

Developing Professionally

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Abstract:

Teaching is a challenging job and teachers need to perform well in order to deliver their lessons effectively. One major prerequisite for effective performance is the need for teachers to engage in continuous professional development (CPD). Professional development (PD) includes a cluster of activities related to the enhancement of career growth and refinement of the skills of the practitioner. It may range from activities like attending pre-service and in-service training, participating in conferences, seminars, workshops, joining teacher associations, reading books and articles etc. This article briefly highlights the key ingredients of professional development, outlines the sources of PD and argues that professional development is essential for promoting individual and professional growth.

Keywords: Professional Development (PD), Continuous Professional Development (CPD), Teacher Development (TD), knowledge base, ELT professional, facets of Continuous Professional Development.

Introduction

As a teacher, feeling good about yourself is your primary professional responsibility and for this simple reason, continuous professional development (CPD) should be high on your agenda. The idea of CPD is old and has existed for a long time but has gained extensive interest among ELT professionals only in the past decade. This concept is rooted firmly in the western world although not quite

known amongst us here. Edge (2000) has commented “CPD has much in common with motherhood and apple pie, in the sense you’ll be unlikely to find anyone who will speak against it”(). But teachers here need to be reminded that they will be left behind if they fail to wake up in time and board the bus of development.

This paper will briefly outline the concept of professional development and its key facets. It will explore the main reasons for engaging in Professional Development (PD) and will outline some ways in which teachers can develop professionally. For the purposes of this paper Professional Development (PD), Continuous Professional Development (CPD) and Teacher Development (TD) will be used interchangeably.

1. Professional Development

Before examining PD, first let us look briefly at the ingredients of professionalism and highlight the main principles of professionalism as these are interrelated and intertwined. Research on professionalism shows that the focus is on a teacher’s knowledge base, ethics, and on reflection and self-evaluation of teaching (Nordkvelle, 2006:9. Nichollos (2001) believes that the expertise and competency teachers display in their teaching, and the extent to which they exert the same in a variety of contexts to promote the core business of the organisation can be termed “teaching professionalism”. Schon’s (1983) work on the “reflected practitioner” has been a major guide in developing teachers and making them perform better. Echoing Schon (1983), Goodson (2001: 185) says,

“reflection is at the heart of what it means to be professional; and teacher education, supervision and development should be constructed in ways that make such explicit reflection more feasible and more thorough”.

In other words, institutions and organizations need to support teachers to help them reflect on their thinking and action.

Goodson (2000) suggests that some principles of professionalism are fundamental to all types of teacher professionalism. These principles demand that teachers lead to the following:

- engagement with moral and social values.
- responsibility for making judgments concerning teaching and the curriculum
- commitment to working with colleagues in collaborative cultures
- occupational heteremony, which is the ability to work authoritatively, yet openly and collaboratively with other partners in the wider community; and
- a commitment to care for students.

We can say that teachers who are aware of and consciously strive to achieve these principles can claim themselves to be professionals. Now let us turn to the specific concept of professional development. According to the thesaurus of the Educational Resources Information Centre (ERIC) data base, professional development refers to “activities to enhance professional career growth” (2009[online]). For example, such activities may include individual development, continuing education, in-service education, curriculum and syllabus design, peer collaboration, study groups and mentoring. Fullan (1991:326) stretches this definition to include “the sum total of formal and informal learning experiences throughout one’s career from pre-service teacher education to retirement” In recent years there has been a significant expansion and emphasis on the use of educational technology. Currently, a wider definition of professional development includes the use of technology to foster teacher growth.

A quick review of the literature shows that teacher professional development implies two concepts: a) the concept of teaching as a profession, and b) the concept of teachers as professionals. According to Corrigan and Haberman (1990), the four critical components of teaching are: knowledge base, quality control, resources and conditions of practice. Doyle states (1990:7-8) that teachers possess the key characteristics of professionals who are

“equipped through specified and prolonged preparation to use validated practices and to apply them intelligently”.

The above few definitions clearly suggest that professional development is a broad, encompassing concept and includes knowledge base, formal and informal ways of helping teachers face the challenges of teaching as well as coming to grips with the fast paced world of technology. Teachers need to develop technology-based teaching and find appropriate ways of incorporating technology with their ongoing instruction. Use of technology will empower teachers and provide them with a cluster of resources. It will also give their teaching depth and at the same time ensure accessibility and availability. The overarching idea is to provide support, opportunities, training and sources of resources to teachers to help them to grow and refine and develop their professional skills. Now let us examine the main facets of CPD.

2. Facets of CPD

Gross (1996) identifies five facets of Continuous Development-

1. The integration of learning with work:
2. Self-directed learning.
3. Process rather than a technique.
4. CD as an attitude. This involves making learning a habit and viewing problems as opportunities for learning.
5. Simultaneous improvement in the performance of employees and organizations.

