
Judit VIDÉKINÉ REMÉNYI**STEPS IN NEED OF TEACHERS' TRANSFORMATIVE PROFESSIONAL LEARNING***Outdated teaching methods blunt the potential of teachers' professional development***Introduction**

Teachers are increasingly faced with ever changing conditions and expectations of education in terms of – among others – learning environments, target group, content, methods and tools. Development and changes are so radical and fast that “no matter how good pre-service training for teachers is, it cannot be expected to prepare teachers for all the challenges they will face throughout their careers.”¹ Obviously, this leads to the growing importance of teachers' quality in-service training and their continuous professional learning. However, a “significant proportion of teachers think that professional development does not meet their needs: over half reported wanting more than they received during the previous 18 months.”²

This problem concerns Hungarian teacher further training programmes, teachers' professional development as well. Surveys and common experience suggest that teachers cannot unlearn and relearn measurably, so the upgrading of their skills is questionable. It is clearly reflected by the surveys showing that they tend to use the instructional methods their teachers used to. This fact implies the slow change of teachers' beliefs, attitudes and practices. The dominance of teacher-centered presentation techniques in Hungarian schools is a growing concern for educationalists. So it is the teacher trainers' challenge to design so effective in-service training programmes that make the teachers change their practice, enable them to grow professionally. However, transmission-oriented teachers' professional development programmes cannot do the job. Teachers' professional development programmes should adopt a teaching approach that diverges significantly from the dominant transmissive teaching practice and will lead to teachers' changing practice in order to maximize student learning.

The maximization of student learning is of key importance if we wish to catch up with the developed countries and achieve a competitive education system. Our education should be able to provide young citizens with 21st century competences instead of 20th century content to meet labour market needs and boost economic growth of the country. The economic and social progress of a country requires skills and capacities as only a highly educated, skilled workforce can adapt to the advancing technologies. It points to a quality education system instead of growing the exposure to learning. More recently, a study of the common characteristics of the most successful school systems highlights the central role of teachers,

¹ The Professional Development of Teachers. <https://www.oecd.org/berlin/43541636.pdf>

² See above.

asserting that “the quality of an education system cannot exceed the quality of its teachers” and that “the only way to improve outcomes is to improve instruction”.³ “The significant, positive correlations between teacher quality and student achievement, as most important within-school factors explaining performance, and between in-service training and student outcomes, are consistently borne out by research.”⁴

“There are many different ways to improve a school system, and the complexity of this task and the uncertainty about outcomes is rightly reflected in the international debate about how this should best be done.”⁵ The method of choosing the right people and training them to become effective teachers works irrespectively of the culture as the experience of the top school systems suggest.

Teachers’ professional development matters

Teachers’ professional development covers different forms of formal, non-formal education and training, informal learning, and various activities (such as learning by doing, learning from colleagues, participating in projects etc.). It is obvious that not all professional development programmes, activities are equally effective. “Most professional development today is ineffective. It neither changes teacher practice nor improves student learning.”⁶ Teachers’ effective professional development is “on-going, includes training, practice and feedback, and provides adequate time and follow-up support. Successful programmes involve teachers in learning activities that are similar to ones they will use with their students, and encourage the development of teachers’ learning communities. There is growing interest in developing schools as learning organisations, and in ways for teachers to share their expertise and experience more systematically.”⁷

However, the “design of high-quality professional development is as complex a discipline as the design of high-quality teaching. It requires the planning of programmes of connected activities with clarity about intended outcomes, and evaluation. “⁸ Short and/or irrelevant professional development programmes, in-service workshops are less effective than sustained, coherent programmes which include structured, collaborative in-school activities.

³ How the world’s best-performing school systems come out on top 2007 <http://www.smhc-cpre.org/wp-content/uploads/2008/07/how-the-worlds-best-performing-school-systems-come-out-on-top-sept-072.pdf>

⁴ Caena, F. (2011): Literature review - Quality in teachers continuing professional development

⁵ How the world’s best-performing school systems come out on top 2007 <http://www.smhc-cpre.org/wp-content/uploads/2008/07/how-the-worlds-best-performing-school-systems-come-out-on-top-sept-072.pdf>

⁶ Gulamhussein, A. (2013): Teaching the Teachers

<http://www.centerforpubliceducation.org/Main-Menu/Staffingstudents/Teaching-the-Teachers-Effective-Professional-Development-in-an-Era-of-High-Stakes-Accountability/Teaching-the-Teachers-Full-Report.pdf>

