991:197). In such explorations, they enhance both their understanding and effectiveness in classrooms. Being a good teacher means being curious about what goes on in the classroom. Allwright and Bailey (1991) suggest starting with a 'puzzle' something that intrigues the teacher to want to understand it better. A couple of intriguing questions could be:

1. Why do I interact better with some students than with others?
2. Why do some students participate more in class compared to others?

In order to find the answers to the 'puzzle' we need to investigate. Exploratory practice is based on being reflective and acting on the beliefs that are the outcome of reflection. As Bartlett (1990) argues that being critically reflective:

means that we have to transcend the technicality of teaching and think beyond the need to improve our instructional techniques. This effectively means we have to move away from the 'how to' questions which have a utilitarian value to the 'what' and 'why' questions' which regard instructional and managerial techniques not as ends in themselves but as a part of broader educational purposes…Asking 'what' and 'why' questions gives a certain power over our teaching. We could claim that the degree of autonomy and responsibility we have in our work as teachers is determined by the level of control that we can exercise over our actions. In reflecting on 'what' and why' questions, we begin to exercise control and open up the possibility of transforming our everyday classroom life. (Bartlett 1990:205)

For teachers to become reflective, Bartlett (1990) suggests a number of principles to guide teachers in the process of reflection. The main principles are that issues for teachers to reflect upon must occur in the teaching context. The teachers must be interested in resolving the problems/issues and this can happen if teachers have a sense of ownership of the problem and its solution. Procedures must be systematic derived from the teachers' experience of teaching and tested through the practice of teaching. Finally, ideas about teaching, once tested through practice must lead to some course of action based on new understandings of redefined practices. Thus to summarize, reflective and exploratory practice is based on reflecting on the 'what' and 'why' questions as a promising way of working towards more effective teaching, both for the teacher and the profession.

3.4 SOME POSSIBLE ALTERNATIVES FOR EXPLORATORY PRACTICE IN SCHOOL-BASED INSET

There are many developmental routes to teacher development within school-based INSET. It depends to a large extent on how prepared and how motivated and interested the teachers are in the process. As exploratory practice invites teachers to critically examine their practices with the aim of changing some of their behaviour, it may cause some teachers to be resistant. We have to consider teachers as "naturally self-directed learners" (Brookfield 1985:44) and offer them choices to decide on their own development. In giving teachers a choice in the decision making process, we are fostering a feeling of personal involvement and ownership. As teachers decide on which alternatives to take, the possibility of rejection is less likely as it is not imposed. As stated by a respondent in the research data, good INSET should not be prescriptive. Reflective and exploratory practice is based on the principle of what good INSET ought to be. It begins in the classroom and starts from where teachers are.

The alternatives to teacher development offered within school-based INSET are consistent with the principles of reflective practice. Teachers may select the alternatives based on their priorities for development, the contextual factors and the availability of resources in their workplace. These options given to teachers which reflect teacher development range from simple and less rigorous exploratory tools to more complex and demanding ones. A great deal depends on how teachers view each of the procedures and are willing to investigate their teaching. The figure below shows the possible options.

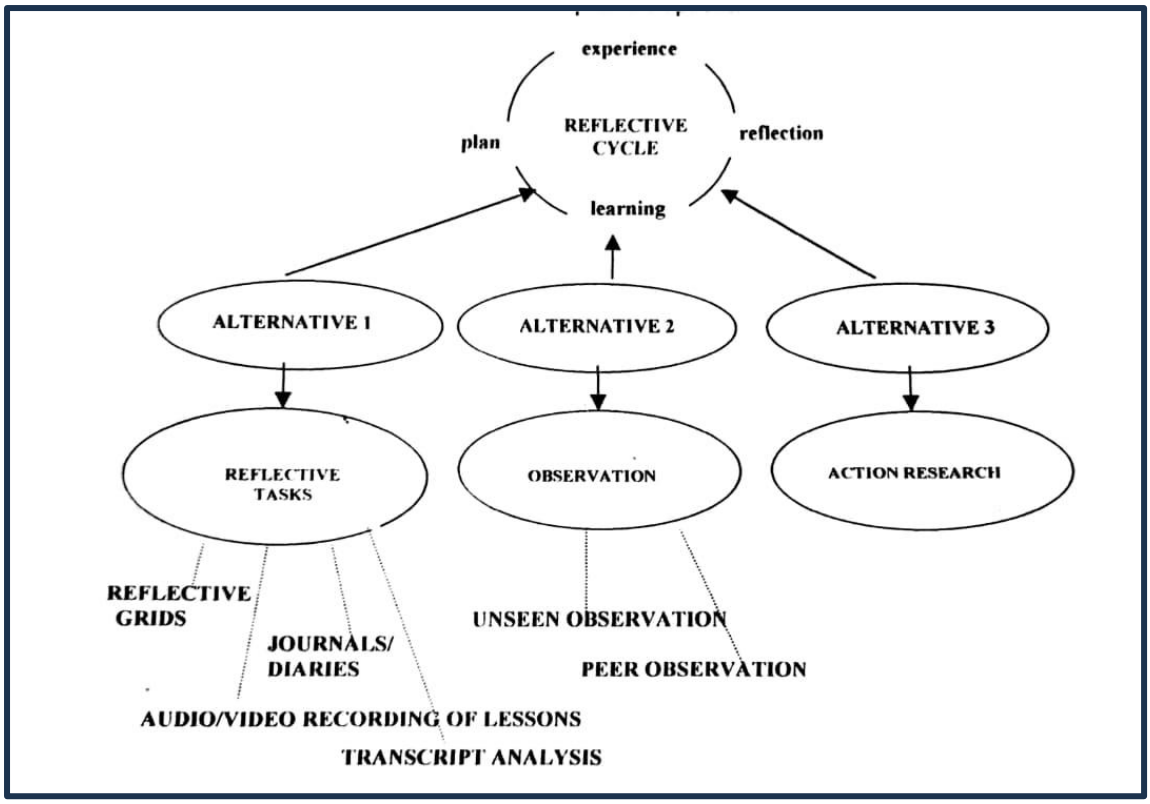


Fig. 3.4 Possible options for teacher development in school-based INSET

3.4.1 Alternative 1 – Reflective Tasks

Before introducing the teachers to reflective tasks it is important to form a professional development group within the school. A professional development group comprises a small group of enthusiastic teachers within a subject department (in this case the English language department) or from other subject departments who are keen to discuss issues of teaching and learning and are willing to share common problems. Teachers meeting in small groups can structure INSET programmes to have personal meaning and value. The group schedules meetings and it serves as an excellent opportunity for teachers to receive feedback and suggestions from their colleagues. Feedback exists to provide teachers with information that enhances their professional development.

Most Principals would be delighted to allow teachers INSET time if they see that teachers are serious and willing to work out a strong developmental INSET experience. Good and Brophy (1978) suggest that participation in these group sessions has to be voluntary. Teachers should be encouraged to join only if they

are ready. The group acts as a unique set of eyes and ears to give the teacher information regarding behaviours about which she wants feedback. Individual teachers make their own decisions planning their own developmental goals. The group acts as a mirror telling the teacher how she looks to them and suggests alternative ways to reach the goals the teacher has set. For example if a teacher wants to be more communicative or learner-centred in her teaching the group can give their viewpoints based on this need or objective.

Within these group sessions, there are alternative ways to assist teachers to reflect, explore and investigate their teaching leading to improved performance and professional development. The following are some suggestions for developmental work within the professional group sessions that are basically reflective tasks. Reflective tasks assist teachers in gaining a better understanding of their practice by exploring what teachers do in classrooms and why they do it. It is through these tasks that teachers self-examine, self-monitor and self-evaluate their classroom practices leading to change and professional growth.

(1) Reflective Grids

To promote critical reflection, reflective grids suggested by Bolitho and Wright (1993:16) for training purposes can be adapted for reflective purposes for teachers. They can complete the grids after their lessons. The advantage of using the grids for both teachers and students is that they provide a record of what happens during lessons. It means teachers can stand back and look objectively at their teaching and they can be used as a basis for feedback and discussions. The grids encourage teachers to reflect on different teaching purposes in a "carefully structured but open ended way" (Bolitho and Wright 1993:17). Students can provide relevant information for the teacher as they have unique perspectives on what goes on in classrooms. What is important is that teachers should not be dismayed by the variety of comments made by students because some students may label the same behaviour as a weakness while others view it as a strength. If the teacher looks closely at the students' responses they may be able to identify issues worth examining. This implies that teachers have to be more open to

receiving feedback from students. The headings for the columns in the grids for teachers and students are given below:

Reflective grid for the teacher

Brief description of lesson	Purpose of lesson	Role of teacher	Role of learners	Part(s) of lesson that went well	Part(s) of lesson that were not successful	Any reasons for less successful aspects of lesson

Reflective grid for the students

Name of activity	Purpose of activity	Role of learners	Part(s) of lesson that you liked	Part(s) of lesson that you did not like

(2) Journal/Diaries

A useful tool for teachers to record their professional self-development is the diary or journal. Bailey (1990) used the diary as a reflective tool for teacher trainees to document their teaching practice and Matsumoto (1996) assigned her students to use diaries to reflect their language (L2) learning. A diary study is a "first person account of a language learning or teaching experience, documented through

regular, candid entries in a personal journal and then analysed for recurring patterns or salient events" (Bailey 1990 in Nunan 1989:55). According to Richards and Lockhart (1994), classroom events and ideas can be recorded for the purposes of later reflection and the process of writing helps trigger insights about teaching. Having a list of questions to guide teachers in journal writing are helpful in providing the teachers with a focus. Bailey and Ochsner (1987) outline a procedure for conducting diary study which I have adapted to be used by teachers for sel -evaluation purposes.

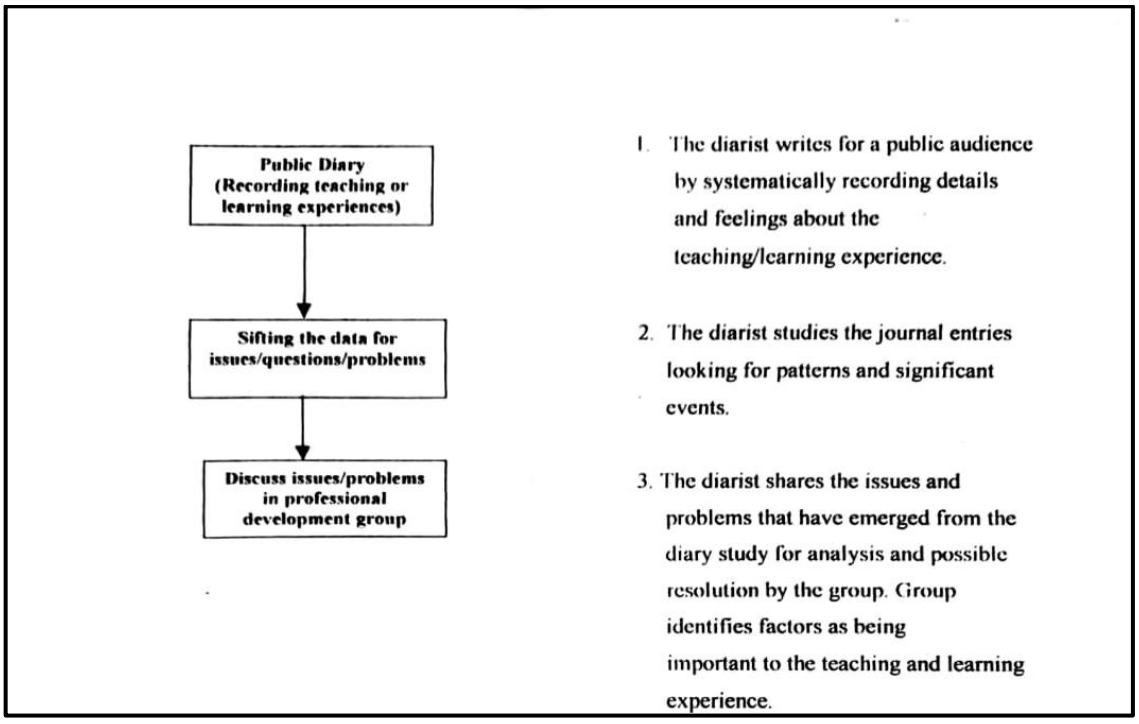


Fig. 3.5 Adapted from activities involved in a second language diary (Bailey and Ochsner 1983:190)

Students may also be encouraged to write journals and share their reactions to classroom experiences which will offer useful insights for teachers about their teaching behaviours Hopkins (1985) suggest that diary study has the following advantages and disadvantages which I have summaried in a table below.

ADVANTAGES	DISADVANTAGES
1. Simple to keep 2. Provide good on-going record 3. Act as aides memoire 4. Useful to explore emerging trends from the date 5. Can reflect general impression of classroom and its climate.	1.Time-consuming 2. Highly subjective 3. Does not provide specific information

(3) Transcript analysis

One of the ways of raising teachers' awareness of their practice is through analysing transcripts. Transcripts are "written records of interaction in which the [teacher] copies down, verbatim, the utterances of the participants" (Allwright and Bailey 1991:62). Good and Brophy (1978) suggest looking at transcripts of classroom behaviour of teachers and students. In examining transcripts, teachers become aware of what happens in classrooms and monitor accurately their personal behaviour. Analysing transcripts also sensitizes teachers to the fact that life in classrooms proceeds at such a rapid pace that it is difficult to monitor their behaviour and that of their students accurately. The following are some advantages and disadvantages of transcript analysis.

ADVANTAGES	DISADVANTAGES
1. Provides useful insights into classroom interaction. Transcripts show how classroom interaction develops. 2. Valuable tool for discourse analysis.	1. It is a time consuming process. You will need to audio or video record a lesson. The transcription will take some time as a one hour lesson may take about twenty hours to transcribe accurately. 2. You will need to know the transcription coding and conventions

(4) Analysing Audio or video recording of lessons

Another reflective task is to get teachers to examine audio or video recording of lessons either their own or that of other teachers to assist teachers in identifying their own attitudes and beliefs about teaching and learning. It will also help teachers to differentiate between making professional judgements and being judgemental. Richards and Lockhart (1994) provide the advantages and disadvantages of the procedures which I have put in the form of a table.

ADVANTAGES	DISADVANTAGES
1. Relatively easy to carry out 2. Allows choice of focus 3. Recording can be replayed and examined many times 4. Powerful self-reflective instrument 5. Provides 'objective' view of what goes on in the class 6. A full account of a lesson is obtained	1. The presence of a recording device can be disruptive 2. Reviewing a recording can be time consuming 3. Recording devices have a limited range and may only parts of the class 4. It can only be applied on special occasions as setting up the equipment takes a lot of time

3.4.2 Alternative 2 - Observation

Observation of any kind is a sensitive business and it tends to raise anxiety levels of the person being observed. It may be viewed by teachers as a negative experience particularly when it is judgemental or evaluative in nature. As teaching is often perceived as being personal and private, the presence of an observer can be regarded as an intrusion into the teacher's domain. In Malaysia, classroom observation is carried out for purposes of appraisal and accountability and is thus viewed as periodic, one-off evaluation procedures to appraise a teacher's classroom performance. For this reason, observation has been regarded by teachers as a tool for assessment rather than for teacher development. To be viewed as a positive experience, observation should be viewed as a way of

gathering information about teaching rather than as a means of evaluating a teacher's lesson. Allwright and Bailey (1991) suggest preliminary steps for securing permission and confidence of the people whose classrooms are to be investigated. This is to reduce anxiety levels of teachers as many teachers find it uncomfortable to have an observer in their classroom. This results in "highly untypical performance" by teachers (Johnston 1991:18). According to Barth (1979) the anxiety and panic of teachers when they are observed is due to their preoccupation with their performance and expectations of the observer. He feels that teachers should reorientate themselves from thinking about "what they want me to do" to "what I want to be able to do". He adds that the response of teachers to observers is "a telling indicator of the underlying dynamics operating within the school or school system" and "this response has powerful implications for [teacher] development" (1979:217-219).

Observation instead should be developmental and provide teachers with an opportunity to develop their own judgements of what happens in their classrooms, heighten their awareness of classroom interactions and increase their ability to evaluate their own practices (Williams 1989: 85). However reassuring the observer is, the teacher and her students will still worry about observation. Teachers who welcome observation are an uncommon lot so I propose here two alternatives to observation which is less threatening and intimidating for teachers.

(1) <u>Unseen Observation</u>

Unseen observation is based on the principle of a caring observer who lends a pair of ears and listens to the teacher's account of what went on in her lesson. The observer sees the lesson through the eyes of the teacher and relies on the teacher's professional judgement. This is a counselling technique and parallels the way supervision is carried out in the fields of counselling and psychotherapy. It is through the after lesson session that the observer tries to make the teacher's tacit knowledge and theories explicit. The main concern is not on "How do I teach? but on Why do I teach what I teach? and Why do I teach the way I do?" (Quirke 1996:18). There are three stages: pre-lesson discussion, the lesson unseen, and feedback.

Step 1 - Pre-Lesson Discussion

The teacher talks through the lesson with the trainer giving reasons for each stage. The trainer just listens and if the teacher needs assistance for her lesson, the observer may provide alternatives. The teacher is given a set of questions to focus during the lesson with the aim of assisting the teachers recall. The trainer is just a listener and clarifier encouraging the teacher to articulate teaching ideas which she is going to put into practice. This promotes the teachers decision-making skills and allows the teacher to gain insights into classroom behaviour. The teacher will know how the feedback session will be run because of the focus questions.

Step 2 – The Lesson Unseen

The teachers carry out the lesson and the pre – lesson discussion made them look at their lesson and their classrooms more objectively.

Step 3 – Feedback

The teacher gives an account of the lesson. In describing the lesson, the teacher gains some valuable insights into their attitudes and beliefs of language and learning. The trainer guides the teacher in describing the lesson but does not judge it. The teacher then suggests areas for future development. The feedback session ends with a decision made by the teacher for the next pre-lesson discussion establishing some form of continuity.

(2) Peer Observation

Peer observation involves two teachers pairing up to observe and examine each other's practice in an atmosphere of mutual trust and support. It provides an opportunity for teachers to understand assumptions underlying their practices. Discussions that follow such observations will create opportunities for reciprocal reflection of their classroom actions. In reflecting, both teachers bring to their own development a plethora of skills and experiences. In thinking up new ideas and reappraising old assumptions in the light of new information teachers are taking control of their own learning. To borrow a metaphor from Barth (1979) peer observation is like a growth producing experience that …pierces the shell of tension and isolation that surrounds most classroom teachers.

Peer observation for developmental purposes is most effective when it is grounded in collegiality, trust, and professional respect. Fitzpatrick (1995) argues that the process should involve a willing colleague who possesses an adequate understanding of observation procedures. Participation should remain voluntary, and the observed teacher should have the opportunity to determine both the observer and the specific focus of the observation. Equally important is the assurance of confidentiality, whereby information arising from the observation is not used for evaluative or disciplinary purposes.

Similarly, Ur (1996) suggests that peer observation is more productive when it is reciprocal in nature, allowing teachers to learn from one another through mutual observation and feedback. This collaborative arrangement promotes shared professional growth rather than hierarchical evaluation. Johnston (1991) further recommends that during the post-observation conference, the observed teacher should be encouraged to reflect on and evaluate the lesson before receiving feedback from the observer. Such an approach promotes self-reflection, professional agency, and deeper learning from the observation process.

More recent research continues to support these principles while extending them in important ways. Contemporary studies emphasise that peer observation should be positioned as a non-evaluative and developmental activity, distinct from formal performance appraisal systems, in order to minimise anxiety and encourage honest professional dialogue. Research also highlights the importance of pre-observation discussions, clear observation goals, evidence-based feedback, and structured reflective conversations. When implemented within collaborative cultures such as Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) , peer observation can contribute to collective teacher learning, instructional improvement, and the sharing of effective pedagogical practices. Furthermore, recent evidence suggests that reciprocal peer observation encourages teachers to construct professional knowledge collaboratively, strengthening reflective practice and fostering a culture of continuous improvement.

Peer observation for developmental purposes is most effective when conducted as a voluntary, confidential, and reciprocal process characterised by trust and collegiality (Fitzpatrick, 1995; Ur, 1996). The observed teacher should exercise agency in determining the observer and focus of observation, while post-observation discussions should commence with teacher self-reflection (Johnston, 1991). More recent studies extend these principles by emphasising non-evaluative observation, structured reflective dialogue, evidence-based feedback, and collaborative professional learning environments that support collective knowledge building and instructional improvement.

