

**Crushed Amongst Teacher Guides and Students in
Practice of Teaching: Guiding Teacher Learning**

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Introduction

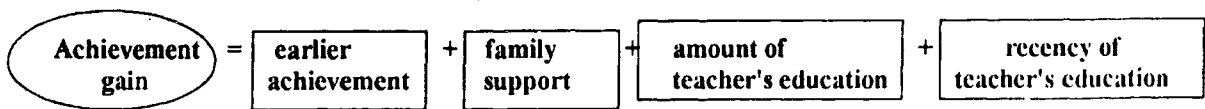
Among all the professions in the world, teaching is a very familiar profession to almost everybody. In Sri Lanka there are about 179590 teachers and out of them about 71836 teach at the primary level. Of the 10300 schools in the island 2809 are primary schools, and in most of the other schools (6944) there is a primary section. In Sri Lanka, parents plan to send their child to a good school even before a baby is born. They try to buy land and build houses close to a good school so that they will be able to send the child to a good school. Some leave their own homes and rent a house close to a good school. The electricity and water bills are produced as proof of residence. According to them "good schools" are the schools which produce "good results" at the scholarship examination conducted at the end of the primary level, G.C.E. O/L and A/L (General Certificate of Education, Ordinary Level and Advanced Level.)

Considering the research on education in 1960s, most of the studies fall into the category of "effective schools" with the objective of improving schools. Large number of samples was used in research studies and data analysis was mainly done using percentages, z-test, t-test, correlation coefficient and regression coefficient (Quantitative research). Findings of such research did not lead to much of an improvement in the schools. The focus of research was changed in 1970s to "effective teachers." There too the aim was to find statistical relationships with different variables, using ANOVA (analysis of variance.) Research emphasis was on "What teachers should know?" Neither the research on "effective schools" nor "effective teachers" had a positive impact in improving schools. As Gallagher (1992) says; these research studies were based on the assumption that knowledge being viewed as a commodity to be transmitted to students whose responsibility is to learn it in a way that is faithful (BEHAVIOURIST - POSITIVIST TRADITION.) Teaching was equated with transmitting information

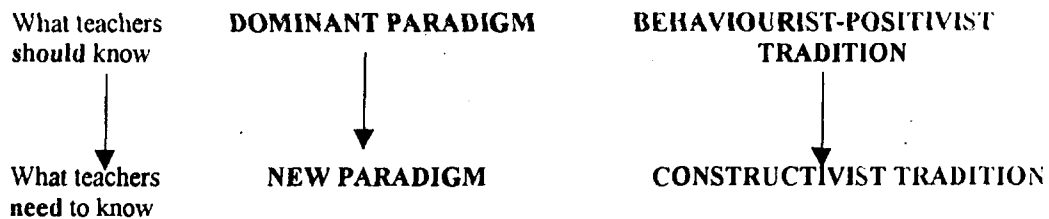
to students and learning was equated to acquiring information quite frequently by memorization (i.e., receiving and storing knowledge.)



Assessment of learning was summative to identify the students who have been successful in acquiring the information. Kennedy (1991) formulates an equation to show the relationship of achievement gained by students as follows:



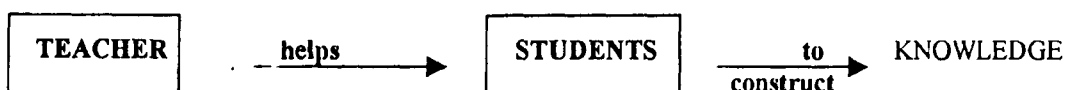
This dominant paradigm of teaching and research changed in the next two decades.



Research in the 80s was mainly on issues of equity and equality in education, and towards the 90s there was a change in the research tradition which relied more on words than numbers (Qualitative research.) Thick descriptions of happenings in classroom teaching were used as data in analyses.

Research emphasis was on, "What teachers need to know?" Teaching in classroom settings was also undergoing change, and knowledge was viewed as something that was constructed by students.

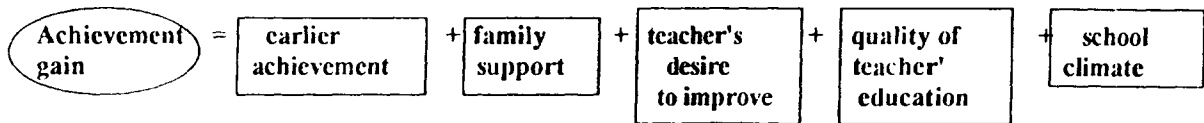
According to this CONSTRUCTIVIST TRADITION, teachers help students acquire scientific information, and assess them to find out whether they have acquired it or not, i.e., MAKING SENSE of what they are learning.



