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CHAPTER 8

Professional Development and School Improvement in Central Asia

GULGUNCHAMO NAIMOVA

This chapter is based on my experience as a resident of Tajikistan; a teacher for over 20 years, first in Dushanbe, the capital of Tajikistan, and later for over 20 years in Badakshan province; and a professional development teacher (PDT) in Badakshan for over five years. I lived through the period of transition from the Soviet Union (USSR) to independence, civil war and after, and saw the influence of these upheavals on schools, teachers and students. In writing the chapter I have also conducted discussions with other teachers and teacher educators including PDTs from Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan. Because of lack of resources on educational issues of the country my readings were limited to some dissertations, Education Ministry documents and other information available about the region on the Internet.

While the chapter is about central Asia, a focus of this study is on the province of Badakshan in Tajikistan and the city of Osh in Kyrgyzstan because that is where my own experience and that of my fellow PDTs is derived from.

This chapter will discuss briefly the educational system of the two Central Asian countries Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan, particularly the experiences of teachers' Professional Development and School Improvement during the Soviet era and at the present time. The chapter will also describe the relationship of the educational institutions in these two countries with the other institutions and especially with AKU-IED and their impact on the Educational Development and School Improvement in these countries.

Education System in Central Asia: Soviet and post-Soviet period

According to Abdushukurova (2002), Soviet social policy created a modern education system in Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan and the other 13 republics that were part of the Soviet Union. These countries had a public education system. The system was financed from Moscow and education was provided free of charge to all the citizens. Male and female citizens had equal educational opportunities from the kindergartens upwards. As elsewhere in the Soviet Union, the system was co-educational and was divided into schools for primary (grade 1-4), middle secondary (grade 5-9), higher secondary (grade 10-11), and higher education (at the special technical or professional schools, universities and institutes).

The achievements of the Soviet Union were a high literacy rate and a good quality of education in terms of students' strong knowledge base, especially in science, mathematics and literature. The teachers were well respected, degrees and diplomas sought after and students were employable upon graduation. All the teachers working at schools even in the remote areas were qualified. They had either University, Pedagogic Institute or Special Vocational Pedagogic qualifications. There were many other structured programmes for the students, including subject clubs, sports, camping, and so forth.

The centralized education system did not prepare the republics for independence in 1991. Everything was uniform and ready-made – curriculum, resources and even the lesson plans were prepared by the central education offices in Moscow. Very little attention was paid to the questions of relevance, sustainability, culture and context. The teachers were not flexible to modify curricular or other resources according to culture or context, or according to the needs of the students. There were 'Teachers' Guides' – books with all the lesson plans, from which the teachers were expected to deliver the lessons step by step following the books.

Education in pre-independence Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan was considered as the responsibility of the USSR with the Republic's Ministry of Education subordinate to the Ministry of Education of the USSR. There were lower departments of education in the regions, districts and cities of the republics. These departments were implementing state policy. By the time the republics became independent, the quality and availability of education was lower than the Soviet Union-wide average. The newly independent countries were left with the Soviet infrastructure and curriculum, but without resources to maintain the buildings, pay salary, carry out extracurricular activities and programmes and keep up with the information revolution. Additionally, in Tajikistan, civil war had destroyed the economy and damaged the social fabric. The education sector along with other social sectors sharply declined.

Tajikistan

The republic of Tajikistan is a small country comprising 143.1 thousand square kilometres. It borders on Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Afghanistan and China. The population of the country exceeds 6 million of which 73% live in the rural districts. Tajikistan is an agrarian country. Agriculture is mainly based on cotton growing, although other agricultural crops like rice, grain, tobacco, corn, potatoes and vegetables are grown. Vineyards and gardens are also cultivated. Livestock production comes after cotton growing. Mining, chemicals, metallurgy, oil processing, energy, construction, food processing industries, mechanical engineering and handicraft industries are all developed in Tajikistan (Encyclopedia: Tajikistan).



Figure 3. Map of Tajikistan.

Within Tajikistan, the autonomous Province (MBAR) lies in the high Pamir mountain range and its capital is Khorog. The population of MBAR consists of 206,000 people. There are 318 schools, about 5000 teachers working for 55,000 students from grade 1 to 11. A student-teacher ratio of 11:1 is as required by law in all areas of Tajikistan (Country Guide, The Times of Central Asia).

