

Andragoški glasnik  
Vol. 19, br. 1-2, 2015, str. 65-72  
Stručni rad

## SUCSESSES AND PROBLEMS OF SCHOOL BASED TEACHER PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM (CASE STUDY FROM GEORGIA)

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**Summary:** *Continuous professional development is efficient in the most educational systems when it is implemented; if trainings and sharing of information is taking place in the place where teachers are working. The system is improving, as it is giving an opportunity to all the members of school to be involved in PD activities any time they need it. External activities of professional development are carrying many limitations as they are less based on individual professional needs, they are determined by external experts, taking place in different locations, which are mostly far from the location where teachers work and live, moreover in a period, that is inconvenient for the participants. In Georgia, School Based Teacher Professional Development Program shifted PD to a new direction. The article highlights the problems and successes of the program implementation in pilot schools. It analyzes hindering factors, activities to eliminate them, and the changes in collaboration culture that turned out to be the main success.*

**Key words:** *collaboration culture; professional development; school based PD team; school pilot program; teacher professional development*

In modern education system the best outcomes shows the schools, where forms of teacher professional development are research based professional development taking place within the school. On the one hand, this type of professional development better meets teachers concrete needs; while on the other hand, it is relevant to the learning goals of students. It is considered that school based professional

development encourages creating new knowledge and improving your practice, also creating shared professional language that is understandable for all members of teaching community, vision and standards, having sustainable school culture. School based teacher professional development (SBPD) recommendations are described by OECD teacher's policy document<sup>1</sup>. Among other recommendations, this document covers supporting SBPD which improves teachers practice. Externally taken professional development activities, such as trainings, seminars or workshops, were dominant in Georgia. These kind of professional development activities are not based on individual professional needs of teacher<sup>2</sup>, or groups of teachers. They are mainly determined by educational authorities. It is worth mentioning that teachers were involved spontaneously and fragmentally in those external PD activities, so they were merely changing practice, existing routine and improving learning-teaching process. It wasn't fast changes in the teaching-learning practice. All above mentioned were the stimulus for launching new program – School Based Teacher Professional Development that was initiated by National Center for Teacher Professional Development. At the beginning piloting process took place in 206 public schools of Georgia. Approximately 10% of schools throughout of Georgia were chosen to participate in the program from applied motivated schools.

The goal of the program was to delegate responsibility and autonomy of schools through:

- Identifying teachers' professional needs and promote continuous professional development at school level.
- Increasing teachers' involvement and responsibility in planning, conducting and evaluation process of their own professional development.
- Establishing culture of collaboration among schools.
- Increasing quality of teacher's work with help of mutual teaching way.

Eventually it will improve the quality of teaching – learning process in secondary schools and enhance the schools.

The model of school based teacher professional development implies those activities that school provides for development of knowledge and skills of its employees.

Based on the criteria developed by National Center of Teacher Professional Development pilot schools elected 7 teachers that were responsible for own and colleagues' professional development. The members of the school based PD team were representing different subject departments that are created in the schools according to National Curriculum. Additionally in the PD team was one deputy prin-

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1 Carlos Mancera and Sylvia Schmelkes. Specific Policy Recommendations on the Development of a Comprehensive In-Service Teacher Evaluation Framework 2010

2 Teacher Professional Development Center (2012), A professional development scheme evolution for teacher research, social research and institute analysis, Tbilisi

principal in learning process. The responsibility of the team members was raised by the fact that they were elected by the subject group departments at school. Also, trust to the activities of the team was higher due to the selection procedures.

To measure the effectiveness of the pilot program research was held at the beginning of the program and after the 6 months of work. Focus groups were conducted with direct beneficiary (involved team members) and indirect beneficiary – other teachers from the pilot schools. Research covers both rural and urban schools.

The main goal of the first stage of research was to identify factors that are influencing motivation of the involved team members, also to find out about the expectations of both of direct and indirect beneficiary.

The following tendencies were identified based on the **first stage** of research:

### **1. Involved team members**

- It was an informed and realized decision of majority of teachers. They were expecting innovations, new possibilities for professional development, and success of the schools. It should be mentioned, that part of the teachers were making absolutely right focus on the main directions of the program – professional development through the mutual learning process;
- Other team members stated that they were in a team against their will and without motivation, as the principal of the school decided their participation in the program without their agreement. Indifference and nihilism were identified among them. Their expression toward programs was not positive and the reasons of this attitude were: lack of time, busy schedule and additional functions without compensation.

