TEACHERS’ DEVELOPMENT IN RELATION TO EVALUATION - LEARNING TEAMS AS A POSSIBILITY FOR MORE EFFECTIVE ASSESSMENT OF STUDENTS’ ACHIEVEMENTS

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TEACHERS’ DEVELOPMENT IN RELATION TO EVALUATION - LEARNING TEAMS AS A POSSIBILITY FOR MORE EFFECTIVE ASSESSMENT OF STUDENTS’ ACHIEVEMENTS

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Abstract:
The answers at many questions connected with the teaching process lie in the professional development of teachers, and it represents the most important segment of a comprehensive and systemic reform. The number of experts who examined the factors that influence the success and achievements of students is big and they all agree that teacher has a key role. Therefore, schools in their development plans must take into account the necessity of continuous professional development of teachers, especially in the very complex process of assessment, and the need to create a stimulating environment for both teachers and students.

Learning teams as a form of professional training of the teachers have a great contribution for improving the assessment and the overall educational process, and therefore this issue needs also to be paid attention.

Teachers need to be continually professionally trained in order to promote and objectivize the process of assessing the students. The aim of this paper is to highlight the characteristics of learning teams and to indicate their importance for the professional development of teachers, having the goal to enhance the assessment and achievement of set standards i.e. the implementation of the objectives.

The justification of the analysis and the criteria justification of the capabilities for forming the learning teams through which the skilled competencies of the teachers will develop in a more positive way comes from our long term experience and work practice that is connected with this type of problem, and from the direct involvement in workshops with programs for professional development and reaching better competencies of the teachers in connection to the assessment of the achievements of the students through the learning teams. In relation to
this, there are some deep considerations from some relevant institutions like the Bureau for Education Development, results from surveys and interviews realized with the teaching staff, as with other relevant factors in the educational process.

Keywords: assessment, professional development, learning teams

1. Introduction

Professional development of teachers is of great importance for the overall educational process and the work of schools in general. It is an indisputable fact that the teacher faces the challenge of continuing professional development as an imperative of modern times. Once the teacher has completed his education and is included in the teaching process, he/she must not neglect his own professional development and he must be included in all activities related to professional development.

The care for all involved and the competent factors for the development of the permanent professional development are evident (Bureau for Development of the Education, Ministry of Education and Science, management of the nine year elementary school, high schools and gymnasiuims\(^1\)). That shows that the professional development slowly but securely gains all of the characteristics of an organized form of teachers’ development.

Our long practice suggests that management puts a lot of efforts for the continuous professional development of teachers, but it is still not able alone without the support of the relevant factors of education, to care for the professional development of teachers, primarily due to the insufficient financial incentives, insufficient knowledge about the role and importance of professional development, etc.

Teachers that have completed the training should be put into schools as relevant factors that will organize and lead professional development through learning teams. Namely, within the learning teams, teachers can find answers to many questions related to the process of assessing students’ achievements, such as answering the question which strategy is better suited to improve certain procedural

\(^1\) The Ministry of Education in the Republic of Macedonia in cooperation with the Bureau of Education makes efforts for continuous professional development of teachers. In 2009/2010 the project Modernization of the education was realized in order to satisfy the need to improve the professional work of teachers and enhance the overall quality of the education system as a whole, and in that sense to meet the standards for quality of programs for professional development of teachers and management staff.
skills and how to assess this skill, answering the question which strategy is appropriate for students to understand better the concept the teacher teaches, the answer to the question how to increase motivation of students to advance their knowledge and achievements, answer the question how to promote themselves in order to assess students’ achievements, objectively etc.

Starting from the indisputable fact that teachers need to deepen their knowledge about the assessment of students’ achievements which is a continuous process that must permanently be planned and to occur, and in that direction that they permanently have to improve themselves, we understand the learning teams as necessary environment through which this professional development of teachers in each segment of the teaching process will take place, especially in a complex area such as assessment. In this sense, professional development of teachers through learning teams happens in order to ensure effectiveness in assessing students’ achievements.

