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A CRITIQUE OF CONTINUOUS PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND INSERVICING OF TEACHERS

Regis Fanuel Gutuza

Senior Lecturer,
Faculty Of Arts And Education,
Zimbabwe Open University,
Zimbabwe

ABSTRACT

Teachers are undoubtedly the greatest assets of any school. They transmit knowledge, skills and values to pupils. In order for teachers to fulfill these functions fully there is need to prepare them thoroughly for their work and to help them maintain and improve their contributions through continuous professional development. In addition, teachers operate in environments that are unstable due to the rapid changes in information and technology. The times when teachers relied solely on their initial teacher training are over and done with. The technological advances demand that teachers upgrade their skills and knowledge in order to remain effective. The explosion of information and knowledge has resulted in situations where teachers are no longer the main sources of information and knowledge. Children learn from many sources as television, internet and computers. Teachers are duty bound to advance their own knowledge and skills in order to cope with situations where pupils may be more up to date than they are. What are the implications of all these changes on teachers and other educators? This presentation will discuss continuous professional development, in-service education and teacher education. It will also discuss the role of distance education in general and, in particular, the role of the Zimbabwe Open University in the whole field of teachers' continuous development and in-service education.

Keywords: Continuous, professional development, inservicing, teachers, educators and critique

1. INTRODUCTION

Professional development can be defined as all those natural learning experiences and conscious planned activities which are intended to be of direct or indirect benefit to the individual, group or school and which contribute through these to quality education in the classroom (Day, 1999).

From this definition we note that professional development can take place as a teacher teaches and acquires teaching experience. It can be deliberately planned for teachers as individuals or groups. Day (1999) further views professional development as a process through which teachers as individuals or groups review, renew and extend their commitment to teaching. It is important to note that professional development is a process that starts with teacher training and ends with retirements (Fullan, 1991).

Similarly, Guskey (2000:16) defines professional development as "processes and activities designed to enhance the professional knowledge, skills and attitudes of educators so that they might in turn improve the learning of students". In both definitions we note that the final aim of professional development activities is to improve the pupils' learning in the classroom. It is an ongoing long term



and sustained, professional development requires the commitment of teachers, schools and the ministries of education in terms of time and resources. Professional development requires the participation of teachers, schools and ministries of education.

Elliot (1993) sums up the value of professional development by saying that it develops “practitioners who are confident and better prepared for the next set of changes”.

2. STAFF DEVELOPMENT

Staff development is a deliberate process that involves identifying and discussing of present and future needs of individual teachers in order for them to further their job satisfaction and career prospects. We have usually viewed staff development as the episodic activities we carry out half-heartedly at the behest of some senior officer. These activities are events not processes. In a few cases they lead to improvement of teachers’ performance but in the majority of cases they do not achieve much. Staff development is not the same as professional development. As we noted above, professional development is an integral part of and embedded in the teachers’ work. It is intended to develop a teacher who has lifelong learning skills, an inquirer and researcher who is able to search for information and solutions to problems he/she encounters in the teaching / learning context. To some extent, clearly developed and executed staff development may contribute to the professional development of a teacher.

Teacher education teacher education is a process through which teachers acquire basic knowledge and pedagogical competencies, attitudes and values necessary for teaching. The process produces or creates a person who facilitates learning and has the skills necessary to tackle the world of teaching. Fullan (1991) argues that preservice teacher education is the beginning of continuous development.

Functions of professional development: -

- To expand teachers’ knowledge base.
- To enable teachers to learn from their practice and become independent learners.
- To develop opportunities for teachers’ self-renewal.
- To collaborate and contribute to the growth of colleagues through collegial learning, dialogue, team building and knowledge sharing.

3. PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT OPTIONS

Professional development can be offered through a number of action options. It can be offered as formal certificated courses in institutions of higher learning such as colleges and universities. It can be offered in schools run by the teachers themselves. In this case, it could start and go through the following steps: -

- Teachers examine current school philosophy on teaching and learning.
- Teachers organize study groups to discuss contemporary views of learning and research on effective instruction for different outcomes.
- Teachers use discussions and conclusions of these groups to reach consensus on a collective vision.
- Teachers understand standards for staff development.
- Teachers create a culture in which they are free to critically assess their own practice.

Subject panels similar to the study circles that ZIMTA used to run during holidays can offer it. Curriculum experts or examination boards can offer it when they prepare teachers for new syllabi and the relevant examinations.

Professional development can be offered as seminars, workshops or conferences. However, the most effective and sustained professional development programmes are those planned and run in schools. These may be in collaboration with universities and



colleges, ministries, teacher organizations. Professional development can be part of such projects as BEST, Better Schools, etc. The overall goal is to improve the effectiveness of teachers in the classroom and thereby improve the overall effectiveness of the school.

Professional development can be self-study, group study, inquiry into practice, action research, consultation with peers or supervisors or training and coaching. Key elements in all these forms of professional development activities are the processes in which teachers engage such as “inquiry, discussion, evaluation, consultation collaboration and problem solving” (Reitzug undated page 3). These processes empower teachers in terms of knowledge, attitudes and beliefs, teaching practice and student achievement. Smyle (1995) argues that teachers who engage in such processes are empowered to reflect critically on their practice and design new strategies for teaching.

Lieberman (1996) identifies three settings for professional development as direct through courses, conferences and workshops; learning in school through peer teaching, critical friends, quality review, appraisal, action research, and collaborative work; learning out of school in professional development centres, universities informal groups and learning in the classroom through pupils’ response.