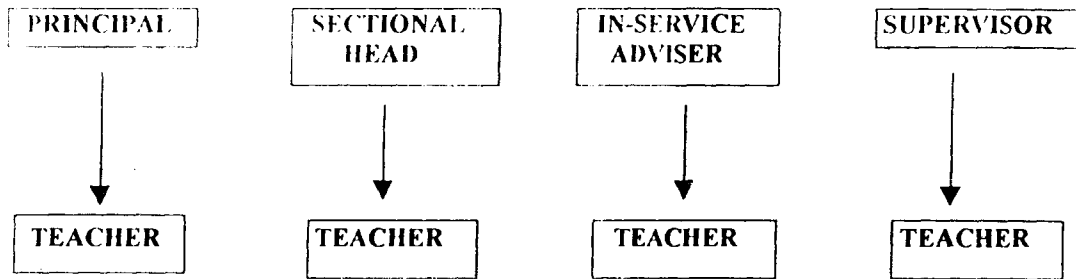
In this tradition students need to integrate the new information with what they already know, i.e., MAKING SENSE and MAKING CONNECTIONS. Students need to learn how to apply their new

knowledge beyond the classroom and connect their knowledge with the world outside school. To guide students in this direction teachers are required to spend a lot of time in planning and preparation.

Kennedy (1991) has revised the achievement gain equation to suit the constructivist tradition as follows:



In Sri Lanka, relationships of teachers with other personnel are varied. For example, teachers have relationships with the principal as the head of the school, they also need to build relationships with sectional heads of the school, and also with the inservice-advisers and other officers from zonal, district and provincial offices, Ministry of Education and Higher Education (MOEHE) and National Institute of Education (NIE.) In all these relationships teachers play a subordinate role where the other officers play a superior role. This kind of superior-subordinate relationship, in a hierachical setting does not invite teachers to discuss their problems with the superiors. It obstructs the quality improvement in teaching.



SUPERIOR-SUBORDINATE RELATIONSHIP

Researchers who go to the classroom to study what is happening in the classroom do not have a supervisory role to play. They observe what is happening and interview students and teachers to understand what has happened. Therefore, the relationship between the teacher and the researcher is different from the above superior-subordinate relationship. It is a collegial relationship.



COLLEGIAL RELATIONSHIP

As with Dewey (1933) to gain successful results of this relationship both the researcher and the teacher should possess intellectual attitudes, such as open mindedness, whole heartedness and, sense of responsibility. Feiman-Nemser et al. (1994) propose a professional activity called “Guided Practice,” which incorporates Dewey’s ideas and also covers terms such as mentoring, coaching, and field instruction.

Objectives

The study intended to identify specific guidance required by teachers to improve their quality of instruction by reflecting their own teaching.

The guiding research question was, “How does the guided practice help improve teaching?” To answer this question following subsidiary research questions were also asked.

What did teachers learn from the guides?

What did researchers discover as needs of teachers during guided practice?

What did researchers find about teachers in co-planning and co-teaching?

How could the existing practice of teaching could be changed to improve the quality of instruction?

The guided practice framework (Figure 1) was used in this study.

Research Methodology

A school close to the work place of the researchers (National Institute of Education, NIE) was selected for convenience. In this particular school there were five classes of the third grade. Five teachers who had obtained teacher training certificate from Teachers’ Colleges were in-charge of these classes.

They all had more than twenty years of experience in teaching. After negotiating with the principal and the teachers, a two-day workshop was conducted during a week-end at the NIE to orient the research team and, to inform the principal and the teachers the objectives of the study. In order to understand what teachers needed to know it was necessary to observe how teachers plan their lessons. Therefore, on the second day of the workshop, teachers were asked to plan lessons for two weeks, while they were observed by the researchers.

The entire study consisted of three phases of two-week duration and two-day workshops in between.

Phase I – Observation

During this phase five researchers went to five classrooms and took down extensive field notes of what happened in the classroom. They observed how the teachers implemented their lesson plans in the classrooms. The observations helped the researchers to identify weaknesses of teachers and the specific areas to be considered in lesson planning and teaching in the second phase:

Phase II – Collaboration and conversation

Researchers and teachers did lesson planning and teaching together at the workshop after the first phase and during the second phase. At the end of each day there were discussions on day's happenings in the classrooms and planned for the next lessons. Special attention was given to teachers' concerns rather than the researchers (guides.) Researchers were careful not to mention teachers' weaknesses, but tried to make them understand their mistakes by finding opportunities to pinpoint problems of teachers indirectly, posing guiding questions and inviting their ideas for discussion. Through these discussions teachers were gradually started reflecting their teaching. At the end of this phase, a workshop was conducted to exchange experiences of each other, where teachers wrote down their reflections of the intervention of researchers.

Phase III – Monitoring

This was another phase of observation where researchers paid attention to understand how teachers implemented what they have learnt from researchers.

Findings

The most visible change in all the five teachers was in their lesson planning. This change had influenced so many other changes in the teachers to improve their teaching (Figure 2.) On the second day of the first workshop when teachers were asked to develop lesson plans for two weeks, they completed lesson plans for the whole term. All the teachers taught language, mathematics and environmental studies for third graders. Hence, they liked to do lesson planning together. While planning they had their teacher guides and syllabuses in front of them and went through page by page.

