

School Self Review: A Reflective Management Tool

Malcolm Hebden discusses how to carry out a School Self Review. This article is based on ongoing work begun in the Bell Language Schools by Malcolm Hebden, Robin Davis and Howard Thomas and was the subject of a talk given at the IATEFL Conference in Brighton, 1997.

Introduction

The talk tried to answer two questions:

How can you have continual development and improvement in your school?

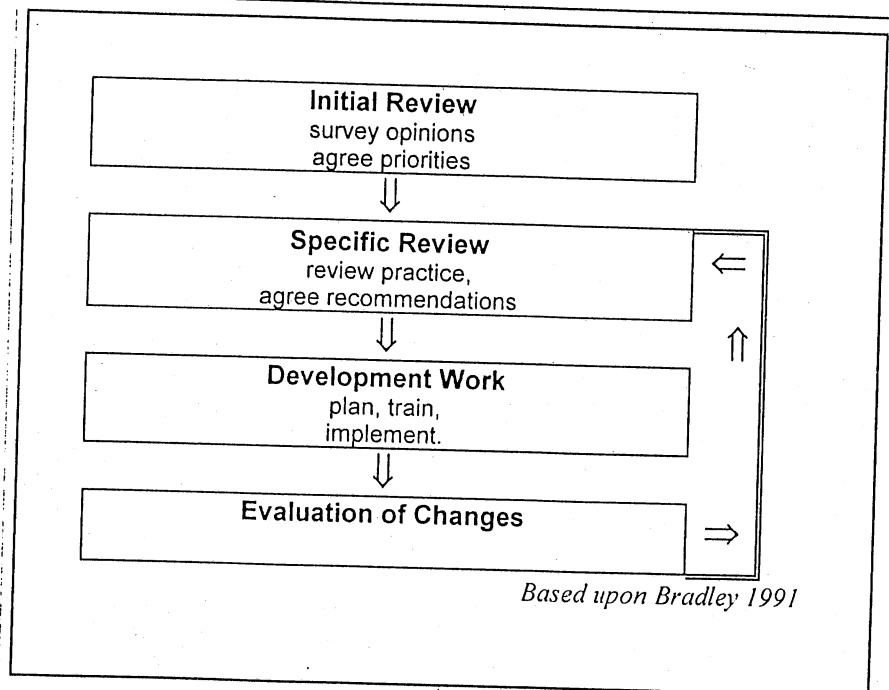
How can the tutorial staff be involved in this process?

The suggested solution was the introduction of a process of school self review.

School Review: What Is It?

It is important to distinguish between School Self Review and Student Satisfaction Procedures. The process of School Self Review is one of staff consultation. It involves reflection on all areas of the school's organization and activities in order to highlight areas for improvement. It is perhaps best understood as a form of organizational appraisal in which the staff focus on the strengths and weaknesses of the school and make recommendations for development.

This process became popular in the State School system in Britain during the eighties at which time a number of reviews were published (see Howard Bradley 1991 *Staff Development* Falmer Press). The following is heavily based upon the ideas in this earlier work. The stages in our process are as follows:



The initial review involves a general assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of the academic organization of the school. The aim is to survey the opinions of all relevant staff and to agree priorities for areas to be improved. Having agreed these priorities a more specific review of a particular area is usually necessary to agree actual recommendations for change that will improve performance. These agreed recommendations then have to become reality through a process of planning, costing, budgeting, training, etc. leading to implementation. The changes then need to be evaluated.

Why Review Your School ?

The reasons for introducing School Self Review can be summarized as follows:

- no organization can be static - improvement involves a continuous process of evaluation and development
- it is a tool for local management to deal with local issues (this is particularly true in multi-school organizations)
- it helps develop strategies to improve local academic programmes
- it provides an opportunity to

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- reflect on quality
- it operates bottomup - not topdown
- ownership is by the staff
- negative attitudes (staffroom moans) can be harnessed for constructive use
- it develops collaboration and collegiality

How We Introduced School Self Review

As seen in the diagram above there is an initial or general review in order to establish priorities. To focus minds and to provide guidance we created a questionnaire designed to be completed in groups which would produce a maximum of reflection and discussion. The focus in this review is academic but non-academic areas such as accommodation could easily be included. Our initial questionnaire has 7 topic areas and 7 separate review modules which look at these areas in more detail. These 7 areas reflect the academic organizational structure of our schools and can be seen below. These would presumably vary according to the organizational structure of the school being reviewed.

