

Do teachers pitch for professional progress and boost their productivity in this challenging environment?

Are all teachers able to cope with advanced technology and boost their productivity in this challenging environment?

Continuing professional development (CPD) for teachers is the process of setting out on a journey to becoming a professional teacher. During the process, teachers gain professional knowledge, skills and competence.

CPD is important for several other reasons. A competent teacher should maintain his/her form and meet the challenges confidently. That is why in-service (ongoing) training is more important than pre-service training.

A teacher with 20th century skills is irrelevant in the 21st century as the challenging environment requires teachers to constantly update their knowledge and expand their skills.

Rightly, the accreditation bodies NAAC and NBA in India give importance to professional development of teachers.

How can one become a professional teacher? There are numerous ways in which one can grow professionally. The following suggestions can be useful to teachers committed to their professional development.

1. Teachers who want to become professionals should have their own vision statements. This helps teachers have a clear goal of what they want to become after 10 or 15 years. It is believed that those who have a clear vision are more productive than those without one.

Plan to translate your vision into action. Merely having a good vision is not enough to achieve the goal. It is important to have a clear workable plan, which can be one's mission statement.

For example, **my vision statement consists of four words: Discuss, Discover, Develop and Disseminate. These 4Ds serve as the key to translating the vision into my mission: Learn, Teach, Research and Publish.**

2. Self-assess your professional knowledge and skills. It is crucial for teachers to assess their professional development and ask themselves whether they are on the right track, whether they are competent enough to face the new challenges, whether their knowledge is up to date, and so on. **Self-assessment helps teachers become reflective teachers.**

Update your professional knowledge and learn new skills by attending conferences, faculty development programmes, webinars, enrolling in MOOCs (Massive Open Online Courses), and other such professional development programmes. Teachers should undergo professional training at least twice a year. It is also important for them to learn to use ICT and social media tools.

Interact with experts and professionals, broaden your knowledge, expand and hone your skills and stay motivated.

3. **Carry out action research.** Action research refers to “a wide variety of evaluative, investigative and analytical research methods designed to diagnose problems or weaknesses.” Teachers should have a **critical mind** and try to find solutions to various problems through proper research. Carrying out an action research can be an empowering experience for them.

Join discussion forums, initiate and take part in discussions. It is important for teachers to discuss their professional issues with other teachers through discussion forums. Social media platforms such as LinkedIn can help teachers join or start an online discussion.

4. Future of Learning can be in **Self-Organizing Learning Environment (SOLE)**, which works on three premises: take whatever you are going to teach and convert it into a big question, pose it to a group of children in a setting that has fewer internet-enabled computers than children. No method is prescribed. The idea behind having much fewer computers is to encourage children to work and learn together. The level of achievement of a group is higher than the highest level of achievement of an individual.

The three Rs of reading, writing and arithmetic can be productively subsumed by the three bigger areas of comprehension, communication and computation (in the wider sense of problem solving) respectively.

5. Publish your work. A professional teacher is also an original contributor. Publishing research work is important as dissemination of knowledge is vital for progress. It is crucial for a professional teacher to be heard and challenged. Preparing oneself for the changing classroom, and thus, to various challenging situations, is the responsibility of individual teachers who must have the conviction that CPD is not an option but a necessity. Identifying the talents, skills and strengths of the teachers, creating professional development opportunities for them to improve their effectiveness and encouraging them to widen their knowledge and expand their skills is the responsibility of educational institutions.

The craze for degrees and insistence on higher qualifications in India has made many academics 'highly qualified and highly unproductive'. This is because there is no clear focus and insistence on professional development of teachers in many educational institutions that focus only on pass percentage and seek 'paracetamol' remedy for their numerous undiagnosed ailments. Becoming a professional teacher is a challenge but a highly rewarding experience.

Are we ready to face the challenge?