⁷ The Professional Development of Teachers *In: Creating Effective Teaching and Learning Environments* (2009) <https://www.oecd.org/berlin/43541636.pdf>

⁸ https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/537030/160712_-_PD_standard.pdf

These should involve different activities designed to sustain and embed practice, including individual and collaborative teacher activity; well-designed formative assessment and evaluation. The activities should have explicit relevance to participants.⁹

Not much is known about how teachers learn, how teacher learning compares with student learning. However, it is obvious that not all teacher development programmes are conducive to the narrowing of teachers' performance gaps, to promoting their professional development and student performance. "Most teachers only experience traditional, workshop-based professional development, even though research shows it is ineffective. Over 90 percent of teachers participate in workshop-style training sessions during a school year.¹⁰ Teachers should be exposed to other forms of professional development in order to boost the efficiency of these programmes. "Despite its prevalence, the workshop model's track record for changing teachers' practice and student achievement is abysmal. Short, one-shot workshops often don't change teacher practice and have no effect on student achievement."¹¹

"The reason traditional professional development is ineffective is that it doesn't support teachers during the stage of learning with the steepest learning curve: implementation."¹² This implies that the largest challenge for teacher trainers is to design professional development programmes that not only make the implementation of new approaches, practices possible, best in the context of the teacher's subject area, but trigger transformation.

Why Transformative Learning¹³?

The answer to the question why it is essential to upgrade our in-service teacher training programmes is trivial: It is impossible to solve our problems with the same thinking we used when we created them. Traditional presentation techniques, structuring practice – most teacher further training programmes have been using – will not result in fundamental changes, as research shows that teachers change only after they see success with students. It is fundamental change in perspective or frame of reference that is essential for transformative learning.

⁹ Standard for teachers' professional development.

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/537031/160712_-_PD_Expert_Group_Guidance.pdf

¹⁰ Darling-Hammond, L. et al. (2009) Professional Learning in the Learning Profession

¹¹ Strauss, V. (2014) Why most professional development for teachers is useless

https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/answer-sheet/wp/2014/03/01/why-most-professional-development-for-teachers-is-useless/?utm_term=.6115e73b6752

¹² See above

¹³ Transformative or Transformational Learning, based on Mezirow, J.'s Transformative Dimensions of Adult Learning (1990) and Learning is Transformation (2000)

Transformative learning is a theory relating to adult learning and its practice is based on learning experiences that cause a shift in an individual's perspective. In general, experience, critical reflection, and rational discourse can contribute to transformational learning.

The process of transformative learning begins with a sense that something needs doing about poor student learning outcomes and lack of student motivation. Once a new technique has been introduced or a new strategy has been deployed and its efficiency in terms of academic performance and/or motivation is recognized, the experience needs to be reflected upon.

In order transformative learning to occur it is fundamental to create such conditions that "have the potential to transform the learner on many different levels (cognitive, emotional, social, intuitive, creative, spiritual, and other)"¹⁴. This kind of teaching should lead to a greater understanding of self as a teacher and learner by discovering and developing their unique talents and capabilities to the fullest extent possible. This way the programme can lead to self-actualization and is individualized.¹⁵

A model of teachers' transformative learning

The transformational approaches should not and cannot dominate the professional development programme offered by universities as most university classrooms are lecture halls which do not tend to support interactive pedagogy and active learning. Auditoriums are much more in favour of lecture-based courses with content-focused knowledge gap correction. However, transformative learning can be applied in formalized classroom environments of in-service teacher training programmes as well to maximize learning through a variety of techniques if these techniques can make teachers examine and reconsider their beliefs and attitudes.

Mezirow describes the ten phases of Transformative Learning, out of which some might be more emphasized, others marginalized. Teacher trainers need to design learning activities that encourage engagement in a transformative learning process composed of the following five essential steps:

1. An acknowledgement of the dilemma
2. Critiquing their own assumptions
3. Critically reviewing new ideas or perspectives
4. Making a decision
5. Taking action

14 Johnson, A. P. (2015): Three Views of Teaching: Transmission, Transaction, and Transformation. <https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/three-views-teaching-transmission-transaction-andrew-johnson>

¹⁵ See above

“As long as incoming information easily fits within a person’s meaning perspective, transformative learning does not occur.”¹⁶ In order transformative learning to occur a strong challenge is needed. Transforming existing ways of teaching requires teachers to be convinced that there is a need for transformation. They first need to examine their old beliefs in the light of new knowledge and new experience, which involves unlearning as well.¹⁷

The necessary introductory phase to transformation – *the acknowledgement of a dilemma* facing most teachers – does not need much mining activity as Hungarian teachers do not need to read the latest PISA reports to be deeply dissatisfied with their students’ academic performance and motivation. Case studies posing a disorienting dilemma can be also used in this phase.

