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Ayesha Bashiruddin

Aga Khan University, Institute for Educational Development, Karachi

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DO TEACHERS LEARN IN SCHOOL CONTEXTS? SOME PERSPECTIVES FROM PAKISTAN

By: Ayesha Bashiruddin, Assistant Professor, AKU-IED

In recent years a lot of importance has been given to teacher learning in research because of its significant contribution to teacher education (Putnam and Borko 1997; Richardson and Placier 2001; Hammerness et al. 2005). Many research studies have been conducted on how teachers learn. Some research studies show that teacher development programmes which are situated in the school provide ample opportunities to teachers to attend implement and experiment with their newly acquired knowledge and skills (e.g., Kwakman 2003; Smith and Gillespie 2007). The research conducted in the area of teachers professional development show that teachers learn from various sources: e.g. they learn from experience (Jarvis 1987), from deliberate practice (Dunn and Shriener 1999) and by working in collaboration with colleagues (Borko et al. 1997; Grossman, Wineburg and Woolworth 2001; Little 2002; Vescio, Ross and Adams 2008). In one of the studies conducted in Pakistan two teachers of English state that most of their learning to teach has been an on-the-job activity (Bashiruddin, 2009). However, in the context of Pakistan not much is known about the role of schools in providing professional development to teachers. This study tried to fill this gap. Hence, this research critically analyzes the current status or practices of teacher learning and development in various contexts in Pakistan, by taking a situative perspective to teacher learning, in order to gain insights into whether teachers learn in the school contexts so that some suggestions could be made to enhance teachers

continuous professional development within their school contexts. The data for this study is based on 18 self-study cases developed by the in-service teachers (M.Ed. students) at the Aga Khan University, Institute for Educational Development in a Teacher Learning course. These teachers come from diverse school contexts of Pakistan. The data analyses of the cases show three major findings.

First, that in most of the private schools there are some provisions of teacher learning which are mostly formal, e.g. workshops, seminars, peer coaching, mentoring and reflective practice. However, the quality of such formal trainings is questionable.

Second, in community based private schools professional development opportunities are also provided.

Third, in public sector there are very few or no professional opportunities provided by schools, however, the education department of the government sometimes hold workshops through which the teachers learn some techniques of teaching.

The cases from public sector show that most of the time their learning in the school is in an informal way where they learn from each other in the staff room conversations which are mostly dominated by senior teachers because of the hierarchical structures of the school. Finally, one important finding that emerged from the data is that within these schools there is no proper structure of professional development, most of the time it is sporadic and based on the assumption that "one size fits all". Most of the teachers work in isolation and develop their teaching independently. There is little evidence of a community of practice in which they can express and restructure their teaching epistemology within a collaborative framework (McLaughlin, 1997; Sullivan Palinscar, Magnusson, Marano, Ford & Brown, 1998; Thomas, Wineburg, Grossman, Myrhe & Woolworth, 1998). Hence, efforts to encourage school based learning needs to be made in collaboration with policy makers, school systems and teachers.