



ENQUIRY-BASED PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT ON IB TEACHERS

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ABSTRACT

The term professional development is now becoming a norm in driving an effective education and is widely used to promote improvement in schools. Professional development can take place among those who have an interest in education and can be in the form of a short chat during break, regular small group collaboration among grade level teachers, a school committee to a full planned course and so on. However, without fundamental concepts to drive the professional development, its implementation may run into problems and may fail in obtaining desired results. Thus, the initial enthusiasm may die down and it loses all meaning. Therefore, to ensure effectiveness there must be certain 'big ideas' to follow. This paper explores the concept of enquiry-based professional development within an IB World School, based on examination of relevant literature and focusing on survey. Findings indicate that specific elements are needed to ensure enquiry-based professional development works and it impacts IB teachers' performance in terms of student as well as school achievements.

Keywords: enquiry-based, professional development, collaboration, specific elements

Introduction

International Baccalaureate (IB) teachers can come from varied backgrounds, both culturally and linguistically. Each brings with them vast knowledge from their different educational backgrounds and practices as educators. The diverse teaching methods to deliver daily

lessons shared amongst colleagues during formal or informal sharing sessions are part of professional development and have in one way or another impacted the way teachers carry out their duties as well as students' learning. Although professional development captures these sharing sessions, according to Stoll et al. (2006, 7(4), p.221-258) in *Professional Learning Communities*, professional development takes place when teachers and leaders continuously work together in communities. They share and examine their practices in an ongoing reflective, collaborative, inclusive, learning oriented as well as growth-promoting way. This also reflects a culture of collective enterprise in which the goal of teachers and leaders is to enhance their effectiveness as professionals for the students' benefit. However, Rick DuFour (2011) warned that placing teachers in a room together was far from enough. If poorly supported, collaboration could turn into gripe sessions, excuse-making, or simply an innocuous activity in which "getting along could be greater priority than getting results." Although time and resources were allocated to professional development in schools, often it ends in disappointment due to the mentality of teachers, school culture, poorly prepared plans, thus its impact can be superficial.

Therefore, this paper focuses on looking at specific characteristic or elements of enquiry-based professional development which makes up positive and effective collaborative enquiry among IB teachers and how it impacts their professional development which in turn impacts students' learning in particular, and the school in general.

Background

Education today sees a different approach and has undergone change from teachers working alone to a more open, reflective, and enquiry-based professional approach. This research project and the results were based on information collected from a questionnaire containing a mix of open and close ended questions to gauge teachers' perception of various research questions given out to Primary Years and Middle Years Programme teachers of an IB World School. The paper explores:

- enquiry-based professional development
- specific characteristics in enquiry-based professional development that make teams work to build sustainable capacity in schools

- the relationship between enquiry-based professional development and students' learning in particular, and the school in general

Problem Statement

The researcher notices that teachers in the IB World School are required to undergo Continuous Professional Development, attend meetings and video conferencing to enhance their professional development. This has spurred the researcher to focus on understanding enquiry-based professional development, identifying specific characteristics or elements that make this sharing of experiences or enquiry-based professional learning effective and the impact of enquiry-based professional learning development through teachers' perceptions.

Literature Review

In today's education system, we are moving towards transparency in the daily running of schools, where teachers are encouraged to collaborate and share their practices as opposed to the conventional method of every man for himself. Teachers working in schools with strong professional development cultures behave differently from those who depend on administrators to create the conditions of their work. In enquiry-based professional development, teachers exercise leadership together and take responsibility for helping all students learn. Teachers work together by supporting one another's journey towards better instruction. When teachers have many opportunities to collaborate, their energy, creative thinking, efficiency, and performance will increase, thus decreasing the cynicism and defensiveness that hampers change.

Research Questions

The main research question for this paper is to investigate on enquiry-based professional development on IB teachers. From this main question, the following sub-questions were formed:

- How do teachers perceive enquiry-based professional development?

- What are the specific characteristics/elements in enquiry-based professional development that make teams work and build sustainable capacity in schools?
- What is the relationship between enquiry-based professional development and students' learning in particular and the school in general?