3.4.3 Alternative 3 - Action Research

In recent years INSET in Malaysia has focused on school-based initiatives and promoted the idea of teachers taking up action research as a form of professional development. The reasons for advocating school-based action research is to shift INSET towards practitioner centred research because of the "closeness of the teachers to the events being researched" (Burton and Mickan 1993:113). It is also to engage teachers in continual professional development through reflection on and evaluation of their practice and to bridge the great divide between theory and practice. It is important at this juncture to define action research which has been called by other names such as practitioner-centred research (McNiff 1988) and teacher research (Hopkins 1985). Stronach (cited in McNiff 1988) gives us some clear insights of action research in INSET.

Action research offers a fresh perspective on in-service education. There is not only the need for teachers to develop the professional skills and competencies of teaching but also to develop a rationale for understanding their own living form of enquiry, that is, to justify why they do as they do, and to be prepared to give instances of their coming-to-know (Stronach 1986).

So basically, classroom action research relates to any teacher who is concerned with her own teaching and is prepared to question her teaching approaches in order to improve it. The teacher is exploring what actually goes on in her classroom and seeks to improve her

While these classical conceptualisations continue to provide the foundation for understanding action research, contemporary scholarship has further expanded its role within teacher professional development. Recent studies suggest that action research is no longer viewed solely as an individual teacher's reflective endeavour but increasingly as a collaborative and systematic process of professional inquiry that supports both individual growth and organisational learning. Teachers who engage in action research are able to develop deeper understandings of classroom practices, make informed instructional decisions, and contribute to the creation of professional knowledge within their schools.

Recent research also highlights the importance of teacher agency in action research. Rather than relying exclusively on externally generated knowledge, teachers are increasingly recognised as knowledgeable professionals who are capable of investigating their own practice, generating context-specific evidence, and implementing meaningful changes to improve student learning. In this sense, action research contributes not only to professional development but also to the empowerment of teachers as reflective practitioners and educational change agents.

Furthermore, contemporary studies indicate that the effectiveness of action research is enhanced when it is embedded within collaborative professional learning structures such as Professional Learning Communities (PLCs), peer coaching arrangements, and school-based professional development programmes. Through collective inquiry and shared reflection, teachers are able to broaden their perspectives, challenge assumptions, and co-construct solutions to common instructional challenges. As a result, action research is increasingly regarded as a mechanism for fostering collaborative professionalism and strengthening professional learning cultures within schools.

Within the Malaysian context, recent studies continue to support the use of school-based action research as an important component of teacher professional development. Evidence suggests that teachers benefit from ongoing mentoring, professional guidance, administrative support, and structured opportunities for

reflective practice. Such conditions enable teachers to engage more confidently in inquiry-based approaches to improving teaching and learning, while simultaneously contributing to school improvement efforts.

At the same time, current literature acknowledges several challenges associated with action research implementation. These include heavy workloads, limited research expertise, insufficient time, and varying levels of organisational support. Consequently, researchers argue that successful action research initiatives require sustained professional development, supportive leadership, and a school culture that values inquiry, reflection, and continuous improvement.

Therefore, while earlier scholars primarily emphasised action research as a means of improving classroom practice through teacher reflection, contemporary perspectives position action research as a collaborative, evidence-informed, and transformative process that contributes to teacher agency, professional learning, instructional improvement, and organisational development

Recent literature continues to support the central role of action research in teacher professional development. However, contemporary scholarship extends earlier perspectives by viewing action research not only as an individual reflective activity but also as a collaborative process through which teachers collectively examine, improve, and transform their professional practice. Through systematic cycles of inquiry, teachers are able to generate context-specific knowledge that directly informs classroom decision-making and promotes continuous improvement in teaching and learning.

Contemporary studies further emphasise that action research contributes to the development of teacher agency, whereby teachers become active producers rather than passive consumers of educational knowledge. By engaging in the processes of planning, implementing, observing, and reflecting on interventions, teachers develop greater confidence in making evidence-informed pedagogical decisions and become more responsive to the diverse learning needs of their students.

Within the Malaysian context, recent research highlights the continued relevance of school-based action research as a vehicle for professional learning. Findings suggest that teachers benefit significantly from structured professional support, mentoring, collaborative discussion, and ongoing opportunities for reflection. Such support enables teachers to engage more meaningfully in inquiry-based practice and strengthens the impact of action research on classroom teaching and student learning outcomes.

Recent studies also indicate that the success of action research is influenced by organisational factors such as school leadership, professional learning culture, availability of research guidance, and opportunities for collegial collaboration. Where supportive conditions exist, action research has been shown to contribute not only to individual teacher growth but also to wider school improvement initiatives and the development of professional learning communities.

Consequently, action research is increasingly recognised as a strategic approach to bridging the longstanding gap between educational theory and classroom practice. By positioning teachers as reflective practitioners and knowledge creators, action research continues to serve as an important mechanism for enhancing professional competence, fostering innovation, and promoting sustainable educational improvement.

Consequently, action research remains one of the most influential approaches to teacher professional development because it enables teachers to integrate theory and practice, systematically examine their own teaching, and generate contextually relevant knowledge that contributes to both individual professional growth and school improvement.

- **Steps in the Action Research Process**

There are many action research models. Kemmis and McTaggart (1988) developed the action research spiral, Elliott developed his action research model based on the schema produced by Kemmis and McTaggart. There are linear,

lateral and cyclical models. However, Hopkins cautions teachers that the different action research models should not inhibit independent action as the "original purpose of action research was to free teachers from the constraints of pre-specified research designs" (1985:55). He suggests that the models at best could be used as starting points or guides to initial action. He also argues against action research as a deficit model of professional development as terms such as 'problem', 'solution' and 'improve' are commonly used in the models. Teachers already suffering from low morale should not be made to feel that they are the reasons for the deficits. Action research usually involves small-scale investigative projects in the teacher's own classroom and consists of a number of phases: planning, action, observation and reflection. These phases often recur in cycles. A simple model is given in the diagram below.

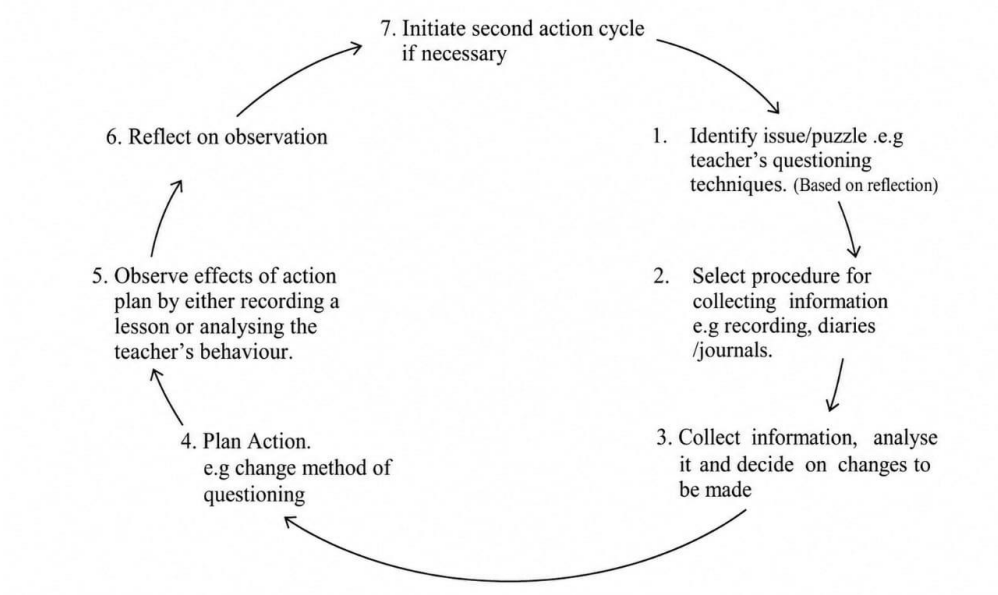


Fig. 3.6 Action Research Cycle based on procedures in Richards and Lockhart (1994:12)

- **Constraints on teachers' action research**

1. The role of the teacher does not include research and the resources of time for research are not built into the teachers' working conditions. With mounting curriculum change in schools, the teachers workload is steadily getting heavier and to undertake research is "another level of work requiring its own time, training, creative energy and commitment, and understandably, most

teachers are too fatigued to contemplate it" (Hancock 1997:89). Adding a data collection dimension to their work can get into the way of teaching.

2. There are no pay-offs for teachers who undertake research as that does not contribute to professional rewards such as better pay or promotion.
3. Teachers are also not equipped with skills and methods for carrying out classroom research as such training is not usually provided on pre-service courses and there are few INSET courses geared towards action research. Interpersonal and communication skills are also necessary skills as the "business of undertaking school-based investigation often involves teachers in a complex series of negotiations" (Blake 1985:74).
4. In contrast with professional researchers, teachers do not get sustained support as their reports are not published. Moreover, their roles as researchers are undervalued and their research not regarded as serious.
5. Hancock (1997) suggests that teachers' insights into classroom teaching and learning have not been recognised as valid forms of professional knowledge and therefore not something which merits research and dissemination.
6. Teachers, according to Johnston (1994)(in Hancock 1997) have a strong orientation to practice and believe that research should be carried out by the 'expert' researchers.

It is therefore not a wonder that teachers do not engage in or are reluctant to engage in research. Enabling conditions for undertaking and supporting teacher research have to be established to change teachers' attitudes towards it. To change teachers' attitudes to research, some of the enabling conditions need to be present to encourage teachers to undertake classroom research. Providing the resources to support classroom research, offering teachers a flexibility of choice in research methods without any mandate or imposition, and encouraging them to publish their findings teacher research will probably be taken more seriously. At present, all the conditions prevalent in academic research are absent in teacher research. Why then are we promoting a concept which in reality is easier said than done?

Contemporary research suggests that many of the concerns identified by Hancock (1997) continue to remain relevant. Recent studies consistently identify time constraints, increasing administrative responsibilities, limited research expertise,

inadequate mentoring, and competing professional demands as major barriers to teachers' engagement in action research. Although educational systems increasingly encourage teachers to become practitioner-researchers, many teachers continue to struggle with balancing inquiry activities alongside their primary teaching responsibilities.

Recent evidence further indicates that teachers are more likely to engage in action research when schools provide sustained professional support, structured research training, mentoring, collaborative opportunities, and recognition for research-related activities. Rather than viewing reluctance as a deficiency on the part of teachers, contemporary scholars argue that participation in action research is strongly influenced by organisational conditions, leadership support, and the extent to which research is embedded within school culture.

These findings suggest that the issue is no longer whether teachers are willing to undertake research, but whether schools and educational systems provide the necessary conditions that enable meaningful practitioner inquiry to occur. Consequently, current discussions on action research increasingly focus on creating sustainable research cultures within schools rather than solely promoting action research as a professional expectation.

- **Rationale for Action Research**

Considering the constraints that act as barriers to action research and the reluctance of most teachers to be researchers, why are teacher teachers promoting classroom research as a tool for professional development? Teachers should not relinquish the idea of action research as Elliott (in Blake 1985) states:

> the main purpose of classroom research [is] the explication and clarification of the actions of teachers in their everyday work so that the phenomenon of teaching and learning are understood from teachers' own points of view.
>
> (Elliott (1980) in Blake 1985:75)

Action Research is supposed to be a friendly methodology and McNiff provides a comprehensive rationale for having it as:

> …applied to classrooms, action research is an approach to improving education through change, by encouraging teachers to be aware of their own practice and to be prepared to change it. It is participatory, in that it involves the teacher in [her] own enquiry and collaborative in that it involves other people as part of a shared enquiry. It is research with rather than research on. (McNiff 1988:4)

So, on a social basis action research represents involvement and on an educational basis, it implies improvement. Teachers as the frontline people in education are most familiar with what happens in classrooms, their concerns and interests. Thus it is necessary to encourage teachers to determine which areas to research relevant to their professional interests. By enquiring into their classrooms, teachers are promoting their own learning and understanding for ongoing professional development. In order to move from being unquestioning consumers of other's theory teachers should be researchers in their own right, generating their own theory and modifying it through practice. van Lier (1992)
suggests that action research can bridge the theory practice gap if teachers are given opportunities to carry out research:

> Theory and practice are not perceived as integral parts of a teacher's practical professional life. …This situation is the result of communication gaps caused by an increasingly opaque research technocracy, restrictive practices in educational institutions and bureaucracies (e.g. not validating research time, or not granting sabbaticals to teachers for professional renovation), and overburdening teachers who cannot conceive of ways of theorizing and researching that come out of daily work and facilitate that daily work. (van Lier 1992:3)

In my view, though there is an increasing interest in action research for teacher initiated classroom investigation, we should not jump on the bandwagon without first providing the enabling conditions for teachers in schools who work within

the constraints of time, workload and isolationist cultures to undertake classroom research. Without the necessary skills and knowledge on techniques of carrying out action research, teachers may produce diluted versions of what they interpret as action research.

Although opportunities for teacher collaboration have increased in many educational systems, recent research suggests that professional isolation remains a significant challenge, particularly when workloads, accountability demands, and time constraints limit collegial engagement. Professional Learning Communities (PLCs)have been identified as an important mechanism for reducing isolation through structured collaboration, peer support, collective reflection, and shared problem-solving.

Despite the challenges associated with its implementation, action research is one of the most effective approaches to teacher professional learning. Contemporary studies suggest that action research enables teachers to engage systematically with issues emerging from their own classrooms, thereby enhancing reflective practice, instructional decision-making, and responsiveness to student learning needs.

Unlike traditional models of professional development that position teachers as recipients of externally generated knowledge, action research encourages teachers to become active creators of professional knowledge. Through cycles of planning, implementation, observation, and reflection, teachers generate contextually relevant understandings that are directly applicable to their own practice. Such an approach enhances teacher agency and strengthens the connection between professional learning and classroom improvement.

Recent Malaysian studies further indicate that action research can contribute positively to school improvement when supported by collaborative professional learning structures, ongoing mentoring, and leadership commitment. These findings reinforce earlier arguments that action research serves not only as a means of individual teacher development but also as a mechanism for fostering organisational learning and continuous school improvement.

3.5 THE NEED FOR COLLABORATION

As exploratory practice requires teachers to work with other teachers in the workplace, collaboration is crucial. In most schools the isolation that surrounds teachers shapes the way they relate to one another. Teachers tend to believe that they should not intrude in another teacher's classroom. As suggested by Fullan and Hargreaves (1992) the isolation and individualism of teachers are a protective shield against scrutiny or intrusion. However, teachers and administrators are aware that collaboration and collegiality are important focal points for change and improvement (Hargreaves 1994). Work done by Berlak and Berlak (1981) in Smyth (1991) provide evidence of teachers learning their craft largely from one another. Fullan and Hargreaves distinguish between 3 other forms of collaboration:

1. Balkanization
2. Comfortable collaboration
3. Contrived collegiality

Balkanization, is a term representing groups or cliques of teachers working closely and attaching loyalties to each other in the school. They spend their time together and are often seen socializing in the staff room or canteen. Groups of teachers who segment themselves from others are building balkanized states which are "detrimental to whole school development" (Fullan and Hargreaves 1992:72). Comfortable collaboration does not extend to classroom settings and is restricted to mere giving of advice, tips or sharing of materials. To be effective it has to extend to sharing ideas, examining classroom practices critically and looking for alternatives to bring about improvements in classrooms and schools. The third, contrived collegiality is normally top-down and is formed for purposes of expediency. Hargreaves defines contrived collegiality as:

> …a set of formal, specific bureaucratic procedures to increase the attention being given to joint teacher planning and consultation. It can be seen in initiatives such as peer coaching, mentor teaching, joint planning in specially provided rooms, formally scheduled meetings and clear job descriptions and

> training programmes for those in consultative roles. These sorts of initiatives are administrative contrivances designed to get collegiality going on in schools where little has existed before. (Hargreaves 1992:229-230)

There are positive and negative possibilities to contrived collaboration. Grimmett and Crehan (1992) suggest that we have to start somewhere and any attempt at initiating collegiality is inevitably contrived. What they argue is that organisationally induced contrived collegiality has a better chance of evolving into a truly interdependent collaborative culture than an administratively imposed one because it is characterised by the belief that teachers can willingly participate in collaborative practices and it affects teachers' intrinsic motivation.

> The administratively imposed type of contrived collegiality consists of 'top-down attempts to manipulate directly the practices and behaviours of teachers as professional teachers. The organisationally –induced type of contrived collegiality is characterized by top-down attempts at fostering 'bottom-up problem solving approaches to school improvement through careful manipulation, not of teachers' practices and behaviours, but of the environment within which teachers live and work and have their professional being. As such it constitutes a deliberate attempt on the part of administrators to influence indirectly teachers' professional practices and behaviours. (Grimmett and Crehan 1992:70)

Given that teachers will not be mandated to collaborate I will have to agree with Hargreaves (1992) that contrived collegiality can serve as a precursor to a culture of collaboration. It would be better than having teachers working in cellular organisations in schools. If exploratory practice is to serve any purpose in teacher development in schools, some form of collaboration has to be initiated. It is through collaboration that we can persuade teachers about the openness of investigating and discussing their classroom practice as a way of breaking down

isolationist barriers and promoting the norm of collegial interdependence (Little (1981) in Grimmett and Crehan 1992: 63).

More recent research strengthens the argument that collaboration is central to meaningful teacher learning and professional growth. Contemporary perspectives increasingly locate teacher development within collaborative professional cultures rather than within isolated individual practice. Professional Learning Communities (PLCs), peer observation, collaborative inquiry, and team-based action research are now widely recognised as important mechanisms for sustaining teacher learning and improving educational practice.

Current scholarship also highlights the importance of psychological safety, trust, and mutual respect in fostering authentic collaboration. Teachers are more willing to share classroom challenges, engage in critical reflection, and experiment with new practices when collaborative relationships are characterised by openness rather than evaluation. Consequently, collaborative professionalism is increasingly viewed as a key factor in supporting innovation, reflective practice, and continuous professional development.

Furthermore, research on reciprocal peer observation and collaborative inquiry suggests that teachers construct professional knowledge more effectively when they engage in structured dialogue about classroom practice. Such findings extend earlier arguments concerning collegiality by demonstrating that collaboration not only reduces professional isolation but also serves as a powerful catalyst for collective learning and school improvement.

SUMMARY

In this chapter I have provided the rationale for a practitioner centred school-based INSET citing the importance of developing teachers within their classrooms as a reason. The contemporary literature reviewed in this chapter suggests that the fundamental principles underpinning reflective practice, action research, exploratory practice, and collaboration remain highly relevant in current teacher education discourse.

However, the role of professional learning communities, collaborative inquiry, teacher agency, and supportive organisational conditions in sustaining meaningful professional development have been emphasized. As educational contexts become more complex, teacher learning is no longer viewed solely as an individual endeavour but as a collaborative and evidence-informed process that contributes to both professional growth and school improvement.

I have also highlighted the importance of reflective and exploratory practice as tools for helping teachers develop and provided some possible alternatives for teachers to choose based on their development priorities. In promoting critical enquiry through reflective and exploratory practice, collaboration is seen as integral in the process. In the next chapter I will propose a school-based INSET programme based on the concepts of reflective and exploratory practice.

CHAPTER 4 A PROPOSAL FOR A SCHOOL-BASED INSET PROGRAMME

OVERVIEW

This chapter is a proposal for a school-based INSET programme with exploratory practice as a basis for helping teachers develop. The goal of this programme is to help teachers become self-reflective practitioners able to examine their own practice critically and decide on future decisions and actions. The main assumption underlying the programme is that if teachers work together clarifying and sharing ideas and concerns, they are more likely to change their attitudes and behaviours through shared insights and a heightened understanding of what is best for themselves and for their students. It begins with the rationale, aims and intended outcomes of the programme taking into consideration important contextual factors essential for effective implementation. As the programme is seen as an on-going process, it is apparent that a preparatory course for teachers within the programme is needed. The preparatory course is to raise teachers' awareness of the possible options available within the programme for their professional development. It concludes with a series of tasks to prepare teachers for a school-based INSET programme.

4.1 BACKGROUND AND RATIONALE FOR THE PROGRAMME

Given that teachers spend approximately 30 to 35 years in schools and opportunities for attending INSET courses are few, the school as "a place for teachers to learn or stagnate is crucial" (Fullan 1992:116). Bolitho (1996) argues that teachers need to emerge from the isolation of their classrooms or they become "stale, stressed and increasingly unsure of themselves" and that this isolation is dangerous "if teachers have no external point of reference or sources of help for themselves" (1996:2). Within schools, there are opportunities for teachers to emerge from the isolation by becoming involved in school-based initiatives where teachers interact, support and assist each other. As Rosenholtz (1989) in Fullan 1992) succinctly puts it, "it is assumed that improvement in teaching is a collective rather than an individual enterprise, and that analysis, evaluation and

experimentation in concert with colleagues are conditions under which teachers improve" (1992:116). Fullan (1991) in Bolitho 1996) outlines the features of effective INSET based on several research findings. They are summarised on the following page:

- School-based
- Programmes based on demonstrations, supervised trials and feedback
- Teachers learn best from other teachers
- Teachers need outside help from consultants who are capable of providing relevant activities
- Programmes in which teachers interact
- Programmes which provide individualized training
- Programmes in which teachers participate as planners and decision-makers in INSET
- Programmes which are part of overall school improvement

3The above features of effective INSET imply that schools are strategic places for continuous learning and improvement for teachers.

