



PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT OF TEACHERS IN INDIA: AN OVERVIEW

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Abstract

Professional development for teachers is more than training or classes as it functions as an agent for change in their classroom practices. The growth of a teacher's skill and understanding is developed through personal reflection, interactions with colleagues and mentoring which gives confidence by engaging with their practices and reaffirming their experiences. It could have a positive impact on teachers' pedagogical content knowledge as many teachers feel challenged with teaching of curricular subjects due to lack of previous experience with hands-on activities, lack of content knowledge, lack of interest to acquire the resources needed to create appropriate learning environments and lack of confidence. This paper would give an overview with regard to the retrospective scenario in the area of professional development of teachers.



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Introduction

Education for All is a global movement led by UNESCO, aiming to meet the learning needs of all children, youth and adults by 2015. UNESCO has been mandated to lead the movement and coordinate the international efforts to reach Education for All. Governments, development agencies, civil society, non-government organizations and the media are but some of the partners working toward reaching these goals. The EFA goals also contribute to the global pursuit of the eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), especially MDG 2 on universal primary education and MDG 3 on gender equality in education, by 2015. The Fast Track Initiative was set up to implement the EFA movement, aiming at "accelerating progress towards quality universal primary education".

Background

In 1990 the world Education Meet held in *Jomtien*, Thailand, outlined the world declaration on Education For All, declaring that every child, youth and adult has the human rights to benefit from education that will meet his/her basic learning needs in the best and fullest sense of the term 'education' which includes learning to know, to do, to live together and to be. The Dakar Declaration, 2000, besides reaffirming the goals set up for the EFA at *Jomtien* in 1990 laid special emphasis on the quality aspects. Thus it advocated that by 2015 all children

including girls should have access to and complete free and compulsory primary education of good quality, and improve all aspects of quality education and essential life skills. A review of the work done in the last one decade or so bring for the fact that despite Jomtien's commitment to an "expanded version of basic education" EFA was generally interpreted to be centred around formal enrolment indicators with insufficient attention to retention, completion and effective learning. Quality aspects also seem to have been relegated to a back seat. Quality however is an elusive criterion.

Education in Indian Scenario

In the new vision of education articulated by National Curriculum Framework (NCF), 2005, curricular goals integrate content with process and affective outcomes and aim for the development of autonomous, confident and capable individuals. The NCF 2005 emphasizes the principles of constructivist teaching and learning, which include active participation of children in the classroom in guiding and in achieving learning; reasoning as opposed to authority as a basis for learning, using children's prior knowledge, thinking, reasoning, communication and problem solving abilities as starting points for teaching and learning, creating a space in the classroom for children's expression in all forms (speech, writing, action) and promoting a culture of listening and discourse.

The NCFTE , 2010 advocates teacher education to be open and flexible, emphasising dialogical exploration rather than didactic communication, diversity of social contexts and learning spaces as sources of inspiration, and teacher education based on reflective practice rather than on a fixed knowledge base (NCFTE 2010, p. 19).

Paradigm Shift in Professional Development of Teachers

The new vision embodied in the curricular frameworks for school education and teacher education envisages not only that teachers achieve a high level of expertise and involvement, but also that they take initiative in their own professional development. Thus TPD programs must seek to build autonomous teacher communities that continuously improve their own expertise and the effectiveness of their teaching.

One of the key components of change is enhanced professional knowledge of teaching. A large body of research in science and mathematics education shows the importance of specialized knowledge required for teaching curricular subjects even at the elementary level, which includes an integration of pedagogy and content. Based on this research, the contours of such specialized knowledge for teaching are available. This knowledge, which is closely tied to the practice of teaching, must be acquired and refined by the teaching community and dispersed among them.

Currently the opportunity to acquire such specialized knowledge is limited - pre-service education is too short for this to happen and school teaching practice is too individualized and lacks a collective, reflective dimension. Hence teachers have to often fall back on their own learning in school, which can be very inadequate.

Mechanisms and structures need to be found to strengthen the process of acquiring specialized knowledge for teaching. The practice of lesson study, which evolved in Japan and is rapidly being adapted in many countries, is an example of such a mechanism.

Besides the demands made in terms of knowledge for teaching, the new vision of education also entails changes in beliefs and attitudes that are currently widely held among the teaching community. Beliefs and attitudes change at the level of a community rather than at the level of an individual teacher. Such changes can happen when the community of teachers internalize a new vision of education as a real possibility that can be achieved in their own classrooms.

Many shared examples of teaching practice in accordance with the new vision need to be created before teachers as a community start to invest their beliefs and hopes in the new vision.

In the decades since independence, due to a variety of systemic factors, the status of a teacher in society has lowered. This is especially true of teachers in government schools. Yet, in recent years, there is a small but noticeable trickle of well-qualified young people venturing into education at all levels.

Developing Links between Teaching and Content

As mentioned earlier, one of the deeper structural limitations of the education system is the separation of pedagogy and content in teacher education. To counter this trend, there is a need to build strong links between universities and knowledge creating institutions and the work of teaching at all levels.