Research Methodology

The purpose of the paper was to explore enquiry-based professional development on IB teachers and examines: (1) teachers' understanding of enquiry-based professional development; (2) specific characteristics in enquiry-based professional development that make teams work to build sustainable capacity in schools; (3) the relationship between collaborative enquiry-based professional learning and students' learning in particular, and the school in general. The survey was carried out on a total of 43 teachers from Primary Years Programme (PYP) and Middle Years Programme (MYP) in an IB World School. The group comprised of homeroom teachers, teacher assistant/trainees, specialist teachers and a coordinator to ensure that data or views are collected from various perspectives. A questionnaire was used to look into the three project objectives mentioned above. The questions prepared are a mixture of close-ended questions using 5-point Likert scale and open-ended questions for each of the research questions.

Data Analysis

The study sample comprised of 43 questionnaires distributed to respondents consisting of teachers from the Primary Years and Middle Years Programme of an IB World School. Under Section A of the questionnaire, respondents shared their understanding of enquiry-based professional development which can be summed up as a broader scope of planning, organising and delivery where specific kinds of support are in place, allowing teachers the time, place, and capacity to enquire successfully into their practice.

In Section B, respondents gave their views to support the findings from the literature review which pointed out that for enquiry-based professional development to work, six basic elements should be in place to allow for teams to work successfully in any collaboration, and they are shared personal practice, favourable conditions, reflective professional enquiry,

collaborative teamwork, collective responsibility and strong leadership support. There is also a strong correlation between these elements.

Table 1: Shared Personal Practice

Importance of sharing practices with other teachers	1	2	3	4	5	Total
Teaching ideas or professional development	0	1	11	21	10	43
Student's work Practices, values, goals in collaborative inquiry	0	3	6	22	12	43
	0	0	2	10	31	43

An average of 82% shared or discussed their ideas on teaching or professional development as well as their students' work with other teachers. This shows that sharing personal practice is a significant element which can be a guideline for teachers to see what is imperative in student learning as well as for their own personal development. It can act as a learning environment where teachers can find support to improve the quality of their work as well as learning. Interestingly, this element was also reflected in the respondents' feedback in Section A and can act as a support to prove the importance of this element.

Table 2: Favourable Conditions

Importance of setting conditions for a better collaborative enquiry	1	2	3	4	5	Total
Regular meeting opportunities	0	0	1	22	20	43
Setting convenient meeting time	0	0	1	12	30	43
Appropriate group size	0	0	7	9	27	43
Usage of media	0	0	9	16	18	43

90% felt that enquiry-based professional development works better if supported by favourable conditions such as regular opportunities to meet, time of meeting is convenient to all members; appropriate group size as well as media used. However, allocating a suitable time for all can be a problem, thus rearranging the use of time in schools to support staff interactions is something which needs to be carefully looked into to supply meaningful time for personal learning and improvement for students. In addition to these two factors, an

appropriate group size during collaborative enquiry will ensure that every member has an opportunity to share and in a way promote good interaction besides providing a productive environment.

The third element which is reflective professional enquiry collected a total of 98% agreement that respondents often use feedback from their colleagues to improve themselves. Hence, this factor showed that teachers frequently examine their own practice and constantly use their newfound knowledge to continuously upgrade themselves while applying them in their delivery of lessons which will ultimately result in improved student achievements. This response also showed that collaborative enquiry promotes lifelong learning that not only enriches schools but is a form of continuous professional development.

Table 3: Collaborative Teamwork

Importance of maintaining good relationship in collaborative enquiry	1	2	3	4	5	Total
Team goals and purpose are stated clearly	0	0	5	14	24	43
Information is understandable and resources accessible	0	0	0	11	32	43
Diverse ideas are represented for problem solving and decision making to take place	0	0	5	14	24	43
Mutual trust and respect is important	0	0	1	6	36	43
Equal distribution in roles	0	0	1	11	31	43
Keep open communications	0	2	16	25	43	
Welcome, encourage and respect views	0	0	0	7	36	43
Avoid judging during creative problem solving	0	0	4	16	23	43
Practice best communication and collaborative skills	0	1	0	21	21	43

Deal with conflict tactfully	0	0	2	13	28	43
Observe punctuality	0	0	1	19	23	43

95% agreed that collaborative teamwork is important to maintain good instructional practice and relationship in collaborative enquiry. The results showed that collaborative teamwork is an important attribute as teachers work together in a variety of ways, thus observing factors such as team goals, open-communication, mutual trust, punctuality among others will result in improved instructional practice which has a positive influence on professional development and student achievement.

