



CONTINUING PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT OF TEACHERS

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Abstract

Knowledge is exploding and new technology is emerging so fast putting challenges before the teachers and learners. As India strives to achieve universal primary enrolment (MDG2) and implements the Right to Free and Compulsory Education Act (2009), well-qualified and effective teachers remain at the heart of school reform. The need for adequate preparation and professional development of teachers has been recognized the world over with the realization that the teacher' conceptions and attitudes play an important role in the teaching learning process. Professional institutions are struggling to find ways of evaluating professional development. This article has two principal objectives. The first is to highlight the skills required for successful, lifelong professional development. The second objective is to suggest strategies and methodologies that can assist in the acquisition of professional development skills. Here, professional development is considered not a product or an outcome - it is a process.

Key Words: Professional Development, Skills, Teacher

Introduction

Knowledge is exploding and new technology is emerging so fast putting challenges before the teachers and learners. As India strives to achieve universal primary enrolment (MDG2) and implements the Right to Free and Compulsory Education Act (2009) well-qualified and effective teachers remain at the heart of school reform. In India, the importance of the teacher was recognized by the Education Commission as early as 1964-66 which observed that “of all the

factors that influence quality of education... the quality, competence and character of teachers is undoubtedly the most significant”.

Teachers have started thinking that no doubt, tomorrow will be interesting, but it will challenge them as a professional. To keep pace with the change, teachers don't want to do the same old tasks. They want new experiences, so that they can continue to grow as a professional. Furthermore, by continuing to learn, they can re-awaken part of themselves and reconnect with the world that their students inhabit. They can rediscover the frustrations of not being able to understand fundamental concepts or master essential skills, and they can again experience the joy of success and the fear of failure. They can remind themselves of the value of the great teacher and of great teaching. And this can only happen if they are ready to learn in new situations. In any case, learning is good for the soul. It leads to regeneration and growth, without which our intellects will wither. It leads to a questioning approach and to reflection on experiences from which both teachers, and their students, benefit - and if that questioning and reflection take place in view of the students, then it will also influence their own approach. Of course, there are many other reasons for signing up to continuing professional development.

The need for adequate preparation and professional development of teachers has been recognized the world over with the realization that the teacher’ conceptions and attitudes play an important role in the teaching learning process. In India, the importance of the teacher was recognized by the Education Commission as early as 1964-66 which observed that “of all the factors that influence quality of education... the quality, competence and character of teachers is undoubtedly the most significant”. Research evidence from other countries indicates that professional development of teachers is significantly related to students’ achievement (National Mathematics Advisory Panel, 2008). There is recognition of the need for some kind of specialized training and preparation of teachers at the tertiary level of education beyond the regular university education. (this volume).

In India efforts have been on continuously over the decades to expand access to schooling for a rapidly growing population. As a consequence, the teacher education system has also expanded vastly but unevenly with some states still having inadequate infrastructure to train teachers. The curriculum and instruction time available do not provide enough opportunity for the student teachers to reflect on their experiences and prepare them to face the ground realities of teaching in a school (National Council of Teacher Education [NCTE], 2009). This adds to the

pressure to provide in service education to more than 5.5 million teachers at the elementary level alone at regular intervals while teacher education institutes grapple with “lack of resources, infrastructure, training materials and professional expertise” (Walia, 2004). The NCF 2005 advocates a shift away from a textbook centered rote learning approach, to one that emphasizes the link between schools Building on the success of the decades long MTTTS programme (See Venkataraman, Sholapurkar & Sarma, this volume) the Pedagogical Training for Mathematics Teachers (PTMT) programme has been launched in 2012 under the MTTTS umbrella. It is aimed at providing a national platform for teachers at the Undergraduate level to improve teaching methods and share pedagogical insights.

Although ideas such as child-centered learning are not new, NCF 2005 has been effective in changing the discourse on education in a system-wide manner. Teachers are now more open to the idea that their teaching approach needs to undergo fundamental change. However, there is very little clarity about what this change really amounts to in terms of classroom teaching and learning, and schools and teachers look for help as they try to interpret the message of the new curriculum framework. In terms of implementation of NCF 2005, besides a significant change in the textbooks, administrators of major school systems have tried to implement reform measures through directives and circulars.

