



# Designing a bottom-up professional development programme

ASHOK PANDEY DESCRIBES A RECENT PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT ACTIVITY UNDERTAKEN AT HIS SCHOOL.

The benefits of a well-structured professional development programme (PDP) for teachers are well known. The challenge lies in the design, structuring, and execution of such a programme. Externally driven engagements have limited success when it comes to the achievement of long-term professional development goals. Instead, collaborative problem solving, holistic development approaches, and a school-wide culture of continuous learning among teachers have significant advantages. Such measures are however, driven by teachers' self-motivation, persuasive rationale, and a commitment to acquiring new skills.

This article presents one such approach to engaging teachers in learning groups to reflect on professional development challenges and suggests some solutions. A workshop was organised in our school for sixteen participants, including both newly inducted and veteran teachers. Additionally, mid-level educational leaders included in the groups brought their own perspectives and those of the school's top management.

The workshop was devoted to the issue of problem-solving. Using one's own rationale and through arguments and consensus-building, teachers participated in sessions moderated by the facilitator. Four case scenarios typically depicting PDP barriers emerged as a result of preliminary brainstorming in the group.

- Play the role of a group of new teachers and passionate learners. The school management has asked the group to chalk out a PDP for the faculty. Prepare a blueprint for the same.

- The group observes that senior members of the school management committee (SMC) are not interested in investing in teachers' professional development. Prepare a pitch to convince SMC members to invest in PDP.

- Fairness and transparency are the hallmarks of any organisation. However, some faculty members get preference

over others in professional development opportunities. Prepare a presentation for remedying the situation that makes a case to the management.

- Some teachers have developed inertia over the years, and are not interested in learning new skills. The challenge is to bring a shift in their mindsets through a useful, sustainable PDP. Prepare a presentation for the target group to bring out the desired results.



The workshop commenced with an ice-breaking activity. In an exciting game, participants picked one item of utility from a tray containing several everyday items. They were asked to share one usage of the item selected but different from that item's ordinary and dominant usage. Each participant creatively thought about it and shared new ideas. One participant who chose a Moserbaer CD shared that she will use it as the proverbial Sudarshan Chakra to ward off all evils. Another participant who chose a white cricket ball said that the ball was a replica of the mother earth, and she would appeal to all to keep it green. A third participant who picked a paper clip said it represented diversity as a paper clip embraces papers of all hues and colours.

Once all participants had shared their thoughts on the items they had selected, a short reflection session followed. The ability to reflect, imagine, and communicate positive and divergent thinking came across as the main outcomes of the ice-breaker. The action was a perfect energiser for the activity that followed.

Each of the four groups selected one of problems described above and deployed a 'peel the fruit' visible thinking routine to get under the skin of the problem, with more in-depth questions and a finally evaluation of the core issue. Each group devoted an hour to discuss the topic and work out a solution collaboratively. Once the discussions were over, the groups presented their case to the larger plenary for 15 minutes each.



The discussions indicated a need to develop a compelling roadmap for school-based in-service education and training (INSET) of teachers. For such an INSET program to succeed, schools need:

- INSET planning
- Leadership commitment
- Investment in teacher education
- Developing a culture of learning
- Reflection, mentoring, and monitoring.

In their presentations, groups provided suggestions such as ‘what is in it for me’ (WIIFM) as a starting point to ensure onboarding of all teachers in the INSET programme. WIIFM is instrumental in bringing senior teachers on board who may have lost the motivation and will to relearn. One group emphasised that role models and ambassadors for change make a difference in all professional development programmes. Another insight highlighted the need to set clear expectations on both sides, participants and resource persons, with the revitalisation of skills, engagement, and innovation setting a tone for ‘learners first’ instead of ‘teachers first’. Another group emphasised current status analysis under three categories – first, identifying the essential attributes, i.e., presentation, communication, punctuality, meeting expectations, subject matter expertise, and interpersonal relationships. Second, going a little extra distance to include enthusiasm, reflection on self-practices, pedagogical innovation, and engaging students in various meaningful ways. Third, examining how students and teachers connect, the level of technology use, assessment practices, and students’ feedback and choices.

One of the teachers, in the fourth year of her career and a workshop participant, summed it up succinctly. ‘Working in groups with seniors gave me the “experience of twenty years” as they all presented their perspectives and listened to me with respect and empathy,’ she said. All groups agreed

that when schools design such a road map for on-the-job learning, and teachers are designers of the content and methodology of professional learning, they become accountable for the implementation and success of PDP. **T**

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