### **2. Other teachers of pilot schools**

- At the beginning of the program they were not informed sufficiently about the program, only few of them were informed about the program goals;
- After moderator's presentation about the program, participants of the discussion identified the program needs.
- Majority of the group mentioned that it will help their professional development. Colleagues will support each other, they will share their experience, that will promote collaborative culture within the school and in general, will become precondition of success of schools;
- Another part of teachers was suspicious about the initiatives launched by the authorities (because of frequent changes of policy and responsible persons that causes cancelation or changes of programs). Embarrassment, mistrust and fear of classroom observation and objectivity of the evaluation of each other was also named as a hindering factor of the program activities.

On the **second stage** of research the main goal was to analyze 6 months' work of the program, if it was successful in achieving its' goal or not.

**Involved team members** have positive attitudes towards the changes that occur during the 6 months period on mutual teaching and learning, on their professional development and the overall success of the school. As an evidence of the increased

collaboration they named joint planning of the lesson plans, analyzing and assessing them. They become more eager to meet each other for professional discussions. They started generating ideas for researches and projects and planning them. Team members were not working in a closed circle anymore and their activities were conducted on the school scale. Teachers' expectations towards the process and each other were increased, individual and team responsibility was also improved.

Repeated research with **other teachers** showed that attitudes towards the program varied. Some of them stated that they were collaborating with team members actively in the initiatives promoted within the program. Another part was not so much involved in the program, and they were not even informed what the teams were doing within the program. Third group stated that the collaboration improved only within the school based professional development team; overall situation in the school remains the same.

Also positive tendencies were highlighted, as majority of the focus groups were admitted meaning and importance of the process.

It was clear that they were frightened of facing difficulties that are accompanying such changes in the existing practice. Supporting was focused on developing their facilitator skills, to be capable to share the experience gained through the trainings and consultations. The PD team members realize that it was a good opportunity to establish status through professionalism and collaboration in their school community.

There were conducted permanent trainings for PD team. To realize the importance of the program school principals were also trained. So, school administration was involved in the process and support groups' work. Program included consultations. Consultants that were highly qualified experts and practitioners were hired by National Center of Teacher Professional Development. Consultants had trained and after it they visited schools once per month. They were supporting PD team in implementation of innovations studied during the trainings. Consultants were provided with the materials and instructions based on PD team feedbacks.

At the end of 2013 summative conference was conducted within the program. One member of the PD team from each pilot schools participated in the conference. It was sharing experience, problems and good practices obtained during one year working process, at the same time some of the schools presented resources created through the collaboration in the program.

The Conference was opened by one participant with the words of Michael Barber that most of the reforms in education are not making real changes in the classroom, they are like the storm in the sea, and surface is shaken by the waves but not the entire sea. This paraphrase was linked with the program itself, program that makes the differences in the classes, in the everyday life of the participants and it changed the culture of the schools in a collaborative, supportive practice.

Sharing successful experience, identifying difficulties and the joint discussions about solutions were affected positively on schools. So after the conference schools

were working in more efficient, deliberate way. The results of the monitoring during the program in spring 2014 were the evidence of this success. Results of the monitoring were representative, as it was covering all the pilot schools. Observation was focused on the conducted activities since program had launched. Portfolios of activities were studied, where reports of consultation, interviews with students, colleagues and principals were included. Result of the monitoring showed that program was successful in 166 schools (or 80%), where School Based Professional Development Program was in process stated that school culture enhanced. Other 40 school members can't recall the program activities and give an evaluation to the program as partially successful (8.3%) or even unsuccessful (11.1%).

94% of the schools successfully implemented an ongoing practice of improving cooperation between the teachers, its mechanisms (teams used the training materials as a source for transferring knowledge from the trainings into practice).

In general, there is a problem with joint planning and proceeding of the projects. School based professional development program was successful in this direction as within the first year 74% of the schools conducted joint projects.

The results were less sufficient in professional needs assessment (special questionnaire was created for this reason) and planning self-professional development:



*Figure 1. Needs Assessment*

86% of the researched schools teachers were stated that they were jointly trying to solve the problem issues.