Developments in the professional learning literature over the past two decades provide strong support for many of the characteristics identified by Fullan (1991). Contemporary research increasingly emphasises that sustained professional learning is most effective when it is job-embedded, collaborative, inquiry-oriented, and directly connected to classroom practice. Professional development that occurs within the school context allows teachers to address authentic classroom challenges, engage in collective problem-solving, and apply new learning in a continuous cycle of improvement rather than through isolated training events.

Recent studies also highlight the importance of teacher agency in professional development. Teachers are increasingly viewed not merely as recipients of externally prescribed innovations but as active participants in the construction of professional knowledge. Consequently, effective professional development programmes seek to balance system-wide priorities with teachers' own

professional concerns, enabling teachers to exercise greater ownership over their learning and professional growth.

Nunan argues that a primary goal of INSET is "to give teachers ways of exploring their own classrooms" (1990:62). suggesting that it can "stimulate the professional competence and development" (Veenman 1994:303) of teachers. Huberman further suggests that teachers who experiment with new materials and techniques in their classrooms experience greater job satisfaction in the long run:

> Teachers…who invested consistently in classroom level experiments in what they called 'tinkering' with new materials…were more likely to be satisfied later on in their career.
>
> (Huberman 1992:131)

Teachers need to continuously 'tinker' in classrooms as Ur (1996) argues it could make a crucial difference between surviving in teaching or dropping out. Some teachers are known to reflect on their professional action from time to time in an unstructured way which to Wallace (1993) is less productive and effective. He suggests an "exercise of ingenuity [by teachers] in devising more structured methods of reflection which … go with the grain of normal professional practice" (1993:4). One of the methods is to engage teachers in exploratory practice.

In Malaysia, one of the challenges of our Vision 2020 is to incorporate in education "ways to expand [learners'] minds. Teachers need to have the "right attitudes" to be "sufficiently liberated to explore fresh perspectives by being proactive and innovative" (Ungku A Aziz 1993:327). A recent working paper on "Strategies to improve English language proficiency among students in schools" (1998) prepared by the MOE outlines short term plans for professional development of teachers as "encouraging self and peer evaluation" and "intensifying teacher support team programmes". As a long-term initiative, action research to inform practice will be introduced in schools in the near future.

Subsequent developments within Malaysian education and international teacher education research suggest that action research, collaborative inquiry, and Professional Learning Communities (PLCs)have become increasingly interconnected. Rather than functioning as separate professional development strategies, they are frequently integrated into school-based improvement initiatives that encourage teachers to investigate classroom practices collaboratively, analyse evidence, and implement contextually appropriate interventions. Such approaches reinforce the view that sustainable professional development is most likely to occur when inquiry becomes part of the normal culture of teaching and learning within schools.

The implication then is that professional development plans will be externally imposed. Encouraging teachers to be innovative, evaluating teachers' practices, solving problems through action research are all legitimate means for developing teachers. However to counteract the possible resistance from top-down initiatives, bottom-up needs will have to coincide in some way. An on-going school-based INSET programme will provide the necessary support needed for these externally imposed priorities. Teachers themselves must identify their own developmental needs and realize that to facilitate the learning of their students, they have first to be facilitators of their own learning. They need to "unleash a sense of inquiry, to open everything to questioning and exploration, to recognise that everything is in a process of change" (Rogers 1994: 153). Chambers (1997) states that the primary aim of INSET is the improvement of the quality of education for students brought about by the professional development of teachers and since teachers spend so much time in their classrooms, they must "see the classroom…and an examination of its realities…as the starting point for any form of in-service teacher development" (Hayes 1997:78).

4.2 AIMS AND INTENDED OUTCOMES

4.2.1 Aims of the programme

1. To promote teachers' own learning about what is happening in their classrooms and to understand reasons why they happen.

2. To enable teachers to reflect systematically on and confront their thinking and classroom practices.

3. To raise teachers' awareness of the benefits of exploring and investigating classrooms to improve teaching and learning as well as achieving school improvement.

4. To establish a community of reflective, enquiring and articulate ELT practitioners.

5. To promote collaboration among colleagues through working together on areas of common concern or interest.

4.2.2 Intended Outcomes

1. Teachers will have a heightened awareness of their classroom practices.
2. There will be an increase in confidence among teachers that they can discuss and conceptualize their practice in theoretical terms.
3. Teachers are equipped with skills and methods of self-evaluation, observation and action research.
4. Teachers have a better understanding of conditions for effective teaching and learning.
5. There will be a climate of collaboration among teachers through working together.

6. Teachers will have greater autonomy in decision-making.
7. Teachers will become responsible for their own development.

These intended outcomes remain consistent with contemporary understandings of teacher professional development which increasingly emphasise reflective practice, professional agency, collaborative learning, and evidence-informed decision-making. Recent studies suggest that professional development initiatives are most effective when they cultivate teachers' capacity to examine practice critically, engage in professional dialogue, and assume responsibility for their own ongoing learning. Accordingly, the outcomes proposed in this programme remain highly relevant to current educational reform agendas which increasingly position teachers as reflective practitioners, collaborative professionals, and contributors to school improvement.

4.3 OUTLINE OF THE PROGRAMME

4.3.1 Establishing a professional development group

As this is an on going programme, to be effective, it has to be built into the school system. Establishing a professional development group in school as Day suggests allows for "built in time to discuss teachers' problems and things that happen in the classroom because we tend to keep problems to ourselves, or discuss them with perhaps one or two close colleagues". These opportunities "enable teachers to reflect systematically on and confront their thinking and practices" (1990:227). Fullan calls such opportunities as "interactive professionalism" (1992:120) where teachers work in small groups and interact frequently in the course of planning, testing new ideas, attempting to solve different problems and assessing effectiveness. It is interactive because it means giving and receiving advice and help. Thus he argues "teachers would be continuous learners in a community of interactive professionals" (ibid:121). In similar vein, Underhill (1992) proposes that people in groups can provide a facilitative climate conducive to the development of self-awareness in teacher development.

Contemporary research provides considerable support for the concept of interactive professionalism. Current studies on Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) , collaborative inquiry groups, and peer learning networks suggest that regular opportunities for structured professional dialogue strengthen teacher learning, foster collective efficacy, and contribute to instructional improvement. Teachers who participate in collaborative professional learning activities are more likely to engage in reflective practice, share expertise, and implement innovations in their classrooms than teachers who work in professional isolation.

Recent literature further suggests that collaborative learning structures are particularly effective when they are characterised by trust, mutual respect, psychological safety, and a shared commitment to improving student learning. Under such conditions, teachers are more willing to discuss difficulties openly, examine classroom evidence critically, and participate in meaningful professional inquiry.

There are two ways of conducting activities within the professional development groups.

(i) The group may meet during school hours. Two periods a week can be set aside for members of the English department (including teachers from other departments who are free during this time) to meet. The timetable has to be arranged in such a way to accommodate for release time for these teachers. The last two periods (80 minutes) on Friday are appropriate for such meetings.

(ii) Teachers may decide on a time and place to meet regularly for their professional development groups. This idea is based on the "quality circles" practised in a Swedish car industry. (Gibbs and Habershaw 1997:113). Teachers may meet informally and appraise their teaching and plan improvements. Meetings can be held after school or on Saturday mornings which are designated for INSET work.

It is felt that through regular meetings of this nature that collegiality can be fostered to bring about more effective teaching and school improvement. Teachers must be made to see these meetings as worthwhile and not a waste of time. As teachers are given options to choose for their own development there will be separate procedures for each of the options. However, for the sake of expedience, teachers may be asked to decide on an option based on group consensus. Before implementation certain variables and contextual factors must be considered (See fig 4.1).

4.3.2 Conditions for Successful Implementation

Recent research suggests that successful school-based professional development depends on several enabling conditions. These include leadership support, access to mentoring, opportunities for collaboration, protected time for professional inquiry, and a school culture that values reflective practice. Studies consistently indicate that professional development initiatives are more sustainable when they are embedded within existing school structures rather than implemented as isolated or short-term projects. Particular attention should therefore be given to creating organisational conditions that encourage teachers to engage confidently in collaborative inquiry and professional reflection.

Current evidence suggests that teachers are most likely to perceive collaborative professional development positively when participation is purposeful, directly connected to classroom practice, and supported by school leadership. Professional learning activities that are experienced as compliance exercises frequently generate limited engagement, whereas activities that enable teachers to investigate authentic classroom concerns and influence professional decision-making are more likely to lead to sustained participation and meaningful learning.

MANAGING SCHOOL-BASED INSET
PLANNING CONSIDERATIONS

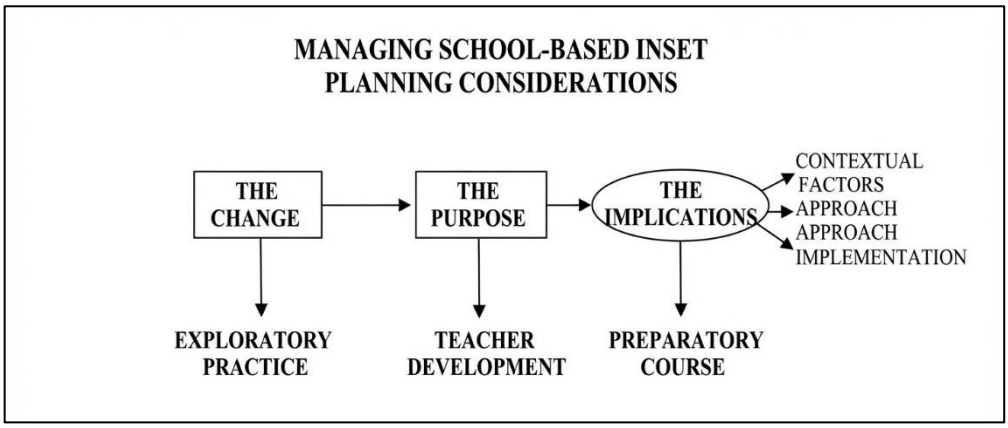


Fig. 4.1 Planning considerations for school-based INSET

Whatever options the teachers decide to go for, the professional development group will act as the central focus for discussions and decision-making. Before implementing the programme, it is essential that since teachers have well 8966developed mental constructs of teaching; these need to be articulated and analysed for potential contradictions with each other, the teaching circumstances, and the beliefs of learners. Only then will teachers be able to accommodate new ideas, to appreciate the theory underlying them, understand practical realizations and evaluate their usefulness.
(Lamb 1995:79)

Developments in the professional learning literature since the 1990s have reinforced the importance of examining teachers' beliefs, assumptions, and professional identities as a prerequisite for meaningful professional development. Contemporary research suggests that teachers interpret new initiatives through existing belief systems shaped by their professional experiences, organisational contexts, and classroom realities. Consequently, sustainable changes in practice are unlikely to occur unless teachers are provided with opportunities to surface,

question, and reconstruct their underlying assumptions about teaching, learning, and student development.

Recent studies further indicate that effective professional development involves more than the acquisition of new skills or techniques. Rather, meaningful professional learning requires critical reflection, collaborative dialogue, and inquiry into existing classroom practices. Through structured opportunities for discussion and reflection, teachers become more aware of the relationship between their beliefs and their instructional decisions, thereby increasing the likelihood that new knowledge will be integrated into practice.

Contemporary scholarship also highlights the significance of teacher agency within professional development programmes. Teachers are more likely to engage with innovation when they perceive themselves as active participants in shaping professional learning rather than passive recipients of externally imposed change. Therefore, awareness-raising activities should not merely prepare teachers to adopt new practices but should also encourage them to participate critically in examining, adapting, and evaluating those practices within their own professional contexts. ,

From this perspective, the preparatory phase of a school-based INSET programme can be viewed as an important process of developing shared understanding, professional ownership, and readiness for collaborative inquiry. Such preparation helps establish the conditions necessary for sustained professional learning and increases the likelihood that subsequent reflective, exploratory, and action-oriented activities will result in meaningful improvements in teaching and learning

Awareness-raising activities are necessary for teachers to confront their own practices and their beliefs underlying those practices. As a preliminary measure this programme will consider raising teachers' awareness for having such a programme in schools and consider the contextual factors which are paramount

to its effectiveness. A summary of the school-based INSET programme is given below in the form of a chart.

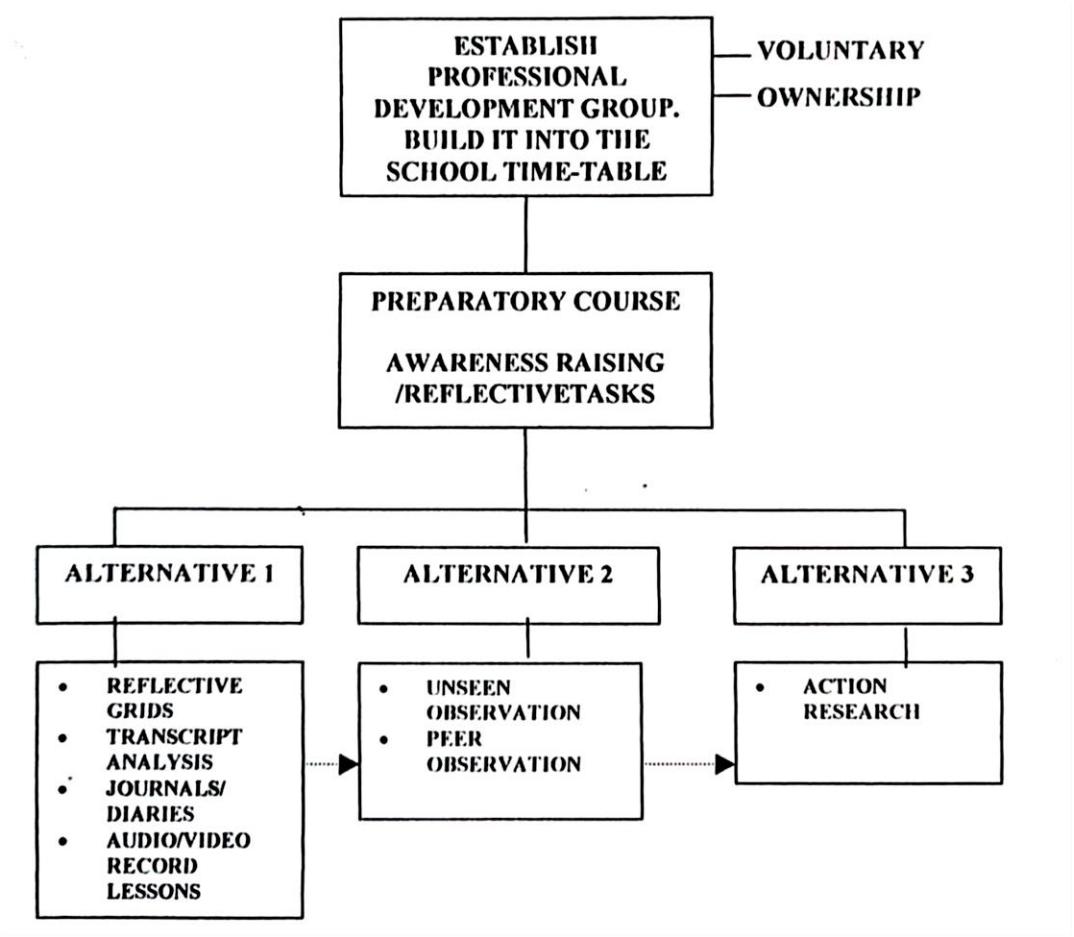


Fig. 4.2 Outline of the Programme

4.4 CONTEXTUAL FACTORS

4.4.1 Motivation

Motivation is seen as a key variable in the effective implementation of the programme. There has to be a degree of flexibility to allow teachers to articulate their concerns and needs in order to promote teacher development within the context of school-based work. We have to consider the teachers as active participants in their own learning and enable them to follow their own interests and pursue educational problems that are their own as these have a personal significance for them. In this way teachers are better motivated as they have

ownership and control over their pursuits. However, resource support with adequate funding and peer support can lead to greater motivation.

Contemporary research continues to identify teacher motivation as a critical factor in successful professional development. More recent studies suggest that teachers are most motivated to engage in professional learning when they perceive relevance to their classroom needs, experience autonomy in decision-making, and believe that their participation can contribute meaningfully to improved student learning. Professional development initiatives that recognise teachers as active agents of change rather than passive recipients of externally imposed reforms are more likely to foster sustained engagement and commitment.

Current literature further suggests that motivation is strengthened when teachers experience professional trust, recognition from school leadership, opportunities for collaboration, and a sense of collective responsibility for school improvement. In this regard, motivation is increasingly viewed not merely as an individual characteristic but as a product of supportive organisational conditions and professional culture.

4.4.2 Management

• Role of the Principal

The principal plays a vital role by first acknowledging the need for teachers to investigate classrooms as a means of enhancing teaching and learning. In carrying out classroom investigations, teachers are reappraising their practices and promoting their own professional development. Principals can offer their support by providing teachers with opportunities to seek ways of expanding their repertoire of skills and knowledge. They can promote or stifle teacher development by their open or narrow vision of what schools ought to be. By encouraging teachers to reflect on their practices, sharing ideas about classroom experiences and trying out new ideas will help promote professional enquiry into classroom practices. I agree with Leithwood (1992) that principals themselves have to be reflective of the interactions they have with teachers and try to foster

norms of collaboration in schools. They need to reflect on the attitudes, beliefs and values of the teachers and shape their schools as learning environments not just for the students but also for the teachers. Principals have the responsibility of working with their teachers and students to create "learning enriched" rather than "learning impoverished" schools (Rosenholtz 1989 in Fullan 1992:60). They have to understand the function of school-based INSET programmes as a means of promoting teacher development and create the time and space necessary for teachers to participate in such programmes. More importantly, they should act as facilitators in them and perhaps work alongside teachers to resolve problems and implement changes. Principals need to have a shared vision with their staff of what the school should look like and what to do in order to realize that vision. To share that vision, principals have to give teachers a voice in deciding what is best for themselves and for the school.

Contemporary research strongly reinforces the importance of instructional and transformational leadership in supporting teacher professional development. Recent studies suggest that effective school leaders create conditions that promote collaboration, inquiry, trust, and continuous learning. Rather than acting solely as managers of curriculum implementation, principals are increasingly expected to function as learning leaders who facilitate teacher learning, encourage innovation, and support evidence-informed practice.

Recent studies also highlights the importance of distributed leadership, whereby leadership responsibilities are shared among teachers and middle leaders. Such approaches recognise that school improvement is more sustainable when leadership is viewed as a collective organisational capacity rather than the responsibility of a single individual

The roles of the principal are manifold. Other than the administrative tasks, they are expected to promote quality teaching, provide favourable conditions for facilitating the professional growth of teachers, offer incentives to teachers and develop staff collaboration just to name a few. With so many responsibilities, principals would not be able to actively monitor or meaningfully supervise teachers. They therefore need an assurance that all is well in the classrooms. In

schools where principals establish a climate and provide support for learning based on shared vision, shared purpose and shared decision making, the teachers would make every effort to improve their practice that will ultimately lead to school improvement and quality results in examinations. Together with the teachers, principals Intercan celebrate the schools' achievements. In "valuing teachers who constantly seek to expand their repertoires and who search for opportunities to learn from their colleagues" (Fullan and Hargreaves 1992:116) principals are recognised as dynamic leaders who believe in the advancement of innovation.

- **Support of colleagues**

A vital component in school-based INSET is the role of colleagues in collaborating, sharing goals and working in teams for successful implementation. Schools are social places and through team efforts, teachers get to know each other better and create opportunities of achieving things together. Fullan (1992) argues that the development of collaboration is not straightforward. Often it is contrived. Easen (1985) suggests that it is through communication that teachers are encouraged to explore issues and problems and help clarify what is said. Teachers need to build interpersonal relationships with their colleagues in order to get help and support in their professional development.

Developments in research on teacher learning increasingly position collegial support as a central component of professional growth. Studies of Professional Learning Communities (PLCs)and collaborative inquiry groups indicate that teachers benefit significantly from opportunities to discuss practice, share challenges, examine evidence of student learning, and co-construct solutions to common instructional problems. Such collaboration contributes not only to individual learning but also to the development of collective professional capacity within schools.