However, it is widely acknowledged that in order to support change in classroom teaching there has to be system-wide preparation involving not only teachers, but also other stakeholders like administrators, principals, education officers as well as parents. This situation creates a potential for change as well as a challenge by way of designing in service teacher professional development that addresses teachers’ needs to comprehend the vision of teaching and learning as articulated in the NCF.

Recommendations about Continuing Professional development in various documents

Recognizing the importance of teachers in improving the quality of education, the Kothari Commission (1964-66) recommended “securing a sufficient supply of high quality recruits to the teaching profession” by increasing the status of teachers, “providing them with the Best possible professional preparation” and “creating satisfactory conditions of work” (GOI, 1966, Ch 3, Sec 3.01). To improve teacher education in the country the commission recommended professionalization of teacher education and urged that isolation of teacher Education institutes from university life, from schools and from one another be removed.

It recommended reorganization of teacher education programmes at all levels, including the reorientation of subject knowledge and improvement in methods of teaching and Evaluation. The Kothari Commission recognized the need for the continuing professional education of teachers and called for “the organization of a large scale, systematic and coordinated programme of in service education, so that every teacher would be able to receive at least two or three months of in service education in every five years of service” (GOI, 1966, Ch 4, para 4.56). It recommended that continuing in service education be based on research inputs. Resource persons for teacher professional development were recommended to be from diverse backgrounds – university professors, people from industry and agriculture and practicing teachers and supervisors. The in service course should be in the workshop mode where materials are developed which teachers take with them for use in classrooms. The commission noted that what teachers need most “is a change in the climate of schools, an atmosphere conducive to educational research and enquiry”.

The New Education Policy of 1986 attempted to break the separation between pre and in service teacher education by considering both as phases of a continuous process thus acknowledging the need for career long professional development of teachers (GOI, 1986a, para 8.17). The Acharya Ramamurthy committee in 1990 (GOI, 1990) emphasized the role of actual field experience during internship to foster professional development of teachers. The Committee explicitly stated that “in service and refresher courses should be related to the specific needs of the teachers. in service education should take due care of the future needs of teacher growth; evaluation and follow up should be part of the scheme”.

Objectives

This article has two principal objectives. The first is to highlight the skills required for successful, lifelong professional development. These skills, like many others in life, can only be acquired by coaching, by practice and by role modeling. The second objective, therefore, is to suggest strategies and methodologies that can assist in the acquisition of professional development skills.

Perspective

For many people in higher education, professional development is synonymous with vocational diploma, certificate courses or with post-graduate qualifications. However, professional development is more than training or continuing education - increasingly it is recognized that

learning also occurs at the work-place through firsthand experience. Work-based learning experiences focus on solving real-world problems. The time and effort invested in the learning are immediately rewarded through completing the task in hand and the usefulness of such learning, together with the short-term nature of the rewards, improves the motivation to learn. Professional development therefore covers a wide range of learning situations. The teachers might add the learning and development that take place when they are transferred to new situations, or when they take on new responsibilities within their existing job functions. Professional development also includes the full range of intellectual discipline, from conceptual understanding to the practical application of knowledge. The informal and ad-hoc nature of much professional development poses problems for teachers as educationalist. How do they evaluate and assess professional development? How can they recognize and reward it? Explosion of knowledge and technological revolution in the field of education has created new challenges for the teachers and learners as well. These challenging situations require new approaches to teaching and learning, and should make use of modern information technologies, adapted and adopted for teaching and learning.

In the present paper, the researcher has reviewed various approaches and strategies to show the importance of both continuing professional development and the skills that enable it to take place. The researcher has defined the terms 'professional development' and 'professional development skills'. Finally, the researcher has identified various methods, techniques to deliver relevant lifelong learning. These methods has also provided the training regime through which one can become skilled or professional development skills can be developed and/ or harnessed.

Need and significance of the study

Professional development is not a new concept, but it is becoming increasingly important. The continuing pace of change in Teacher Education means that what we learned in our initial training courses soon becomes out dated and irrelevant. It has been estimated that the half-life of technical knowledge is about seven years. Furthermore, the amount of knowledge - and the amount of information - continues to increase. Teacher Education has become knowledge intensive: we have entered the knowledge-based economy.

In this new world, it is impossible for us to know that prevails all around, yet access to the knowledge base is increasingly readily available. So what will make us good teacher

educationists, rather than poor ones, is that our knowledge is more relevant, and more current, and is applied more efficiently and effectively.

