

# Importance of 'Understanding the Self' in Enhancing Professional Capacities for School Teachers



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## Abstract

Professional development refers to activities to enhance professional career growth. It provides a means to build capacity among school personnel when it is delivered as part of a systematic, long-term approach to school and teacher improvement. This research examines the importance and necessity of the course on 'Understanding the Self' for teachers. 9 experts (4 students) from different areas of specialization like school principal, special educator, school counselor, academician, school course coordinator, private tutors and parent will be interviewed. A semi-structured interview schedule comprising of questions related to the importance and necessity of the course on 'Understanding the Self' in Enhancing Professional Capacity will be used as a data collection tool. Content analysis will be used for data analysis. The analysis will probe the extent to which such course play a vital role in enhancing teaching efficiency and further implications will be drawn.

**Keywords:** Enhancing Professional Capacity; Understanding Self.

## Introduction

"Professional development refers to activities to enhance professional career growth" (Mohan, 2013). A Professional teacher that is a teacher possessing high degree of professionalism approaches each of his professional tasks and responsibilities and systematic manner with level of efficiency. There is little doubt that the role of the teacher has changed significantly in recent years along with the status of teaching as a profession and the demands and expectations the community places on teachers and schools (Vick, 1998; Groundwater-Smith, Cusworth & Dobbins, 1998). Such changes have been the subject of a long series of reports spanning the past two decades (Gonczi, 2001). These reports have been driven by a number of political and practical agendas. The changing role of teachers, together with the increased demands and expectations placed upon them, will significantly influence the types of knowledge/s teachers require in their undergraduate education and ongoing professional development. It would seem that the process of becoming (and staying) a teacher is increasingly being acknowledged as a multi-faceted process which involves the person intellectually, socially, morally, emotionally and aesthetically (Beattie, 1995).

The National Council for Teacher Education (2014) has introduced a course, Enhancing Professional Capacities for teachers and divided in into 4 parts:

1. Reading and Reflecting on Texts.
2. Drama and Art in Education.
3. Critical understanding of ICT.
4. Understanding of Self.

These courses have been implemented with the aim of enhancing the abilities of the teacher beyond the four walls of the classroom. The course on 'Understanding of Self' is developed with the objective of understanding of student-teachers about themselves – the development of the self as a person and as a teacher, through conscious ongoing reflection.

The course is designed to address aspects of development of the inner self and the professional identity of a teacher in order to enable student-teachers to develop sensibilities, dispositions, and skills that will later help them in facilitating the personal growth of their own students while they teach. It is important for student-teachers to develop social-relational sensitivity and effective communication skills, including the ability

to listen and observe (Hall & Hall, 2003). The course will enable student-teachers to develop a holistic and integrated understanding of the human self and personality; to build resilience within to deal with conflicts at different levels and learn to create teams to draw upon collective strengths. As an individual in society one has different identities – gender, relational, cultural – and it is important to address one's implicit beliefs, stereotypes and prejudices resulting from these identities. It is important for the student-teachers to be aware of their identities and the political, historical, and social forces that shape them.

Transformational education involves reflection, introspection and action, with a deep relationship between the head, heart and hand. (NCTE)

The aspects of self like self-regulation, self-presentation and effective communication also plays an essential role in improving professional abilities of a teacher. Self-regulation refers to the ways people control and direct their own actions. Teachers require the capacity to self-regulate their thinking, behavior, and emotions. They need to be able to exercise direct control over their thinking, behavior, and teaching circumstances. Teachers might be said to be self-regulated when they are metacognitively, motivationally, and behaviorally active participants in the process of teaching (Zimmerman, 1986). Self-presentation refers to a deliberate effort to act in ways that create a particular impression of the self. Much like an actor on the stage the teacher's major assignment is to keep the attention of the audience. Unlike the actor on the stage however, the teacher has not been given an exciting script and he has the additional handicap of having to appear before young people day after day in a setting without any aesthetic enhancements (Goffman, 1963). Hence the presentation of the teacher becomes an important aspect in the classroom setting. And effective communication involves the skills of listening and observing which plays a major role in the classroom setting where one teacher is managing a big crowd of students.