Recent literature further emphasises that productive collaboration depends upon trust, mutual respect, and psychological safety. Teachers are more likely to seek

support and engage openly in professional discussions when they are confident that collaboration is developmental rather than evaluative

• The role of the INSET facilitator

The role of the INSET facilitator is very important as she is like an 'idea champion' (Miller and Lieberman (1988) in Baird 1992:39) a person with sufficient motivation, commitment, and above all energy to shoulder many responsibilities. She has to arrange and organise meetings, set up clear and relevant tasks based on explicit objectives. INSET facilitators need to be identified in schools to lead INSET activities. A number of schools have TST personnel who have been trained in interpersonal skills, team-building skills and in teacher support. They can be persuaded to take on the role of INSET facilitators. Some schools have master teachers, teachers with post graduate qualifications in teacher training, TESL or TEFL and all secondary schools also have English Heads of Department or Heads of Languages. All these teachers are key figures that could be encouraged to facilitate INSET work in schools. Ur (1996) provides a helpful list of the functions of trainers which can be adopted for school-based facilitative work. They are:

> (i) To encourage [teachers] to articulate what they know and put forward new ideas of their own. .
> (ii) To provide input or to make available further sources of relevant information
> (ii) To get [teachers] to acquire the habit of processing input from either source through using their own experience and critical faculty, so that they eventually feel personal 'ownership' of the resulting knowledge.
>
> (Ur 1996:8)

I would like to add to this list the additional functions of an INSET facilitator.

> (iv) To work with the teachers in planning and implementing school-based work.
> (v) To identify together with the teachers their felt needs and concerns
>
> (vi) To record them and to liase with the Principal or State Departments' English Language Officers providing them with the teachers' suggestions of how those needs may be realised.

Contemporary perspectives extend the facilitator role beyond coordination and support. Recent research suggests that facilitators increasingly function as learning coaches, critical friends, knowledge brokers, and facilitators of professional inquiry. Their responsibilities include supporting reflective dialogue, helping teachers interpret classroom evidence, encouraging collaborative problem-solving, and maintaining a culture of professional trust and continuous learning.

Current scholarship further indicates that effective facilitators do not position themselves as experts who provide solutions but as partners who help teachers construct professional knowledge through inquiry, reflection, and collaborative learning processes.

• Facilitator training

Once the INSET facilitators have been identified, they need to undergo intensive training. Facilitator training for school-based work is crucial. Consultants or specialists are needed to provide the training. As there is a danger of a high turnover of teachers in schools and INSET facilitators may go on transfer or promotion, co-facilitators have to be identified to work closely with the INSET facilitator in the event that the facilitator has to leave the school for personal or professional reasons. This is to ensure sustainability of the programme. It would be ideal to have INSET facilitators in all secondary schools to assist in teacher development activities and to provide the necessary support in schools in the event of any top-down curriculum change. Facilitators will need training in the following:

1. School-based INSET techniques
2. Methodology of reflective and exploratory practice
3. Observation skills and methods
4. Action research skills

Recent research suggests that facilitators may also require competencies in coaching conversations, facilitation of professional learning communities, conflict resolution, data-informed decision-making, and the use of collaborative

inquiry protocols. As professional learning becomes increasingly collaborative and evidence-based, facilitators must be equipped not only with technical knowledge but also with interpersonal and leadership capabilities that enable teachers to engage confidently in professional learning processes INSET facilitators will need to possess the following characteristics:

(i) Committed to school-based INSET work
(ii) Enthusiastic about helping teachers develop
(iii) "Suitable" personality for establishing interpersonal relationships and building effective teams among teachers
(iv) Highly motivated, open, honest, empathetic and genuine
(v) Possess leadership qualities
(vi) Knowledgeable
(vii) Have sufficient years of teaching experience to provide professional judgement on issues pertaining to school and the teaching, learning processes
(viii) Command the respect of other teachers

I would add at this point that leadership does not have to come from those who occupy top positions in the management of the programme. Leadership can be exercised at all levels.

This view is strongly supported by contemporary theories of teacher leadership and distributed leadership. Current scholarship increasingly recognises that teachers can influence school improvement through professional expertise, mentoring, collaborative inquiry, and participation in decision-making processes. Teacher leadership is therefore viewed as an important mechanism for strengthening professional learning cultures and sustaining innovation within schools.

According to Whitaker it is "behaviour that enables and assists others to achieve planned goals" (1993:73). This suggests that teachers participating in this programme must be given a voice in making their own suggestions and strategic directions. Just as they listen to other people's ideas they may expound their own

because leadership may emerge from these teachers as and when necessary and such leadership will make the programme more effective.

• Budget

School – based INSET will require funds to run the programme. Teachers will have to request financial support from the State Education Department or from Principals for conducting on site workshops or courses. Running this programme is cost effective as teachers can rely on the physical amenities and resources available in the school for teacher development activities. Requesting funds will require negotiations based on valid and coherent proposals.

Recent studies indicate that while financial resources remain important, successful professional development is influenced equally by access to time, leadership support, collaborative opportunities, mentoring, and organisational commitment. Contemporary researchers frequently identify protected time for professional inquiry as one of the most significant resources needed for sustainable teacher learning and action research engagement.

- **Digital and Technology-Mediated Professional Learning**

Recent developments in professional learning have expanded opportunities for collaboration beyond the physical boundaries of schools. Digital platforms, online professional learning communities, video-based lesson study, virtual coaching, and technology-mediated collaborative inquiry now provide additional avenues for teacher learning, reflection, and knowledge sharing. Such approaches can complement school-based INSET by enabling sustained professional interaction across schools and geographical locations.

4.5 THE OPERATIONAL PRINCIPLES

4.5.1 Teachers' experience is a valuable resource

This programme follows the principle that "adult learners value their own experience as a resource for further learning and that they learn best when they have a personal investment" (Nunan 1989:112) in the programme. Through the professional development group sessions, teachers can bring to the surface their beliefs, values and attitudes they have formed from their teaching experience. The experiences of teachers will be explored through the process of reflection and through "awareness of their own practice [they can] determine the specific areas that they wish to develop, and formulate their own agenda for change in the classroom" (Lamb 1995:79).'

Studies continues to affirm the importance of teachers' experiential knowledge within professional learning. Contemporary teacher education literature increasingly acknowledges that effective professional development emerges from the interaction between research-informed knowledge and teachers' lived classroom experiences. As such, teachers are recognised as valuable contributors to professional knowledge creation rather than merely consumers of educational research.

4.5.2 Encouraging teacher talk

As this programme is based on the concept of "interactive professionalism" (Fullan 1992) "reflective practice" (Schon 1983) and "exploratory practice" (Allwright and Bailey 1991), it will be necessary to create space for teachers to articulate their thoughts and ideas. In doing so, teachers can clarify ideas and through the process of reflection, conceptualize them, create meaning and plan future action. For talk to be open and free, a climate of trust has to exist among the teachers where "honest dialogue can take place" (Pozzo 1997:41). It is through dialogue that teachers are encouraged to derive theoretical principles from a study of classroom practice rather than to impose on them a set of principles to be applied in their classrooms.

Current research highlights professional dialogue as a key mechanism through which teachers develop reflective capacity, professional judgement, and shared understanding. Structured conversations about practice are increasingly recognised as essential components of collaborative inquiry, peer learning, and professional learning communities. Through dialogue, teachers are able to articulate tacit knowledge, challenge assumptions, and develop more sophisticated understandings of teaching and learning.

4.5.3 Action Learning

Hayes (1997) suggests that in-service training has to be practical in orientation, "allowing teachers to see techniques in action in actual classes" (1997:82). The INSET facilitator may have to demonstrate how exploratory practice can be carried out in classrooms before teachers have a go at it. It is based on the principle of learning by doing. McGill and Beaty state that action learning is based on "the relationship between reflection and action"…and it "involves a group of people"…"[learning] with and from each other by working on real problems and reflecting on their own experiences"(1992:17).

The principle of learning through action remains highly relevant in contemporary professional development literature. Recent evidence suggests that teachers learn most effectively when professional learning is embedded within authentic classroom contexts and connected directly to instructional challenges. Job-embedded learning opportunities that integrate action, reflection, collaboration, and inquiry are consistently associated with stronger professional learning outcomes than one-off workshop models.

4.5.4 Providing emotional support

As this programme depends on collaborative efforts and will be initiated from a group of teachers, there is a need to build life into the group. Easen (1985) sees the group as an effective support system for educational change. I believe that in-service activity can be a positive experience for any member in that group if we

take into consideration the different personalities and their 'personal biographies' (Hayes 1997:84). Providing emotional support means building life into the group and helping to sustain the programme. What is needed to effectively help members within the group is 'emotional competence' a primary aspect of character for effective helping where "people learn to prompt and support each other's self-direction" (Heron (1990) in Head and Taylor (1997:77).

It has elevated the importance of emotional support and psychological well-being within professional learning environments. Studies increasingly suggest that teachers are more willing to engage in innovation, reflection, experimentation, and professional risk-taking when they experience psychological safety and emotional support from colleagues and school leaders. Consequently, emotionally supportive professional communities are viewed as important foundations for sustainable teacher learning and organisational improvement.

4.5.5 Importance of active listening

The alternative routes to teacher development offered in this programme require that feedback be given to teachers to assess their practice. Recent research continues to highlight the importance of active listening within professional learning contexts. Studies suggest that effective feedback is increasingly viewed as a dialogic process rather than the simple transmission of information. Teachers are more likely to engage with feedback and translate it into improved practice when they experience psychological safety, feel respected, and perceive that their perspectives have been genuinely heard. Active listening therefore serves not only as a communication skill but also as a mechanism for building trust, encouraging professional reflection, and sustaining collaborative learning relationships. Research conducted in educational settings further indicates that active listening promotes empathy, mutual understanding, emotional well-being, and stronger professional relationships among teachers

For feedback to be effective, Bolitho and Wright suggest that "it is important to be open and non-defensive when…receiving feedback" (1997:32). It is important too that when we provide feedback we should have a non-judgemental attitude

and try to be active listeners. Active listening requires giving full attention to the speaker and this is essential for giving or receiving feedback because this gives her the feeling that she has been understood.

4.6 APPROACH AND IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGY

4.6.1 The on-going INSET Programme

This programme is based on an understanding that to help teachers develop and to improve their teaching requires them to reflect on themselves and their practice, and this reflection should be set within a process of systematic enquiry. Consistent with this understanding is the belief that both reflection and enquiry should begin with collaboration among teachers working in a professional development group. The role of the professional development group is to facilitate the development of critical self awareness (Underhill 1992) of particulars of personal practice from which is drawn productive pedagogical theory (Baird 1992).

Recent evidence indicates that collaborative professional learning contributes not only to pedagogical growth but also to the development of professional identity, resilience, and collective efficacy. Networked Professional Learning Communities (PLCs)provide opportunities for teachers to exchange diverse perspectives, challenge assumptions, and develop shared understandings of effective practice. Such collaborative environments appear particularly valuable in supporting sustainable professional growth and school improvements.

Recent studies continue to support reflection and inquiry as central features of effective professional development. Contemporary research on Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) suggests that sustained cycles of reflection, collaborative inquiry, implementation, and review contribute significantly to teacher learning and pedagogical improvement. Scholars have also found that professional learning is more likely to influence classroom practice when teachers engage collectively in examining evidence from their own classrooms rather than participating solely in externally delivered training

The programme is presented based on an understanding that teachers are constrained by time and myriad school duties, demands and deadlines. It is also based on the assumption that teachers are not accustomed to systematic reflection and the benefits of collaboration as processes towards teacher development. Teachers will only be supportive of the programme if they see it as practical, worth their while and they have a personal stake in it. For these reasons, there have to be preliminary activities to raise teachers' awareness of the goals of exploring and investigating classrooms as possible routes to personal and professional growth. Teachers have to be aware of the isolationist nature of teaching in which they operate and that through group endeavours, they can get their colleagues' support in discussing professional issues, sharing information and materials, determining appropriate action with the intention of getting things done better. For these reasons, within the programme, there will be a preparatory course to provide teachers with an opportunity to understand in preliminary fashion the manner in which the school-based INSET will be run and the benefits of exploratory practice.

4.6.2 The Preparatory Course

The preparatory course will be presented in two stages initially. Each stage will have its own subsidiary steps and procedures. Stage 1 begins with awareness raising tasks to heighten teachers' awareness of the necessity for promoting teacher development through exploring classrooms and that a collaborative effort is more feasible and viable.

Recent studies indicate that professional awareness is closely linked to teacher identity formation, professional judgement, and reflective capacity. Awareness-raising activities can encourage teachers to critically examine assumptions underpinning their instructional decisions and increase readiness for professional learning and change initiatives.

Stage 2 is an introduction to the possible choices offered to teachers for their professional development. The options will be explained to the teachers making explicit the skills, knowledge and effort necessary in the process. During this stage

the sessions are used for explaining the procedures for each of the alternatives. If teachers are interested they may experiment with some of the ideas and they may report on the process during the professional development sessions. Teachers are free to experiment whenever they feel like it as I believe teachers are self-directed learners and that "change is mandatory, growth is optional" (Laing 1992 in Fullan 1993:135).

Contemporary research increasingly views teachers as active agents in their own professional growth. Effective professional development programmes allow teachers to exercise autonomy in selecting areas of focus, investigating classroom concerns, and adapting professional learning activities to their local contexts. Such agency has been associated with stronger commitment to professional learning and greater implementation of innovative practices

- **Time frame**

The preparatory course will run based on the assumption that the principal has given the go ahead for the formation of a professional development group that meets weekly during two periods in a week on the school timetable. There will be a series of sessions held during the professional development group meetings and every session covers approximately 80 minutes. There are a total of 14 sessions planned but more sessions could be arranged based on teachers' needs. Due to the many school activities and work demands of teachers these sessions will realistically cover a period of about six months. It is foreseen that some teachers may wish to attempt some classroom investigation themselves so time has to be created for these trials and teachers may use the weekly group meetings to discuss their attempts.

- **The Target Group**

This preparatory course and school-based teacher development programme is directed towards the teachers of the English language department of a secondary school. As the skills and knowledge to be shared are generic, teachers from other

departments should be invited to join in the professional development group activities.

- **The Learning Sequence**

Each session involves some experiential learning tasks to be undertaken individually, in pairs or as a group. Kurt Lewin's research demonstrates that "learning is more productive in groups where people could interact and then reflect upon their mutual experiences" (cited in Carroll et al 1997:6). The tasks given at the preparatory course provide opportunities for teachers to reflect on their concrete experiences of classroom practice and raises their awareness of what those experiences mean. From these experiences, they may generate concepts, rules and principles to guide their teaching behaviour or they may modify these concepts to improve their effectiveness in classrooms. The whole learning sequence can be seen in the diagram below:

PREPARATORY COURSE

Raise teachers' awareness on school-based exploratory practice

↓

PREPARATORY COURSE

Prepare teachers for different options in the programme

↓

EXPERIMENTATION

Teachers try out different options

↓

ON-GOING PROGRAMME

Teachers choose alternative for investigating their classrooms.
Support is provided within the professional development group

↓

PLAN OF ACTION

Teachers plan individual action on what option(s) would suit them. Facilitator is on hand to provide assistance.

Fig. 4.3 The Learning Sequence

Recent research on Professional Learning Communities (PLCs)similarly demonstrates that collaborative learning enables teachers to develop knowledge through cycles of reflection, discussion, experimentation, and collective inquiry. Such collaborative structures create opportunities for both individual learning and organisational improvement, leading to sustained changes in classroom practice. A summary of the preparatory course outline is given in the table below.

Time Frame	**Sessions**	**PREPARATORY COURSE TO INTRODUCE TEACHERS TO EXPLORATORY PRACTICE IN SCHOOL-BASED INSET**
80 mins Per Session Over A Period Of About Six Months	**STAGE 1: AWARENESS RAISING**	
	1	Group Decision Making
	2	Exploring Classroom metaphors
	3	Using classroom data: transcripts
	4	Using classroom data: audio/video recording of lessons
	5	High/Low yield questions
	STAGE 2: CHOOSING AN OPTION	
	Alternative 1 – Reflective tasks	
	6	Reflective grids
	7	Using journals/diaries
	8	Using transcripts
	9	Using a video recording of a lesson
	Alternative 2 – Observation	
	10	Preparing for observation
	11	Giving and receiving feedback: The Johari Window
	12	Unseen Observation
	13	Peer Observation
	Alternative 3 – Action Research	
	14	Preparing for action research

Table 7: Preparatory Course to introduce teachers to exploratory practice in school-based INSET.

- **Stage 1 – Awareness raising**

One of the first concerns of raising teachers' awareness is that it can be "painful" or destabilizing. Underhill (1992) argues that developing awareness "lies at the heart of [the] development [of] teachers (Head and Taylor 1997:47). It is the awareness of the disparity between what teachers do and what they think they do that produces the destabilization. He proposes 4 stages of development of teachers' performance in relation to awareness of their competence.

1. Unconscious incompetence
2. Conscious incompetence
3. Conscious competence
4. Unconscious competence

He suggests that Stage 2 "conscious incompetence" is usually overlooked because it can psychologically hurt. It is at this stage that group support can help teachers overcome the "defensive" obstacles to teacher development. Teachers also find it disquieting to have other teachers watch them perform and judge their performance so awareness-raising tasks are essential to change teacher attitudes.

Recent studies on examining teacher noticing and reflective awareness suggests that productive professional growth frequently begins when teachers become conscious of discrepancies between intended and enacted practice. Although this awareness can initially create discomfort, such dissonance often serves as a catalyst for deeper reflection and professional learning when supported through collaborative dialogue and mentoring

Stage 1 – Awareness Raising

Session 1

- **Group decision making**

To get teachers to appreciate the benefits of working in a group, it is essential to include some preliminary tasks that engage them in group work particularly problem-solving tasks that illustrate the advantages of support, interaction and co-operation within the group. After the problem-solving tasks, teachers may discuss their roles and contributions within the group and even evaluate their group performance. In doing this, it will raise their awareness of the need for working together to enable and support development.

Current research continues to demonstrate that collaborative learning environments promote professional reflection, knowledge sharing, and collective problem-solving. Teachers participating in collaborative Professional Learning Communities (PLCs)report greater confidence in implementing new pedagogical practices and stronger commitment to ongoing professional development.

Procedure:

(i) Inform teachers that the objective of the exercise is to raise their awareness of the need for solving problems based on collective decision making.

(ii) Select a teacher to observe the group's behaviour during the exercise.
The observer needs to be briefed on two things:

How well distributed is participation in the group?

How did they act during the group task?

(iii) Teachers first work on the task individually for ten minutes and then work in a group to complete the task in ten minutes.

(iv) After completing the task, facilitator conducts a general discussion on:

(a) the different experiences of working alone and in a group in solving problems.

(b) the observer's feedback on the group's behaviour.

TASK – WRECKED ON THE MOON

You are a member of a space crew originally scheduled to rendezvous with a mother ship on the lighted surface of the moon. Due to mechanical difficulties, however, your ship was forced to land at a spot some 200 miles from the rendezvous point. During re-entry and landing, much of the equipment aboard was damaged and, since survival depends on reaching the mother ship, the most critical items available must be chosen for the 200-mile trip. Below are listed the fifteen items left intact and undamaged after landing. Your task as a group is to rank them in terms of their necessity in reaching the rendezvous point. Place the number 1 by the most crucial item, the number 2 by the second most crucial item until number 15, the least important.

- Box of matches
- Food concentrate
- Fifty feet of nylon rope
- Parachute silk
- Portable heating unit
- Two .45 caliber pistols
- One case dehydrated milk
- Two 100 pound tanks of oxygen
- Stellar map (of the moon's constellation)
- Life raft
- Magnetic compass
- Five gallons of water
- Signal flares
- First aid kit containing injection needles
- Solar powered FM receiver transmitter

(Adapted from Johnson and Johnson 1975: 71)

OBSERVER'S CHECKLIST – ROLES IN THE GROUP						
Put ticks (/) in the end columns against the initials of the teachers to show how many times each action was performed.						
						Number of Times
						Teachers' Initials
ACTION	W	N	A	L	Y	AM
Organised the other members of the group						
Contributed an idea						
Encouraged others to say something						
Tried to get everyone to come to an agreement						
Summarised what other people had said						
Evaluated other people's ideas						
Asked people to explain what they meant						
Made everyone laugh						
Tried to smooth out problems						
Ignored other people's suggestions						
Distracted the group by digressing						
Interrupted while someone was speaking						
Did something else while the group was involved in the task						
Number of people who didn't speak at all						

(Adapted from Hadfield 1992:42)

Session 2

- **Using classroom metaphors**

Since the focus of exploratory practice is the classroom, it is fitting to raise teachers' awareness of how they view their classrooms. Exploring classroom metaphors is a powerful tool for revealing teachers' perceptions of their roles and that of their students. It is also a process of symbolization which provides teachers with insights into their values, attitudes and beliefs of what teaching and learning in classrooms is all about. Exchanging numerous and diverse classroom metaphors in group sessions "will enrich [teachers] with multiple insights" (Inbar

1996:79) of classroom phenomena. The process of generating metaphors should be seen as a springboard for the analysis of classroom practice.