Data from the Ministry of Education shows that Tajikistan is short of 72,200 teachers. The political non-stability and deterioration of the inter-ethnic relations resulted in the migration of a huge number of teachers to Russia and other countries. The prestige of the profession fell, together with the value of education. Having low economic conditions and working in hard conditions for a miserable salary, the teachers lost their desire to work at school. They left their workplaces at school to engage in trade. Children also dropped out of schools because they had to help their families with earning. They left their desks at schools for a place in the bazaar. The Department of

Statistics reported that only about 79.8% of school age children attend classes (Bruker, 2002).

We can observe very similar problems in the education system of Kyrgyzstan, the neighbouring country to Tajikistan.

Kyrgyzstan

The Republic of Kyrgyzstan has an area of 198,500 square kilometres. It borders on China, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan. Its population is 4.832 million. The majority of the population is Kyrgyz.

Osh is the second biggest city in Kyrgyzstan. There are 50 public schools, two private (Iilim and AKS) and two Turkish Lyceums funded by the Turkish government plus several professional lyceums (Kyrgyzstan Development Gateway).



Figure 4. Map of Kyrgyzstan.

According to Karim (2003), ‘The secondary education in Kyrgyzstan is facing a number of problems, most of which are due to lack of resources. Among these, shortage of qualified teachers and lack of the textbooks are the most serious problems.’ According to the information provided by the Ministry of Education and Culture of the Kyrgyz Republic, there is a shortage of 2,863 teachers and about 2,500 schoolchildren have dropped out of schools (Karim, 2003).

It is clear from the above descriptions that education systems in Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan are beset with similar problems. Considerable effort is needed to reform the system and improve the quality of teaching and learning in schools.

Professional Development and School Improvement

Tajikistan

The goal of the Ministry of Education is to develop an education system and an education policy which will meet international standards, provide quality and equal access to education and encourage teachers to use modern methods of teaching (Rashidov, 2000).

Education has always been considered important in Central Asia. Here education is not only identified with schools as it covers a wider range of issues rather than just training and professional development. Education is a process that influences all life. It is a process which is oriented towards the formation of the individual; it is a process of development of human resources. Education concerns the quality of life for all members of society. Its purpose is to satisfy the requirements of the person in all-round development for the realization of all abilities, survival, existence, and improved quality of life and work, thereby improving the economic, cultural and spiritual legacy for maintaining the social and economic development of the republic (Rashidov, 2000).

The constitution (Article 41) and (Article 12), says that all the children must complete nine years (Class 1-9) of compulsory education. After this, education is not compulsory but every child is guaranteed a place in the state-run higher secondary school (years 10 and 11), in the schools for professional education and in the university. All state schools are free of cost. (Rashidov, 2000).

According to Rashidov (2000), on 4 June 1997 the Tajik government accepted Resolution No. 266 on the State Standard of General Secondary Education of the Republic. This resolution identified disciplines and skills to be taught at each level of education and emphasized the holistic development of a child. The document also talks about the creation of conditions for supporting the child and realizing the rights of children for high-level physical, intellectual, spiritual, moral and social development. It recommended material support to large families, and the development of public health services and educational services for children. To develop a normative document is admirable, but to apply it is challenging if not impossible in the existing situation as described above. Teachers are the key to students' achievements, and every student deserves an experienced, well-prepared teacher. Especially needed are teachers for the primary and secondary schools in almost all subjects. However, as I said earlier, few well-qualified teachers are available.

During the Soviet era, professional development for teachers consisted of self-study and organized training designed to improve the content knowledge, methodology and pedagogy of the teachers. Teachers were expected to do research on their own and present it at the teachers' seminars and conferences. Professional development or training courses were designed and conducted by Institutes for Professional Development. Teachers would

attend these courses once in five years. Once every few years some teachers could get the opportunity to attend professional development courses offered at the national level by the Central Institute for Professional Development in Dushanbe, the capital of Tajikistan. Also, every year the teachers had to attend a one to two day conference on different areas such as methodology, pedagogy, innovations in education, and so forth. In addition, there were monthly subject-wise 'methodology sessions' at schools' subject departments. The Professional Development courses for the heads of the schools and other administrative staff were organized the same way by the Central Education Departments for all the areas.

