Chapter 10

Collaborative Teacher Development on Teaching World Englishes

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ABSTRACT

Teachers play a central role in shaping education. Educational innovations succeed or fail with the teachers who shape it (Lieberman & Pointer Mace, 2008); thus teachers’ professional development process should be given utmost importance and organized in a way that supports and promotes their growth. Traditional INSET programs based on knowledge-transmission are found to be ineffective in reaching this aim. The present case-study introduces a collaborative INSET program, in which the participating pre-and in-service teachers tried to develop their understanding of World Englishes and integrate it into teaching under the guidance of university supervisors. Data collected by means of interviews revealed that this process enriched the knowledge of the participants and enabled them to look at the relevant issue from a critical perspective.

INTRODUCTION

In today’s rapidly changing world, undergraduate education is seen as only the beginning of life-long professional learning (Jarvis, 2004). The need for continuing development to maintain high quality practice is widely identified as a responsibility of professionals who feel increasing pressure toward the pursuit of more effective practices that deliver improved outcomes.

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Today’s teachers are demanded to be well informed about new insights into learning, knowledge and curriculum, and to master the prescribed skills and knowledge accordingly. To fulfill these expectations, teacher learning after the initial teacher education goes on as teachers are involved in various learning activities matching their professional goals to adjust their knowledge, beliefs and/or teaching practices (Bakkenes, Vermunt, & Wubbels 2010; Webster-Wright 2009). Thus, in-service education plays a significant role in teachers’ professional development.

BACKGROUND

The knowledge and skills necessary for the teaching profession cannot be developed fully in pre-service teacher education programs so teachers need to develop themselves professionally through in-service training and education (INSET) (Sowder, 2007). Bolam (1981) defines INSET as,

…those education and training activities engaged in by secondary and primary school teachers and principals following their initial professional certification and intended mainly or exclusively to improve their professional knowledge skills and attitudes in order that they can educate children more effectively (p.3).

Similarly Perron (1991) indicates that teachers become involved in INSET activities and practices “in order to broaden their knowledge, improve their skills and assess and develop their professional approach” (cited in Eurydice, 1995, p. 8).

For a long time, INSET based on training model has been the dominant form of development for teachers. This model of development supports a skills-based, technocratic view of teaching; teachers are provided with the opportunity to update their skills to demonstrate their competence. Knowledge is delivered to the teacher by an expert and the participating teachers are placed in a passive role. Many of these programs are also deficit models which focus on compensating for deficits in knowledge and competencies for immediate enhancement. However, despite their popularity, such development programs are found ineffective by the teachers. According to Ball and Cohen (1999), most professional development funding is spent on “sessions and workshops that are often intellectually superficial, disconnected from deep issues of curriculum and learning, fragmented and noncumulative” (pp. 3-4). Posch (as cited in Roesken, 2011, p.10) compares this “one size fits all” mentality to the medical one of organ transplantation “when the recipient’s body turns against the new organ.” In a similar vein, a training, although designed theory driven and conducted in a well-composed manner, may not be suitable to the teaching context of the teachers. As stated by Ayas et al., (2007) it is possible that teachers do not accept the rationale and theory behind the presented ideas and thus may not be eager to implement them in their classroom.

These concerns have provided the impetus for much research related to professional teacher development. Over the last 30 years, teachers as lifelong learners have been the focus of extensive research and transmissive professional development has given way to transformational approaches which aim to help teachers enhance their teaching practice and link personal and professional learning, grounded in their own classrooms (Bax, 1997; Burns 2009; Hockly, 2000; Sandholtz, 2002). Discussions on enhancing the effects of INSET programs indicate that these programs should concentrate on teachers’ needs and interests, encourage their engagement, and help them develop collaborative relationships (Atay, 2007). Sandholtz (2002) also suggests that an effective INSET prioritizes teachers and their context-dependent