

THE IMPORTANCE OF PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT FOR TEACHERS

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Abstract: *Teachers is a profession that requires to learn constantly, since only thus it is possible to adapt the instruction to the era of ongoing agility. Professional development for new teachers is even more important and can reduce the percentage of individuals who decide to leave this meaningful profession due to many challenges in the field. The quality of in-service courses and teachers' practical implications of the relevance of professional development frameworks are also discussed in the current article.*

Key Words: *professional development, in-service courses, teacher status, quality of education, new teachers, knowledge*

“To improve classroom teaching in a steady, lasting way, the teaching profession needs a knowledge base that grows and improves”.

(Hiebert, Gallimore and Stigler, 2002, 3).

It is a known fact that the teaching profession is about continuous learning. Teachers need to learn all the time due to fast dynamics in the world of education: development of technology, top-down policies that come from the Government and the Ministry of Education, changes in population of students, growing awareness to special needs of students – all these require teachers to acquire new knowledge, skills and changes in perceptions. Sychev, Fanfanova & Starodubtseva (2008) claim that the very quality of education depends on professional development of teachers and their perception in the country processes that are meant to improve education, especially in the reality of constant and rapid changes – the so-called “agility”.

In many countries in the world there is a system of in-service courses that provide teachers with “rewards”: after participating in-service courses for a certain number of hours a teacher (with the principals' permission) can “move” to the next level that also influences the teacher's salary.

According to Tittle (2006) when examining teachers' learning and development, it is important to group the research to the following areas: teacher subject matter or content knowledge,

including pedagogical content knowledge and teacher development. Tittle (2006) is sure that this data can be useful for educational psychologists and will allow to improve subject matters, cognitive psychology of teachers, and sociocultural and interpretive perspectives. Continuing the theme of teacher's learning and professional development, a worry exists. This worry connects to the fact that teachers do not always learn, since their saturated routine often makes them just to "get through the day". This given fact only emphasizes the importance to create a relevant, quick, useful and convenient data base for teachers, which will store the necessary knowledge, which will transform from practitioner knowledge to professional knowledge. "Practitioner knowledge" is acquired in the field – literally as the result of teacher's practice. It usually develops in response to specific problems of practice. It is also grounded in the context in which teachers work: identifying the problem, analyzing classroom practice in relation to the problem, seeking for solutions for the problem, reflecting and recording what is learned. Because the practitioner knowledge is linked to the field – it is usually "detailed, concrete and specific". It means that it is not necessarily suitable for the larger audience and this is probable the biggest difference between practitioner knowledge and professional knowledge. Professional knowledge must be public. Karl Popper as cited in Hiebert, Gallimore and Stigler (2002).

Professional development for novice teachers

It is discussed in Akcadag's work (2012) that since teachers are measured by their pupils' scores – they need to know how to teach. In order to know how to teach it is not enough to get their B.ed. Teaching, education and pupils are extremely dynamic and changing all the time. The need of in-service is justified with the following reasons: teachers start their career with "insufficient" skills; technological changes demand new skills; the curriculum is changing quite often; teachers need to understand that their motivation for personal and professional development requires them to study all the time. Yogevev and Michaeli (2011) support: especially new teachers are in need of a clear professional framework as they need to become "individuals involved in the community from the teacher training stages". Thus, a training model, which contains four parts is suggested: 1. It presents social, cultural and education contexts. 2. Theoretical part that explains how exactly teachers can become involved intellectuals while applying the ideas of Antonio Gramsci – it starts from validating the sense of professional efficacy. 3. The third part is about knowing organizational policy. 4. It presents the findings of several studies on the topic. The model itself is mostly about collaboration with the student's union while teacher training, college office holders and the dean

of students. It is also important to promote collaboration with local authorities, mayors and school principals.

Ezer, Gilat and Sagee (2010) present perception of teacher education and professional identity among novice teachers. 97 students in their fourth year of education were questioned in five areas: motivation, conceptions of teacher-learning, roles of teachers; components of teacher education and agents of training. In the students' answers teachers were perceived as providing sense of purpose, mission and lifelong development. Constructivist approach of training was chosen as optimal by the majority of students.

According to Akcadag (2012), the need of in-service courses for new teachers is justified with the following reasons: teachers start their career with "insufficient" skills; technological changes demand new skills; the curriculum is changing quite often; teachers need to understand their motivation for personal and professional development – it requires them to study all the time.

Pianta and Hamre (2009) also relate to the issue of leaving teachers – they say 87% of new entrants to the profession, leave it before a decade of experience. The authors relate one of the reasons to lack of proper professional development framework for these teachers.

The connection between professional development and teacher status and prestige and what is a "good teacher"?

"...80% of Polish teachers indicated the lack of prestige, and slightly less than half mentioned low authority as a problematic issue when dealing with students." (Smack & Walczak, 2017, 22). When asked about the advantages of this special profession, teachers mentioned the importance of having contact with people and a whole continuum of professional development. A few professional sources above mentioned such important points as professional level of current teachers and their constant professional development. It is also a very significant part of their status. In this relation, it will be suitable to discuss the concept "good teacher", since logically it is easier to respect teachers that are good and professional.

