**Professional development……..Which model?**

By The Antigua and Barbuda National Accreditation Board

Continuing professional development, as pointed out in our last article, is a necessity for teachers and other professionals. Institutional, societal, technological and other changes demand the constant upgrading and re-training of persons. Yet, there is no ‘one size fits all’ template which can be used for continuing professional development. The type of institution, the type of training needed, the type of trainees and the cost of the training are all critical factors when formulating a professional development policy.

**Models of professional development**

There are several models of professional development which schools and other institutions can adopt or adapt as their unique situations might dictate. There are variations of off-site and on site models which have been used in institutions with differing results. Any model, tailored to the particular experiences of the institution, when used effectively, will make the professional development process more meaningful.

On-site models have been in existence for a very long time, both in formal and informal ways. On one level, this includes ‘on the job’ training where staff members learn from more experienced practitioners or supervisors who oversee their work and offer practical advice. Coaching and mentoring relationships are prime examples of how individuals can develop professionally while remaining on the work-site. This type of professional development can prove to be a beneficial situation for the trainer, the trainee as well as the institution. The trainer is honing his or her leadership skills and in so doing, is showcasing management potential, the trainee benefits from the knowledge shared and the institution benefits from two better equipped staff members.

On another level, the on-site models may include more structured ‘in-service courses’ which target a particular group or groups within the institution. These courses provide opportunities for staff members to increase their knowledge base, develop new skills and competencies. Practical examples and demonstrations are easy to implement as participants are right on site, and this model has the added advantage of being extremely cost effective. There are some other factors which must be taken into consideration, however. On-site courses tend to be insular, affording little cross-fertilization of ideas, since participants and facilitators are from the same institution. Additionally, on-site programmes do not usually lead to formal certification, so this is another limitation of this model. Professional development opportunities which offer some type of certification are more appealing to employees and so they are more willing to participate.

Off-site models may be more suitable for other institutions and do provide more formal opportunities for development. In one variation of this model, participants are sent at an off-site facility where training is conducted for persons from various institutions. This training exercise, if conducted during working hours, will of necessity, involve staff members having to be away from regular duties for a period of time as determined by the length of the training undertaken. One of the benefits of this off-site model of professional development that must be noted however, is the coming together and sharing of ideas between participants from a variety of backgrounds and experiences. Additionally, these formal courses pursued in such off-site settings are more likely to be recognized and certified.

The off-site model also includes opportunities for professional development under other circumstances. Short overseas courses, management training workshops, middle management seminars and summer vacation courses for those in teaching, are other examples of off-site opportunities. One disadvantage of the off-site model summer vacation courses for those in teaching, however, is the cost associated with it.

In our next article, ABNAB will discuss the issue of cost of professional development. Who bears the cost? Is it worth the investment?