

# LESSONS from the field

Girls'  
Education  
Challenge



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## Teaching the teachers: sharing good practice in the professional development of teachers

The quality of teachers is central to engaging and inspiring all learners and making sure that they gain the knowledge and skills that will help them live fulfilled lives. However, recent research<sup>1</sup> into teacher practices shows that, in many places, high levels of teacher quality have yet to be achieved at scale and teachers' skills and practices in the classroom need to be strengthened. The most obvious response is more continued professional development (CPD) for teachers. However, over the last 20 years, despite much investment in teacher professional learning, the results have often been disappointing.



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So, what new approaches can, or should, we take? Recent experience, reflected in the work of the Girls' Education Challenge (GEC) projects, shows that, increasingly, efforts are being made to design teachers' CPD sensitively so that it responds to the needs of individual teachers and their students and ensures an inclusive, gender-responsive approach to teaching and learning. 'One-size-fits-all' CPD is neither sufficient nor effective.

Meeting the specific needs of the teachers, whilst taking local priorities and contexts into account, is critical.

This issue of 'Lessons from the Field' shows how varied the Teacher Professional Development (TPD) landscape is across the projects and highlights a number of approaches being taken in response to lessons learned by implementing organisations thus far in their GEC journey. It also presents some pointers towards good

practice when working with teachers, and offers a number of useful links for GEC projects and other practitioners to follow up.

<sup>1</sup> Pritchett, L., 2003. The Rebirth of Education, School Aint Learning, Centre for Global Development [https://www.cgdev.org/sites/default/files/rebirth-education-introduction\\_0.pdf](https://www.cgdev.org/sites/default/files/rebirth-education-introduction_0.pdf) and Westbrook, J., Durrani, N., Brown, R., Orr, D., Pryor, J., Boddy, J., Salvi, F., 2013. Pedagogy, Curriculum, Teaching Practices and Teacher Education in Developing Countries. Final Report. Education Rigorous Literature Review. Department for International Development

In the GEC, one of our core concerns is sustainability – how to embed shifts in the practices of teachers and those who support them, including headteachers, government education officials (such as district supervisors), local teacher advisers and teacher educators. This encourages a focus on how we can initiate and nurture collaborative learning, providing opportunities for teachers to talk to each other and practise together, learning with and from each other. Models which involve peer coaching or mentoring, local action research and professional learning communities all have potential here. They enable teachers, and others, to make connections with each other's ideas and knowledge, and to develop and evolve new 'know how' in their own specific context. Such school focused interactions enable teachers to focus on '*problems of practice*' in their own context. By contrast, cascade models for CPD (whereby trainers train a limited number of teachers who then train more teachers etc.) have been shown to be less effective, as they risk a dilution of quality and restrict teachers' agency to develop meaningful peer relationships and sustained engagement with new ideas.

Digital technologies are beginning to feature in collaborative professional learning, blending 'e-learning' with classroom activities and in-person discussions. Examples include the use of tablets (or even mobile phones) to create videos of teachers' practice. These clips then provide a focus for the subsequent mentoring conversation and teachers can return to them later for in-depth reflection. The ubiquity and power of teachers' own mobile phones is increasingly being harnessed to distribute audio and video resources and to support sharing within teacher communities. Mobile phones and tablets are also being used by teachers to engage in online study. We are beginning to see evidence that combining online study with local face-to-face sessions is more economical (when enacted at scale) and more effective in meeting local professional needs than more conventional extended training away from the classroom.

However, not all teachers believe they will necessarily benefit from the professional development opportunities available to them. This is understandable where CPD sessions are poorly designed, incentives and rewards for improvement are weak, and career-long, professional learning

is not discussed. This shows the importance of working *with* teachers on development plans, and taking local structures and systems into account, so that teachers can become 'agents of change' in their own communities. The examples below (teacher coaching) from Education Development Trust and I Choose Life outline how this is being done in practice. The STIR<sup>2</sup> initiative in India and Uganda also tackles this challenge by providing a two-year development 'journey' for teachers. Teachers undertake this journey in collaboration with other teachers from nearby schools in small, supportive and reflective networks, run by trained government officials. So far, evidence has shown significant positive effects of the approach on teacher motivation and effort as well as student engagement and learning.

