

# *The Professional Development of Teachers<sup>1</sup>*

## **1. Enlightened Anarchy: *Swa-Raj***

The educational vision of the Pokhrama Foundation and the Pokhrama Foundation Academy (the latter is a subset of the former) underscores the importance of creating schools marked by the *gift of fearlessness (abhayadanam)*. This has been elaborated in our vision document in some detail:

Pokhrama Foundation Academy shall be a place of *abhaya*, fearlessness. No violence. No corporal punishment -- none at all. No bossing over children. No intellectual or cultural hierarchies. Children will not fear the Foundation, not their teachers, not other kids. There will be incessant dialogue. It will be open and free.

Just as the learner requires space, freedom, flexibility and respect, so does the teacher and every other stake-holder. At the heart of our system is the *gift of fearlessness*. This is the bedrock of our ethos and culture. The gift of fearlessness that members of the Foundation and Academy offer each other is inextricably linked to the idea of enlightened anarchy. What is this latter idea?

The author of this powerful idea is Mahatma Gandhi and this is what he has to say:

To me political power is not an end but one of the means of enabling people to better their condition in every department of life. Political power means capacity to regulate national life through national representatives. *If national life becomes so perfect as to become self-regulated, no representation becomes necessary. There is then a state of enlightened anarchy. In such a state everyone is his own ruler. He rules himself in such a manner that is never a hindrance to his neighbour.* (Emphasis mine). In the ideal state therefore, there is no political power because there is no State. But the ideal is never fully realized in life. Hence the classical statement of Thoreau that that Government is best which governs the least.

*Young India*, 2 July 1931, p.162

Here Gandhi is talking about the nation and its state apparatus. But the core idea could well apply to the running of different types of institutions. Pokhrama Foundation seeks to build an ethos “where everyone is his [or her] own ruler”. We believe in self-governing mechanisms that emphasise the rule of the Self (*swa-raj*). We therefore believe that everybody working in the Foundation will take ownership of their work, of the institution, and of their professional development. We wish to build a culture where teachers and others are so passionate about their work that they become self-driven, striving to seek the highest standards in all respects. At the Foundation, the *ethos* of enlightened self-regulation is perhaps even more significant than “outer” *systems* or the attendant *rules* and *regulations*. Our conception of the professional development of teachers is informed by this understanding. Consequently, teachers are strongly encouraged to adopt many of the principles and practices of professional development enunciated below. The Foundation has chosen for itself the difficult path of deliberate, conscious and voluntary action on the part of teachers rather than that of necessity

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<sup>1</sup>This document has been created after wide-ranging consultation. The teachers of Pokhrama Foundation Academy have provided invaluable inputs from time to time. The author is also beholden for sage advice to Farah Farooqi of Jamia Millia Islamia and Pallavi Varma Patil and Swati Sircar of Azim Premji University. John Bangs, formerly of the National Union of Teachers of the UK, London, now retired, so passionate about this subject, provided useful inputs. GAN (Nishtha Gaur Singh, Garima Gaur and I) discussed the matter in different ways: patient listening, animated discussion, fierce disputation. I thank Nishtha and Garima for stimulating conversation.

and imposition. After all, compulsion could breed fear or drudgery or mechanical adherence while self-chosen paths lead to ownership.

## **2. Professional Development**

“Professional development” is a wide-ranging term that includes many different aspects of professional welfare, satisfaction and progress. One of these is in-service enrichment. From its very inception, the Foundation has been committed to the in-service enrichment of faculty. It will always seek to provide such enrichment in various areas of education. These areas will include the manner in which different concerns and disciplines have come to form the rather hydra-headed creature called education; child development and learning; curricular knowledge and pedagogy; the school as a site of learning; systemic matters; and national and international concerns.

Professional development also includes the manner in which teachers view their work: as a job or a profession or a vocation or a calling! In other words, there is an important interplay between the way in which teachers perceive education and schools and their professional identity. The Foundation is committed to helping individual teachers transform their work into a calling, in so far as this is possible. It will do its best to provide forums for orientation, discussion, debate, experimentation, reflection and incessant practice. In so doing, it hopes to pave the path to ownership.

## **3. Teacher, School and Calling**

Educationalists, including leaders of teachers’ associations, hold that any policy regarding the professional development of teachers must look at the School as a whole. An “excellent” blueprint for the professional development of teachers will never work in a “poor” school. A “poor” school may be defined *either* as one whose primary purpose is not education but the making of money for the owner(s) *or* as one whose primary purpose is education but the school management has little sense of sound, wholesome education. (For what the Pokhrama Foundation considers to be sound, wholesome education, please read our vision document). In other words, there has to be *consonance* between conceptions of the “good school” and the professional development of teachers. Both these conceptions must respect the teachers’ voices and Teacher Voice. They must seek to build the teachers’ sense of self, self-efficacy, teacher wellbeing and teacher leadership. In our perspective, teacher professional development is not a tool of accountability or the mere enhancement of salaries. It shall always be seen as a means of helping teachers reach the pinnacle of their calling.

## **4. Professional Progress**

We have been speaking until now about lofty ideals. This is important. Progress can only be made by keeping ideals in mind. Even so, careful planning, constant practice, iteration, and revisiting are the crucial ingredients of any achievement. From here on, therefore, this document will make practical suggestions for achieving high standards that might begin to approximate ideals.