1.1. Effective Professional Development of the Teachers for Assessing Students’ Assessments - Learning Teams

Professional development of teachers is a continuous process that should never stop. In the professional literature, there are many terms that refer to the concept of professional development of teachers, such as training of teachers, professional learning, training of school staff, and education of the teaching staff within the workplace and so on. The term professional development of teachers involves all learning experiences and all planned learning activities which are beneficial to the teachers and which contribute to improvement of students’ achievements, improvement of the quality of the work of teachers and the overall atmosphere in schools.

When it comes to professional development of teachers in the Republic of Macedonia in the last ten years, the numerous projects must be mentioned, which, to a large extent, changed the physiognomy of the educational system and besides the new techniques, strategies

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3 The rush of projects, often undertaken with financial support from foreign foundations, offer a rich repertoire of techniques, strategies and various activities for the active involvement of students in classes and reduce the dominant role of the teacher in the classroom, to enhance the learning process and the results of that process, and to promote the assessment through evaluation techniques for formative assessment and summative assessment.
and activities for the movement of reflective capacities of students and for increasing their active role during the lesson, they offered series of models and approaches for professional development of teachers in almost all areas of the teaching process.⁴

New approaches for professional development of teachers in terms of assessment are a great opportunity to connect the system and individual needs in this complex and very relevant area. They involve the vision of the challenges in themselves those teachers, students and schools are faced with. In addition, we stress several different features of the new type of effective professional development:
- Professional development has individual and organizational character;
- Professional development is focused on the needs of students and the results of their learning;
- Professional development is a continuous process;
- Professional development is implemented in the workplace;
- Professional development is implemented by teachers, etc.

A single list of characteristics of effective professional development does not exist, although many authors dealing with this issue are trying to discover the final list of features. The model for the professional development of teachers in terms of assessment - learning groups or learning teams contains within itself all the characteristics of effective professional development.

Above all, learning teams are concentrated in the working environment of teachers. The teams are an opportunity for continuous professional training directly related to the different needs for teachers and students. The needs for teachers and students give direction to the goal of the work of the learning teams. They have the potential to provide sustainable development because with them a culture of mutual research is built which is transferred to the new teachers.

⁴ Teachers from 50 secondary vocational schools were involved in workshops with different contents, in various forms of professional training in order to improve the competence of teachers in terms of assessment, and thus students’ achievements. Recent studies show that a small number of teachers can impose themselves in their schools and create learning teams as a form of professional development. Upon completion of the financial stimulus the sustainability of professional development has been questioned, cf. Richardson, Janusheva (2008): When the Dance is Over (in manuscript)
⁵ Characteristics of professional development of teachers before: the individual character, focus on one area, discontinuance carrying out of the workplace, implementation of experts, mostly from abroad, etc.
Professional development through learning teams is a continuous and virtually endless process of analyzing, planning and assessing. In addition, we illustrate the work of a learning team: Suppose that the learning team in a school recognizes the importance of assessment as a complex process and that the team members through informal discussions among themselves establish generally observed weaknesses and difficulties in assessing students while working in groups, and the contribution of the individual in the group. The activities undertaken by the team learning are as follows:

I. Analysis
- At the beginning of the school year the frequency of meetings is determined (e.g.: twice a month);
- At the beginning of the school year the problem that will be taken into consideration (in this case, difficulties in assessing the group work of students and the contribution of the individual in the group is identified);
- The identified problem is generated by teachers (that is, there is self-initiative to form a learning team to solve the problem);
- Problem identified is recorded with evidence (for example, lists of analytical assessment of the group and the individual in the group, is shared between themselves and it is realized that difficulties are present and that the lists are not sufficient);
- A variable specific strategy or intervention is planned (in this case teachers can allocate roles so that someone will consult existing national literature, others will analyze the current foreign literature, the third will analyze the strategies or interventions that will help in solving this problem etc.). The question for intervention can be set as follows: How can ________________ (certain strategy) be used in order to improve (for ________________)?

II. At the arranged meeting teachers analyze that data they came across / collect and share them with team members to discuss and analyze.