## Review of Literature

Ross & Bruce (2007) argued that Self-assessment is a powerful technique for improving achievement. They outlined a theory of teacher change that links self-assessment by teachers to their professional growth. The theory provides avenues for peers and change agents to influence teacher practice. They applied the theory to change in mathematics teaching and reported an explanatory case study in which use of the self-assessment tool, in combination with other elements, contributed to change in the instructional practice of a grade 8 mathematics teacher. Provision of a self-assessment tool contributed to teacher growth by: (1) influencing the teacher's definition of excellence in teaching and increasing his ability to recognize mastery experiences; (2) helping the teacher select improvement goals by providing him with clear standards of teaching, opportunities to find gaps

between desired and actual practices, and a menu of options for action; (3) facilitating communication with the teacher's peer; and (4) increasing the influence of external change agents on teacher practice. The study argued that providing a self-assessment tool is a constructive strategy for improving the effectiveness of in-service; provided it is bundled with other professional growth strategies: peer coaching, observation by external change agents, and focused input on teaching strategies.

Eekelen, Boshuizen & Vermunt (2005) studied on the work-related learning processes reported by experienced higher education teachers with the aim to discover whether teachers actively self-regulate their learning experiences (as their students are expected to do) and to examine how this regulation takes place in the workplace. They tested some generally held assumptions and conceptions regarding teacher learning. Fifteen experienced college teachers, from three different colleges in The Netherlands, participated. Two semi-structured interviews and a (digital) diary study were used as the primary data collection methods. 86 examples of teacher learning episodes were collected and were analysed using a phenomenographic method. The results showed that teachers' learning experiences are not as self-regulated, planned, reflective, or spiral as some assume. Sometimes, the teachers' learning was planned (self-regulated), but mostly it occurred in a non-linear (both external and self-regulated) or spontaneous (externally regulated) way. They concluded that teachers do not always self-regulate their learning, but they mostly do self-regulate their teaching practice (with learning as a result).

## Rationale

This study will help in understanding the requirement and essentialism of the course on 'Understanding of Self' for improving teacher's professional capacities in the current trend. The experts working and dealing with children have attained wider knowledge of different aspects that play a significant role in enhancing teacher's proficiency and in turn improving student's learning-the ultimate goal. There are many researches done on the role of Art and Drama in Enhancing Professional Capacities of teachers but very little work on the section of 'Understanding the Self' in Indian context. Ross and Bruce (2007) have argued that providing a self-assessment is a constructive strategy for improving the effectiveness of in-service provided by teachers bundled with other professional growth strategies like peer coaching, observation by external change agents, and focused input on teaching strategies.

West & Sloane (1986) examined the teacher presentation rate and point delivery rate with classroom disruptive behavior. In a class of five disruptive students, the effects of teacher presentation rate of academic response opportunities and point delivery were assessed on classroom disruption, performance accuracy, and student response rate. Two levels of teacher presentation rate were paired with two point delivery rates resulting in

four treatment conditions: high point rate/fast presentation; high point rate/slow presentation; low point rate/fast presentation; low point rate/ slow presentation. Using a multielement design, it was demonstrated that the fast presentation rate was associated with significantly less disruptive behavior than the slow presentation rate. Point delivery had little effect. For some subjects the slow presentation rate was associated with higher student performance accuracy, although the fast presentation rate produced high overall rates of correct performance.

**Objective of the Study**

1. To know about the importance of 'Understanding the Self' as a course for teachers in Enhancing their Professional Capacities.
2. To know some aspects of self that play an important role for a teacher.
3. To understand the requirement of self-regulation, self-presentation and effective communication for effective teaching.
4. To gain an insight if personal development and alter the teacher's personality.
5. To explore the various methods and ways that can be used to impart a course on 'understanding of self' for teacher training.
6. To understand the relevance of continuing such courses.

