Study on Continuous Professional Development for Teachers*

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Abstract—**This article deals with the issue of teacher professional development (TPD) and discusses its concept, practices and conflicts between various aspects in TPD such as the institution, the teaching context and the individual teacher. The essay intends to draw attention to the potential problems in promoting TPD and encourage the discussion about some possible solutions.**

Keywords—teacher professional development; training; learning; reflection

I. INTRODUCTION

Professionals were described by Humes (1986, as cited in Forde, 2006:15) as practitioners "educated to a particular standard, and were often in possession of knowledge or skills which were not then available to the wider community". Professionals own certain kinds of skill and expertise. Schön (1983) argues that „professionalism" can be a term of both empowerment and fragility (p.4). We rely on professionals to solve our problems and grant them "rights and privileges" but at the same time tend to blame them for their "failures" in updating their knowledge in this ever changing world (Schön, 1983:4). According to Flood and Romm (1996, as cited in Brockbank and McGill, 2006:32) professional development is learning to improve or maintain one's performance in a certain field of work by "doing things right and doing the right things".

Brockbank and McGill (2006) explore three levels of learning. The first level is the improvement of skills and practice. An individual learns to improve his/her professional practice (Burley & Pomphrey, 2011). The second level is transformation which involves challenging, questioning and brings out new knowledge. The third level is learning how to learn, which refers to translating successful learning experience to new situations. Similar categorizations of professional learning can be found in Hargreaves and Fullan (1992) who describe professional learning as development of knowledge and skills, self-understanding and ecological

change. Both of the above two interpretations of professional learning refer to the same developmental process in any profession. At first, people acquire the knowledge of a certain skill. Then they assimilate and innovate through reflection on the knowledge. In the final stage, a connection is made between the obtained knowledge and new contexts, which indicates that an individual has developed the ability to learn.

Easton (2008:755) claims, "Development" creates a mental image in which an individual is required to do something, not being necessarily out of their own will. However, „learning" represents a dynamic process where personal growth is achieved through interactions with other people, characterized by self-reflecting, questioning and collaboration. For discussion purposes, the two terms of "professional learning" (PL) and „professional development" (PD) are used interchangeably in this essay. I take a stand for conceptualizing both PL and PD as an ongoing process of learning in a certain field. This paper will examine how professionalism can be applied to teacher development and what it indicates for English teachers. It will outline and critique various models for promoting continuous professional development (CPD) for teachers. It will discuss the implications for Hargreaves and Fullan's (2012) statement, "constant inquiry and continuous individual and collective development are essential to professional success" (p.22).

II. TEACHER PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

A. The Connotation of Teacher Professional Development (TPD)

Villegas-Reimers (2003:11) believes that the terminology of "teacher professional development" replaced "staff development" or "in service training" and has become a new perspective towards PD characterized by frequent professional learning opportunities and systematic planning. "Staff development" used to be carried out in the form of workshops, or standardized training and it is often skill-focused but at the same time, overlooking teachers' individual beliefs, attitudes and specific teaching contexts. Richards & Farrell (2005) conceptualize the professional learning of teachers as skills development, a cognitive as well as constructive process and reflective practice (p.6-7).

Teaching is not an exact science such as medicine or engineering. In daily work, teachers interact with students who are full of energy and curiosity. Different beliefs, identities, education background and habits all go into mapping out the teaching context. Tsui (2003, as cited in Richards & Farrell, 2005:7) points out that novice and expert teachers do not share the same perceptions of TPD due to "the different ways in which they relate to their contexts of work."

