Looking into schools and classrooms:

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In answering this question I will have to learn to walk backwards for a while. I will look at the product before discussing the process. In this case the product is quality teaching and learning; the process is how innovative in-servicing can raise the quality.

What is quality teaching and learning?

It can be very limiting to try to use definitions. Maybe it serves our purpose to start with some generalisations. It can be assumed that every human has the right to learn, that is, the right to make meanings for him/herself and for the world that makes sense for the common good. The right to teach, then, could be the acceptance of responsibility to facilitate the learner to make meanings accordingly. Here the question of social consciousness and social justice become of prime importance. Teachers have to assist learners seeking to do justice to themselves and to the world around them. Teachers are like coaches. They show the skills to apprehend moments – but they cannot live through the moments on behalf of their learners. Whenever we plan for the in-service training of teachers we have to consider how much we empower them in coaching the learners, not driving them.

Schooling has been mistakenly thought to be the accumulation of facts for reproduction during examinations. This has been the obsession with most learners and teachers in today's Tanzania. Learners work hard to remember even the most senseless facts rendered to them. Teachers and texts claim to be absolute and the proof is the examination. In this way schooling is not guided by knowledge for better life. School knowledge seems to be distanced from actual life. The examination grades and certificates are what count most. And in this way the examination becomes the tail that wags the dog and not otherwise. This high stakes testing, almost like gambling, has led to a tuition syndrome (extra school, after school) and what happens is cramming of answers to predetermined examination questions. Some even venture into stealing the examination papers or walk in with notes to cheat in the examination room.

However, attempts have been made by the Ministry of Education and Vocational Training (MOEVT) to reorganise teaching and learning. Efforts have been made to introduce concepts like active learning, participatory approaches to learning, co-operative learning, competence-based curricula and a number of other interventions. But the question is, how have we prepared our teachers to cope with the changes? What kind of in-service education is given to the teachers to help the learners? How do the people (even the elites) look at the changes? In fact, many parents who are able to, take their children to schools outside the country or to English-medium schools, thinking that quality could be found in the mastery of skills in the English language. That being the case, we need to know what our teachers believe to be knowledge and what keeps them in that belief.

The question of meaning-making in learning has not been a success so far. There has been a series of upgrading in-service courses (e.g. B/C to A, Grade A to Diploma) but most of them still lean on reproduction of knowledge rather than reflection on actions and knowledge. The Teacher Educators Program (TEP) has made progress toward achieving a paradigm shift in educational thinking. They have put welcome emphasis on studying and learning, rather than stressing teaching. But the shift of emphasis is tricky as it touches teachers' beliefs. It is like a religious conversion that has to move the teacher from one setting of values to a different one. Given the nature of examinations that have not yet registered the paradigm shift, the victory of the crusade for meaningful teaching and learning is still far off.

How can we define a community of learners?

We need to understand our communities of learners and the social dynamics that produce them before we arrange for the in-service training of teachers. First and foremost we have to accept learning to be at the centre of life. Learning is the force that holds consciousness together. Then when we talk about the community of learners we look at learning as belonging. One learns to position oneself among others harmoniously. Then there is identity, which makes one learn how to become what is socially appropriate. Living is for meanings. If life does not seem to make meaning, most humans lose their way. Learning is for meanings to sustain and propel life, hence learning is experience. Learning tied to experience entails practice (learning to do). Learning is reflecting on doings in order to reflect in doing.

Belonging, becoming, experiencing and practicing – these qualities of learning are interrelated and supportive of each other. They are the ones that bind individuals together in an enterprise of living. Communities have these attributes and we have them at different levels, from family to school and other higher levels. We have to understand how these attributes hold together in order to develop the right kind of help for teachers and their learners. The question is, how much is taken into account in developing the in-service training for teachers?

It might also be of importance to think of the human capital that can be developed by training the teachers. Schools and classrooms are centres for developing human capital. Students need to learn how to learn, and they have to learn for lifelong experience. They have to learn how to build profitable and sustainable relationships and networks that develop the individual and all others. They have to develop the positive sense of otherness – knowing how to value others as they value themselves. They also need to know how to add value to the collective community. In nurturing the learners the teachers need to develop intellectual capital among the teaching staff. They need to stand for truths and virtue and stick to universal human commitments. Teachers will be able to maintain the community of learners if they also build professional capital by reflecting on past doings and on continuing actions. Reflection helps teachers to be guided by informed wisdom. When they share their experiences collegially then the school becomes a community bound together towards a common destiny.

Unfortunately most of the in-service training of teachers is on methods of teaching. Methods are treated as recipes of a cookbook. No wonder many people are still comfortable with teacher training and not teacher education. Recipes for training horses and police dogs are acceptable in their contexts. But when learning is given to reflection, then recipes become limiting and "training" is not the suitable word for the process. Teacher education creates more possibilities than we find in training.

How can we develop the individual capacities of learners in order to build strong communities of learners?