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6 About the difficulties in assessing the work of groups of students, as well as evaluating the individual contribution of the student in the group, cf. Janusheva, Tabakovska (2009)
The analysis focuses on solving the problem identified and discussion moves towards indication of the data for the identified problem;
- Some solutions that surprise are discussed (for example, solutions that some teachers are coming across the opportunity to apply their views in the actual situation, success of the implementation, etc.);
- The data obtained are being categorized in groups (for example, one group refers to possible solutions offered by the domestic literature, another group to possible solutions offered by foreign literature, a third group refers to specific activities, strategies, techniques for solving the problem identified etc.);

III - Once the data will be analyzed, the learning team can see that the data collected are sufficient to plan and implement specific strategy; may perceive that they need more data (in this case teachers re-focus the literature search for the next meeting); can be seen that it is satisfactory to use a certain strategy, technique, etc. (Suppose that in this case teachers make decisions to intervene with some strategy: How will the structured academic discussion be used to improve the way of assessing the group work and the contribution of the individual in the group?);

IV. Planning
- Team members provide clarification on what would be improved with the application of this strategy (it is expected, largely, this strategy (to) overcome the weaknesses of the assessment of work of the group, and to assess and evaluate the contribution of the individual in the group);
- The ways of implementation of this strategy in the classroom are discussed (whether all teachers would use the same strategy with some modifications, if certain teachers implement another type of strategy to improve group work, whether there will be comparison of results between two approaches or not, etc.);
- Assessment and data collection are planned.

7 Structured academic debate is one of the strategies or techniques for improving the assessment of group work of students, ext. Module 1, 2, 3, 4: SEA - Component for professional development of teachers from vocational schools
V. Assessment

- In the classroom the solution that is agreed upon is implemented, information about the work that should be adopted at the next meeting is gathered - recorded classes, lists of assessing group work, that is gathering evidence for assessment, the evidence is discussed thus determined whether the concrete strategy after its implementation, leads to improved success and achievements of students and the cycle starts from the beginning again: analysis - planning - assessment.

In this regard, we should mention that members of learning teams must learn to develop communicative skills in order to successfully lead the discussion, and to constantly work on their skills to manage the dynamics of the team in order to maintain focus on the problem, friendship and so on.

The model of learning teams is a high quality model for professional development of teachers. It can encompass all involved in the teaching process and it is model which approaches to solving certain problems in assessment, as well as other issues relevant to the teaching process.

Through learning teams we are getting professional and effective professional development that has all of the features of the new approach to professional development:
- Learning teams introduce comprehensive process of changes in the school;
- Learning teams include all teachers in the planning of the professional development in this way and in its implementation;
- The teams are organized type of professional development;
- Teams concentrate on cooperative and collaborative problem solving;
- Learning teams should receive adequate institutional support;
- Teams must learn to concentrate on many sources of data on the processes of learning, students outcomes, as well as data sources for the knowledge of teachers;
- Teams must learn to impose;
- Teams must continually learn to evaluate their job and so on.

This model of professional development offers a great measure of effectiveness and efficiency. Professional development in this way is realized in the working environment of teachers. Professional development of this kind requires, above all, a strong internal motivation of teachers, a desire and need for improvement in order to
improve students’ achievements and meet the requirements of the new market society. Learning teams are organized on a voluntary basis.

It remains once again to point out to the necessary institutional support that learning teams should get to learn to become effective centers of learning as well to point out to a change of awareness among teachers on ways of continuous improvement and adoption of the model of learning teams.

Action plans are the basis of the teacher professional development. It is important to include action plans of learning teams in the annual programs of schools in order to provide effective professional development and improve teaching quality in general. Action plans themselves include possible activities to be undertaken for effective professional development, the reason why these activities are undertaken, the manner in which these activities are undertaken, appropriate allocation of roles among team members regarding the activities and time frame.