Hungarian teachers again and again blame external factors for their “unsuccessfulness” such as lack of resources, lack of time, lack of students’ enthusiasm, underskilled students, bad school books, students’ study overload, teachers’ workload etc. As long as they fail to recognize their own responsibility, it is extremely difficult to make them change. This tendency can be due to poor self-assessment and self-reflection skills. These skills are essential to professional development and an important part of learning.

Critiquing their own assumptions is the second essential phase and based on “self-reflection upon the previously unexamined assumptions that generated the problem in the first place”.¹⁸ This can be implemented in university classrooms as well by means of well-prepared activities that lead to teachers’ examining beliefs, feelings, behaviours, analyzing their former experiences, exploring relationships or new roles. These activities include critical questioning, discussion of examples and counterexamples, alternative scenarios, or differing perspectives, reading conflicting case studies and should be followed by critical reflection, as it is central to learning from experience and getting rid of teacher-centered perspectives. The discussions – also a fundamental component of transformation - should lead to the teachers’ recognition of the limitations of their current beliefs and practice. Action research can also lead to change in understandings and practice.¹⁹

¹⁶ Filer, J. - Barnes, C. D. – Cooper, M.: The Role of Faculty in Dispositional Development of Teacher Candidates.

<https://books.google.hu/books?id=ossyfypEuPAC&pg=PA161&lpq=PA161&dq=http://www.lifecircles-inc.com/Learningtheories/humanist/mezirow.html>

¹⁷ Gravett, S. (2004): Action research and transformative learning in teaching development, *Educational Action Research*, 12:2, 259-272, DOI:10.1080/09650790400200248. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/09650790400200248>

¹⁸ Gogia, L. (2012): Transformative learning theory: How Mezirow created a living seminal work through dialogue

https://www.academia.edu/8018605/Transformative_learning_theory_How_Mezirow_created_a_living_seminal_work_through_dialogue?auto=download

¹⁹ Peters, J.: Teachers Engaging in Action Research: challenging some assumptions
<http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1080/09650790400200267>

New strategies, concepts, or paradigms can be introduced; research papers, readings or best practices can be presented to encourage *critical reviewing of new ideas or perspectives*. Role-playing, simulation or debates can also be useful for focusing on a problem and approach it with multiple perspectives or problem-solving approaches. When encouraging a “move from thought to action, students need opportunities to apply new knowledge”²⁰ and try on new perspectives. It is important that students’ activities will most probably result in success.

In this phase it is of vital importance that students can contradict and discuss their assumptions and then reflect on their “for and against” experiences, as this phase is followed by decision making. Teachers need to actively engage in making sense of a new practice in order to innovate new teaching strategies. Consequently, this is the phase when teachers need to “experiment with” new strategies and methods to be able to make meaningful decisions which will impact their future practice. Innovative teaching methods imply new technology (and new learning environments) to transform the students’ engagement level and create an enhanced learning experience.

Active engagement in innovative practice can only be implemented by the teachers themselves in their own contexts and followed by critical reflection. It can be a collaborative activity as well. However, this might be the most “critical” component of transformative learning as without the teachers’ complete commitment and genuine engagement, transformation will not occur. Teacher trainers must design the activities to be implemented by the teachers and the evaluation criteria of fieldwork carefully to avoid the danger of teachers’ choosing experiences that comfortably fit their frame of reference. This kind of sham activities can deceive both the teacher and the teacher trainer as well, when teachers insist on their prejudices, stereotypes and are unwilling to unlearn their unquestioned and unexamined assumptions. In other words, it cannot be taken for granted that transformation is welcome by all teachers. Empirical studies suggest that not all students feel comfortable with a goal of transformative learning and “not all students are predisposed to engage in transformative learning”.²¹

The most serious barriers of teachers’ transformative learning are to be found in this phase. Teacher trainers do not have control over the teachers’ external learning environment, that is, their school environment, cannot impact the teachers’ consideration of alternatives and cannot ensure teachers’ genuine self-reflection. Without the teachers’ genuine willingness

²⁰ Peters, J.: Teachers Engaging in Action Research: challenging some assumptions
<http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1080/09650790400200267>

²¹ Santalucia, S. and Johnson, C. R. : Transformative Learning. Facilitating Growth and Change Through Fieldwork. http://www.duq.edu/assets/Documents/occupational-therapy/Fieldwork-Education/Suggested%20Readings/Transformative_Learning.pdf

and active engagement, teachers' transformative professional development programme is only a 'pit stop' in their continuous professional development, and they cannot meet the specific challenges of changing their classroom practice.

