



## A learning community of reflective teachers: from whispers to resonance

compiled and edited by Neeraja Raghavan, New York, Milton Park,  
Routledge, 2024, 270 pp., £42.99 (Paperback), ISBN 978-1-03-249510-1

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## BOOK REVIEW

**A learning community of reflective teachers: from whispers to resonance,**

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Exploring teacher professional development through the lens of collaborative learning and reflective practice, this innovative initiative (that emerged during the Covid-19 pandemic) brings together teachers from diverse locations in India to form a supportive learning community. It exemplifies professional growth through teacher collaboration for transforming educational practices. Action Research provides a methodological framework for the book.

The book is divided into three main sections.

The introductory section, *From Teachers to Change Agents*, provides the backdrop by discussing and critiquing traditional models of teacher development and advocating teachers as transformative intellectuals. The author presents a strong case for a model where teachers' voices are central, and their collective experiences are crucial for professional development and identity. She advocates a shift from isolated professional development to a community-based approach.

The central section of the book titled *A Learning Community That Strives to Effect Change* is a Compilation of Action Research Papers conducted by members of the Learning Community of Reflective Practitioners (LCoRPs). These case studies span diverse topics such as kindergarten learning environments, learner autonomy, critical thinking in marginalised communities, and empathy between students and staff.

The final chapter titled *A New Model of Teacher Development* amalgamates the insights gained from the LCoRPs initiative and proposes a new model of teacher development. Situating this model within the broader context of existing frameworks, it offers practical ways of adoption. This design allows seamless presentation of central ideas of collaborative learning and action research for teacher professional development. Drawing theoretical insights from various key educational constructs [like John Dewey (1910) and Schon (1983) for reflective practice, Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1999) on the significance of knowledge in practice, Community of Practice by Lave and Wenger (1991), Teacher Agency and Empowerment: Giroux (1988) and the role of teachers as intellectuals capable of driving change Kincheloe (2001)], it integrates these theoretical perspectives and constructs into a robust framework for a new model of teacher development. A collaborative space is created where teachers can share experiences, challenge assumptions, and collectively develop new insights.

The methodological framework used in the book is primarily qualitative. Teachers work together to identify problems, design interventions, and evaluate outcomes. While promoting a sense of ownership and collective responsibility, reflective writing (integral to the methodology) enables teachers to reflect on and share insights with fellows. This practice is shown to enhance self-awareness and critical thinking. Though the book is based on qualitative and interpretivist framework, some chapters (like Chapter 4) incorporate quantitative data to support findings. Each action research project offers detailed narratives that illustrate the application of reflective practice and collaborative inquiry in diverse contexts, providing rich, contextualised insights into the challenges and successes of the LCoRPs initiative.

It demonstrates the power of collaborative inquiry by showing how teachers break professional isolation and develop a collective sense of "purpose" and "agency". Teachers were able

to critically examine their beliefs and practices through reflection, leading to meaningful insights and improvements. Arguing for greater teacher agency and the importance of listening to teachers' voices, it argues that when teachers have the autonomy to direct their own learning and collaborate with peers, they are more likely to develop innovative and effective teaching strategies. In Chapter 7, Dutta Majumdar documents the impact of breaking barriers and enabling exchange and cross-pollination of ideas among teachers. In Chapter 8, Vivekanand delves into the teacher's mind and heart through storytelling and reflective writing. The book illustrates how change can be driven by systematic inquiry through Action Research projects. Particularly evident in Chapter 9, Sundar turns passive middle schoolers into self-motivated learners through action research. In Chapter 10, Gautam explores the role of empathy in building relationships between students and support staff.

Sustained professional development that goes beyond traditional workshops and courses is stressed. By forming a community of practice, teachers can engage in continuous learning and reflection, enabling long-term professional growth.

Chapter 11 synthesises the insights from the LCoRPs initiative to propose a new model of teacher development, capturing the book's advocacy for a shift from traditional, top-down models of teacher development to a more collaborative and empowering approach. Integrating theoretical perspectives with practical applications effectively, it shows how communities of practice can be operationalised in real-world settings. Voices from a diverse group of teachers present a comprehensive, multi-faceted view of the challenges and opportunities in teacher development, thus enriching the narrative and adding depth to the analysis.

The emphasis on 'teacher agency' and "empowerment" is a significant strength of the book, as it addresses a critical gap in traditional models of professional development. Practical recommendations for implementing the proposed model make the book a valuable resource for educators, administrators, and policymakers.

While this initiative is clearly successful within their context, a more explicit discussion of the scalability of the proposed model would help. Focusing more on the successes of the action research projects, and less on the challenges and limitations encountered, the need for a critical examination of the difficulties and barriers is felt. The initiative documented in the book was successful, but it relied on the commitment and motivation of individual teachers. A discussion of institutional support to sustain such initiatives would enhance the applicability of the model.

A significant contribution to the field of teacher education, the book provides a visionary yet practical approach to transforming teacher professional development through community building and reflective practice. It inspires readers to rethink traditional models of professional development and consider more holistic and inclusive approaches. Its strength lies in its rich narratives, integration of theory and practice, and practical recommendations. It is a valuable resource for educators, researchers, and policymakers committed to enhancing the quality of education through the empowerment of teachers. While documenting a successful initiative, it also offers a vision and design for fostering a culture of continuous learning and collaboration among teachers, providing a powerful framework for teachers to become change agents within their own contexts.

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