PROFESSIONAL CHALLENGES AND DEVELOPMENT OF TEACHERS

Dr. Kalpana J. Modi

Associate Professor

P.V.D.T. College of Education for Women,

S.N.D.T. Women's University, Mumbai. Pin- 400 020.

Abstract

Improving teachers' skills and knowledge is one of the most important factors that one needs to think about. Yet with the wide variety of professional development options available, which methods have the most impact on student learning, needs to be thought about. Today's teachers are facing big challenges. Different problems faced by the teachers are narrated here and some programs for professional development of these teachers are recommended. Research on professional development is scattered throughout subject areas, with its focus ranging from classroom processes and structures to teachers' personal traits. In this paper, the author has limited view to learning opportunities for teachers that are explicitly aimed at increasing student achievement.

Key words: *Teachers, Development of teachers, Challenges of teachers*

Introduction

Good teachers form the foundation of good schools. Improving teachers' skills and knowledge is one of the most important factors that one needs to think about. Yet with the wide variety of professional development options available, which methods have the most impact on student learning, needs to be thought about. Today's teachers are facing big challenges. Different problems faced by the teachers are narrated here and some programs for professional development of these teachers are recommended.

Problems faced by teachers

Here are some cases where the teachers have narrated problems of their daily school work. A language teacher has problem that the children come to school but even after four months in school, they come without doing their homework. The teacher talks to parents but still cannot get the children to do their homework. It is not an academic problem but it is a social problem.

Another teacher teaching in secondary school has a problem of behavior management and getting control of the class. This problem becomes bigger in bigger classroom of 60-70 children. When there is a very big class than the teacher can never pay attention to each child.

An English teacher in High school faces the problem that she does not want to leave any child behind. Her problem is how to differentiate instructions so that the need and learning style of each student is taken care of.

A teacher who has been teaching for over fifteen years is tired of assessment work. According to her, the multiple-choice and short-answer questions are relatively manageable, but the essays and research projects are a burden. They consume three to four hours of each week-end.

For the modern educator, there is no greater stress than wanting to succeed admirably at an important task and being systematically denied the resources to do so, but that is precisely the fate awaiting most who undertake the job of teaching. To paraphrase the old saying, the three secrets of effective teaching are: time, time and time. The requirements for presenting excellent instruction are: time to plan effective lessons, time to present those lessons and, finally, time to assess whether learning has taken place. All three are absolutely essential for improving student achievement.

However, good teaching is where teachers donate innumerable hours of non-compensated time to the schools for the purposes of planning and assessment. Teachers in typical school are in front of children for 275 minutes a day, and if they are fortunate, they have 45 minutes to plan their lessons. The remainder of a teacher's requisite planning must be performed outside the seven-hour school day.

Research on professional development is scattered throughout subject areas, with its focus ranging from classroom processes and structures to teachers' personal traits. In this paper the author has limited view to learning opportunities for teachers that are explicitly aimed at increasing student achievement.

What Are Teachers Learning?

Focus on teaching skills

Research on the links between teacher learning and student achievement is divided into two waves. The first wave, beginning in the 1960s, focused primarily on teaching skills, such as allocating class time, providing clear classroom demonstrations, assessing student comprehension during lectures, maintaining attention, and grouping students. These studies showed small to moderate positive effects on students' basic skills, such as phonetic decoding and arithmetic operations. For example, in an experimental study of fourth-grade mathematics in urban schools serving primarily low-income families, student achievement was greater when teachers emphasized active whole-class instruction, giving information, questioning students, and providing feedback and more frequent reviews, among other measures. Student achievement also was enhanced when teachers learned to follow the presentation of new material with guided practice asking questions and supervising exercises.

Focus on Content

In the 1990s, a second wave of research worked deeper into student learning, focusing on students' reasoning and problem solving potentials rather than only on basic skills. It suggested that professional development can influence teachers' classroom practices significantly and lead to improved student achievement when it focuses on (i) how students learn particular subject matter (ii) instructional practices that are specifically related to the subject matter and how students understand it and (iii) strengthening teachers' knowledge of specific subject-matter content. Close alignment of professional development with actual classroom conditions also is important.