There is no 'one size fits all' recipe for establishing learning environments conducive to transformative learning. Research suggests that the potential of modelling should be exploited, that is, teacher trainers should not forget that the "revolutionary move away from replicating traditional classroom-based teaching practices"²² should start in university auditoriums.

Supposing that the previous phase - *critical reviewing of new ideas or perspectives through innovative activities* - has been successful, teachers need to *make a decision and take action*. Although many a teacher considers innovative teaching important, it must be rewarded in measures related to salaries, promotion, and workload. Research has shown that in addition to teaching quality school leadership is the most important factor in raising student achievement.²³

While making an action can only be encouraged and hoped by teacher trainers, action taking cannot be monitored at all, as it relates to the teachers' future practice. Hedberg²⁴ lists 11 obstacles to integrating ICT into teaching and learning activities referring to Vrasidas, C. and Glass²⁵. These include the following ones:

"Teachers' resistance to changing their traditional teaching approaches"

"Lack of ongoing support"

"Lack of released time and incentives for teacher innovators"

"Incompatibility of traditional teaching with the constructivist framework fostered by ICT"

"Need for teachers to unlearn traditional teaching beliefs and practices"

"Lack of training in how to integrate ICT into learning within teacher preparation programs".

It can be supposed that teachers who have made a decision and intend to take action will face the very same barriers. From this phase on it is the school leaders' responsibility whether fundamental changes will occur in our schools or not as without individual transformation there is no school transformation.

²² <http://theconversation.com/outdated-teaching-methods-will-blunt-technologys-power-40503>

²³ http://learningforward.org/docs/pdf/why_pd_matters_web.pdf?sfvrsn=0

²⁴ Hedberg, J. G. (2006) : Searching for Disruptive Pedagogies: Matching Pedagogies to the Technologies. http://www.curriculum.edu.au/verve/_resources/hedberg_paper.pdf

²⁵ Vrasidas, C. and Glass, G. V. (eds) (2005): Preparing teachers to teach with technology, Information Age publishing, Greenwich, CT.

Conclusion

Teachers should be presented with new (innovative and proactive) teaching methodology via interactive pedagogy encouraging active-learning in order that they unlearn their direct information transmission beliefs about teaching and learning. Once teachers do not hold this view anymore, transformation of their practice can start. Teacher trainers should encourage discourse, to change thinking and take transformative action. When professional development programmes impact teachers' practice in a powerful and transformative way, significant personal and professional growth will be catalysed. Minor changes in teachers' beliefs and practices will not lead to major changes in students learning outcomes and will not change Hungarian schools. It is of utmost importance that more emphasis is put on teachers' professional development and schools act as learning organizations.

Bibliography:

Hedberg, J. G. (2006) : Searching for Disruptive Pedagogies: Matching Pedagogies to the Technologies. http://www.curriculum.edu.au/verve/resources/hedberg_paper.pdf

Johnson, A.P. (2015): Three Views of Teaching: Transmission, Transaction and Transformation.

<https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/three-views-teaching-transmission-transaction-andrew-johnson>

Major Éva: A tanárok folyamatos szakmai fejlődése, Európában az EU és az OECD anyagainak tükrében (Teachers' professional development in Europe, from the viewpoint of the EU and the OECD reports)

http://www.oktatas.hu/pub_bin/dload/unios_projektek/tamop315/Major_Eva_tanulmany.pdf

Peters, J.: Teachers Engaging in Action Research: challenging some assumptions

<http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1080/09650790400200267>

Simmons, E. H. (2012): Rewarding Teaching Innovation

<https://www.insidehighered.com/advice/2012/04/18/essay-how-colleges-can-encourage-professors-innovate-teaching>

The Human Capital Report 2015

http://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_Human_Capital_Report_2015.pdf

Webster-Smith, A. – Albritton, S. – Kohler-Evans, P.: MEANINGFUL CONVERSATIONS
Coaching to Transform the Heart, Head and Hands of Teaching and Learning
<http://www.lifecircles-inc.com/Learningtheories/humanist/mezirow.html>

<http://harvardmagazine.com/2012/03/twilight-of-the-lecture>