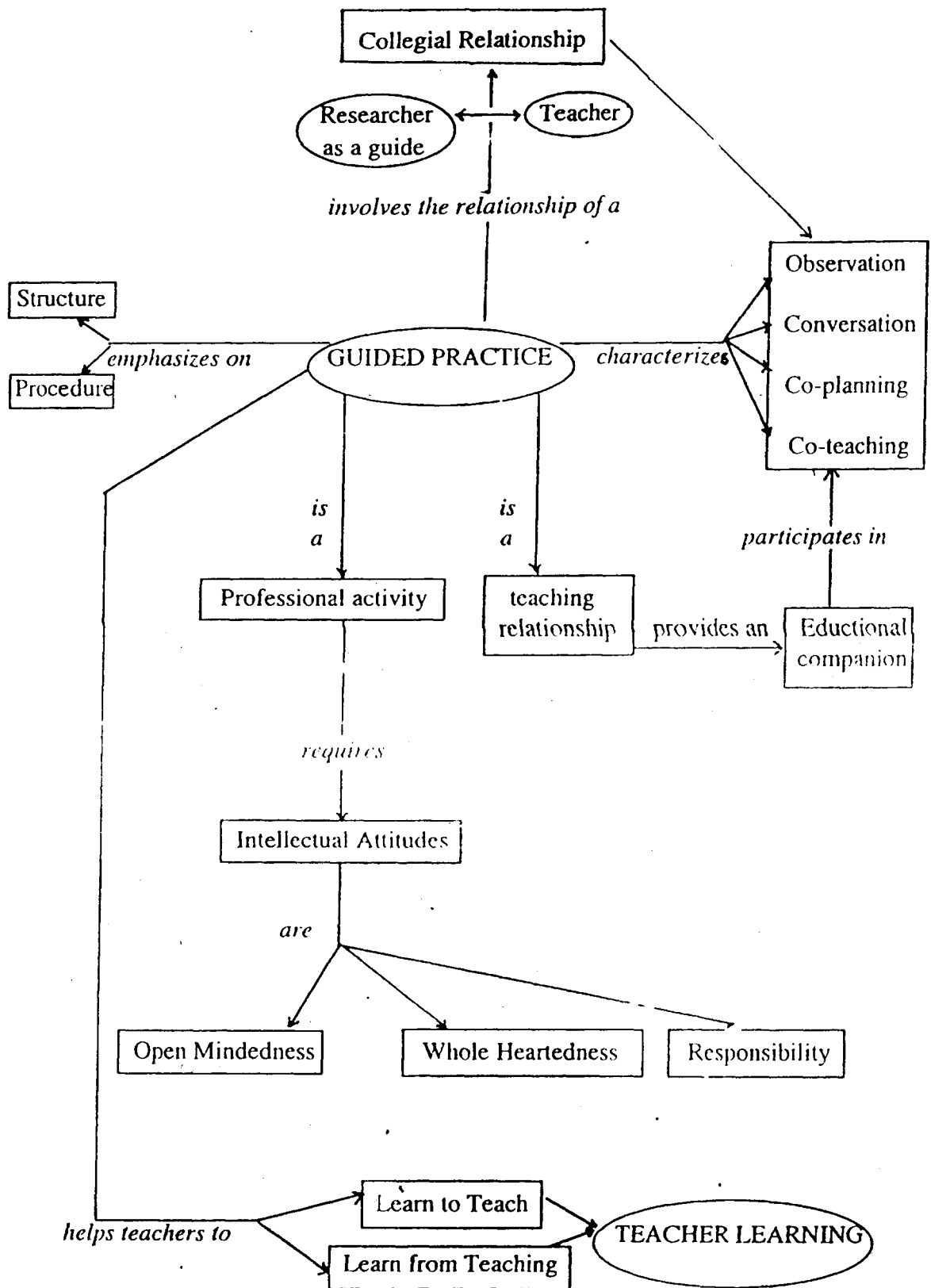


Figure 1: Guided practice framework

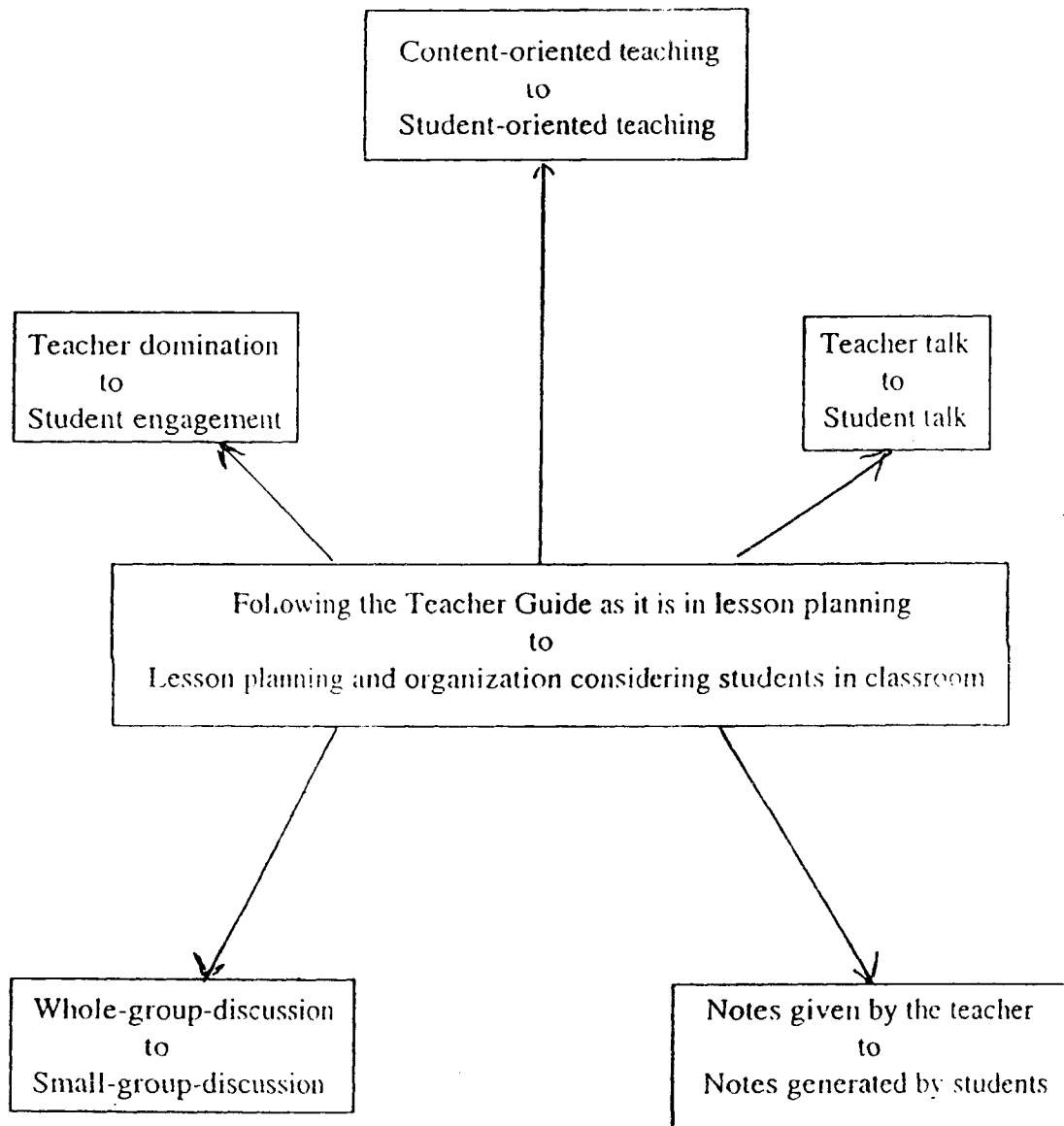


Figure 2: Summary of findings of the study

Most of the time they copied what was in the teacher guide to their plans. After talking a while they ignored the places where there were suggestions for teachers to design activities by considering the school and classroom contexts.

At the end of the first phase researchers found that there were some common patterns in their instruction. They started the day by offering flowers to Lord Buddha and observing religious activities. Instruction was started by writing the date on the upper left corner of the chalkboard. Most of the time they began the lesson by saying, " Today we are going to learn about----," and wrote the topic on the board. Sometimes teachers asked questions from students to start the lesson, but student responses were not taken into consideration in building up concepts. While teaching they had the teacher guide in front of them and looked at it time to time. They did not open the lesson plans that they had written. At the end of the lesson teacher wrote a summary in nice round letters including punctuation. Student task was to copy what teacher wrote. The teachers marked these notes and stars were awarded to students who copied nicely. According to the teachers, notes given by them were appreciated by parents, as well as the principal and other administrators.

It was a difficult task for the researchers to make teachers identify and understand their weaknesses. In the intellectual work during the second phase, researchers had to confront dilemmas, pose guiding questions, provide clues to get teachers' ideas. Planning lessons as a collaborative activity of researchers and teachers provided opportunities to pinpoint shortcomings of the teachers as examples related to a topic under discussion. There were prolonged discussions to let teachers realize their mistakes and to suggest overcoming strategies. For example some teachers wrote even the objective given in the teacher guide on the board. Although there were discussions focussed to move away from this habit, it took time for teachers to note the irrelevance. Towards the end of the co-planning exercise teachers were able to write descriptive lesson plans as steps, including questions to be asked and anticipated answers. This improvement made by the teachers in lesson planning influenced them to make some other changes (Figure 2), which will be exemplified in the following vignettes of teachers.

