

CONTINUOUS PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT: A PANACEA FOR TEACHERS

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ABSTRACT

An important strategy to guide the country towards becoming a fully developed economy is the development of its human resource. Universal access to quality education is a stepping stone towards human resource development. To realising this goal, the Indian government has been spending billion of rupees on education. The role of teachers in this context can not be overlooked. As schools continue to change and educational reforms continue to dominate the education scene, teachers are expected to develop themselves, update their knowledge and skills, and remain current. Continuous Professional Development (CPD) helps to facilitate learning and development among educators, specifically to learn to cope with new and changing roles and new approaches to teaching. It enhances teachers' capabilities and competencies and enables them to keep abreast of current issues, and helps them implement innovations and refine practices. This paper traces the meaning, principles and importance of Continuous Professional Development in harnessing skills and broadening the knowledge of teachers.

Keywords: Professional Development, Skills and Learning.

INTRODUCTION:

The education reform cannot succeed without the reform of teachers. Teachers have been seen as a key to improve the performance of the students. In recent years, there has been growing recognition that teachers are the most important factor in student achievement (Carey, 2004). The McKinsey report (Barber & Mourshed, 2007) emphasises the fact that 'the main driver of the variation in student learning in school is the teacher' and points out that even in good school systems, 'students that do not progress quickly during their first years at school, because they are not exposed to teachers of sufficient calibre, stand very little chance of recovering the lost years'. As schools continue to change and educational reforms continue to dominate the education scene, teachers are expected to continue to develop, update their knowledge and skills, and remain current. Continuous Professional Development (CPD) helps to facilitate learning and

development among educators, specifically to learn to cope with new and changing roles and new approaches to teaching.

Rapid changes in the evidence base, the technology and the skill requirements of the profession make CPD a career long process through which professionals remain up-to date by augmenting and enhancing their competence. It is an extension of the basic principle in the Society's Code of Conduct.

CONCEPT OF CONTINUOUS PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT:

The term is said to have been coined by Richard Gardner, who was in charge of professional development for the building professions at York University in the mid-1970s. The term is now common to many professions. CPD embraces the idea that individuals aim for continuous improvement in their professional skills and knowledge, beyond the basic training initially required to carry out the job. In teaching, such development used to be called 'in-service training', or INSET, with the emphasis on delivery rather than the outcome. Arguably, the change in terminology signifies a shift in emphasis away from the provider and/or employer, towards the individual. In other words, the individual is now responsible for his or her lifelong career development, under the umbrella of the school or schools that employ the teacher (Gray, 2005).

Continuing Professional Development (CPD) is the means by which members of professional associations maintain, improve and broaden their knowledge and skills and develop the personal qualities required in their professional lives (Wikipedia). It is defined as a commitment to structured skills enhancement and personal or professional competence.

The Department for Education and Skills defined CPD as "any activity that increases the skills, knowledge or understanding of teachers, and their effectiveness in schools" (Bubb, 2004).

The Training and Development Agency for Schools (2005) defined CPD as "reflective activity designed to improve an individual's attributes, knowledge, understanding and skills"

The British Psychological Society (2006) defined CPD as “any process or activity that provides added value to the capability of the professional through the increase in knowledge, skills and personal qualities necessary for the appropriate execution of professional and technical duties, often termed competence”.

The Chartered Institute of Management Accountants (2008) defined CPD as “The systematic maintenance, enhancement and continuous improvement of the knowledge, skills, and ability.”

Guskey (1999) notes that continuing professional development, as a process, should be:

- i) intentional: i.e. professional development activities are based on purposes which are linked to broader vision of the profession
- ii) ongoing: i.e. professional development involves ongoing processes and activities based on horizontal and vertical integration within a dynamic professional field; and
- iii) systemic: i.e. professional development activities, need to be integrated and related to the system where professional practice takes place.

As can be seen, the definition of CPD varies across the professions, however, the cornerstone is the continuous pursuit of knowledge and skills throughout the professionals’ careers. In a broad sense, CPD refers to the development of a person in his or her professional role after their initial training. It encompasses the process that professionals engage in to prepare themselves, continuously update themselves, and review and reflect on their own performance. In a specific term, CPD for teachers can be viewed as activities designed to improve professional performance of educators and their effectiveness in schools (Bailey, Curtise & Nunan, 2001)

THE PURPOSE OF CONTINUOUS PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT:

Shaha, Lewis, Donnell & Brown (2004) argued that the primary purpose of CPD is to help teachers become better teachers and educators. CPD is intended to equip teachers with new or refined skills and techniques for educating students effectively, and helping teachers themselves to be more confident, capable, and fulfilled. In addition, Day & Sachs (2004) summarized three common interconnected purposes of CPD for teachers, including extension, growth, and renewal. Extension is to introduce new knowledge or skills to teachers. Growth is to develop teachers to

greater levels of expertise. Renewal is to transform or change the knowledge and practice of teachers.