The overall control of the implementation of the Professional Development courses and teachers' professional growth was led by the Ministry of Education. We can say that Professional Development courses for the teachers were intentional – the teachers were expected to attend them in an ongoing and systematic process. They consisted of a short (the longest being one month) retraining of the teachers and educators. In Tajikistan they were usually conducted by the educationalists from the universities and institutes. Most of these educationalists were not aware of the school contexts and their history, of classroom situations, teaching learning processes and accessibility of facilities/resources. Also as the ideas for the professional development came from the centre, from Dushanbe, they were not very applicable for all the areas in the republic. These courses did not meet the needs of the teachers from the different areas.

As a teacher, I have attended several training courses. The approach to them was always top down, never bottom up. There was no needs assessment conducted in the beginning to know what the teachers really need from these courses and what are their objectives for attending these courses. Almost all the Professional Development courses involved theory-based lectures on content and methodology. Instead of practical approach, there were lectures on child-centred learning, on group and pair work techniques and on classroom discussions. The Professional Development courses had nothing practical, neither practical demonstrations, presentations, nor model teaching and no classroom observations at schools or follow- up activities in the field.

As a result, classroom teaching was mainly teacher centred; with teacher-talk, teacher at the front and activities directed to the whole class. No element of a child-centred approach could be observed. There was very little group work, pair work, or debate and discussions. Teachers had very little or no understanding of these approaches to teaching so that they just put the students in groups or pairs and gave them a task to do. They gave no instructions about how to work in the group nor distributed roles and responsibilities (such as idea generator, writer, timekeeper and presenter) among group members. Thus the strong students who had better knowledge of the subject would do the task without sharing with others and without asking for and considering others' ideas. The other group members would engage in off-task talk. As a result there was always an unhealthy noise in the

classroom. After giving the group task, teachers themselves would mark the students' exercise books, fill in the register or do other things instead of observing the students and facilitating and monitoring their work.

From my own experience as a teacher, I know that the teachers were bound by the curriculum and the textbooks. Even if they had good ideas about teaching approaches they were not confident to apply these approaches. They had a fear that they would not be able to finish the textbook, or cover the syllabus and they would not be able to meet the curriculum requirements. Also there was a fear of inspection starting from the administration (head, deputy heads) of the school up to the educational officers of the departments. Inspections from the school administration – head and deputy heads and subject department leaders – were quite regular. There was the so-called 'Frontalnaya proverka' – the whole school inspection by the team from the Regional Education Departments (RED) once in three or four years. This team spent about a month in one school observing all the teachers teaching, and checking all the documents starting from the students' notebooks and diaries up to all the curriculum and syllabus, matching them with the topics in the registers. The consequences were very bad if the teachers were not teaching according to the curriculum.

There was very little or no room for the development of the students' thinking skills or creativity in lessons. Mainly the teachers' understanding was that the students have no outlook and very limited knowledge; therefore they have to gain knowledge from the teachers, who know everything. The teachers' questions to the class were usually open but time was limited, so that the students did not get chance to think and respond to them fully. So the teacher would do it instead of them. The students were taught to be good listeners and to respect their teachers. Therefore there were no questions from them during the lessons, no enquiries, as if they knew everything from what their teachers taught them.

To develop the students' thinking skills and creativity there were extracurricular and very good outdoor activities, called subject clubs. A student could choose the area of his/her interest and attend these clubs. These clubs were very interesting with hands-on activities, where the students could develop their creativity, thinking and other skills. And the most interesting thing was that the same subject teachers could conduct activities at these clubs. These activities were very interesting and applicable for the classroom sessions, but as the teachers were bound to the time and the textbooks, they could not bring them to the classroom. Unfortunately, because of family commitments or other interests, not all students attended these clubs.

All of the above refers to pre-independence in Tajikistan as a whole. I am now going to refer to my own experiences in the MBAR, post-independence; since this is where the IED has been involved.

Mountainous Badakhshan Autonomous Region (MBAR)

After the Soviet era, during the early years of independence, as in other parts of the country, many qualified teachers left their places in the schools because of the poor economic situations of their families. The new graduates of the pedagogical institutes and universities did not choose to work in school and opted to work with international development agencies working in the region who could give them higher salaries. This raised serious problems for the education system. According to Ismailova (2000), the schools in the Mountainous Badakhshan Autonomous Region are short of almost 800 teachers, both in the primary and secondary schools. She says that only 12 out of 264 graduates of the higher educational institutions sent to the MBAR applied for a job in the educational departments of the region. The other graduates sought work with a private organization.

