



INNOVATION IN PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT OF TEACHERS

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Abstract

One of the key elements in most of reforms is the professional development of teachers; societies are finally acknowledging that teachers are not only one of the 'variables' that need to be change in order to improve their education system ,but they are also the most significant change agents in these reforms. This double role of teachers in educational reforms –being both subjects and objects of change-makes the field of teacher professional development a growing and challenging area. When teachers are given the opportunity, via high-quality professional development, to learn new strategies for teaching to rigorous standards, they report changing their teaching in the classroom This paper provides new insights and methods needed for creating rich and innovative bases for professional development of teachers to meet the future needs.



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Introduction

A core aim of our education system must be to enable all children to develop their creativity and unlock their creative potential... If the innovative and creative minds of tomorrow are to be nurtured and inspired, teaching has to be developed in a way which appeals to the creative and emotional and which encourages conceptual thinking. The curriculum review is an opportunity to create a new dynamic which will allow this to happen (Moira Fraser Steele, Director of Education & Research, The Design Council).

What is needed to prepare people – young and old – for the challenges, risks and rewards of the global, ICT-enabled, innovation society? What skills, capabilities and networks will teachers need to produce the best social outcomes? What climate is required in schools and education systems to foster changes that will enable teachers to do things better? David Hargreaves says 'the time is ripe for exploring new innovative ways in which to increase teachers' professional knowledge and skill'. He argues the need for 'deep change' that will transform rather than simply improve schools. That need is driven by: *The growing recognition that in a knowledge-based economy more people need to be more creative and this in itself will require new approaches to teaching. Without reducing the importance of the*

basics, we must now aspire to nurture through education the qualities of creativity, innovativeness and enterprise. If teachers are to participate in and serve the burgeoning needs of the future – where creativity, innovation, risk, autonomy and self-management are the secret life that drives economic and social development – then they need a make-over. The following elements of teaching shown to be most effective in *How People Learn: Brain, Mind, Experience and School* (Bransford et al. 2000, pp. 19–21), an authoritative summation of the research on how students learn and the environments that support learning.

THE PRINCIPLES OF INNOVATIVE AND HIGHLY EFFECTIVE PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

To be an effective teacher requires a combination of professional knowledge and specialized skills as well as personal experiences and qualities. And adding to their knowledge base and acquiring new skills are among the main reasons teachers participate in professional development activities (Bailey, Curtis, and Nunan 2001). The following principles underpin the delivery of high quality professional development to improve student outcomes and apply to all levels of the system – school, network, region and centre.

Principle 1: Professional development is focused on student outcomes (not just individual teacher needs)

Professional development is aimed at maximising student learning so that all students achieve their learning potential. Using multiple sources of student outcomes data, teacher professional development should be guided by analyses of the differences between goals and standards for student learning and student performance. Such analyses will define what teachers need to learn and make teacher professional learning student centred. Student outcomes will improve if professional learning increases teachers' understanding of how to represent and convey content in meaningful ways.

Principle 2: Professional development is focused on and embedded in teacher practice (not disconnected from the school)

Teacher professional development should be school based and built into the day-to-day work of teaching. The most potent and meaningful learning experiences occur in the school, where teachers can address the immediate problems and challenges of learning and teaching. This does not imply that beyond school learning experiences, such as postgraduate studies or attendance at workshops and seminars are not valuable. External learning opportunities can complement school-based professional learning. Professional learning should be anchored in the school-based work of teachers but enriched with ideas and knowledge sourced from outside the school.

Principle 3: Professional development is informed by the best available research on effective learning and teaching (not just limited to what they currently know)

Teacher professional development improves and prepares teachers to apply research to decision-making. Successful professional development programs immerse teachers in the content they teach and provide research-based knowledge about how students learn that content. Research in the area need to be made accessible to teachers to enable the expansion and elaboration of their professional knowledge base. This research should include information on effective teaching and learning, how students learn particular content, classroom management, assessment and curriculum.

Principle 4: Professional development is collaborative, involving reflection and feedback (not just individual inquiry)

Teacher professional development opportunities should relate to individual needs but be organised around collaborative problem-solving. It should take collective responsibility for solving the complex problems of teaching and learning and improving student outcomes. Constructive, objective and actionable feedback on teacher practice is important for targeting areas where a teacher needs to improve his or her performance and for the purpose of designing professional learning opportunities that address areas for improvement. Competent, experienced teachers, school leaders or an expert from outside the school can also provide teachers with feedback on their professional learning.

