

Why teachers do

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Education

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THERE is a growing literature on change at the societal level through education in general and teacher education in particular. This article takes the stance that a change which is short-lived is easy to acquire, less difficult to demonstrate, but has little to contribute to sustainable professional development. On the other hand long lasting change is more difficult to bring about, harder to demonstrate in a short period of time, but is crucial for sustainable professional development.

In teacher education programmes in Pakistan, a short term, visible, measurable change may be achieved but the impact of this change seldom makes its way to a school, or if it does then is usually temporary in nature. Consequently, the professional development of teachers is not sustained. There are a number of reasons for this. For instance, there could be a lack of reconceptualization of educational ideas, deficient teacher education programmes that make it difficult for professionals to re-enter the teaching profession, insufficient support from colleagues, lack of cooperation from head teachers, dearth of follow-up programmes to track performance, or the lack of 'follow-on' programmes to update professional (both content and pedagogical) knowledge of the trainees. This article focuses on sustainable professional development from the perspective of teacher education and suggests a mechanism to sustain the educational change initiated by a teacher education programme.

Before I discuss the possible scenario of change, let me clarify a misconception about sustainability. Sustainability does not mean just "preservation" but rather that it is an ever-developing process. Thus, a sustainable change is a change that is developmental in nature. Now let us look at some frequent practices and possibilities with reference to change as a result of a teacher education programme or a workshop.

Let me start with some possibilities with reference to educational change as a result of a teacher educational programme or a workshop.

Possibility one

This situation is very common in short-term teacher education courses or workshops. The instructor uses some tailor-made activities which are bound to 'click'. Also, the materials used are often geared towards showing instant change. For instance, one popular demand of workshop participants is how to increase their reading speed. For that, specially crafted materials are used and activities are sequenced in such a way that the easy text comes later to demonstrate an 'increase' in the reading speed. Similarly some tricks of trade are demonstrated by the instructors and in a very artificial context the participants are given the impression that they have undergone change. But this change (which is an illusion) remains confined to the duration of the workshop or the teacher education programme. When the participants go back to their real context, they revert

to their own familiar style of teaching. This kind of change does not stay with the individual teacher nor does it go to the school where that teacher is working.

Possibility two

The second possibility regarding change is perhaps more frequent and familiar in Pakistani context. This kind of change stays with the teacher for a short time. The teacher tries to make use of the learnt strategies for some time but due to a lack of a support system at the school, e.g. lack of cooperation by the head teacher and other colleagues in school, the teacher after the initial experimentation or 'adventure' goes back to the 'comfort zone' (his or her old ways).

Possibility three

The third possibility happens when participants of a teacher education course are exposed to some pedagogical strategies. Some participants take away a few strategies and then stick to them for the rest of their teaching life. This kind of change is static and non-developmental in its essence. Dalin (1993) refers to such situation by saying that "replacing one practice with a new one may simply mean to replace one rigidity with another". This change is deceptive because the teachers who keep on using these strategies believe that they have changed and that is all what was required of them. This belief leads to an attitude of snobbishness and the process of learning is stopped.

Possibility four

The fourth possibility with reference to change is that after a teacher education programme the participants undergo a change and when they go back to their school they keep on developing and reflecting on their experience, learning from their experiences, modifying their strategies throughout their professional career. The core of this kind of change is its sustainability.

Having discussed the four possibilities with regard to change I would now like to focus on question central to the whole discussion: why does the line of change have a strong tendency to come back to the baseline of the status quo? (Or, why does any kind of change eventually lead to a situation where no change in effect has occurred?)

Here we need to identify those gravitational forces that pull back the rising line of change and make it a straight horizontal line of status quo. Unravelling the phenomenon of resistance which I would call in this article the "gravitational force", will help us have a better understanding of why change does not stay in teachers' lives and why it doesn't pass on to their schools.

'Gravitational' forces

Now I would like to mention some of the 'gravitational' forces that may pull down the line of change back to the status quo or create another status quo.

Individual-based forces

Along with other forces that may play a part in the process of change is the individual him/herself (in this case the teacher). If a teacher is committed and persistent, the chances are there that a change is initiated and sustained. On the contrary, if the

teachers are not confident and committed there are less chances that a change is initiated or that it stays for some time.

Programme-based forces

In this section I would like to refer to some problematic issues inherent in a typical teacher education programme or workshop in Pakistan. These directly affect the initiation or the sustainability of change.

Pedagogical change equated with educational change: In a typical teacher education course or workshop there is extra emphasis on pedagogical skills. Teaching is often equated with knowing and applying some strategies. These strategies, e.g. encouraging students to work in pairs, groups, asking them to be more interactive, etc. — all socially desirable — are given to the teachers as a panacea for all educational ills. Little effort is made to explore teachers'

reflective practice, and so on but their own practice is just the opposite. The wide gap between the theory and practice de-motivates the course/workshop participants and they tend to think that theories are meant only for books or for teacher education workshops; there is no link between a theory and classroom practice in the real world.

Transplantation approach vs. reflective practice: In a typical teacher education workshop or course participants are given a handful of recipes for good teaching. Various lists pertaining to the characteristics of good teachers are shared with the participants with the assumption that knowing the characteristics of good teaching will automatically turn the participants into good teachers. In this model, the teacher is not viewed as a generator of knowledge but a user. Participants are rarely exposed to

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beliefs and notions about some basic educational issues and then build on these notions. Similarly, not enough attention is given to attitudinal change. Consequently, the teacher is not convinced about the strategies or methods he or she is exposed to and uses them because the experts say so. In this model of teacher education, change is not viewed as a holistic process but just considered as a tool.

Local problems, imported solutions: Another factor that hinders the process of change is the fact that most of the methods/strategies teachers are exposed to in a programme are alien to their context. This is quite understandable since most of the socially desirable themes are imported from the countries where the classroom culture and problems are quite different from ours. So, when teachers in Pakistan go back to their classes they hardly see any relationship between what they were taught in the workshop and what they are supposed to teach.

Conflict between the professed ideas and actual practice: A stumbling block in the way of change is a visible gap between instructors' professed ideas and their actual practice. Let me explain this with a few examples. I have come across teacher educators who profess wonderful ideas like adopting a humanistic approach, collegiality, critical thinking, reflect-

reflective practice or critical thinking when making decisions according to their school community and school culture. Consequently, the teachers have a fixed and inflexible model of teaching, handed over to them during the workshops or courses, which hardly works in different contexts. As a result when the teachers go back to their school at the end of the course they often find that they cannot use the given recipes in their context which is quite different from the artificial and contrived environment of workshops. This leads to a feeling of vulnerability and frustration and the teachers drop themselves from the curve of change to the smooth line of the status quo (i.e., they revert to their pre-workshop method of teaching).

Teachers' self-image of a helpless consumer: A common feeling among the majority of teachers is that the curriculum is handed down to them and that they cannot make any changes to it. Similarly, research is a scary word for teachers. A typical teacher education workshop hardly addresses the issue of blending teaching and research and how a teacher can enhance or enrich a given curriculum. This self-image of a tiny screw in the big machine of education is further strengthened by traditional workshops. This defeated outlook discourages teachers from rising above