International Conference on Learner Diversity 2010

New Teachers’ Perception on the New Academic Staff Pedagogical Training Module’s Learning Logs – A Report from a Pilot Study

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Abstract

A pilot study on the Learning Logs was conducted by the Centre for Learning and Teaching (CLT) for new teachers in an institution for 6 months. The new teachers were placed in 3 groups. After a number of discussion sessions, the new teachers were asked to reflect and carry out action learning. CLT compiled all the Learning Logs. A link to a questionnaire was emailed to the new teachers at the end of the module. The feedback was analysed. The findings were used to determine whether the Learning Logs should be revised or revoked.

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Keywords : Pedagogical trainings, Learning logs, Reflect, New teachers training, Centre for learning and teaching

1. Introduction

The Malaysian Ministry of Education hire trained teachers to teach in public schools throughout Malaysia. These teachers have either graduated with a Bachelor in Education degree, BEd or completed their Diploma in Education, DipEd. They have undergone courses on pedagogy and went through practicum of at least 10 weeks in secondary schools throughout Malaysia. Once they have been certified as trained teachers, even though still a novice, these teachers are sent to secondary schools to teach. This is not the case for private educational institutions. The majority of teachers who were hired to teach are those who have no pedagogical training. They are those who recently graduated and seek employment as teachers. These teachers are normally asked to teach on the day they report for duty. Some are asked to teach 4 classes despite knowing that they do not have any pedagogical knowledge and training. These teachers are categorized as new in-service teachers.

In order to help these new in-service teachers cope with pedagogy, the Centre for Learning and Teaching was assigned the task of providing such trainings. Prior to 2010, the trainings designed by the Centre for Learning and Teaching were more lecture base. New in-service teachers were required to attend several lecture-cum-training sessions of 2 to 3 hours set on different days. The training module aimed to assist new in-service teachers in their day to day teaching. The pedagogical training consisted of various lectures/trainings ranging from Classroom Management to Web 2.0. The training module were deemed unsatisfactory by the Administration for 2 reasons: (1) the in-service teachers were unable to implement what they had learned in their lecture-cum-training sessions and, (2) students complained about these teachers’ teaching method and lack in content. Hence, the Centre was given
another task to design a new pedagogical training program. The Learning Logs was modelled after Cambridge International Diploma for Teacher Trainers (CIDTT) and based on action learning. The Learning Logs is a 12-module pedagogical training covering from preparation right up to evaluation. The pilot study will be used to determine whether Learning Logs is to be revised or revoked.

2. Review of Literature

Teacher training programs are classified into 2 categories: (1) pre-service and (2) in-service (Ismail et al., 2009). Pre-service training program is normally more academic and based on specific curricula. These types of trainings are usually provided by formal educational institutions such as the Universities. In-service training program is a training program for teachers who have begun teaching yet have not gone through the pedagogical modules or under-trained. In-service training programs can be in the form of workshops, seminar, conferences, short courses and long courses. It could be a training program with credit or non-credit (Bagwandeep & Louw, 1993).

Babione & Shea (2005) stated that new teachers are lacking in their ability to practice what they have learned. The new teachers are also unable to make reflective decision to the framework of their actual learning. Therefore, it is critical that these new teachers acquire the necessary skills for them to be able to teach effectively and efficiently (Rosenberg, Sindela & Hardman, 2004). Oduolowu (2007) emphasised that the teaching force is the foundation of excellence and significance of education at all levels. Training programs are meant to assist the growth and development of individual teachers into becoming full-fledged teachers. These programs should also provide them with the necessary skills and professional capabilities to motivate students to learn, and to aid them into acquiring the correct concepts, values and attitudes needed, not only to manage classroom instruction but also to contribute to the society and community. Therefore, teacher training programs are designed to generate a teacher who is highly motivated, sensitive, conscientious and able to effectively and professionally handle their students so that these students could become excellent in their education and be able to contribute to the betterment of the society.

Darling -Hammond (2005) stated that teacher education should not only impart knowledge but where teacher trainers are able to diagnose problems, understand the learning process and have a vast knowledge of teaching methods. Teacher trainers should also emphasize that teaching is a process where it is both learner-centered and learning-centered. Mandolini (2007) wrote teacher education or training must involve constant personal involvement of teacher trainer and new teachers or teacher trainees. This is in sync with active education where practical and competencies cannot be taught in the classroom but needed to be experienced by the new teachers. Communicative skills and principles of holistic framework such as integration, ecology and spirituality cannot be taught in the classroom (Pagani, 2003; Salite & Pipere, 2006). Thus, in-service training programs are crucial in the development of new teachers as it improves their skills, knowledge and performance competencies (Renitta et al., 2004).

