Book Review

N. Raghavan (Ed.), *A Learning Community of Reflective Teachers: From Whispers to Resonance*. Routledge, 2024, pp. xviii+ 234, ₹1,128. ISBN: 978-1-032-67172-7 (Paperback).

Professional development should foster the development of teachers as reflective practitioners, which will enable them to adapt to a variety of classroom contexts and increase their autonomy. Reflective practice is improved when teachers are afforded the opportunity to learn in a secure social environment, such as professional learning communities, where they can interact with their peers to exchange ideas, resources and practices, collectively ruminate on practice-related issues and seek peer support (CETE, 2024).

Neeraja Raghavan's edited book, *A Learning Community of Reflective Teachers: From Whispers to Resonance*, explores the implementation of a continuous professional development (CPD) model in India during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown period. The approach of an online course and online community of practice intended to build reflective and enquiring educators by utilising action research within a supportive community of practice—LCoRPs (Learning Community of Reflective Practitioners). Raghavan methodically demonstrates the significance of cultivating reflective and autonomous practitioners for facilitating educational transformation by presenting eight action research chapters produced by her learners (school teachers and leaders). As she says, 'For, where school teachers are on the road to discovery and learning, can students be far behind?' (p. 200). As a majority of the participants transition from being *consumers* to *contributors* and possibly *co-creators* through *cooperation*, Raghavan notes that the LCoRPs and action research model of CPD have the potential to be transformative or at the least transitional.

Three sections make up Raghavan's book. The first part explains the background and structure of the CPD programme. The action research

chapters written by LCoRPs members comprise the second part. In part three, Raghavan provides a comprehensive analysis and observations on the implementation, ultimately presenting a model for CPD.

LCoRPs was established by a group of 15 educators from mainstream and alternative private unaided schools with varying levels of experience who had successfully completed an online course titled 'Reflective Writing' offered and certified by Raghavan, the Founder-Director of *Thinking Teacher*, which aims to create a network of reflective practitioners. These educators voluntarily joined the community and were highly motivated from the beginning. Raghavan asserts that the group found it simpler to share their ideas with one another due to the absence of a common workplace and their geographical dispersion across several states in India. Raghavan herself had a significant role in facilitating the community during its initial period. During the process of selecting their action research themes, Raghavan established three thematic clusters: the pedagogy cluster, teacher development cluster and curriculum and attitudinal change cluster. Initially, the group was partially guided by these clusters, and later on, by pairs of members. The members convened every fortnight for a year (2021–2022) to engage in discussions and exchange ideas regarding their action research projects, as well as to address and share their experiences and methodologies. All members highlighted the assistance they received from LCoRPs in effectively conceptualising and carrying out their action research.

Among the eight action research projects, four were carried out by education leaders, specifically two headmistresses, a teacher educator and the head of a department from different schools. The central focus of all four action research investigations was the cooperation with teachers to empower them in addressing their professional development needs and promoting their learning via self-reflection on their attitudes and actions. Both headmistresses, Natarajan (Chapter 3) and Nagaraj (Chapter 5) discovered, via their investigation, that altering their leadership styles by relinquishing strict control and attentively considering the opinions of their teachers enabled the teachers to assume responsibility for their own learning. The head of the department, Majumdar (Chapter 7) witnessed the advantages of peer cooperation by guiding teachers from different disciplines to collaborate in order to create an interdisciplinary curriculum. The teacher educator, Vivekanand (Chapter 8), established a rubric to assess the reflective practices of teachers. This initiative is noteworthy for its integration of theory and practice in the development of English language instructors as reflective practitioners.

The remaining four action research projects were carried out by teachers in classrooms with their students across different grade levels, ranging from second grade to middle school. These research projects aimed to foster learner autonomy, critical thinking and empathy among the students. Two teachers, Bharat (Chapter 4) and Sundar (Chapter 9), used different pedagogic strategies to foster student reflection, wonder and curiosity, ultimately cultivating student autonomy and ownership of their learning. Consequently, they observed the positive outcomes of this approach in their teaching and learning environment. Two other teachers aimed to cultivate students' social awareness, fostering the development of critical thinking skills and empathy. Sundar working with middle school children observed that even the most progressive teaching strategies do not universally apply, as two or three learners required more structured assignments due to challenges they faced, unlike their peers. An exemplary action research study was conducted by Bedadur (Chapter 6) who worked outside of the school system. She worked with four tribal students who were located in different tribal districts in Maharashtra. The teacher employed online audio storytelling techniques to facilitate learning and foster the development of critical thinking skills. She contemplates her shift in attitude towards these youngsters and the possibilities of effective teaching methods as she witnesses the growth of critical thinking skills in these children. Gautam's research in Chapter 10 explores the objectives of education and her broader responsibilities as a Hindi language teacher. She strives to foster empathy among her students in a residential school and the school support personnel.

Raghavan utilises meticulous observations and analysis to construct a framework that categorises a teacher's involvement in the LCoRPs. This framework is shown on a coordinate plane with trust and doubt as one axis and consumer and contributor as the other. The framework has the potential to be implemented and confirmed in future studies. She however misses discussing innovations that have already been tried out in the Indian context to give us a richer understanding of the status of CPD in India (Singh et al., 2021) and how to scale such a large and diverse system. Therefore, her final recommendation to scale the CPD programme, drawing on concepts from networking theories and proposing a gradual transition from centralised to decentralised and ultimately distributed models of management, is a good thought experiment.

This book provides insights into the classrooms of private unaided schools through seven of the eight action research initiatives, which have been relatively under-researched. The challenges faced by teachers and

leaders in their schools are specific to their particular circumstances, yet they also exhibit several shared themes, including the implementation of active learning methods, fostering critical and higher-order thinking skills in students and empowering teachers as independent and inquisitive individuals. These themes are important to consider irrespective of the school type. The research projects also highlight how accountability is a two-way street in education whether between the head teacher and her teachers or between the teacher and her students. All the research projects show that developing autonomous and thinking teachers and students created a more positive and active learning environment.

The act of reading this book brought to mind Sayed and Sarangapani's (2021) proposition to embrace a 'critical humanist agenda' while approaching the work and professional growth of teachers, recognising the complimentary nature of teaching and teacher education activity. This book presents a significant concept of efficiently utilising technology for teacher development throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. It emphasises the significance of prioritising professional growth and utilising technology as a tool. It is a must-read for teacher educators and people working with teachers and teacher education in India.

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