Nowadays, many teachers are not certified. These teachers have a higher secondary school certificate but no professional training and were employed during the war or in postings in remote areas where no teachers were available. These teachers have either limited or no understanding about methodology and subject content knowledge and no knowledge of curriculum. They usually face lots of problems such as classroom management, resource development, giving instructions and, of course, teaching methods. This problem is evident in the following quotation from a history teacher from Niyozov (2001).

The current programs for all the subjects are being developed in Dushanbe ... Many important themes are not in the program. There are debates around the meaning of (the history behind) Badakhshan and Pamir and we teachers even do not have enough knowledge about them. I would include the view of the mountains, the traditions of the people of Badakhshan, the needs of Badakhshan and the problems we face today. (pp. 222-223)

The Ministry of Education is now concerned not only with the retention of teachers and school administrators but also with the development of their professional skills (Rashidov 2000). A policy requiring formal certification of teachers and retraining of all teaching staff was developed and authorized by a Government Resolution (4 June 4 1995, no. 264). The government expects that certification will lead to improvement in teachers' professional skills, increase in their salaries and overall improvement in schools.

Regional Education Departments

After independence, the Regional Education Departments took charge of the financial and pedagogical needs of the schools. The local authority (Hukumat/Government of the areas, towns and regions) implements the state policy in education, develops and realizes regional programmes for the development of education within the national context and takes into account

the socio-economic, cultural, demographic and other peculiarities of individual districts. Having a small budget, the Regional Education Departments cannot afford to change the curriculum and purchase or develop all the needed resources for the schools in a short period of time. They are not able to develop and conduct courses for all the teachers of the area. Even when training courses are offered, they do not always lead to improvement in teaching practice. It is hoped that strategies to increase incentives for teachers to help them improve the economic situation of their families, may also provide opportunities for more exposure outside the school activities and may also lead to development of teachers and improvement in the quality of teaching and the school as a whole.

According to Rashidov (2000), the new policy paper on the National Schools (3 January 1995) is the most important document in the education sector which defines the purposes of education. The Ministry of Education issued the order for the implementation of the policy. Various measures were developed for addressing various aspects of school organization including maintenance of the school norms, rules and regulations, preparing teachers and improving their qualifications, solving of the urgent problems, defining the contents of school education and studying the existing educational programmes, textbooks and educational methodological literature for comprehensive schools. All this has to be done by the authorities from the central education office in Dushanbe, through the regional educational offices in the regions.

The influence of independence was different in the MBAR in Tajikistan from the rest of the country and from other Central Asian countries. Badakhshan has a lot of problems in schooling but fortunately the educational departments as well as the teachers and the students are very open and supportive of making changes and improving the system. The greatest motivation for the teachers of Badakhshan to work in school and to improve the students' knowledge comes from the Aga Khan, the spiritual leader of the Ismaili community, a sect of Muslims, which forms almost 100% of the population of MBAR. The Aga Khan development has supported the community through many initiatives, particularly in the education sector in MBAR, since 1991. The speech the Aga Khan IV made at the opening ceremony of the Aga Khan Lycée in Khorog in 1998 was particularly inspirational for the teachers. He expressed high praise for the teachers, who in a very difficult time of poverty (because of the civil war) did everything to keep the education alive. He said: 'I should pay My compliments, My respect and My gratitude to the teachers who have kept education alive in Badakhshan' (Aga Khan IV, 1998).

Teachers are considered the most honest, most educated and most important people in Badakhshan. Those teachers who had continued to work as teachers had kept education alive without getting any salary or promotions. From 1992 to 1994 teachers did not get any salary and starting from 1994 they could get only half of their salary. I myself was a teacher and

remember the faces of foreigners who were surprised when they learnt that I received only US\$4 per month as salary and still continued to work as a teacher. My response was similar to a teacher quoted in Niyozov (2001):

Mavlo sends us everything, food clothes, his love and care. He said that we were always in his thoughts and heart ... The only thing that Mavlo wants from us is to work hard, seek knowledge and teach the children. (p. 201)

All the teachers and students thought that this was the best way to pay back to Hazir Imam; therefore they were all trying their best to improve educational standards

There is another example of teachers and students being highly motivated in the teaching and learning process. Case (2002), a professor at the University of Toronto who worked as an education consultant in Badakhshan, described his visits to classrooms of Khorog (capital city in Badakhshan) in the south-eastern part of Tajikistan:

Classrooms have no heat, and children sit in their winter coats, the wind whistling through cracks in the walls and the windows ... The situation is excruciating, classrooms are inhabited by cold and often hungry children and teachers who attempt to learn and teach using methods abandoned decades ago in other parts of the world. Teachers continue to teach and students continue to learn ... nowhere else in the world have I ever seen teachers as highly motivated and giving of themselves. (p. B19)

The teachers in the MBAR are very lucky in the sense that the Educational Departments are very supportive of their professional growth, although they still lack funds and opportunities. Regional, local and district governments in this area are paying much attention to the improvement of the education system. There are still economic difficulties in the area but in 1996 the National Assembly of the region set up a programme called 'The programme of future education development' to conduct ongoing training programmes and to introduce new reforms such as the introduction of English medium sections in existing schools. Teacher training motivated teachers to return to school, leading to improvement in the quality of schools as well as in the economic conditions of the teachers themselves. Due to this programme in 1996-2002, education achieved some successful results in improving the schools' performance in examinations judging from the number of students securing admission in universities.

The Ministry of Education and the local educational department bodies work strongly in collaboration with the non-governmental organizations working in the education field and assist in their charitable activity. There are several institutions – the Aga Khan Foundation Education Department [1], the Aga Khan Education Service and the Aga Khan University, Institute for Educational Development – that have great impact on the development of

the education system and school improvement in Badakhshan. The greatest and most valuable contribution to the development of education in Badakhshan was made by His Highness the Aga Khan and His Development Network (AKDN).[2]

Kyrgyzstan

I cannot speak personally about Kyrgyzstan. However, writing about the secondary education in Kyrgyzstan, Karim (2003) says that there are acute problems in the rural areas. She says: 'Schools in remote villages desperately lack teachers of English and Russian. There are cases when people without proper qualification have been teaching some subjects. As a result the quality of secondary education is suffering greatly.' She also says that the secondary education system in Kyrgyzstan has the same problems as the other former Soviet Union republics particularly the lack of and high price of the textbooks. As a result, the situation of the schools in the rural areas is very bad. 'Most of the people do not have access to books and even if they do, not all of them can afford to buy them.'

Educational reform in Kyrgyzstan aims to change the economic organization in education. It talks about the establishment of a variety of education facilities at all levels, democratization of the education system, and introducing new technologies. According to Jusenbaev and Ryskulueva (2002), since 1991 the republic of Kyrgyzstan has started drastic, social, political and economic reforms. In 1992 the law of the republic of Kyrgyzstan called 'On Education' was adopted. This document determines the state education policy and the main principles of managing and functioning of the system of education to be implemented in the republic. It is associated with a set of comprehensive measures aiming to change radically its economic organization, institutional structure and content. According to different sources, there has been constant growth in the number of schools and the number of children enrolled and teachers in Kyrgyzstan have more opportunities for professional development and school improvement now than they had in the Soviet era. There are many Professional Development Institutions in Osh such as the Institute for Professional Development, Osh State University, foreign organizations and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) which support teacher education. Despite these institutions the area still lacks qualified teachers.

Impact of AKU-IED on the Education System of Central Asia

This section will highlight the impact of the Aga Khan University Institute for Educational Development (AKU-IED) on the professional development of teachers and the overall improvement of schools in Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan. AKU-IED's impact in Tajikistan started from 1994 and in Kyrgyzstan from 1996. These are the years when the first students joined

AKU-IED to do their Masters in Education (M.Ed.). Since then a number of teachers have had the opportunity to do their M.Ed. and get the qualification of Professional Development Teacher (PDT) from the AKU-IED. Also, a large number of the teachers from these countries attended two-month courses of the Visiting Teacher Programme (VTP). Table III shows the number of M.Ed. and VTP graduates from Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan participating in the courses run by the AKU-IED.

Year	Tajikistan		Kyrgyzstan		Total per year
	M.Ed. graduates	VTP graduates	M.Ed. graduates	VTP graduates	
1995	1				1
1998	2	5	1	4	12
1999	2	9	2	3	16
2000	2	11	1	6	20
2002	2	7	3	5	17
2003	3		2		5
2004	3		1		4
2005	2		1		3
Total	17	32	11	18	78

Table III. M.Ed. and VTP graduates from Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan participating in the courses run by the AKU-IED.

Five PDTs from Tajikistan and three from Kyrgyzstan have left the areas to which they had returned after graduation to take up jobs with another institution within the country or another outside the country. All the other PDTs are working in their respective areas. This study will talk about their achievements and problems later.