There is therefore a section in the initial questionnaire and a full module on each of the 7 topics.

To illustrate this I have reproduced below, in reduced format, a sample section from the initial questionnaire and subsequently the relevant module for that topic:

Example of a Module: Teaching and Teacher Development

The following appears in the initial questionnaire to encourage reflection on the quality of teaching and teacher development:

If the response to this part of the initial

questionnaire was that this was an area in which improvement was thought necessary then this would be the focus of a subsequent session at which a longer questionnaire (i.e. the relevant module) would be used. The format of the questionnaires involving numerical grading was one we agreed as authors but a number of other formats could be used. We have found that what is of most importance is the discussion which the questions prompted and the suggestions which were subsequently put forward. The longer questionnaire for this topic is reproduced on the next page.

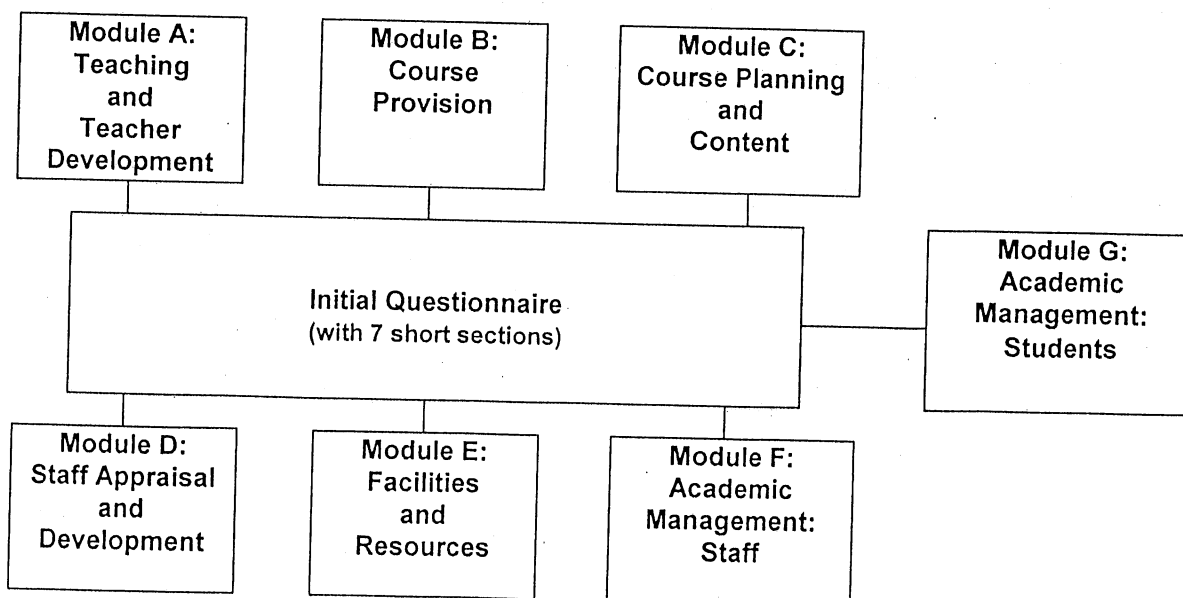
A. Teaching and Teacher development

Grade the overall standard of teaching in your school in the areas below as indicated:
1 poor, 2 satisfactory, 3 good, 4 excellent

skills (L.S.R &W)	1	2	3	4
language (Gram, Pron, Voc)	1	2	3	4
special subjects	1	2	3	4
use of technology	1	2	3	4