Table 4: Collective Responsibility

Importance of collectively playing an active role in problem solving	1	2	3	4	5	Total
Often take steps to solve problems instead of identifying them	0	0	0	11	32	43
To take an active role in decision making	0	0	5	16	22	43
Continually learn and seek new ideas	0	0	7	23	13	43
To engage in various school projects and own progress	0	0	6	21	16	43
Stance towards work is enquiry and reflection	0	0	7	20	16	43
Regularly examine school performance and personal development	0	0	11	23	9	43

86% concurred that collective responsibility is required in teamwork. All of the respondents agreed that in collaborative enquiry teachers need to be proactive in taking steps in problem solving while 88% supported an active role in decision making. The response gathered, points out that when there is collective responsibility, then unified commitment from members is more likely to happen which will drive the group's dynamics, foster loyalty and

unity at the same time members will feel a sense of belonging or ownership, thus will be more motivated.

In the last element of strong leadership support, there was a 100% agreement that it is an important factor in ensuring successful teamwork in collaborative enquiry and building sustainable capacity in schools. Strong leadership is important as it reflects the quality of leadership which impacts the quality of teaching, learning and relationship in collaborative enquiry. Leaders who reflect the qualities of lifelong learners engages themselves in learning experiences which promotes professional growth. They then will be a role model that motivates their members. This would mean that the type of leadership support influences the nature of collaborative enquiry. Leaders must be approachable and believe in teamwork. They need to ensure a good collaborative culture, strike a balance between interests, focus on its members, encourage open-communication, take a holistic approach to problem solving and create conditions which will foster commitment from members. Leaders should also model particular behaviours as they are the role models and a source from which members look upon and refer to.

In the final sub-section of the questionnaire (Section C) which comprises of a mix of close-ended and open-ended questions, all 43 respondents completed this sub-section. They share a general agreement that there is a relationship between enquiry-based professional development and students' learning in particular and the school in general. According to their responses, enquiry-based professional learning will benefit students the most when teachers feel ownership and positive ethos, which will generate into a synergy for effective planning as well as best classroom practices, as students will then be expose to the best teaching pedagogies to promote a higher order thinking learning environment. The school will ultimately progress from students' achievement and growth in reputation.

Findings of the study

All 43 respondents agreed that the 6 basic elements are crucial to make enquiry-based professional learning work which in turn will impact students' learning and the school. The 6 basic elements are shared personal practice (82%), favourable conditions (90%), reflective professional enquiry (98%), collaborative teamwork (95%), collective responsibility (86%) and strong leadership support (100%).

These elements also have a strong correlation where one cannot be without the other. Strong leadership where leaders' endorsement and active encouragement must first be in place to create, support and sustain the learning culture. This will spur continuous self-reflection by teachers which encourages new developments in teaching methodology, thus bringing an impact on students' learning, development, and achievement in particular, and the school in general. When the first two elements are in place collaborative teamwork will take place to produce a conducive environment for collaboration. Team goals, accessibility of information and resources, being proactive and open during discussions and sharing ideas, having mutual trust, equal distribution of roles, social skills, being punctual among others, contributes largely to a successful collaboration during teamwork and will boost teachers' morale. Favourable conditions work quite closely with collaborative teamwork as this element sets the conditions for collaboration to function productively. Collaboration will produce better results if there is a proper time and place for teachers to meet so that they don't feel harried. When enquiry-based professional development takes place, all members will take collective responsibility for student learning. This element will sustain teachers' commitment whereby they will feel accountable for student achievement results and will use this information to stimulate continuous reflection, take action and ensure professional improvement. In a nutshell, teachers must model lifelong learners for their students. When all of these 5 elements have been set, then the last element of shared personal practice will become more meaningful and fruitful. All the above are pre-conditions to ensure teachers are fully engaged and committed during enquiry-based professional development to push for learning of higher intellectual quality which is the key to student success (Newmann, 1995). The impact this will bring to the school was aptly defined by Martel (1993, p24) to be 'the quality of life, quality of work, quality of learning – in short, a total quality focus' to achieve academic excellence for students and improved professional learning for teachers.

Conclusion

The paper shows that enquiry-based professional development provides a platform for educators be it a small group, department, or school to come together to share and look at each other's educational practice, gathering, questioning, and analysing information in consideration of students learning needs with the aim of improving students' learning in particular and the school's progress in general. This research serves to promote good practice

among IB teachers and a reference to schools practicing enquiry-based professional development.

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