

Towards the Professionalisation of Teaching through Improving Teacher Knowledge and Teacher Development

E.K. Klu¹, L.M.P. Mulaudzi, N.C. Neeta, W.J. Gudhuza, R.M. Makhwathana
and M.J. Maluleke

Department of English, University of Venda, South Africa
¹*E-mail: ernrst.klu@gmail.com*

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ABSTRACT Regarding teaching as a profession is a debatable topic with some views acknowledging teaching as such and others arguing that it should be regarded as a semi-profession. Despite this debate, teaching remains the fountain and the foundation for all other professions. Its value and importance for human capital development which is the bedrock for national development can never be overemphasized. In spite of its importance, teaching has lost some of its former prestige and status. For instance, in South Africa, the South African Council for Educators (SACE) was established in 1996 to promote and uphold teachers' professional development, but teachers themselves do not seem to appreciate and understand teaching as a profession. The literature abounds with information that illustrate that their subject knowledge still leaves much to be desired and a true professional should be a master of his/her craft. Besides, the conduct of most teachers has also been questioned by the public. This paper looks at some of the ways in which teachers can be developed. The researchers argue for teacher development according to a model of professionalisation. This model seeks to encompass all avenues through which teachers' knowledge and development can be improved.

INTRODUCTION

There are various definitions ascribed to the concept 'profession'. According to Pratte and Rury (1991), a profession is an occupation with enviable remuneration and high social status. Cruess et al. (2004) proposed the following definition which encompasses almost everything other authors posit about a profession. A profession is an occupation whose core element is work based upon the mastery of a complex body of knowledge and skills. It is a vocation in which knowledge of some department of science or learning or the practice of an art founded upon it is used in the service of others. Its members are governed by codes of ethics and profess a commitment to competence, integrity and morality, altruism, and the promotion of the public good within their domain. These commitments form the basis of a social contract between a profession and society, which in return grants the profession a monopoly over the use of its knowledge base, the right to considerable autonomy in practice and the privilege of self-regulation. Professions and their members are accountable to those served and to society (Cruess et al. 2004). For instance, according to the South African Minister of Basic Education, in 2012, there were more than 1,700 unqualified teachers teaching in secondary schools (West Cape News

2012). Such teachers cannot claim to be true professionals but they are fully registered and paid-up members of professional teacher organizations. In this paper, the researchers adopt Beletz's (1990: 16-17) definition of professionalisation that it is a process which an occupation increasingly satisfies the criteria set for a profession. Professionalisation is an ongoing, dynamic process that entails an improvement in the status of an occupation and in its real application and delivery of service (Socket 1993:9). With regard to status, Hargreaves and Fullan (2012) quote the special intergovernmental conference on the status of the teacher in Paris in 1966, which unanimously defined status as:

... the expression 'status' as used in relation to teachers means both the standing or regard accorded them, as evidenced by the level of appreciation of the importance of their function and of their competence in performing it, and the working conditions, remuneration and other material benefits accorded them relative to other professional groups.

Various researchers have expressed opinions on what should be regarded as the typical or ideal determinants or characteristics of a profession. There is no unanimity regarding these characteristics but authors (Moloney 1992: 17-20; Calitz 1996: 67; Donnelly 2001:31) agree on the following:

Specialised Knowledge: The knowledge and expertise possessed by the professional, gained through a long period of study, that an outsider or even members from other professions do not have.

Professional Development and Research: Commitment to learning and participation in professional activities that enhance performance by expanding the practitioner's knowledge base.

Professional Authority and Autonomy: Professional authority refers to the power or right to enforce obedience or an influence exerted on opinion, based on recognised knowledge or expertise. This empowers the profession to regulate its own affairs and make decisions on behalf of their less-knowledgeable clients.

Code of Ethics: A code of conduct is set that embody personal qualities and life-style habits that are expected of practitioners of the specific profession. A code of ethics brings order and harmony in the profession and serves to protect clients from charlatans while at the same time; protecting the reputation and credibility of members.

