Faculty Development and Institutional Support Systems

Dr. Sruti Ramachandran
Assistant Professor of English,
Govt. College for Women,
Thiruvananthapuram, Kerala.

Abstract: Faculty Development has emerged as a vital component shaping key higher education policies. Professional/Individual and Institutional development practices inspire and guide many an educational framework. Challenging the teacher-learner binary, faculty development programmes typically put the teacher in the learner's shoes. Though largely self-reflective in method and spirit, such programmes rely heavily on institutional support for their success. Faculty development programmes are successful only when they pass the litmus test of student progression. Student feedback and performance are important determiners for such institutional support programmes. This paper attempts to open a discussion on the need to promote institutional support systems for faculty development in our institutions of higher education

Keywords: Higher education, faculty development, Institutional support, Quality Assurance

"We cannot hold a torch to light another's path without brightening our own."

Ben Sweetland

Teachers, as engaged learners, learn from their experiences and respond to the changing academic concerns around them. The entire academic edifice is built upon the dedication and effort of teachers. Maintaining the interest, passion, creativity and enthusiasm of teachers in their profession is one of the challenges faced by academic-coordinators, teacher-educators and policy-makers alike. Teachers need to expand their roles and responsibilities over time if they are to continue to find teaching rewarding. Also, recognition and acknowledgement of excellence will give teacher motivation levels a much needed fillip. Challenging the stereotype of self-aggrandizement and individual career advancement, faculty development has come a long way. It is a win-win situation for the faculty and the institution as there is a consensus in academia that the benefits of faculty development ultimately percolate to the students. The diverse and ever growing demands of the student community need to be factored in for any discussion on higher education.

The term 'Faculty development', though branded as archaic by some educationists, enjoys popular currency in India. Also known as 'Academic development', 'Educational development', etc, it is a continuous process that helps a teacher to review his/her teaching and plan ahead for the future. Teachers in different stages of their career have different aims and goals. Faculty development programmes recognize these needs and format procedures to enable faculty to achieve them. Some of the procedures that facilitate professional development for teachers include workshops, self-monitoring, teacher support groups, journal writing, teacher portfolios, case studies, peer observation, etc. Practicing teachers keen on learning on the job engage in self-reflection, review and evaluation to develop specialized knowledge and skills about the different aspects of teaching. However, faculty development cannot occur in isolation and requires the unstinted support of students, colleagues, senior staff, institution *et al.* The table below highlights the role of support systems in faculty development

Individual	One-to-One	Group- based	Institutional
Self-monitoring	Peer Coaching	Case Studies	Workshops
Journal Writing	Peer Observation	Action Research	Action Research
Critical incidents	Critical Friendships	Journal Writing	Teacher support groups
Teaching Portfolios	Action Research	Teacher support groups	
Action Research	Critical incidents		

Table 1: Activities for Teacher Development (Richards 14):

Faculty development, a transformative concept in higher education, could work wonders if the individual and institutional interests converged. A well-aligned link between the teacher's natural interest in inquiry and the institution's larger concerns is prerequisite for academic excellence. From the institution's perspective, the work that teacher's undertake to improve their teaching should contribute to advance institutional priorities. There is a growing recognition in the educational enterprise that investing in faculty development augments institutional academic standards. Today, "faculty work habits and personal expectations –to continue to learn, to undertake meaningful work in a supportive and collegial environment, to commit to and act upon the larger social goals of education- are considered essential for institutional growth" (Hutchings 48).

Academic Institutions are increasingly providing opportunities for teachers to develop long-term career goals over time. A coherent and strategic approach to teacher development needs to be adopted by the institutions with a keener focus on continuous professional development. Many staff development or In-Service training programmes are intended to directly or indirectly enhance the performance of the institution as a whole, as well as to contribute incidentally to the teacher's individual development. Jack C. Richards and Thomas S.C. Farrell identify three goals of staff development programmes:

1) Institution Development: Improvement of the performance of the institution as a whole to make it more successful, attract more students, and achieve better learning outcomes.
2) Career Development: It also facilitates the professional advancement of teachers to more senior positions in the institution by providing them with the necessary knowledge and skills. Increased job satisfaction will lead to better teacher performance and better teacher retention.

3) Enhanced levels of student learning: An important goal is to raise the achievement levels of the students in the institution, a goal that is not only important for its own sake but that also adds to the reputation of the institution and its teachers. (Richards 10)

Institutional support systems for faculty development take different paths to achieve their goal of excellence. For instance, some institutions provide information in the form of a dossier of articles or reports that make available examples and guidelines for carrying out different kinds of activities whereas others create a forum for teachers to meet and review their progress, providing the much needed time and space. Institutions also encourage professional development procedures such as peer-coaching and peer-observation that allow participants to receive modelling and advice from more experienced peers (POLT- Peer Observation of Learning and Teaching). Learning and Teaching Units of the institution take faculty development initiatives to a whole new professional realm with their commitment to standard and quality. These centres, a ubiquitous presence in most campuses, offer specialized programmes that respond to the career span and changing needs of academic life.

There is a new learner in the classroom; the teacher. As professional development programmes move from the exception to the norm, only an engaged and committed teacher/ learner can participate in the ever –evolving learning and teaching paradigms of academia.

Faculty development programmes galore in the Indian higher education system. National and international agencies offer a range of fellowships and awards to interested and eligible faculty. However, there is a shocking lack of support and guidance for faculty interested in such schemes. Zero motivation, lack of awareness, administrative red tape, etc smother the slightest of faculty initiatives. This is where institutional support systems can step in and make a significant contribution to faculty development. Under the auspices of the Quality Assurance body of the institution, a forum for faculty can be constituted. This forum may consist of two-three faculty members with significant fellowship experience (with at least one awardee). The forum can organise awareness seminars on various fellowship opportunities for the faculty of the institution. The forum could mentor interested applicants and guide them through the application process and encourage academic staff to reflect on the effectiveness of their teaching and learning regimes and inform their professional development. Through effective mentoring, they can guide the applicants towards making a strong CPD portfolio. The impact worthiness of the application will be judged by the forum and necessary suggestions would be given. After the forum approves the application, the applicant can send it to the respective agencies. Such a scheme would be of immense help to the prospective applicants who would otherwise have to run from pillar to post in circles.

Faculty development recognizes academic practice, supports peer observation, disseminates effective practice in teaching and learning, contributes to quality assurance and promotes a learning enhancement culture. Institutional support for faculty development would bring recognition not just to the faculty but also accrue academic benefits for the institution.

Works Cited:

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