These five aspects are interrelated and not new for our profession. They have several parallels to styles of learning/teaching used in the field of ELT. All of us will agree that there is an inseparable relationship between learning, the work place and professional development. One key feature of professional development is that teachers should be able to initiate and choose their own path of learning.

Proponents of CPD declare,

“we believe that teacher development, by its very nature, must be teacher –led development in which teachers take

control and responsibility for their own development” (TD NL, 2001:23).

They add developing as a teacher is the desire to learn which wells from within - not something that is coerced. As Elridge (2005) points out “development is essentially growth that is not coerced”.

In addition, CPD is not a one-shot approach. It is a long –drawn out process and an ongoing journey. Moreover, for engaging in CPD a positive attitude is required, the willingness to learn from past failures and the mind-set to turn negative experiences into positive spring boards for further career development.

Furthermore, CPD contributes to twofold development. Clearly the outcomes of effective development contribute to the professional growth of the organisation and therefore the advantages of CPD are mutually beneficial for both individuals and institutions (Underhill, 1999:10).

3. Why do we need CPD?

We need CPD for a number of reasons. The key ones are as follows:

- 3.1. When we start our first teaching assignments as novices we are nervous, confused and lost. We need a sense of direction and guidance or some support to help us gain confidence and be on the right track. Participating in professional development activities such as seeking help from an experienced teacher or pulling peer resources, including discussion and sharing ideas can be useful.
- 3.2.. As teachers gain in experience and grow older life gets complicated. Problems multiply and teachers sometimes juggle two or three jobs simultaneously and find it hard to balance their working lives with their personal and social lives. Fatigue takes over and they feel spent out. The technical term for this feeling is “burnout”. Maslach (1983) rightly encapsulates the symptoms of burnout as follows:

Burnout is a syndrome of emotional exhaustion, depersonalisation, and a reduced sense of personal accomplishment. It culminates in a build up of negative feelings about our students, colleagues and administration. As motivation decreases and frustration increases, we lose the desire and energy to be creative developing teachers. Physical and emotional stress play on self-esteem and we lose the sense of being in charge of our lives.

Burnout seems to be a potential threat in our lives because it kills our motivation for self development. We seem to be trapped and feel stale and pessimistic (Barduhn, 2002: 10). We stop worrying about our classes and keep re-using the same notes. We lose the desire to be creative. We neither bother to take risks nor update our lesson plans or course outlines. We feel continuous physical and emotional stress. It is argued that majority of teachers experience one or more periods of burnout during their careers. We need to get out of this state of mind and the way out is engaging in professional development.

- 3.3. Professional development activities help to increase capacities and highlights weak areas which need attention and thereby brings about change.

In other words, we need CPD for professional growth and professional growth is a long drawn process. Professional growth consists of a cluster of activities and is linked to transformative learning (Kohonen, 2001: 46). We need to learn and change ourselves. Firstly, it is important to realise the significance of professional interaction for growth. Secondly one needs to develop an open critical stance for professional work. Thirdly it is imperative to develop a reflective attitude and a new self-understanding. One also has to consciously take risks and learn to live with uncertainty, that is, be tolerant of ambiguity. Some of these activities echo the characteristics of good language learners (see Thomas and Rubin, 1981). At the same time, it is important to note that professional growth will not happen overnight. It requires hard work and

commitment. Moreover, if there is no appropriate support (e.g. family, institutional) it may result in fatigue and withdrawal.

We have examined a few key reasons for engaging in professional development. Now let us turn to some sources and examples of CPD activities:

4. Sources of CPD

4.1. Pre-service Training:

Teachers undergo this type of training before entering the teaching profession. In Bangladesh the National Academy for Educational Management (NAEM) offers this type of training on a regular basis.

4.2 In-service Training:

This kind of training is a traditional model of PD and can take many forms. In the past it mainly took the form of training programmes imparted to teaching personnel during the summer or winter breaks. These can also be provided by different programs to current staff. An orientation programme conducted for freshers may also be labelled as in-service training. These also can also be part of a weekly, bi-monthly or monthly staff meetings. However, currently it is perceived that in-house staff meetings of groups of teachers in the same institution can also provide a forum for sharing reflections, problems and successes. Traditionally, teacher training colleges provide in-service training programmes for secondary and higher secondary school and college teachers. However, at the university level this kind of training is not available.

4.3. Higher Education Training: These can be continuing education courses and degree programs. Teachers already working can apply to register for diploma and degree programmes in foreign universities.

4.4. Reading Books and Journal Articles: These are the easiest forms of CPD activities. It is easy to keep ourselves updated by reading current articles in the field. Increasingly, internet based

journal resources are becoming available and more relevant than print based resources.

4.5. Participating in Conferences and Seminars: This is a rich way of developing oneself. National and International conferences provide a platform for novice and experienced teachers to gather and share ideas. Attending conferences – be it national or international - is a good source of networking.

4.6. Joining Professional Associations: Joining professional associations can be very rewarding. They play a significant role and have much to offer by way of professional development to their members. There are many things to learn and positive experiences to be gained by serving in a volunteer capacity. It is true that one has to give time and forgo some amount of income but the work is challenging and provides opportunities for learning and growth.