Control of Access: Professionals determine the admission and certification of members to the profession, establish high standards for entry into the profession and conduct examination for new entrants, accredit all training of members and award certificates to eligible practitioners.

For teaching to be regarded as a true profession it must be tested by the above criteria which are generally accepted as indicative of what constitutes a profession. The researchers argue that if South African teachers want to be regarded and treated as true professionals they do not only have to meet the criteria indicated above but they also have to change their attitude to work. For instance, teacher organizations should do more to control the conduct of their members as it is expected of a professional body. The researchers' point is that, once a person has passed through a teacher training process and has been certified, he or she is a professional of a sort. This has nothing to do with the fact that a teacher has taken French leave or comes to work in a drunken stupor. Such misdeeds or acts of misconduct are ethical issues. The ethical principles of a profession concern a particular morality as a cohesive whole of well-founded convictions and prescriptions, which is valid for a specific group within a particular community.

To this end, Bayles (1981: 3) states that "... professional ethics encompass all issues involving ethics and values in the roles of the professions and the conduct of professionals in society". The researchers introduced this brief argument, because the researchers would like to problematise the notion of professional development. The researchers assert that it entails much more than learning skills, techniques and constructing new knowledge, while also referring to values and attitudes.

TEACHER DEVELOPMENT

Klu (2005) has argued elsewhere that teachers, like all other professionals, need a continuous professional development programme if they are to keep abreast with the developments within the profession (see also Day et al. 2012). This in effect leads to growth and development. Teacher development is therefore the professional growth a teacher achieves as a result of gaining increased experience and examining his or her teaching systematically. It is universally acknowledged that teachers' knowledge and skills are subject to deterioration and new developments in educational thinking and content render teachers' skills and knowledge outdated and inefficient (Steyn 2004; Hargreaves and Fullan 2012). Leithwood (in Gall and Acheson 2010) concluded in his multidimensional model that teacher development has three central dimensions, namely development of professional expertise, psychological development and career cycle development. The teachers' development of expertise goes through six stages:

- ♦ developing skills
- ♦ becoming competent in the basic skills of teaching
- ♦ expanding one's instructional flexibility
- ♦ acquiring instructional expertise
- ♦ contributing to the professional growth of colleagues
- ♦ exercising leadership and participating in decision-making.

Obviously there is a value judgement implicit in Leithwood's analysis, namely, that professional development finds its highest expression in the exercise of leadership. Not all teachers share that value, since many expert teachers seem satisfied to devote all their energies to teaching. There are, however, three factors which seem to influence teacher development, namely (i) those

involving the teacher as a person, (ii) those relating to the context in which the teacher lives and works, and (iii) those involving specific interventions to foster teacher development. These three factors are discussed below:

Individual Teacher Needs

School In-service Education and Training (INSET) plans also have to take into account individual needs, which in the United Kingdom are identified through school-based systems of teacher appraisal. The central purpose of such appraisal is professional development, and targets are jointly agreed and/or reviewed on each occasion (Hargreaves and Fullan 2012). These targets may relate to classroom strategies, wider school roles, or career development. Part of the “bargain” is the provision of support, including if necessary the use of some of the schools’ own INSET funds.

Teachers also need encouragement to participate in external professional meetings in order to widen their horizons, stimulate their thinking, and prevent the school from becoming too insular. On the whole, the privacy of an appraisal interview appears to offer a better context for the expression of need than a more public school self-review; however, more evidence is needed to confirm this hypothesis. Whatever the system, the crucial question still remains to be answered: under what conditions and circumstances will teachers diagnose their own learning needs, engage in the collection of evidence to deepen that diagnosis, or agree with a diagnosis made by another person?

