



Photo: Ghana, Klaus Hosting

CONCEPT PAPER

EDUCATOR PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Oxfam is guided by “Universal and Equitable access to Quality Education” and also the fact that “lack of access and poor quality of education have serious consequences for especially girls and women” (Oxfam Strategic Plan 2013-2019)..

In November 2016, in Copenhagen, in a meeting convened by Oxfam IBIS, Oxfam constituted an “Education Community of Practice and Influence” agreeing that “Strengthening transformative public education for all to fight inequality” is the overall goal of our future education work.

Achieving this goal will:

1. Have a straight redistributive impact – putting ‘virtual income’ into the pocket of poor and marginalized people – particularly in relation to girls and women.
2. Enhance social mobility.
3. Strengthen political mobilization - a transformative, quality education leads to knowing your rights and responsibilities, having a voice, being able to participate and organize, and building active citizenship for children, youth and adults.

This series of Oxfam IBIS concept papers define the Oxfam IBIS’ understanding and approach in key areas.

Each paper contains the following sections:

- A) [Justification](#) for Oxfam IBIS’ work on the issue
- B) Brief overview of relevant [theories and definitions](#)
- C) Presentation of [Oxfam IBIS’ approach](#) and lessons learned
- D) References to [further documentation](#)

JUSTIFICATION

With only a few years to meet the deadline of Education for All, the international community is now talking of a 'global learning crisis'. 250 million children are not learning basic skills, even though half of them have spent at least four years in school, and the poor quality of education leaves a legacy of illiteracy for youth and adults (in 2011 there were 774 million adult illiterates, two-thirds of whom are women). Educators are one of the key solutions to this crisis – and they need to be sufficient, qualified and motivated. UNESCO estimates that over 1 million teachers need to be recruited per year just to achieve universal primary education. Not to mention that education initiatives for youth and adults often lack qualified educators and function on a voluntary basis. Many countries have sought to increase access to education by hiring untrained teachers – on such a large scale that in one third of countries worldwide, less than 75% of primary school teachers are trained according to national standards. Many educators themselves lack even basic skills in reading, writing and mathematics, and have even poorer knowledge about teaching methodologies. Overall, this global task of securing sufficient numbers of qualified educators is also a huge financial challenge. Even when countries have the political will to invest in teachers, they are often hindered in doing so by restrictions put on social budgets by international macroeconomic institutions.

Quality Education lies at the heart of Oxfam IBIS' work in education, and educator's professional development is therefore one of the key intervention areas. Advocacy is needed at all levels in order to ensure adequate financing and education policies to recruit, educate, motivate and supervise educators for children, youth and adults. First and foremost, Oxfam IBIS promotes the following vision: "Educators are at the heart of achieving quality education. They are the role models and the key to unlocking learners' potential. The relation between the learner and the educator is crucial in all education. Without well trained, committed and empathetic educators leading a process of inquiry and investigation, education will fail to be either empowering or of high quality. Oxfam IBIS therefore prioritises the continuous professional development of educators in all education interventions and where possible supports relevant actors in improving the working conditions of educators" (Oxfam IBIS Education for Change strategy).

To be a better learner, and to be a better facilitator of other people's learning, one needs to understand how learning occurs. Oxfam IBIS works on two different continents supporting The Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) through a Rights Based Approach (RBA) to education. The contexts in these countries and regions are very diverse, and thus the Oxfam IBIS Education for Change Thematic Programmes (TP) and Education in Emergency (EinE) projects are contextualised, planned and implemented in a way that suits the local reality. One rewarding way of working in Latin America might not be relevant or meaningful in the context of Ghana. Nevertheless, there are similarities in the way Oxfam IBIS' educational staff view adult learning and thus also the professional development of educators (whether trained or un-trained). And as the (further) professional development of educators is one of the main vehicles to quality education, Oxfam IBIS works with this in all its programmatic work, no matter the education level, context or strategy of the TP or EinE project.

