

## Supporting Change Agents in Schools

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### Introduction

In Papua New Guinea, within the current reform process, schools, districts and zones have embarked on various forms of in-service support. The Curriculum Reform Implementation Project (CRIP) supports initiatives through direct funding of provincial in-service programs (PIST Week or NIST Week), Curriculum Reform Support Programs (CRSP) to schools and clusters of schools and Curriculum Reform District Support Programs (CR-DSP). CRIP also works closely with the Papua New Guinea Education Institute to develop study guides to be used in DEP (I) programs, a program designed for teachers holding a Teaching Certificate to upgrade to Diploma status. These study guides can also be used by schools to assist with the facilitation of in-service.

Over 400 teachers have been trained as external assessors for PNGEI, with a further group of approximately 30 to be trained in late 2005. These assessors assist PNGEI in enrolling and assessing teachers in DEP (I) courses throughout the country, as external students. Many assessors have fulfilled that role but many more have been enlisted by school, district or provincial authorities to act as facilitators of in-service. The reason for their selection in this role is normally because they have received some recent training and are assumed to have current curriculum knowledge

In the National Capital District (NCD) the PNGEI external assessors have been used extensively, as a part of the NCD In-service Plan, to facilitate cluster based in-service throughout 2004 and 2005.

This paper will explore the experiences of the assessors in fulfilling this role and the efforts of one inspector of schools, an assessor herself, who has taken on the role of supporting them in their efforts to facilitate the implementation of the reform curriculum

### The Training

Teachers, recently graduated from the DEP(I), course apply to become assessors and a selection process is undertaken. PNGEI external assessors complete two weeks of intensive training and must demonstrate achievement of a set of outcomes. Their training includes; Understanding of outcomes based education, study of syllabus documents through use of the study guides, student centred teaching strategies, and procedures for PNGEI enrolment and assessment.

As a result of their training assessors are encouraged to enrol teachers in DEP(I), to guide study programs and to assess teachers on their completed tasks or use the study guides as a self paced learning modules for teaching.

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PNGEI, funded and assisted by CRIP, trained 25 NCD teachers as assessors of either lower primary (N=13) or upper primary (N=12). Some teachers were trained in both areas. Upper primary assessors were trained in the use of study guides that drew from the current syllabus documents that are underpinned by an outcomes based approach. Those trained in lower primary were trained in use of the study guides based on draft curriculum materials that were objectives based and involved thematic approaches. Both the current upper primary documents and the draft lower primary documents emphasised student centred approaches to teaching and learning.

### **Assessors as Facilitators**

In NCD, regardless of their training, assessors have been used as facilitators of in-service for implementation of the upper primary and lower primary curriculum. Most of the in-services conducted involved awareness and/or planning and programming.

The NCD assessors have been asked by in-service committees and Primary School Inspectors to take on the major role of conducting in-service within the clusters of schools and have also often taken the lead within schools. In this sense, assessors can be considered the major agents of change within NCD schools.

Topics covered by assessors include;

- Awareness of the curriculum documents
- Planning and programming
- Assessment
- Timetabling

### **Support for change agents in NCD**

The NCD In-service Plans for 2004 and 2005 did not include provision for an assessors support group. Ms Isafa, a Primary School Inspector within NCD, decided in mid 2004 that assessors needed some support if the in-services in NCD were to be effective, so she took the initiative to approach the Senior Primary School Inspector, Mr V Kada, seeking his approval for the establishment of a support group for assessors. Approval was granted. She then had to gain approval from the Assistant Secretary NCD, Mr H Nauna, and his approval was also given.

Despite this approval from the senior education managers within NCD, there was no funding allocation for this initiative. However, the Assistant Secretary gave permission for assessors to attend a day-long meeting twice a term. This move was significant, as it allowed Ms Isafa to plan for workshops that would not place further strain on teachers who were already doing work beyond their normal workload

### **Support for change agents- Ms Isafa's perspective**

I trained as both a Lower Primary Assessor (2002) and Upper Primary Assessor (2003). Both lots of training were very hard work and very intensive. I also acted as a facilitator and assessor in an ensuing training session in Goroka. Before attending this session I did a lot of reading of the documents to make sure I was well prepared. My involvement in

this assessor training workshop and all the extra reading really gave me the confidence to work as an assessor and to feel I could run in-services.

When I was doing my inspection visits, I often talked to teachers who were bypassing assessors to enrol in their DEP (I) directly with PNGEI. They were expressing some lack of confidence in the external assessors. I'm not sure why, but I think the reasons for the lack of confidence could have been that some in-service sessions did not seem to be successful, or that PNGEI staff were seen to be more knowledgeable and competent. I wanted to change these perceptions through developing assessors' confidence and competence. This would have two benefits. When teachers enrol as full time students, they leave their schools without a teacher for a long time. If more teachers enrol through assessors as external students, there would be less disruption to classes in NCD. But I also thought that better informed assessors could run better in-services for NCD and teachers' perceptions of them would also improve.