When it comes to teacher education, two types of expectations are often recognized: training and development (Richards & Farrell, 2005). They describe training as being standardized, short-termed and immediate-goal-oriented, often serving as a kind of preparation for novice teachers before they take up new assignments or responsibilities (Ibid, p.3). They view development as "general growth" and being unspecific, serving as a basis for reflective practices to take place (Ibid, p.4). Continuous thinking and reflecting on practice help teachers stay intellectually alive. Laurillard (1993) classifies professional knowledge for teachers into three categories. The first type of knowledge is academic knowledge or subject knowledge (math, physics, English, etc.). Situated knowledge is the second type with mediated knowledge being the third. Ponte (2010, as cited in Burley & Pomphrey, 2011:19) interprets academic knowledge as being independent and usually imparted from practice. Situated knowledge is connected with practice and specific context, usually for direct application. Mediated learning combines academic knowledge with actual experience in order to conduct the transference from previous knowledge to an immediate situation. Thus transformational learning is achieved. In this essay, the author will discuss PD for teachers as a lifelong, sustained and reflective process of learning aiming to improve professional practice. It should be constructive, reflective, collaborative and context-dependent (Villegas-Reimers, 2003:13-14)

B. The Meaning of CPD to an English Teacher

Teachers face students" diverse needs, expectations, beliefs and personalities in and out of the classroom. English teaching is characterised by teaching a language with cultural awareness, identity consciousness and attitude sensitivity. Diaz-Maggioli (2003) sees professional development as a continuous ever-changing process in which teachers are motivated to learn and adapt themselves to the students" learning needs. As for English teachers, Hawkins (2004) argues for a socio-cultural perspective since learners of English are studying different varieties of English, each bearing its own background resources and the meaning of a social language is largely built through human interactions. Hawkins (2004:15) then claims that English teachers are teaching social languages instead of "language". Cultural and political complications, discourse, pragmatics as well as linguistic forms are all embedded into language teaching. Successful foreign language teachers should serve as "transformative intellectuals" (Giroux 1988, as cited in Johnson 2006:248). Using intellectual tools, English teachers try to explore their professional identities, attitudes towards being open-minded, responsible and context sensitive in

teaching the subject of English as a second or foreign language.

Being a non-native English speaker who teaches English as a foreign language in China, I have found my job very challenging and even confounding sometimes. English teachers in EFL context in China, more often than not, tend to focus their teaching on linguistic knowledge rather than the culture related to the language. There are various reasons for this, such as constraints from a national syllabus, English proficiency of individual teachers and teacher autonomy (Wang et al., 2014). Another important cause for this phenomenon is that English teachers in China are not comfortable with stepping too deep into the cultural, historic or political realm in the language we teach. The issue of socio-cultural conflicts deserves due attention. Zheng (2010) conducts research on Chinese teachers" beliefs in EFL context against the backdrop of National English Curriculum Standards (NECS) promotion. Zheng (Ibid) finds that teachers are facing dilemmas in different learning cultures, contextual influences and a gap between theory and practice. Language teaching is different from other subjects in that its subject knowledge and the media of delivering that knowledge are the same: language. Therefore, taking a socio-cultural approach and being contextually sensitive are essential in professional development for English teachers.

III. BEYOND INITIAL TRAINING

Educationists and theorists have come up with multiple strategies to achieve teacher professional development. Kolb (1984) proposes a four-stage learning cycle which starts from experience, moves on to reflection on the experience, creates new understanding and the last stage is action taking with the purpose of testing the new knowledge through practice. In other words, the process of learning for teachers is to experience, reflect, internalize and then practice. Kolb"s (1984) model depicts the workplace as "a learning environment" and stresses holistic individual growth (p.4). Watkin, Carnell, Lodge, Wagner and Whalley (2002, in Burley & Pomphrey, 2011:21) develop three learning models: instruction model which is learning by teaching; construction model which is learning by understanding and co-construction model-learning through dialogues. This section outlines several important approaches to developing teachers beyond their initial training.