**Sample**

9 experts from different areas of specialization like school principal, special educator, school counselor, academican, school course coordinator, private tutors and parent and 4 students from grade 11 and 12 were interviewed. The experts had an experience of minimum 2 years to maximum 40 years in dealing with students and teaching practices. 4 male and 9 females from age group of 16 to 59 years were interviewed. These experts have worked in the city of Baroda and Ahmedabad, Gujarat.

A semi-structured interview schedule comprising of questions related to the importance and

**Results and Discussion**

necessity of the course on 'Understanding the Self' in Enhancing Professional Capacity will be used as a data collection tool.

**Research Design**

Survey research was used for data collection. A semi-structured interview was administered as an interview schedule either face to face or on voice calls. 9 experts from different fields and 4 students from grade 11 and 12 were taken and they were interviewed regarding their views on the importance of course on 'Understanding of Self' for enhancing professional capacities of teachers.

**Tool**

A semi-structured interview comprising of 7 questions and taking about 20-30 minutes was prepared in English language with the help of experts and based on the review of literature. It comprised of open ended questions regarding the importance of 'Understanding of Self' for teachers for effective teaching; role of self-regulation, self-presentation and effective communication on effective teaching; methods for increasing understanding of self and views on the relevance on continuation of such programs. In the beginning of the interview demographic details like name, age, gender, qualification and experience in the field of education were also taken. The tool is attached with the appendix A.

**Procedure**

The experts from different fields having direct exposure and knowledge in the field of education were listed. Then permission from authorities was taken for conducting the interview. The interviewee was informed regarding the purpose of the interview. Rapport was established by asking the demographic details. Further, questions were asked to the experts in English or Hindi according to the comfort of the interviewee. The interviewees were encouraged to give elaborated answers from their experiences. Then the data was collected and content analysis was done.

Item	Responses
Have you heard of courses on Enhancing Professional Capacities AKA EPC for teachers? (Yes/No).  If yes, what do you know about it?	Yes (30%) Role transformation from teacher to student; life skills training; local level professional training.
In your expert opinion, does 'Understanding Self' play a role in enhancing teacher's professional efficiency? (Yes/No).  If yes, how?	Yes (100%) Helps to know about strengths and weaknesses. (60%) Know one's Emotional Intelligence [temperament, passionate, empathy] (50%) Knowledge of weaknesses: help to know about areas to work on/ where to modify according to child's abilities (40%) [example: tolerance level] Unless aware of self, will be unable to help/ motivate students (30%) Know one's teaching style/classroom management style (20%) Instead of comparing self with others, knowing about self's aptitude and gaining knowledge if 'teaching' is their field. (10%) Answer to "Why teaching as a profession?-not some other career" (10%)

<p>What aspects of "Self" do you think play a significant role in the professional background of a teacher?</p>	<p>Capacity in terms of teacher characteristics like self-confidence, patience, empathy, tolerance, content knowledge, classroom management, combination of strictness and love, organizational skills, responsibility, discipline, integrity (80%) "because teachers are live performers!" Strengths and weaknesses (30%) [eg. aggressive] Aptitude: develop self in that area (10%)</p>
<p>In your view, how do the following concepts affect or enhance effective teaching?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• self-regulation</li> <li>• self-presentation</li> <li>• effective communication</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Regulating emotions- temper, anticipating the reactions to actions [child's emotional development should not get hindered] (30%)</li> </ul> <p>Students model teacher (30%) Teacher: as in-charge position in class "classroom leader" (30%) Regulate timing [yearly planner] (20%) Rapport building (10%) Regulating student-teacher boundaries (10%)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Presentation in terms of: physical, verbal, non-verbal [smile, walk, attitude], authenticity - Unique (60%)</li> </ul> <p>Carried image determines others' reactions [students' willingness to stay longer in class, understand better] (60%) Most important aspect (30%) "First impression is the lasting impression"  <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Help in emotional need management [interest, attention needs of children, discipline] (80%)</li> </ul> <p>Identifying difficulty [using feedback method - are examples age appropriate?] (60%) Broadening teaching methods using VAK [Visio-Auditory-Kinesthetic] Approach (30%) Clarity in speech (20%) Maintain eye-contact (10%)</p> </p>
<p>Can personal development sessions really enhance the teacher's personality?</p>	<p>Yes (100%) Depending on: revision of such sessions [to internalize] (20%), the way it is imparted (20%), designing of the course (20%), practical exposure (20%), dedication of trainees (10%).</p>
<p>According to you how can such programs be imparted?</p>	<p>Basic method: Introspection (10%) Practical activity based - role play, games, projects- long and short term goals, sessions, self-disclosures, GDs (70%) Constant training [self an ongoing process] (20%) Feedback from others (20%) Self report questionnaires (20%) Experiential learning (20%) Practical knowledge along with theory (10%)</p>
<p>Should such programs be implemented and/or continued as a part of curriculum in teacher training courses?</p>	<p>Yes (100%) Schools should also take responsibility for ongoing growth of self (10%) Such courses should be marked on practical basis instead of theorizing them (10%) "Teachers are like doctors; Doctors save lives and teachers shape lives"</p>

