

CALL FOR VOICES WITH VISION AND MISSION FOR SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

Raju Shrestha

English Trainer

ETC- Tanahun

Abstract

This article strives to introduce the concept of recent paradigm shift in teacher education. It focuses to the notion that today's need and call of the day in teacher education field is to generate knowledge rather than knowledge transformation. It discusses to the notion of teacher professional development program. It also discusses the concept of school restructuring which means to re-define the roles, responsibilities and duties of the teachers, students, teacher leaders and parents. Finally, it concludes with the concept that mission and vision building for school restructuring is the collective action rather than individual effort.

Introduction

The world where we are living is in a state of transition. In this transit world everything is in a process of change. We cannot see anything being fixed, final, absolute, complete and perfect. If this is so, it is no exceptional case where there is a changing concept in language teaching as well. This is the changing time, changing perspectives and changing schools, classrooms and teachers. Some scholars view language teaching as the activities which are intended to bring about language learning. Brown (2000, p. 7) has said language teaching as "showing or helping someone to learn how to do something, giving instructions, guiding in the study of something, providing with knowledge, causing to know or understand". Moreover, in the age of globalization, the concept of language teaching is becoming very vast and complex. It is in this sense that our learners from early days of their class they start to learn with televisions, computers, e-mail internet which are the call and need of the day as well as great sources of language teaching and learning. Therefore, today's learners are known as screen agers. They depend on the computer and laptop's screen in their own learning. Similarly, if we read and study the learners' stories, what we teachers and teacher educators find is "learners learn more in outside the classroom settings" (Murray 2008) and this kind of learners' related knowledge provides us teaching content, techniques and evaluation processes as well. Therefore, if we do not familiarize ourselves with these recent teaching concepts and technologies, of course, we will face great challenges and it may create frustration and disappointment toward the profession. It is, therefore, Brown (2001, p. 2) says 'challenges await us at every turn in our professional path because the discipline of language teaching has only begun to solve some of the perplexing questions about how people learn foreign language successfully.

On the contrary, in our Nepalese context our teachers have perceived language teaching profession as a low-cost, less prestigious, very difficult and boring profession. They put this profession in low priority in comparison to other professions. They do not feel themselves as being respected and satisfied from this profession. It is, therefore, teaching has been portrayed as lacking both organizational and professional controls. Nobody can comment to the teachers

about their teaching styles and behaviors. There is totally lacking answerabilities and accountabilities of teachers toward their teaching. They do not understand that teaching is really one of the most rewarding and wonderful jobs in the world (Cowley, 2008). One of the invigorating things in teaching profession is we never stop to learn. From this kind of contrasting and conflicting perceptions and perspectives in Nepalese educational scenario, educational researchers, educationists, teacher educators, policy makers, teacher trainers, and other concerned stakeholders have envisioned joining in the educational climate of school change or school improvement. At this time it is the teachers (i.e. insiders) who should pay their serious attention towards school change and development than the outsiders. Regarding this Hargreaves (1994) has also said that:

In recent years we have come to realize that the teacher is the ultimate key to educational change and school improvement. The restructuring of schools, curriculum modification, developing local curriculum, the development of the benchmarks of assessments- all these things are of little value if policy makers and planners do not take the teacher into account. Teachers don't merely deliver the curriculum. They develop, define it and reinterpret it too. It is what teachers think, what teachers believe, and what teachers do at the level of the classroom that ultimately shapes the kind of learning that young people get. Growing appreciation of this fact is placing working with teachers and understanding teaching at the top of our research and improvement agendas (p. ix).

From this Andy Hargreaves's sayings we are clear that the more responsibilities are on the shoulders of teachers for the change and development of schools. They should be directed towards such missions of school improvement and development with their inner voices of visions. This is the main theme which this article strives to investigate and explore to fit in our context.

Paradigm Shift in Teacher Education

Paradigm is a basic set of beliefs that guide action (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005, p. 183). A paradigm encompasses four terms: axiology (ethics), epistemology (theory of knowledge), ontology (nature of existence) and methodology (process of delivery). Teacher education paradigm also encompasses these four terms. Now, a paradigm shift in teacher education is a change from one way of thinking to another. It is a revolution, a transformation from one way of teaching to another way. It just does not happen, but rather it is driven by agents of change. Shift in paradigm is only possible when a body of knowledge develops or evolves to the point that the existing paradigm becomes increasingly inadequate to model it and another, more adequate paradigm is available or emerges through research based activities. It brings the ideas of educational reform, professional development of teachers and education personnel. Successful professional development opportunities for teachers have a significant positive effect on students' performance and learning. We may have curiosities to know that "Does professional development have an impact on the success of educational reform?" This will be discussed in the subsequent discussion.