Finally, recognising and rewarding the changes and improvements in teachers' practice is increasingly receiving attention. Formally accrediting teacher development programmes and certifying teachers' learning helps to value their commitment to their own professional learning and to plan their personal professional learning journeys.

2 <https://stireducation.org>



## Teacher development in practice

### What are GEC projects telling us?

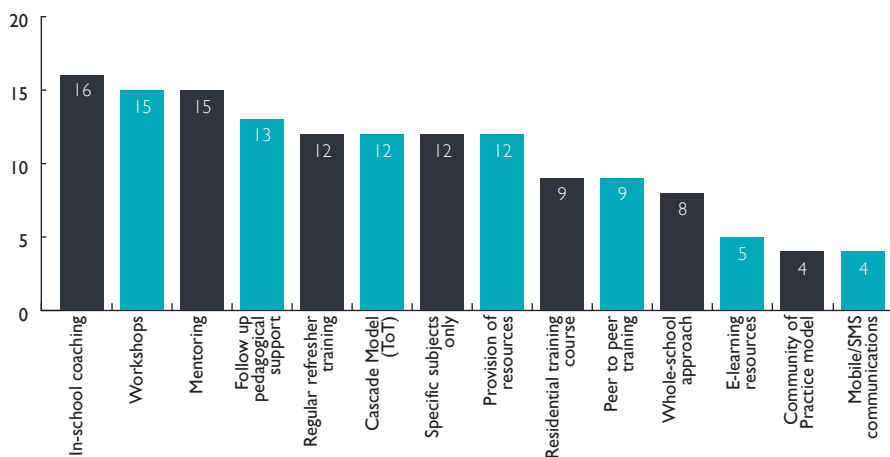
A recent survey amongst GEC Transition projects revealed a range of approaches to working with teachers. While several projects described a common programme for large numbers of teachers, the majority of respondents are taking a more individualised approach to teacher development, facilitating professional learning at the school level. Projects described the Whole School Approach, Professional Learning Communities and various ways in which teachers are learning through coaching and mentorship – strategies which appear to be highly valued across the portfolio.

The results also show that TPD is dynamic and the approaches to it are adaptive. All projects have made some adaptations to strengthen teacher development, from encouraging self-reflection among teachers to adjusting training design in response to feedback and monitoring (see the example of Cheshire Services Uganda below). A common development is an increased focus on peer-to-peer support, to complement externally sourced training. Overall, the opportunity for teachers to share good practice and support one another's professional development stands out as a key strength for the majority of the GEC projects.

Some projects are finding ways to improve *how* they share learning between teachers, for instance through the introduction of communities of professional learning. Others are focusing on better identification and response to

specific skill gaps – for example, moving from a model where teachers from all schools within a geographic cluster receive the same training to one which allows a more school-based approach, where appropriate. This allows for even more tailored support, particularly for struggling teachers. Some projects have also shifted to providing more subject-specific training.

What are teachers learning? Projects report a considerable range of skills, competencies and knowledge that teachers stand to gain through their models. These include: student-centered approaches; gender and inclusion-responsive methodologies; the use of assessment for learning<sup>3</sup>; child protection and safeguarding; classroom management strategies; and positive discipline. Most projects include a subject-specific focus on literacy and numeracy. It's important that all CPD aligns with government strategy, and in some cases projects are delivering CPD content on behalf of or in liaison with local education offices. For example, the government officials in Ethiopia play an integral role in the development and implementation of project activities in Link Community Development (LCD). Woreda (local district) officials support the needs assessment, design, training and follow-up of teacher support. They play a key role mentoring and coaching teachers. This close collaboration is critical for sustainability of all project outcomes.