The classroom environment has also changed and with the result that content, methods and materials are changed demanding a wider range of skills. The teachers increasingly work in teams on projects and much of what they do is virtual rather than tangible. As one project ends, another begins, and so they move from project to project, from team to team, and from one workplace to another. Indeed, for many, the increasingly itinerant nature of work leads them into several different careers during their working lives. These are strong, compelling reasons for professional development skills, but there are many more as shown below:

- A better informed and more sophisticated public is demanding a higher duty of care and level of service from professionals.
- Linked to this is the increasing risk of claims for negligence from professionals deemed to have 'failed' in their duty or given poor advice.
- Within organizations, modern quality management systems demand that qualified people are in place to make decisions.

The researcher identified different sets of Professional skills from various resources. These sets of Professional Development skills are shown below

A Skill Set of its own.

A Skill set for teachers to Learn for themselves

A Skill Set Teachers need to make their students learn

If teachers do not respond to this challenge, they face the prospect of becoming irrelevant. If, as professionals, they assume that their old time-served competences will last a lifetime, they will find themselves becoming candidates for redundancy. The organizations they work for equally run the risk of failing to provide the new products and services that the market requires, resulting in decline. And so they need to learn continually as they work. This requires a skill set all of its own, a skill set they need to learn for themselves as teachers and mentors, and a skill set they need to instill into their students for their future benefit.

What is Professional Development?

Professional development is the process by which a person maintains the quality and relevance of professional services throughout his/her working life. It has been defined by the Institute for Continuing Professional Development as: 'The systematic maintenance, improvement and broadening of knowledge and the development of personal qualities necessary for the education of professional and technical duties throughout the practitioner's working life.'

It follows that we have an ethical responsibility as professional materials technologists to continue our professional development throughout our careers. Professional development is not a product, devised by training providers and academic institutions. It is a mindset, a habit to acquire. Professional development requires self-directed, independent learning. It also demands an active rather than passive approach to learning. It differs from other forms of learning because it requires teachers to decide that needs to be learned or un-learned, how to learn it, and how to test and assess their learning. The European Society for Engineering Education (SEFI) has issued a discussion document (Padfield et al., 1998) with the intention of stimulating debate on professional education and lifelong learning for engineers.

The above is a list of 'performance criteria' by which the teachers might assess their professional development skills. However, what is missing from the list is the approach by which they might achieve these objectives. It is suggested that a five step approach is used:

STEP 1 - Profiling Themselves

This is the starting point for their individual professional development plan and should contain the ingredients from the table below:

The personal profile

Working Life	List strengths and successes
Skills inventory	Identify expertise that has not been exploited Rate skills and competences on a scale of 1-5 Identify skills needing further development
Values, attitudes and beliefs	Review the opinion of others Evaluate your own views and opinions
Learning skills	Identify types of learning preferred

Developing your personal profile will make use of the reflective practices discussed in step 5.

STEP 2 - Define the Strategy

Their professional development needs to be correctly focused for maximum impact so that it meets both: the individual development needs and those of the organizational needs for which they work (see Table 2 below). If their employer has in place an annual staff review and

appraisal process, then their individual aspirations and the organizational goals may have been reviewed, and a training and development plan agreed for the foreseeable future. Otherwise, they should discuss their professional development needs with their manager and their human resources department.

Table 2: The differences between a Fragmented approach to Continuing Professional Development and a Focused approach (based upon Willie, 1991)

Fragmented approach to CPD	Focused approach to CPD
Not linked to organizational goals	Linked to both organizational and individual needs
Seen as a cost not an investment	Viewed as an investment in human resource management
Focused on training (discontinuous) not development (continuous)	Focused on on-the-job skills development in addition to knowledge-based training
Unsystematic	Evaluated with both pre- and post- course assessment
About directive training and knowledge acquisition	About 'learning' as opposed to 'training'
Not transferred, with learning rarely being implemented at the workplace	Transferred to action and change in the workplace
Weighed with course attendance, frequently cancelled due to pressure of work or lack of commitment	Flexible in application including open, distance and self-development
Viewed as unimportant	Viewed as a reward for good performance

STEP 3 - Develop an Action Plan

Putting the strategy into action can be the biggest challenge. An effective action plan has four key ingredients:

- A clear statement of the goal to be achieved
- The actions required to achieve the goal
- The target timescale for achieving the goal
- Criteria to assess when we have reached our goal

In order to deliver the action plan, the teachers will have to seek out opportunities for learning and skills development, ideally in partnership with the principal and management. And since professional development benefits both the employee and the employer, they might find that

their employer asks them to make a contribution to their own professional development, by committing some of their own time and perhaps by sharing the costs.

