



Teacher Empowerment Is A Matter Of Professional Development

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ABSTRACT

Teacher empowerment in education has drawn considerable attention over the past decade. This means decentralization of all the aspects related to educational management and administration at the lowest levels because teachers are the ones in the classroom, closest to the students. Short and Greer identified six dimensions of empowerment: decision-making, teacher impact, teacher's status, autonomy, self-efficacy and opportunities for professional development. Professional growth refers to develop professionally, to learn continuously and to expand one's own skills through the work life of the school by the teacher. This leads to developing knowledge, skills, and competencies required in a profession so as to meet the contemporary and future demands of that particular profession. Empowerment of Teachers necessitates collaboration between management and teachers to solve problems, make decisions, create innovative solutions, and decide on the mission and vision of the school.

Key word : Teacher empowerment, Professional development, Self-efficacy

Introduction

Teacher empowerment in education has drawn considerable attention over the past decade. Empowerment means different things to different people. According to Liontos (1993), empowerment means bringing the responsibility for decision making to the lowest possible level, which specifies that the administrator does not make all the decisions. Leadership, where teacher empowerment exists, looks quite different from traditional bureaucratic, hierarchical conceptions that slot individuals into different, limited functions and that place them in subordinate relationships to one another (Darling-Hammond, Bullmaster & Cobb, 1995). Empowerment creates ownership for those responsible for carrying out decisions by involving them directly in the decision-making process (Harrison, Killion, & Mitchell, 1989). Therefore empowerment can be defined as a form of decentralization that places decision making and accountability at the lowest level; thus, teachers are involved in decisions about instruction, curriculum because they are the ones in the classroom, closest to the students (Richardson, Lane & Flanigan, 1995). Teacher empowerment can bring the job efficacy, competency, professional skills, etc for the professional development.

Professional development is a process of developing one's knowledge, skills, and competencies required in a profession so as to meet the contemporary and future demands of that particular profession. Empowerment has been defined as a process whereby school participants develop the competence to take charge of their own growth, resolve their own problems, and fulfill their needs to effectively participate in the workplace (Kreisberg, 1992; Short, 1994). According to Teacher Empowerment (2002), Bolin (1989, p. 82) defined teacher empowerment as 'investing teachers with the right to participate in the

determination of school goals and policies and to exercise professional judgment about what and how to teach.' According to the Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC), professional development refers to "activities to enhance professional career growth." Such activities may include individual development, continuing education, and in-service education, as well as curriculum writing, peer collaboration, study groups, and peer coaching or mentoring.

Question's of why?

- Empowerment creates a sense of ownership in teachers' work environments and provides teachers with the opportunities to perform to their fullest capabilities (Whitaker & Moses, 1990).
- A teacher to be empowered is the inspiration to grow as professionals.
- Empowerment inspires collaboration among educators.
- To make teachers as lifelong learners
- Give recognition to teaching as a reflective practice & teacher as the reflective practitioner
- To make teacher the first and foremost active agent in every aspect of the educational system
- To ensure natural development of teachers in their teaching efficacy
- To give concrete shape to code of ethic to make the teachers effective, resourceful, competent and role model for the students and contributing agent without burden to society.

How it is useful ?

Teacher empowerment can bring the various empowerments in professional development of teachers by developing the professional efficacy, accountability, professional ethics and making the teachers as a resourceful. Also it creates the cooperative, adjustable environment, sportive mind, interest, etc in the teachers and its main advantage is professional development of teachers.

The present context

In the present status the teacher empowerment and professional development is in dilemma because a common mistake is not adequately addressing the role changes of teachers and administrators. Liberty of thought, innovation of teachers in an institution is curtailed due to rigid patterns of curricular structure and existing frame of routine work and The lack of preparation for the realities of change. Professional competencies-i.e. the ability to perform the activities within an occupation or function to the standards expected in employment is not fully experienced due to inappropriate placement, under-placement of the teachers, lack of opportunities and appropriate learning environment. The socio-economic status of teachers from primary to tertiary level is looked down upon as the salary, service conditions and emoluments have been widely despised because of the fact that their designation and the nature, structure of salary are below the dignified level- even less than sweepers and wages earners in any corporation / public establishment. Status and social recognition go hand in hand. The ignominious status of teachers have left them, de-recognized en masse in the eyes of the public and also partly by the immoral and unethical acts committed by the teachers themselves. The process of selection to colleges of education and the duration of training, the obsolete content, and out dated methodology of training; such professionals are responsible for not earning due recognition for teachers in the society at present.

The most important criteria that are professional ethics (principal of code of conduct followed by the professional members) are not adhered to by most of the members of the teaching community. No incentives and reinforcement is accorded to the teachers: in reality most of them are not getting their genuine dues as per the provision of the service conditions; as a result, a large number of the teachers take shelters under the law for retrieval service conditions.

Unwarranted political interference- involuntary, unethical and unusual transfers put the teachers into embarrassment, which in turn affects the quality of dispensation and discharge of their normal duties.

Measures to be taken for teachers empowerment & professional development

- For empowerment of teachers to be successful, Smith and Lotven (1993) declared that four conditions must be in place; both teachers and administrators must: 1) know what roles both will play; 2) understand and theoretically accept the benefits of empowerment and shared decision-

making; 3) recognize the existence of a discrepancy gap between what currently is and what could be; and finally must 4) take the risk of commitment to change. Teachers believe that they are more empowered when the school in which they work provides them with opportunities to grow and develop professionally (Blasé & Blasé, 2001; Short, 1998) other than that,

- The principals should avoid the tendency to focus on the "here & now" rather than on the future. Therefore, a clearly stated end result must be communicated so that all parties understand the vision and mission of the school (Phillips, Romanish)
- SELF LEARNING: A teacher can never really teach unless he learns himself. "A lamp can never light unless it burns its own flames" (R.N. Tagore). A Teacher should keep learning always.
- IN-SERVICE PROGRAMME AND REFRESHER COURSES: A teacher requires refreshing and updates his knowledge by attending such courses.
- SEMINARS, SYMPOSIUMS AND WORKSHOPS: A teacher needs to participate in the above activities with significant contribution in terms of contributing papers, delivering talks and organizing and chairing the sessions.
- INNOVATION AND EXPERIMENTATION: A teacher needs to innovate and experiment upon new methods, techniques and practices.
- WRITING BOOKS, ARTICLES AND RESEARCH PAPERS: A teacher should contribute originally in this endeavor for his professional growth.
- FIELDTRIP, OUTING AND EXCHANGE PROGRAMME: Professional growth occurs through gaining personal experience, contact and communication and knowledge gathered through the above means.

Conclusion

In the light of the above-cited logical reasons and illustrations, it can be strongly visualized that teacher empowerment and professional development is a must for every teacher in enabling teaching-learning context. Any individual who enters the teaching profession should know and understand the expectations, challenges and issues of the teaching profession in relation to the needs and demands of time and society. For this proper knowledge and understanding of the presented reasons in relation to teaching as a profession. The Teacher empowerment and professional development of teachers is highly essential through the organization of educational activities and programmes in teaching, training, research and extension perspectives.

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