3. Methodology

There were 13 new in-service teachers who joined the institution in late 2009 and early 2010. They were grouped together based on their campus location. There were 3 groups; Alpha, Beta and Gamma. Alpha group consisted of 6 new teachers, Beta group consisted of 4 new teachers and Gamma group consisted of 5 new teachers. New teachers from the same campus were selected randomly and placed into Beta and Gamma groups. Table 1 shows the Learning Logs which consisted of 12 modules and their learning outcomes.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 1. Learning logs module and learning outcomes</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Learning Logs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Module 1</td>
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</table>
Module 2  Practice 1  At the end of this module, you should be able to:
   a. present information to your students,
   b. give instruction and demonstration,
   c. use visual aids effectively.

Module 3  Measure 1  At the end of this module, you should be able to:
   a. prepare and use formative assessment
   b. analyse formative assessment data.

Module 4  Preparation 2  At the end of this module, you should be able to:
   a. plan content delivery of resources.

Module 5  Practice 2  At the end of this module, you should be able to:
   a. supervise learning activities
   b. manage the flow of activities
   c. manage the learning environment

Module 6  Measure 2  At the end of the module, you should be able to:
   a. provide feedback of progress
   b. maintain records of learners' progress

Module 7  Preparation 3  At the end of this module, you should be able to:
   a. preparing learning materials
   b. planning for evaluation
   c. preparing for learning environment

Module 8  Practice 3  At the end of this module, you should be able to:
   a. motivating/encouraging learners
   b. guiding/supporting learners

Module 9  Measure 3  At the end of this module, you should be able to:
   a. preparing summative assessment
   b. using summative assessment
   c. analysing summative data

Module 10  Evaluation 3  At the end of this module, you should be able to:
   a. evaluate learning using evaluation for improvement
   b. planning further evaluation

Module 11  Measure 4  At the end of this module, you should be able to:
   a. provide feedback on your students' achievements
   b. maintain records about learners' progress

Module 12  Evaluation 4  At the end of this module, you should be able to:
   a. identify goals
   b. specify actions

The new in-service teachers met with the trainer from the Centre for Learning and Teaching on a weekly basis for 6 months. It took longer than 12 weeks due to the different programs having different semester breaks. New teachers were required to upload their Learning Logs into their google doc and share it with the trainer. The trainer will go through the new teachers’ responses and provide feedback prior to the discussion sessions.

During the discussion sessions, the trainer went through the Learning Logs to clarify parts of the Learning Logs where the new in-service teachers have difficulty with. The teachers were then required to reflect on their experience in the classroom and what they gained from the discussion into a column found in the Learning Logs. Since the Learning Logs is an action learning type of pedagogical training, the new teachers were to implement what they had learned into their teaching. At the end of the 12th module, a link to a questionnaire was emailed to all new in-service teachers to get feedback on the Learning Logs.
4. Results and Discussion

The feedback to the questionnaire was collected. The data consisted of options and free responses. The data was analysed and the results were discussed in the following order:

4.1 Question 1: How did the new teachers feel about the Learning Logs?

Table 2 shows the percentage of the responses based on the options given in the questionnaire. 69% of the new teachers liked the Learning Logs while 31% disliked the Learning Logs. Those who liked the Learning Logs can be divided into those who found the Learning Logs “ok” and those who really like the Learning Logs. 54% of the new teachers found the Learning Logs “ok” and only 15% found they liked the Learning Logs. Out of the 31% who disliked the Learning Logs, 8% said they were totally against it while 23% claimed that they dislike it.

Table 2. Responses on how the new teachers felt about the learning logs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Choice of responses</th>
<th>No. of new teachers</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I'm ok with it.</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>54%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I like it.</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I love it.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I hate it.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I dislike it.</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I'm totally against it.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Below are the explanations given by the new teachers on their choice of option.

I'm ok with it. \textit{I am ok with it because some of the learning logs are quite useful.}

I like it. \textit{It was a great way to get the staff initiated into the teaching expectations/culture at the institution... However felt a bit long-drawn out as opposed to a 2-day induction program.}

I love it. \textit{Nil}

I hate it. \textit{Nil}

I dislike it. \textit{I didn't like the learning log. I don't see a clear impact by going through this process. It was said that if we don't finish this, then the management will not confirm us. That was really bad and we are forced to do it.}

I'm totally against it. \textit{It will be better if we just attend a training instead of searching of all the information by ourselves.}

The teachers who liked the Learning Logs found it useful and helped them to know the institution that hired them. They also obtained an insight on what is expected of them by the institution, their responsibilities and the different types of students attending their classes.

Table 3 shows the level of difficulty the new teachers felt pertaining to the questions in the Learning Logs. 62% of the new teachers found the Learning Logs tough, 23% found it misleading while 15% found it easy. None of the new teachers found the questions in the Learning Logs either extremely tough or extremely easy.
Table 3: Learning Logs’ Level of difficulty

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level of difficulty</th>
<th>No. of new teachers</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Extremely tough.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tough.</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>62%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Misleading.</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Easy</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extremely easy.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The explanation to the choices made by the new teachers above are as the following.

a. Extremely tough.  Nil
b. Tough. Many questions required clarifications at the weekly meetings... However after some hints and guidance from TL Dept, they became easier/more straightforward
c. Misleading. Only after the questioned are explained then only I could understand.
d. Easy Most of the questions were easy for me. There were a few that were not clear but after discussion with the supervisor I knew what the questions want.
e. Extremely easy. Nil

Even though 69% of the new teachers liked the Learning Logs, some still found the questions difficult.