Mrs. Silva

Mrs. Silva was a teacher who showed a remarkable change in her lesson planning. She was the language coordinator for the third grade. She was observed to be writing very brief lesson plans. Sometimes only a few words comprised her lesson plan. The objectives of the lesson were often missing, instead she put down the number of the relevant lesson objective in the teacher guide. It appeared as if she was fulfilling the official requirement of writing lesson notes. One of her lesson plans and the relevant extract of the teacher guide are as follows:

Extract of the teacher guide

4.0 Pronunciation

Objectives	Teacher tasks	Student tasks	Reinforcement
4.2 Improvement of correct pronunciation skills	4.2.2 Preparation of a list of words suitable to improve pronunciation. Present the list to students and make them pronounce correctly.	Read the words loudly with correct pronunciation.	Encourage to read the lists of words prepared.

Mrs. Silva's lesson plan

Date 96.3.28

Objective - 4.2.2

Teacher task - Instructing to prepare a list of words suitable for improving pronunciation.

Student task - Read the words loudly with correct pronunciation

Mrs. Silva implemented teacher dominated lessons without taking into account of student preconceptions and abilities. Hence, the lessons appeared to be dull and stereotypic. Although the classroom was arranged into groups, no group activities were observed during language lessons. During the co-planning sessions, Mrs. Silva's contribution was minimal at the beginning. When others were presenting ideas she kept quiet. But as she was the language coordinator the other teachers wanted to get more information from her. Gradually she started talking and towards the end of the phase she expressed her ideas very freely. It could have been due to the self-respect she gained as a result of the feeling of being needed with her services as the coordinator.

A significant change was observed in Mrs. Silva's lesson planning and teaching during the monitoring phase. Not only she wrote detailed lesson plans, but also she tried to integrate subject matter on a thematic approach. One such lesson was where she had to teach a type of traditional Sinhalese folksongs. This particular lesson was very creative and had many favourable characteristics, where she taught a type of Sinhalese folksongs sung by "chena" cultivators who kept awake at night to protect "chena" (cultivated ground) from wild animals. Her lesson plan was as follows:

Lesson Plan

Date 96.5.14

1.1.1. Listening and singing of folksongs

Opening of the lesson

We learned about the farmer who provides us with rice, vegetables and fruits in a previous lesson. We also know that farmers produce many other types of crops such as cereals. These crops should be planted not in paddy fields but in chenas. Chenas are prepared by cutting down trees in certain areas of the forests and building fences surrounding the area. In order to protect the crops from wild animals chena cultivators have to stay in the chena at night. He builds a small hut on a top of a tree in the chena and be there during the whole night without falling

falling asleep. There he used to sing certain verses to overcome his loneliness, sleep and to drive away the animals. We will learn such a verse now.

Student activity

Dramatization of a chena at night.

The verse 1 (Not included, it was in Sinhala-language of Sinhalese)

The verse 2

Reinforcements

1. Encourage students to come in front of the class to sing the verses.
2. Ask the students to listen to verses with appreciation.
3. Ask to recite other verses if they know.
4. Ask the students to learn more verses from parents and grand parents.

For this lesson she had asked the students to prepare the classroom dismantling the group structure. Desks and chairs were moved to a side and in one corner a chair was kept on top of a desk to denote the hut of chena cultivator. One student sang the folksongs while the other students mimed to play the roles of various wild animals coming to the chena.

The above vignette shows the changes observed in Mrs. Silva from a brief lesson note to a descriptive one, and teacher domination to student participation.

Mrs. Zoysa

Mrs. Zoysa was young and enthusiastic learner compared to other teachers. She was found to be following her senior colleagues in lesson planning, when we met her at the first phase. The researcher who observed her teaching noted that she had several misconceptions regarding some mathematical concepts. Being a keen learner she unlearned them very quickly. She implemented many group activities, sometimes different innovative activities were also given during the same lesson. During peer observations she tried to help her colleagues in implementing group activities. She expressed about her experience at a discussion as:

I feel we should do away with following a common lesson note without incorporating ones own creative ideas. Students should not be restricted and

pressurerised with teachers ideas. They should be allowed to express their ideas and we must help them in organizing those.

I felt team teaching was a very good strategy even with the limited experience I gained. A teacher would feel much comfortable and less trained if team teaching could be carried out.

Mrs. Zoysa appreciated the friendly relationship that developed between the researchers and teachers, where they were able to talk freely without fear of being evaluated. It was an important factor that facilitates teacher learning.

Mr. Somadasa

Mr. Somadasa although taught the third grade during the recent past, he had experience in teaching in all grades during his teaching carer. He had 35 years of experience and had taught in a number of schools. He appeared to be a rather strict master. He was the sectional head for grades 1-3.

The main assertion formed during the first phase by the researcher who worked with him was that his method of teaching involved predominant "teacher talk" and "teacher domination." His sentences were long and his vocabulary consisted of high sounding words. He would go into too much detail along one aspect. Although he asked questions he would answer them himself without giving an opportunity for his students. During his lessons most students were passive listeners, while certain others were engaged in activities such as talking, playing desk games using pencils, pen covers and pencil boxes. Mr. Somadasa was found to be exhausted after his teaching at the end of the day. His ideas abut his teaching were:

I have been teaching all the grades in my teaching career. Mostly I have taught the higher grades. I am used to talking in this manner. If I use 'big words' my students will also start using them and thereby would improve their language.

