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<th>Preparing career teachers for Singapore schools</th>
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<td>Author(s)</td>
<td>Esther Tan</td>
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PREPARING CAREER TEACHERS FOR SINGAPORE SCHOOLS

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PREPARING CAREER TEACHERS FOR SINGAPORE SCHOOLS

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National Institute of Education


Introduction

In the Singapore context, career guidance in schools is seen as part and parcel of a developmental guidance programme called the PCCG programme (Pastoral Care and Career Guidance). In this programme, classroom teachers serve as frontline care givers and play an active role in implementing a pastoral curriculum often known as the Personal and Social Education (PSE) through a series of group guidance activities. Career Guidance is one important component of this curriculum. The efforts of these frontline pastoral tutors are supported by a small team of key teachers taking on the role of coordinators and resource persons, among them the career teachers. The Ministry of Education has recommended that all the secondary schools, junior colleges and centralized institutes in Singapore should have at least 2 career coordinators each. The main responsibilities of these Career Coordinators are to plan and implement career guidance programme in the school/college and they are expected to work closely with the Pastoral Care Coordinators. This new development in the educational scene resulted in a rising need to train many career teachers for our Singapore schools within a short time.

The Training Programme

To face this new challenge, we at the National Institute of Education introduced in 1988 a specially designed part-time in-service training programme known as the Specialist Diploma Programme in Pastoral Care and Career Guidance. Keeping in mind the wide range of training needs of our teachers, this Specialist Diploma Programme is designed to provide basic training for the frontline care-givers as well as in-depth training for a smaller group of key teachers such as the Career Coordinators to assume leadership roles in the planning, implementation and evaluation of pastoral care and career guidance in the schools.

This Specialist Diploma Programme is organized on a modular approach. It comprises eight modules of 30 hours each, adding up to a total of 240 hours of course work plus about 60 hours of practicum work in the schools.
Level One Training

Level One courses are foundation courses to meet the general needs of classroom teachers who are preparing to be frontline care-givers in the pastoral provision of their schools. These courses are intended to provide the front-line care givers with the basic knowledge and skills in pastoral care, counselling and career guidance to help them make optimum use of their "Contact Time" with pupils under their care. There are four modules at this level of training:

Module 1 Introduction to Pastoral Care and Career Guidance in schools

This first course provides an overview on the nature, scope and function of pastoral care and career guidance in schools. The course emphasizes the proactive aspect of developmental guidance and encourages teachers to examine critically their guidance role in schools.

Module 2 Basic Skills in Tutoring and Group Guidance

This course examines the place of group guidance in pastoral care and career guidance. It introduces the teachers to theories of group process as well as a whole range of group guidance techniques.

Module 3 Basic Skills in Pastoral Casework

This course focuses on theories and techniques of individual counselling. It aims at enhancing understanding of mental health and maladjustment. The teachers are introduced to a variety of counselling methods covering affective, cognitive and behavioural approaches in pupil counselling.

Module 4 Planning and Implementing Career Guidance in Schools

This course aims at equipping the teachers with both knowledge and skills in careers guidance. It examines theories of career development and introduces the teachers to a variety of approaches in career counselling.
Level Two Training

Level Two courses are designed to provide both breadth and depth in the training of specialists counsellors in schools who are expected to provide leadership in planning and implementing pastoral care and career guidance for pupils. Thus in addition to more in-depth training in guidance and counselling, the teachers are also taught managerial skills, programme development skills as well as research skills: -

Module 5 Developing and Implementing a Pastoral Curriculum

This course is designed to address the training needs of pastoral leaders who are entrusted with the responsibility of leading a pastoral team to plan and implement pastoral care programmes in schools. As the pastoral care curriculum often includes a career education component, this training is also relevant to Career Coordinators seeking in-depth training.

Module 6 Assessment and Evaluation in Pastoral Care and Career Guidance

This course focusses on the role of assessment and evaluation in pastoral care and career guidance. It introduces the teachers to a variety of assessment methods and examines critically issues in programme evaluation. Hands-on sessions offer the participants opportunities to try out and examine critically assessment instruments that are commonly used in career guidance.

Module 7 Advanced Skills in Pastoral Groupwork and Case-work

This course probes deeper into the realms of group guidance and individual counselling. It aims at further sharpening the teachers' counselling skills and thus prepares them for supervisory roles in the pastoral setup of their schools.