Number of GEC projects using the listed approaches to teacher development. Total responses = 21

<sup>3</sup> See also <https://dfid-gec-api.s3.amazonaws.com/linked-resources/LFTF-Assessment-for-learning-and-the-GEC-Dec-2016.pdf>

Child-centered learning	Gender responsive pedagogy	Inclusive education	Content and curriculum – teaching and learning resources	Specific approaches for literacy and/or numeracy	Assessment for learning
Activities which focus on the child or student, increasing their agency as learners and promote self-directed learning.	Interventions which seek to influence expectations, attitudes and practices of teachers and schools to be more gender sensitive and responsive.	Interventions designed to support the education of children with disabilities: improving teachers' and others' skills and knowledge about inclusive education.	Development of materials (text books, software, learning aids) or contributing to curriculum design.	Targeted interventions (training, resources, content) aiming to improve the teaching of literacy and/or numeracy specifically.	Building capacity of teachers to give and apply feedback to students with the intention of improving the teaching and learning process.

## Spotlight on projects

The following examples illustrate the various ways in which teacher professional development is happening within the GEC, much of which is at the school level. While school-based teacher professional development is not new, the examples illustrate how varied and tailored the approaches are.

### Teacher coaching

#### Education Development Trust (EDT), Kenya

EDT's 'Let All Girls Learn' project aims to build capacity within schools to provide a safe and supportive environment for girls to learn and thrive, and to support the Ministry of Education to deliver equitable and effective education. As such it aims to improve teachers' classroom practice through a comprehensive coaching programme for teachers, involving peer mentoring and tailored skills development. The approach developed from a recognition of the motivating effect for teachers when they were encouraged to work together through 'lesson study' and similar reflective discussion and support. Over 90 teacher coaches (practising teachers who are supporting the professional development of their peers) have received training in improving learning outcomes, child protection, inclusive education and gender responsive pedagogy. The coaches work with teachers through a series of follow up visits; they assess, guide and support teachers in how they are applying the principles they have learnt about to ensure quality teaching is being delivered and that the learning environment is safe and inclusive for girls.

Now that the model is established and has shown impact in the quality of teaching, the project is broadening the coaching programme to incorporate school leadership coaching and mentoring.

The diagram below shows the concept of teacher coaching models.

Teacher coaching model – adapted from EDT



#### I Choose Life (ICL), Kenya



© ICL

ICL's Jielimisha project in Kenya has put improved quality of teaching at the centre of its programming. Supporting teachers in both primary and secondary schools, the project engages teacher coaches who help guide teacher professional development, with a particular focus on improving each teacher's skills in teaching literacy and numeracy.

A key part of the approach is the observation of teachers' classroom practice. Together, the teacher and coach develop an individualised improvement plan to develop specific practices and enhance student learning. The regular teacher observation provides a development framework as well as opportunities for evidenced-based feedback for teachers. The project has adapted the teacher performance appraisal and development tool used for observation and assessment, to inform the teachers' capacity improvement plan and an evidence-based matrix has also been developed to help document and continuously track teachers' skills growth. Developed by Jielimisha, the tool maps each teacher's skill gap and informs the plan for each teachers' improvement and the project's overall professional development strategy. After analysing a sample of 10 of its implementing schools, the project found improved learning across each of the schools. The project attributes the improvement to a combination of effective teacher coaching and pedagogy introduced.

Both projects are engaging in advocacy to demonstrate the benefits of teacher coaching to government and other stakeholders.

#### Whole-school approach

#### Cheshire Services Uganda (CSU)



© CSU

CSU has a clear vision to enable schools to become fully inclusive of students with disabilities. From its inception the project leaders understood the importance of reaching all staff in the school rather than a select few, and in the first phase held large group professional learning sessions for teachers, administrators and management. Very quickly, the school became a more welcoming and inclusive environment, but learning outcomes did not keep up with improvements in attendance.