4. THE ROLE OF DISTANCE EDUCATION IN TEACHER TRAINING

Let me turn to the role of distance education in teacher education. As we are aware, distance education operates in situations where the learners are physically and temporally separated from the institution and teacher. Programmes are offered through a variety of media such as print, face to face tuition, internet, audio and visual cassettes and radio broadcasts, among many media.

Many countries have opted to use distance education to train teachers for a number of reasons among which are the following: -

- Distance education has wide coverage. It can reach people in remote parts of the countries in which they are used.
- Teachers trained through distance education develop into self regulating and independent learners who are able to serve as models for learners who do not need full time institutional teaching to improve themselves.
- Distance education can serve the purposes of lifelong learning through use of modern technological strategies such as the internet, television, radio and print materials.
- Some teachers cannot afford to leave work to go and study full time. Distance Education is a viable alternative for such teachers.
- Distance education complements conventional teachers training programmes and increase teacher supply, just as our own ZINTEC did just after independence.

It has been found that teachers trained by the distance education mode are in many respects more effective than teachers from conventional teachers training programmes. Studies carried out in Tanzania by Galabwa (1979), Chale (1983), Mahlck and Temu (1989) found teachers trained through distance education just as effective as other teachers. Our own Chivore (1993) evaluated the effectiveness of teachers trained through ZINTEC and conventional college graduates. His findings were similar to the Tanzanian studies. He actually found the ZINTEC trained teachers more effective in some respects than graduates from conventional colleges.

Distance education has been used to train teachers in many parts of the world – United Kingdom, Turkey, Malawi, South Africa, etc. in the UK, the Open University conducts the Postgraduate Certificate in Education (PGDE) by distance education, school-based partnerships, clearly defined outcome assessment, a portfolio model of formative and summative evaluation, support from local tutors, regional seminars and workshops (Mayes, 2000). Zimbabwe’s ZINTEC model has been copied and adapted to suit many different nations of the world. Bangladesh’s BRAK is similar to the ZINTEC model. Through the ZINTEC model, Zimbabwe learnt that teachers could effectively be trained in school through distance education.

Distance education is made even more effective when student teachers have mentors who supervise them on a regular basis, and serve as exemplars of effective teaching and scaffolds for students to fall back on. ZOU’s Postgraduate Certificate in Education has adopted the mentoring of student teachers for this reason. Mentoring has been widely accepted internationally as a means of guiding and assisting trainee teachers in school based teacher education programmes. Use of modern technology also enhances the training and ensures teachers so trained are independent learners who contribute significantly to the development of school and communities.



5. THE ROLE OF THE ZIMBABWE OPEN UNIVERSITY IN TEACHER TRAINING AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

ZOU has a number of programmes service the needs of teachers.

a) The first group comprises programmes which upgrade and enhance subject content for teachers and others. In this group we have the following programmes: -

- BA English and Communication Studies
- BSc Mathematics
- BSc Geography and Environmental Studies
- BSc Agricultural Management

Let me hasten to say that even though these programmes were not designed with teachers in mind, many teachers have taken advantage of them to upgrade their subject content and improve their qualifications. Such teachers acquire enough subject content to teach up to A Level.

b) The second thrust is directed at educators who are serving heads and deputy heads of schools or teachers who have aspirations of being promoted to these levels. The Bed Education Administration, Planning and Policy Studies (BED EAPPS) was the flagship of ZOU. Comments from stakeholders indicate that the programme has made significant changes in the management of schools.

c) The Med (Educational Management). After offering the BEd (EAPPS) for a number of years, our ex students wanted a way of advancing themselves. The MEd was thus a response to requests from our stakeholders.

Initially the two programmes were meant for heads and deputy heads. However, many teachers ended up studying the two programmes because there were no other degrees open to them in ZOU. I am pleased to inform the conference that with effect from 2006, ZOU will introduce degrees that will upgrade the qualifications of teachers and enhance their performance in the classroom. We will offer the Bed (Secondary) first and gradually add more programmes at first degree and Masters' levels, according to the expressed needs of our stakeholders.

d) The third programme is the Post Graduate Diploma in Education which we offer over three semesters to university graduates teaching without a professional qualification. For this programme we have adopted the mentoring mode of teaching practice. We take the training of mentors very seriously and have already started training mentors at the beginning of each semester.

Other programmes that benefit teachers are BSc Counselling, BSc Special Education and BSc Psychology. Teachers who pursue these programmes broaden their perspectives, skills and attitudes in handling pupils. This positively affects their classroom performance as teachers.

Currently ZOU is negotiating with the Ministry of Education, Sport and Culture for the introduction of a Diploma in Education (Primary) to cater for untrained teachers operating in Matebeleland North, Mashonaland Central, Mashonaland West and Mashonaland East. These four regions have had to operate with a high number of untrained teachers over the years. Over the last five years up to December 2004, Mashonaland Central and Matebeleland North had an average of 20% untrained primary school teachers each year. Other regions like Harare, Masvingo and Manicaland had less than 2% untrained primary school teachers over the same period. Yet the two regions are the smallest in terms of teacher numbers. By its nature, ZOU will be able to get into these problem regions and train the untrained teachers in situ. The teachers are unlikely to leave the regions after training when those regions are also their home areas.

6. CONCLUSION

This paper has clearly shown that Distance education has a role to play in initial training and the professional development of teachers. ZOU is strategically poised to tackle the challenges of preservice teacher education and the continued professional development of



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teachers. Many serving teachers prefer to study by distance education to avoid the opportunity costs of full time study. As ZOU expands its programme base, we will be able to meet the needs of classroom teachers in order to improve their classroom performance and change management techniques. I thank you.

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