

NETWORKED LEARNING FOR PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT OF TEACHERS

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Abstract:

In many countries, the role and functioning of schools are changing and so is what is expected of teachers. Teachers are asked to teach in the increasingly multicultural classrooms; to place greater emphasis on integrating students with special learning needs in their classrooms; to make more effective use of information and communication technologies for teaching; to engage more in planning within evaluative and accountability frameworks, and to do more to involve parents in schools. No matter how good pre-service training for teachers is, it cannot be expected to prepare teachers for all the challenges they will face throughout their careers. Education systems, therefore, seek to provide teachers with opportunities for in-service professional development in order to maintain a high standard of teaching and to retain a high-quality teacher workforce. Effective professional development is on-going, it includes training, practice and feedback. It also provides adequate time and follow-up support. Successful programmes involve teachers in learning activities that are similar to ones they will use with their students and encourage the development of teachers' learning communities. There is growing interest in developing schools as learning organisations, and in ways, for teachers to share their expertise and experience more systematically. In the present paper, the investigators have climaxed some opportunities like MOOCs, Web 2.0 technologies, Social Networking and some common workshops for teacher professional development.

Key Words: Professional Development, MOOCS, Programmes, Workshops

Introduction:

Teacher Professional Development (TPD) is 'an organized, initial, unremitting, intelligible and modular process of professional development of educators in accordance with professional competency standards and frameworks'. It is recognised as a key vehicle to improve teaching and student achievement. Professional development is a way to introduce curriculum and pedagogical reforms (Carr et al., 2000). It consists of the systematic activities with clear purpose and these purposes are concurrent with the needs of teachers that arise from time to time. The arena of educational practice is ever developing and there is always something novel to learn. It is widely observed as an imperative means of enriching teaching and learning. Most of the teachers start learning about their profession through a formal teacher preparation program. Since any such preparation is incomplete without practising the profession, the learning continues even after starting the practice of teaching. Additionally, it is not practical to expect to learn everything through formal learning in an ever-emerging field like teaching. Starting from the initial teacher preparation program to on-going teacher learning activities, teacher professional development can be seen as a continuum. With the evolution of professional practice, the professional competency standards and frameworks that are to be developed in tune with the philosophies that govern the educational theory and practice. All these would happen on a continuous but in the modular process, but always coherent when seen together. The teacher professional development is now a developing area in teacher education and it is important because education is an ever growing and ever-changing field. This means that teachers must be lifelong learners in order to teach each new group of students. Professional development not only allows teachers to learn new teaching styles, techniques, and tips but also allows them to interact with educators from other areas in order to improve their own teaching. Though some short workshops are effective in introducing new topics, the most effective workshops are taught over time and involve hands-on activities and interaction. This also allows for more questions and discussions to occur throughout the presentations. On-going professional development is critical for teachers who wish to be great at their jobs and offer the best to their students each day. Professional development can be highly beneficial if what is learned is then utilized to further the education of students. Typically, those professional development opportunities that are multi-day and require interaction among and between attendees are the most

useful. Teachers, much like students, tend to learn better when hands-on activities are used. Effective professional development needs to be sustained over time, with intensive learning experiences, and it needs to be contextualised (Garet et al., 2001). Teachers need to experience 'on-going sessions of learning, collaboration, and application, accompanied by the school and classroom-based support, over an ample time period; to incorporate new behaviours fully into a teacher's repertoire' (Killion, 2005). Education is a never-ending process. It doesn't stop after earning a degree and starting a career. Through continuing education, career-minded individuals can constantly improve their skills and become more proficient at their jobs. Hence teachers should be encouraged to pursue professional development, not only to ensure the best learning outcomes for their students but also to be more effective and satisfied in various other aspects of their work.

Methodology:

The present study is solely based on secondary data. The investigators consulted different sources like websites, e-books and research-based papers and articles of national and international context.

Opportunities Available for Professional Development of Teachers:

ICT is becoming increasingly prominent in the process of teacher professional development. The emergence of new technologies has given many platforms for teachers to learn. In Professional Development, teachers are encouraged to become active learners who pursue continued growth in their knowledge, understandings and skills to support the development of themselves as on-going learners. The investigators have explored various opportunities available for professional development of teachers through ICT.

Online Professional Development:

Professional development is both a requirement and opportunity for teachers at every level and in every subject. There are multiple options available to fulfil these requirements. Some of these opportunities are offered online through County Board of Education offices or through colleges that offer education degrees at the Bachelor's, Master's, and Doctoral levels. Online professional development can be paid or free, depending on the program.