Module 8 Research and Development in Pastoral Care, Counselling and Career Guidance

This course examines research issues and surveys current practices as well as new developments in pastoral care and career guidance in Singapore and other countries. After some input from the lecturers, all participants are required to conduct a piece of school-based research as part of their practicum work.
While front-line pastoral care-givers are required to take at least module 1 which is the introductory course, Career Coordinators are encouraged to complete all four basic courses at Level One. Some, however, just take Module 1 for exposure to pastoral care in general and Module 4 for specific training in career guidance. A few, it has been noted with gratification, have both the motivation and the perseverance to complete all eight modules leading to the Specialist Diploma.

Ideally all Career Coordinators should complete modules 1 to 4 which will equip them with a comprehensive range of knowledge and skills essential for effective career guidance:

1) Knowledge on Adolescent psychology -

It is important for Career Coordinators to have a sound knowledge of the social, emotional, psychological and cognitive development of the pupils they work with.

2) An understanding of the group process -

As career guidance activities are often conducted in small groups, Career Coordinators should have an understanding of the group process. They should also be equipped with group techniques to foster communication and interaction in groups.

3) Knowledge in Theories of career development

All Career Coordinators should be familiar with major theories of career development. They are also expected to have in-depth knowledge of at least one approach in career counseling.

4) Knowledge and Skills in Counselling

An effective Career Coordinator should also be a good counselor. He should be familiar with a whole range of counseling theories and be competent in at least one model of counselling.

5) Knowledge and Skills in Assessment and evaluation

As assessment is one important aspect of career guidance, Career Coordinators should be familiar with a whole range of test materials in career guidance. They should also be trained in the selection and administration of such assessment instruments.
6) Knowledge of the World of Work

To be effective Career Coordinators should have sufficient and up-to-date information of the world of work. If they are not armed with such a knowledge, they should at least know how to source the knowledge through networking with community resources. This is important as they are expected to organize Work Experience programmes in schools as well as to set up Career Resource Centres.

7) Knowledge of the Self

In addition to the knowledge and skills described above, the Career Teachers are also encouraged to go through some sensitivity training in the modules to develop in-sight into their own strengths and weaknesses as helpers and counselors. This is included because we believe that self-awareness is essential for any person functioning in a helping role.

Approaches to Training

In order to meet the challenge of training a great number of teachers within a short time, we at the National Institute of Education have experimented with two non-traditional approaches along side the conventional method of in-service training.

Since Pastoral care and Career Guidance in the Singapore context adopts the "whole-school" approach involving all the teachers, we were convinced that the most effective way to prepare front-line care-givers is to conduct school-based in-service courses for schools wishing to set up pastoral care programmes. So instead of the teachers coming to the Institute to attend classes, lecturers from the Institute go to the school to conduct weekly training sessions for the whole teaching staff. Such an approach has three advantages. Firstly, this is one way to train many teachers within a short period of time. Secondly, this approach allows teachers from the same school to get together to share experiences and to engage in problem-solving in issues pertaining to their particular school. Thirdly, such involvement of the total teaching staff has been found to be an effective way of creating a caring school environment that is conducive to the implementation of pastoral care and career guidance.

In addition to school-based in-service courses, we also conduct what are known as campus-based School-focused in-service courses. This means schools can send a specified number of staff (usually about 30 from each school) to form a cohort but the training is to be conducted on campus. Such an approach allows 60 to 120 teachers from two to three schools to undergo training at one time. The format of training includes mass lectures for the
whole cohort to be followed by workshops in smaller groups led by a team of lecturers. In the workshops, the grouping of teachers is according to the school they come from so that discussions in the workshops can be school-focused. We have found that this is a good way to cover several schools at one time.

To cater to the training needs of individual teachers who may not be designated Career Coordinators but are motivated to undergo training, we also continue with the traditional format of campus-based training courses for which enrollment is open to all teachers from both primary and secondary schools. Thus a class of 30 often comprise of teachers coming from 15 to 20 schools. The advantage of such an approach is that it allows teachers from many different schools to interact and share professional views as well as to discuss practical problems, in this way obtaining mutual support and mutual help.

Regardless of the format of training, course work comprises lectures followed by group discussion and workshop activities. As the emphasis in training is on experiential learning, there is much opportunity for hands-on activities such as micro-counselling sessions. Two approaches are used in the training and supervision of counselling skills. The first is through role-play sessions in class. The second is by audio-taping or video-taping actual counselling sessions conducted in schools which are then played back and evaluated in class. Initially feeling rather shy about having their taped sessions heard and watched in class, most of the teachers eventually overcome their shyness and are able to benefit from these practicum sessions.