A. Experiential Learning

People start from learning by doing. As Kolb (1984) puts it, "we are the learning species" (p.1). People learn from experience and this contributes to their professional knowledge. Experiential learning model is the product of interdisciplinary mergence such as psychology, philosophy and cognitive science. In designing the learning model, Kolb (1984) borrowed the lifelong learning concept from John Dewey; the idea of integrating theory and practice from Kurt Lewin and the cognitive development tradition from Jean Piaget. Experiential learning emphasizes "a holistic integrative perspective on learning that combines experience, perception, cognition and behavior" (Ibid, p.21). Kolb and Fry (1975) identify that experiential learning fosters abilities

in four areas: hands-on experience; reflective observation; abstract conceptualization and experimentation. In summary, experiential learning is focused on self-awareness, concrete knowledge and individual perceptions of experience. It can promote learner autonomy.

Much as Kolb's learning model has been applied in education, there are still some issues. Boud (1985) argues that Kolb (1984) is insufficient in exploring the nature of reflective activities and not enough attention is directed to what happens after the experience stage and Kolb does not offer explicit explanations as to how abstract conceptualization is attained. Smith (2001, 2010) identifies some drawbacks of the experiential learning model. For example, it is inadequate in developing the awareness of cultural contexts. The interpretation of the learning sequence in the model is over-simplistic as they do not fit well with reality thinking. Experiential learning can be described as way of testing how well people can apply their understanding of a certain experience in a real life situation. It encourages an individual's motivation to try things out but at the same time may confine their broad thinking which goes beyond the current knowledge realm.

As such a discovery view of professional learning gains popularity in schools, quality assurance and assessment become the issue. Teacher assessment is based on how well they "do" things. The concepts of reward, outcome evaluation as well as performance standards all seem to be compounding. NATFHE observation guidelines (LTSN Generic Centre, 2002) serve as the illustration of how tension can be generated through peer observation and third party observation of a teacher's classroom performance. It is a "top-down" approach with criteria being decided at the managerial level and hence teachers lack their own voice and may feel insecure in the assessing process. In addition, if the evaluation is reward or redundancy related, observation judgments may be veiled by teachers' "pre-planned acting" in the classroom in order to get a favorable mark, which puts challenge on the validity of the assessment system.

B. Reflective Practices

Reflection can support experiential learning. Boud (1985) understands reflective practices as "intellectual activities" in which individuals examine their experiential knowledge so as to achieve new perceptions (p.19). To Boud (1985), concrete learning needs to be conceptualized or internalized before it can be applied to new situations. Such conceptualization is developed through reflections. Schön (1983) advocates for reflection in action and claims that "our knowing is ordinarily tacit, implicit in our patterns of action and in our feel for the stuff with which we are dealing. It seems right to say that our knowing is in our action". (p.49) Practitioners tend to deal with certain situation so repeatedly that their practice becomes routine. Thus fewer opportunities are available for people to question and challenge the existing way of doing things. If any uncertainty or change occurs, the practitioner may find it difficult to come up with prompt solutions to solve new problems.

Some teachers experience difficulties in adjusting to new teaching methodologies, techniques or concepts, because their knowledge stays at the primary level and is not theory guided, which makes it hard for transformative learning to happen. Farrell (2016) reviews 116 studies on reflective practices for TESOL teachers and finds that positive impact is reported in most of these studies. An increased level of awareness appears among teachers to examine their current approaches to their practice. Research also shows that for TESOL teachers, there can be "tensions between their philosophy, principles, theory and practice both inside and outside the language classroom" (Ibid, p.241).Therefore, reflection is recognized as a key practice of professional learning. People look back at what they know and believe in pursuit of some sort of guideline for future actions.

However, Schön (1983) also recognizes the limits of reflection in action because when people constantly carry out doing and thinking at the same time, they may not think thoroughly. Thus the depth and scope of reflection can be affected (Ibid, p.275). Criticality should play an active role in reflective practices. According to Kilminster, Zukas, Bradbury, and Frost (2010:3), "…the reflections themselves can be superficial and procedural, as if one were following a recipe compliantly, rather than questioning and challenging...", thus running the risk of becoming controlled instead of being critical. Reflection also takes time to happen. The amount of teaching experience varies among individual teachers and this indicates how much a teacher is able to draw upon their previous teaching on their practice. "There will be many similarities between present and past events, unusual circumstances will be rare. This is not so for the initial trainee" (Grenfell, 1998:16). Therefore, it is unrealistic to expect every teacher to equally gain quality outcomes from reflective practices.