Homi Bhabha Centre for Science Education (HBCSE) of TIFR (Tata Institute of Fundamental Research) is significant in this context since its perspective integrates content and pedagogy in the teaching and learning of science and mathematics, while also drawing on the social sciences to shape its pedagogical designs. It is important to found centres focusing on educational innovation at all levels of education in universities and premier institutes of learning, and to foster strong ties between such centres and mainstream academic departments. Facilitating the integration of pedagogy and content in the larger sense is one of the important roles that HBCSE can play.

A part of teacher education/ preparation needs to be moved into mainstream university degree programs. For example, learning science or mathematics for an undergraduate degree can be enriched by an exposure to the issues related to the teaching of science or mathematics.

Teacher's Professional Development

It is necessary to distinguish between and systems development in the developed countries like the USA, Canada, UK, Australia, Japan, etc. and those practiced in a developing country like India. There are not only subtle difference in the two sets but these differences are the result of and accentuated by the social and economic factors prevalent there, as well as the composition and ethos of their respective societies.

(i) Pre-service and In-service Models

The Teacher Professionalism is an important Pre-services model used in the developed countries. This model is based on the principle of matching academic or subject knowledge and professional competencies. Future teachers are expected to be provided with instructional skills and knowledge of pupils' learning practices and child development.

(ii) New Models.

Over the last two decades, several new models of teacher professional development have been developed and used in some of the educationally highly developed countries notably the USA, Canada, UK, Australia, and Japan, while it is not possible to describe them fully, effort is made to present them briefly here under.

A. Professional Development Schools

These schools represent an organizational setup involving partnerships between teachers, administrators and university faculty members. The PDS attempt to restructure the preparation and induction of teachers into the teaching profession, improve their working conditions, raise the quality of education imparted to the students and provide opportunities for professional development to teachers as well as the administrators.

B. The University-School Partnerships

The University-school partnership model seeks to establish firm base in two distinct cultures, school and university, to cross institutional boundaries, to ensure inclusive decision making and to create new venues for educator development. These partnerships are a kind of networks which connect the practitioners who share common interest which connect about education and are found in schools with the institutions of higher learning and research like the universities. The partnerships are with a number of schools with the universities of the area, but sometimes the area boundaries are also crossed over.

C. Inter-Institutional Co-operation.

This model is a step further than the University-school partnership model in that it envisages partnership between the schools, universities, district institutions, ministries of education and other organization involved directly or indirectly in professional development in the educational field. Pre-services and in-service training institutes are also roped in. The idea is to draw upon wider experience and at varying levels of educational activity with the expectation that teacher's professional horizons will be widened.

D. School's Networks and Teacher's Networks

Under the school networks model a number of schools are brought together in the district/state to share experiences, curriculum development effort, research activities etc. Such networks are popular in Australia.

E. Teacher Professional Development in India

India has made commitments to fulfill the goals of Education for All (EFA), both at Jomtien and Dakar, and has even brought about certain Constitutional amendments for that purpose in spite of considerable provisions made during the last three or four decades, the problem of illiteracy still continues to be the main national concern as India has almost 35% of the world's illiterates.

(i) A Centrally sponsored scheme of teacher education was launched in 1987 which aimed at mass orientation of school teachers in the main priorities and directions envisaged in the NPE, 1986, and also at improving their professional competencies. Orientation camps were held all over the country during the summer vacations. A special training package was incorporated for training the teacher in the use of teaching-learning materials (TLM).

(ii) Almost simultaneously a program of setting up District Institutes of Education and Training (DIET) in each of the 600 districts in the country, was also undertaken to create a proper structure for providing quality pre-service and in-service education to elementary school teachers and adult education/non-formal education personnel. The DIETs are also looked upon to provide academic as well as resource support to the elementary and adult education systems and to carry out action-research and innovative projects in these areas.

(iii) Another important post-NPE development is the setting up of a large number of Elementary Teacher Education Institutes (popularly called the D.Ed. colleges) all over the country. With the tremendous growth of elementary schooling in the country, covering most of the hitherto unserved areas, the demand for teachers has also, *pari passu*, gone up. In view of the stress on quality education in the NPE/POA, many states have prescribed D.Ed. (Diploma in Education) as a pre-condition for recruitment of elementary teachers. This

resulted in establishment of a large number of D.Ed. colleges in different parts of the country, with provision for internship.

(v) Colleges of Education are functioning in all the States for the last several decades. and award degrees such as B.Ed., M.Ed., etc. In many states a B.Ed. degree is an essential qualification for appointment as secondary school teacher. M.Ed. degree holders are preferred for appointment in the higher secondary schools/colleges.

(vi) Almost all the universities have post-graduate research and teaching departments in education. Teacher seminars, workshops, conferences, orientation and refresher courses are regularly conducted in the universities as well as colleges with a view to enlightening teachers on latest developments in the field of education, which helps teacher professional development. Recently with the ushering into the era of globalization of education and incorporation of GATS (General Agreement on Trade in Services), a series of seminars was held in most of the universities and leading colleges of education to examine the implications of these developments on the Indian education system.

Conclusion

There is a saying that: No one can teach the teachers. But the whole academic world knows that without strengthening the quality of education, we cannot achieve the goal set by us. Therefore, it would be appropriate for us to conclude that the professional development of teachers plays a crucial role towards ensuring the quality in the field of education, irrespective of Primary, Secondary and Tertiary education in India. While professional development of teachers will go a long way, there is need to bring about a change in the mindset of the teachers who would accept that they should upgrade their skill from time to time.

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