

## **Developing the Teaching Profession: Factors Influencing Teachers' Performance**

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**Abstract:** Teachers always seek for possible ways to develop their teaching. There are many ways teachers can develop professionally. They can do this by generating new ideas or thinking deeply about reformulating what they do in class. Nevertheless, they cannot fully improve professional development on their own. Teachers can learn with the help of other people who have knowledge and experience in teaching and learning. They learn from in-service training programs that teach new techniques and approaches. Teacher development is a long-term process that requires systematic planning. Professional advancement in the teaching profession is based on some factors. This paper defines the characteristics of teachers' professional development and aims to explain the factors it hinges upon.

**Keywords:** Teaching Profession, Development, Experience, Skills

Teaching quality holds an important place for a quality education, for that reason teachers need to develop their teaching skills throughout their career. Professional development is the advancement of knowledge and skills of teachers. These knowledge and skills can be considered as teachers' knowledge of the field, pedagogical information, information about the education, information about the pupils and their needs, values, and goals.

In broad sense professional development refers to the development of teachers, schools and organizations. Rudduck (1991) describes the professional development of the teacher as continuing curiosity in the classroom and finding opportunities to create areas of interest in learning and teaching. Heideman (1990) views professional development of teachers as using different teaching and learning activities by changing their attitudes and behaviors to improve the academic achievement of students. Professional development covers the needs of individuals, professions and organizations. Fullan (1990) describes teachers' professional development as an activity to improve the content of understanding, present and future roles. Sparks and Loucks-Harsley (1990) interpret teachers' professional development as all methods for improving knowledge, attitudes and skills. Oldroyd and Hall (1991) describe

professional development as the development of skills in working conditions and the professional advancement in the teaching profession.

Day (1999) defines professional development of teachers as all natural learning experiences that are planned or done consciously, contributing to the educational criteria of individuals, groups and schools. Professional development is a process in which teachers endeavor to find better ways of developing their teaching and dedication. At the same time, they develop their knowledge, and talents. Bredeson (2002) describes it as job opportunities that enhance the skills of teachers. From all abovementioned definitions, we can infer that the common points about the professional development of teachers are:

- Teacher's professional development is a process,
- Can be done individually or in groups
- It should be considered within the field of teaching

There is an ever-growing consensus that professional development for teachers lies at the heart of educational reform and instructional development. Some features of a successful professional development can be summarized as follows: it focuses on classroom practices, teachers are exposed to real practice rather than the definition, it provides opportunities for observation, criticism and deep reflection, and it provides opportunities for cooperation. The characteristics of the professional development of teachers are (Marcelo, 2009):

- Although the teacher is in the teaching position, he/she is considered to be an active learner.
- It is a long process; therefore, teacher development of the teachers takes long time.
- The most effective experience for teacher development is school activities that involve daily activities rather than traditional activities (because they do not correspond to the activities in the class).
- Teacher professional development refers to school reform process. School reform is also regarded as a process of school culture in which teachers are professionally involved.
- Teacher development is seen as knowledge and teachers acquire more knowledge and reflect it as they gain more experience. Professional development activities involve developing new theories and pedagogical experiences.
- Although professional development is done individually, it is seen as a process that is done together.
- There is no single professional development model that fits all schools. Teachers and schools should evaluate their own beliefs, needs, cultural structures and decide upon the best development model for themselves.

Learning is a long process; thus, professional development cannot occur in a short time. Teachers should constantly make effort to improve their teaching skills. Teachers occupy themselves with teaching and always look for new teaching methods that will contribute to student learning. When looking for new methods of teaching, teachers participate in conferences, organize meetings to discuss some issues concerning teaching and learning, exchange ideas with other colleagues, and participate in in-service courses. As long as teachers develop their teaching, they can always keep the students motivated, get their attention easily in the classroom, establish good relationships with them, and direct them easily.

These elements help teachers not only make learning fun, engaging and stimulating but also make differences in the lives of the students.

There is another important point that should be paid attention. Professional development includes personal development, team development and school development. In addition to the development of individual talents, professional development also has an impact on shared values and equal opportunities. According to Guskey and Huberman (1995), there are some success factors to follow when planning professional development. For instance, it is important to recognize the change as an individual and an organizational process, work in teams, and provide feedback for results. Fullan (1987) lists four important factors for successful teacher development:

- Redefining professional development as a learning process
- Leadership role at school level
- Organizational culture at school level
- The role of external factors

It goes without saying that the conditions teachers have in their work places affect their job development, motivation, job attitudes and job performance. Teachers' dedication is directly linked to their motivation. Teachers who believe that they can make important contributions to the organizations they work for can be said to have a high motivation to be more successful. Teachers with high motivation are at an important advantage to maintain their professional development in a successful way. The higher the motivation, the more the teacher will be interested in teaching. Motivation does not absolutely leads to commitment and dedication, but it is true that teacher motivation contributes to job satisfaction, business environment, and the quality of the activities that the teacher has made (Wagner & French, 2010). Some of the factors that affect teachers' professional learning process are (Day, 1999):

- work experiences
- past lives
- career stage
- social and political conditions
- school cultures
- leadership and peer support
- dialogue between the individual and the system
- the quality of learning experiences
- the connection of learning experiences to cognitive and affective needs
- teachers' own responsibility for their learning

It can be concluded that there is a relationship between teacher's professional development and organizational development. Teachers give importance to school and student development if they give importance to their own professional development. Some factors related to teachers' professional development which will contribute to both personal and organizational development are (Krecic & Grmek, 2008): working together, taking risks, accessing to available information and use it, providing incentives, involving in vocational learning, implementing professional development in organizational

culture, taking unanimous decisions, establishing a link between personal and organizational development, and the support of administration.

### **Conclusion**

As a result, we can say the following about teacher professional development (Villegas-Reimers, 2003):

- The professional development of a teacher is a long-term process which starts with initial preparations and continues until retirement.
- Teacher professional development is influential on achievements such as educational reform and student learning.
- Teacher professional development should be systematically planned.
- Teachers should participate in development programs organized for them.
- Teachers should be supported for the implementation of experiences and opportunities that will allow them to develop in their profession.
- The programs and activities organized for the professional development of teachers should respond to their professional needs, personal and professional information.
- Schools and teacher training programs should work collaboratively for teachers' career development.
- External elements should support teachers' professional development programs by organizing activities.
- Various models and techniques should be regularly available for professional development.
- Technology and distance education should be used as a tool to support the professional development teachers.
- Professional development programs should be regular. Thus unnecessary repetition should be avoided.
- The objectives of the professional development program should be in accordance with the curriculum.

Teacher development is a process which allows teachers to improve their knowledge and skills. In order to make changes in the lives of students, teachers should constantly develop their subject matter knowledge, and teaching practices. Though some factors might impede teachers from developing their teaching profession, making use of development programs, experiences of other teachers, working in cooperation with other teachers are some useful ways for professional development.

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