The course on Enhancing professional Capacities has been added in the new revised curriculum in 2014. There is not much awareness about this course yet. Only participants from the field of teacher education knew about this course. There were also some misconceptions about this course, which were clarified before moving further to other questions. The research study shows that programs on 'understanding of self' are important in teacher training as they will help future teachers to know about their strengths and weaknesses, their emotional and social quotient which includes awareness about

their temperament, passion for teaching, ability to empathize with children and understand children according to their age appropriate abilities. If the teacher is well aware of his/her temperament s/he will be in a better position to handle complex classroom situations; for instance if a teacher has a very short temper s/he should know where the conversation with the student should be stopped-before a situation arises where things get out of control. When these teachers are aware about their strengths and weaknesses at a training stage, they can make use of their strengths in the classroom environment and at

the same time work on the weaknesses and modify the teaching methods. Only when a teacher is well aware of self, will s/he be able to understand children in a huge class of students and help and motivate them. An understanding about one's teaching style and classroom management techniques helps to know if any difficulty is coming up in the classroom as a result of one of these reasons. It is also necessary that the teacher knows and understands why teaching has been chosen as a profession and the dedication towards his/her work.

'Teachers are live performers'- there are multiple factors that play a role in the teachers' performances. There are various aspects of 'self' that play a role in a teachers' professional background. The teachers should have the characteristics of self-confidence in her ability to teach what s/he knows; patience to explain the concept over again if not understood and at age appropriate pace. The quality of being tolerant and handling one's temperament is very important. Apart from the content knowledge the skills of managing the classroom and organizing the class activities is very important. The teacher should be approachable and thus have trustworthy and loving impression. But at the same time, have some strictness to handle the class and maintain the integrity and discipline in the classroom environment. The understanding of strengths and weaknesses help in building on the strengths and working on the weaknesses. The teacher should also be aware of one's skills and aptitude and accordingly develop self in the area of abilities.

Self-regulation refers to the ways people control and direct their actions. It is a necessary quality for a teacher to possess this quality as in the classroom the teacher is not only delivering the lecture but also the 'classroom leader' and directing the classroom environment. The teacher should be able to regulate her emotions as in the school environment the age group of children is such that their own emotional development is also taking place. If the teacher is not able to direct the emotions rightly any child from the class of many children can get affected by the reactions. Thus, the teacher should be able to anticipate what reactions could come out as a result of their actions. There should also be regulation of time in terms of managing the course material as well as content for each period. Most of the schools also follow the yearly planners in order to regulate this. There are also some boundaries between a student and a teacher. The teacher should regulate this so as to maintain the level of respect and decorum in the student-teacher relationship.