4.2 Question 2: Did the new teachers find the Learning Logs useful?

In Table 4, it is found that 77% of the new teachers found the Learning Logs useful and 23% found the Learning Logs not useful.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Usefulness of Learning Logs</th>
<th>No. of new teachers</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>77%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The reasons given by the new teachers on the usefulness of the Learning Logs are shown below.

a. Yes It gives us direction/guidance on the expectations of teachers and students.
b. No Frankly it is no. The discussion with my colleagues and the trainer did help me but not the writing portion. Seriously, it is a waste of time or maybe I was not good in my time management.

The new teachers found the Learning Logs useful in preparing them for classes, selecting materials for their students, and able to identify their learners but most of them dislike the reflective writing part.

4.3 Question 3: Did the Learning Logs help the new teachers in their preparation for their classroom teaching?

Table 5 shows that 77% of the new teachers agreed that the Learning Logs did help them in their preparation for classroom teaching while 23% disagreed.
Table 5. Learning logs are helpful to new teachers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Learning Logs are helpful</th>
<th>No. of new teachers</th>
<th>percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>77%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The reasons given are as follows:

a. Yes  
   *The tips and sharing sessions gave us many new ideas on how to manage a classroom.*

b. No  
   *I have not been able to fully use what I have learnt everyday due to lack of time.*

The new teachers found that the Learning Logs are helping them start their teaching career but some of them did not have the time to implement it in class.

4.4 *Question 4: What are the challenges faced by new teachers while completing their learning logs?*

There are 3 main areas identified by the new teachers where they faced the most challenges. The areas are shown below:

a. Time constraint  
   *Time-consuming factor.*

b. Questions  
   *To understand the question given. Sometimes it's pretty tough.*

c. Implementation & monitoring  
   *To implement the plan and monitor the progress.*

There were 62% of the new teachers who managed to overcome the challenges they faced while completing the Learning Logs. Another 38% did not manage to overcome the challenges they faced while completing the Learning Logs.

The new teachers’ response to the question on how they overcame the challenges they faced are shown below:

a. Yes  
   *Tried to do them regularly/consistently than let them pile up. After I let four logs pile up it took me 4 hours to finish them!*

b. No  
   *I have started to implement some of the things mentioned, but many things mentioned can only get the result much later.*

The new teachers were asked the kind of support they obtained while completing the Learning Logs are classified into guidance and technology. Their responses are as the following:

a. Guidance  
   *My Colleagues were generous in explaining the questions to me and we shared how to handle hardcore students and about teaching styles.*

b. Technology  
   *Article related from the internet.*

5. Conclusion

Learning Logs is a relatively new form of New Teacher training module introduced in one private educational institution. The main purpose of the Learning Logs is to guide the new teachers in areas such as pedagogy, lesson planning and assessments. The Learning Logs is based on action learning where as the new teachers are required to be actively engaged in discussions and to consistently reflect on their day-to-day teaching experience. The Centre for Learning and Teaching held discussion sessions with the new teachers on weekly basis. During these discussion
sessions, new teachers clarify some of the questions they found difficult to understand, share the problems they faced in their classrooms and at the same time, learned new teaching methodologies.

The Learning Logs was only introduced in January 2010. They mirrored Cambridge International Diploma for Teachers and Trainers (CIDTT), a diploma in teaching for those without pedagogical training.

From the data gathered and analysed, it is found that the Learning Logs have successfully helped new in-service teachers to: (1) prepare their lessons, (2) motivate their students, (3) know their students, (4) use appropriate teaching methodology, and (5) choose the correct assessment.

However, there are several areas in the Learning Logs which needed to be revised. These areas are:

1. The questions for each module, and
2. The length of Learning Logs (12 modules) to minimize writing.

Some suggestions from the new in-service teachers to improve on the Learning Logs include the following components:

1. Classroom observations,
2. Character Building, and
3. Teaching Methodology.

The use of Google doc during the pilot study makes it easier for the participants and the trainer to communicate with one another. Both parties were able to view the module and gave feedback in real time by using the “Share” function in Google doc. The Google doc spread sheet could then be exported into pdf or excel or words doc format. Hence, for future trainings, it is advisable to use Google doc for real time communication.

Even though this pilot study has shown that the Learning Logs helped the new in-service teachers obtained the knowledge on pedagogy, the final decision to revise or revoke the Learning Logs will fall into the hands of the management of the educational institution.

6. References


Rosenberg, M. S. (2004). Preparing highly qualified teachers for students with emotional or behavioral disorders. Behavioral Disorders, 38, 266.