Principle 5: Professional development is evidence based and data driven (not anecdotal) to guide improvement and to measure impact

Data from different sources can be used to determine the content of teachers' professional development and to design and monitor the impact of professional development programs. Evidence, rather than anecdotes, needs to be collected regularly at the student, teacher and school level to help focus teacher development. Student journals, for example, can be analysed to identify areas where students are struggling or how students are progressing. Data can be used to measure and improve the impact of professional learning. Formative evaluations allow teachers to make mid-program refinements and corrections, while summative evaluations measure the effectiveness of professional learning activities and their impact on teacher practice, knowledge and student learning.

Principle 6: Professional development is ongoing, supported and fully integrated into the culture and operations of the system – schools, networks, regions and the centre (not episodic and fragmented)

Professional development needs to be ongoing, long term and sustained as it is essential to ensure improvement in schools and classrooms, particularly when unexpected problems arise. Significant and long-term change in teacher practice does not occur in a matter of weeks but more often over months or years. Teachers need support in the form of expertise and additional resources in implementing innovative practices for their professional learning. Supported, ongoing professional learning must be embedded in the system.

Principle 7: Professional development is an individual and collective responsibility at all levels of the system (not just the school level) and it is not optional

Professional learning should occur at all levels of the system. It is an individual and collective responsibility encompassing schools, regions and the centre. For teachers and school leaders, professional development needs to be linked to schools' performance goals. These goals in turn need to reflect the needs and aims of the regions and the centre. They should work collaboratively to determine strategies for improvement and share best professional learning practices to drive school and system-wide improvement.

Attributes of an Innovative Professional Teacher

The innovative professional teacher exhibit a number of personal attributes including altruism, creativity and passion. Those who know these teachers well tend to explain how they are 'different' by focusing mainly on their personal qualities, raising the issue of whether exceptional teachers are born rather than made.

A second key finding is that these teachers demonstrate advanced skills in a number of areas including applied learning, standard setting and change management. A common feature is their capacity for enabling students to make 'connections' between key learning areas as well as to link aspects of their home, school and working lives. More significantly, however, is the extent to which these teachers are able to facilitate innovation and change, especially through the focusing of disparate energies and the development of teamwork for whole-school and other projects.

Third, innovative educators possess in-depth knowledge on a range of topics including innovation, pedagogy and professional development. While students and others frequently identify expertise in a key learning area as a strength of these teachers, this tends to be surpassed by their knowledge and understanding of those who are in their care. More than just simply establishing and maintaining good relationships, this involves comprehending theories of adolescence and the nuances of contemporary youth culture. Keeping up-to-date

with current trends and developments within and beyond the education sector is also characteristic of these teachers.

Fourth, these teachers display core values that are synonymous with being a true professional. These include a total commitment to those they teach; a willingness to share their knowledge, skills and strategies with others; and an insatiable desire to improve their own practice and 'reinvent' themselves in response to new demands, challenges and opportunities. Innovative teachers are regarded as role models and mentors for others, within and beyond the schools in which they work. They follow a personal code of ethics and are invariably driven by what they consider to be in the best interests of their students. They also view themselves, and are seen by others, as actively contributing to school and professional communities.

Fifth, these innovative educators employ a range of multi-faceted strategies including the creation of alliances, the marshalling of resources and the identification of advocates. Phrases captured during the research include 'pushing the boundaries', 'creating spaces' and 'value-adding'.

BARRIERS TO INNOVATION IN PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT OF TEACHER

- ❖ The content of the teacher training curriculum is too full to allow for much space to innovate and discuss creativity.
- ❖ Outdated and outmoded teacher training curricula, and conservative and traditionalist academics were seen as a barrier to improving innovative methods in professional development.
- ❖ The separation of practical and theoretical aspects of the teacher training curriculum, with an emphasis on educational theory or history in a vacuum, with scant attention paid to practical encounters with children in real environments, was seen to be damaging to the quality and potential of the teachers produced by the system.
- ❖ An emphasis on subject-knowledge rather than on pedagogic approaches during teacher training courses is seen as a complex and problematic barrier to classroom innovation.
- ❖ A lack of relevant and challenging in-service training is also a barrier.
- ❖ The innovative professional development offer is not sustained and strategically targeted to give teachers the confidence to transform their teaching environment. In some cases there are too many bits of training going on currently with no common thread. In other countries the continual professional development is provided erratically by private organisations and is not compulsory so many teachers miss out.