Having established the action plan, teachers need to decide how they are to go about the learning process/ learning styles.

STEP 4 - Learning Styles

Research commissioned by the British Audio Visual Society in 1988 suggests that we remember 10% of what we read, 20% of what we hear, 30% of what we see, 50% of what we see and hear, 80% of what we say and 90% of what we say and do at the same time. Fisher (2000) recommended that we integrate learning and working, so that we learn within the context of our work using real-world problems. Then the time and effort we invest in professional development is rewarded by immediately assisting us to complete the task in hand. Fisher believes the immediate usefulness of the learning greatly improves our motivation to learn.

Whilst this learning style may be generally true for groups of people, as individuals, each teacher has his/ her own preferred learning styles. There are many ways to categorize learning styles, but the simplest way to categorize learners into one or more of three categories:

- Visual - those who learn best through their eyes and what they see and read. The ideal learning approaches in this case will involve studying magazines and books and learning online.
- Auditory - those who learn best by hearing things, either on tape or television or in discussion. Dialogue and discussion is important to their learning process. The ideal learning environment is the classroom, but discussions with colleagues and audio tapes, can also be useful.
- Kinesthetic/Tactile - those who learn best by 'doing', such as taking their own notes or participating in demonstrations and hands-on projects. Ideal structure: magazine and online learning; classroom that encourages participation, excursions, field trips, orientation programs, refresher courses experiments, workshops, seminars, co-curricular activities, curricular activities, extra- curricular activities.

It is important to analyze the way they learn best before devising the learning strategy/action plan to achieve their goals. They would find themselves drawing upon their past professional experience to build new knowledge and understanding, whereas before they could assimilate facts almost effortlessly.

STEP 5 - Evaluation and Reflection

As we have seen, good professional development relies strongly on self-analysis and appraisal to develop their personal profile and to analyze their preferred learning styles. This is not necessarily easy for a number of reasons. First, it can be hard to understand thyself and see thyself as others see you.' Second, reflecting on skills and competences is not something that teachers are necessarily trained to do. Third, as the pace of life continues to increase, it is not easy to find time for self-analysis and reflection.

Mentoring is one way of overcoming these problems. A mentor is someone who can advise and guide you in your career. He or she has a number of roles - as an appraiser, a supporter, a communicator and a motivator. The relationship therefore is different from that between a superior and his/her subordinate, and it is unlikely that a manager can carry out these functions. A good mentor has coaching skills, is trustworthy, respected and is free from biases, major distractions either within or outside the workplace. Choose one with great care!

Without a mentor, reflection is also not always a productive experience. You can spend time thinking without arriving at a conclusion. It helps, of course, if you have a structure to your thinking. The key questions are:

- What is happening/has happened?
- What brought this about?
- What went well and what did not go well?
- How can the situation be improved?
- What might we learn from the situation that might influence future action?

It is recommended that you carry out this reflective evaluation both during and at the end of any task or learning you might undertake. One way of encouraging reflective practice in your professional life is to keep a reflective diary or logs to list your business or social appointments. A reflective log is like a personal diary or record in which you note not just what you have done or accomplished, and what you have learned but also reflect on your feelings, thoughts, ideas. What did you find difficult? What should you do to resolve the situation? What is your dream and how can you make your dream come true?

An instance or a particular incident may challenge your performance or make you think about reviewing your performance. Such critical incident analysis should be reported in the log or diary. As teachers, you make good use of major disasters and failures in our teaching and learning. However, when it comes to personal reflection, you should take care to include successes as well as difficulties so that you keep a balanced record of your achievement. The reflective diary also has a role in helping you to evaluate your learning.. By looking back on your experiences, you can reassess your goals. What have you accomplished? What should the next steps be? This leads you naturally back to revisit and update your professional profile and your action plan. Professional institutions are struggling to find ways of evaluating professional development. There is still a tendency to measure the inputs (number of hours) rather than the outputs (increased competence). However, you should remember that professional development is not a product or an outcome - it is a process.

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