Self-presentation refers to a deliberate effort to act in ways that create a particular impression of the self. Much like an actor on the stage the teacher's major assignment is to keep the attention of the audience. Unlike the actor on the stage however, the teacher has not been given an exciting script and he has the additional handicap of having to appear before young people day after day in a setting without any aesthetic enhancements. The presentation of the teacher with respect to the physical appearance and the way the teacher dresses up, the kind of language

and vocabulary used and also the non-verbal expressions like having a smile on the face showing approachability, the way of walking in the class, the kind of attitude and the interest the teacher raises among children have a great impact on the learning of the children. The teachers' attitude should show some authenticity and be creative in using unique styles as monotonous presentation of the learning material make the learning process mundane for the students. The way the teacher would present self in the first impression would make the lasting impression on the children and also determine the way students react in the class and their interest in the subject would also get affected.

Effective communication is where the speaker in making the listener involved in the conversation by exchanging the roles and also going beyond what the words are saying, through observation. An effective communication helps in managing the classroom's emotional needs like maintaining the interest of students, paying more attention to students who need extra attention and maintain discipline in the class. When the teacher listens to the students and is an active observer, s/he is able to identify the areas of difficulty among the students and can also make use of feedback from students to understand their level of understanding. For a communication to be effective, the speaker needs to make sure that the listener actually understands what is being told. Thus, the use of VAK (Visio-Audio-Kinesthetic) Approach can be helpful, where the teacher identifies the learning styles of the students and uses a mixed approach with visual, auditory and kinesthetic stimulations for better teaching. Above all, the teacher should have clarity in speech as a part of effective communicator as well as a presenter and maintain constant eye contact with the class.

The course on 'understanding of self' is a one fourth part of one course of the two year curriculum in the B. Ed. training program but it can still have a positive influence on the trainees if the course is presented on a practical basis with constant revisions as self is an ongoing process and only constant exposures can help in internalizing of such understanding. Moreover, the teachers can only have any influence of the course if they are truly dedicated in understanding oneself.

Training not only depends on the nature of the trainee or the content but also in the ways the content is imparted. Understanding of self is a complex and a constant process. Some of the techniques that can be employed to make the process of understanding self more qualitative can be by the use of practical activity based training including role plays, games and projects with short and long term goals, sessions on self-actualization by experts, group discussions and so on. Some self report questionnaires can be used for objective reflection of oneself. When such skills are given practically along with the theoretical background and 'in-field' experiences it can make the training more effective.

Thus, such courses should be a part of training curriculum for the to-be teachers. More so,

even the schools should take the responsibility of constant training of teachers for understanding self in the ongoing growth process. Teachers deal with lives of students and are equally positioned as doctors. When doctors are said to save lives, teachers shape lives. Thus a teacher should be well equipped in the understanding of self before s/he steps in the classroom as the leader of the class: the teacher.

#### Conclusions

The courses on 'Understanding of Self' play a significant role in enhancing teachers' professional capacities. Self-regulation, presentation and effective communication play a major role in teacher's 'in-field' practice. These courses clubbed with various factors like practical training and focus of emotional development can enhance the professional capacities of teachers.

#### Suggestions

1. The training programs can include more sessions and activities involving group discussions, feedbacks and self disclosures for knowing 'self' better.
2. The trainees can be explained the relevance and importance of such courses to increase their dedication towards such courses.
3. The experts can keep seminars in schools for ongoing self-awareness among teachers and guiding them how to work on their needs and become proficient in imparting knowledge.
4. Teachers in practice should be encouraged to make use of anecdotal notes to reflect on self on constant basis and seek for help and guidance when required.
5. The 'understanding of self' can be practiced on personal level which would modify the belief systems and in turn automatically enhance the professional capacities.

#### Limitations

1. The sample for data collection was very small.
2. There was not equal number of experts from all the various fields.
3. The data was collected from the institutions of Baroda only.

#### Future implications

The current study will enable the teacher educators to understand the importance and relevance of such courses according to in-field experts. And establish an understanding from experts to make training better for the upcoming teachers who will be molding the lives of hundreds of children.

...teachers really can lead innovation; teachers really can build professional knowledge; teachers really can develop the capacity for leadership, and teachers really can influence their colleagues and the nature of professional practice in their schools. However, what is abundantly clear is that teachers are only likely to do these things if they are provided with appropriate support. (Frost, 2011: 57)

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