Over time, the project has adapted its approach to work more intensively with teachers on skills and techniques to apply in classrooms of children including those with disabilities, while maintaining the principle of training all school staff. Primary school teachers are trained by Centre Coordinating Tutors within their schools, and teachers of specific classes from different schools (for example, from 10 schools within the same locality) are brought together in one central school for professional development; this method of training peers from different schools together seems to enable participants to share more freely than when they were trained alongside their senior staff under the original model of the whole-school approach. After training, the Centre Coordinating Tutors and head teachers continue the discussions with teachers as they put what they have learnt into practice in their own schools. Similarly, headteachers are brought together for training and find it helpful to be able to share challenges with their peers. Administrators in each school are also supported in applying inclusive practices to their roles, so that the whole school is pulling together towards a shared goal – it is hoped the impact of this will be reflected in the midline evaluation.

## World Vision, Zimbabwe

World Vision's IGATE project reports that, because almost all children still need to acquire basic foundational skills, all teachers (from Early Years classes to Grade 7) need to learn how to teach foundational skills. The project has therefore adopted a 'whole-school' approach, including every teacher in regular CPD held in fortnightly 'staff development' meetings. At the meetings, led by a literacy or numeracy facilitator in the school, teachers study open-learning materials together. They practise new classroom activities from the modules and plan when and how to use them with their learners during lessons.

Additionally, as the junior school curriculum assumes children already have foundational skills, the project has produced a more extensive literacy and numeracy teacher programme than originally envisaged, with two and a half years of CPD and classroom practice available for all its teachers.

Additionally, noting that teachers often feel pressure to complete the curriculum – moving on to more complex concepts before students have understood them – IGATE has worked with school heads, school management committees, district inspectors and with the ministry to develop teachers' agency for teaching at the right level, in line with government policy.

## Professional learning communities

### ChildHope and CHADET, Ethiopia



© ChildHope / CHADET

In an effort to place teachers at the centre of improvement practices, this project in Ethiopia encourages teachers to share good practice and learning through a solution-focused, knowledge sharing approach. Small groups of teachers meet on a regular basis with the main aim of improving teaching and learning and ultimately, to improve learning outcomes for girls. At the heart of the approach is the notion of a collaborative learning process of 'thinking together'.

Any teacher can become a member of the group (not only GEC-supported teachers). The focus of the discussion is usually linked to findings emerging through peer-to-peer classroom observations. An important feature is the non-hierarchical nature of the group – while a facilitator or coordinator is appointed to lead the group (on a rotating basis) there is no group director. This helps foster constructive criticism and an open and supportive learning environment. Learning groups are developing a support network that continually shares new ideas. Some teachers are beginning to use social media platforms (such as WhatsApp) to share learning amongst the group. While still in its infancy, reports from teachers suggest they value the regular interaction and opportunities for learning together offered by the model and that overall, they are receptive to the approach.

## The challenges

Despite these positive accounts, GEC projects have highlighted a number of challenges when enabling teachers' professional development. The most common challenges are the high attrition rates of trained teachers, the transfer of teachers away from project schools, and low levels of teacher motivation. In addition, teachers' initial professional education levels are extremely low in some project contexts, a challenge compounded by low student performance, which may require a broader teaching skill set and a more flexible approach than projects expected, as illustrated in the example from World Vision above.

These challenges are exacerbated in situations of crisis which often result in teachers moving location and being replaced with less qualified teachers who also lack contextual knowledge. Projects then need to quickly adapt their approach to supporting teachers. In very protracted crisis contexts projects sometimes contribute to strategies to offer initial teacher training programmes, working closely with government to ensure sustainability.

While several projects issue certificates of completion or informal awards to teachers who have participated in training activities, currently only one project offers full certification from the Ministry of Education. A number of projects are discussing the possibility of formal accreditation with local authorities, but there are often administrative hurdles to overcome which can be lengthy and time-consuming.

## Proposed approaches in Leave No Girl Behind (LNGB) projects

Educators come in all guises – teachers, mentors, coaches, tutors, education champions – and those supporting the learning of the most educationally marginalised girls in the world are no exception.

The GEC's most recent set of projects (LNGB), focusing on these marginalised girls, are now moving into implementation and two things are becoming increasingly clear:

1. For LNGB projects, as for GEC-T projects, it's essential that TPD approaches respond to the specific project context and start with a thorough understanding of the learning needs of the teachers and of the girls they will be teaching. While some LNGB projects are planning to provide initial, intense training for teachers (or tutors and coaches) in a non-formal curriculum, others are focusing on preparing the educators to better understand the multiple barriers for the girls and their learning. Others plan to provide more continuous, 'on the job' professional support.
2. As projects start to pave the initial path of professional development for the diverse group of LNGB educators – many of whom are not from formal teaching backgrounds and are working in some of the most challenging of educational contexts in the world – it is becoming all the more evident that the projects will have to offer the highest quality of professional support.

Over the coming months, we will see how the support for the LNGB educators themselves unfolds and which approaches are proving to be most successful and sustainable in ensuring success for girls' learning. Careful identification and recruitment of facilitators to teach, mentor and coach the girls will help ensure a strong start to the project. While they may not be formally trained at the start, they will need to demonstrate the right competencies and capabilities to support the learning of the girls. They will benefit from carefully designed professional development strategies – tailored to their needs and to the local context. These are just two important starting points that will influence the quality of teaching and learning, and can determine future success.

## Conclusion

Evidence from within and outside the GEC consistently shows the importance of investing in teachers' continual professional development. The examples in this paper illustrate that approaches are most promising when they are tailored to the specific needs of the teachers, which in turn relate to the specific needs of learners. This reflects a shift away from the previously popular cascade approaches to teacher professional development. In the GEC, specific attention is given to ensure approaches support teachers in teaching literacy and numeracy, and take a gender equitable and socially inclusive approach. Flexibility is key, as is meaningful support from leaders and stakeholders. And for the investment to have the most effect, models of CPD must be aligned with and integrated into the relevant local systems, so that their impact continues beyond the project.

### WHAT DOES GOOD TEACHER DEVELOPMENT LOOK LIKE?

The core features of effective teacher professional development have been well-documented in recent literature<sup>4</sup> and resonate with the experience of GEC projects. For TPD to be effective it should be:

- Classroom-based and integrated into the daily life of teaching
- Sustained, with follow up visits to the teacher's classroom
- Focused on student learning and student outcomes
- Subject specific (with complementary materials)
- Involving active learning
- Including opportunities to reflect on professional practice
- Embracing a collegial or collaborative culture
- Targeted to the explicit needs of individual teachers

<sup>4</sup> Darling – Hammond, L., Hylter, M.E. & Garner, M. 2017 Effective Teacher Professional Development Palo Alto, CA: Learning Policy Institute; Popova, A., Evans, D.K., Breeding, M. & Aranchibia, V. 2017 Global Landscape of Teacher Professional Development Programs: The Gap between Evidence and practice Washington: World Bank



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### USEFUL LINKS AND RESOURCES

**Global Partnership for Education outline its approach to giving teachers the skills and support they need to do their job well:**

<https://www.globalpartnership.org/blog/how-gpe-supports-teachers>

**Interagency Network for Education in Emergencies' resource bank for supporting teachers in crisis and post-conflict settings:**

<https://inee.org/collections/teachers>

**Save the Children Resource Centre for teacher professional development:**

<https://resourcecentre.savethechildren.net/search/site/teachers%20professional%20development>

**Teacher Education in Sub-Saharan Africa (TESSA) – a collaborative network for teachers and teacher educators to improve their practice:**

<http://www.tessafrica.net>

**United Nation Girls' Education Initiative (UNGEI) resources and reports:**

<http://www.ungei.org/resources/>

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