During the second phase the researcher worked with the teacher to reduce his control over the classroom discourse in order to allow for increased pupil participation to let him realize his

shortcomings on his own. Researcher had to do a considerable amount of modelling in order to achieve a favourable result. One such lesson involved a role play of an episode in a public bus dramatised with the objective of enhancing active listening and values of students. Another factor which contributed to his change was peer observation of teaching. He too observed Mrs. Silva's lesson on "folksongs."

Mr. Somadasa enjoyed the student activities during the second phase, and as a result he expressed himself at the last phase realizing the shortcomings:

*Children's desire to be active could be used in their learning.
It is best to consider this as a principle and organize the
teaching to incorporate student activities.*

Mr. Somadasa gradually incorporated student activities into his lesson plans in contrast to the "teacher talk" approach adopted in the phase-1, where the subject content was delivered predominantly by the lecture method. He encouraged the students to come up with ideas facilitating "student talk." Use of simple language and adoption of appropriate questioning techniques enabled the students participate better. Both the students and the teacher appreciated the change.

Mrs. Ratnayake

Mrs. Ratnayake possessed the habit of writing lesson notes daily and tried to involve students in activities specified in the teacher guide. She had the inclination of extending her hand to help the slow learners. When examining her lesson notes it was found that it was almost a carbon copy of the teacher guide. She merely copied the relevant portion of the teacher guide daily. Even when implementing the lesson she would peep into the teacher guide for reference. The teaching aids used for the activities were sometimes technically incorrect. One such critical instance was with the usage of abacus. She had given instructions to make an abacus at home on the previous class. All what students brought were incorrectly made. The rods which should have had the height just enough to incorporate only nine disks/ balls were far too long. The mere concept of 'place value' could not be constructed such an abacus. The researcher modelled the activity with a proper abacus that she borrowed from the NIE. Mrs. Ratnayake

realized that she should look into the accuracy of the teaching aids intended to be used in activities.

When the activities were over she would also dictate/write a note on the board for the students to copy. Such notes included advanced glossary terms, like standardized units. The teacher guide includes such terms for teachers reference, and not to be introduced in classroom instruction.

After going through the co-planning and implementation she realized that although she did write lesson notes before, she never did it successfully and, she found teaching as a monotonous activity. She reflected her improvement as:

Yearly we implemented the syllabus in the same old manner. We restricted ourselves to the instructions given in the teacher guide. Although we planned our lessons we never did it properly. It is much better to write lesson plans in a step by step order. Then I found easy to implement them.

By planning lessons without adhering strictly to teacher guide allows us to include novel ideas. Then teaching also becoming interesting for both the teachers and students. I noticed my students were cheerful then. They also enjoyed writing lesson notes on their own with the observations and experiences made during the activities.

Mrs. Ratnayake was keen on her professional development and discussed with the researcher about some of the difficulties she had in some other units.

Mrs. Yapa

Mrs. Yapa was a teacher who wrote lesson plans and marked students' books daily. She had adopted a method to keep track of submitting notes. She considered these things as essentials of teaching, to be a good teacher. In the lesson planning exercise at the very beginning she played a dominant role in the discussion by presenting her ideas and experiences, which might have hindered suggestions of the others. In her instruction she had some routine steps. She asked the students to clap once, then twice, and then to a rhythm. According to her this was to break the

monotonous behaviour of students after one lesson. She had the habit of writing the topic of the lesson at the beginning. While teaching there were instances where she asked questions from students, but she herself answered to most of the questions. Even the chorus answers given by the students were not incorporated to a discourse. Although the classroom arrangement had six groups, she never utilized that structure in her instruction.

Guided questions asked by the researchers and the ideas presented by the others made Mrs. Yapa to play a participatory role towards the end of the second phase. The following excerpt provides evidence for her change to involve students in the discourse:

Mrs. Yapa started the class (1996.05.11) by asking the students about what she asked on the previous day.

T: Yesterday we talked about the things we did in the first grade. How many of you have brought your work books and what you wore when you were in the first grade?

Students were impatient to show what they had brought. Some even made comments of their friends garments. Mrs. Yapa asked the students to display the clothes they were brought and to compare those with what they were wearing in the third grade. She whispered to me, "Let them do it on their own." She named a student in each group to report what the group thought about. [This day I noticed the change in the classroom arrangement. Instead of the six groups she had, there were nine groups so that each group had five students. When I asked her about it she replied, "Yesterday when we were discussing I realized a group of five to six encourage more students interaction."] After about three minutes, she started asking responses from students:

Deepika: Teacher, they look very small.

Renuka: Size is small.

Priyantha: Look like dolls' clothes.

Mrs. Yapa noticed that students' answers were based only on the size of the clothes they brought, and she wanted to get a comparative response from students:

T: I asked you to see what you had put on when you were in the

first grade, and to find a difference with what you are wearing now. I want you to discuss and report.

Her question helped the students to think aloud to compare the clothes, considering their growth.

This lesson was on physical and mental development of children.

Preethi: Smaller than what we wear now.

