

# Valuing Teachers Means Supporting Their Growth

Anurag Behar

Teachers grow by watching each other teach. Structured peer observations—where colleagues visit each other's classrooms to focus on specific practices—can be transformative. Debriefing afterwards helps both the observer and the observed to refine their methods.

Education is the foundation of a thriving society, and at the heart of education is the teacher. The role of a teacher is deeply creative, dynamic, and profoundly consequential. Every day, teachers navigate complex classroom realities, adapt to diverse learning needs and human situations, and foster intellectual, social and emotional growth of their students. Given the enormity of this responsibility, it is absurd to assume that a teacher's preparation ends with initial training or occasional workshops.

Even more than other high-stakes professions—medicine, engineering, or scientific research—teaching demands Continuous Professional Development (CPD), because at its core, teaching is a social-human process with all its unpredictability and variability. Simply put, children have different needs, their behaviours are diverse – even that of the same child across time – and they have a large number of other influencers that the teacher has little control over – all of which require a continuous honing and broadening of the capacities of the teacher, which is what CPD must do.

Yet, in many education systems, teacher development is treated as a box-ticking exercise—a sporadic training session here, a mandatory workshop there. This approach is not just inadequate; it reflects a deep misunderstanding of the profession and is detrimental to students.

True professional development must be ongoing, embedded in daily practice, and responsive to teachers' real challenges. It must take multiple forms—collaborative learning, mentorship, classroom-based support, and peer networks—all aimed at helping teachers refine their craft and gain the pride and satisfaction that comes from doing one's job more effectively with each passing day.

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'then' situation and evoke deep empathy. A teacher must constantly adapt to new pedagogical approaches, the unique dynamics of their classroom, changing societal expectations and context, and more. Unlike many other professions, teaching is alive with unpredictability – an approach that works with one group of students may fall flat with another; a concept that seems clear may need multiple explanations with different children, and students' curiosities and conflicts open up new learning avenues. This is why one-off training programmes fail. Imagine a surgeon who does not learn with each operation or a musician who never practises. The very notion is ridiculous. Yet, teachers are often expected to function with methods that rely on initial training that may have been theoretical and disconnected from real classroom contexts.

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Effective CPD must be continuous because teaching itself is a process of perpetual learning. Every interaction with a student, every lesson plan, and every assessment offers feedback that a reflective teacher uses to improve. But this reflection cannot happen in isolation. It must be supported by structured opportunities for growth. Traditional 'training programmes'—where teachers sit through lectures on pedagogy—are often ineffective because they are disconnected from actual classroom practice. Instead, teacher development must be experiential, collaborative, and sustained.

One of the most powerful forms of professional learning is teachers learning from each other. Small, structured groups where educators discuss challenges, share strategies, and reflect on their practice create a culture of collective improvement. These discussions must be facilitated but not overly controlled, allowing organic exchange. When a maths teacher explains how she helped

a student struggling to grasp fractions, or a history teacher shares a debate technique that sparked engagement, these real-world insights are far more valuable than theoretical training.

Workshops are useful only if they are practical and immediately applicable. A workshop on 'active learning' should not just define the concept; it should involve teachers designing activities that they can use the next day. Follow-up is critical—did the new method work? What adjustments were needed? Without this loop of implementation and feedback, workshops remain abstract.

The most effective professional development happens inside the classroom. Instructional coaches or mentor teachers can observe lessons and provide real-time, non-judgmental feedback. Did the questioning technique encourage deeper thinking? Were all students engaged? Such support must be constructive, not evaluative, fostering a growth mindset rather than fear of criticism.

Teachers grow by observing one another teach. Structured peer observations—where colleagues visit each other's classrooms to focus on specific practices—can be transformative. Debriefing afterwards helps both the observer and the observed to refine their methods. Teachers should be part of broader networks—within their school, across schools, or even digitally. Platforms where educators exchange ideas, discuss research and seek advice create a culture of continuous learning. A physics teacher in a rural school should have access to the same innovative practices as one in an urban school.

A teacher's sense of pride does not come from hollow praise or ceremonial awards. It comes from the quiet confidence in doing their job well. When a teacher sees a struggling student finally understand a concept, when a lesson goes exceptionally well, when former students return to express gratitude—these are the moments that sustain educators. But these moments are not accidental. They result from refined skill, experimentation, and relentless improvement. If a teacher feels stagnant—repeating the same lessons year after year without growth—their motivation erodes. Conversely, when they see themselves evolving, their engagement deepens.

This is why professional development must be intrinsic to the teaching profession, not an add-on. Schools must create time and structures for CPD, recognising it as essential, not optional. Policymakers must move beyond tokenistic training and invest in long-term, embedded support systems.

When teachers grow, students thrive. A teacher who continuously hones their craft fosters deeper understanding, critical thinking, and curiosity in their students. Over time, this shapes not just individual lives but entire communities. Consider this: every professional—doctors, engineers, entrepreneurs—was once shaped by teachers. If we want a society of lifelong learners, innovators, and thoughtful citizens, we must start by valuing the people who nurture these qualities. And valuing teachers means supporting their growth at every stage of their careers.



Figure 1. One of the most powerful forms of professional learning is teachers learning from each other.

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The transformation needed is systemic. It requires schools and school systems to dedicate time for collaborative

teacher learning, governments to prioritise CPD in policy and budgets, teacher education institutions to shift from one-time certification to sustained engagement, and society to recognise teaching as a dynamic, intellectual profession. Teachers are not just transmitters of knowledge; they are intellectuals, mentors, and lifelong learners themselves. Their development cannot be an afterthought. It must be continuous, meaningful, and woven into the very fabric of education. Only then can we truly do justice to their role; and only then can we build the future our children deserve.



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