To these days, educational climate has been changing in teacher education paradigm, that is to say, teacher education program is qualitatively marching ahead towards quality education. Ministry of Education in Nepal is rendering to legitimate programs in improving the quality of teacher education by formulating and implementing various academic policies and educational

programs. To be specific, teacher education in Nepal has recently shifted its paradigm from training- knowledge transformation from trainers' minds to trainees' minds to development- knowledge creating through co-operation, co-ordination and collaboration. This means previously there was the concept of teacher training where the focus was on knowledge transformation. Teachers were considered as the technicians served to transmit the knowledge from the curriculum and text book to the learners' minds. The knowledge contained in the curriculum and text book is considered as the 'sacred text' or 'all-in-all'. More specifically, teacher training programs were conducted on the belief that if we provide new teaching techniques and methodologies to the teachers, they can teach well in the classroom. But, in the present time what has been realized that "developing teachers and improving their classroom performance involves more than giving them new tricks and shortcuts". They are needed to be the classroom researchers and researchers for the school improvement and development.

Teacher Professional Development as the Paradigm Shift

Teacher professional development is the by-word or buzz-word. It is in every body's mind and mouth that are in education field. This refers to the process of becoming the best kind of teacher that a teacher can personally be (Head and Tylor 1996). Similarly, Reimers-Villegas (2003) says:

In a broad sense professional development refers to the development of a person in his or her professional role. More, specifically it is the professional growth a teacher achieves as a result of gaining increased experience and examining his or her teaching systematically. It includes formal experiences such as attending workshops and professional meetings, mentoring, etc. and informal experiences such as reading professional publications, watching television documentaries related to an academic discipline (p. 11).

From the above mentioned saying of Reimers-Villegas what we can understand is professional development or growth means enabling teachers to generate their own ideas about classroom practice. Moreover, the concept of teacher professional development has come with the view that every teacher will continuously have his or her pedagogical problems. In order to solve those pedagogical and professional problems it is not possible to send and bring teachers to the training centers under the care and guidance of trainers. It is, therefore, what is thought is that if we can change our teachers from technicians to researchers, they can solve their own pedagogical problems.

Teacher professional development which we are talking cannot be done by a single means. It involves multilevel changes which therefore demand multilevel experiences. It demands from the teacher to be from classroom learner to action researcher about classroom problems, cultural diplomats within the cross-cultural settings of classrooms and so on. It requires from the teacher's side to be reflective, creative and critical practitioners. Therefore, teacher professional development is a personal journey (Brown, 2001, p.2) or personal mission rather than something that can be done and prepared by others. We teachers are the self-agency. We put all the responsibilities on our shoulders how much we want to grow or develop.

Vision and Mission for School Improvement

In the present time, the school restructuring is the main effort and slogan of Ministry of Education in our context. Policy makers and Planners have envisioned a kind of school restructuring and the quality of education which newly envisioned schools will provide. School restructuring is the re-definition of rules, roles, responsibilities and relationships for students, teachers and leaders in our schools. Restructuring tries to address the emerging challenges, learning needs of the post industrial, post modern age, and more flexible structures of schooling that are required to meet those needs. Regarding this, Hargreves(1994) says that:

school restructuring aims to create schools that are more centered on learners' needs for active, experiential, co-operative and culturally connected learning opportunities, supportive of individual talents and learning styles of the learners. Restructures aim to create these learning opportunities within school organizations energized by collaborative inquiry, informed by authentic accountability and guided by shared decision-making. (p. 241)

From this what we need to understand is teachers are the key change agents. They are the key factors to bring change in educational scenario. If we unheard, neglected, rejected and ignored teachers' inner voices, our educational planning would be failure or failure to understand the teacher's teaching is the failure to implement educational planning and policy. Therefore, what is demanded is teacher-led professional development which wrestles with one another. One of the greatest needs in the present time is emergence of teacher voices for strong educational vision. Furthermore, vision-building is the collective process. Collaboration should be creating the vision together, not obeying the principal's vision. Teachers, support staff, parents and students should also be involved in illuminating the mission and vision of the schools.

Conclusion

Finally, school re-structuring is the need and call of the day. This should be done with proper vision and mission. The fundamental of vision and mission of school restructuring can be done through collaborative process among teachers, students, teacher leaders, parents and other concerned educational stakeholders.

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