At this point we should accept the truth that individuals differ in the ways they make meanings, that is, the way they learn. Currently there has been an extended discussion on multiple intelligences. The way people apprehend their worlds develops not only frameworks for organising knowledge, but also tastes for taking certain perspectives when facing or expressing new knowledge or new situations. They form patterns that cannot be identical among the group. That is why teachers have to learn to teach individuals in groups and not generalise the thinking of a whole class. The class cannot have one mind.

Eight patterns of learning have been named as an intelligence and they can be classified as follows:

- environmental
- kinaesthetic
- artistic-spatial
- mathematical-logical
- musical-rhythmic
- verbal-linguistic
- intrapersonal
- interpersonal.

The ninth intelligence (spiritual intelligence) is still being researched. There is not space here to discuss each intelligence in detail and show how each reveals itself in the classroom situation. But practice has shown us how learners can spread their interests variously across the list. They form their images and meanings with selected perspectives and inclinations. These distinctive patterns do not have to appear singly; many times they are in combinations. It is important for those who plan the in-service education of teachers to know about these intelligences, and see how they can help the teachers to work with individuals, and to enable learners to share their different ways of apprehending their worlds.

Currently there has been a move towards building of competencies in the classrooms. The Tanzania Institute of Education (TIE) has already prepared competence-based syllabuses and teachers' guides for schools that take long strides towards developing our schooling culture.

Those strides require a lot of in-service education for the teachers. It is quite a big jump from teaching to accumulate content to teaching to use content in order to build competence. Many teachers cannot see the difference because they are indoctrinated into the "banking" of content. They accumulate facts in order to reproduce knowledge; they do not use facts to produce knowledge that can help them live better. Here we are faced with a big problem of epistemological

awareness. How is knowledge chosen and then organised? Who chooses for whom, and for what purpose? What choices do teachers make in facilitating that knowledge through classroom interactions? Do the forms of assessment and evaluation agree with the new intentions (of the new syllabuses)?

The problem is that many teachers at present cannot identify competencies. Even if they are trained in the intended competencies they may not be competent in practice. That is, they may lack the skills to manifest those competencies through appropriate use of teaching content. Most of the teachers take the content as an end in itself. Unless this changes, the outlook for educational attainment is bleak. Teachers need to be supported to learn how to work out rubrics and indicators that can foster the development of competencies. These new syllabuses need a new kind of teaching and new kinds of examinations. Teachers have to be oriented to both.

How can the in-service education of teachers be commonly understood or misunderstood?

Forms of in-service provision depend on the kind of pedagogical leadership that heads the education system. If educational policies are not clear about the philosophical line that educational development has to take, then there will be trouble. In our postcolonial era, knowledge in the so-called developing countries is organised to fit into trends that still perpetuate the superiority of the former metropolitan centres. Knowledge in the formerly colonised nations is still peripheral and set to dance to the tune of recorded history. Worse still, in the days of globalisation the poor nations have to dance to the tune so as not to fall out of the global setting. But the question is – do we hold the world together or are we zipped up in their world? Are we on the same journey or are we caught up as hostages in that trip? Do we share destinations and destinies? These are major questions we have to consider when we engage in educational movements across the world, especially when dealing with post-modern approaches in education.

Much in-service training is top-down in thought and action. We are used to short and rushed seminars (crash programmes) that can be justified by the scarcity of funds. Many teachers go back to their stations without the ability to explain what they learnt. The general pattern for in-service training is by cascade. Even when big changes are introduced to schools very few teachers get access to intelligible discussion. Many times it only involves selected teachers who go to the seminar and then come back to orient others. Sometimes the ones that attend the seminars are not the best representatives, as they might not be able to work across the curriculum.

How can we understand teachers' professional development?

Before discussing teachers' professional development we need to consider professionalism in general. This is not a simple task, but we can draw on two traditions in our explanation.

The old tradition (derived from Aristotle) has stood the test of time in defining a professional It stipulates that a professional should:

- have a sound knowledge base
- have authority over her/his practices and be respected for the decisions made by her/him in the conduct of duty
- have autonomy to make and change decisions, not depending on a supervisor; accepting full responsibility for the outcomes of her/his practice
- show accountability in all his/her deliberations – accepting full responsibility over the results of his/her work
- have collegiality – contribute knowledge (through research, journals and forums) to promote the condition of the profession, also be protected by the colleagues as a member of the field of knowledgeable practice
- adhere to the professional code of conduct in order to uplift the value and good name of the profession.

The new tradition (derived from Donald Schon) defines the professional with an additional attribute, that of reflective practice. A professional should have all the above qualities, but the prime attribute is the ability to reflect on action and in action. That means the professional should be able to reflect on theory when evaluating his/her own work and then reflect on what he has learnt in the practice in order to enrich theory. Therefore, the professional is guided by informed wisdom (praxis), which means the professional has to have enough capacity to link theory with practice in making decision.