1.2. Standards, Criteria and Indicators for Professional Development of the Teacher in Relation to the Assessment Through the Learning Teams

Learning teams as a form of professional training of teachers in terms of assessment, largely promote the whole work of the school. Without an effective professional development, school reforms cannot justify their purpose. The teacher must understand the reforms and to dedicate to them. Teams must learn to include standards in their work, criteria and indicators for success in their work.

Suppose that in a school the need for professional development through learning teams is recognized. In addition, we give a list of standards, criteria and indicators for the success of work of the learning teams. This list is only of an illustrative character and can be changed according to the needs of the members of learning teams, as well as the needs of the school in general and so on.

**Standard 1:** The school has established an organizational and managerial structure (body) which will coordinate activities for professional development of teachers in relation to assessment

**Criterion 1:** Maintenance of the meetings of the learning teams and planning activities in relation to assessment

**Criterion 2:** Activities that are planned for the assessment are implemented
Criterion 3: The realized activities are constantly analyzed and based on the insights (on new observations are planned
   Indicators: Record of meetings, notes, records, observations of classes

Standard 2: Among the members of the learning teams team members to learn that there is coordination and cooperation
   Criterion 1: Roles and responsibilities of among the members of learning teams team members to learn how to be effectively allocated
   Criterion 2: Among the learning team members there is a sense of self-initiative and autonomy in work
   Criterion 3: The work of the team learning is transparent
   Indicators: Records of meetings, notes, records, conversations with teachers, surveys and interviews with teachers.

Standard 3: Learning teams have the necessary competence and professionalism to face difficulties in promoting the professional development
   Criterion 1: The teams identify the learning difficulties
   Criterion 2: Overcoming difficulties within the school
   Criterion 3: Advanced anticipate ways to overcome difficulties
   Indicators: Record of meetings, records, notes, surveys and interviews with teachers, informal conversations with teachers, specific activities undertaken for a specific problem in terms of assessing

Standard 4: Team learning involves all teachers in professional development activities in relation to assessment
   Criterion 1: Teachers attend meetings organized by the team for learning
   Criterion 2: Teachers demonstrate responsibility and interest
   Criterion 3: Teachers develop action plans for their own professional development and related analytical and reflexive diary.
   Indicators: Record of meetings, minutes, memos, conversations with teachers, surveys and interviews with teachers, their own action plans for their own professional development and analytical and reflexive journals.8

8 Analytical-reflexive journal is a powerful tool for organizing thoughts and to enhance the learning process. Regardless of what the technical appearance of analytical-
Standard 5: Team learning develops strategies for the sustainability of this type of vocational training

Criterion 1: The learning team recognizes the importance of professional development through learning teams

Criterion 2: The learning team with other learning teams develops plans for sustainability of this type of vocational training

Criterion 3: The learning team takes concrete steps for the sustainability of this type of vocational training

Indicators: Record of meetings, notes, minutes, very specific plans and actions

Standard 6: Teachers apply techniques and summative and formative assessment\(^9\) in everyday teaching practice.

Criterion 1: Teachers include some techniques and summative formative assessment in some subjects

Criterion 2: Teachers include techniques for formative assessment and summative almost all topics

Criterion 3: Teachers include various techniques of formative assessment in summative and more instructional content of each topic

Indicators: annual and thematic plans of teachers, the daily preparation of teachers, observing classes, talking with teachers and students, surveys and interviews with teachers and students

Standard 7: Teachers take action for improving the assessment, to improve the way they teach, and activities to improve the way students learn

reflexive diary, he always contain fields like: the most important I learned from this topic, How will I use the learned, as of today I learned will help me later in life, which concepts can relate what I learned today, this reminds me of ... For this I can say that ... aspects that must be detained, comments and suggestions, most I liked ... Do not I found it quite good ... and so on. This kind of diary is a kind of reflection. The teacher can use to work with students, their notes may greatly help to plan the assessment, to monitor what students learned and how and so on. This kind of diary teacher can use it for yourself, because the information that it receives every day students can quickly be forgotten

\(^9\) Formative assessment is any assessment which helps the student to improve their achievement, or any assessment which directs, promotes and encourages student to improve achievement. This assessment is known as the assessment of the learning process and not a specific test situation but it happens while students are still in the learning process. It is characterized by continuity and consistency of feedback
Criterion 1: Teachers evaluate the progress of students
Criterion 2: Teachers bring analytical lists for assessment of students
Criterion 3: Teachers in evaluating include effective feedback
Criterion 4: Teachers take account of the learning processes of students

Indicators: Various notes, reports, surveys and interviews with teachers and students, analytical lists for assessment, monitoring of the hour and so on.

