

# IMPROVING TEACHER DEVELOPMENT AND TRAINING

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## INTRODUCTION

Quality professional development for teachers has never been more important than it is today, as the challenges and expectations they face for high quality education increase constantly.

Professional development is a vital component for ongoing teacher education and it plays a central role on principals and teachers. This development is committed to improve teacher's instructional methods, their ability to adapt education to meet students needs, and their classrooms management skills; and the need to establish a professional culture that relies on shared beliefs about the importance of teaching and learning and that emphasizes teacher comradeship.

*Guskey and Sparks*<sup>1</sup> describe staff development in terms of: content, process and context. Their model provides a useful guide for principals to develop an ambitious plan for professional success.

A.- **Content:** Professional development activities provide teachers with useful tools to understand academic disciplines and pedagogical principles. These activities also help teachers to gain, the necessary new knowledge to adapt their practice to changing educational technology or to use the brain research to match the children need from diverse backgrounds.

To maximize usefulness, the content of professional development activities must be thoroughly grounded in the best available research on teaching learning leadership and best practices.

<sup>1</sup> GUSKY, TR and D. SPARKS. 1996. «Exploring the relationship between staff development and improvements in students learning». *Journal of Staff Development* 17 (4): p.34-38.

B.- **Process:** Whereas content describes the what of professional development, process refers to how the professional teacher develops. In other words, how activities are planned, organized, carried out and followed up.

A high degree of proficiency considers the teacher as an adult learner and applies what it is known about adult development, learning styles and ways the teacher goes as a learner. Professional development requires teachers and others professionals to work together, for example: participating in formal mentoring programs and net working with teachers in other schools, building skills in collaboration is often the prescribed approach. Skills in working with others are specially important if the aim of professional development efforts change. Effective professional development is also tailored for the value teacher career stages.

The effective professional development efforts are designed to engage teachers intellectually, socially and emotionally.

C.- **Context:** The context of professional development refers to the organization system and culture in which the activities occur. Context accounts for much of the success or failure of activities aimed to improving teaching. According to Fullan<sup>2</sup>, considering the school culture is very important for professional development.

Optimal professional development is based on continuous improvement of three stages: individual, academic and organizational. Effective professional development also seek for a balance between meeting individual and organizational needs.

As we analyze teacher training and development, we will describe their differences. The idea of training is commonly associated with preparing someone to perform a task or role, usually but not necessarily, in a work setting. As such, it is a part of the boarder fields of human resources development.

<sup>2</sup> FULLAND, MG. 1995. «The limits and potential of professional development. In Professional development» in *Education: new paradigms and practices*. New York Teacher Colleague Press.

It may also be seen, however, as a specific element or outcome for more general process education.

*Development*, may be considered in a variety of levels: macro, meso and micro. «At macro level it has to do with nations and international relationships while the micro level is individual and personal. In between, the meso level has relevance for organizations and communities. All these levels are relevant to adult education and training, and have some connections between them»<sup>3</sup>.

Development is the most important process, through which every individual and organization grows, and can achieve its fullest potential in time. Education is a major contributor to this development process, because it affects not only knowledge and abilities, but also character, culture, aspiration and achievements.

## **TEACHER DEVELOPMENT AND TRAINING: TRAINING IN-SERVICE TEACHERS**

### *A) Schools That Learn:*

The idea of a school that learns has become increasingly important during the last few years by taking learning orientation and developing with together capabilities everyone in the system.

A school that learns is often an effective school. This term involves both individual and team work, and it will constantly enhance and expand awareness and capabilities of the people.

We must call upon teachers to act with greater autonomy, to draw their own conclusions, to lead as well as follow, to question difficult issues in a safe manner, and to risk failure so that they may build capabilities for future success. These are the skills that learning organizations, schools and communities demand.

Our view, at this point, is that learning disciplines offer genuine help for dealing with the dilemmas and pressures of *education today*:

<sup>3</sup> TIGHT, Malcom. *Key concepts in adult education and training*. p.26.

- **Personal Mastery:** Personal mastery is the practice of articulating a coherent image of your personal view, along with a realistic assessment of the current reality of your life today. This produces a kind of innate tension which, when cultivated, can expand your capacity to make better decisions and to achieve the best possible results.

- **Shared Vision:** This collective discipline establishes a focus on mutual purposes. So people with common ideas can develop shared images to create the principles and guiding practices for getting what they want to obtain.

- **Mental Models:** This focuses on developing awareness of attitudes and perceptions that can also help us to define current reality. Since most mental models in education are often hidden from sight, one of the critical goals of a learning school is to develop the capability to talk safely and productively about dangerous and uncomfortable subjects.