THEORIES AND DEFINITIONS

TEACHING AND LEARNING – AND ‘LEARNING CENTRED METHODOLOGIES’

The distinction between teaching and learning is one of the central issues in understanding *Quality Education*. Teaching has all too often been the focus of education reform processes, namely the educator teaching the curriculum, thus implying a belief that if the educators just teach, the learners (whether children, youth or adults – in formal or non-formal education) will or ought to all learn the same, in the sense of being able to reproduce what the educator taught. Learning, on the contrary, focuses on what the learner learns, using prior experiences and former knowledge and applying diverse learning strategies to create meaning out of what is taught. The main focus of the educators should be to prepare and facilitate learning processes for their learners which aim at the overall education outcomes, using different teaching methods. Thus learners learn different things from the same teaching. Oxfam IBIS uses the expression “learning centred methodologies” in connection with *Quality Education*. For Oxfam IBIS, this concept embraces the whole idea of learning as both an individual process, and a process where the individual is always understood as part of a social group, related to the historical and current political, economic, cultural, social and linguistic context. There is a tendency in many places in the world that learner-centred pedagogy solely focuses on the individual, without being seen in its social context. In many countries this individualisation is impossible with 75 students in the class and many researchers and practitioners also question the outcome of such an individualisation.

HOW ADULTS LEARN

Future educators are trained when they are young or adults, and it is important to take into account how adults learn. An adult – irrespective of past activities – will already have a vast pool of knowledge and life experience before entering into training. Some points to take into account to meet the needs of adult learners are:

- Learning always takes place between new impulses and the already established understanding, experience and knowledge that exist in the individual.
- Learning might be regarded as a response to an experience or even as a response to an experience created through an action.
- Learning is not only an individual experience. Learning is socially related and socially constructed.
- The importance of emotional feelings as part of the learning experience is now far more accepted in learning theory than it used to be. (We learn with our heads, our hearts and our feet.)
- Learning takes place by doing things (action learning) and then reflecting on the action afterwards. For learning to be transformative, the learning process should help the learner to question his/her own previous knowledge and to put it into new perspectives.

WHAT THE ‘IDEAL’ EDUCATOR SHOULD LEARN

Educators should have a basic knowledge themselves of the subject and content in which they will be teaching or facilitating learning. Learning basic skills such as reading, writing and mathematics as well as relevant subject matter is a condition for the educator to be able to facilitate learning. An educator should also learn how to teach: how learning takes place and how to apply different methodologies relevant to various types of learners and subject matters.

The educator should have an understanding of how to cater for learners with special needs and learning disabilities. The ideal educator should also be able to create a safe and trusting environment in the classroom and know how to promote active citizenship, a democratic culture, tolerance and respect for all learners, including gender equality. Finally, the educator should preferably be able to teach in the learners' own language (and where relevant also the national language as a second language) and have the skills to manage multilingual and multicultural classrooms.

CONTINUED EDUCATOR DEVELOPMENT

Oxfam IBIS uses the inclusive term educator, embracing teachers, youth and adult education instructors/facilitators, headmasters, education supervisors, etc. Based on the above, educator professional development should be planned in such a way that it includes both theoretical and practical aspects of educators' work, and the practical component must include supervised in-service training. How to teach is not learned once and for all, and educators continue to learn on the job – by doing. Continued educator development and supervision is therefore essential to generate good educators.

OXFAM IBIS APPROACH

The educators with which Oxfam IBIS works in different regions of the world are both trained and untrained, and work within both formal and non-formal education. As such, some of their (further) professional development might be considered pre-service and some in-service. It is an aim in all of Oxfam IBIS' work with educators that they should receive a relevant education and obtain a recognized qualification. Based on the notion of how adults learn, Oxfam IBIS has established the following perspectives on and principles for educator professional development:

PERSPECTIVES ON EDUCATION PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Academic perspective of educator development

On an academic level, a professional development programme must be based on pre-knowledge and challenge this pre-knowledge as well as give opportunities for reflection on one's own practice. The programme needs to be practice orientated and focus on problem solving. Any development is knowledge-based, but knowledge can come both from one's own experience and from that of other participants and facilitators.

