# BODHI: AN INTERDISCIPLINARY JOURNAL
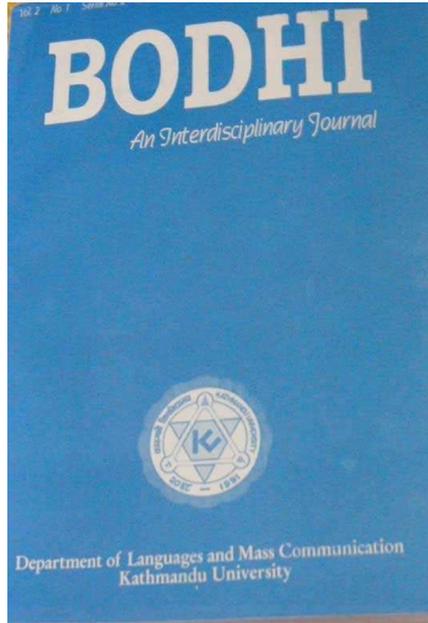
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# Teacher Development: What is it and Who is Responsible?

-- Laxman Gnawali

Learning in any profession is a life long process. The training one gets before starting the profession is not an end in itself. It cannot be complete either. In the teaching profession, the pedagogic knowledge and skills a trainee teacher gets at the training college are not sufficient for his life long career. There are several reasons for this. Firstly, with the passing of time, there will be new kinds of challenges in this profession; new ideas and concepts will be developing which the teacher will have to keep up with. Secondly, learners' needs and wants will be changing with time and social change; the teacher will have to cater for them. Thirdly, everything requires change to have life in it; this change is continuous. Pennington (1990) believes that every teacher needs professional growth throughout her career. Here a question comes up: What does this *growth*, or in other words *development*, mean for teachers? Or more precisely, what is teacher development? For Underhill (1988) it is to keep learning, always to keep alive a sense of challenge and adventure in one's career, and to avoid getting into rut (p. 4). He believes that this development brings about change in the teacher without which the teacher will not be in position to educate others. Lack of change is not good for the teacher and consequently for the learners.

The concept of teacher development is relatively new, which, as Wright (2000) claims, started "...with the realisation that teachers want something more from INSET than just new classroom ideas or new knowledge about grammar and vocabulary" (p. 2). In order to develop as a teacher, one needs to develop as a person, which means teacher development is concerned with various aspects of teachers' personality. He claims teacher development involves the following key areas.

- a.  psychology of the self, others and of groups
- b.  managing stress

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  c. coping with changing circumstances and understanding the change process

  d. motivation - self and others

  e. physical and psychological well-being

  f. learning about learning itself

  g. how spiritual and moral well-being relate to teaching(Wright, 2000,  p. 2)

Wright's beliefs are in contrast to what Wallace (1991) calls the technicist approach to teacher training. In this approach, teachers are provided with classroom techniques by the 'experts' and they will apply these techniques during their teaching. We need to remember that only the classroom techniques are not enough for teachers. Teachers need to be able to relate the classroom world to the outside world. How society at large influences classroom learning is a question every teacher needs to know. As this is not possible in a single training course, whether pre-service or in-service, teachers need skills to lead their own development as their career advances. A question poses itself here: what does teacher development involve? In order to arrive at an objective definition, Rossner (1992) carried out a survey among English teacher with the question: *What do you personally understand by the term 'teacher development'* and teachers' responses indicated the following four key areas that teacher development is concerned with.

  a. Developing language and other skills like counselling, meditation computing etc.

  b. New experiences, challenges and opportunities for teachers to broaden their repertoire and take on new challenges and responsibilities.

  c. Needs and wants of the individual teacher in ways that suit that individual.

  d. A bottom-up approach in decision making about what developing teachers need. (p. 4)

In this list, the first two statements are not concerned with teacher's personal point of view, whereas the second two allow

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teachers to express their needs and make their own decisions. I also agree that developing language and other skills is part of development but autonomy in making decisions is the ultimate aim of teacher development because I believe developed teachers are those who can identify their own potentials and problems and find their ways forward.

Maley (1990) claims that this notion of autonomy runs parallel with the learner independence movement with the philosophy that teachers should be responsible for deciding what they need. Just as learners appear to make better progress when they make their own learning decisions, the chances are that teachers too will achieve better personal and professional growth when they take on personal responsibility for their own development.

Teaching involves not simply the imparting of knowledge and skills but also human interaction between teacher and students. It means teachers need to be able to understand each action they take and its implications. Teacher development can prepare teachers for such situations as it is "a reflective way of approaching whatever it is that we are doing as teachers, and at whatever level of experience we are doing it" (Head and Taylor, 1997, p. 12). This statement highlights the fact that teacher development should start when the teachers are at a novice stage and continue until the end of their career. So, who is responsible for teacher development? Teachers themselves? Trainers? Inspectors? immediate supervisors? Wajnryb (1992) is of the opinion that teacher development is voluntary and it comes from the individual teacher or the group and that nobody can force teachers to develop. I agree that teachers cannot be forced to develop, but what I believe is that they can be helped to develop. Not every teacher will be able to diagnose her problems and areas of weaknesses and be able to find appropriate solutions for them or realise their strengths and build on them. To this Wright (2000) says that a facilitator can facilitate the process of teacher development. The only condition he states for this is the teachers' willingness to take part in this process. Thiessen (1992) supports the idea of

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facilitation and suggests that teacher development should be less concerned with what to do 'to' or 'for' teachers, and more with teachers themselves inventing what to do with others or by themselves.

In line with Wright, Clark (1992) labels teacher development as 'self-directed professional development'. To support his claim why teachers' professional development needs to be self-directed and not other-directed, he puts forward three arguments:

> a. Adult development is voluntary - no one can force a person to learn and grow.
> b. Each teacher is unique in important ways. It is impossible to create single centrally administered and planned programmes of professional development that meet everyone's needs and desires.
> c. That is the way the best teachers already operate (Clark 1992, p. 77)

So teacher development is an on-going process through which teachers keep growing with their own voluntary effort. A facilitator can help teachers realise that "they have the potential within themselves to become better teachers through deepening their own understanding and awareness of themselves and their learners" (Head and Taylor 1997, p. 5). I also believe that development of teachers will result in better learning of students and better performance of the school as a whole as Somekh (1989) says teachers who follow this path are the treasures of the school because developed teachers will pass on development to the learners.

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