Recent studies focusing on teacher identity suggest that metaphors remain valuable tools for exploring teachers' beliefs, professional identities, assumptions, and emotional experiences associated with teaching. By articulating and examining metaphors, teachers can gain deeper insights into how personal beliefs influence classroom practices and interactions with learners.

Procedure:

(i) Get teachers to select one of their classes that they think pose a challenge. Tell teachers to choose an appropriate metaphor that would describe that class. In pairs, ask teachers to discuss their metaphors with their partners.

(ii) In a group, get teachers to discuss their classroom metaphors and to focus on two important points:

Do their metaphors change with different classes?

Do the roles of teachers and learners change when the classroom metaphors change?

(iii) Ask teachers to visualise their metaphors in the light of their actual perceptions of their classrooms and what could be the potential metaphoric perceptions of them. Teachers could conceptualise both the actual and the potential perceptions by drawing the metaphors.

(iv) Students may also be encouraged to describe and/or draw metaphors of their classrooms. It would be interesting to see whether there are gaps in perceptions of the teacher and her students in how they view their classrooms.

Session 3

- **Using classroom data**

(I) Transcript analysis

Using classroom data can raise teachers' awareness that the "development of skills in observing and describing classroom behaviour is a prerequisite for improving classroom teaching" (Good and Brophy 1978:1). Teachers may use a transcript and describe key classroom behaviour and offer suggestions of what is regarded as effective teaching (See Appendix III). This task could be a prelude to more detailed transcript analysis.

Recent work in practitioner inquiry and evidence-informed teaching supports the use of authentic classroom data as a catalyst for professional learning. Systematic analysis of classroom interactions enables teachers to move beyond intuition and base professional judgements on observable evidence, thereby strengthening reflective decision-making and pedagogical improvement.

Procedure:

(i) Allow teachers time to read the transcript of a lesson.

(ii) Get teachers to give their general impressions of the class, teacher behaviour and student behaviour.

(iii) Ask teachers to pick out the strengths of this teacher and discuss what they are.

(iv) Ask teachers to look closely at the transcript and pick out anything that intrigues them or raises their curiosity on how the lesson is presented.

(v) Teachers can discuss in a group their views about the lesson and what they have learnt from analysing a transcript.

Session 4

(II) Audio/video recording of lessons

As a precursor to reflective tasks, teachers could either listen to an audiotape recording or watch a video recording of a lesson to identify specific aspects of teaching. They could be aspects such as the structure of a lesson, classroom interaction or simply the general atmosphere of the classroom to detect 'puzzles' or anything unexpected from it.

Recent research has identified video-based reflection as one of the most effective tools for supporting teacher learning. Video recordings allow teachers to revisit classroom events, analyse interactions in detail, and notice aspects of teaching that may be overlooked during the lesson itself. Studies suggest that video-supported reflection enhances teachers' pedagogical awareness, reflective thinking, self-evaluation skills, and understanding of classroom dynamics

Procedure:

(i) Get teachers to listen to a 10-minute segment of an English language lesson or get them to watch a 10-minute segment of a video recording of an English lesson. The video recording is preferred because generally teachers enjoy watching other teachers teach.

(ii) Ask teachers to list down, as they are watching the video recording of the lesson, the questions they would like to ask the teacher in the recorded lesson. In raising questions, teachers are learning to enquire into classroom practice.

Furthermore, collaborative analysis of video recordings involving peers or facilitators has been shown to deepen reflection by exposing teachers to alternative interpretations of classroom events. Such collaborative viewing processes contribute to increased professional dialogue, enhanced teacher noticing, and more meaningful feedback discussions.

Session 5

- **The quality of questions – high yield or low yield?**

Asking the "right" questions can help in the development of awareness. Underhill suggests that examining the quality of some types of questions we can ask about our own practice are more "conducive to the development of self-awareness than others" (1992:72). High yield questions "enable [teachers] to challenge [their] perceptions and attitudes which may have been distorting the questions by seeing the problem as only 'out there' and not seeing the part of the problem that is 'in here' (ibid:73). An example of this is a question commonly heard in staffrooms: "Why don't they (students) hand in their work on time?" (low yield) to "Am I giving the students work that they can manage and is the work relevant and meaningful?" (high yield).

Procedure:

(i) Ask teachers to write down some of the questions they have asked or would like to ask themselves concerning their own teaching.

(ii) Get teachers to write down statements of the assumptions underlying the questions.

(iii) Provide teachers with an example.

Question : Why do some of my students not finish their homework?

Assumptions : They are not interested to learn
The work is too difficult
They have no time
They are too lazy
The subject is not high in their priorities
I am too lenient

(iv) Ask teachers to transform the question to high yield by looking closely at the assumptions.

High yield questions: Do I give students sufficient time to finish their homework?
Do I consider the proficiency levels of my students when I give homework?
What are my reasons for giving homework?
Am I consistent about the ground rules regarding handing in of homework?

Current research on reflective practice and professional inquiry suggests that carefully framed questions play a significant role in fostering professional growth. Questions focusing on teachers' own actions, assumptions, and decision-making processes tend to promote deeper reflection and metacognitive awareness than questions attributing responsibility solely to external factors.

4.6.3 Stage 2 – Choosing your option

- **Alternative 1**

Stage 2 provides teachers with opportunities to choose their own developmental route. What is offered are alternative ways for more structured reflection of classroom phenomena and identification of "principles of effective teaching from within the classroom itself" (Nunan 1989:111). Reflection is seen as productive "when it leads to changes in practice that may or may not be retained but that result in a better understanding of one's practice" (Russell 1993:146).

Contemporary research continues to affirm the relationship between reflective practice and professional growth. Reflection is increasingly conceptualised as a cyclical process involving evidence gathering, analysis, interpretation, action, and evaluation. Through systematic reflection, teachers develop deeper pedagogical understanding, strengthen professional judgement, and refine instructional practices.

Therefore, the goal of Stage 2 is to get teachers to examine critically their own teaching and justifying their actions, shifting their perceptions by exploring other approaches to teaching or confirming that they are doing it right by understanding better why somethings work better in their classrooms. As shown in Stage 1, "awareness is an important component of the developmental process so in Stage 2, practice is the visible expression of development" (Swan 1993:248). In order to facilitate greater awareness of their own practice and the beliefs that underpin them, teachers need to reflect. However, there is a concern that some teachers may be reluctant to reflect because it places unfamiliar demands on them. Moon and Boullon (1997) suggest that teachers may be unwilling to reflect for the following reasons:

(i) They lack experience in reflection as prior training was the "received knowledge" type and they may find time spent on reflection a waste of time as their concerns are mainly practical and pragmatic.

(ii) They may be engrossed in their own personal concerns. Age, gender and stage of their career may affect their interest and motivation to professional development and curriculum innovation.

(iii) Time and opportunity are needed to develop the higher level metacognitive skills in the reflective process. Teachers need to detach and distance themselves from school routine in order to reflect.

(iv) Not all teachers will be comfortable with reflective activities involving awareness raising, critical thinking and self evaluation.

(v) Teachers need to have self-confidence to engage in reflective activities.

Recent literature suggests that barriers to reflection remain largely consistent with those identified by Moon and Boullon; however, additional factors have emerged, including increasing administrative demands, digital workloads, accountability requirements, curriculum reform pressures, and concerns regarding teacher well-being. These contextual factors may reduce teachers' capacity to engage

meaningfully in reflective activities unless adequate institutional support is provided.

Reflective practice continues to be recognised as a cornerstone of teacher professional growth. Recent systematic reviews indicate that reflective activities promote instructional improvement, professional identity development, critical thinking and self-efficacy. Heron's meaning dimension and confronting dimension support this process by encouraging participants to examine experiences critically, challenge existing assumptions and develop deeper understandings of their practice.

To counteract this reluctance to reflect, Moon and Boullon (1997) suggest that reflection can best be facilitated through closer links with actual classroom practice. “A longer term INSET programme in which teachers are introduced to reflective thinking gradually and given plenty of opportunity to apply it over an extended period of time” can promote reflection (1997:69-70).

Alternative 1 of the programme takes the above points into consideration and will include tasks that will help teachers to develop skills in reflection based on their practical teaching experiences.

Current evidence suggests that sustained professional learning initiatives are more likely to produce lasting changes in classroom practice than one-off workshops or short-term interventions. Programmes characterised by continuity, collaborative inquiry, structured reflection, and ongoing support appear particularly effective in promoting teacher development and school improvement.

Session 6 – Reflective grids

Structured reflection tools continue to be widely recommended in contemporary professional development literature because they help teachers organise observations, identify patterns in classroom practice, and connect experience with theory. Reflective templates and guided journals may also promote consistency in

reflective practice and facilitate subsequent discussion within professional learning groups.

Procedure:

(i) Teachers fill in the grid after a lesson. They can do it once or twice a week to record the events that happen during their lesson.

Reflective grid for the teacher

Brief description of lesson	**Purpose of lesson**	**Role of teacher**	**Role of learners**	**Part(s) of lesson that went well**	**Part(s) of lesson that were not successful**	**Any reasons for less successful aspects of lesson**
Note the topic and the stages of the lesson	Write down the aim of the lesson e.g developing reading skills	Their perception of their role e.g Knowledge provider, clarifier etc	Note what they expected the students to do during the lesson	Brief description	Brief description	Hypothesize the reasons

ii) hese reflective grids can also be given to students. Feedback from students can provide useful insights for teachers.

Reflective grid for the students

Name of activity	**Purpose of activity**	**Role of learners**	**Part(s) of lesson that went well**	**Part(s) of lesson that were not successful**
Note down the topic	Write down the aim of the lesson e.g developing reading skills	What the students think they were expected to do	Brief description of that part of the lesson.	Brief description of that part of the lesson.

(iii) The reflective grids can be used by teachers to highlight certain aspects of their lessons which were successful to share with their colleagues in the professional development group. If they wanted assistance from their colleagues to improve on their practice, they could also discuss with the group the least satisfactory parts of the lessons.

4.6.4 Contemporary Perspectives on Teacher Professional Development

Contemporary teacher professional development literature increasingly emphasizes collaborative, school-based and inquiry-oriented approaches rather than one-off training workshops. Professional Learning Communities (PLCs), reflective practice, peer observation, classroom-based inquiry and action research are now widely recognised as effective mechanisms for improving teacher learning and classroom practice. Recent reviews indicate that participation in PLCs enhances teacher efficacy, professional collaboration, instructional innovation and interpersonal trust when supported by strong leadership and a culture of professional learning.

In Malaysia, the Ministry of Education has promoted teacher professional development through the Malaysia Education Blueprint (2013-2025), Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) and the *Pelan Induk Pembangunan Profesionalisme Keguruan (PIPPK)*. These initiatives encourage collaborative reflection, classroom observation, mentoring, coaching and action research as part of continuous school-based professional learning.

The activities proposed in this programme, namely journals, transcript analysis, video reflection, observation and action research, are therefore consistent with current national and international directions in teacher professional development.

Session 7 – Journals/Diaries

Procedure:

(i) Teachers keep a learning diary and note down events in their classrooms. They may make entries once or twice a week or if they are keen they can do it daily.

(ii) At the weekly professional development meetings, they may share with their colleagues insights gained from their diary entries. Teachers may then share their concerns and discuss with their colleagues who may help them identify alternative procedures.

(iii) If teachers are busy, they may take turns to write the journals.

(iv) Journals written by students may offer teachers insights to the effectiveness of their lesson and the direction in which they should take. Students need to be informed about the purpose of writing journals. They have to be told that the journals will not be corrected but that comments will be given regarding the thoughts and ideas they have noted down. It would be necessary to ask students to focus on things that happen in the classroom.

(v) A periodic review of students' diaries/journals is necessary though it may be time consuming.

(vi) If teachers do not find it too threatening, they may discuss in class diary entries which students are willing to make public.

Allwright and Bailey (1991) provide some useful tips on keeping diaries which I have adapted:

TIPS FOR KEEPING DIARIES
1. Set aside some time when you are free to write in your diary. 2. Keep your diary where it is accessible so that when you feel free to write it is available. 3. Do not worry about your style, grammar, or organisation, especially if you are writing in your second language (for students). 4.Carry a small notebook with you so you can make notes about your language learning (or teaching) experience whenever you wish. 5. Support your insights with examples. Be focused when you write something down, ask yourself, "Why do I feel this is important?" 6. At the end of each diary entry, note any additional thoughts or questions that have occurred to you. You can consider these in more detail later.

(Adapted from Allwright and Bailey 1991: 191-192)

Recent studies continue to highlight reflective journaling as an important tool for teacher professional growth. Reflective journals encourage teachers to analyse classroom events, examine instructional decisions and develop greater awareness of teaching and learning processes. Research suggests that reflective practice contributes to instructional improvement, critical thinking, professional identity formation and emotional resilience.

Within the Malaysian context, reflective thinking has been identified as an important component of teacher education and continuous professional development, enabling teachers to respond more effectively to classroom challenges and learner needs

Session 8 - Transcript analysis

Procedure:

(i) Teachers may examine the data from transcript extracts and look out for useful insights on classroom interaction and the roles played by the teacher and her learners.

(ii) Teachers may attempt to audio/video record their lesson and transcribe them but this is time consuming and there are transcription conventions to follow for classroom discourse.

Nunan (1989) provides a useful guide to transcript analysis which I have adapted.

TRANSCRIPT ANALYSIS GUIDE
Objective of lesson: Teacher's beliefs about language and learning: Teacher's role: Learners' roles: Types of questions teacher asks: Who determines the speaking turns: Any parts of the lesson that work better than others: Positive feedback for teacher: Constructive feedback for teacher: What issue or area should teacher investigate?

(Adapted from Nunan 1989:111)

Recent research on reflective teaching supports the use of transcript analysis as a means of examining classroom discourse and interaction patterns. Through careful examination of transcripts, teachers are able to identify questioning strategies, participation patterns, wait time, feedback practices and opportunities for increasing student engagement. Such evidence-based reflection promotes deeper pedagogical understanding and professional learning.

Session 9 - Video recording of lessons

Procedure:

(i) Before viewing the tape, ask teachers to note down three things that they will be interested in looking at

in the lesson.

(ii) List the areas on the blackboard. Usually, they will want to focus on areas such as:

- Classroom management
- Classroom interaction
- Questioning techniques
- Methods used
- Variety of activities
- Materials used
- Student participation
- Boardwork
- Error correction
- Teachers' language
- Aspects of language taught
- Pacing

(iii) Ask teachers to focus on one area based on the list on the board and as they watch the recorded lesson to pick out what they consider to be the most satisfactory and the least satisfactory aspects of that area of focus.

(iv) Provide teachers with some background information on the lesson.

(v) Teachers view the lesson.

(vi) Facilitator lists down teachers' perceptions and views.

(vii) In a group teachers provide reasons why they think certain aspects of the lesson were satisfactory while others were not. This will stimulate discussion on assumptions and beliefs about teaching and learning underlying their various opinions.

(viii) Another alternative is that teachers may audio or video record their own lessons and reflect on their teaching.

Video-based reflection has emerged as one of the most powerful tools for teacher learning because it provides opportunities for teachers to revisit and analyse authentic classroom events. Studies suggest that video reflection enhances self-awareness, pedagogical decision-making and classroom management skills while supporting collaborative discussion among colleagues

• Alternative 2 - Observation

Both unseen observation and peer observation have been suggested as they are less intimidating for the teacher as the presence of an "outsider" in the classroom can be unsettling for some teachers. Observation is a valuable resource to enrich our understanding of teaching and learning. As Bowen and Marks argue "observation is very much a two-way process: teachers can learn so much from observers and observers can learn an enormous amount from observing teachers" (1994:33). Though unseen observation does not involve an observer there is someone willing to listen to the teacher's account of her lesson. Peer observation on the other hand involves a trusting and trusted colleague to help the teacher develop her practice.

▪ Observation as Professional Learning

Contemporary professional development literature views observation as a developmental rather than evaluative process. Effective observation occurs within a climate of trust and professional dialogue where feedback aims to improve practice rather than judge performance. Studies have shown that structured classroom observation within PLCs contributes significantly to teacher learning and instructional improvement.

Session 10 - Preparing for observation

Procedure:

(i) Get teachers to list down adjectives normally associated with observation. List all the adjectives on the board.

Nervous	Indifferent	Upset
Uncomfortable	Angry	Pleased
Scared	Uptight	Privileged
Unconcerned	Worried	Harassed

(ii) Ask teachers to explain their perceptions of observation.

(iii) Match their reactions of observation to the people who conduct them – colleagues, School Inspectors,
Principal and outsiders.

(iv) Discuss with teachers the three categories of common teacher reactions to observation:

- Those who dread observation
- Those who are indifferent to it
- Those who welcome it

(v) End session by discussing with teachers the various purposes of observation and the roles and activities of observers.

Session 11 – Giving and Receiving feedback : The Johari Window

Procedure:

(i) Recapitulate previous session on the nature and purpose of observation with the aim of highlighting the importance of feedback.

(ii) Introduce Luft and Ingham's (1984) Johari Window which explains the four types of information about teacher behaviour to understand the limits of our self awareness and the possibilities of exploring different sections of the window.

	What the observer knows about the teacher.	What the observer doesn't know about the teacher.
What the teacher knows about herself	PUBLIC OR OPEN SELF 1	HIDDEN OR SECRET SELF 2
What the teacher does not know about herself	BLIND SELF 3	UNDISCOVERED OR SUBCONSCIOUS SELF 4

Fig. 4.4 Adapted from Luft and Ingham's model of the Johari Window (1984)

(iii) Explain to the teachers the concept of the Johari Window

The first quadrant or open self is information the teacher is willing to reveal to the public.

The second quadrant, the hidden or secret self, is information known to the teacher for example Underhill's "conscious incompetence", which the teacher is unwilling to share for fear that her colleagues may think less of her.

The third quadrant, the blind self, is information that others know about the teacher which she is unaware of herself. Through observation teachers may be made to realize their blind selves. For example some teachers may favour certain students in the class and only direct questions to them.

The fourth quadrant, the undiscovered self, is information that is unknown to others and also to the teacher herself. Through self evaluation and feedback from others the subconscious self may surface.

Through constructive feedback, teachers may be willing to share with trusted colleagues aspects of the 'hidden area' and through communication with others teachers may discover aspects of the 'blind self' that can stimulate personal and professional growth.

(iv) Ask teachers to sit in a circle. Teachers take turns to reveal their 'public self' by saying "I think/believe you know that I……"

(v) Teachers may the take turns to reveal their 'hidden selves'. This is optional for teachers who are not comfortable in revealing things unknown to others. They start with "I don't think you know that I ……."

(vi) End session by explaining to teachers why it is important to open up for giving and receiving feedback in the observation experience.

Session 12 - Unseen Observation

Procedure:

(i) There are three phases, pre-lesson discussion, unseen observation and post lesson feedback. In the pre-lesson discussion, the teacher will work with the facilitator talking through the lesson. The facilitator will listen actively and provide the teacher with a set of focus questions for her to recall specific points of her lesson. She may use reflective grids, diaries or recordings for recall.

(ii) The teacher then carries out her lesson.

(iii) The facilitator meets the teacher for feedback. The teacher gives an account of her lesson using the focus questions as a guide for recall. She suggests areas for her future development and the facilitator can help the teacher look at her suggestions with a wider perspective.

Session 13 - Peer Observation

Procedure:

(i) There are three phases in peer observation. Once you have found a willing colleague, arrange a pre-lesson meeting. During this meeting discuss the background of the class to be observed, the characteristics of the students, their typical patterns of interaction and class participation. Include in the discussion the content to be taught, the methods and approaches to be employed by the teacher. Identify a focus for the observation. Richards and Lockhart (1994) provide a useful list for peer observers to focus on such as:

- ORGANISATION OF THE LESSON
- PACING
- STUDENTS' PERFORMANCE ON TASKS
- TEACHERS' QUESTIONS AND STUDENTS' RESPONSES
- INTERACTION PATTERNS DURING THE LESSON

(ii) The observer has to decide on what procedures she will use for the observation. There are several procedures for observing but according to Bowers, "there is substantial evidence to suggest that no one observational technique is in itself adequate: all techniques can help to cancel out the weaknesses of each while capitalizing on their strengths" (1987:144). The following are some examples:

- Blank sheet in which observer records everything that captures his notice.
- Structured narrative with headings to guide the observer.
- Count coding in which the observer pre-determines the feature or features to be focused on and then records the number of occasions the specified event or behaviour occurs during the observation period. This involves a frequency count of the feature(s) observed. (See Appendix IV)
- Time-lapse coding involves a wider set of categories to observe a wider range of behaviour. Observations are recorded based on time intervals generally from about a minute to as long as ten-minute intervals. This is a highly systematic and statistical analysis of classroom behaviours.