It is suggested that teachers look at their progress with respect to:

- A. Research and reading in their teaching-subject
- B. General reading
- C. Pedagogy and classroom transactions
- D. Interest in, and knowledge of, learners including knowledge of the learners' homes
- E. School transactions and the development of the Academy's overall culture
- F. Contribution to institution-building (**examples**: looking after the library; participating in job-talks; creating curricular material; documenting best practices; building a robust house-system; administrative work)

It is not necessary for every teacher to contribute towards all the six areas bulleted above. They should strive to do so in at least four.

#### *4.1 Goal-Setting*

Teachers should set goals for themselves at the beginning of each academic year (in late June/early July). **No "goals" may be set with respect to bullets C and D above unless the teacher wants to state something specific that she has planned for the upcoming academic year.** The reason for this is that the manner in which teachers acquire knowledge about individual learners or the class as a whole can seldom be pre-decided. Pedagogy and classroom transactions also evolve with each teaching-period. Individual teachers needn't set goals about the syllabus or prescribed textbooks. The broad contours of syllabi are pre-decided and the textbooks are already prescribed. Teachers would need to take decisions regarding syllabus-load and choose the chapters/themes to be taught. [**Example**: There are 22 chapters in NCERT's EVS textbook for Class 5. The developers of this textbook knew that all the 22 chapters can never be taught in an academic year. They visualised that teachers in a given school will decide how many and which chapters to teach. So, we would need to undertake such an exercise with respect to each textbook and each class in the beginning of the academic year.]

If, apart from the prescribed textbook, teachers decide on the use of specific materials for their classes before the beginning of the academic year, they may include this in goal-setting. On the other hand, several teachers take such decisions as they progress with their classes. If this is the case, the use of additional materials can be mentioned as part of the review and appraisal exercises (see section 3.3 below).

With respect to A, B, E and F, however, each teacher would need to set broad goals at the beginning of the year.

The Academy's office shall circulate a format for goal-setting.

#### 4.2 Teachers' journals

With respect to C i.e. pedagogy and classroom transactions, it is suggested that all teachers maintain a journal that details classroom transactions. The left-hand page of the journal should be used to create a lesson plan for any *given* class or teaching-period.<sup>2</sup> Once the class is over, the right-hand page should be used to document what precisely happened in the class, its flow, the discussion that took place, and the teacher's perception of how the period went. A careful record of this kind will serve several purposes. Other things being equal, it is likely to make classes truly interconnected, crisp and efficient. It will provide a range of evidence about our pupils' grasp. It could serve as a precise basis for formative and summative assessment. It could help the teacher prepare not just for the classes to follow but also for subsequent terms and years. And, last but not least, all the journals together will become an invaluable archive! This has been a "best practice" in several good institutions and you are urged to adopt it.

#### 4.3 Review and Appraisal

It is suggested that all of us together (teachers and GAN) create pairs of peers (i.e. buddies) so that all teachers always have a colleague to talk to with respect to professional interests. Each pair of buddies shall function as it likes but must remain in sufficient discussion with each other. It is also suggested that a peer-review of the goals set be undertaken in mid-November. The purpose would be to take stock and see how each teacher is progressing with respect to the goals that have been set.

It is further suggested that an appraisal be held at the end of the academic year i.e. in late March. Self-analysis-reflection (SAR) will form the bedrock of this appraisal. In addition, it could also be based on feedback by peers and senior colleagues. It is hoped that the appraisee shall have confidence in the ability and integrity of the appraiser and every effort shall be made towards the creation of such confidence. Furthermore, there shall be prior agreement between the appraisee and the appraiser over exactly what is to be appraised and how it will be done.

Although details about pedagogy and classroom transactions as well as knowledge of learners may not figure in the goal-setting document, these should be extensively discussed during review and appraisal. Hence, they should get pride of place in the SAR document. An understanding of learners could be about a cohort as a whole but it could also be about individual children – their strengths and limitations, likes and dislikes, areas of improvement, impediments in learning, their thought-processes, health, homes and the wider community.

Review and appraisal exercises shall never become tools of policing. They shall never ever involve thoughtless or mechanistic form-filling. And, the Academy is duty-bound to ensure, as much as it can, that they do not lead to drudgery.

The Academy's office shall circulate a format for appraisal.

#### 4.4 Looking Ahead

Even when we perform exceedingly well, there is scope for improvement. Teachers will be encouraged to think about how they can actualise their untapped potential and the

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<sup>2</sup> Given class or teaching-period: A single class taken -- say, English class held with Class 6 on Wednesday in the second period.

Academy will try its best to help them do so. This rubric will be written into the appraisal form.

## **5 Conclusion**

Mutual respect, active listening and dialogue are at the heart of all planning and policy perspectives at Pokhrama Foundation. These cardinal principles shall always inform our attempts at professional development too. Institutions always need some modicum of governance. They, therefore, need to have an administrative hierarchy. It should, nevertheless, be our responsibility to ensure that differing administrative roles do not translate into a social hierarchy or didactic instruction. At the Foundation and its Academy, liberty, equality and dignity, thoughtfully arrived at as a result of mutual consideration, shall lead to a robust fraternity!