Teacher Knowledge

One of the more critical developments in educational research during the 1980s and 1990s has been an attempt to characterize the nature of teachers’ professional knowledge to study how it gets used (Elliot 2012). As a result, the problems facing the INSET designer can now be better understood. For any practical situation there is a large amount of potentially relevant theoretical knowledge which can contribute to its understanding; however, its relevance may not become apparent until it has become part of each teacher’s conceptual framework. In other words, theory acquires relevance through use, and use involves thought and discussion in periods of time set aside for that purpose.

On the other hand, practical knowledge is partly tacit in nature, and is not easily articulated or explained. Some INSET goals cannot be achieved by words alone, as teachers have to experience and do things for themselves. The concomitant problem is that what teachers do is unlikely to be fully understood and only partly under their critical control. Thus, if INSET is to develop new and valid practice, it will have to combine the use of theoretical and practical knowledge in some kind of dialogical relationship, involving close linkage between off-the-job reflection and on-going classroom experience. Below are some models of professional learning developed as responses to the problems discussed above.

Joyce and Showers’ Approach to Skill Development

Joyce and Showers’ (1988) approach was designed to expand teachers’ repertoires by teaching them new teaching techniques such as inquiry teaching, higher order questioning, or groupwork. Although they identify five essential components of their model, the model’s most distinctive feature is a substantial period of off-the-job practical training (not dissimilar to that used in microteaching) followed by transfer into normal classroom supported by coaching. The contribution to learning of each component is clearly explained.

An exploration of theory through discussions, readings and lectures is necessary for understanding the rationale. “Study of theory facilitates skill acquisition by increasing one’s discrimination of the demonstrations, by providing a mental image of guide practice and clarify feedback, and by promoting the attainment of executive control” (p.68).

The demonstration or modelling of skills through video, or live in the training setting. There are advantages in interweaving the theory and demonstration components, as each facilitates the understanding of the other.

Practice under simulated conditions, teaching either a group of peers or small groups of children. For a technique of medium complexity, this practice requires 20 to 25 trials over a period of 8 to 10 weeks in a setting which approximates the normal workplace. Feedback can be provided by peers under guidance, once the model has been understood. Audio or video recording is desirable, and feedback should be as soon as possible after practice.

Coaching provides continuing support during the difficult process of transferring acquired skills into the normal classroom setting.

Joyce and Showers refer to their final goal as not just the use of new skills in the classroom, but the acquisition of “executive control”, which is defined as “the consistent and appropriate use of new skills and strategies for classroom instruction” (1988:68). They expect flexibility in multiple situations, not the delivery of blueprint. Coaching must be attached to a proper training programme and should remain under its overall guidance even when most of it is provided by peers. Thus the transfer of training, supported by coaching, is seen as the experimental component of a period of continuous study. Interaction between theory and practice takes place throughout the programme.

REFLECTIVE MODELS

While Joyce and Showers’ model can be seen as a method of introducing into techniques and approaches whose credibility derives from research, reflective models aim to build on teachers’ own experience by increasing their capacity to learn from it. They are a deliberate attempt to counteract the “dailiness” of teaching by encouraging teachers to attend to different features and seek new information about the flow of classroom events, then put aside time to reflect upon it and discuss it with others. As Schulz (1967) has noted, an “act of attention” is required to distinguish an “experience” from the flow of life in order that it can be reflected upon.

Reflective models have received considerable impetus from research into teachers’ thinking which has presented an increasingly sophisticated account of teachers’ professional knowledge, much of which has been found to be tacit and intuitive. Classroom behaviour is characterized by routines interspersed with rapid intuitive decisions which require instant interpretations of the developing situation and almost immediate responses. The appropriateness of such decisions can only be considered during reflection after the event, if there is the time and the will to do it. The argument as to why teachers should engage in reflection is essentially moral, and is derived from teachers’ responsibility for the progress and well-being of the students in their classes. This argument is under-

pinned by a particular view of teachers’ professionalism and accountability. Thus, Eraut (1995) argues that being a professional teacher implies:

A moral commitment to serve the interests of students on their well-being and their progress and deciding how best it can be fostered or promoted;

A professional obligation to review periodically the nature and effectiveness of one’s practice in order to improve the quality of one’s management, pedagogy, and decision-making;

A professional obligation to continue to develop one’s practical knowledge both by personal reflection and through interaction with others.