Team members in 82% of the schools were actively sharing their knowledge, skills, and experience gained during the trainings and workshops with the school members.

77% of the schools wrote their reports; others stated this type of work as a paper work, not interesting and it was a burden for them that is complicated their duties. The question “Were there other activities that are improves teaching and learning process at school that was planned additionally (as school conferences, integrated lessons, and etc.) 95% of the respondents gave the positive answer.

Monitoring of the program based on interviews with team members and other members of the school showed overall evaluation of the respondents: 92% of schools have a positive answer on program and only 8% stated that it was neutral. There were no negative answers.

We could conclude that among the main problems of the program implementation was difficulties with involving other teachers in collaboration process. The hindering factor was:

- The so-called “Star Teachers” (experienced, recognized) attitudes towards program (who is going to teach us)
- Individualistic approach to issues.
- Class observation problems (focuses on negative side of a lesson)
- The problems in feedback delivery (fear of receiving negative feedbacks).
- Indifferent attitude from principle.
- Low motivation of other teachers at schools (lack of salary, lack of incentives)
- Improper ratio of the length of the school with the number of team members (in many schools PD team 7 members were working in large schools with more than 100 teachers).

Besides the difficulties, during the piloting process, majority of the schools showed positive tendencies:

1. There were created teams of motivated teachers who are oriented on continuous professional development, which are capable to identify professional needs both for individuals and at the school.
  - Teachers plan their professional self-development based on identified needs.
  - Increased number of applications in the professional development activities from involved schools on individual and school level.
2. Increased cooperative culture in majority of the schools , the indicators of this are:
  - Improving working process of “Critical friends” groups.
  - Joint planned and integrated lessons.
  - Making learning resources through collaboration.
  - Educational-methodical conferences in school and with schools.
  - Joint Projects (Departmental level, school level, district level).
  - Joint action researches.

## Conclusion

As schools not involved in the program showed the interest towards the School Based Professional Development Program we could conclude that the program is successful. They are highly motivated for participation in it. To apply the experience into practice and use human and material resources appropriately in the National Center of Teacher Professional Development was decided to launch new program of school networks, which will support newly involved schools to collaborate in continuous professional development, will create open system that is oriented on development; teachers and schools will share the gained experience and they will discuss professional problems together and find their solution. These networks might become a basic for creation of professional associations in the future. Through collaboration schools will become more influential in local community and it will increase active involvement of the society in school life.

## REFERENCES:

1. Mancera, C. and Schmelkes, S. (2010), Specific Policy Recommendations on the Development of a Comprehensive In-Service Teacher Evaluation Framework, OECD
2. Teacher Professional Development Center(2012), A professional development scheme evolution for teacher research , social research and institute analysis, Tbilisi

## USPJESI I PROBLEMI PROGRAMA PROFESIONALNOG USAVRŠAVANJA UČITELJA KOJI SE IZVODE U ŠKOLI (STUDIJA SLUČAJA - GRUZIJA)

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**Sažetak:** *Trajno profesionalno usavršavanje učitelja uspješno je u većini obrazovnih sustava u kojima se provodi ukoliko se trening i podjela informacija odvijaju na mjestu rada učitelja. Sustav se poboljšava osiguravajući prilike za sudjelovanje u aktivnostima profesionalnog usavršavanja svih učitelja kada god im je to potrebno. Aktivnosti profesionalnog usavršavanja koje organiziraju različite ustanove imaju svoje manjkavosti: manje se zasnivaju na individualnim potrebama, određuju ih izvanjski eksperti, održavaju se na različitim lokacijama uglavnom daleko od mjesta rada učitelja i vrlo često u vremenskom periodu koji ne odgovara samim sudionicima procesa. Programi profesionalnog razvoja u Gruziji krenuli su u novom smjeru. Rad naglašava probleme i uspjehe programa profesionalnog razvoja implementiranog u pilot školama. Analizira ometajuće faktore, aktivnosti koje ih mogu ukloniti i promjene u kulturi suradnje koje su se pokazale kao najveći uspjeh programa.*

**Ključne riječi:** *kultura suradnje, profesionalni razvoj učitelja, profesionalno usavršavanje, pilot program.*