Grade the teacher development in your school in the areas below as indicated:
1 poor, 2 satisfactory, 3 good, 4 excellent

the quality	1	2	3	4
the variety	1	2	3	4
the relevance	1	2	3	4
the quantity	1	2	3	4
staff involvement	1	2	3	4



BELL SCHOOL SELF-REVIEW MODULE A: TEACHING AND TEACHER DEVELOPMENT

1 Grade the quality of teaching skills (e.g. per course type, in your current course) in the areas below as indicated.
1 poor, 2 satisfactory, 3 good, 4 excellent.

listening				
speaking	1	2	3	4
reading	1	2	3	4
writing	1	2	3	4
pronunciation and intonation	1	2	3	4
grammar	1	2	3	4
communicative behaviour (strategic competence, communication strategies etc.)	1	2	3	4
vocabulary	1	2	3	4
project work	1	2	3	4
self-access training	1	2	3	4
special subjects	1	2	3	4
classroom management	1	2	3	4
assessment and progress testing	1	2	3	4
using video in the classroom	1	2	3	4
using video recording	1	2	3	4
using CALL activities	1	2	3	4
using the language laboratory	1	2	3	4
using the Study Centre	1	2	3	4

2 Now list what you feel are the school's teaching strengths. (Include any areas not listed above.) (More space is provided.)

3 Now list what you feel are the school's teaching weaknesses. (Include any areas not listed above.) (More space is provided.)

4 Identify the areas in which teacher development is currently needed. If you give a grade below 4, please give explanatory comments and suggestions. (NB non-teaching specific staff development is covered in Module D)

1 high priority, 2 medium priority, 3 low priority, 4 unnecessary.

listening				
speaking	1	2	3	4
reading	1	2	3	4
writing	1	2	3	4
pronunciation and intonation	1	2	3	4
grammar	1	2	3	4
communicative behaviour (strategic competence, communication strategies etc.)	1	2	3	4
vocabulary	1	2	3	4
project work	1	2	3	4
self-access training	1	2	3	4
special subjects	1	2	3	4
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using video in the classroom	1	2	3	4
using video recording	1	2	3	4
using CALL activities	1	2	3	4
using the language laboratory	1	2	3	4
using the Study Centre	1	2	3	4

5 Grade the following as strategies to remedy the weaknesses identified above:

peer observation				
observation by senior staff	1	2	3	4
team teaching	1	2	3	4
classroom action research	1	2	3	4
other experimentation	1	2	3	4
materials writing projects	1	2	3	4
inset sessions	1	2	3	4
ideas swapping sessions	1	2	3	4
input from colleagues outside Bell	1	2	3	4
attendance at courses and conferences	1	2	3	4

6 Comments (Include any other suggestions for improving teaching standards): (More space is provided)

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The content of the review, if it is to be comprehensive, needs to cover not only the activity but also the systems created by management. The review is therefore a collaborative task and involves an open and frank exchange of views which operates in all directions much as with 360 degree appraisal. How easy it is to introduce this process in other schools will depend very much on the existing organizational culture of the school. Issues to consider may include: making time for staff to take part in the process, paying staff to do so, training staff to take part in the process, and assessing the costs involved.

Implementation and Evaluation

The discussion stage is, of course, only the beginning and just as with appraisal interviews it is the follow up work by school staff on implementing development and reviewing that

development which makes the process effective. A major difference with School Self Review is that the changes have been initiated by the staff rather than imposed upon them as with so much that we do. As a result the implementation of change tends to be viewed by the staff as a positive process.

Results

This process is now in operation in our schools and while we are still developing the process itself, a continual development and improvement in the academic organization of the school, initiated by staff review, is taking place. For example, following the use of the above module in my school we have introduced and supported voluntary peer observation, re-organized staff development to provide for different levels of staff needs, increased the

number of staff development sessions by providing more optional topics, and focused the topics more on improving the quality of specific areas of teaching. A final point to make is that School Self Review is not a quick fix solution but one that needs time to be effective. While the above changes are happening the staff are involved in reviewing further academic areas so that change is incremental and continuous.

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