Although there is considerable debate about how these goals can best be promoted, it is possible to describe the range of practices which have been tried in terms of their experiential and reflective components. The experiences to be reflected upon may be based on either (1) normal occurrences in a teacher’s own classroom, possibly enhanced by the collection of more information than usual (for example, recordings, children’s views, observations by a colleague, analysis of children’s work); or (2) changes or experiments and their effects. The reflection which follows may include (3) a discussion of the above, possibly aided by questions or issues previously agreed; and/or, (4) action-planning for some modified practice or experiment. Finally, the whole process may be supported by, (5) readings to illuminate (or divert?) the discussion; and/or, (6) an internal or external consultant as a facilitator and/or resource person.

According to the context, the combination of (1) and (3) has been described as mutual observation peer-assisted review, self-evaluation, or even needs assessment. The sequence (1), (2), (4), (5), (3) is often described as ‘action research’, although Elliot (2012) raises the question of whether the starting point should not be (2) rather than (1). In this, he refers to two rather different accounts of how teachers might reflectively develop their practices:

(a) The teacher undertakes research into a practical problem and to this basis changes some aspects of his or her teaching. The development of understanding precedes the decision to change teaching strategies. In other words, reflection initiates action.

(b) The teacher changes some aspect of his or her teaching in response to a practical problem and then self-monitors its effectiveness in resolving it. Through the evaluation the teacher's initial understanding of the problem is modified and changed. The decision to adopt a change strategy therefore precedes the development of understanding. Action initiates reflection (Elliot 2012: 23).

Elliot adds that the first account may constitute "a projection of academic bias into the study of teachers' thinking," while the second "may reflect the natural logic of practical thinking more accurately" (2012: 23). Another interpretation might be that the first account is more typical of a deliberately created action research group or project (Stuart 1991), the second of ongoing reflective practice by individual teachers who have developed a strong self-monitoring capability. Research on reflective models gives little guidance on the relative effectiveness of these different approaches, but consistently draws attention to the enabling or disabling effect of school management and ethos. The main personal barriers to participation appear to be the commitment of time and the loss of self-esteem which accompanies initial confrontation with new evidence from one's own classroom. Appropriate support can help overcome these problems, where the teacher accepts the underpinning view of teacher professionalism.

Eraut (1989b) has argued that while reflection at the level of self-monitoring is an ongoing professional obligation, reflection at the level of self-review ought to be treated more as a periodic activity. It is unrealistic to expect major changes in classroom practice to arise from waves of innovation, inadequately resourced for INSET support, or an accumulation of small adjustments triggered by school-based staff development and an appraisal system. Continual disturbance may accurately lower the quality of teaching by reducing teachers' sense of efficacy and allowing too little time for any specific change to take root. The question arises as to whether it would not be better to build periods of self-renewal into the professional life cycle of teachers, so that every 5-10 years they engage with a few colleagues in a period of reflection and action research with proper support. Such a strategy would make sense to teachers, establish such interludes as a normal part of professional life, and focus support structures more effectively on teacher development.