- **Team Learning:** Means group interaction. Through the same techniques as dialogue and skillful discussion, small groups of people transform their collective thinking, and learn to mobilize their energies and actions to achieve common goals and an intelligence and ability greater than the individual's talents.

- **Systems Thinking:** People learn to better understand inter-dependency and change and so they are able to deal more effectively with forces that shape the consequences of their actions. Systems Thinking is about the behavior of feedback and complexity. It is a powerful practice for finding the leverage needed to get the most constructive change.

Organizational changes reduce fragmentation in teaching and other school services. These changes support the stronger relationships and deeper knowledge of learners that are essential to serious learning.

#### B) *Educational Technologies:*

Teachers can be trained to use communication and information technologies, but what for? There are two answers to solve this question.

First, the use of technology allows to manage distance contents. When teachers do not have enough time to attend a traditional classroom, they have other options like teaching on distance education and look for more information in other kind programs. This distance educational model represents a gap in time and space. Although learning can functionally occur in the absence of traditional classroom environments, the process is asynchronous.

Second, is that technology has always been present. Specifically, in school the technology has been used for teaching and learning. Therefore, it is important that the education professionals are trained on:

1. Capacity to work with informational systems.
2. Search digital material.
3. Know the different uses of computers: summary of information, communication, presentations, etc...
4. Use multimedia systems.
5. Practice ethics norms in the use of technology.
6. Use technology to increase the productivity on teaching.

### C) *Research as a key for teacher developing:*

Schools that are trying to learn educational technologies to achieve their goals, need time to investigate about key concepts. For example: learning, education, competence, evaluation, quality, developing the curriculum, knowledge and skills, capability and enterprise, input and output experiences and others.

Several current efforts hold great promises to transform teaching: redesigning, initial teacher preparation, rethinking professional development, and involving teachers in research, collaborative inquiry and a standard-setting in the profession.

To increase research, it is essential to pay more attention to learning and cognition, as well as to have a dependable appreciation of content pedagogy and constructivist teaching.

A good way to investigate is to work in mixed groups,

composed by teacher educators, beginners and experienced teachers, so they can work on real problems of practice in learner-centered settings so they can develop a collective knowledge and common understanding about practice. The professional development that tests the effectively involved teachers, working directly with one another and with other experts over a continuous period of time on developing, testing and refining the use of new student curriculum.

It is important to understand that working on applied research could give teachers the key to solve every day problems in the classroom.

### **TEACHER COMPETENCES DEVELOPMENT**

A vocational qualification is a statement of competence clearly relevant to work in, and intended to facilitate new employment opportunities, further education and training, issued by a recognized body to an individual. This statement of competence should incorporate the assessment of<sup>4</sup>:

- Skills to specify standards.
- Relevant knowledge and understanding.
- The ability to use skills and to apply knowledge and understanding to the performance of relevant tasks.

<b>Competences in several countries<sup>5</sup></b>	
Key competences	Australia
Essential skills	New Zeland
Core skills	United Kingdom
Project and transfer oriented training	Germany
Employability skills	Canada
Work place know-how	United States

<sup>4</sup> TIGHT, Malcom. *Key concepts in adult education and training*. p.120.

<sup>5</sup> ÁLVAREZ, Luis. *La educación basada en competencias*; DIDAC. No. 36. p.26.

Competence is concerned about what people can do, rather than about what they know. This has several implications:

- First, if competence is concerned with doing then it must have a context.

- Second, competence is an outcome and it describes what someone can do. It does not describe their learning process, which the individual has undergone.

- Third, in order to measure reliability on someone's ability to do something, there must be clearly defined and widely accessible standards through which performance is measured and accredited.

- Fourth, competence is the measure of what people can do on a specific subject in time.

In teacher education, the learning process must be considered to reach their goals. So through competence they can achieve: the knowledge, aptitude, attitude and ability.

These are some of the competencies to be developed in a teacher training program:

- Listening to students.
- Journaling their work.
- Emmerging opportunities in their students.
- Evaluating student learning process.
- Curriculum development.
- Coaching.
- Studying educational cases.
- Team work.
- Action research.
- Finally, a crossed curriculum competence should be developed among all the professional work, and this is on-the-job learning.

## **QUALITY IN TEACHING**

Nowadays the focus on quality education and training provided in many countries, like United States, Australia and The United Kingdom, have introduced some competency-based

systems through the formal concern that is internationally on its scope. Its impact can be seen upon all levels of provision, from school through further education and university to professional continued education.