Some well-known online learning platforms are listed below:

- Khan Academy - <https://www.khanacademy.org/>

- Sailor - <https://learn.saylor.org/>
- EdTech Leaders Online - <http://www.edtechleaders.org/>
- iEARN - <http://www.earn.org>

Massive Open and Online Courses (MOOCs):

It constitutes a dynamic field, where ideas and approaches from different disciplines and origins, such as e-learning and educational technologies, open education and lifelong learning, educational policy for higher education, etc., are converging. In this context, MOOCs are considered as a new innovation, a new way of providing education in a higher level, which uses web technologies and e-learning platforms and provides public with an open access to new knowledge. In addition, MOOCs allow experimentation and testing new pedagogical approaches and technological tools that able to widen access to education and distance learning. The design and implementation of MOOCs is internationally an innovative alternative to formal education and professional development. The essential feature of MOOC is that it is offered free through online learning platforms, to anyone interested in learning, to any number of participants, at a fixed given timeframe in a modular form. In MOOCs, one is able to enrol into a full-fledged course, consisting of course structure, instructional video, guided interaction, monitored evaluation, grading of the tasks completed etc. In other words, the MOOCs provide a complete online learning experience. There are numerous MOOC platforms and some of the well-known free and paid courses are as follows:

Coursera: Coursera is a for-profit, educational technology company that offers MOOCs. Coursera works with top universities and organizations to make some of their courses available free online and offers courses in many subjects. This can be accessed at the following link: <https://www.coursera.org/>

edX: edX is a MOOC provider and it hosts online university-level courses in a wide range of disciplines including some free courses. It offers interactive online classes and MOOCs from the world's best universities. It also conducts research into learning based on how people use its platform. This can be accessed at the following link <https://www.edx.org/> Some other popular MOOC platforms are:

- Open learning - <https://www.openlearning.com>
- NPTEL - Managed by IITs and IISc - <https://onlinecourses.nptel.ac.in/explorer>
- Future Learn - <https://www.futurelearn.com/>

- Stanford Online - <http://online.stanford.edu/>
- European School Net - <http://www.europeanschoolnetacademy.eu/>
- NovoEd - <https://novoed.com/>
- MOOC-Ed - <https://place.fi.ncsu.edu/>

Social Media Networks:

Social media networks provide teachers with opportunities to get connected with different teachers from other schools or from all over the world. On the professional front, social networking acts as an informal resume. Most highly valued use of such networks is sharing ideas and among them Twitter(<https://twitter.com/>), LinkedIn (<https://in.linkedin.com/>), Facebook (<http://www.facebook.com/>) and Google+ (<https://plus.google.com/>) offer instant opportunities to follow and learn from authors, educators, educational leaders who not only share information and resources but frequently initiate and invite direct engagement. Social media-based platforms provide access to professional organizations and resources of value to adult learners. Online communities created in these social media spaces provide opportunities to share resources, spark questions that expand collective learning and make connections that sometimes lead to employment offers, consulting requests and collaboration opportunities. Some educators compile much learning from social networking and organize them in Personalized Learning Networks (PLN). Following is the link for Educator PLN (<http://edupln.ning.com/>) which is an exclusive educator PLN.

Web 2.0 Technologies (Blog, Wiki and Podcasts):

Web 2.0 technologies such as blogs, wikis, and podcasts are considered as 'social software' because they are perceived as being well connected, allowing users to develop web content collaboratively and open to the public. Web 2.0 tools are easy to use and quickly developed and organized. Thus, they allow powerful information sharing and straightforward collaboration. Further, these tools have the advantage of requiring minimum technical skills to use their features. Hence users can focus on the information exchange and collaborative tasks without bothering about technical knowledge.

Following or writing a blog is another way of engaging in professional development. Systematic, articulated writing is only a product of thoughtful engagement in the profession. Wiki is another web 2.0 technology where the teacher can contribute and hence engage in professional development. Wiki is a type of interactive website where the

webpages are editable and the users can edit existing pages and add new pages to the site. This allows the groups to collaborate on the creation of web-based information. The wiki users can keep the content improving till the members of the community are satisfied with the content. Since putting information together on a particular topic requires research, synthesis and presentation that helps teachers to develop their knowledge in the particular area they are exploring. Some of the useful wiki links for teachers are as follows:

- Wikipedia - <https://en.wikipedia.org/>
- Wikimapia - <http://wikimapia.org/>
- WikiHow - <http://www.wikihow.com/>

Podcast is another web 2.0 technology that is useful for teachers. It consists of a series of digital audio or video files which a teacher can download in order to listen to. It is often available for subscription so that new episodes are automatically downloaded via web syndication to the user's own local computer, mobile application, or portable media player. Since the archives of the resources are always available for use, podcasts become very handy when they are in need i.e., teachers can select what, when and where they want to learn. Following are some useful podcast links for teachers:

- A History of the World in 100 Objects - a <http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b00nrt2/episodes/downloads>
- ISTE podcast - on how technology is changing the classroom-
- Grammar Girl - <http://www.quickanddirtytips.com/grammar-girl>
- Radio Lab - <http://www.radiolab.org/>
- How stuff works - <http://www.radiolab.org/>
- Teacher Created Materials - <http://www.teachercreatedmaterials.com/podcasts/>
- Math Mutation - <http://mathmutation.blogspot.co.uk/>
- NASA Science Cast - <http://science.nasa.gov/science-news/sciencecasts/>