DOMAINS OF TEACHER KNOWLEDGE

A teacher's knowledge has also been examined in terms of its domains, its forms or structures and its relation to classroom practice. A number of researchers have proposed frameworks for domains of teacher knowledge (Leinhardt and Smith 1985; Wilson et al. 1987; Korthagen 2010). Although represented as discrete domains in these frameworks, the knowledge domains are usually regarded as interwoven in practice. One possible typology of teacher knowledge includes six domains:

(1) Knowledge of content includes both subject matter knowledge and more explicitly "pedagogical content knowledge". (2) Knowledge of learners and learning includes knowledge of learning theories; the physical, social, psychological and cognitive development of students; motivational theory and practice; and ethnic, socioeconomic and gender diversity among students. (3) Knowledge of general pedagogy includes knowledge of classroom organisation and management, and general methods of teaching. (4) Knowledge of curriculum includes knowledge both of the processes of curriculum development and of the school curriculum within and across grade levels. (5) Knowledge of context includes knowledge of the multiple and embedded situations and settings within which teachers work, including the school, district or area, and state or region. It also includes teachers' knowledge of their students and their families, as well as the local community. (6) Knowledge of self includes teachers' knowledge of their personal values, disposition, strengths and weaknesses and their educational philosophy, goal for students and purposes for teaching.

All of these domains are important to the work of teachers, but research has however concentrated on content knowledge, general pedagogical knowledge and knowledge of self (Day et al. 2012).

TEACHER KNOWLEDGE IN RELATION TO CLASSROOM PRACTICE

Researchers have argued about the various forms of teachers' knowledge; some researchers argue for the need for generalizable knowledge of principles of teaching and learning, while

others contend that teachers' knowledge is inherently situational and personal, stored in the tacit forms of metaphors or images or the more explicit forms of stories or cases. In describing different potential forms of teachers' knowledge, Bruner (1986) makes a distinction between paradigmatic and narrative ways of knowing to describe at least two general forms of teacher knowledge.

Paradigmatic ways of knowing emphasize generalizable laws and principles applicable across a wide variety of contexts. Knowledge within the natural sciences has been described as paradigmatic knowledge. In contrast, narrative ways of knowing are more contextualized and situation-specific. Research on teaching has experienced a shift from the search for paradigmatic knowledge to an interest in narrative knowledge, a shift that has affected research on teacher knowledge (Swart 1994; Kaufman and Stein 2010).

Personal Factors

Most researchers who have examined the personal factors influencing teacher development have taken a developmental perspective. They have examined chronological age, ego development, moral development, interpersonal development, cognitive development, career development and motivational development (Burden 1990). Of these factors, the ones that seem to play the most significant role are the teachers' cognitive development, career development, and motivational development.

Cognitive Development

The teacher's cognitive development is usually equated with the extent to which the teacher can reason conceptually. Glickman (1981) posited three levels of abstract thinking: low, moderate and high. Teachers at the low level think more concretely, differentiate fewer concepts and tend to see problems simplistically; those at a high level can reason abstractly, see connections between disparate elements, and enjoy complexity.

Career Development

This denotes the growth experienced as teachers move through the stages of their pro-

fessional careers. Huberman (1989) posits five stages of the professional career, demarcated in terms of years of teaching experience. "Career entry" from the first to the third year is a time of both survival and discovery. Teachers having four to six years of teaching experience seem to move into a "stabilization" period. Teachers having seven to eighteen years of experience enter a "divergent" period. Divergence also occurs for teachers with nineteen to thirty years of experience. The final period from thirty one to forty years of teaching experience is a stage of "disengagement", a gradual withdrawal as the end of the career looms. For some, it is a time of serenity, for others, a time of bitterness.

Motivational Development

"Motivation" refers to the strength of the inner drive to achieve professional goals. Glathorn (1990) has identified several factors that influence a teacher's motivational level. The first is a supportive environment consisting of five features:

- ♦ positive relationship with students and parents
- ♦ the presence of effective leadership
- ♦ adequate physical conditions
- ♦ positive school climate and
- ♦ a manageable teaching assignment

The second factor is meaningful work. The teacher has an appropriate degree of autonomy and believes in the significance of his or her work. The third factor is the teacher's belief system. The following beliefs are essential for a high level of motivation. "I can perform successfully". "The actions I take will achieve the results I want". "The results I achieve will be recognised by rewards that I value".