- Rating systems are given at the end of the observation period. Points can be given from 1 to 5, A to E, or a set of terms from 'very frequent' to 'rare'. The rating is descriptive and not concerned with value judgements. The rating system is based on what is being observed. (See Appendix IV)
- Transcript systems record actual classroom-talk verbatim. Transcript analysis begins with either audio or video recording the lesson and transcribing the interaction in the lesson. This can be a very time consuming process but the analysis of the transcription will reveal interesting data for the teacher to examine and interpret.

(iii) The colleague carries out the observation by deciding with the teacher in advance the procedure and focus of the observation.

(iv) Arrange for a post lesson meeting where the peer observer discusses with the teacher the information they have collected and decide on their next plan of action.

Recent studies indicate that peer observation is most effective when teachers voluntarily participate, jointly determine observation focuses and engage in constructive post-observation dialogue. Malaysian research has found classroom observation and collective learning to be among the most valuable PLC activities contributing to teacher professional development.

Alternative 3 – Action Research

Though the term 'research' may seem daunting to teachers, the process of action research involves teachers themselves deciding on which aspects of teaching they wish to explore and taking constructive steps towards solving immediate classroom problems. Action research may be carried out for its own sake or it could be an inevitable follow-up of observation or other classroom investigation. The following is just one way of conducting action research.

Session 14 - Preparing for action research

Procedure:

(i) Teachers individually list their major concerns about teaching and learning in the classroom. These are some examples:

I don't seem to be able to get my students to speak in English in class.
Despite my efforts, my students make the same grammatical errors.
My students are bored with the materials I use.
Some students in the class do not seem interested in participating.

(ii) In a group, the teachers discuss their individual concerns. Then they list down one common concern that they feel is worth investigating.

(iii) The teachers will then hypothesize to account for the problem.

(iv) They will select a procedure for collecting information to test the hypothesis for example through recording or using diaries.

(v) After collecting the information, the teachers can work collaboratively to analyse the data.

(vi) They can then plan their action based on their findings.

(vii) They then observe the effects of their action plan and reflect on it.

(viii) They can then start on the second action cycle if necessary.

Action research continues to be recognised as an effective form of professional development because it allows teachers to investigate problems arising directly from their classrooms and develop evidence-based solutions. Recent Malaysian research involving primary school teachers found that action research increased teachers' awareness of classroom learning issues, strengthened reflective practice and enhanced their ability to implement targeted interventions. The study also highlighted the importance of collaborative support and sustained professional learning during the action research process.

4.6.5 Evaluation of the course

The success of the preparatory course depends on several factors, which include:

Creating the right environment
Good group interaction
Worthwhile activities/tasks

There are two types of evaluation: formative and summative. During the course, the facilitator can carry out formative evaluation by reflecting on how the course ran. Formative evaluation helps the facilitator to respond to the teachers' needs and assists in guiding the planning of subsequent sessions. Summative evaluation takes place at the end of the course. Getting the teachers to reflect on their experiences during the course is one way of evaluating it. The effectiveness of the course will be seen in the willingness of the teachers to attempt any of the options for exploratory practice introduced to them to help them develop professionally after the course.

Although reflective and inquiry-based professional development approaches are strongly supported in educational policy and research, several challenges remain in their implementation. These include teacher workload, administrative demands, limited time for reflection and inconsistent participation in collaborative learning activities. Studies suggest that supportive school leadership, trust among colleagues and structured

opportunities for collaboration are essential conditions for sustaining professional learning initiatives.

SUMMARY

In this chapter I proposed a school-based INSET programme from the perspective of exploring and investigating classrooms for professional development. I have also suggested a preparatory course within the programme based on an understanding that to offer teachers options for development, they need to know what is available and what is at stake. This programme is consonant with current directions in ELT that reflective and exploratory practice is teacher initiated and classroom based. Within the programme, I have provided a series of tasks to introduce teachers to the notion of exploratory practice with the basic skills and knowledge necessary to initiate such a practice. In the next chapter I will look into the implications and strategies necessary for such a programme to take root.

The professional development framework proposed in this chapter continues to be highly relevant in contemporary educational settings. Current international and Malaysian research supports reflective practice, collaborative inquiry, peer observation, video analysis, Professional Learning Communities (PLCs)and action research as effective approaches for teacher learning. The proposed programme therefore remains consistent with current professional development policies and practices in Malaysia while providing teachers with practical opportunities to investigate, understand and improve their classroom practice.

CHAPTER 5 IMPLICATIONS FOR PROPOSING EXPLORATORY PRACTICE WITHIN SCHOOL-BASED INSET

OVERVIEW

In proposing a school-based INSET programme in the previous chapter, I have outlined the need to prepare teachers for an on-going programme based on the notion of exploratory practice as a vehicle for professional development. In this chapter I will examine some of the implications of implementing teacher initiated investigative work within school settings. Such a move is seen as timely as Malaysia needs a cadre of critically reflective and dynamic teachers to create a new breed of enquiring, analytical and resourceful individuals for the 21st century. It begins with a statement of Malaysia's vision for the schools of tomorrow. It then goes on to examine the crucial factors that affect successful implementation of the programme. The chapter concludes with implications of implementing it based on a belief that commitment and motivation to the idea of school-based INSET is more likely to be achieved through support from all sectors involved in this initiative.

5.1 TOWARDS THE DEVELOPMENT OF EFFECTIVE SCHOOLS

5.1.1 Malaysia's vision for education in the 21st Century

Malaysia's vision of schools in the new millenium as places "where schooling is a pleasurable and rewarding experience, a place to belong, where one feels valued" (Smart schools steering committee meeting 1996) is commendable. For this vision to be realised, the MOE recognises teachers as the most valuable resource to teach students to think and be well informed and creative. A cadre of enquiring, critically reflective teachers will be needed to produce students of this calibre. The implication here is that the "teaching profession is at the crossroads" (Fullan 1992:120) and changes in the culture of teaching and the culture of schools are required. For changes to happen, we have to recognise that "schools can no more change without the informed commitment of teachers than teachers can change without the informed commitment of the institutions in which they work" (Kemmis 1987:74). In other words, to produce smart students, we need smart teachers in smart schools. Smart teachers are those able to adopt

a critically reflective stance, examining their practices and constantly exploring ways of improving classroom skills and action to complement the constantly evolving growth and change in education. In essence, teachers need to be empowered individuals taking responsibility for their own professional growth.

The importance of teacher empowerment has become increasingly prominent in contemporary educational reform. Current research suggests that effective education systems are characterised by teachers who are active participants in professional learning, collaborative decision-making and continuous improvement of classroom practices. Professional Learning Communities (PLCs), teacher inquiry, reflective practice and action research are widely recognised as mechanisms that support teacher agency and instructional improvement. Studies indicate that teachers who engage in collaborative professional learning demonstrate greater professional efficacy, stronger commitment to innovation and improved instructional practices.

In Malaysia, teacher professionalism remains a key priority under the Malaysia Education Blueprint (2013–2025) and the *Pelan Induk Pembangunan Profesionalisme Keguruan (PIPPK)*. These policies emphasise continuous professional learning, collaboration and reflective practice as essential elements in developing high-quality teachers capable of preparing students for the challenges of contemporary society.

5.1.2 Empowered teachers in effective schools

Ideally, to be an empowered teacher is to be an autonomous professional "responsible for and an authority on, professional learning and practice, rather than subordinate to external authority and expertise" (Ur 1996:11). Realistically, in schools, the content of the curriculum and its delivery are mandated by external authority. However, schools can increase the degree of professional autonomy by "giving [teachers] a considerable amount of freedom for their professional development…assuming responsibility for what…[they do] on the job to carry out the job" (Hickcox and Musella 1992:166). Teachers should be given opportunities to refine their professional judgements and not just depend on their intuitive ones.

Recent literature suggests that teacher empowerment is strengthened when schools provide structured opportunities for collaborative reflection, peer observation, mentoring and professional dialogue. Professional Learning Communities (PLCs)create conditions in which teachers develop professional judgement collectively by sharing experiences, examining classroom evidence and discussing strategies for improving teaching and learning. Such collaborative inquiry helps teachers move beyond individual practice and contributes to the development of a professional learning culture within schools.

This is done through encouraging teachers to share professional judgements with colleagues, carrying out mutual observations in classrooms and reflecting on the informed opinion of others in the professional literature. Enhancing the teachers' professional judgement means an improvement in the quality of teaching and learning thus enhancing the development of the school making it a more effective and rewarding place for teachers and students.

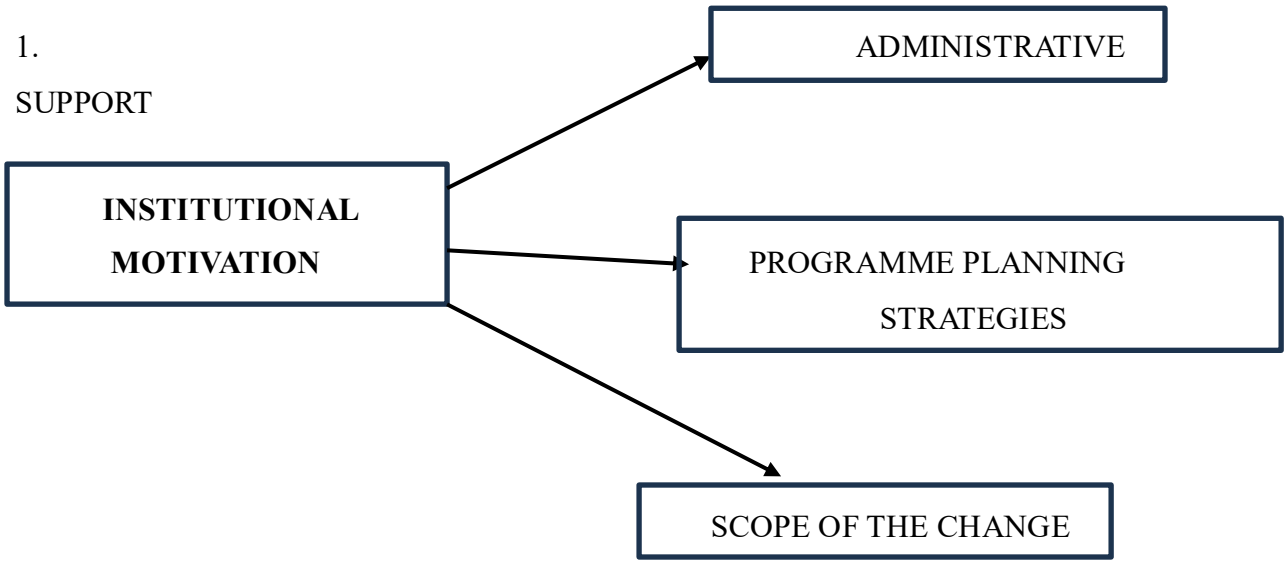
Contemporary research increasingly views effective schools as learning organisations in which teachers continuously engage in reflection, collaboration and inquiry. Within such environments, professional development is embedded in everyday practice rather than being confined to external courses or workshops. Reflective journals, classroom observation, peer coaching, transcript analysis and action research provide opportunities for teachers to generate professional knowledge from their own classrooms. This perspective is consistent with the exploratory practice framework proposed in this study, where teachers assume an active role in investigating and improving their teaching while contributing to wider school improvement efforts.

Heron's autonomous mode of facilitation is also consistent with contemporary perspectives on teacher agency. Rather than viewing teachers as passive recipients of externally generated knowledge, current professional development literature emphasises teachers as active decision-makers capable of investigating and improving their own practice. Professional learning is therefore increasingly viewed as teacher-led, context-specific and inquiry-based. Such perspectives are aligned with Heron's view that facilitation should ultimately encourage learner autonomy and self-directed professional growth

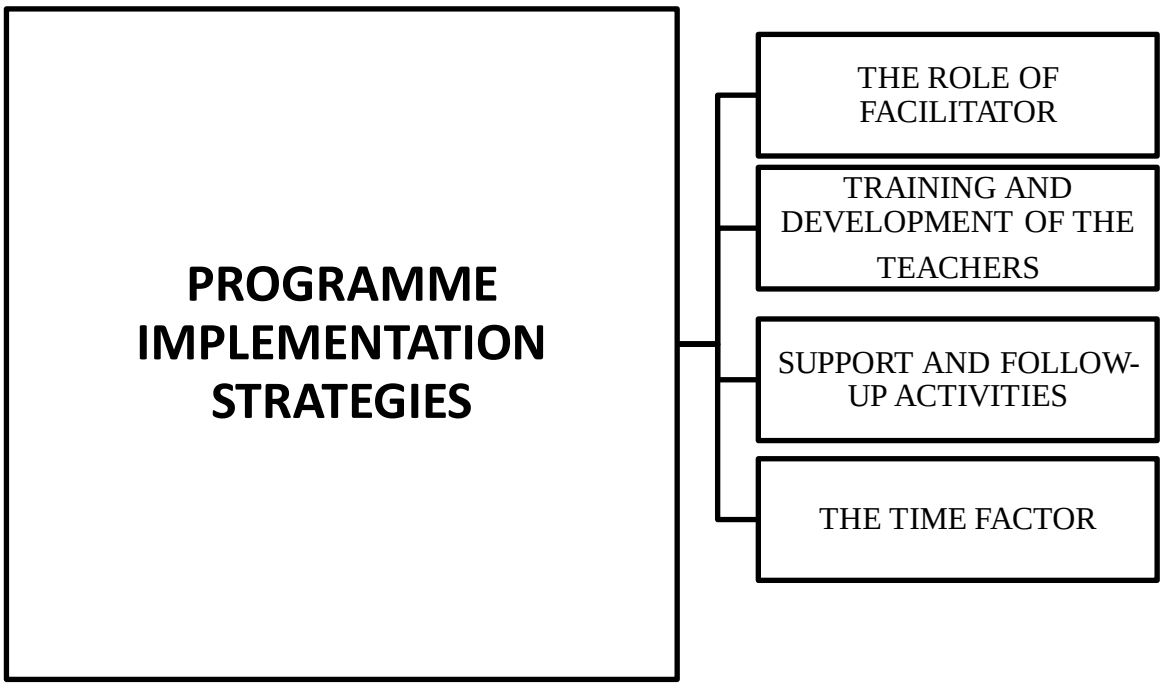
The exploratory practice approach proposed in this study is closely aligned with current developments in Malaysian teacher professional development. Activities such as reflective journaling, peer observation, collaborative discussion and action research mirror many of the professional learning activities promoted through Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) in Malaysian schools. Research indicates that these forms of collaborative professional learning contribute to improved teacher competence, stronger professional identity, enhanced instructional practices and increased student learning opportunities. Consequently, exploratory practice may be viewed as a practical framework for strengthening teacher professionalism and supporting the development of effective schools in Malaysia

5.2 IMPLICATIONS FOR IMPLEMENTATION IN A SCHOOL

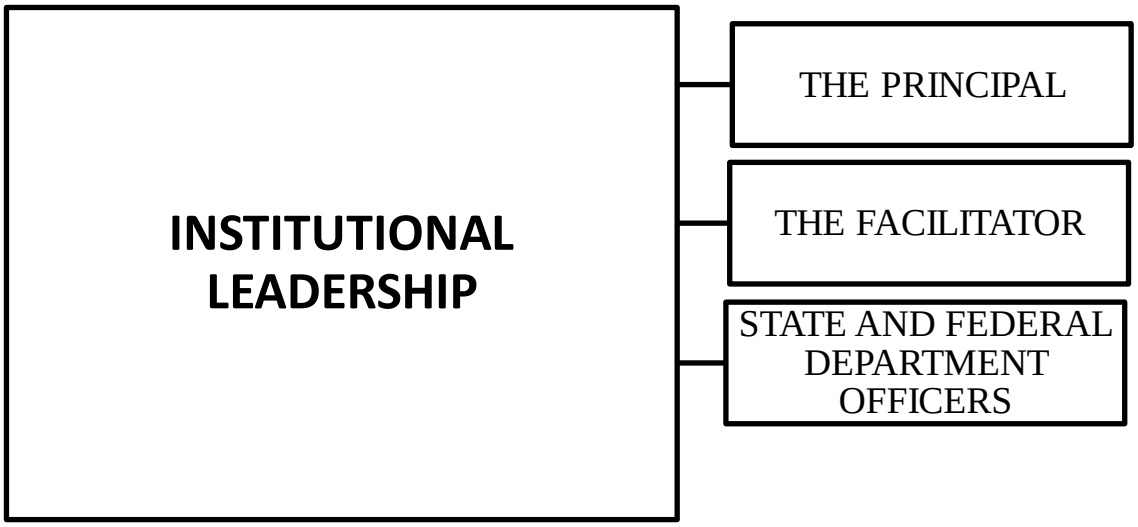
For successful implementation of the school-based programme, 4 crucial factors have to be considered. They are illustrated in the diagram below:



2.


PROGRAMME IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGIES
THE ROLE OF FACILITATOR
TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE TEACHERS
SUPPORT AND FOLLOW-UP ACTIVITIES
THE TIME FACTOR

3.


INSTITUTIONAL LEADERSHIP
THE PRINCIPAL
THE FACILITATOR
STATE AND FEDERAL DEPARTMENT OFFICERS

4.

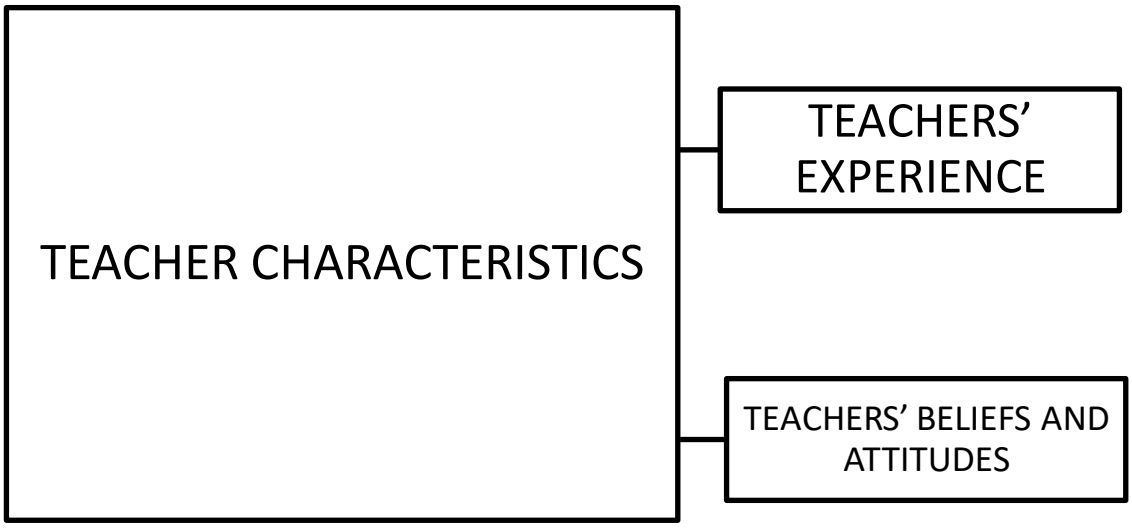


Fig. 5.1 Crucial factors for the successful implementation of the programme.
Adapted from the Rand Change Agent Study (1978) in McLaughlin MW and DD Marsh (1990:213-231)

5.2.1 Institutional Motivation

- **Administrative Support**

To get teachers to see exploratory practice as an opportunity for professional growth, we have first to acknowledge the fact that not all teachers will initially be convinced. There will be some teachers who are eager to learn new practices and there will be others who are simply not interested. The strategy is to start with the enthusiastic few who show strong initial interest and motivation. Teacher participation is very much influenced by the support from the principal.

Contemporary research consistently highlights the importance of school leadership in supporting teacher professional learning. Studies on Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) indicate that principals play a critical role in creating organisational conditions that encourage collaboration, reflective practice and continuous improvement. Leadership support through the provision of time, resources,

professional trust and shared decision-making has been identified as a key factor influencing teacher participation and the sustainability of professional development initiatives.

In implementing this programme, the principal has to be seen as an educational battery energising her staff. Without motivation and support from the principal, any developmental effort is unlikely to succeed. The principal's contribution to the programme acts as a 'signal' to the teachers about the importance of the programme. Her commitment to the programme is a boost to teachers' confidence in the programme because if top management believes in the programme, the teachers will therefore give it high priority. One way in which the principal can show her support is by blocking the time-table to free all members of a department from teaching at the same time for professional development work. This can be done on a permanent basis or at certain times of the year. What has been suggested in the programme outline in 4.3.1 is that the timetable be blocked for regular professional development meetings for members of the English department.