In addition to quality, assurance, control, validation, examination and assessment, reference may also be found in quality audit, management, enhancement, circles and improvement teams.

Quality, like freedom and justice, is an elusive concept. We all have an instinctive understanding of what it means, but it is difficult to articulate. Quality is also a value-laden term: it is subjectively associated with what it is good.

It is also a contested concept which embodies tensions within itself. Those, in the idea of quality assessment, we can identify tensions between:

- The demands of external accountability and the process of internal improvement.
- The idea of goal standard and something that is «nearly» fit for its purpose.
- Criteria and norm referencing, for example: do we judge quality in terms of some absolute standards or in reference to our competitors?
- Assessment of inputs and-or outputs, of the whole education or training process.
- Cross disciplinary or discipline specific demands.
- Responsive or strategic approaches.

The quality of teaching not only depends on the qualities of those who join and stay, but also in the workplace factors. Teachers who feel unable to succeed with students, are more committed and effective than those who feel unsupported in their learning and in their practice. Those who can have access to teachers networks, enriched professional roles and collegial work, with feel more effective in gaining the knowledge when they need it to.

### A) *Standards:*

Usually high standards reflect the knowledge and skills that citizens need in the 21st century. Schools are unlikely to achieve these standards, however, without greater investments on both, students and teachers, the opportunities to learn increase. But these investments in turn, are unlikely to occur without radical rethinking of how professional development fits in the overall organization of schooling, teaching and learning.

While there is growing consensus about what professional development should be sustained on and ongoing embedded in teachers daily activities, and connected to their work with students, current school structures and schedules make this virtually impossible in many schools. The master schedule –the grater of all possibilities in schools– must be changed before schools can afford to serious teaching and learning for both, students and teachers.

### B) *Supervision:*

A survey on the literature reveals many definitions for supervision, each one unique on its parts and purposes. For example, at the custodial end of the continuing, supervision can be generally overseen and controlled, managing evaluated, or any activity in which the principal is involved in the process of running the school. A more humanistic definition suggests that the supervision of instructions is a multifaceted, interpersonal process that deals within teaching behavior such as curriculum, learning environments, grouping of students, teacher management and professional development.

In *Bolin* and *Panartitis* view «supervision is primarily concerned with improvement of classroom practice for the benefit of students regardless of what may be entailed»<sup>6</sup>.

*Further Mc Quarrie* and *Wood* stated: «the primary purpose of supervision is to help and support teachers as they adapt, adopt, and refined the instructional practices they are trying to implement in their classrooms»<sup>7</sup>.

<sup>6</sup> BOLIN et PANARTITIS. *The 1992 year book of the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development*. p.31.

<sup>7</sup> MC QUARRIE et WOOD. *Supervision, staff development and evaluation connections*. p.91.

Some purposes that are useful in obtaining a quality supervision are:

1. Improving instruction.
2. Promoting effective teacher staff development.
3. Helping teachers to become aware of their teaching and its consequences for learners.
4. Enabling teachers to try out new instructional techniques in a safe supportive environment.
5. Fostering curriculum development.
6. Encouraging human relations.
7. Fostering teacher motivation.
8. Monitoring the teaching learning process to obtain the best results with students.
9. Providing a mechanism for teachers and supervisors to increase their understanding of the teaching learning process through collective inquiry with other professionals.

### **SEVERAL PROBLEMS WE HAVE FOUND**

Teachers usually do not have enough time to investigate and to study on their own; this carries the big problem of short teacher development.

So, why do so many teachers subjects for which they have little background? Many assume that out-of-field teaching is a defect of poorly educated teachers and can be remedied by more rigorous standards for teaching education and training. Typically, those subscribing to this view, assume that the source of the problem lies on a lack of academic work course on teachers development.

Teacher development and training is a world wide problem because in many countries an enormous number of teachers work without a license. So they do not know the basic pedagogy contents to achieve a quality professional development. This is a problem that leads to a poor student approach.

## CONCLUSIONS

- Every organization is product of how its members think and interact.
- Highly qualified teachers may actually become highly unqualified, if they are assigned to teach subjects for which they have little training or education.
- Teachers are expected not only to cover the curriculum but to create a bridge between the needs of each learner and the attainment of challenging learning goals.
- To improve student learning, schools will need structures and schedules that provide them with enough time for complex teaching and long-term relationships, conditions that give serious, on going assistance to learners.
- As a result of unlinking between curriculum and professional development, competence has emerged to solve this big problem.
- Finally, the quality of teaching depends not only on the qualities of those who enter and stay, but also on how workplace factors affect that teaching. ●

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