The new tradition emerged with the industrial revolution and particularly after World War II when

so many technologies developed, enough to surpass the knowledge base that supports the traditional professions: architecture/engineering, law and medicine. For example, an expert in robotics, aeronautics or computer science might need more sophisticated knowledge than that of the traditional professions.

Can teachers be professionals?

Teaching can be a more complicated profession than we usually think, and could be even more professional than the other professions. Why? All other listed professions do not need as much will and thought on the part of their clients in order for the practitioner to act. Lawyers, doctors and architects/engineers can succeed in their practice even if their clients were not concerned with what was going on. Their clients submit to the experts completely and the latter would go on even if the client were unconscious.

Teachers cannot succeed with unconscious students. Teachers are agents that help the students develop their own meanings. Teachers must follow the intentions of the curriculum, the intentions of the students (who are many and so diverse in their power to will), and intentions of the society. Then teachers have their own intentions. That means the teacher is the negotiator of many complex intentions in the classroom (before, during and after teaching). Working with the human mind in building meanings could be a more complex project than what was thought of in the traditional professions.

Comparing professional and in-service teacher training

We have already discussed the patterns that in-service training of teachers takes in most cases. We have also looked at the qualities of a professional. Now, it is upon us to judge if the kind of in-service training of teachers can develop a reflective practitioner or not. The one-hit seminars/ workshops that are set on the cascade model suffer many communication breakdowns before they touch the teacher who did not attend the appointed forum.

If we want to strengthen reflective practice in our teacher education then we need to adopt the idea of establishing mentoring in our teacher development. Mentors oriented to ways of guiding and counselling fellow teachers in changing their classroom practices would be greatly beneficial.

Mentors could use action research approaches among others. They could help teachers in identifying problems together, and then propose strategies together, see into the solving/working out together and finally evaluate the results together. This is a process that tackles one problem after another. It allows a spiral development in the mentee. The mentor also clarifies his/her knowledge as s/he works with the mentee. This way both of them develop. This approach could bring in a new way of working with the teachers as opposed to the one-hit seminars that are expected to scale up by cascade. Teacher development is supposed to offer opportunities for teachers to use theory to inform their practices and then reflect on the practices to improve theory. In this way theory shall not be static. It cannot be an absolute set of facts but a viable proposition to inform and guide classroom practice with all the uniqueness of different situations.

Mentoring can also be used to link teachers colleges with schools. College tutors can work with subject mentors who develop student teachers in their year of practice (for example, the diploma students). When college tutors work with mentors in the schools they increase their own knowledge about the complexities of teacher education. That knowledge has a multiplier effect on the teaching of pre-service courses. Working with the mentors is also a form of in-service development as it improves the capacity of the teacher appointed as subject mentor. There are many way of creating a mentoring service according to need.

How can in-service experience be shared?

We have already discussed the one-hit seminars that are open to very few teachers. It can be possible to establish systems in which teachers have in-house sessions to give feedback on what was developed in the workshops. This is possible if the school has a system that allows teachers time for professional development. A good example in Tanzania is Shinyanga, where Oxfam's Education Quality Improvement by Pedagogy project (EQUIP) has engaged in whole school approaches and made a lot of strides in teacher development. They have successfully used mentoring as an approach and they could be a good reference for others who want to try.

Networks that link schools could be another way of sharing experiences. Teachers could develop and exchange texts as well as share strategies.

These kinds of links could be supported by a newsletter that reports good practices.

How could a teachers' professional board improve the in-service education of teachers?

The establishment of a teachers' professional board could help in focusing on teachers' professional development and developing clear career paths for teachers.

A teachers' professional board would be best placed too to define what a professional teacher in Tanzania is. It could also determine how to develop the knowledge base of its professionals, thus pay attention to the suitable modes of education that could attract the teachers. It would also look into modes of auditing and accrediting the in-service courses so that teachers are motivated even to pay for their own in-service development. This could also go with the rewards (salaries) based on how productive the professional becomes. This could involve research and publications.

Some questions to reflect on in relation to the in-service education of teachers

It would be too imposing to give direct solutions to the problems that we have in our teacher development, as the change process is complex and it needs much reflection. No one has the right answer and we cannot shut our eyes in desperation. Maybe it pays to work with guiding questions that could propel our reflection for viable solutions. The following questions are just starters, the real questions will emerge from contextual engagement by those who have the benefit of innovatively contributing to the in-service education of teachers. Everyone has the right to innovate and to add to this list of questions:

- How do teachers relate knowledge to self-empowerment (in poverty or prosperity)?
- How can teachers give enough to life in order to get the best from it? / What do they hold as value of life?
- How is global knowledge localised (adopting and adapting post-modern trends)?
- How can the in-service education of teachers improve their literacy?
- Can quality be attained without a philosophy? (Is philosophy too laborious?)
- Can we have a philosophy that can sustain the in-service education of teachers and our education as a whole (for example, Education for Self Reliance)?
- Can we set clear career paths for the teachers, how can the trajectories be developed, and with what kind of force?
- How do we gauge professionalism?/Can the courses be synchronised?

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