Reflection is beneficial for practitioners and it is important to organize reflective practices in an approachable and evidence-based way. Vieira and Marques (2002) argue that criteria for reflective practices should be provisional and contextually appropriate. "Critical reflection involves critical reason, critical self-reflection and critical action at different levels of criticality, from critical skills to transformatory critique". (Barnett 1997, as cited in Vieira & Mauques, 2002:3) Boud (2010) presents the view of productive reflection and summarizes the key features (Cressey and Boud 2006, as cited in Boud 2010:32) as being organizational, contextualized, generative, open and developmental. Reflective practices are not supposed to be static or one-dimensional. They should be well organized and engage individual teachers to actively draw upon their previous experiences and gain new understandings for their own teaching contexts. Fook (2010) understands critical reflection as "a process …which is based irrevocably upon an understanding of the individual in social context (p.38). Teaching is a complicated process and any criteria might be unsuitable or irrelevant in another teaching condition with different ethical, practical and political dimensions.

Group work contributes different perspectives to the reflective process. It broadens one's vision and brings inspiration in the problem solving process. The use of

dialogue is an important approach in the co-construction of professional learning. Dialogues can be internal or external and take place in the relationship of mentoring and coaching (Burley & Pomphrey, 2011). Question asking and conversations are beneficial in "developing a process of professional learning and achieving a level of individual or institutional change" (Ibid, p.31). However, Colley (2003, as cited in Burley & Pomphrey, 2011:30) challenges the above purposes of mentoring and coaching and perceives this model as "poorly conceptualized and weakly theorized, leading to confusion in policy and practice". Concerning the effectiveness of mentoring and coaching relationships, some issues remain, such as the criteria for becoming a mentor or coach; the extent of participation of both sides; the frequency and form of a mentor offering advice and a mentee providing feedback and so on. The ultimate goal of dialogues and collaborative conversations is to testify theories and remove confusions by putting them into practice.

C. Action Research and Inquiry

Action research (AR) and inquiry can make the reflective process more systematic and analytical. "Action research is a specific method of conducting research by professionals and practitioners with the ultimate aim of improving practice" (Koshy, 2010:1). Kemmis and McTaggart (1988, in Burns 2005:59) propose four movements which occur repeatedly in AR which are plan, action, observation and reflection. Koshy (2010) addresses AR as context based, constructivist and inquiry involved. Koshy believes that AR is beneficial for progressive evaluation, combining theory with practice and producing open-ended outcomes. Burns (2005) points out that empirical evidence drawn from conscious classroom observation can assist teachers in assessing their current beliefs as well as gaining theoretical support for classroom practice. Through action research, practitioners get a chance to put their quests for new knowledge into action. It is a further step after reflection, for thinking without doing is senseless. Research shows that school practitioners benefit from conducting action research. Wyatt (2011, 2010) suggests that if schools provide in-service language teachers with action research education courses in a planned and supported way, it can be highly beneficial, for at least some of the teachers.

However, as a recent research method in the field of language teaching, there is criticism about action research, too. Jarvis (1981, as cited in Burns, 2005:66) argues that research be left with trained and capable academics. Burns (2005) assumes that Jarvis's (1981) notion widens the already-existing gap between academics (applied linguistics) and practitioners (TESOL teachers). Burns (2005) outlines some main criticisms of action research. There is a lack of sound procedures and methodologies in AR. The outcomes are not generalizable due to its small scale. Strong personal involvement affects the objectivity of results. Finally, it does not generate reports with scientific genre. In contrast, Bailey (1998, as cited in Burns, 2005) argues that untraditional criteria ought to be applied to judging AR, as action research mainly serves to solve problems in local contexts.