Rewards are particularly important. In the USA, teachers are more motivated by such intrinsic rewards as satisfaction of improving student learning than they are by extrinsic ones such as merit pay. However, the opposite has been found to be true of teachers in France and the United Kingdom (Broadfoot and Osborn 1987).

Most of the literature on teacher beliefs and belief systems suffers from three basic problems. First, it is ethnocentric; much of it comes from Western, developed nations, especially the United States. Second, the literature rarely gets past teachers' inferential beliefs to their descriptive

ones; too much of it, to use the language of ethnographers, is outsider or “etic” and not enough is insider of “emic”. A third problem is that the literature tends to focus on teacher beliefs and belief systems about a small portion of their job. Fortunately, work is beginning to appear that addresses each of these problems. On the ethnocentric front, writing has emerged that supplements the Western, industrialised belief literature. Thomas (1992), for example, has companioned his volume on comparative theories of Western child development with one on theories of Eastern child development.

The fourth factor is the teacher’s goals. The teacher’s level of motivation is more likely to be high when the teacher’s goals are shared by peers, when the goal-setting process is a collaborative one, when the goals are specific, and when the goals are challenging but attainable.

The final factor in teacher motivation is the type and frequency of feedback. Several studies suggest that the teacher’s level of motivation is more likely to increase when the teacher makes continuing assessments of students’ learning and uses positive results as reinforcement. Frequent and positive feedback from administrators and supervisors can also increase the level of teacher motivation.

CONTEXTUAL FACTORS

These include all those elements of the environment that impact upon teacher development. From the literature, five embedded contextual layers have been identified as follows: Society and the community, the school system, the school, the teaching team or department and the classroom. The most remote (but not necessarily the least influential) layer is the community and society. Increasing proximal layers are the school system or school district, the school, the teaching team or department and the classroom.

Extrapolating from trends in the larger society and the profession, several trends in teacher development are likely in the near future. First, there will be increased co-ordination between the pre-service and in-service education of teachers. Second, the use of technology as the central means for delivering staff development programmes will increase. Finally, there should be increased contact and collaboration with professionals from other human service organisations.

CONCLUSION

This paper looked at what constitutes a profession and for that matter a professional. It has also looked teaching and why there is debate as to whether it is a profession or not. The paper further explored some of the avenues through which teacher knowledge and teacher development can be improved and maintained. It has been argued that this is the only way in which teachers can be taken seriously as other professionals. It has also been argued that teachers themselves have to put their house in order and start behaving like true professionals or else no one would take them seriously. Furthermore, based on the typical or ideal characteristics of a profession which the researchers highlighted at the beginning of the paper, the researchers conclude that in South Africa teaching cannot be regarded as a profession in the strict sense because of the following reasons:

- ♦ teachers work under the Department of Education and are subjected to civil servant working conditions of service.
- ♦ teachers do not pass through the ranks to become senior teachers, HOD, principals, subject advisors, circuit managers, etc. That is, teachers with little or no experience are promoted because they are well connected with people at the top. This hardly happens in other professions where there are clearly defined rules and qualifications for entry and promotions.
- ♦ there are just too many under-qualified and/or unqualified personnel in the field. No profession allows this to happen.
- ♦ there is no autonomy for teachers and there are too many splinter groups or unions, hence the inability to come out with a uniform code of conduct for teachers.

This is not to suggest that teachers cannot become professionals or should not be regarded as such, but, for this to happen a few issues have to be taken into consideration.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Teacher development should be taken seriously and it should be well planned.

Teachers should be made to progress through the ranks and not just promoted because of their links with those in authority.

Unqualified personnel should not be allowed near a classroom as they would bring no value to the education system.

Under-qualified teacher should be put into realistic INSET programmes to help them upgrade their qualifications.

Union activities should be kept to a minimum as it has a disruptive effect on the teaching profession.

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