

# Continuing Professional Development: The Way Forward for English Language Teachers

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## **Introduction**

Continuing Professional Development (CPD) centres on the idea that an individual aims to augment her/his professional skills and knowledge beyond the training received at the onset of their career, or as part of the qualifications required to carry out a job. Over the course of any career, it would be reasonable to expect that there are opportunities available for informal and formal engagements that assist individuals in the renewal of their technical skills and enhancement of thinking. In the case of teaching in India, after pre-service training, there are few opportunities for in-service development. This is because in-service training is dependent on external factors such as institutional support, employer's initiative, policy measures, etc. As a result, opportunities for growth and learning often rest with the individual teacher, and individual learning can be incidental, or evolutionary, or in some cases, planned. It can also be isolated and slow. Moreover, CPD as a lifelong career development strategy should be more than just aiming for career progression or incidental learning because of personal interest. "[CPD] is the process by which, alone and with others, teachers review, renew and extend their commitment as change agents to the moral purposes of teaching..." (Day, 1999, p.4).

The paper will discuss the principles of CPD and the importance of evolving CPD from being an individual and unguided initiative to a collaborative process. It will also suggest some means of professional development for teachers

in the field of language education, which may be adopted or adapted by teachers and teacher trainers.

## **CPD for teachers**

CPD should not be treated as an event, but should be considered as a process that includes knowledge development and change in attitudes, skills, disposition, and practice. Also, CPD does not comprise only of knowledge transfer from field experts, but has ample scope for experiential learning, involving participants as active learners, and facilitating peer group based review of practices. According to Harwell et al. (2001), "professional development for practising teachers must combine the expertise of researchers and the knowledge of practising teachers in a collaborative effort to inform instructional decision making if educators want to create learning environments conducive to effective learning among students" (p. 260). Bryant et al. (2001), have also stated that "time must be allocated for teachers to share their own personal knowledge about their students and teaching and to receive guidance from experts on topics" (p. 251).

Teachers also need to understand the social, professional and administrative contexts in which they work. In a school, CPD can function as a catalyst for change in school-related practices. Conscious analysis of, and engagement with the specific contexts in which they teach will further the professional development of teachers as well as the growth of their learners. Julian Edge

(1999) defines this as the “professional body perspective” wherein teachers “...try to set up standards and criteria according to which individuals can register themselves as professionals and demonstrate their commitment to their continuing development.” Evaluating oneself vis-à-vis personal goals as well as institutional and community goals can provide a framework for constructive feedback, and appraisals can be in the form of self-appraisals, peer appraisal, and feedback from students and concerned authorities.

CPD therefore includes “private, unaided learning...informal learning opportunities and...more formal learning opportunities available through internally and externally generated in-service education and training activities” (Day, 1999).

### **CPD for English language teachers**

As established above, teacher education needs to be ongoing, onsite, as well as preparatory. In the context of language education, the emphasis of CPD initiatives should be on teacher proficiency or familiarity with the language, as the teacher is often a role model. It will also be a means to cultivate teacher awareness or sensitivity to language learning. (Position Paper on Teaching of English, 2006) Teachers should in fact be given opportunities to develop their competencies and proficiency in the language they teach. Self-reflection is therefore a vital component of such programmes wherein the teachers can themselves work towards identifying and addressing gaps in knowledge and practice. Opportunities for reaffirmation of their own experiences will also boost their confidence and have a positive impact on the teaching-learning process.