It is not constructive to stick to a single set of rules, be it traditional or untraditional. The meaningful and productive cooperation between theorists and practitioners is greatly desired to promote teacher development and ultimately good learning outcomes of students.

Wallace (1996) carries out a study with two TESOL students/trainees from Malaysia to identify the role of a professional project in developing teachers" reflective practice. The two students were supported to complete the professional project in which they studied research methodology, conducted school experience and collected data. In the final year, they learned to analyze their classroom practice through reflection. Several problems occurred during the students" action research, such as limited time for data collecting; perplexity among the students" colleagues about being taped in class; clash between research requirements and school standard for teaching planning. From this case study, Wallace (1996) identifies ambiguity as well as confusion in the meaning and function of a professional project in a training program. In the meanwhile, Wallace points out that this kind of structured reflection can be highly-structured and thus is not easy to be applied to future professional development of practicing teachers. Wang and Zhang (2014) propose a model to improve teacher autonomy through university-school collaboration. They examine the cultural context of action research in China through a research with a group of university researchers and school teachers. Findings show that teachers in school need proper trainings on the basic research theories and skills for conducting action research. Support from schools such as time which allows school teachers for training sessions, group discussions, data collection and analysis as well as composing report summaries.

Systematic enquiry is often enhanced if practitioners want to or are required to publicize their classroom findings. Jackson and Street (2005:9) define collaborative enquiry as a school-based practice which serves the purpose of transforming practitioners" thinking and improving school effectiveness. Darling-Hammond and Richardson (2009) review current research and find that "providing intensive, content-rich, and collegial learning opportunities for teachers improve both teaching and student learning" (p.52). Butler, Schnellert and MacNeil (2015) conduct a case study of a multi-level community of enquiry which is composed of teachers, school leaders and district-based leaders to improve educational change and innovation. Similar concepts of community building are verified by Groundwater-Smith and Hunter (2000) who advocate for the joint participation of researchers, teachers, parents and students to ensure the spectrum and quality of inquiry.

Servage (2009) draws conclusion from reviewing publications of professional learning community and points out that learning presently are too much focused on technical and managerial requirements which are exhausting enough for teachers to cope with. As a result, "craft knowledge and critical perspectives" are overlooked and understandings of teacher professionalism become "narrow and impoverished" (Ibid, p.149).

Some key elements of the effective implementation of collaborative inquiry can be listed as below: teacher autonomy to participate, administrative support in terms of time and finance; theoretical guidance from academic researchers and clarified goals and emphasized feedback. Boud (1985) stresses that co-operative inquiry helps to refine an experiential learning cycle systematically and make sense of recent experience. At the same time, it is worth noting that validity and criticality are essential in reflective process, such as the teacher"s authentic participation in collaborative inquiry and the sustainment of an objective view when examining one"s classroom practice.

D. Discussion

Kennedy (2014) provides a comprehensive framework for professional learning models which include training, award-bearing, deficit, cascade, standards-based, coaching and mentoring, community of practice, action research and transformative models. There are advantages as well as drawbacks with every model. For example, in a cascade model, individual teachers attend a training program and then go back to their own schools to disseminate what they have learned to their colleagues. However, 100 percent message delivery is almost impossible since these champion teachers tend to overlook the "participation, collaboration and empowerment" in their own learning during the training (Day, 1999, as cited in Kennedy, 2014:240). Kennedy also argues that beliefs, values and attitudes are put aside for the sake of skill training in a cascade model. An award-bearing model can serve to ensure the quality of learning since the programs are usually provided by universities but those programs also run the risk of being controlled at the level of content or discourse.

