SAMPLE TEACHER WORKSHOP: LARGE CLASS SIZE

Because emergencies displace children, destroy buildings, and stop some teachers from teaching, classes that do run are often overflowing with students. While an ideal class size is around 30 children, it is not unheard of to have three times that number in class. This can make learning an unpleasant – or impossible – experience for children.

Participants: 15 primary school classroom teachers
Time frame: One day, part of in-service training series
Location: Primary school classroom and recreation ground
Materials: Ball, food ingredients, flipchart, markers, pens, blank paper

Objective: Teachers will learn basic strategies to cope with large student numbers in class

9:00 INTRODUCTIONS, including workshop purpose and schedule

Ball toss (15 mins) Participants stand in a circle. One teacher holds the ball and says, ‘my name is Xxxxx, and I will throw the ball to….’ As they speak, they throw the ball, the next person catches it, and they add their name. This continues until everyone has caught the ball and said their name. Then participants repeat the pattern, this time saying the next person’s name first. Ask the group to go faster and faster. Once this is mastered, reverse the pattern.

9:30 WHAT ARE LARGE CLASSES LIKE?

What are the challenges and opportunities? (30 mins) Participants reflect on their own experience (as teachers and learners) to identify problems and advantages of large classes.
- Challenges – different ages, needs, abilities and past learning experiences
- Opportunities – children develop independent and co-operative learning skills

10:00 HOW DO CHILDREN LEARN?

‘Cooking’ exercise (45 mins) Introduce child-centred and active learning approaches. To illustrate the difference, one simple idea is to ‘teach’ the group to make a sandwich, or a local dish. First teach by rote learning, asking participants to listen and repeat the process used to make the food. Next, ask several members to take the ingredients you provide. Guide them through the actual process of making the food. Discuss the learning differences, focusing on:
- the role of the child – active learning through exploration
- the role of the teacher in facilitating this process.

BREAK (15 mins)

11:00 STRATEGIES

Idea brainstorm (60 mins) Participants brainstorm for strategies that they use when teaching large numbers of students at once. Choose three of the ideas for small groups to explore in further depth and then report back on to the large group. Some ideas that may be interesting are:
- Individual and Group Work – Participants identify activities appropriate for the following groupings: individual work, small groups, whole class
- Arranging the classroom – Participants plan alternative layouts which include areas where children can work independently, in small groups and all together
- Involving community – How can families support children’s learning in the classroom and at home? What are obstacles to involving community? How might they be overcome?
Teaching-learning resources (30 mins) What resources are available? Give examples, showing their use for different activities. Ask participants for suggestions and discuss the following:

- Making resources from recycled materials
- Using the local environment in teaching and learning activities
- Creating and managing a learning centre for independent study
- Involving children and parents in making and managing resources

12:30 LUNCH (60 mins)

13:30 WORKING WITH CHILDREN

Using games (30 mins) Go outside and play a large group game from the local culture. Talk with participants about what children might learn from the game. Ask them to make a list of other large group games that could be used to help children learn and keep them occupied.

Managing behaviour (30 mins) Introduce the following techniques through asking three groups to perform role-plays. Participants should share their own experiences as well.

- Positive behaviour management such as positive feedback, star chart, etc
- Involving children in agreeing and upholding class rules
- Involving children in arranging the classroom, developing resources, choosing activities

Inclusion (15 mins) Participants consider the following questions: Who might the excluded groups be in your class? What are the obstacles to their inclusion in a large class? How can the environment be adapted to become more inclusive?

BREAK (15 mins)

15:00 GETTING ORGANISED

Planning for large classes (60 mins) Participants work together to devise lesson plans for a large class for either a day or full week of teaching, depending on time available.

- What are the learning aims for different groups in the class?
- What activities will be used for individuals, a small group, the whole class?
- Will students have a balance of activities guided by teacher and peer support each day?
- Will the teacher be able to observe each child at some point during the day or week?

16:00–16:30 CLOSING

Wrap-up (30 mins) Share the tips below for large classes. Ask participants to add to the list, based on today’s discussions. Everyone should also fill out an evaluation form before leaving.

Tips on How to Manage a Large Class

1. When teaching a new or difficult skill, teach the class in groups of 15–20, instead of trying to teach the whole class at once.
2. Assign pupils to small groups of 5–7 and give them simple tasks or projects to do together.
3. Train all the pupils in how to lead a group. Give everyone the chance to be group leader.
4. When groups are working on assignments together, have them sit in a circle.
5. Match more advanced students with those who need help, asking them to mentor the other.
6. Play large group games with children that can teach them basic skills.
7. Establish simple rules of acceptable behaviour for everybody to observe.

Adapted from Pasigna, Aida L, Tips on How to Manage a Large Class, Improving Educational Quality Project, Institute for International Research, Inc, 1997
8. Train students to complete class chores as part of the daily routine.