To streamline the training at both in-service and pre-service level, we have recently converted the basic course (Module 1) to be part of the Foundation Course in Teacher Education taught at the Institute whereas modules 2 to 4 are turned into electives for student teachers interested in career guidance and counselling. This means that from 1991, all graduates from the National Institute of Education will have been exposed to a foundation course in pastoral care and career guidance. Some of them will also be equipped with group skills, counselling skills as well as knowledge and skills in career guidance.

Progress of the Training Programme

In the lapse of two and a half years, more than 3,000 teachers have completed the basic module in this programme. Of these about 100 have completed Level One training (up to Module 4). Details of the number of course participants for each module are as follows:
Currently 22 teachers are enrolled in the final module (Module 8). They hope to complete the course successfully by late September to become the first batch of graduates of the Specialist Diploma Programme.

General Feedback on the Training Programme

To evaluate the effectiveness of the training programme and to ascertain the extent to which the teachers are able to put into practice what they have learned in the in-service courses, the participants are followed up three to six months after completion of their training. This is usually done through a survey using either the questionnaire technique or the interview method.

One such follow-up study was conducted in December 1988 with a random sample of 100 teachers from 10 secondary schools who had completed Module One training. As shown in Table 2, the results of this follow-up study revealed that at least 75% of the respondents were able to apply the knowledge gained to understand their pupils better. They had also put their newly acquired group guidance and counselling skills to good use. When asked if they had the opportunity to develop pastoral curriculum for use in their schools, about 50% answered in the affirmative. More than half of the teachers had the opportunities to share their knowledge with their colleagues. Lastly, 80% of the teachers indicated that they had benefited from the training and would strongly recommend the course to their fellow teachers.
Table 2

Feedback on Training

N = 100

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Comments</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>%</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I have used the knowledge to understand my pupils better</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have applied the group guidance skills gained in tutoring my pupils</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have put the counselling skills learned to good use</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have been involved in the development of pastoral curriculum</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I strongly recommend this course to my colleagues</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>20</td>
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Another method of obtaining feedback is through informal meetings with principals and key teachers to obtain their views on the effectiveness of the training programme as measured by the level of functioning of the trained teachers. One such meeting was held at the Institute in early 1989. On the whole feedback from the principals present had been both positive and encouraging. They felt that their teachers had benefited from the training. They also spoke enthusiastically in favour of the school-based approach in in-service training, pointing out that this approach has the advantage of involving practically the whole teaching staff of the school, including the principal, and is therefore an effective way of promoting a conducive school environment to facilitate a whole-school approach in implementing pastoral care and career guidance.
The Development of Training/Resource Materials

To supplement and compliment the training efforts described above, we at the Institute have also made a humble start in developing resource materials through team effort as well as research and development projects. Firstly a few concerned colleagues have pooled their efforts to develop a handbook for teachers involved in pastoral care and career guidance. We are also developing a resource book which will include more than 100 workshop activities in developmental guidance such as activities to enhance self-concept and group activities in career guidance. Last but not the least, a team of researchers at NIE are currently working on a R & D project to develop a computer-assisted career guidance programme called JOBS (Jobs Orientation Backup System) which will be a useful guidance tool for Career Coordinators in schools.

Conclusion

Where the introduction of career guidance is concerned, we have only made a modest start in Singapore. However, the time is ripe for rapid development and innovations in this area. This is so because the current educational scenario in Singapore has never been so conducive — there is official policy in the Ministry of Education to implement career guidance into all secondary schools as soon as possible; principals are given a free hand to organize career guidance programmes in the ways they see fit; the pupils themselves are motivated and their parents are interested. Last but not least, public awareness has been heightened through much publicity of existing programmes.

Being the nation's only teacher training institute, the National Institute of Education not only has the responsibility to provide comprehensive and systematic training programmes for teachers both at the pre-service and in-service level, it also has the professional and moral responsibility to develop resource materials and to spearhead research and development projects in the area of career guidance.

The training programmes described in this paper came about as we responded to the training needs of teachers in schools. They also reflect the concerted efforts of a team of teachers in search of better and more effective methods of preparing teachers for their new roles as pastoral care-givers and Career Coordinators in schools. In the two years of experimentation, we have succeeded in some aspects. We have also fallen short in some areas. What is important, however, is that we have learned valuable lessons in the process. We are also encouraged by the positive response and appreciation shown by many of the course participants. Such comforting thoughts are enough to urge us on.