According to Krishnan & Pandit (2003), “Teacher proficiency in English is linked to the teacher’s sense of satisfaction, indeed to his/her willingness to teach English.” Wright &

Bolitho (1993) believe language acquisition is important “to develop their sensitivity towards their language, as part of a strategy aimed at enhancing classroom teaching and learning.” CPD programmes may therefore address concepts such as:

- Self-improvement: Improving their own skills in order to be role models for learners in terms of listening, speaking, reading and writing;
- Pedagogy of language education: Emphasizing that language teaching and learning cannot be mechanical and introducing new methods and approaches;
- Constructivism: Facilitating learners’ construction of own knowledge through participatory activities;
- Critical thinking skills: Integrating peace, values, special needs, gender, environment, culture, inclusiveness and vocational skills in language teaching-learning;
- Use of grammar and vocabulary in context;
- Multilingualism as a resource: Approaching language education holistically in that languages supplement and complement one another;
- Methodologies of teaching English/Second language: The different methods and a critique thereof;
- Materials development and curricular renewal: Becoming materials developers themselves and proactively using locally available authentic texts;
- Assessment and evaluation: Linking continuous and comprehensive evaluation to everyday classroom practices and learning outcomes;
- Teacher as a researcher: Conducting action research for identifying and addressing problems in language learning through audits of their own practices with the aim of improving effectiveness.

According to Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin (1996), “Effective professional development involves teachers both as learners and as teachers and allows them to struggle with the uncertainties that accompany each role. . . It must be connected to and derived from teachers’ work with their students.”

### **Individual ownership/initiative**

CPD necessitates a self-development perspective on the part of the teachers. Often, constraints such as demanding schedules, lack of motivation and support from authorities as well as additional expenses can deter individuals. However, teachers must recognize that CPD is a journey, and it is important for teachers to remain learners themselves if they aspire to develop the qualities required in their careers. Above all, teachers should learn from their learners and recognize the value of reflecting on their own performance. Richard Whiteside (2012) sums this succinctly when he says, “. . . we teachers should endeavour to provide the best education we can to our students. . . to consider our situation and try to identify what exactly ‘best-practice’ is for us in our context.” For this, regular analysis, and consultation with peers and colleagues are a must.

Here, ICT can play an important role in ensuring that individuals can transcend institutional and geographical barriers to interact with their peers and domain experts. Online discussion forums, SIGs, archives and blogs are rich sources of information and best practices. At the same time, face to face interactions, be they peer to peer or individual to expert, can enable participants to enhance their spoken skills as well as learn from others. Writing articles for journals based on their classroom experiences is another way of facilitating peer review and feedback. Attending seminars and conferences also boosts confidence and enhances one’s knowledge base.

Teachers may also:

- record and reflect on their own practices by writing a daily journal;
- read and explore about areas of teaching that interest them;
- observes colleagues’ or seniors’ classes;
- enroll in training programmes; and
- discuss observations with groups.

### **Institutional support**

Often, teacher orientation programmes are time-bound and budget-driven. Moreover, the organizing bodies (State, NGOs, Teachers’ associations) often have narrow/specific and therefore non-representative agendas which may not cater to the needs of all teachers. Consequently, it is critical that managing bodies foster CPD in their schools. Schools should emerge as spaces where collaborative communities are established and which engage with the shared aspirations and values of all members. Lack of information and access impact participation by teachers, and these can be addressed by ensuring relevance to teachers’ needs and contexts. Further, investments also need to be made in the development of teachers’ materials such as teachers’ packages, handbooks, manuals and journals so that they can be self-reliant when it comes to updating themselves. Rather than imposing a uniform plan, CPD systems should be able to facilitate personalization of the CPD process. Offering a range of options will stimulate teacher initiative, experimentation and agency.

At the same time, thought must be given to:

- defining goals and standards of CPD for teachers;
- identifying the strategies and practices that will support them;

- developing tools to monitor and assess CPD initiatives;
- promoting teacher autonomy and responsibility.

Demonstrating commitment to the continuing development of employees by facilitating a discussion on these aspects will boost the standards of the institution by creating a competent, adaptable workforce. Also, “people’s professionalism may be considered to be enhanced” (Evans, 2008), which will have a direct positive impact on the learners.

### Conclusion

Developing teachers’ resources and proficiency in a language facilitates innovation, and increases teacher proficiency. CPD is a planned and systematic activity, and the space and the ability to reflect on methodology, content and approach will help teachers to develop a deeper understanding of language learning and make the English classroom a vibrant centre for knowledge acquisition and development. After all, change in education depends on what teachers do and think.

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