Living in an information era, we are all aware of the rapid changes occurring in many aspects of our life and teacher professional development is no exception. Teachers" role has shifted from a main resource provider to a planner, facilitator and evaluator in a classroom setting. Compound knowledge is becoming a desired quality of being a teacher, especially being a language teacher. In an English class, the teacher ought to be aware that the subject knowledge and the media of conveying that subject knowledge are embedded into each other. Therefore, English teachers are expected to be contextually sensitive during lesson planning, activity designing, material selecting and teaching method applying. Inquiry plays a key part in teachers" individual as well as collective development.

IV. Implications

After reviewing different models for teacher development, it is evident that there is no "one-size-fits-all" strategy which works for every educational context. Though Hargreaves and Fullan (2012) believe that "strong collaboration and distinctive individuality go together in vibrant communities of innovation and growth" (p.111), it is sensible to integrate various approaches in promoting teacher development and keep a balance between teacher autonomy, institutional prospects as well as social demands. TPD helps to build the foundation for a sustained development of an institution and brings vigor and vitality to education. Satisfying performance of students depends on high-quality, motivated teachers who are aware of different learning strategies and keen on professional development (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012). It is worth noting that teacher professional development is an ongoing and complex process which requires joint efforts from policy makers, administrators, teacher educators as well as individual teachers.

Despite the general notion that professional learning is beneficial for both teachers and students (Kettle & Sellas, 1996; Youngs, 2001; as cited in Villegas-Reimers, 2003:20), there is still a sense of anxiety conveyed from Hargreaves and Fullan"s (2012) statement, constant inquiry and continuous individual and collective development are essential to professional success" (p.22). Wordings such as "constant" and "continuous" can elicit an image of teachers" being rushed or pushed. It is acknowledged that learning acts as a key to one"s professional success but the question as to how to connect the worlds of ideal and reality finds no easy answers.

There is evidence that practitioners believe reflection and inquiry improve their practice. Burnard (1995, as cited in Forde 2006:73) claims that teachers increase the level of confidence, open thinking and get a chance to try out more systematic approaches to their practice through professional learning. Forde (2006) challenges the validity of reflection and inquiry by questioning the degree to which practitioners are willing to rationally assess their own practice. Teachers do not live and work in a vacuum. There are multifaceted factors influencing a teacher"s professional development such as school administration, community culture, individual difference as well as social environment. The directions or guidelines can be hard to put into practice. The delivery of a line manager may not be the same as the ideal. Issues such as the clash between institutional perspectives and individual perspectives, the balance between collaborative and self-directed learning, the accountability and validity of different learning models for teachers, deserve due attention.

V. Conclusion

Real effectiveness of collaboration in professional development is not easy to achieve since variables such as organizational culture, individual differences as well as resources all play an indispensable role. From the analysis of several important models for teacher professional learning, it is clear that there is still disconnection between research and classroom practice, between school expectations and individual needs and between "contextual influences and professional support" (Zhang, 2010:12). Therefore, it is unrealistic to expect that professional learning stays as a top priority for all teachers at all times. Hiebert, Gallimore and Stigler (2002) conclude from their research that "teachers are not always learning. More often than not, they take all of their energy just to get through the day". (p.4)

When there is a tension between demands brought by social changes and teachers" inability caused by static structure of schooling, continuous professional development becomes problematic and burdensome for teachers. "More

and more is added on to existing structures and responsibilities, little is taken away, and still less is completely restructured to fit the new expectations of and demands upon teaching" (Hargreaves, 1994:x). Inquiry can be encouraging and beneficial for teacher development but it can also turn into a tool for central control when measuring and auditing are involved. Thus authentic autonomy from individual teachers is essential to make inquiry work and it is a challenging task for people at the managerial level.

Despite various difficulties teachers may face in their professional growth, lifelong learning is becoming an unstoppable trend in an era of information. It is sensible for teachers as well as institutions to be aware of changes in different aspects of the profession, internalize relevant theories and adopt realistic approaches to solve the problems in different teaching contexts.

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