In one study, Thomas Carpenter and colleagues randomly placed first-grade teachers either in a month long workshop that familiarized them with research on how students understand addition and subtraction word problems or in professional development that focused

on mathematical problem-solving strategies. Teachers who participated in the student learning workshop more often posed complex problems to students, listened to the processes students used to solve those problems, and encouraged them to seek different methods of finding answers. By contrast, teachers who were not in the workshop emphasized basic fact recall, getting answers quickly, and working alone rather than in groups.

Student achievement was consistently higher and growth in students' basic and advanced reasoning and problem-solving skills was greatest when their teachers' professional development focused on how students learn and how to gauge that learning effectively. This suggests that professional development that is rooted in subject matter and focused on student learning can have a significant impact on student achievement.

In another study, Paul Cobb and colleagues provided opportunities for teachers to examine new curriculum materials, solve mathematics problems that they would teach to students, and then study student learning. At the end of the school year, these teachers' students did better on conceptual understanding and maintained their basic computational skills.

Although research in teacher professional development is dominated by mathematics studies, good examples of such research also exist in other subjects including science, literacy, and basic reading skills.

In reading, Deborah McCutchen and colleagues studied two groups of kindergarten and first-grade teachers. One group received professional development that improved their knowledge of word sounds and structure, whereas the other group had no additional training. Students' reading performance then was tracked over the course of a year. Teachers who got the extra training spent more time explicitly teaching the building blocks of words and language, and their students did better on tests of word reading, spelling and comprehension.

Professional development

To be effective, professional development must provide teachers with a way to directly apply what they learn, to their teaching. Research shows that professional development leads to better instruction and improved student learning when it connects to the curriculum materials

that teachers use, the district and state academic standards that guide their work, and the assessment and accountability measures that evaluate their success.

Two recent studies that support focusing professional development on curriculum have implications for states striving to connect education policy to instruction. David Cohen and Heather Hill found that teachers, whose learning focused directly on the curriculum, they would be teaching, were the ones who adopted the practices taught in their professional development. These teachers embraced new curriculum materials when they were supported by training and, in some cases, workshops about the new state-required student assessment. The study also showed that students of teachers, who participated in this kind of curriculum-focused professional development, did well on assessments.

In another study, Michael Garet and colleagues surveyed a nationally representative sample of teachers who, in the late 1990s, participated in a Professional Development Program, which emphasized mathematics and science. The study found that teachers were more likely to change their instructional practices and gain greater subject knowledge and improved teaching skills when their professional development linked directly to their daily experiences and aligned with standards and assessments.

Studies suggest that the more time teachers spend on professional development, the more significantly they change their practices. Participating in professional learning communities optimizes the time spent on professional development. Therefore, it is striking that one national survey found that in nine of 10 content areas, most teachers said that they spent one day or less on professional development during the previous year. While adequate time for professional development is essential, studies also show that by itself, more time does not guarantee success. If the sessions do not focus on the subject-matter content that research has shown to be effective, then the duration will do little to change teachers' practices and improve student learning.

Most states and school districts do not know how much money they are spending on professional development for teachers or what benefit they are actually getting from their outlays because they do not systematically evaluate how well the additional training works. An effective evaluation includes an examination of actual classroom practices, the training's impact on

teacher behavior, and its effect on student learning. Evaluation should be an ongoing process that starts in the earliest stages of program planning and continues beyond the end of the program.

Conclusion

Our changing goals for learning, coupled with shifts in curriculum, emphasis understanding of teacher learning and student thinking. This has led to new findings about the impact of teacher professional development and how best to sharpen teachers' skills and knowledge. What matters most is what teachers learn. Professional development should improve teachers' knowledge of the subject matter that they are teaching, and it should enhance their understanding of student thinking in that subject matter. Aligning substantive training with the curriculum and teachers' actual work experiences also is vital. The time teachers spend in professional development makes a difference as well, but only when the activities focus on high-quality subject-matter content. Extended opportunities to better understand student learning, curriculum materials and instruction, and subject-matter content can boost the performance of both teachers and students.

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