Recommendations

At a time when more and more emphasis is being placed on measuring student performance and, as a result, on “teaching to the test,” it is critical that we don’t lose sight of what really makes a difference in student performance—the classroom teacher. We must find models for preparing teachers to use the findings of research to determine how best to teach content, and then equip those teachers with knowledge and skills that will enable them to innovate. In pursuing that goal we should seek ways to implement and support professional development programs that not only empower teachers to succeed in the present but enable them to grow over time. Innovative professional development programs should focus on how people learn in a world of unbounded information, and they should give teachers time to reflect and interact within learning communities. These recommendations are consistent with those of Sparks and Hirsch (nd), who recommend the following professional development model for teachers: (1) Create learning schools in which all staff is involved in “sustained, rigorous study of what they teach and how they teach it” (2) Provide time for teacher professional development equaling 25 percent of time during each day for teachers to work together and to collaboratively plan lessons and share information and (3) Base professional development on the collaboration model—teachers learning from each other. There are a number of other recommendations that emerge from the review of the literature. These are:

- ❖ Teachers’ professional development must be thought of as a long-term process, which begins with initial preparation and only ends when the teacher retires from the profession. This new approach to the education and development of teachers requires a transformation of processes and policies that support teachers, their education, their work and their growth in the profession.
- ❖ Teachers’ professional development has a significant impact on the success of educational reforms and on students’ learning. The more opportunities the teachers have to be both subjects and objects of educational reform, the more effective the reform and the teachers’ work is.
- ❖ Teachers’ professional development must be systematically planned, supported, funded and researched to guarantee the effectiveness of this process. They must be encouraged to participate in programmes designed for their development. In addition, teachers must be given the time and the financial support to be active designers, implementers and participants of professional-development opportunities.

- ❖ External agencies can and must support teacher professional-development programmes, both financially and by offering particular activities and programmes that address the needs of teachers.

It will be interesting to follow the progress made in the future in the area of improving the teaching and learning environment. One thing is certain, effective and innovative professional development for teachers can never be simply an event constrained by time. Innovative professional development for teachers must be part of the continuous process of quality improvement in education.

Conclusion

Education is seen as central in fostering creative and innovative skills. In today's complex world young people need high level problem-solving skills and an ability to apply knowledge to new and challenging situations. The extent to which students develop these capacities will depend in large part on the quality of teaching they experience at school. To accomplish this task teachers need in-depth knowledge of the subject areas they teach, how students learn that content and an understanding of classroom environments that optimize learning. They need access to ongoing, high quality and innovative professional learning opportunities to develop and enhance the necessary skills and understandings. Creative learning requires innovative teaching which will require, first of all, a paradigm shift in format and methodology (Simplicio, 2000). The main actors of change are teachers (Redecker, 2008), but without institutional support they could not only kindle but also kill creativity and innovation. Teachers who wish to be creative have to be willing to change their approach and method (Simplicio, 2000). Teaching creatively and for creativity involves a change in the content and method of teaching, and also in assessment (Simplicio, 2000). In this way, teachers will not be instructors anymore but rather facilitators (Burke, 2007). Another path to innovation in education would be the establishment of a network of teachers to disseminate good practice (Hargreaves, 2003). Teachers have, therefore, to be encouraged to share their expertise through the observation of other teachers within and outside their school (Simplicio, 2000). Another option could be the establishment of an institutional virtual network of expertise, where teachers could exchange resources and tips (Hargreaves, 2003). Again, technologies are fundamental for this kind of transformation, as ICT can be an effective and affordable means of peer-to-peer exchange and networking. Investing in professional learning is the key to ensuring that schools become learning communities where teachers work together, learn from each other and share best practice on effective teaching and learning. It is only through

the collective work of teachers and by creating a shared professional knowledge that sustained school improvement will be secured.

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