The principal can request for financial allocation to run the school-based INSET programme. Equipment such as a xerox machine, audiovisual equipment and computers should be accessible to teachers for INSET work. There should also be funds for materials such as books on education, teaching, learning, management and training for teachers to start them off on reading professional literature thus broadening their knowledge and skills.

In the Malaysian context, current professional development policies emphasise school-based professional learning that is supported by adequate infrastructure, access to learning resources and opportunities for collaborative engagement. Research suggests that teachers are more likely to participate actively in professional learning when schools provide practical support mechanisms and recognise professional development as an integral component of school improvement

- **Programme Planning Strategies**

There are three possible planning strategies: top-down, bottom-up, or collaborative planning. Top-down strategies will normally meet with indifference or resistance as teachers are not consulted on decision making thus there is no sense of ownership of the programme. The bottom-up strategy implies that teachers devise all the plans but have little or no support from the State Education Departments probably sustaining only short-term interests. Collaborative planning, the third strategy, is favoured as it generates the necessary support for effective implementation and continuation of the programme. It involves collaboration among teachers, between teachers and the principal, and between the school and the Education department.

Recent literature similarly advocates collaborative models of professional development in which teachers actively contribute to planning, implementation and evaluation processes. Such approaches promote teacher ownership, collective responsibility and professional agency. Evidence from studies of PLCs has shown that collaborative planning strengthens teacher commitment and increases the likelihood that innovations will be translated into classroom practice.

The principles underlying Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) are particularly consistent with Heron's facilitation framework. Recent studies suggest that PLCs support teacher efficacy, collaborative learning, instructional innovation and professional trust through regular opportunities for discussion, reflection and shared problem-solving. These characteristics correspond closely with Heron's meaning, valuing and confronting dimensions of facilitation, where teachers collaboratively interpret classroom experiences, challenge assumptions and support one another's professional growth.

In Section 1.3, the weaknesses of the transmission model of INSET were discussed and illustrated that top-down curriculum change had a limited impact on its intended outcomes. Bolitho's (1996) earthquake model demonstrates two versions of educational change. The first version in Fig 5.2 shows the major effect of the centralised system of change at the centre (national level) has a limited effect at the periphery (the classroom). The second version of the model implies that "it is difficult for a teacher, working alone,

to make an impact outside the classroom…that will be felt at national level" (1996:146). School-based INSET establishes a bridge between the two versions. This is represented diagrammatically in Fig 5.2.

At national level, in the event of any curriculum change, there is now less likelihood of dilution as at school level INSET facilitators will assist in providing the necessary support and follow-up for implementation of the curriculum change. Joyce (1991) in Cohen (1997) emphasizes the difficulties of transferring and translating [the change] into sustained practice within the classroom. With school-based INSET, teachers can form collaborative, reflective and exploratory partnerships with colleagues and test out these changes and decide on ways to adopt or adapt them for their classrooms. Similarly, at classroom level, teachers working in collegial interaction may through critical reflection and examination of their practice uncover some new possibilities for effective implementation of the curriculum. Teachers can also work at their own pace. Through reports and feedback from schools and State education departments, personnel at federal level are aware of innovative practices in classrooms. This implies establishing a bridge based on professional interaction between school level and national level with the INSET facilitator playing the role of intermediary. Thus top-down and bottom-up needs may coincide.

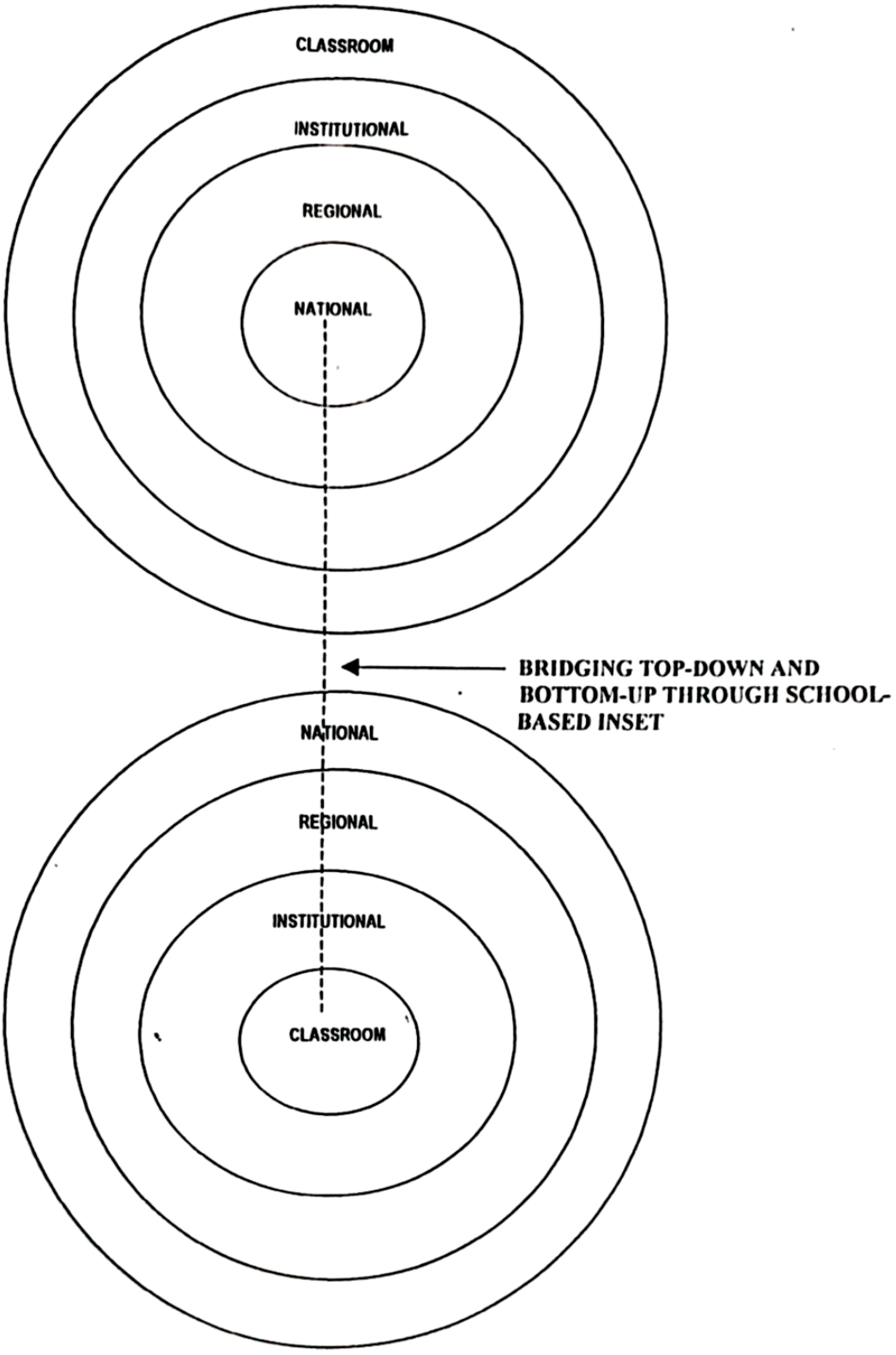


Fig. 5.2 The Earthquake Model (Versions 1 and 2) in Bolitho (1196: 147) Bridging the Gap between top-down and bottom-up initiatives

- **Scope of the change**

It is felt that the teachers themselves must see the relevance for the innovation. The primary motivation of teachers to take on extra work and other personal costs in implementing the programme is based on the premise that the programme will help them become better teachers and that their students will benefit from it. This observation remains consistent with contemporary findings which suggest that teachers are most motivated to engage in professional development when they perceive a direct connection between professional learning activities, improved classroom practice and enhanced student outcomes. Participation tends to increase when professional learning is classroom-based, practically relevant and responsive to teachers' immediate concerns and challenges.

Another motivating factor is the opportunity offered to teachers for their professional growth. For teachers to work collaboratively suggests a change in mindset from working in sacrosanct classrooms to sharing professional knowledge with colleagues. It suggests a change in thinking from "independence to interdependence, from individually formed judgements to collectively developed thinking and practice" (Cohen 1997:155). However, it must be mentioned that teachers will not lose their autonomy because the decisions on classroom teaching and learning will ultimately rest with the teachers themselves.5

5.2.2 Programme Implementation Strategies

To put the programme into practice we need to consider three important factors: the role of the facilitator, the training activities and the support and follow-up activities for the teachers. Well-conducted training and support activities by a trained facilitator in assisting teachers in acquiring skills and knowledge in exploratory practice will enhance the effectiveness of the programme.

- **The role of the facilitator**

The INSET facilitator has to be someone who wants to serve in that role, who has confidence, is trained in facilitative work, has a knowledge of skills required for exploratory practice and who can arrange for the time within the confines of her job.

The role of a facilitator is best seen from what facilitation entails. Bentley (1994) gives a very concise definition of facilitation:

Facilitation is a process of helping people to recognise that change is possible…Empowering action can be done using a variety of ideas that include encouragement, support, doing things together, challenging and contradicting. The aim is to create an atmosphere where change becomes a desirable notion, not from seeing any specific change but for recognising more fully where we are and where we want to be. (Bentley 1994: 112-113).

Heron's (1989) model of facilitation remains relevant to contemporary teacher professional development because many of its underlying principles continue to be reflected in current approaches such as Professional Learning Communities (PLCs), reflective practice, instructional coaching and action research. Heron's six dimensions of facilitation, namely planning, meaning, confronting, feeling, structuring and valuing, provide a comprehensive framework for supporting teacher learning through collaboration, reflection and inquiry. Contemporary research similarly emphasises that effective professional learning environments require purposeful planning, opportunities for collaborative meaning-making, constructive challenge, emotional support, structured learning processes and a culture of trust and mutual respect.

More recent perspectives on teacher learning conceptualise facilitators as instructional coaches, mentors and professional learning leaders rather than experts who transmit knowledge. Their role is to support teacher inquiry, encourage reflective dialogue, guide collaborative problem-solving and create psychologically safe environments where teachers feel comfortable discussing uncertainties and challenges in their practice. Such facilitative leadership is particularly important in inquiry-based professional development models such as exploratory practice and action research.

In order to facilitate professional learning among teachers, the facilitator has to recognise that adult learning is self-directed, experiential, related to social and occupational roles, and problem centred (See 3.2.1). As the adult learner is capable of self direction, the facilitator has to play the role of “learning reference” rather than a “traditional instructor” not tell teachers what they should do but “tell it like it is” and

"how I do it" (Neale et al 1981:200). In short, the facilitator tries to meet the teachers' needs. As teachers bring a lifetime of experience with them, the facilitator has to utilize the experience. Articulating or "externalizing" the experiences is "an important initial step in the process of reflection" (Bolitho and Wright 1997:30). Teachers need opportunities to identify the competency requirements of their occupational roles thus the facilitator helps the teachers to fill gaps in their knowledge. Finally, the facilitator has to realise that adult learning is more problem centred than theoretically oriented so teachers need to be involved in such things as problem solving.

The facilitator's role within exploratory practice is therefore not to prescribe solutions but to create opportunities for teachers to investigate their own classroom experiences, generate professional knowledge and engage in collective reflection with colleagues. This aligns with contemporary professional development frameworks that view teachers as active agents of learning rather than passive recipients of expert knowledge. Within Malaysian schools, such an approach complements current efforts to strengthen Professional Learning Communities (PLCs), reflective practice and school-based professional development as mechanisms for improving teaching quality and student learning outcomes.

Heron(1989) discusss six dimensions and three modes of facilitation. They are summarised in a table in the below.

6 dimensions of facilitations	**3 modes of facilitations**	**Application in my research**
1. Planning How will the group meet the objective of the programme? 2. **Meaning** How shall meaning be given to and found in the experiences and actions of the group members? **3.Confronting** How to raise the group's consciousness about their resistance to and avoidance of things?	**1. Hierarchical** The facilitator takes full responsibility and takes charge of all the major decisions of the learning process. **2. Co-operative** The facilitator collaborates with the group members in devising the learning process. **3.Autonomous** The facilitator creates conditions for and give teachers freedom to	1. Facilitator introduces exploratory practice concepts and procedures. 2. Teachers work collaboratively through journals, observation and reflective discussions. 3. Teachers independently conduct inquiry, reflection and

4.Feeling How to handle the feelings within the group? **5. Structuring** How to structure the group's learning experience? **6. Valuing** How to create a supportive climate of personal value, integrity and respect?	exercise their own judgement in their learning.	action research within their own classrooms.

Table 8. Six dimensions and three modes of facilitations.

Adapted from Heron(1989:15-17).

This progression mirrors the professional growth pathway envisioned within exploratory practice.

Heron's (1989) framework of facilitation remains particularly valuable for school-based professional development because it balances facilitator guidance with increasing levels of teacher autonomy. The six dimensions of facilitation provide a comprehensive framework for supporting adult learning, while the hierarchical, co-operative and autonomous modes reflect contemporary understandings of teacher professional learning as a gradual movement from supported participation towards self-directed inquiry. This orientation is consistent with current emphasis on reflective practice, Professional Learning Communities (PLCs), teacher agency and action research within Malaysian schools

Action research similarly reflects Heron's autonomous mode of facilitation because responsibility for identifying problems, collecting evidence, implementing interventions and evaluating outcomes rests primarily with teachers themselves. Recent Malaysian research has shown that action research helps teachers become more reflective, responsive and evidence-informed in addressing classroom challenges. Such findings support Heron's contention that professional learning is most effective when participants actively investigate issues arising from their own contexts

Contemporary instructional coaching models increasingly position facilitators as partners in professional learning rather than experts who merely transmit knowledge. Coaches support reflective dialogue, provide constructive feedback, encourage inquiry and create psychologically safe learning environments. These responsibilities closely reflect Heron's co-operative mode of facilitation, in which learning is achieved through collaboration and shared responsibility between facilitator and participants.

Although Heron's facilitation framework was originally developed several decades ago, it continues to provide a useful theoretical lens for understanding contemporary teacher professional development. Current research on PLCs, reflective practice, instructional coaching and action research emphasises collaborative learning, professional dialogue, teacher agency and inquiry-based improvement. These principles are highly consistent with Heron's six dimensions and three modes of facilitation. Consequently, the framework remains valuable for guiding exploratory practice initiatives in schools as it supports a gradual progression from facilitated learning towards teacher autonomy and self-directed professional inquiry.

- **Training of the facilitators**

The challenge for the facilitator then is to organise the six dimensions and three modes of facilitation into a well-balanced whole depending on the learning objectives and the prior experiences of the group. Heron (1989) suggests a set of criteria to be competent facilitators:

- ✓ Have distress-free authority
- ✓ Confront supportively
- ✓ Provide clear conceptual orientation
- ✓ Be caring, empathetic, warm and genuine
- ✓ Have a wide repertoire of techniques and exercises for personal and interpersonal development
- ✓ Respect the group members' autonomy and their right to decide when to change and grow.
- ✓ Have a flexibility of style to match the situations, the different dimensions and modes of facilitation.

To add to this is Nunan's (1989) list of facilitator's roles for teacher research that is considered relevant for exploratory practice:

Able to plan, implement and evaluate the different options in exploratory practice.
Is familiar with the professional literature on the subject of exploratory teaching and learning.

Has skills in classroom observation, transcription analysis and action research.
Able to draw conclusions from such observation and analysis.

Thus the training of the facilitators has to cover the skills, knowledge, awareness expected of competent facilitators. The following diagram (Fig 5.3) is a proposed design for the training of facilitators in country.

Recent studies suggest that facilitators require more than technical expertise and training skills. They need the ability to support teacher agency, promote reflective dialogue, and create professional learning environments in which teachers feel safe to question existing assumptions and experiment with new practices. Contemporary studies on professional development in Malaysia indicate that facilitators are increasingly expected to act as coaches, mentors, and critical friends rather than merely transmitters of knowledge. This shift reflects a broader movement away from training-oriented models towards facilitative approaches that empower teachers as active participants in their own professional learning (Osman, Zakaria & Mansor, 2024; Kabilan, Annamalai & Yunus, 2025).

We have at the moment a strong cadre of trainers with sufficient expertise to undertake facilitator training for school-based INSET facilitators. They have been trained under the Primary English Teacher Education Project (PETEP), Teacher Support Team Programme (TST) and Training of Trainers Programme (TROT).

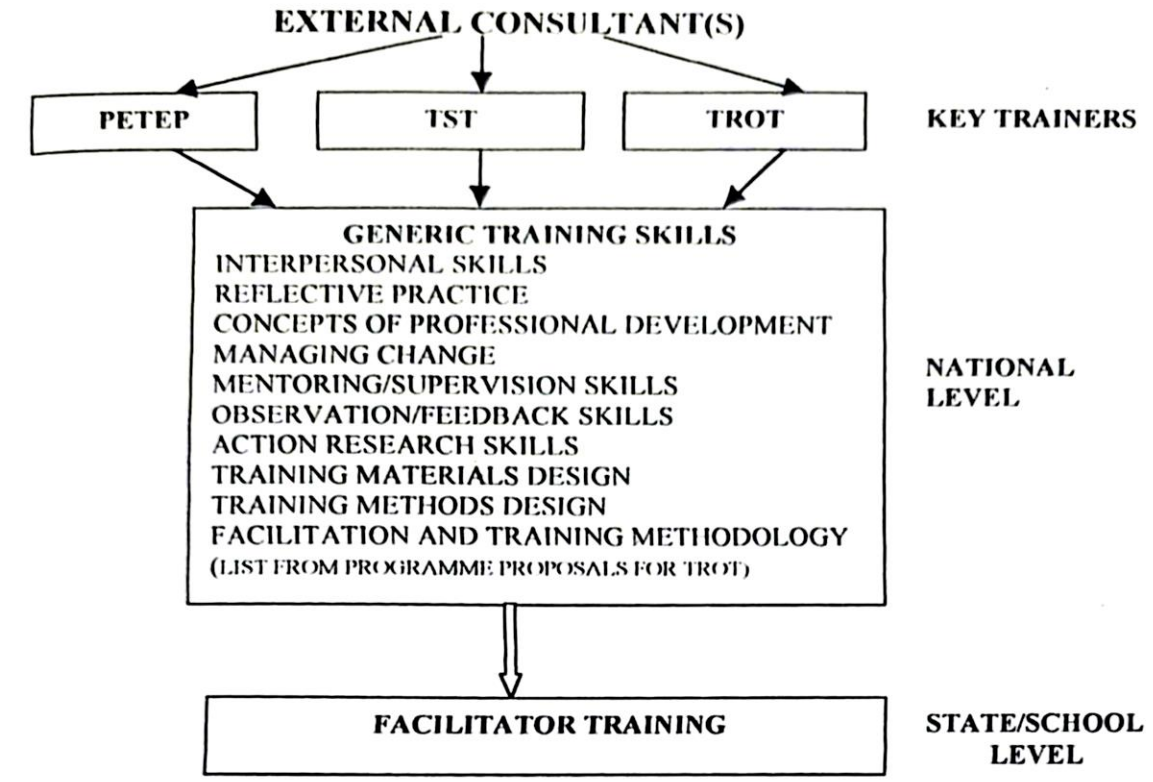


Fig. 5.3 Proposed in-country facilitator training

For the training of the INSET facilitators to be a reality, the following strategies should be considered.

The INSET unit of the Teacher Education Division has to have a database of information on all the key trainers in each state so that it is easy to retrieve information on the trainers' profiles.

The workload of the key trainers has to be reduced at certain times of the year for facilitating INSET work at state or school level.

Key trainers can also be freed from college/school duties for a period of time to conduct facilitator training.

Their absence from college or school should be covered by careful reorganisation of the timetable.

Key trainers in teacher training colleges can offer their services by inviting teachers for facilitator training in their colleges.

\

Key trainers can work from the Resource Centres located in every state and work with clusters of schools as at the present moment there are not enough key trainers to facilitate training at state or school levels.

Resource centres can serve as the base for facilitator training as some of these centres are well-equipped with reprographic equipment.

