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## Continuous professional development of special education teachers

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### Abstract

The National Curriculum Framework of Teacher Education articulated the vision of teacher education by adaptation of reflective practices to be the central aim. Programmes for the continuous professional development of teachers should be oriented to explore, reflect and develop practice as a teacher. Special Education Teacher are expected to have a solid base of understanding of the general content area of curriculum as well as capable of designing appropriate learning accommodations and modification for students with special needs. The continuous professional development programmes in special education should also be extensively designed to address different specific and contextual need of children with disabilities. It also demands training and hands-on exposure in several aspects including communication, classroom management, daily living skills, assessment and other related areas. These training programmes for special education teachers have pertinent expectation that they must exhibit vibrancy in context to the emerging paradigms of school education and roles in order to enhance teacher effectiveness.

**Keywords:** continuous professional development CDP, special education teacher, professional development of special education teachers

### Introduction

Teacher Education in Special education recently observed a comprehensive reform in terms of level, duration and structure. Considering the complexity and significance of teaching as a professional practice, there are need to equip the system as well as continuous professional development (CDP) of teachers (NCTE, 2010, RCI 2015). The convergence between professional preparation and continuing professional development of teachers also suggested by National Policy on Education 1986 by stating that pre-service and in-service teacher education are inseparable for the development of teachers (Government of India, 1986). In-service teacher education was supported by the establishment of Institutes of Advanced Studies in Education (IASEs) in chosen institutions of Education and District institutes of Education and Training (DIETs) in each district. These institutions, together with SCERTs in state, provided space for conducting in-service courses for Teachers. The District Primary Education Programme (DPEP) set up Block Resource Centres (BRCs) and Cluster Resource Centers (CRCs) across the country with the explicit mandate to provide in-service training to teachers in learner-centred pedagogic methods and school based support to teachers (Government of India).

Continuous professional development programmes for special education Teachers could be broadly categorized in to two categories. One category includes continuing Rehabilitation education (CRE) programmes recognized by the Rehabilitation council of India. These CRE programmes are also mandatory for registered special education teachers to accumulate points to be eligible for renewal of their registration (RCI, 2010.). Whereas second category includes other CPD programmes which are majorly made available by the employer for capacity building. The emergence of need of professional preparation of teachers in special education was majorly driven by the Serva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA). The SSA has also played emphasis on continuous in-service teacher education for their professional development (SSA, 2001). But, both the categories of training are not much focused toward needs of special education teachers. It is evident by the unavailability or inadequate availability of CRE programmes exclusively for special education teachers. Whereas, majority of registered rehabilitation professionals and personal are special educators or special education teachers.

### CPD for Special education Teachers: Aim & Strategies

There is significant and positive correlation between teacher professional competence and student achievement (Angrist&Lavy, 2010; Rivkin, Hanushek & Kain, 2005) <sup>[10]</sup>. Special education teacher must have competence in understanding of the content of curriculum, proficiency in communication, as well as special educators should be well capable of designing appropriate learning accommodation and modifications for students with exceptional learning need (CEC, 2004) <sup>[2]</sup>. Ten areas were discussed by the council for description of standards of special education teacher, which are follow (CEC, 2004) <sup>[2]</sup>.

1. Foundations of Special Education
2. Development and Characteristics of Learners
3. Individual Learning Differences
4. Instructional strategies
5. Learning Environments and Social Interactions
6. Communication
7. Instructional Planning
8. Assessment
9. Professional and Ethical Practice
10. Collaboration

There are plenty of opportunities and avenues for the continuous professional development of special education teachers. The board aims of continuing professional development programmes for special education teachers should be to explore, reflect on and develop professional competency of special education teacher. Many pre-service professional development programmes are of poor quality and often fail to provide teachers with sufficient understanding and competence who could lead to reflective practice (NCTE, 2010) <sup>[6]</sup>. We need to fill the gap in competency by leading continuous professional development as key instrument. Further, it is also a pertinent expectation that these teacher education programmes exhibit vibrancy in context to the emerging paradigms of school education and roles of the teachers (NAAC, 2007) <sup>[4]</sup>. These programmes could also be highly beneficial by inculcating innovative up-to-date practices among the teachers.

### CPD for Special Education Teachers: Design & Implementation

World development indicator forecast that there would be substantially increase the supply of qualified teachers by 2030 international co-operation for teacher training in developing countries (World Bank,2016) <sup>[11]</sup>. But, teaching is not as prestigious or esteemed as other professional and it often appears to be low on the list of career options for most young graduates in India (Bolitho & Padwad, 2013). Very low teacher motivation is reported by several researches in our country (Ramchandran *et al*, 2005). It affects the professional preparation consist of short pre-service teacher education courses with limited field exposure and practical relevance.

The strength and quality of any profession largely depends on how it manages at different stage of preparation, induction and ongoing development (NCTE, 2010) <sup>[6]</sup>. CPD for special education teachers could be designed with following three stages:

- a) **Preparation:** The need of CPD programmes should be generated from both the end; I.e, teachers' end policy end. Need based CPD to be planned and offered to support individualized need of special education

teachers. New policies and national or state related issues could also leads to origin of CPD. Adequate preparation is ensured through professional-specific education with judicious balance between theory and practical components, supplemented by field exposure, apprenticeship and on the job training.

- b) **Induction:** Planning and preparation should be followed by systematic and gradual induction of CPD. Induction of CPD must be supported either by mentoring, internship, shadowing, team work, or other academic support system. CPD programmes should be made available with multiple domain of instruction. It will create teacher as an independent and autonomous professionals.
- c) **Ongoing Development:** To make a robust system in CPD, we could adopt many mechanisms. Proper monitoring and mentoring system could be evolved for regular need based feedback and up gradation of events thereof. Linkage of CPD with professional associations and research practice creates better dissemination. Innovative practices and evolution in CPD.

### Conclusion

Ongoing professional development is being seen in a very restricted, narrow sense and there limited opportunities and support for the continuous development of teacher. The problems begin with perception about CPD. 'The and broader nation of CPD as a lifelong process of learning, both formally and informally, based on teachers' conscious initiative and voluntary efforts, and supported by school and authorities (NCTE, 2010) <sup>[6]</sup>. Ongoing professional development of special education teachers must be need based and it should provide support and resources necessary for teachers to be effective in the education of students with disabilities.

Special education authorities or bodies must develop a shared vision in order to achieve quality. The professional association of teachers and teacher education will have to come forward and play a constructive role for upgrading the CPD programmes for Special education teachers. It needs a systematic view to look at all components simultaneously like curriculum structure, curriculum content, training modalities, support materials and evaluation strategies (NCTE). Monitoring and feedback should become important segments of the developmental process. Comprehensive plans should be made available at all levels so that each teacher gets an opportunity to participate in CPD programmes and undertakes continuous education programmes. Therefore, compulsory Continuing Rehabilitation Education (CRE) programme by Rehabilitation Council of India (RCI) and other professional development programme should be made need, choice and competence based in order to capacity building and awareness with new trends and practices. Otherwise these programmes could be merely formality.

While we advocate special or inclusive education for children with disabilities we are much focused to meet the specific educational needs. But, when we are planning CRE it designed for cater the professional needs of diversified domain in a very short duration under single programme. Therefore, exclusive CPD or CRE must be designed for special education teachers. These programmes are to upgrade knowledge and skills in the teachers. Multi-channel learning, open distance learning and communication

technologies should be fully utilized for optimum benefits. For knowledge based competency development there is immediate need of MOOC (Massive Open Online Courses) platform in the line with or synergized with Swayamprabh project of Ministry of Human Resource Development, Government of India to reach the wider section.

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