Professional Development Centre, Gilgit   Institute for Educational Development

November 2012

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Recommended Citation

THE VALUE BASED PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT FOR TEACHERS' ATTITUDE, BEHAVIOR AND ENHANCED PROFESSIONALISM: A SCHOOL BASED INTERVENTION THROUGH A WHOLE SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT PROGRAM (WSIP)

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Abstract

This paper highlights the strategies and approaches employed to bring about positive changes in the attitude and behavior of the teachers and enhance their sense of professionalism in a girl's high school of Gilgit Baltistan Pakistan. In addition to that, it illuminates the successes, challenges and the influence of these strategies and approaches on the overall school environment. These interventions were part of the one year long whole school improvement program(WSIP) exercised by PDCN in the academic year 2009-10 of the particular school. The strategies started with vision building, team building and task delegation, distributing the leadership and teacher empowerment, emotional intelligence sessions and workshops on professional ethics for teachers. After this initial platform building, regular sessions of reflective dialogues, maintaining professional portfolios, managing the student's and teacher's behavior were made the daily culture of the school. Additionally, individual and group counseling, mentoring, peer coaching and calling guest speakers on special issues were made the regular practices of the school life. The interventions resulted into the positive attitudinal, behavioral and value based changes in teachers' personalities and their outlook toward the profession. After few months a learning culture and enthusiasm for the profession was quite visible in the attitude and behaviors' of the teachers. Their sense of achievement and ownership of their accomplishments, voluntarily preparing and gathering materials for their lessons and portfolios as lifelong learners were some of the characteristics of the school culture. Our yearlong experiences at the school, leading and facilitating the change, realized us the significance of the value based professional development of the teachers particularly focused on the attitude, behavior and professional ethics. Therefore, in the light of the experiences we suggest for the policymakers and teacher educational institutions, to design and deliver tailor made programs in the above mentioned areas.

Introduction and Background

Gilgit–Baltistan formerly known as the Northern Areas is the northernmost political entity within Pakistan. Several educational institutions are working in Gilgit-Baltistan. For instance, Karakurum International University, Education Colleges for male and female and thousands of private and public schools. Along with public, several private institutions serve their services for the educational and social development of the region. One of these institutions is the Aga Khan University-Professional Development (AKU-PDCN) which was established in 1999 as a part of the Northern Areas Educational Project funded by the European Commission and the Aga Khan Foundation. This institution has a emarkable contribution in the school improvement initiatives in Gilgit-Baltistan.

Various research studies have shown that the interrelationships among different aspects of school improvement have a critical role in enhancing or constraining students learning and outcomes. These factors together create the culture of a school, which is instrumental in enhancing or constraining student learning (Hargreaves, D. 1995. Fullan et el, 1990. Stoll and Fink, 1995). Another major factor in improving schools is the quality of support and monitoring provided by various educational systems. This has a profound effect on the quality of schools as learning organizations. Centered-based and individually focused training in Gilgit-Baltistan over the past decade has changed the traditional practices in schools to certain extent but not raised standard significantly. What is evident is that a trained individual, who returns to his own school, is engulfed into the very powerful current of the existing ethos, attitudes and beliefs of the organization. As a result, the newly gained skills are quickly eroded and the status quo is reestablished albeit with some minor changes in individual classrooms in most cases. Hargreaves also claims that *there is little teacher development without school development (1995).* This is not to say that all center-based and individually focused training is fruitless. Rather, it could be very productive if schools were somehow enabled to move forward at the same time as the newly trained individual.

Remaining within this academic thought, PDCN initiated WSIP intervention is a school based approach focusing on six pillars of school improvement. This paper highlights the way of intervention and key successes achieved in F.G. Girls High School of Gilgit Baltistan Pakistan.

Pre-Intervention Baseline Survey

In order to insure the relevancy, efficiency and effectiveness of the WSIP intervention, a thorough baseline survey was conducted to understand the existing structures, culture and overall ethos of the school. This survey portrayed a comprehensive prevailing picture of the school and served as fundamental ground for proposing and installing future improvement initiatives at the intervention stage.

Interventions

Professional Development, Positive Attitude and Teacher Motivation

Teachers, because of their peculiar position in the school milieu, can play a decisive role in the success or failure of any school improvement program. DuFour and Eaker (1998) have very rightly mentioned that "Teachers represent the heartbeat of a school and the changes essential to school improvement" (p.233). Hence a teacher who is professionally capable can prove a valuable asset in the overall school improvement. Based on this philosophy, a deliberate endeavor was made through various classroom based efforts and series of workshops to enhance the pedagogical knowledge and skills, content knowledge, context knowledge and leadership capabilities of the school teachers. The continuous efforts made to improve the quality of teaching and learning itself predominantly served the purpose of teacher's professional development. Above all, the teacher's professional commitment, motivation and positive attitudinal change remained the focal point throughout the intervention process. The ultimate aim of our effort was to create a team of teachers who not only consider themselves as teachers but also believe that they are lifelong learners too (lovely and Buffun, 2007).

Teachers Professional Portfolios

In order to keep a track record of the professional development of the teachers, individual professional portfolios were initiated and maintained throughout the year. The teachers actively maintained their portfolios by including various handouts on different teaching strategies, interesting activities, newspaper cuttings and their own prepared subject based attractive written materials and reflections on their practices. Retallick (2003) argues, "A portfolio must be more than a collection of documents…it must include reflection on those documents and experiences to show evidence of professional learning" (p.3).

The overall school improvement initiatives in general and the professional portfolios in particular remarkably contributed towards the enhanced professional attitude, commitment and motivation of the teachers. A noteworthy positive change was explicit in the school culture such as in the informal interactions at tea time, corridors and other out of classroom occasions. Majority of the teachers were found discussing various professional issues and taking and giving alternative solutions to and from each other. Sergiovanni, (1998) maintains that, "inquiry in classroom is not likely to flourish where inquiry among teachers is discouraged…Where there is little discourse among teachers discourse among students will be harder to promote and maintain" (p.40).   In this sense we have been successful to initiate a culture of professional discourse and inquiry among the teachers and expect it to gradually permeate among the student community of the school.

Developing Leadership and Management

Keeping in view the peculiar milieu of the school, the intervention began with a focus on bringing about an improvement in the leadership and management capacities and professional attitude of the school leaders and teachers. Literature on school improvement for example Harris, (2006) highlights that the success of leading a school improvement initiative in any challenging circumstances mainly depends on creating strong professional communities through team work, trust building, and sharing culture. Be that the target, professional development sittings pertaining to the areas of team building, collaborative approach to the profession, visioning and developing a shared vision for their school were conducted as the inspectional themes of the ongoing weekly session.

A conscious and deliberate course of action was followed to ensure that these sessions not only remain as theoretical underpinning but also become part of the practice. For example, the team building session was followed by helping the head teacher in establishing subject teams, appointing coordinators, delegating authorities and responsibilities for effective and sustained operations of these newly enacted structures. In this regard a teacher Shahzadi maintains, "We and the faculty members of PDCN have established subject wise teams. We take help from each other within our group whenever we face any challenge or difficulty during the process of teaching and learning" (Translated from an Urdu reflection, 25/06/2010).   In view of the importance of vision for the school a series of visioning exercise was carried out in the school. This series of visioning exercise was an amalgamation of theory and practice for the reason that in the end the participants reached to the conclusion of developing a shared and collectively understood vision for their school.

Classroom Based Teaching and Learning Support

Pedagogical Support

Introduction and practicing of various teaching methodologies such as project based teaching, analogies in science, learning by doing, inquiry based teaching and usage of maximum resources in classroom teaching remained one of the focal areas. The raised level of motivation and interest among the teachers for these newly acquired methodologies was evident in their professional portfolios and resources they developed at home as preparations for their classroom lessons.

Content Support

Apart from the above ongoing teaching and learning support, a conscious effort was made to address the particular issues faced by the school at large. The formal and informal reflective discussion with head teacher and teachers revealed the general concern for student writing skills in English and Urdu. For that reason, two series of workshops one for Urdu and one for English were conducted for the school teachers. The Urdu workshops were primarily focused on phonics, different shapes of alphabets, their breakage, joining and sentence forming whereas; the English series chiefly addressed the grammar such as part of speech, tenses, conversion of sentences, voices and the narrations. Another common problem, observed was teaching of the earth science portions in the social studies. In this regard a series of workshop focused on earth science was carried out to enhance the content and pedagogy of the school teachers in general. In this regard a teacher Salhin writes in her reflection, "We have learned how Urdu alphabets have different shapes and how they are joined and pronounced and written. We learned about English Grammar and ways of using English Language in our classrooms" (Translated from an Urdu Reflection, 25/06/2010).

Student Behavior Management (SBM)

We started with initiating a system of delivering speeches in the morning assembly by some of the teachers pertaining to the moral, social and spiritual development was already in place. This practice was encouraged and strengthened by including all the teachers in the process through a turn by turn course of action. But only relaying on some speeches along with some disciplinary action cannot fulfill the crucial purpose of the student behavior management.

In addition to the literature arguments, the peculiar circumstances of the school and the surrounding community, gave the impression that a comprehensive school based policy and structure is indispensable to cater to the social, moral, spiritual and health needs of the students. In this regard the student behavior management committee was established in the school. The assistant head teacher took the lead as coordinator along with five teachers and five students as members of this committee. As its mandate, the SBM committee started its function by identifying students with behavioral irregularities and medical difficulties. At the second step, series of one to one counseling sessions were arranged for these students and in some cases their parents were also involved in the process. It was decided to continuously monitor the behavior of these students after every individual counseling session and based on the observations next counseling session is designed. The committee declared to uphold confidentiality and secrecy of such personal matters of the children and their parents.

Parental Involvement

Stern (2003), maintain that "Parents are the children's first and most enduring educators. When parents and educators work together from early years, the results have a positive impact on children's development and learning"(p. 78). In order to hookup the parents with the school, class wise parents meetings, monthly group meetings and occasional meetings were arranged between the parents and the school teachers but the attendance ratio of parents participation remained comparatively low especially in the case of fathers. On enquiry it was revealed that this behavior of parents is chiefly as a result of their agro economic involvements. Majority of the fathers is out of the village for their livelihood earnings in the day time and mothers remain involved in subsistent farming. Secondly, a considerable chunk of the students come from the nearby and far flung villages. In such cases, the children live with their relatives whereas the parents live in their native villages consequently such parents are difficult to be accessed by the school. But still conscious efforts were made to bring parents in contact with school by calling them on particular occasions such as exhibition of project work, terminal result days and class wise teacher parent meetings. The teachers felt that we have made a good improvement in this area as compared to the previous track record.

Key Successes

At the very beginning of the intervention, teachers' professional attitude, behavior and commitment was a remarkable challenge. Teachers were reluctant to change and even unwilling to give a second thought to the practices that were there for years. The informal discourses were revolving around their annual increments, transfers and promotions. Through the inculcation of positive school culture starting with younger generation of teachers we ventured to overcome this challenge. Gradually, **attitudinal, behavioral and value based change in teachers' personalities** and their outlook toward the profession turned into a success story. After few months a learning culture and enthusiasm for the profession was quite visible in the attitude and behaviors' of the teachers.

The lack of **community support and involvement in the school** was openly admitted as one of the biggest challenges of the school by the head teacher during the baseline survey. She gave many socio-economic and cultural reasons for this issue. We decided to face this challenge and started our intervention through focusing on school management committee. The body was already there but in an inactive status. After extensive individual and collective meetings we became successful in attaining the enthusiastic support of the school management committee and the ADI for the overall school improvement. With the help of this committee we were able to attract around half of the parents towards the school.

During the baseline survey we observed that the student level of confidence in facing strangers in the school milieu is considerable low. We worked on this area by increasing our own interaction with the students and providing them opportunities of facing external people through project demonstrations and class speech. Providing leading opportunities and involving them in the classroom discourses was another effective strategy in this regard. In this way we were successful in **enhancing student confidence and self-esteem.** After the period of one year there was a remarkable improvement in the confidence and motivational level of these teachers.

The introduction and institutionalizing of these various teaching methodologies and resource based teaching, established the school as a prominent Government school in the region. **O**n the one hand we concentrated establishing a pool of resources chiefly comprised of low cost no cost material. On the other hand we **introduced modern teaching methodologies** which

are using these resources. Gradually we were able to make it as part of the normal school culture which we consider one of our successes.

Conclusion

Generally, in the context of Gilgit Baltistan the parents in government schools are normally of low socio-economic and educational status consequently are less aware of their responsibilities as parents for the education of their children. Additionally the system plays a critical role in establishing working relationship with the target schools.   Therefore before launching the intervention in the schools these system authorities must be taken not only into confidence but also as active intervention partners. Generally, it is believed that in a change process the senior and most experienced teachers are resistant to change.   We experienced that instead of colliding with such change resistant teachers, we must start with building a professional learning culture with the young and receptive teachers. This slow but sure approach in our case remained very successful where we gradually infolded teachers one by one and expended the learning culture. Furthermore, due to the particular personal economic and social background of the government school students, more attention to the confidence building of students in the beginning of intervention is crucial. To make them part of a change their active and willing support is imperative. In order to gain this enthusiastic support from the students it is prerequisite to enhance their level of confidence and motivation towards their learning.

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