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Professional Development Programmes for Teachers of English by S.Ganesan and R.Shalini

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Introduction

Teachers in general tend to take an easy path after getting employment in educational institutions. Very few teachers enhance their skills further after joining the teaching profession. To encourage teachers to develop their professional skills, planners and administrators have introduced Faculty Development Programme. They have announced incentives to motivate the teachers to qualify further. Performance is always monitored and salary increments are linked to performances by the teachers. This paper discusses the various options available to the teachers for their professional development. A professionally developed teacher ensures good academic performances of the students under his care.

Faculty Development Programme (F.D.P.) is supported by U.G.C. and A.I.C.T.E. to empower the teachers serving in the Higher Education segments in India. The teachers



gain self-confidence and subject knowledge by participating in F.D.P. Alice Murray declares:

Empowerment is the process through which teachers become capable of engaging in, sharing control of, and influencing events and institutions that affect their lives (3).

Positive attitude, self-belief and proactive quality are the skills that empower the teachers. Fresh teachers cannot acquire these skills all on a sudden. F.D.P. helps the teachers to acquire these skills. Professional knowledge and soft skills together with personal qualities and experience mould the teachers. According to Bailey, Curtis and Numan (2001), teachers participate in professional development activities to add more to their knowledge base and to acquire new skills.

In the present 21st century, knowledge explosion takes place at a furious speed. New concepts and methodologies are introduced in teaching English as a second language/E.F.L. So teachers should be aware of the latest developments in English teaching. Teachers of English who attend Faculty Development Programmes are more inclined to adopt new techniques and resource materials with their students (Chrisman & Crandell, 2007). This is a definite positive sign shown by the trained teachers.

Nowadays, teachers do not have free time or inclination to interact with their senior colleagues. This leads to the situation where young teachers are isolated, resulting in their frustration. F.D.P.s address these issues and bring the young teachers to meet the experts in the field. Another important activity for a teacher to improve professionally is to read journal articles on E.L.T. These activities enlighten the teachers about new trends and research activities happening across the world. After reading many articles, the enthusiastic teacher can even try writing about his/ her experience in the classrooms.

Reflective Teaching

Zeichner and Liston (1996) describe the key qualities of reflective teaching practices. The ability to identify the problems and solve them in classroom teaching is a major component of reflective teaching. The other components are awareness of the cultural contexts and the ability to self-examine critically the teaching methodology.



Reflective teaching practice enables the teachers to adopt innovative methods in knowledge sharing process. Farrell (1998) observes that reflective teaching helps free teachers from impulsive behaviour or on the other extreme, from monotony in their teaching; it also allows teachers to develop their own educational perspectives.

Academic File

Maintaining an academic file is another activity that will help the teachers fine-tune their professional performances. The academic file should contain the details of the daily teaching with the topics covered, questions asked, explanations given and the names of the students who participated actively in the learning process. This academic file is a record of the teacher's performance in the classroom. It throws light on the teacher-student interactions, the feedback of the students and the effective way of evaluating the students' performance. In course of time, the teacher can write about the goals set for a particular group of students and the success or lack of success.

According to Bailey, Curtis and Numan, (2001) the process of describing events, asking questions, and formulating hypotheses can reveal aspects of language teaching that further a teacher's own professional development.

Peer Mentoring

The academic file is the forerunner of academic journal. By analyzing the entries, procedural patterns can be identified and any classroom techniques can be modified. This is an advantage of maintaining an academic file. With this, one can analyse the performance of the students as well as the teacher. At a later stage, the academic file is given for the opinions of colleagues. The teachers in the department can interpret the data, question some of the techniques and offer suggestions. This type of interaction between experienced teachers is called peer mentoring.

The goals behind peer mentoring include giving new, teachers individualized attention and encouragement and at the same time, strengthening their teaching skills. (Yanoshak 2007). Both the mentor and the fresh teacher benefit mutually. According to



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Alice Murray, “The mentoring process also benefits the mentors because the questions and comments from their partners aid the mentors in reflecting on, and possibly improving, their own teaching practices (PT).

Special Interest Group (S.I.G.)

This group consists of teachers who meet regularly to discuss a particular aspect of their teaching. The S.I.G. is not a monthly workshop. There is no expert giving instructions. All the teachers are equal and their only goal is to enhance their teaching abilities. The aim is to analyse and know more about the teaching strategies. The group meetings follow a fixed agenda and everyone takes the turn to chair the meetings. The S.I.G. can be conducted online also if all members have the net connectivity.

Teacher Support Network

Support network is different from S.I.G. It includes teachers from several institutions in a particular region. The outcome of the support network depends on the goals of the group, but fundamental basis such as membership size, organization, meeting time and venue should also be considered (Richards and Farrell 2005).

National Teachers’ Association

Every teacher of English must enroll in a national teachers’ association as a member. This is a basic requirement to pursue professional development. English Language Teachers Association of India is doing a great service to English teachers. It offers good support to its members by informing them about the impending workshops, seminars and conferences. It is an affiliate of an International Association. ELTAI publishes a journal, containing articles about English teaching in India and also an online journal. It also informs its members about study programmes, teachers exchange programme and nominates members for overseas programmes. ELTAI conducts regional, national and international conferences, which help the members to gain professional skills, international recognition and support.

International Teachers’ Association

Any teacher by joining an International Association gets the opportunity to connect with other teachers worldwide and pursue personal goals for further professional



development. An International membership benefits the teacher through regular newsletters, updates and the opportunity to share and learn from other teachers in different countries. Teachers of English to Speakers of other Languages (TESOL) and International Association of Teachers of English as a Foreign Language (IATEFL) are two well-known International associations. Such organizations promote professional enhancement by conducting conferences, workshops, online exchange of ideas and correspondence. Members also get the opportunity to apply for grants and awards and publish their articles in journals.

Participation in Workshops and Conferences

Workshops provide teachers the opportunity to learn about the specific skill related to E.L.T. within a fixed time. Workshops are designed to give participants a chance to try out practical applications about the topic being presented and to contemplate how they might utilize and adapt elements of the activity for use in their own classrooms (Richards and Farrell 2005). A successful workshop highlights a particular area of teaching and makes it relevant to the context of the participating teachers. Participation in a conference gives the opportunity to the practising teachers to gain confidence and exposure to new ideas. Presenting a paper in a conference involves a lot of research, organization of ideas and preparation of power point presentations. This type of activity helps the teachers to motivate themselves to attain professional recognition. Another benefit of attending a conference is the opportunity to learn about new techniques and solutions to recurring problems in E.L.T. A teacher can gain experience by presenting papers in regional and state conferences, then moving on to national and international conferences.

Conferences can provide teachers with information and strategies to create new policies or make changes in curriculum. Conference participation also enables teachers to develop long lasting professional and personal contacts in the English teaching community (Alice Murray 10).

The teachers are empowered when they return from a conference and they can in turn induce their colleagues to follow new teaching practices.



Conclusion

A teacher must learn new ideas and strategies throughout his/her career. There is no place for stagnation. Professional development is always a never-ending process. What is modern today may be outdated within few years. So a teacher is always expected to equip with new concepts in tune with the changing times. The teacher should understand that there are many options to learn more about E.L.T. Professional development can take place only if it is pursued with determination. One should not rest on past laurels. There is always scope for further developments. One method may be suitable for one teacher but it may not work for others. Teachers achieve professional development by cooperating with others. This in turn leads to self-empowerment. This paper lists out various steps to attain the goal of self-empowerment by the teachers. Some of the steps are informal activities while others are traditional. The English teacher is responsible to decide on his/her own empowerment.

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