In 2004, I held 2 sessions and 5 sessions have been conducted in Terms 1 & 2, 2005. Some of these sessions I planned and ran on my own and some were planned and conducted together with the Regional Implementation Support Adviser for CRIP, Christine Stores. The topics for the sessions included;

- Awareness
- The Syllabus documents
- The role of an Assessor
- Programming- Practical Implications
- Timetabling and Programming
- Facilitating in-service- Literacy Enrichment
- Assessment

Two of the sessions included an emphasis on development and implementation of Facilitator's Guides for use in cluster and zone in-service in NCD.

In 2004, the sessions were large with the majority of the assessors attending the sessions. Attendance in 2005 has been less, but there is a consistent attendance by about 15 assessors who are very active in their own schools. I'm not sure of the reason for non attendance of the other assessors but some reasons could be: transfer of staff, lack of interest (not all of the assessors were very active), lack of support within the school or maybe communication difficulties.

I try to keep the sessions very practical in nature and I include both practical exercises and professional discussion. The teachers really enjoy the discussions.

If support from the education managers within NCD continues, I intend to continue the program for assessors. I believe the assessors gain a lot of knowledge which will lead to better informed in-service in NCD. Hopefully, teachers will also begin to look to the assessors for their enrolment in DEP (I).

### **Support for change agents- the assessors' perspective**

Assessors (N=13) within NCD were surveyed. Of these the majority (N=8) were trained to be upper primary assessors, 4 as lower primary assessors and 1 was trained as both an upper and lower primary assessor. Only 2 of the assessors have actually used their training to assess teachers for PNGEI. However, all the assessors have acted as facilitators of in-service in their respective clusters of schools and individual schools.

### **Knowledge and Confidence**

Assessors were asked to rate their knowledge or confidence, on a 5 point scale, in 5 areas. The top two ratings of 'good and very good' have been determined as the desirable levels. As the purpose of the Assessors Support group (ASG) sessions was to increase confidence and competence the numbers of assessors who rated themselves within these two ratings was compared before and after the ASG sessions. The first score relates to the score prior to NCD ASG sessions, the second score relates to the score following the NCD ASG sessions.

In every category there were increases in the levels of knowledge or the levels of confidence.

1. Knowledge of the syllabus documents.  
Before ASG                    15% good-very good  
After ASG                    76% good-very good
  
2. Knowledge of planning and programming  
Before ASG                    38% good-very good  
After ASG                    84% good-very good
  
3. Knowledge of assessment  
Before ASG                    18% good-very good  
After ASG                    69% good-very good
  
4. Confidence in Planning and in-service session  
Before ASG                    31% good-very good  
After ASG                    84% good-very good
  
5. Confidence in facilitating in-service sessions  
Before ASG                    46% good-very good  
After ASG                    92% good-very good

After the sessions there was only 1 assessor in one category (assessment) that indicated a rating below average. This compared with 13 assessors spread over all categories prior to the sessions. In all categories there was a significant increase in the numbers of assessors who felt their knowledge or confidence was good-very good.

Assessor's comments about the sessions indicated they had gained benefits in a number of different areas other than the development of skills and knowledge.

Some of these related to confidence attitude and morale.

*Assessor meetings boost my morale...I am now confident in facilitating the in-service handbook on the reform. (T1)*

*Assessors meetings are worthwhile or useful because it (sic) encourages assessors a lot (T2)*

*Assessor meetings have given us courage to stand firm to carry out our responsibilities... (T3)*

There is no financial benefit for assessors in running in-service so the benefits need to come in different ways. One comment was interesting in that it pointed to the recognition of the assessor's status within NCD.

*Approval given to us by the Assistant Secretary for the meetings to be conducted has increased our morale (T4)*

Others indicated there was benefit in terms of a developing collegiality.

*It helps assessors become more involved (T4)*

*They let us encourage one another to improve our role as assessors (T5)*

The results of this survey clearly indicate the benefits of bringing together this group of assessors to discuss issues, explore solutions, build knowledge and skills and provide collegial support. While all expressed some confidence and level of knowledge prior to the sessions, very few indicated that their level of knowledge was good or very good. This situation was significantly improved following the ASG sessions. However, it is obvious that the benefits do not stop with the increase in knowledge. Teachers feel supported and valued through their recognition and their discussions with colleagues.

### **Conclusion**

This paper has explored one effort to support change agents in NCD, Papua New Guinea. While it may have been hoped that the assessors would facilitate change through their efforts within the PNGEI program, it was not planned that they would become the prime in-service facilitators within a province or district. However, this has been how they have been used within NCD and the pattern has been repeated throughout many provinces. There was recognition in NCD that these 'change agents' required support in conducting in-service as well as further support in their own understanding of the curriculum.

The effort to support the change agents through the Assessor Support Group sessions, the development of facilitator's guides and through recognition has had a positive effect on the assessor's knowledge base, their confidence in conducting in-service and their sense of being valued.

Many provinces are using an approach to in-service that includes Training of Trainers (TOT), who may or may not have received assessor training, followed by school based or cluster based in-service. NCD is only one example of how support can achieve positive results for change agents. Many provinces are conducting very successful TOT sessions. The experience in NCD would suggest that the TOT sessions need to be very supportive, informative and focused on both the content of the in-service and the conduct of the in-service to ensure the change agents, can conduct quality in-service programs.

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