Senaka: Those are small for us to wear now.

Pubudu: Now we are big. Our clothes are also bigger than those.

I noticed that teacher was happy with the answers and continued a discourse with the students by asking them to compare what they had written in the first grade with the third grade. While this activity was going on she asked people to comment on what the others were saying. At the end of the discussion she was able to get from students that they were grown now physically, and at the same time there was a mental development that enabled them to work on harder mathematical problems than in the first grade.

The above vignette shows how Mrs. Yapa changed from a teacher oriented teaching approach to involve students in doing work to construct knowledge. Teachers started using parents as a resource in their classrooms. They were happy of the way that researchers listened to them, and appreciated the way researchers helped them in correcting their mistakes in a friendly manner, without directly saying the mistakes. Teachers expressed that they learned so many things for their professional development from the researchers. They valued the guidance given them to learn to teach and learn from their own teaching.

Implications

As mentioned at the beginning of this paper our intervention as guides in the classrooms was to build up collegial relationships with the teachers. Through this relationship we wanted to understand what teachers needed to learn to teach. We propose the following suggestions to be considered in the professional development of teachers.

- a) Although there are so many pressures exerted on the teacher (Figure-3) teachers are willing to accept challenges and ready to make a change. They are trainable with proper guidance. They need on-going guidance for their professional development.
- b) In guiding teachers, guides should possess competencies to identify weaknesses of teachers and to help them in providing remedies. If not, monitoring and supervision will not be successful. (Principals, in-service advisers and other officers who visit teachers' classrooms should develop the required competencies through training and reading)
- c) School culture should be conducive to facilitate exchange of ideas among teachers and peer observation in teaching. It will be helpful in developing high self-esteem to handle problematic situations. Teachers should be guided to develop the "habit of mind" to look for new things.
- d) Exchange of ideas among teachers should be extended to the zonal, district and provincial levels (Figure-4.) Establishing teacher resource centres will help in this type of conversation. Teachers should be provided with more opportunities to discuss their problems with the colleagues as well as with the superiors.
- e) Teacher training programmes in the teacher colleges and colleges of education should have a component of research methodology in their curriculum to provide opportunity for trainees to undertake short-term research and action research to improve their own teaching by reflecting the practice.

In the existing system there are in-service advisers and other officers to monitor teaching. The approach of visiting the classrooms with a superior-subordinate relationship, need to be changed to welcome teachers' questions and problems. Retraining officers with a new approach would not involve incurring of an additional cost to the state to bring about the changes emerged out of this study.

***Note:** (The medium of instruction in this school was in Sinhala. All the documentary evidence, dialogues and interviews were originally in Sinhala)