AKU-IED prepares all the graduates academically and with the work skills required to return to their areas. PDTs are very good in administration, in the practicalities of designing and delivering workshops on teaching methodology and improvement of content knowledge. Out of the 21 graduates of the M.Ed., 13 have remained within the education system of the two countries; 7 in Tajikistan and 6 in Kyrgyzstan. By 2006, 7 more PDTs from the two countries will return after graduation. These PDTs along with the VTP graduates (all of whom have returned to their schools) have returned confident and better equipped to take leadership roles in their respective areas. They are very confident; they have good knowledge in pedagogy and methodology and have the potential to bring changes in the educational system of the area. The PDTs aim to support the education systems providing models of teaching, education and development by conducting workshops and seminars for the teachers and other school staff. They are considered as exemplars of practice, builders of knowledge and

sources for communicating professional understanding amongst the teacher educators, and experienced and non-experienced teachers.

PDTs in Khorog and Osh

The Aga Khan Education Service (AKES) Tajikistan [3] opened the first private Aga Khan Lycée (AKL) in Khorog in 1998. The first two PDTs upon their graduation from IED joined AKES and started working at the Aga Khan Lycée, presently considered as the best school in Tajikistan, as classroom teachers and school-based teacher educators. They worked closely with teachers conducting content, methodology and English learning proficiency courses. Later one of the PDTs worked as a manager of the newly developed Learning Resource Centre of the school. This PDT developed and organized training courses on methodology and English proficiency for the primary and secondary schoolteachers; prepared teachers for the Visiting Teacher (VT) courses at AKU-IED and for English proficiency courses at the American University in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan. The other PDT rejoined his position at the Kharog State University and developed and conducted methodology and English proficiency courses for the teachers and university students (years 4-5).

Today there are three PDTs at AKL and two at the Institute for Professional Development (IPD) in Khorog. The three PDTs at AKL have been asked by the AKES and the Ministry to lead the development and modification of curriculum for all subjects to be taught at the Lycée, especially for the newly opened English medium classes in the primary and secondary sections of the school and for the lower secondary school classes. They involved teachers in material development for the new curriculum thus creating ownership of the new curriculum among them. The PDTs also develop and offer ongoing school-based professional opportunities for the AKES teachers. Sessions of two to three hours are conducted after classes four times a week, with a focus on primary methodology twice a week and on science and English once a week. Also, throughout the year, PDTs continue to do classroom observations, demonstration lessons and presentations. Similar inputs are made in the secondary schools for all subject areas. Attendance in these professional development activities is part of the teachers' contract and PDTs and head teachers are involved in performance appraisal. However, there are many difficulties also since it makes too much work for teachers after they are already tired after taking all their classes.

PDTs are involved in other initiatives as well. AKES, in partnership with AKF and government, has started a new educational development project called the Allied School Project. Some selected government schools are targeted for provision of resources, teacher training and repairs. The teachers come to AKL from the districts, observe the classes, attend workshops and short courses and return to their schools to apply their learning in the classrooms. The PDTs facilitate teachers through

observations, workshops and courses, and teaching them to prepare low cost or no cost materials.

The PDTs also work at the Institute for Professional Development (IPD) which is a government institution. According to the deputy director (DD) of the IPD, the PDTs, along with the VTP graduates from the Primary section of AKL, developed and conducted some training sessions in teaching primary English and mathematics. They also conduct training in content knowledge and pedagogy for primary and secondary teachers of different subjects from the government school. IPD has a Mobile Training Resource Centre (MTRC) and its workshop leader is one of the PDTs. With the MTRC, the PDT and her team go to villages and conduct teachers' development courses. An oral report of the other DD, at IPD, suggests that this PDT has been very successful in designing and implementing this IPD project in almost all of the districts of MBAR. This PDT also delivers seminars for the certified and uncertified English teachers to improve their language proficiency and knowledge of methodology. The DD also said that monitoring of the project showed that the PDT had made considerable impact on the teachers in planning and conducting the lessons; in preparing resources, and in their relationship with the students. Student results have also improved since the MTRC initiative. The IPD annual report on education says that the most important and successful result achieved in education is the encouragement and increased motivation of the students. MTRC also succeeded in bringing in the school parents' committees [4], through allowing community members to borrow books and other resources and building trust through the regular contact. Along with the other trainers, the PDTs at IPD are preparing reading materials such as story books for the primary students. These books are very colourful and they are in three languages: Tajik (national), Shugnani (local) and English. The purpose for developing such books is to motivate students to read and to improve their language skills.