Social bookmarking: Social bookmarking is an online service through which adding, annotating, editing and sharing bookmarks of online resource is possible. Teachers can make the use of this online service by identifying various online sources and shortlist the most useful ones. Then the teacher can give an annotation (brief description) for each of the sources. Some of the most popular social bookmarking service providers are Diigo, StumbleUpon, Delicious. Following are the links of few social bookmarking service

providers. Diigo - <https://www.diigo.com/> StumbleUpon-

<http://www.stumbleupon.com/> Delicious - <https://delicious.com/>

Online groups: There are many ways to get connected with different people for sharing ideas and expertise. Online groups like the mail group, WhatsApp group, hike etc are some of the well-known groups that people are using nowadays. All these online groups help teachers to share information and provide platforms for conversations.

Web Conferencing:

Web conferencing allows teachers to connect and communicate in real-time with other teachers, mentors or educators in different locations through the internet. It allows them to reach in a conversation at national and international boundaries, crossing various time zones. Web conferencing combines graphics, such as PowerPoint Presentations, with voice and or video. It also includes a range of interactive tools such as polling/voting; chat and a 'hand raising' feature to indicate that one has a question or comment. Web conferencing can create opportunities to offer teachers a specific feedback that is crucial to satisfying their developmental needs and can greatly enhance the scope of their professional development. There is another source called webcasting which is often confused with web conferencing. Webcasting, however, is totally different from web conferencing which refers to a session that is recorded and streamed to participants at a time of their choice. Webcasting does not happen in real time. A live web conferencing session can also be recorded and provided as a webcast after the event. Web conferences are often referred to as webinars, a term derived from the combination of two words; web and seminar. Web conferencing is most effective when used with individuals who are in different locations. The interactive features are designed to allow individuals to respond. Some of the better-known services of the webinar are provided by Elluminate, WebEx, Centra (now Saba) and Adobe Connect. Dimdim, Yugma and WizIQ are currently popular free services. Web conferencing has become popular for delivering professional development to teachers. Whenever an expert, be it a subject expert, pedagogic expert or a teacher expert needs to be invited from a distant place, webinars are found to be a good tool for hosting such interactions.

Common Professional Development Workshops:

From one-day workshops to multi-day seminars, there is a myriad of professional development opportunities for teachers, educators and administrators. Following are some popular professional development workshops.

Common Core State Standards:

Typically taught in separate sessions to administrators and teachers, workshops on Common Core standards help each group understand the purpose and usefulness of common core standards. These types of workshops also answer questions related to the interpretation of specific standards in addition to offering strategies for implementing the teaching of some content area standards.

Differentiated Instruction:

Meeting the individual needs of every student can be an overwhelming and challenging job, but nevertheless expected. This type of professional development offers support for teachers as they group and manage data, work with students on varying levels.

Independent Reading Practices:

Getting students to love reading can be a challenging task. This professional development opportunity helps the educators to learn how to grow classroom libraries and engage students in the act of reading and comprehension on their own.

Nonfiction/Content Area Reading:

Real-world reading is most often informational in nature. These workshops offer to teach strategies that use nonfiction writing and texts to build background knowledge and vocabulary through scaffolding content area instructions. This professional development opportunity also helps teachers to foster inquiry and 21st-century thinking skills through the use of different teaching techniques.

Adolescent Literacy:

Adolescent readers and writers are often reluctant to take part in reading based activities. This professional development workshop helps the teachers to learn to foster a classroom community of readers and writers who use critical discussions, mentor texts, and mediation.

Literacy Retreat:

This multi-day format retreat offers professional development for teachers who want to help students become better readers of both fiction and non-fiction. In addition, teachers are taught to foster critical and creative thinking skills in students at various levels. The workshop offers a look into how teachers can create the global citizens that our current students must be in their adult lives.

Some Recommended Professional Development Readings -

- [5 Trends in Professional Development We Must Think About](#)
- [Professional Development: How Sweet It Is](#)
- [Demonstrating Knowledge of Resources](#)
- [Popping the New School Year Bubble](#)
- [The Best LIVE PD, EVER: 7 People Who Supported My Elucidation of Education](#)

Conclusion:

The investigator besides various avenues including online learning platforms, MOOCs, Social Media Networks, Web 2.0 technologies and Web Conferencing has explored different workshops for providing teacher professional development. Professional development programs can enable teachers to expand their knowledge base in different subject areas. The more professional development a teacher undergoes, the more knowledge and industry insight he or she gains. Today, online training courses that have been mentioned above have become a very successful and popular way for staff to receive on-going learning and development in the workplace. To keep learning, developing and growing within your profession, **Professional Development Programs** (PDP's) are a simple and effective way to address this need, in the form of personalized action plans that get you from where you are right now to where you want to be in the future.

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