It is worth joining a professional association as it provides the scope for networking, intellectual stimulation and a platform to discuss, reflect on and develop ideas. The International Association of Teachers of English as a Foreign Language (IATEFL) and Teaching English to Speakers of other Languages (TESOL) are two major International professional associations based in the UK and USA which offer substantial benefits for their members (e.g. special interest newsletters, online discussions, short professional courses, conferences, video-conferencing and so on). Another international association is the Asian Association of Teachers of English as a Foreign Language (Asia TEFL) with its headquarters in South Korea. In Bangladesh we have the English Language Teachers Association (BELTA) which aims to develop English language teaching professionals (primary, secondary, tertiary), leading to improved teaching/learning and subsequent capacity building at all levels.

4.7. Training Abroad: Getting training abroad can be very useful for working teachers. Both short and long term training can enhance the existing skills of teachers, build their knowledge base and raise their confidence level. In the past Dhaka University had taken

initiatives by collaborating with the British Council to send their faculty members abroad for both short term and long term training. Once such example was the link programme between the Department of English, Dhaka University and the University of Warwick (UK) which provided opportunities to quite a few faculty members to undergo training abroad. More link programmes with foreign universities should be established to facilitate foreign training. Universities, both public and private need to enter into partnership programmes with the British Council and American Centre to promote ongoing training opportunities for staff development.

4.8. Workshops: One day workshops can be useful ways of getting hands on experiences in certain areas e.g. language and presentation skills.

The workshop mode is particularly suitable for materials production, textbook evaluation, lesson plans, designing tests and development of visual aids. Workshops can be a means of raising awareness about current issues, new ideas and spreading best practices. Many teachers say that there are things they do in the classroom today that are the result of attending a workshop years ago.

4.9. Action Research:

Action research which is teacher-initiated classroom research is becoming increasingly popular. It empowers teachers to take control of their own learning and development. Collaborative, institutional and participatory approaches to action research may be preferable than individual attempts at investigation mainly because of the benefits of discussion, reflection and personal growth. Feedback from research shows that teachers overwhelmingly endorse action research. It is referred to as “a powerful form of professional development”(Burns, 1997:107) because of the critical awareness it engenders.

4.10. Distance Education and Online Courses: Sometimes, despite their best efforts and intentions teachers are unable to go abroad to pursue an academic course or obtain any kind of foreign training. Teachers teaching at the tertiary level as well as students at higher

education institutions can enroll in distance education and online courses (e.g. short courses, diploma, MA or Ph.D. programmes). These are good examples of engaging in PD. Costello (1993) observed that open university projects helped learners to become reflective practitioners.

4.11. Information Technology (IT) Education: Currently, teachers need to be involved in technology based teaching/learning. They need to become aware of the latest technological advancements in the field of education and be convinced that learning to use technology is worth the time and effort.

Teachers ought to strive to be technology savvy and learn to cope with new technology. For example, teachers can learn to work with various emerging technology tools - Wiki, Facebook, Twitter, Ning and Social Bookmark to enhance teaching and learning. Technology empowers and empowered teachers deliver better when they incorporate and weave technology with their ongoing instruction.

Teachers who do not have adequate computer skills should be encouraged to enroll in computer courses and become familiar with basic skills like making tables and charts, sending and receiving e-mails, preparing a power point presentation and networking. In short, institutions should persuade teachers to participate regularly in technology development programmes.

Conclusion

This paper has provided an overview of what is involved in professional development and some key features of what constitutes professional development. Some major sources of CPD have also been identified. The bottom line is teachers need to develop and they have to make this decision on their own, and as mentioned earlier, this desire for self-enhancement has to come from within.

Teachers are expected to constantly update themselves and keep in touch with what is new in the field. We as teachers also need to be aware that we cannot separate teachers' professional lives from their personal lives. For successful and healthy professional development we need to value both these dimensions as complementary to each other and not view them in isolation. In today's fast paced world we have to move away from past approaches to PD to new models which embed professional development into the daily lives of

teachers and help them strive to become *learning teachers*. Nordkvelle (2006) holds that a new sense of professionalism needs to be invoked in the area of teaching. He argues strongly that teachers at the tertiary level must take part in distance education activities involving the use of information technologies to keep them updated with recent trends in the field.

Applying this model of PD to the Bangladesh ELT context may appear difficult initially. However, if we genuinely relate to the underlying principles of the CPD process, steps may be developed in the long run which will make PD doable and exciting. Most importantly, we need to take this concept to heart and cultivate it. At the same time we must remember what I find to be a very apt description of PD given in the Teacher Development Special Interest Group Newsletter (TD SIG NL).

“I do feel that what really leads to professional development is variety. It’s when we are stretched and challenged and step out of the comfort zone of what we’ve done before that development takes place” (TD SIG NL, 2007:15)”.

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