The PDTs in Osh Kyrgyzstan are also trying hard to achieve educational improvement. One of the PDTs from Kyrgyzstan reflecting upon his experience during our informal meeting said that while he was working with the AKES in Osh, he was responsible for planning and organizing professional development courses for the Aga Khan School (AKS) staff. During these courses they used the expertise of all the PDTs and VTP graduates. Their focus was on lesson planning, learning styles and critical thinking. These PDTs have conducted professional development workshops for Government schools in Osh as well. Another PDT said that she was working with the teachers in the area of methodology, trying to teach them child-centred learning approaches and also facilitating the AKS teachers in their everyday teaching practice.

These PDTs have developed a curriculum for all subjects taught at AKS. Some of the PDTs are working with the students and teachers at the Osh State University. They are bringing new methods, techniques and

approaches to their classes; teaching the teachers and the students how to do research. Talking about their experiences the PDTs feel that IED has not only developed their content knowledge or methodology but it has changed their attitude towards the teaching/learning process and their behaviour towards their colleagues and students. They have become more open to sharing and have contributed to the change in the teacher culture of isolation.

One of the VTP graduates with whom I worked wrote in her reflection,

IED was a high mount I climbed. Before IED I thought that I was a very good teacher and I was always trying to be isolated from the others. I was jealous if any other teachers' performance was better than me. After IED I came back totally changed not only because I improved my knowledge of pedagogy and methodology, but my attitude and behaviour towards my colleagues, my students and everyone around me. I became more sociable, confident and supportive to them.

This reflection shows that IED has helped its graduates develop subject knowledge and teaching methodology as well as social attitudes. These graduates as PDTs and visiting teachers have in turn attempted, often successfully, to help other teachers in the system develop more collegial relations with each other and improve their knowledge of the content and the methodology of teaching primary and secondary classes. They have worked particularly in the area of development of the teaching of English in the AKES schools. They have also begun, in a small way, to influence the teachers' professional development structures and culture and the curriculum.

Shortcomings

Despite the many achievements, noted above, there are still many areas where improvement is needed.

- Along with the successes, the PDTs face many challenges as well. Today the PDTs are doing a lot for professional development and school improvement, but they are spread out and therefore their work is not very visible.
- The PDTs are working with AKES at AKL, at IPD and at AKF, sometimes duplicating their efforts and not learning from each others' work. For example, the PDT at AKL has developed a curriculum for English language instruction for the primary classes, taking into consideration students' age level, the culture, content, context of the school and meeting all the requirements of the Concept of National Schools document in developing curricula and teaching resources. The AKL PDT worked very closely with the teachers and the students, conducting experimental model teaching and introducing the curriculum through a team teaching approach. To apply this

curriculum in the class for her students the PDT has done a small-scale study on 'How the curriculum works in the classroom. What changes do we need to make?' The commission of the Ministry for Education has approved this curriculum as well. Unfortunately, the PDTs at IPD have also started their work on the same thing without referring to the work already done. They could work with the already prepared curriculum and add something extra to it. Unfortunately they have spent a lot of time in duplicating the effort. This kind of duplication is happening a lot with the training material on methodology and pedagogy and development courses as well.

- The PDTs in the area are not able to support each other because they are overloaded and cannot get together and share their success or problems. They do not have time to go and observe each other while conducting workshops or seminars and to learn something more from each other. According to them, they are bound to their respective areas. Working in different institutions, although very close to each other in terms of distance in buildings, they feel isolated. At one of my meetings with the PDTs they said, 'The administration wants us to share with the other PDTs our experience but we are not able to do it. We do not get time during the day to visit and talk to other PDTs or observe what and how they are doing.'
- There is only a little support from the administration of the institutions the PDTs work in or from AKU-IED in further development of the PDTs. They rarely attend seminars, conferences or other courses. Sometimes the PDTs feel lonely and they give up. Working for three to four years with the same group of teachers, one PDT feels that 'the jar of knowledge and experience is empty.' Reflecting on her experience she adds,

for more than three years I was working with the same group of the primary school teachers in the areas of pedagogy, methods of teaching, child centred learning approach, curriculum, syllabus, lesson plan development, development and use of the no-cost, low cost resources/authentic material etc. I conducted an English proficiency course for the same teachers. After my courses almost 85% of the teachers have attended VTP in Karachi and training courses in Bishkek Kyrgyzstan. To work with the same group was not more exciting and challenging for me after that. I had a feeling that the jar of knowledge and experience I had is getting empty but there were no opportunities for me to fill it again. Thanks to IED I was very confident in taking part in the English teachers' competition organized by the American Councils and won a scholarship to attend the three month development course in US. After I came I thought my jar is again full although there was nothing new for me at the sessions. But these sessions made me recall the knowledge that I have lost somewhere back in my mind.