CPD has become part of the working life for many professionals in many countries. Friedman & Phillips (2004) identified several different purposes of CPD across many professional associations as:

- To gain career security
- To develop professionally
- To continuing in lifelong learning
- To assure the public that individual professionals are up to date
- To ensure that the standards of professional associations are being upheld
- To gather a more competent workforce

PRINCIPLES OF CONTINUOUS PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT:

Continuing Professional Development (CPD) is an educator-driven, flexible system where educators engage in planning learning experiences over time that result in better and better learning and life experiences for students and educators (Ferguson, 2006). He mentioned the following principles of Continuous Professional Development.

Child & Youth Centred: The purpose of CPD for educators is ultimately to make a difference in the learning and lives of students. Any effective CPD system must keep this point in focus and help participants connect their learning to student outcomes.

Educator/Learner Focused: Effective CPD is about educators learning and exploring new ideas they can then apply in their own practice. The educator/learner must be “in charge” of designing their own CPD experiences in ways that benefit their own learning, application and reflection.

In-depth: Effective CPD creates the opportunity for educators to take the time needed to work extensively with new ideas and information. Only such in-depth learning can be adequately integrated into practice in ways that benefit both educators and students.

Continual: CPD never ends. Effective educators pursue learning and growth continually. CPD systems should be structured in a fashion so educators can periodically revisit and redesign those CPD experiences that support their continued growth.

Context Sensitive: Every educator's professional experiences are unique. CPD experiences should be designed in light of the particular educator's students, school, and district in order to be most effective and responsive.

Focused on Group Practice: Educators do not work alone. Increasingly, meeting the needs of urban children and youth requires groups of educators and others to design together effective learning. CPD should promote and provide experiences with this kind of interdependent group learning and purpose.

Research Oriented: The knowledge base of teaching and learning continues to grow and change as a result of the efforts of university-based and field-based educators and community members. Effective CPD should draw upon and in turn contributes to this growing knowledge base.

Use of Panel-Validated: Self-Assessment Assessment of the results of CPD should be vested with the educator/learner. At appropriate times, the educator collects evidence of the effect of continuing professional development, which is then validated by "friendly critics" representing a broader constituency of professionals and consumers. Effects of CPD experiences should be related to student learning, teaching practice, and growth in organizational capacity.

CONSTRAINTS IN THE WAY OF CONTINUOUS PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT:

The difficulty of providing high-quality professional development to the teachers is exacerbated by the structure of the system itself. Teachers are hindered by factors that make it hard for them to know what professional development opportunities are available, and then to participate (Burt & Keenan, 1998). After researching few important projects and interviewing 60 "decision makers" and practitioners from 10 states, Wilson & Corbett (2001) found the most important hindering factors included the following:

Time constraints: Working part time makes it hard for teachers to participate regularly or for extended periods of time.

Financial constraints: Often teachers are not paid to participate in professional development.

Distance: Professional development is not offered locally through the program but at state-organized, centrally located venues, which requires practitioners to travel.

Information gaps: Teachers often teach in decentralized locations and have infrequent contact with other practitioners in and out of the program. They may not hear about professional development unless their program directors or other supervisors who serve as “gatekeepers” pass information along.

Lack of face-to-face interaction: Due to the part-time nature of staff, in many programs staff meetings are rare, so teachers have limited opportunities to meet and talk.

Mismatch of goals: There may be a mismatch between the goals of the professional development and individual practitioners’ professional interests. This may result from the diversity of settings and instructional contexts in which teachers work, or can be due to differing perspectives on the overall goals of education; for example, between preparing students to pass a test, or preparing them for civic, work, and family life.

THE TYPES OF CONTINUOUS PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT FOR TEACHERS:

Friedman and Philips (2004) indicate that CPD activities are often perceived as formal training courses linked to work or gaining a qualification. However, the new concept of CPD is one that moves away from attending courses and training days to all forms of teachers’ professional learning on a continuing basis. Fraser (2005) also holds a similar view that CPD includes any activities that teachers engaged in to develop professionally. It incorporates a broad range of learning experiences, both formal and informal learning. These learning experiences of CPD can range from personal learning such as private reading to attending courses organized by the institutions and organisations.