Emotional perspective of educator development

A professional development programme is fundamentally based on a safe environment. Participants need to feel the learning situation is safe in an atmosphere of solidarity. Motivation comes from feeling that you are part of something and that your current understanding is being challenged – and having fun.

Social perspective of educator development

The framework for professional development is based on participatory methods. Participants are involved in discussions and interact in all sessions. It is based on cooperation, participation in group- and peer work and being challenged in action with other participants. Both collective and the individualistic learning are important.

PRINCIPLES FOR EDUCATOR PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Relation to national education policy

The educator professional development activities should be in alignment with the policies of the current formal education system, but also work to challenge this system in order to demonstrate quality implemented in practice (evidence) as part of overall advocacy for free, quality education.

Promotion of transformative quality education

Oxfam IBIS' strategy for professional development of educators has as its main objective the development of reflexive educators and the development of critical active citizens in a democratic society. Oxfam IBIS' strategy for professional development of educators supports the development of quality education. Quality in education supports the development of relevant knowledge, skills, values and attitudes. Relevance is explained as an education programme that supports sustainable living in the local context.

Focus on the relationship between educator and learner

Oxfam IBIS' strategy for professional development of educators focuses on the relationship between learners and educators. Oxfam IBIS focuses on the development of an appropriate learning environment. The education process must build on learners' prior knowledge and new learning is linked to pre-existing concepts and understanding. Educators should be taught how to establish a trusting relationship with the learners as well as an environment of trust and respect among the learners.

Involving leaders in professional development

School and programme heads must participate with educators in capacity building activities and then work as co-learners in implementing what they have learned in order to improve educational processes.

Quality educator professional development takes time and resources

Allocation of sufficient funding and support to quality educator professional development is essential, and Oxfam IBIS works for this through advocacy.

SUPPORTING EDUCATORS' MOTIVATION

Ensuring quality education depends not only on having highly qualified educators, but also to a large extent on having **motivated** educators. Oxfam IBIS believes in inspiring professional development and supervision of educators as one of the key factors that promote motivation. In addition to this, Oxfam IBIS also uses advocacy at local and national levels in collaboration with other actors to ensure that educators have decent and conducive working conditions. The UNESCO-ILO Recommendation concerning the Status of Teachers adopted in 1966 has essentially served as a charter of rights for teachers worldwide (signed on October 5th, World Teachers' Day). Similarly, the Recommendation on the Status of Higher Education Teaching Personnel adopted in 1997 made further commitments regarding college and university faculty (Education International). Oxfam IBIS' work is based on these international commitments and seeks to support teachers in ensuring:

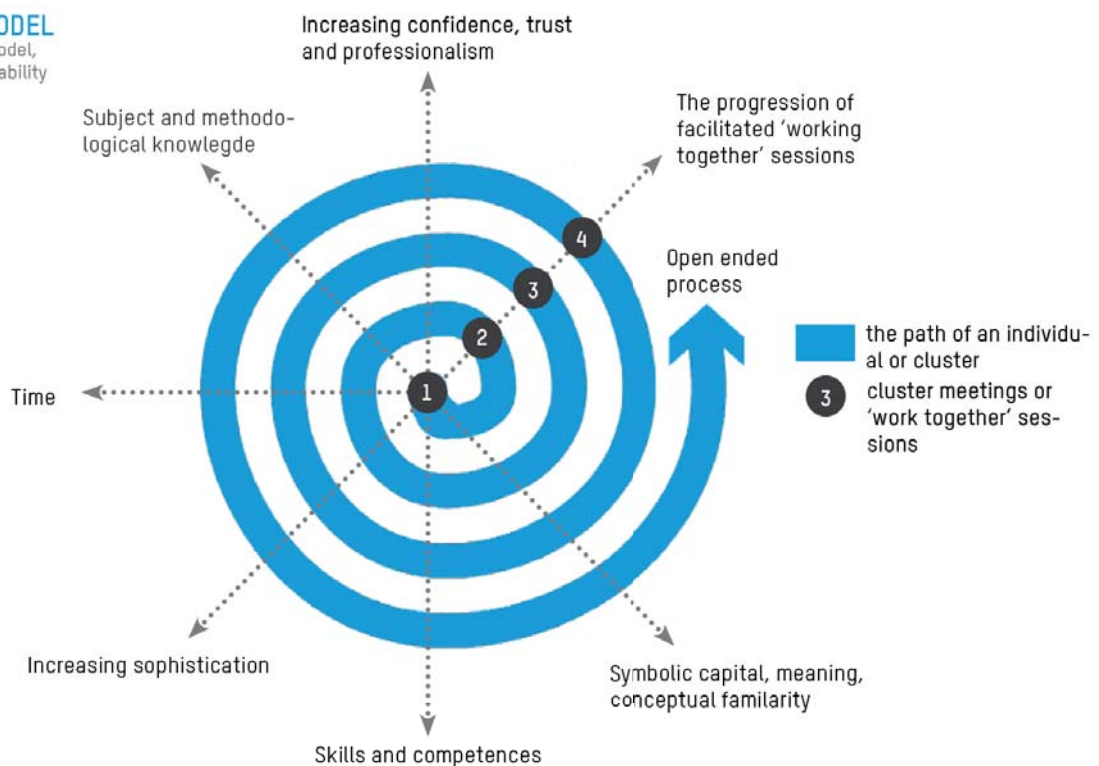
- Free and active educators' unions that are able to negotiate decent salaries and working conditions for educators (including access to continued professional development)
- Special incentives for educators to work in deprived rural areas with dropout children and youth or other difficult situations
- Special measures and incentives to increase the number of female teachers
- School management with the necessary skills to motivate and retain educators and to ensure a positive working environment and good relations to parents/communities
- Codes of conduct to guide the work of educators and school related staff

THE SPIRAL MODEL FOR PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

The spiral model developed by Oxfam IBIS provides a process model that enables educators to work together in clusters over a period of time, and encourages ongoing action reflection and the development of applied competence. Presented diagrammatically as an outwards spiralling coil, this model reflects professional development as a process in which educators move outwards towards increasing levels of sophistication in both professional development, and curriculum development and implementation processes. A spiral moves outwards in ever broadening circles, representing progress over time. However, its circular nature also means that it is recursive, in other words that it returns to the same point on its radius again and again. This represents the opportunities for cycles of action and reflection that the spiral model provides, and the means by which this model of professional development allows for the building of increasing levels of sophistication and complexity of understanding.

THE SPIRAL MODEL

Source: The Spiral Model, Learning for Sustainability Project, 2000



Although a spiral has a fixed starting point, there is no defined future end point. The professional development journey starts at the centre of the model and moves outwards in broadening circles. The spiral itself represents the journey made by an individual educator over time, while the numbered points at which the line radiating out from the centre of the spiral intersects the spiral itself represent cluster meetings where educators come together and professional development is mediated. The approach uses Education Clusters – groups of educators and education officials (e.g. supervisors, trainers) that meet regularly to share ideas and experiences and encourage professional development. They work together in clusters over an extended period of time. In this way they get to know each other and develop trust and a supportive network. In cluster meetings, educators and education officials work together to discuss various issues and aspects of the curriculum and methodologies, and the results of activities they have already carried out. Cluster meeting content/discussions feed into each educator's practice and vice versa. The time between cluster meetings offers an important space for practical experiments with or considered work on aspects of professional development, while regular meetings provide structured opportunities for reflection, professional dialogue, peer support, and mediation of the learning process.

10 KEY FEATURES OF THE SPIRAL MODEL

1 Contextualization

Learning cannot occur in a vacuum. Professional development must take into account the social, educational and environmental contexts in which it occurs. In the spiral model, educators use and refer to things that come directly from their own socio-political, biophysical and educational contexts.