Also just talking to teachers from different parts of the world one can learn a lot.

Another PDT during an informal discussion with me shared:

We know that our colleagues from the other countries are getting the chance to attend School Improvement Programmes (SIP) conferences; they conduct development courses in the neighbour countries and the same way they develop their knowledge. Unfortunately we have none of these opportunities.

- The M.Ed. graduates are playing an important role in the work towards improving the classroom teaching practice of teachers. The PDTs are the only people with the M.Ed. degree in the education institutions but neither the heads of the government education offices nor the administration of the institutions they work with pay enough attention to this.
- The PDTs work from 8 in the morning to 5 or 6 in the evening in their workplaces (the other employees work from 8 to 5) if they are not conducting courses. During courses they stay up to 8-9 at night. They have only one day off during the week. This is the only day they can be with their families and do something for the family. In addition their salary is very low which creates problems for them in their families. This is one reason several PDTs have left the education system for a better salary elsewhere.
- The PDTs working in the institutions do not get any leadership role (department leader) even though they have M.Ed. qualification. They get frustrated when a person with no such qualifications or even knowledge and experience leads them. This is another reason why they leave education.
- The PDTs who left their workplaces also say that nobody is interested in what they want to do or recognize the value of a M.Ed. or a PDT. Sharing his experiences during informal talk a PDT said that he wanted to be involved in research projects on professional development activities but the possibilities were zero, because the administration was not interested in this. The same PDT, talking about the salary, said that people with less experience and with no Master's degree were getting more salary than him. He concluded that 'The PDTs are also human beings and they need some intrinsic motivation as well. But the administration expects everything in the area of development from them, without any support.'

Recommendations for Improvement

- A meeting between a team of AKU-IED faculty members with government administrators and government authorities held in Khorog in the summer of 2002 helped immensely to change local perceptions and develop more understanding about AKU-IED's activities and about its graduates, both PDTs and the VTs. More such meetings are needed.
- We always talk of sustainability of professional development and of professional development as a continuing process. As mentioned earlier, the graduates from AKU-IED do not get enough opportunity to interact with the professionals within or outside Central Asia. There is a need for organizing meetings, seminars or conferences, or follow-up courses in the country or region as well as making it possible for the PDTs to attend such occasions outside the region.
- M.Ed. students should work together. This may become possible with the establishment of a Professional Development Centre in Khorog or establishing a team of PDTs at IPD.
- M.Ed. graduates need support in improving their economic conditions. Also these graduates have a very busy workload and almost no time for the family. Some of the M.Ed. graduates are living in rented houses and pay a lot of rent. The low salary packages are very significant in reducing the PDTs' motivation.
- M.Ed. graduates must have time and encouragement to do research on their own practice and on classroom teaching/learning processes. This is an important activity to learn and improve one's work. Not being able to do research will result in no learning for the PDTs and consequently for teachers they work with.

Notes

- [1] The Aga Khan Foundation (AKF) is a non-denominational, international development agency established in 1967 by His Highness the Aga Khan. Its mission is to develop and promote creative solutions to problems that impede social development, primarily in Asia and East Africa. AKF is one of the departments of AKDN and was created as a private, non-profit foundation under Swiss law.
- [2] Aga Khan Development Network (AKDN) is a group of development agencies working in health, education, culture and rural and economic development, primarily in Asia and Africa.
- [3] The Aga Khan Education Service (AKES) Tajikistan is a private non-profit organization, a part of the Aga Khan Development Network (AKDN). It manages and supports many development projects around the world. AKES manages over 300 schools in the world. More than 50,000 students are enrolled in these schools in Pakistan, India, Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda and Bangladesh.

- [4] The schools in MBAR have parents' committees. These committees support the schools in building a close relationship with the community through meetings, informal gatherings, and so forth.

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