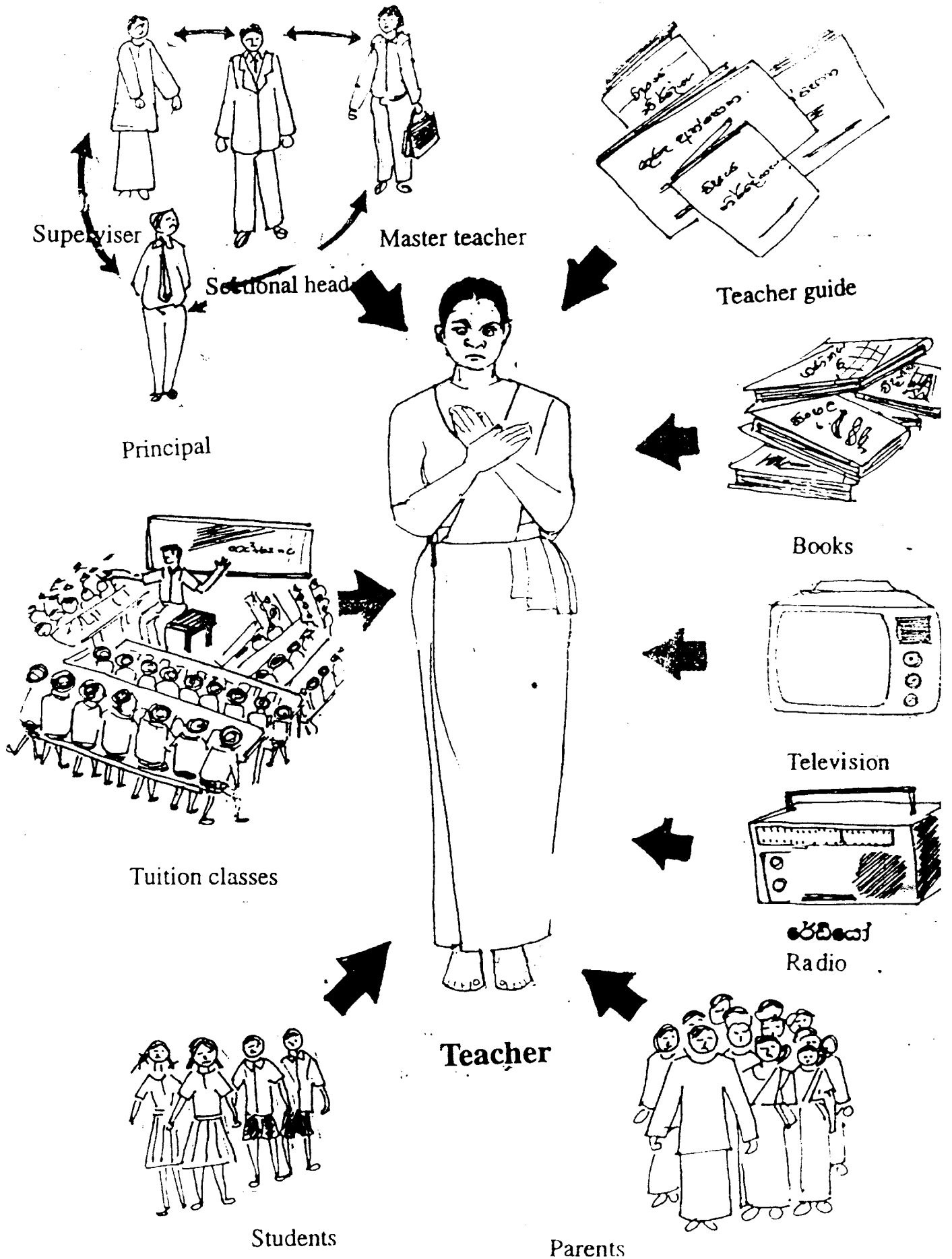
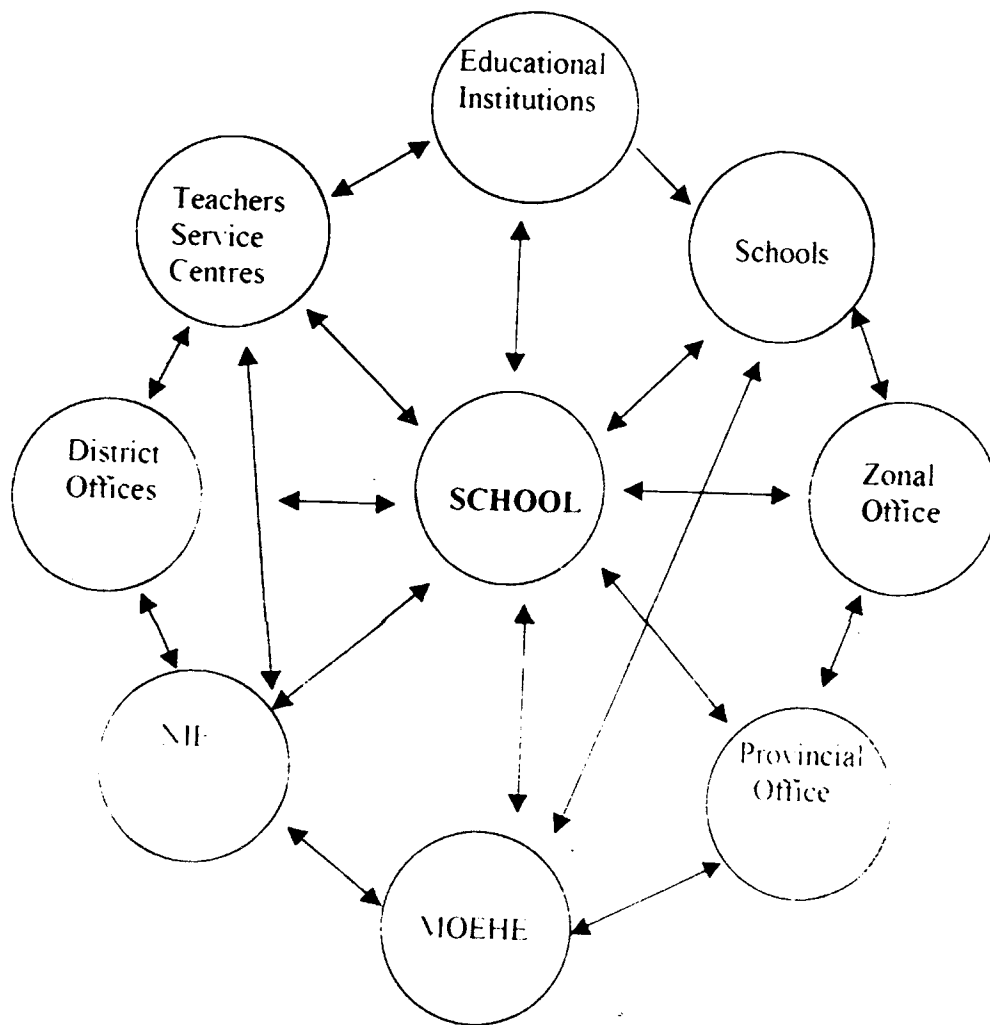


Figure 3: Pressures exerted on a teacher



WORLD VIEW

Figure 4: Possible networking for teachers

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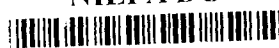
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