Learning Communities in the field of Education: Professional Development programme for Educators in KendriyaVidalaya Learning Community and Learning Outcomes

Neelu Gupta
Assiatant professor
Email: neelugupta7777@gmail.com

Abstract- *The perception of schools as learning communities has attracted cumulative attentiveness and observation within the continuing professional education for teachers of Kendriya Vidalaya, in recent years. It is a concept which places particular emphasis upon the 'inner strength' of a school community and lures from the experiences and proficiency of staff, teachers, and pupils, within the school as a module of self-empowering mechanisms for transformation and development. Professional teamwork is important and can greatly improve teaching, instruction, and professional relationships in a school, but it falls short of producing a true community of learners. In contrast, a school learning community includes educators, students, parents, and community partner's work together to improve the school and enhance students' learning opportunities.*

This paper reports on the progress of the applicability of the notion of 'learning community' as an avenue for professional education of teachers in Kendriya Vidalaya. This paper will also focus on the aims of learning Community. A professional learning community that emphasizes the teamwork of principals, teachers, and staff to identify school goals, improve curriculum and instruction, reduce teachers' isolation, assess student progress, and increase the effectiveness of school programs. Such programs improve schools, strengthen families, and energize community support, and increase student achievement and success.

This paper seeks to examine the notion of schools as Learning Communities, and to reclaim the educational components of the debate as a basis for the continuing professional education of educators and the simultaneous benefits for their students. In our view, professional development is learning. Professional development for the learning community is creating a learning community and the process is one of learning.

Introduction

We live in a time of rapid change, where technological complexity, demographic change, environmental crises, increasing urbanization, changes to our economic base, moral uncertainty, and crises of national identity, look prevalent. While 'change' has always been present, it is the increasing rate which creates a world and social context markedly different from our prior experiences. Similarly, in education we are confronted with processes of change and reform, the development of new programs and terminology.

A school learning community works with many partners to increase students' learning opportunities and experiences. Activities to enrich students' skills and talents may be conducted during lunch, after school, and at other times by school, family, and community partners. In Kendriya Vidalaya teachers are expected to do more, much more at the same time, faster, and better than previously. Often, the consequence is what have termed overload, where not only are teachers faced with the escalating internal demands, expectations and complexities of schools and their communities, but more significantly are increasingly required to implement externally initiated changes. In short, teachers are either overloaded with what they do or with all the things they think they should be doing. The effect is often one of dependency whereby the teacher, faced with the constant external bombardment of new tasks and interruptions on the job, comes to be shaped, however unintentionally, by the events and actions of others who, typically, are external to the school and classroom context. The opposite, then, is a situation of empowerment which involves a recognition of the situation and leads to the teacher, and community, taking a central role in determining both what and how things are done in their school situation. Rather, what is required is a simultaneous top-down-bottom-up influence, where both the school and the wider system are collaboratively negotiating both the direction and processes of change.

Learning Communities or Organisations?

Both the terms 'learning organisation' and 'learning community' are sometimes used interchangeably in the literature as if they were synonymous, and certainly there are characteristics which are similar. For the purposes of this paper, however, we have taken the position that organisation implies a business-oriented term and adopted community to refer to educational setting.

Schools have a vested interest in becoming true learning communities. They are now accountable for all students' learning. The No Child Left behind Act (NCLB) requires schools, districts, and states to develop academic programs that will increase students' proficiency in reading, math, and science. To learn at high levels, all students need the guidance and support of their teachers, families, and others in the community. NCLB also requires schools, districts, and states to develop programs to communicate with all families about their children's education and to involve them in ways that help boost student achievement and success. Most schools conduct at least a few activities to involve families in their children's education, but most do not have well-organized, goal-linked, and sustainable partnership programs. The schools featured here differ from most schools in two important ways. Organizationally, educators, parents, and other partners are working together to systematically strengthen and maintain their family and community involvement programs over time. Interpersonally, these partners recognize that they all have roles to play in helping students succeed in school—and that, together with students; they are the school's learning community

Professional Learning Communities

Big Idea: Ensuring That Students Learn

The professional learning community model flows from the assumption that the core mission of formal education is not simply to ensure that students are taught but to ensure that they learn. A simple shift—from a focus on teaching to a focus on learning—has profound implications for schools.

School mission statements that promise "learning for all" have become a cliché. But when a school staff takes that statement literally—when teachers view it as a pledge to ensure the success of each student —profound changes begin to take place. The school staff finds itself asking, What school characteristics and practices have been most successful in helping all students achieve at high levels? How could we adopt those characteristics and practices in our own school? What commitments would we have to make to one another to create such a school? What indicators could we monitor to assess our progress? When the staff has built shared knowledge and found common ground on these questions, the school has a solid foundation for moving forward with its improvement initiative.

As the school moves forward, every professional in the building must engage with colleagues in the ongoing exploration of three crucial questions that drive the work of those within a professional learning community:

- What do we want each student to learn?
- How will we know when each student has learned it?
- How will we respond when a student experiences difficulty in learning?

The answer to the third question separates learning communities from traditional schools. Here is a scenario that plays out daily in traditional schools. A teacher teaches a unit to the best of his or her ability, but at the conclusion of the unit some students have not mastered the essential outcomes. On the one hand, the teacher would like to take the time to help those students. On the other hand, the teacher feels compelled to move forward to "cover" the course content. If the teacher uses instructional time to assist students who have not learned, the progress of students who have mastered the content will suffer; if the teacher pushes on with new concepts, the struggling students will fall farther behind.