What is a good teacher? Korthagen (2004) raises two important questions in this relation: 1. What are the qualities of a good teacher? 2. How can we raise good teachers? In 1970s a contrasting model was developed – the Humanistic Based Teacher Education, which focused on teacher's personality, personal growth, connection to Maslow's and Roger's humanistic psychology and theories of human's needs that have to be satisfied (Combs et al, Joyce and Shapiro, as cited in Korthagen, 2004). Korthagen (2004) relies his model on an adaptation of Bateson's

model, which depicts a persona as an onion. Yes, an onion that has layers (Dits, as cited in Korthagen, 2004). Each layer provides a way to understand teacher's actions, ways to develop, grow and change, and etc. "The assumption underlying the model is that inner layers can influence the outer ones manifesting eventually in behavior and vice versa – the environment can forge the inner layers." (p. 78, Korthagen, 2004).

It is also proved in Bykov, Bykov and Vlasova (2020) that students who find themselves in classes of teachers of highly developed professionally, do better than those who study in classes where teachers are not developed professionally. The issue of grades is very clearly defined in Bykov, Bykov and Vlasova (2020). It is not really important the budget, the administration, the population... what is the most important thing eventually – the quality of teacher's work. Since many times in the same school, different teachers get different results.

In Sychev, Fanfanova & Starodubtseva (2008) the authors claim that the quality of education depends on main processes: 1. Professional development of teachers and their participation in the country processes that are meant to improve education. 2. The social politics of the country towards teachers. The process of digital informalization of the society changed the teachers' status drastically. This process opened the dialogue between the learners and the teachers. This openness has the direct influence on teachers' status, since now teachers are not the only sources of knowledge. In addition, these changes influenced and changed the requirements from teachers.

In order to be able to fulfill this significant role, teachers need high quality training and ongoing professional development, says the document. Another important process, that the document mentions is teacher evaluation system. According to the authors of the document, teachers need to be constantly evaluated in order to raise their standards and performance in the classroom.

According to European Commission (2013), mentioned in the document – there are performance indicators that align to standards for teachers. These standards and indicators are needed in order for the society to know what to expect from the teaching staff. There are three types of indicators: emerging, skilled and expert.

The Finnish Ministry of Education which has a respectable place on the world "arena of education", in collaboration with municipalities aimed to devote the public funding for teacher

professional development by 2016. The fact that there is a significant autonomy in curriculum and assessment for schools and teachers – make teaching an admirable job in Finland.

The quality of professional development matters

In Akcadag (2012) it is possible to read about teachers' expectations from in service courses – teachers are looking for positive learning environment and active participation. Very often teachers find such courses not relevant and even boring. "...teachers place special emphasis on the content and methodology of the training programs, and the expertise and positive attitudes of the trainers..." (Akkadag, 2012, 193). The main topics that were suggested by them were: classroom management, special education, communication skills, learning games and drama, child psychology, parents' training, design and application of teaching materials. The results of Akkadag's study also suggest that courses need to create an opportunity for active participation of teachers. The learning environment of courses needs to be exciting, meaningful and positive – it needs to "answer" the teacher's needs in the field. It doesn't always happen, for example in Israel in-service courses are often chosen for teachers by their principals.

According to Lortie (2002), once school districts were not ready to spend money on professional development of teachers, despite the known advantages of reflective practice. Sogomo, as cited in Gitonga (2012) also mentioned low salaries in the US as an example, emphasizing the fact that teachers with more experience and higher education earn more than those with a standard bachelor's degree, thus bringing back another important topic that relates to teachers' status and prestige and this is – professional development and professional growth. It is important to note here, that not all teachers may pay for higher studies due to low salaries at work.

Top-down policies and professional development

Top-down demands are frequent in education, but the lack of proper professional development and suitable training for teachers make the implementation of these demands challenging if not impossible (Alam and Farid, 2012). According to Gaziel (1993) not only professional development is missing, but also other resources that teachers may need in order to bring the Ministry's requirements to life. For instance, for differential teaching (an approach that requires a teacher to plan his/her instruction of different levels, taking into account differences of learners' achievement, personal background, and other varieties) a teacher needs more preparational time, because the same topic needs to include at least three levels of difficulty and in most cases these resources and obstacles are not taken into account by the policy makers. Many

inquiries were made on the topic of differential teaching: most of the teachers pointed out that they don't see how they can teach not differentially since there are many levels in one class; most of the teachers agreed there was not enough professional development on the approach.; the differential approach was seen by teachers as positively influencing the students' general understanding and improvement on some language skills, since the students had to continue their progress right from the point they stopped it and without the connection to what they need to learn at a specific point in a specific grade. Despite the understanding that the approach is necessary in any classroom, the teachers talked about difficulties and the lack of resources needed to apply the approach – not enough knowledge, not enough assistance in planning and executing, not enough time to prepare multi-leveled lessons together with additional requirements from the school administration and the Ministry.

Conclusion

Professional development seems to be the key to such crucial areas of the teaching profession as: quality of their education, sense of success and knowledge development, implementation of top-down policies and adaptation of the instruction to the changing reality and pupils' needs and finally prestige and social status since better education and professional teachers - is easier to respect. It is so significant that can even be linked to teachers' leave of this important profession since they don't have suitable framework and professional support.

It is important though to take into account teachers' expectations and practical implications for better professional development – one of the important ones is that in-service courses need to encourage active participation of teachers and their classroom needs need to be cited.

Ministry of Education and Government have to dedicate budget to professional development of teachers, since not always their personal economic situation can allow them to develop on their own.

New teachers must get professional support, starting from the very training stages only thus can they succeed in their teaching career. It is crucial to create a shared data base of professional knowledge in any field, but in the field of teachers especially.

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