2 Participation

The functioning of the spiral model relies on active participation by educators in cluster and individual activities. Examples include discussion and familiarization with current policy, discussing and negotiating aspects of professional development, practising skills, carrying out professional development tasks, and contributing opinions, information, suggestions and criticism. Educators actively participating on a number of levels shape both collaborative professional development and their individual learning.

3 Dialogue

Learning cannot occur in isolation. Constant dialogue among education practitioners on relevant issues allows the sharing and growth of increasingly sophisticated understandings of concepts. The making of meaning is a socially negotiated process, and dialogue provides an opportunity for educators to grapple with new knowledge, professional issues and classroom practice. Meanings and understandings cannot be expected to be uniform across clusters, but should be mediated and guided by policy and be negotiated in such a way as to be contextually relevant.

4 Reflexivity

By reflecting critically on previous actions, we learn to 'do' better. Putting ideas into practice and then deciding whether their implementation is useful or not can be an important tool for professional development, and ensures a form of 'built in' self-evaluation and evaluation of policy.

5 Integration of theory and practice

Professional development that integrates theory and practice allows for the building and refining of competences in the context in which they will be used. The spiral model provides an opportunity to discuss theoretical issues, try out their practical implementation in schools, and reflect on this implementation and how it can be improved. The integration of theory and practice helps to build an ever-increasing feedback cycle that works to ensure the appropriateness of practical implementation of policy.

6 Flexibility

A model that responds to needs as they arise and allows for ongoing modification and adjustment of professional development processes encourages continuous updating of skills and competences, and lifelong learning. Different contexts result in different needs, and issues may have different relevance in different contexts. In addition, there may be diversity within the education system, and not all educators have the same professional development needs. The spiral model for professional development takes this into account, unlike the 'one size fits all' approach of many of the previous models.

7 Democracy

Educators take on responsibility for their own learning processes – they negotiate aspects of the professional development program and logistical arrangements, attend cluster meetings, and complete their negotiated tasks. The spiral model encourages a high level of negotiated self-determination and transparency.

8 A constructivist approach

if learning is the making of meaning, and knowledge is meaning that has been socially negotiated, it is important to recognize that there is not only one single correct way of achieving it that can be adopted uncritically. The social constructivist orientation of the spiral model acknowledges the importance of the construction of the most appropriate knowledge and a critical orientation to learning processes in a particular context.

9 Development of sophistication of meaning

The extended time frame and frequent dialogue that form part of the spiral orientation to professional development encourage the development of increasingly complex understandings of educational themes. The learning processes that form part of the spiral model facilitate the development of meaning that is appropriate, relevant and contextually situated.

10 Continuous learning

Lifelong learning is a concept embraced by the new education and training policy framework. The long term nature of the spiral model for professional development allows for the mediation of continuous learning, rather than providing isolated workshops of inputs to professional development.

FURTHER DOCUMENTATION AND REFERENCES

- *Global Monitoring Report 2013/14: Teaching and Learning: Achieving Quality Education for All*, UNESCO, 2014.
- *The Pyramid of Practices*, IBIS, 2008.
- *Cluster based approaches to professional development*, NEEP – GET project/IBIS, 2004.
- *Learners, Learning & Educator-Learner Relationships*, NEEP – GET project/IBIS, 2004.
- *Recommendation concerning the Status of Teachers*, UNESCO-ILO, 1966.
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- *The Spiral Model*, Learning for Sustainability Project, 2000.

ABOUT OXFAM IBIS EDUCATION FOR CHANGE CONCEPT PAPERS

Oxfam IBIS Concept Paper: Education and Gender, version 1, March 1st, 2017

This series of concept papers was introduced June 1st, 2014 with the target audience being Oxfam IBIS staff and management as well as partners and stakeholders. The papers have been developed through a participatory process and are living documents to be revised whenever needed. At this point the series includes the following concept papers:

1. Quality Education
2. Transformative Education
3. Educator Professional Development
4. Youth Education and Training
5. Mother Tongue - Bilingual Education
6. Education in Fragile Situations
7. Education and Gender Equality

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