Clark & Hollingsworth (2002), Ling & Mackenzie (2001), and Craft (2000) propose several types of CPD for teachers. These include:

- self directed study
- workshops, seminars, short courses

- coaching, mentoring, or tutoring
- job shadowing
- networking
- collaborative learning
- action research
- personal reflection
- distance education
- professional learning teams
- observations
- portfolios
- information technology mediated learning

Lieberman (in Goodal, Day, Lindsay, Muijs, & Harris, 2005) further classified CPD into three settings in which teachers' learning may occur: direct teaching (e.g. conferences, courses, workshops, consultations), learning in schools (e.g. peer coaching, action research, working on tasks together), and learning out of the classroom (e.g. reform networks, school-university partnerships, professional development centres.) Day (1999) also adds learning in the classroom (e.g. student responses) as a fourth setting of possible learning opportunities for teachers. These four settings provide a comprehensive insight that teachers can acquire CPD through a variety of ways; on the job training, at home, and in the classroom/workplace

IMPACT OF CONTINUOUS PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT:

Continuing professional development (CPD) of teachers is receiving plenty of attention from policy makers, researchers, educators, school administrators, teachers, and professional developers throughout the world. The importance of CPD for teachers is increasingly acknowledged as a key element in the improvement of teaching and learning process. As a result, many countries have recognized the value of CPD and support the learning opportunities for classroom teachers to be able to teach students effectively.

Continuing professional development (CPD) consists of reflective activity designed to improve an individual's attributes, knowledge, understanding and skills. It supports individual needs and improves professional practice.

- In 2003, EPPI (the Evidence for Policy and Practice Information and Coordinating Centre) carried out a review of research that examined the impact of CPD on classroom practice. It found that sustained, collaborative professional development with colleagues, Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), had a positive effect on teaching and learning in almost all of the cases reviewed.
- Continuous professional development influences personal performance at work and develops competencies. According to Imants, VanPutten & Leijh. (1994) and Davies (1995), studies have shown that professional development helps enhance teacher competencies and professionalism and subsequently improves students' performance. Continuous professional development is, therefore, seen as important for teachers because it enhances their knowledge and capabilities especially with regards to the teaching learning process and helps them to perform their role more effectively and efficiently.
- Sydow (2000) argues that CPD results in significant gains for the instructors, students, and institutions. Gains included increased sharing among colleagues, greater student satisfaction, improved curricula, and increased subject knowledge for instructors, updated skills, as well as new classroom materials. The findings suggested that the CPD program contributed to the professional development of the teachers. The teachers had gained more self-confidence, had become more reflective and more aware of their practice, and had changed their teaching practice.
- Bredeson (2000) reports that a survey of teachers' participation in professional development programmes indicated that professional development activities provided teachers with new information, changed their views on teaching, changed their teaching practice, and caused them to seek additional information.

- Boyle, While & Boyle (2004) reported that professional development can result in changes in aspects of teaching practice such as planning, classroom management, teaching style, assessment practices, and teacher collaboration.
- Terrell, Powell, Furey & Scott-Evans (2003) investigated the perceptions of primary and secondary school teachers on the impact of CPD at the individual, classroom and organization levels. The findings indicated that teachers reported positive gains by participating CPD in relation to the reflection on their teaching practice, confidence, classroom management, and professional discourse.

CONCLUSION:

Continuing professional development is a collection of activities offered in response to serve the needs of teachers and school staff members, as well as government, school improvement initiatives, accreditation requirements, and funding agencies (Pritchard & Marshall, 2002). Teachers need well designed CPD programs and activities to be able to update their knowledge and skills, change their teaching practice, and educate students to high level of standards. Educational leaders need to stop providing ineffective CPD that does little to improve the quality of teaching. They need to find a better way to improve the quality and efficiency of CPD to increase teachers, instructions, and organizational effectiveness. They may participate in CPD activities during and after school, on weekends, holidays, and over the summer. All teachers require different types of support so that they may consistently plan, facilitate, and assess quality learning experiences. Supporting ongoing CPD is essential for teachers to develop and achieve success in the teaching profession (The Bureau of International Cooperation, 2005). The need for in-service and continuing training for teachers is widely promoted. Evidence of the use of CPD to attempt to improve the performance of teachers, improve the learning outcomes of students, and enhance teacher professionalism can be seen in the promotion of CPD provision by government agencies.

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