- **Training and development of teachers at school level**

Section 4.6.2 outlines a preparatory course within the on-going professional development programme for the training and development of teachers in school-based INSET. The preparatory course includes raising the teachers' awareness of the relevance of exploratory practice as a vehicle of professional development. It also includes preliminary skills and knowledge required for undertaking exploratory teaching and learning. The training and development of teachers can be seen as a continuum from the most to the least structured situation as shown in the diagram below:

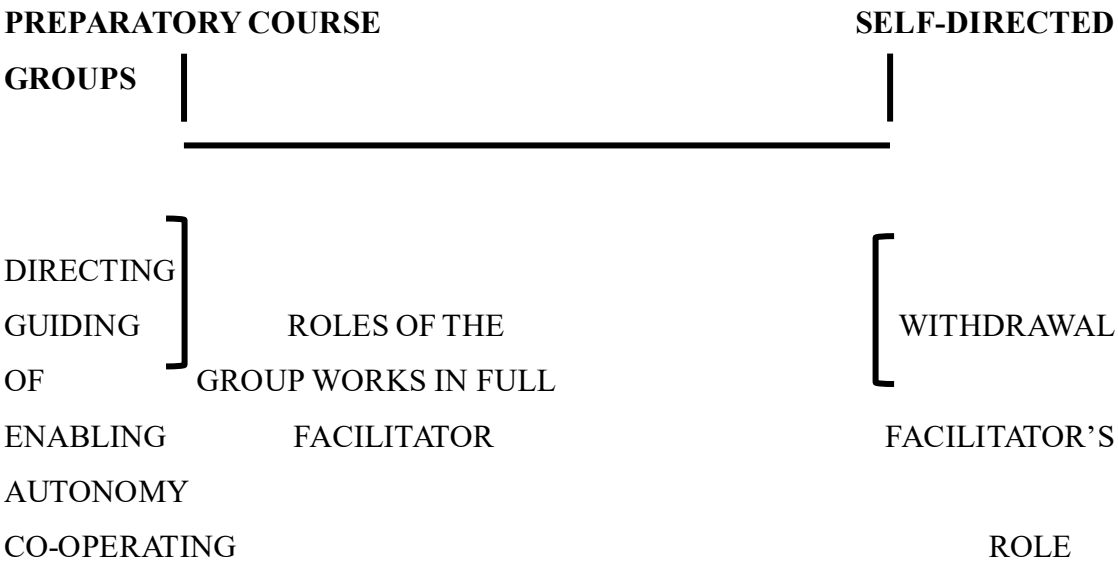


Fig. 5.4 Continuum of training and development of teachers in school-based INSET
Adapted from Pozzo 1997:41)

In this training and development continuum, the facilitator initiates the programme by proposing tasks for reflection, offers guidance in the formulation of questions and highlights the alternatives offered to teachers. The facilitator also provides the necessary skills and knowledge for teachers to initiate exploratory practice. As skill-specific training activities may have a transient effect and may not contribute to teacher learning and change, it is necessary to have support activities to sustain the programme.

- **Support activities**

There have to be a number of activities to support teacher assimilation of skills and knowledge delivered in the preparatory course. According to McLaughlin and Marsh (1990) training is essentially information transfer providing teachers with necessary techniques. Implementation is the process of mutual adaptation in which teachers modify their practices to adapt to the realities of the classroom. Support activities provide classroom assistance from the facilitator and regular meetings provide feedback teachers need to make the modifications. Through support activities, the training becomes individualized. Support activities provide the follow-up necessary for sustainability in any change effort as seen in Section 1.3.5.

This observation continues to be supported by contemporary research. Recent studies on English language teacher professional development have consistently found that one-off courses rarely result in sustained changes in classroom practice unless they are accompanied by follow-up support, mentoring, professional dialogue, and opportunities for collaborative reflection. Teachers who receive continuous support are more likely to adapt innovations successfully to their classrooms and sustain changes over time than those who participate only in isolated workshops (Kabilan et al., 2025; Lee et al., 2026). Such activities aid teachers in understanding complex new strategies in terms of form and content. The facilitator offers some kind of 'on-line' assistance but she needs to know when help can become interference. External consultation from TST personnel or from lecturers in institutions of higher education can provide concrete practical advice when needed. Frequent and regular meetings of teachers are another support strategy as they provide a forum for teachers to learn from one another's experience. These meetings also support the affective needs of teachers as they may share problems and report on the process of implementing the new ideas.

- **The time factor**

One of the impediments foreseen in the implementation is that of time. Due to the pressure of other school commitments and the need to become involved in the implementation of additional innovations, teachers may suffer from fatigue. According to Hewton and Jolley (1991) there are three main sources of time for school-based INSET: personal, internal and external. Personal time is time contributed by teachers, internal time is time found by schools themselves from their own resources and external time is provided mainly through government funding and occasionally other external bodies.

Personal sources of time are contributed by teachers when they take part in school-based activities, attend courses or engage in self-directed study beyond their hours of service. This may be undertaken individually or in a group before or after school hours, during weekends or vacations. Teachers may contribute their personal time for the following reasons: professional responsibility, career advancement, interest and keeping up with change. If INSET is undertaken in the teachers' personal time, an appropriate incentive would be to provide comfort and food. It does show that teachers are treated as professionals if they are given pleasant surroundings and provided with good meals (See Section 2.2.2). To have INSET during teachers' personal time, we have to ensure that the quality of INSET provision does not lead teachers to regard it as "a waste of time" or "irrelevant". We have to acknowledge that teachers have personal lives and weekends and evenings are for family and friends.

Internal time is when the school makes time for professional development from their own resources. In schools where professional development is seen as essential and normal part of school-life, time will be built into the system to achieve this. If professional development is high on the school's agenda, then there have to be a creative approach to the use of time and resources. 'Slots' have to be found within the school day for professional development activities. Blocking the timetable has been suggested in 4.3.1. A key factor in determining the effectiveness of professional development is the quality of time designated for INSET. It has to be time when the teacher is not tired,

pressured or rushed, when they have the attention to benefit from professional development activities.

External time has its source outside the school. This would include courses run by divisions in the MOE or State Education Departments or other educational bodies. One of the disadvantages is that students are disadvantaged with their teachers away for INSET. But as the data in Section 2.2.2 suggests, teachers need time away from school to exchange professional talk with colleagues from other schools. Hewton and Jolley suggest that personal, internal and external time are "interdependent and mutually supportive"(1991:23). The interrelationship is illustrated in the diagram below.

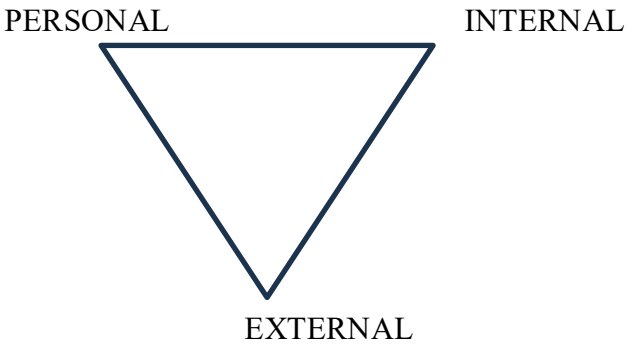


Fig. 5.5 Interrelationship between the sources of time
From Hewton and Jolley (1991: 24)

Usually, personal and internal time are combined (top line) as teachers who out of their own professional interest may continue to hold sessions after school hours. At the base of the triangle encouraging and supporting personal and internal time is external time. Schools and teachers look to the outside for encouragement and support (including funding). Teachers depend on the broader vision, stimulus and experience which external sources provide. It is through external sources that schools are aware of curriculum changes. The interdependence of all three sources are equally important for professional development work. What is needed is the flexibility to achieve some balance of all three.

5.2.3 Leadership

The question of leadership is crucial as most schools are conservative organisations and leadership, particularly administrative leadership needs to be augmented for any programme to be implemented successfully. Leadership is important especially in the initial stages of the programme when anxiety is high as teachers may think that the new idea implies that all is not well. The intervention of leaders at this stage is thus necessary.

• The principal's leadership role

Strong leadership from the principal can foster successful implementation and continuity of the programme as they are in the best position to bring together interested teachers for concerted and collaborative efforts for improvement in classroom practice. With the active support of the principal the 'message' is clear that the programme is important and "teachers cannot help but receive and interpret in terms of their professional self interest" (McLaughlin and Marsh 1997:223). As Head of the school, the principal's participation in the training sessions will impart to teachers that the programme is a school effort and that everyone is expected to work hard and co-operate.

The principal's role in establishing a collaborative school climate would enhance good working relationships among teachers. Recent research suggests that leadership for professional development is increasingly viewed as a shared and distributed responsibility rather than solely the responsibility of the school principal. While principals continue to play a critical role in setting direction and allocating resources, successful professional learning cultures are often characterised by shared leadership, collaborative decision-making, and active teacher participation in school improvement initiatives. Such environments encourage greater teacher commitment to change and stronger professional ownership of development efforts (Osman et al., 2024; Lee et al., 2026). If the school is efficiently run, has esprit de corp there will be greater possibilities of good working relationships and it will lead to increased teacher participation in the programme.

• Leadership role of the facilitator

An effective facilitator will have a significant effect on how the programme is run. As initiator, she has to lead in clarifying programme objectives and use her special skills and knowledge to promote understanding of new concepts. She also has to help minimize difficulties encountered by teachers as they attempt the new ideas in their classrooms.

• Leadership role of the State Education Officers

The State English language officers play a vital role in school-based programmes. They act as liaison to State authorities and as a link between federal and school levels. To supplement school inspections and evaluation exercises carried out annually, they can offer assistance to schools by supplying needed expertise and directing teachers to resources to help in their professional development.

In the current educational environment, State Education Officers also play an important role in connecting schools to wider professional learning networks, specialist expertise, and national educational priorities. Their role has expanded beyond monitoring and support to include facilitating access to professional learning opportunities, mentoring programmes, and collaborative initiatives across schools.

5.2.4 Teacher Characteristics

• Years of experience

A teacher's abilities and experience can influence her response to participation in school programmes. Huberman's (1992) teacher career cycle illuminates "different reactions of teachers at different stages in their careers" (Jarvis 1991:6). McLaughlin and Marsh (1990) quote the Rand study that suggests that the longer a teacher is on her job, the capacity for her to change diminishes. This implies that the professional development needs of experienced teachers are different. Thus the reactions of a fresh teacher still mastering classroom skills and the experienced teacher who wants to explore new areas of teaching have to be considered. This INSET programme therefore offers teachers options to take responsibility for their own professional growth. A more personal

approach to professional growth may be necessary for experienced teachers in which they are able to look at new frameworks to reflect on their teaching and their effectiveness as teachers.

- **Teachers' beliefs and attitudes**

Teachers' beliefs and attitudes towards their professional responsibility and competence are a major influence on how they will participate and contribute to the programme. If teachers are viewed by school administrators as competent professionals capable of making decisions, it could change teacher attitudes towards a more active involvement in the school-based INSET. The professional development group meetings that have been proposed may hopefully influence teacher attitudes and beliefs towards support of school-based activities.

Recent studies continue to identify teacher beliefs as one of the strongest influences on professional learning and educational change. Even where high-quality professional development is available, teachers are unlikely to adopt new practices unless they perceive them as relevant, practical, and compatible with their existing values and classroom realities. Consequently, effective professional development needs to engage not only teachers' skills and knowledge but also their beliefs, motivations, and professional identities (Kabilan et al., 2025; Osman et al., 2024).

5.3 OTHER IMPLICATIONS

- **Transfer of training**

School-based training is generic in nature and the transfer of training among subject departments is encouraged. If we believe in promoting collegiality among teachers then we should open the professional development group sessions to teachers from other departments within the school hence reducing the effect of "balkanization" in secondary schools.

This recommendation is particularly relevant today, as schools increasingly face complex educational challenges that extend beyond individual subject boundaries. Contemporary approaches to school improvement emphasise interdisciplinary collaboration, knowledge sharing, and collective problem-solving. Professional

learning that crosses departmental boundaries enables teachers to learn from diverse perspectives and contributes to the development of stronger Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) within schools (Lee et al., 2026).

- **Pre-Service**

If education is seen as a continuum from pre-service through in-service until the end of a teacher's career, then skills necessary for reflection need developing from early on in training. In pre-service training, classroom monitoring skills should be included to let trainees explore what some teachers do well in classrooms. In schools, fresh teachers should be encouraged to share their pre-service experience of using journals as reflective tools with the more experienced teachers in schools.

- **Report on teacher research findings**

Results of teachers' exploratory efforts in classrooms should be reported particularly the "outcomes, successes and failures, problems and solutions" (Nunan 1989:121). In most of the states in Malaysia, TST newsletters have been produced, published and disseminated. In these newsletters teachers should be encouraged to report on findings of their classroom research or discuss classroom 'puzzles' that need to be solved. Within schools, supportive principals can demonstrate their interest and commitment by giving teachers opportunities of communicating their research findings to the rest of the staff.

5.4 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY AND DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Several limitations define the claims that can be made from this study. First, the empirical component is deliberately small and exploratory, involving 12 educators known to the researcher; it cannot represent the full diversity of Malaysian schools, subjects, phases or regions. Second, the thesis develops a programme blueprint but does not report a longitudinal implementation trial, so claims about effectiveness remain propositions to be tested. Third, much of the argument is grounded in teacher development and English-language teaching literature, which may require adaptation for other subject disciplines and school settings. Finally, professional learning is influenced by changing policy, technology, workload and school conditions, so the model should be treated as adaptable rather than fixed. Future research should pilot the programme in contrasting school contexts, use mixed methods and repeated measures,

examine changes in teacher practice over time, include teacher and school-leader perspectives, and investigate how professional learning affects student learning without reducing teacher development to a single outcome measure.

5.5 CONTRIBUTION TO PROFESSIONAL PRACTICE

The practical contribution of this thesis is a coherent school-based professional development architecture rather than a single training technique. It brings together teacher choice, structured reflection, classroom observation, action research, collaborative dialogue and facilitation within an ongoing cycle of professional learning. For educational leaders, the framework clarifies that sustainable professional development requires conditions as well as activities: protected time, psychological and professional trust, access to facilitation, opportunities to share evidence, and leadership that balances accountability with teacher agency. The model can therefore be used as a design and review framework for schools seeking to move from episodic INSET towards embedded professional learning. Its value lies in providing a bridge between system priorities and classroom realities while preserving teachers' responsibility for examining and improving their own practice.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

To view teaching as a profession and teachers as empowered, autonomous individuals, school-based INSET has to be grounded on principles of ownership, collaboration and shared decision making. This sense of ownership comes with recognising teachers as competent professionals able to make concrete decisions and offer practical suggestions on what is regarded as effective teaching and learning. Very few teachers can become competent professionals on their own. They need to work with their colleagues because working alone can “undermine a teacher’s sense of confidence” while collaboration can “increase [her] sense of efficacy” (Fullan and Hargreaves 1992:61).

Introducing school-based INSET does not necessarily change teachers’ practices but if change does occur, it is the result of teachers changing their own thinking and their approaches. According to Shuard et al “a supportive INSET environment can only provide a setting in which professional development can begin” (1991:14). Schools are

places where teachers offer the richest source of expertise, ideas and models of good practice.

This view continues to find support in contemporary literature on teacher professional learning. Recent Malaysian studies have highlighted the importance of teacher agency, professional collaboration, and school-based learning in sustaining educational improvement. Although external expertise and training remain important, meaningful and lasting change is most likely to occur when teachers are actively involved in reflecting on their practice, investigating issues arising from their classrooms, and working collaboratively with colleagues to improve teaching and learning. Professional development is therefore increasingly understood as an ongoing process embedded within teachers' daily work rather than as a series of isolated training events (Osman et al., 2024; Kabilan et al., 2025).

Moreover, current discussions on teacher professionalism in Malaysia, including the aspirations reflected in Standard Guru Malaysia 2.0, place greater emphasis on continuous learning, reflective practice, collaboration, and self-directed professional growth. In many respects, these aspirations are consistent with the principles underpinning exploratory practice and school-based INSET proposed in this study. By collaborating with their colleagues, teachers can further build on the professional knowledge and draw new theories out of their daily practice.

To fulfil Malaysia's vision of schools in the new millenium "what is now envisioned is a quantum leap toward the creation of a setting where inquiry is normal and conditions of the workplace support continuous collegial enquiry" (Joyce and Calhoun (1995) in Cohen (1997:153). Exploratory practice within school-based INSET is a possible means in attaining this vision.

APPENDIX I

A sample of the questionnaire sent by electronic mail

A Survey of Teachers' Perceptions of In-service Education and Training (INSET) in Malaysia.

Please answer the following questions aimed at finding out Malaysian teachers' perceptions of INSET. Your cooperation is much appreciated and your anonymity ensured.

Name:

School:

Position in school:

Years of teaching experience:

1. What is in-service (INSET) to you?

2. What do you hope to gain by attending INSET courses?

3. Have the INSET courses you attended met your expectations?

4. If they have not, what are the reasons?

5. Do any INSET courses stand out in your mind as being particularly interesting and helpful? If so, can you
say why they were interesting and helpful.

6. In your view what are the features of good INSET courses?

APPENDIX II

A sample of an e-mail reply to the questionnaire

From:
To: Gopala Krishnan
Subject: Re: Hello, remember me?
Date: 17 May 2025 05:17

Name:
School:
Position in school: Eng. Lang. Panel Head
Years of teaching experience: 18 years

1. To me INSET is training provided for trained teachers for them to develop professionally.

2. By attending INSET courses, I hope to acquire knowledge that is useful for teaching. This way, I'll not stagnate in my career but go on improving. The joy is by improving myself, I can increase my effectiveness as a teacher and hopefully, help my students improve themselves.

3. Not all the INSET courses I have attended meet my expectations.

4. Many are mere repetitions of what I did in the uni. or things that I already know. I take such courses, as refresher courses though.

5. I attended a computer course run by my sch. once. I think that it was useful and interesting because I wasn't that computer literate and wanted to learn more as I see the potential of computer in my work. It was embarrassing to keep on asking my colleagues to help me in every little thing I didn't know. Not to ask, however, was frustrating. Thus the course was welcome tho I could not learn everything in just one day.

6. A good INSET course should meet the needs of its participants. It should be carried out in interesting ways and involve the participation of the participants. There shouldn't be too much lecture-style deliveries. It also should not drag on too long.

APPENDIX III

A sample of a transcript

T Once you've got a set of pictures… Bo, are you listening? I'm waiting for people to listen. Still waiting.

Ss Listen. Listen.

T When you've got a set of pictures, go anywhere in the room. Anywhere. Don't have to sit in a circle. Go anywhere. Find, find your own personal space. Now, how many pictures should you have? How many?

S Nine. Nine.

T All right. Nine.

S Nine.

T And they should all be different. Now this time, this time…

All right, this time it's going to be difficult because I'm not going to speak.

The… instructions will come from the cassette. So you must listen very carefully, all right? You must listen for the picture to find and hold it up, then you have to listen where to put it… On top of … on top of (Ss on top of). Underneath. On the right, on the left. Between.

T Is everybody ready?… How could you possibly not…? What were you doing? Talking? (laughter)

S No, I give to…

T Oh, you gave them away… turning off the… nine… there you are. You can go over there if you like.

Taken from Nunan, D Understanding Language Classrooms (1989:91-92)

APPENDIX IV

Two examples of classroom observation instruments

Rating Systems

Classroom Management

Rate the lesson according to the following key:

1 Does not at all reflect what went on

2 Only marginally reflects what went on

3 Neutral

4 Describes rather well what went on

5 Is a totally accurate reflection of what went on

CRITERION	5	4	3	2	1
1. There were no cultural misunderstandings.	□	□	□	□	□
2. The class understood what was wanted at all times.	□	□	□	□	□
3. All instructions were clear.	□	□	□	□	□
4. Every student was involved at some point.	□	□	□	□	□
5. All students were interested in the lesson.	□	□	□	□	□
6. The teacher carried out comprehension checks.	□	□	□	□	□
7. Materials and learning activities were appropriate.	□	□	□	□	□
8. Student groupings and sub-groupings were appropriate.	□	□	□	□	□
9. Class atmosphere was positive.	□	□	□	□	□
10. The pacing of the lesson was appropriate.	□	□	□	□	□
11. There was enough variety in the lesson.	□	□	□	□	□
12. The teacher did not talk too much.	□	□	□	□	□
13. Error correction and feedback was appropriate.	□	□	□	□	□
14. There was genuine communication.	□	□	□	□	□

15. There was teacher skill in organising group work.	□	□	□	□	□
16. There was opportunity for controlled practice.	□	□	□	□	□
17. Students were enthusiastic.	□	□	□	□	□
18. General classroom management was good.	□	□	□	□	□

(Taken from Nunan, D 1988. The Learner-Centred Curriculum. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press)

Count Coding

Use the chart below to find out the time the teacher allows before rephrasing, or re-directing or adding a prompt (count in seconds and record it under wait time.) Record about five exchanges.

Teacher Prompts	Wait Time	Student Responses
Who can tell me the past participle of 'run'?	////	
Is it 'ran' or 'run'?	//	'run'

(Adapted from Wajnryb, R (1992) Classroom Observation Tasks. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press)

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