What typically happens in this situation? Almost invariably, the school leaves the solution to the discretion of individual teachers, who vary widely in the ways they respond. Some teachers conclude that the struggling students should transfer to a less rigorous course or should be considered for special education. Some lower their expectations by adopting less challenging standards for subgroups of students within their classrooms. Some look for ways to assist the students before and after school. Some allow struggling students to fail.

When a school begins to function as a professional learning community, however, teachers become aware of the incongruity between their commitment to ensure learning for all students and their lack of a coordinated strategy to respond when some students do not learn. The staff addresses this discrepancy by designing strategies to ensure that struggling students receive additional time and support, no matter who their teacher is. In addition to being systematic and school wide, the professional learning community's response to students

who experience difficulty is Timely. The school quickly identifies students who need additional time and support.

- Based on intervention rather than remediation. The plan provides students with help as soon as they experience difficulty rather than relying on summer school, retention, and remedial courses.

- Directive. Instead of inviting students to seek additional help, the systematic plan requires students to devote extra time and receive additional assistance until they have mastered the necessary concepts.

Big Idea-- A Culture of Collaboration

Educators who are building a professional learning community recognize that they must work together to achieve their collective purpose of learning for all. Therefore, they create structures to promote a collaborative culture. Despite compelling evidence indicating that working collaboratively represents best practice, teachers in many schools continue to work in isolation. Even in schools that endorse the idea of collaboration, the staff's willingness to collaborate often stops at the classroom door. Some school staffs equate the term "collaboration" with congeniality and focus on building group camaraderie. Other staffs join forces to develop consensus on operational procedures, such as how they will respond to tardiness or supervise recess. Still others organize themselves into committees to oversee different facets of the school's operation, such as discipline, technology, and social climate. Although each of these activities can serve a useful purpose, none represents the kind of professional dialogue that can transform a school into a professional learning community. The powerful collaboration that characterizes professional learning communities is a systematic process in which teachers work together to analyze and improve their classroom practice. Teachers work in teams, engaging in an ongoing cycle of questions that promote deep team learning. This process, in turn, leads to higher levels of student achievement.

For teachers to participate in such a powerful process, the school must ensure that everyone belongs to a team that focuses on student learning. Each team must have time to meet during the workday and throughout the school year. Teams must focus their efforts on crucial questions related to learning and generate products that reflect that focus, such as lists of essential outcomes, different kinds of assessment, analyses of student achievement, and strategies for improving results. Teams must develop norms or protocols to clarify expectations regarding roles, responsibilities, and relationships among team members. Teams must adopt student achievement goals linked with school and district goals.

The professional learning community model is a grand design—a powerful new way of working together that profoundly affects the practices of schooling. But initiating and sustaining the concept requires hard work. It requires the school staff to focus on learning rather than teaching, work collaboratively on matters related to learning, and hold itself accountable for the kind of results that fuel continual improvement.

When educators do the hard work necessary to implement these principles, their collective ability to help all students learn will rise. If they fail to demonstrate the discipline to initiate and sustain this work, then their school is unlikely to become more effective, even if those within it claim to be a professional learning community. The rise or fall of the professional learning community concept depends not on the merits of the concept itself, but on the most important element in the improvement of any school—the commitment and persistence of the educators within it.

The Teachers in a Learning Community

The role of teachers in a Learning Community subtly shifts from 'receiver' of external policy and curriculum syllabi and 'dispenser' of knowledge to one of mediator between societal expectations of presumed school-based outcomes and the forces of the children's own thirst for information. Teachers are propelled into broadening their own knowledge base as well as their strategies for teaching and inspiring learning. In these ways, teachers take more responsibility as learning leaders for the children and the school community. They are also leading learners as they find themselves learning with and from the children and community.

Future Plan: Action Team For Parterships

A well-organized partnership program starts with an Action Team for Partnerships. Made up of teachers, administrators, parents, and community partners, the Action Team is linked to the school council or school improvement team. With a clear focus on promoting student success, the team can write annual plans for family and community involvement, implement and evaluate the activities, and integrates the activities conducted by other groups and individual teachers into a comprehensive partnership program for the school.

Annual action plans will use a research-based framework of six types of involvement— parenting, communicating, volunteering, and learning at home, decision making, and collaborating with the community— to focus partnerships on school improvement goals. By implementing activities for all six types of involvement, schools can help parents become involved at school and at home in various ways that meet student needs and family schedules. Input from participants helps schools address challenges and improve plans, activities, and outreach so that all families can be productive partners in their children's school success.

Six Types of Involvement

- Parenting. Assist families with parenting skills, family support, understanding child and adolescent development, and setting home conditions to support learning at each age and grade level. Assist schools in understanding families' backgrounds, cultures, and goals for children.

- Communicating. Communicate with families about school programs and student progress. Create two-way communication channels between school and home.

- Volunteering. Improve recruitment, training, activities, and schedules to involve families as volunteers and as audiences at the school or in other locations.

- Learning at Home. Involve families with their children in academic learning at home, including homework, goal setting, and other curriculum-related activities. Encourage teachers to design homework that enables students to share and discuss interesting tasks.

- Decision Making. Include families as participants in school decisions, governance, and advocacy activities through school councils or improvement teams, committees, and parent organizations.

- Collaborating with the Community. Coordinate resources and services for families, students, and the school with community. Enable all to contribute service to the community.

Conclusion

Our traditional concept that teachers teach, students learn, and administrators manage is completely altered. In a community of learners, everyone is about the business of learning, questioning, investigating, and seeking solutions. The basis for human interaction is no longer a hierarchy of who knows more than someone else, but rather the need for everyone to contribute to the process of asking questions and investigating solutions. The learning community becomes a lead learner and they are intuitive, risk-taking, visionary, self-confident, empathetic, and trusting.

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