Standard 8: Teachers involve students in self assessment and evaluation of peers
Criterion 1: Teachers involve students in activities to assess their own learning
Criterion 2: Teachers involve students in making the criteria for evaluation and self assessment
Criterion 3: Teachers ask students to reflect on their own learning and ways it can improve
Criterion 4: Teachers involve students in activities to assess learning with the students

Indicators: Lists for self-assessment and evaluating classmates, annual and thematic plans of teachers, surveys and interviews with teachers and students, the teachers’ daily lesson plans

Standard 9: Students demonstrate progress and improvement of their achievements
Criterion 1: The application of techniques for formative assessment and summative positively affect the greater number of students
Criterion 2: The application of techniques for formative and summative assessment increases the motivation of students during class
Criterion 3: The application of techniques and summative formative assessment to improve achievement of a greater number of students

Feedback is an essential part of formative assessment. Through her teacher recognizes the effect of his teaching among students and can better plan their own work, students gain insight into their achievements, their strengths and weaknesses and based on that, alone or with the teacher, plan their learning in the direction of its further improvement.
Criterion 4: The application of techniques and summative formative assessment encourages students to think about their own learning.

Indicators: surveys and interviews with teachers and students, observation time, notes, etc.

The above parameters are illustrative and may vary depending on the needs of the school, teachers and students. The purpose of establishing standards, criteria and indicators in the work of teams for learning teaching is primarily promoting the school in all segments, especially in the most sensitive part - the assessment. Studies show that the work of learning teams focused on issues related to the assessment, in a great extent improves students’ achievements, and develops awareness of their own learning processes.

Conclusion
Professional development of teachers is a continuous process that should never stop and efforts for an effective, efficient and quality professional development of teachers should be imperative of the activities of all involved in the teaching process.

Professional development of teachers in the Republic of Macedonia in the last ten years, is accomplished through numerous projects, which, to a large extent, changed the physiognomy of the educational system and beside the new techniques, strategies and activities for the movement of reflective capacities of students and to increase their active role during the lesson, have offered a range of models and approaches to professional development of teachers in all areas of the teaching process.

But despite the serious efforts of the relevant factors in the education system in everyday practice teachers are still facing difficulties in terms of lack of clear standards, criteria and indicators for assessing students’ achievements. The assessment of students’ achievements is still one of the crucial problems in the educational process, and taking into account the complexity of this problem, a serious approach is needed towards continuous training of teachers through professional development. In this sense learning teams emerge as a revolutionary opportunity to overcome this situation. With the learning teams we can set and check the appropriate criteria and parameters for assessing student achievement. Namely, through learning teams it is needed to achieve a stimulating environment to meet the
diverse needs of all participants in teaching and also get to answer the numerous questions that affect the assessment of student achievement and to overcome difficulties associated with complex processes assessment of the knowledge of students, evaluation of procedural skills, etc..

But in practice, solving problems does not stop at solving the problems related to assessment. As already mentioned, projects that deal with issues of assessing the achievements, realized to date models and offered them gave only a framework, guidelines and practical examples that often after the completion of the training cycle undisseminated remain forgotten, and in educational institutions, and in that sense as a more serious problem arises the problem of lack of motivation and non-initiative staff after completion of training for vocational training. Learning teams require a strong internal motivation and need full self-determination and pledging the resources of teachers with evident support from the management to improve their own practice, going out to meet the needs of students and improving the process of assessing the achievement of student’s complex as a specific problem. When these assumptions are taken into account, the prospects to come to an environment that is conducive to resolving issues and problems in the assessment process will be much larger.

Bibliography:


