The “STAR” Teacher:

A Model for Assessing Quality of Teachers as

Professionals in Today’s Society


Stella Adagiri
School of Education and Continuing Studies
University of Portsmouth
Email- Stella.adagiri@port.ac.uk
Abstract

This paper examines the teacher in today’s society, and presents an innovative model based upon key qualities which have been categorised under the acronym, ‘STAR’. The paper illustrates and focuses on what constitutes a STAR teacher and relates it to the qualities of a professional in today’s society. The emphasis on quality has been a major issue in teacher education for the past two decades. The STAR is perceived as one who possesses essential pedagogic skills, professional training, has the right attitudes and is a reflective practitioner. The paper argues that teachers who embrace the STAR concept will be outstanding in their profession, and continually renewing in their practice. One of the ways of supporting individual needs and improving professional practice is through Continuing Professional Development (CPD) which consists of reflective activities designed to improve an individual’s attributes, knowledge, understanding and skills.

Introduction:

Teaching in many countries, has gradually emerged from a mere occupation into a profession which requires training and development of specific skills. To remain effective and relevant in contemporary society, it has become imperative that all teachers have appropriate training and develop the skills required to do the job. Recent concern for the quality of education has placed pressure on school administrators to assess and upgrade the competency of their teaching staff. Teachers are expected to have relevant knowledge and the right attitudes towards their job and their students. With the advances in technology, globalisation and the rapidly changing nature of our society, teaching has changed from being a source of knowledge to managing and coordinating the learning process. Setting professional standards and redefining what it means to be a professional teacher are at the forefront of educational reform in most countries (Goodson and Hargreaves, 1996).

Various measures are being adopted and employed by different countries to ensure and promote quality in the teaching force. Thomas (1984) claims that school administrators adopt several approaches such as supervision, teacher evaluation, and
in-service training, incentive programs and innovative instructional leadership to increase the likelihood of attracting and retention of competent and devoted professionals in their classrooms. Most state and national educational reforms today lay emphasis in improving the quality of the teacher and enhancing professionalism. Research shows that various countries are giving priority to improving the quality of teaching in every level of education (Tahir 2006, Garuba 2006, Gray 2005, Fullan and Hargreaves 1992). In Nigeria, the National Policy on Education (NPE) through the TRCN (Teachers Registration Council of Nigeria) has put in place several measures to enhance the quality of teacher education and professional development (TRCN 2008). In the UK, the Teacher Development Agency (TDA) has also established professional standards to guide teachers’ professional development which cover key career stages (www.tda.gov.uk).

As a result of the emphasis on teacher quality and professionalism, this paper shall provide an innovative model, drawing from various recommendations and standards that define who a professional is and what quality represents in teaching. The aim of this paper is to discuss some of the basic standards teachers need to possess in order to stand out as professionals, and also serve as a model for assessing the quality of teachers in primary and secondary education.

The Professional Teacher

Given that the STAR concept is focused on the teacher as a professional, it is important to understand the concept of the professional. According to Hoyle (1995:60), “To be a professional is to have acquired a set of skills through competency-based training which enables one to deliver efficiently according to contract, a customer led service in compliance with accountability procedures collaboratively implemented and managerially assured.”

There has been a lot of debate over the years as to whether teaching is a profession or just an occupation. Generally teachers have been viewed as a lower status professional probably because they have not developed a strong professional voice compared to other professionals. The manner in which teachers see themselves also influences their status as professionals.
According to Kolo (2006), professionalisation in teaching entails both pre-service trainings meant to facilitate teaching skills and in-service professional development programmes such as seminars, workshops and training sessions. Hoyle (1995), views professionalism as a term used to describe improvement of quality of service rather than enhancement of status, which brings about the debate on the ‘new professionalism’. Boyt et.al (2001:322) emphasises the influential capacity of the professional and suggests that professionalism consists of the attitudes and behaviour one possesses towards ones profession. Hence it can be argued that professionalism cannot be attained except the particular tasks performed by the professional are different from those of other workers. This implies that no one can claim to be a professional without undergoing a special training by the certified organisation which brings about quality of practice. However, another important dimension of teacher professionalism is the attitudinal and behavioural orientation of the teachers towards their work. These form part of the essential criteria that make up the STAR concept.

The STAR Teacher

In an attempt to describe what the STAR teacher is, it is important to note that this concept is not just another cliché but a model that can be used as a form of assessment for teachers’ competency or performance. The STAR teacher is one who is outstanding and whose impact is evident in the progress and performance of his students and is also among his / her colleagues and the school. The idea behind this concept is to stimulate and encourage teachers to strive to constantly reflect on their practice having the right attitude, training and skills. Hence, teachers who possess these qualities qualify to be called STARs. The four letter acronym gives a description of what is require of a teacher to become a STAR. It can be argued that Continuing Professional Development (CPD) is an essential tool in achieving these qualities. Professional standards provide the backdrop to discussions about performance and future development. The standards define the professional attributes, knowledge, understanding and skills for teachers at each career stage (www.tda.gov.uk).

According to Wragg (1984:4) “good teachers are keen enthusiastic, well organised, firm but fair, stimulating, know their stuff and are interested in the welfare and
The progress of their pupils.”. The paper will further highlight on what the STAR teacher stands for and how it can be applied in today’s educational system.

**Skill** - Every professional requires key skills in order to practice effectively. The type of skill required varies from profession to profession. For example, the skills required by a medical doctor are quite different from those required by an engineer. Likewise in teaching, certain skills are required for effective teaching at different levels of education. However, there are key skills that are common to most professions, which play an essential role in developing personal effectiveness and enable workers adapt and respond creatively to change.

According to Reece and Walker (2007), *management skills, teamwork, communication skills, problem solving and ICT (Information and Communication Technology) skills* are key skills required in every profession. ICT can be regarded as part of the training required for teaching as it has become an important criteria especially because of the level of technological advancement of our society. Teaching skill can simply be described as strategies or techniques teachers’ use to enable children learn. Hence it is imperative for teachers to be aware of this as to enable them focus and develop their teaching skills. The term skill according to Reece and Walker (2007), denotes cognitive (i.e. thinking) and psychomotor (i.e. manipulative and technical) abilities. Skill can not be separated from the teacher as it is an important attribute that makes a good teacher. According to Muijs and Reynolds (2001), the essence of being an effective teacher lies in knowing what to do to foster pupils learning and being able to do it. It is the skills a teacher possesses that will enable them to perform effectively. Developing pedagogic skills is therefore fundamental in improving the quality and standard of teaching.

The role of practice in any performance related job must not be underestimated. Teaching is more of a practical job which gets better and improves with constant practice and training. Teaching skills can be developed through various forms of continuing development activities such as service trainings, workshops and collaborative activities with colleagues. Some of the key teaching skills are:

- Class room management – this includes proper coordination and organisation of class.
• Behaviour management and discipline.
• Problem solving - Ability to handle issues that arise.
• Good communication with students.
• Innovative and creative teaching by exploring and trying out different methods, techniques and activities. Trying out new ideas in the classroom has a way of making teaching and learning more interesting.

It can be argued that teachers become more skilful in their teaching when they put knowledge into practice.

Training- Professionalism cannot be attained without adequate training. Training and education are the bedrock of any profession. It is important to ensure that teachers undergo adequate education before they go into teaching. It is mandatory in most countries that teachers follow a prescribed training and obtains a teaching qualification in order to teach in schools both at primary and secondary levels. Different countries have different criteria and recommended standards for teachers before they go into teaching. In some countries it is being extended to include further and higher education although it is not universal.

In Nigeria, the National Policy on Education (NPE 1998, section 63) states that, “the minimum qualification for entry into teaching profession at any level in the Nigerian schools system should be the National Certification in Education (NCE). NCE teachers are eligible to proceed to do a Bachelor of Education degree programme for three years at the university if they so wish. Graduates who have no previous teacher training experience and have decided to go into the teaching profession register for a Postgraduate diploma in education (PGDE), Postgraduate Certificate in Education, (PGCE) or the Technical Teachers Certificate (TTC) of the polytechnics and colleges of technology (Umar 2004). This has become necessary for teachers to remain relevant and maintain their professional status in today’s electronic generation.

Also, to be qualified to teach in any of the maintained schools in England and Wales, a professional Qualified Teacher’s Status (QTS) must be obtained. The General Teaching Council (GTC) for England is responsible for awarding this certificate and certain criteria are required. A one year Post Graduate Certificate in Education (PGCE) course also known as initial teacher training will have to be completed, after which there is a one year induction period as a Newly Qualified Teacher (NQT) in a
school. It is expected of every teacher to complete this within five years or by the end of the initial teacher training period. The newly qualified teacher is also expected to pass the QTS skills in numeracy, literacy, ICT while on the PGCE course. The paper argues that, adequate training and qualification, is a precondition of membership of the teaching profession.

A Professional should have a broad knowledge base of whatever area he or she specialises in. Education covers a wide scope and enables the teacher to acquire knowledge which is relevant. Teachers need to develop their knowledge of what ever area they specialise in, order to deepen their understanding of the theories underpinning learning and teaching practices and keep up with new knowledge. Hence both education and training should continue as a lifelong experience, even after the initial teacher training, thereby encouraging teachers to engage in CPD activities.

**Attitude** - The attitude of the teacher reflects on his or her performance at work. A teacher with the right attitude toward the job and professional development will be more effective than one with a lackadaisical and complacent approach. A teacher’s attitude will eventually determine his/her progress, level of development and performance at work. In a world where new knowledge is constantly emerging, learning how to learn is crucial for lifelong learning and effective CPD of the teacher. Attitude has to do with the individual’s response to a group of people, object or organisation. A teacher’s attitude should reflect on his/her commitment and dedication to work, and his/her response to handling responsibilities and being innovative. A positive attitude reflects values while a negative attitude is associated with prejudice. According to Kelly (2000), teachers need to have a high expectation, positive attitude, good sense of humour to be successful in their career. Flexibility, consistency and fairness are equally important attitudes that would make a teacher effective in his/her practice (Kelley 2000, McDonald 2004). Based upon a three year study at the University of North Dakota, Gourneau (2005) suggested some attitudes which can be identified with an effective teacher. These include,

- **Genuine demonstration of care and kindness** - Teachers should have sincere interest and concern about their student’s wellbeing.
• **Willingness to share the responsibility involved in a classroom** - Teachers can establish a shared environment by allowing students take responsibility and some form of freedom in the classroom.

• **Sensitively accepting diversity** - This has to do with empathy, sensitivity, encouragement and understanding the students or pupils.

• **Stimulating the student’s creativity** - Teachers should develop the attitude of stimulating creativity amongst students by listening to their suggestions, opinions and ideas for lesson activities.

• **Fostering Individualised Instructions** - This attitude discusses the teacher’s ability to provide learning opportunities for all students.

The teacher’s attitude towards his or her own professional development, his students and his work is very important and determines how much he or she will improve in the practice. Learning is much better when recalled, enjoyed and understood and this can be achieved when teachers have the right attitude toward their profession.

**Reflective Practitioner and Researcher** - Reflective practice as a learning tool underpins the training of many professionals today such as doctors, lawyers, nurses, and engineers (Keeley-Browne 2007). Reflective practise remains one of the key principles that underpin existing models of teacher training. A teacher is seen as a reflective practitioner, who enters a profession with a certain knowledge base but who acquires new knowledge and experiences based on that prior knowledge (Cochran-Smith and Lytle 2001). The main emphasis in reflective practice is that learning is a continuous process. It exposes the teacher to his/her strengths and weaknesses. Hence as one reflects on the strengths and weaknesses, we become more aware of our training needs and can confidently adapt our teaching styles to try different approaches to meet different student needs. “Reflective practice is common in most professions and it is an important research tool in the practitioner researchers’ tool box as stated by Ollerton (2008).

Due to the dynamic nature of the world we live in, teachers need to constantly reflect on their practice and skills and explore new ways of improving on the job to enhance their professional skills. Reflecting upon practice should be a normal practice in teaching. Progressive professional development requires teachers to re-evaluate their beliefs about learning and focus not just on their pedagogic skills but also on how it
impacts on pupils learning. Keeley-Browne (2007: 52) argues that reflective practice is based around a cycle of professional development which involves:

- Professional Knowledge
- Professional Values
- Professional Practice
- Evaluation of Practice

One of the advantages of the reflective process as stated by (Keeley-Browne 2007) is that learning gained from one experience can be used and adapted to another.

As a reflective practitioner a teacher is also encouraged to be a researcher as the research skill required is to reflect on ones practice, make enquiries and think of ways to improve the practice. This can also be seen as illustrated in a cyclical form as below Gibbs (1998).

Apart from being reflective in their practice, teachers can be perceived as researchers as their role entails detecting and solving problems as they teach. As researchers they
are focused on making enquiries on the ‘how’, ‘why’, and ‘what’ of teaching and learning through evidence based practice or action research on teaching methods. They ought to be inquisitive and willing to seek to understand the reason why and how something occurs.

Teachers can come together to identify and diagnose a problem and develop a solution through collaboration. Collaboration amongst teachers is necessary if they are to tackle action research in the context of their working life in school and become more fully engaged in working on pupil learning and participation (Davis and Howes 2007). Teachers should be encouraged to be more involved in evidence based research as they hold the key which unlocks most of the problems in children’s education. Enhancing their research potentials will go a long way to resolving and revealing issues relating to teaching and learning.

In the UK this is being developed into more common practice and is encouraged by initiatives like the TLRP (Teaching and Learning Research Program), TERN (Teacher Education Research Network), and websites like www.whatworkswell.org and www.teachersnetwork.org which are online sources which provide quality assured knowledgebase of effective practice to improve learning where anyone can make contributions (www.tlrp.org/tern). This is not a very common practice in Nigeria and should be encouraged as it is one of the ways to make an impact and find fulfilment and satisfaction as a teacher.

**Adopting the STAR Concept**

This paper would be incomplete without looking at how the STAR concept can be implemented. There are several ways in which the STAR model can be adopted in the school. For example, it could be used as a guide to plan the CPD program of teachers. According to Day 1999:7, “**CPD consists of all natural learning experiences and those conscious and planned activities which are intended to be of direct or indirect benefit to the individual group or school and which contribute to the quality of the education in the classroom.** This will consist of reflective activities aimed at improving the quality and standard of teaching and learning and supports individual needs and professional practice. Even though teachers learn naturally from experience over the course of their career, additional opportunities for further development will
go a long way to helping their professional growth. These activities can be focussed on each of the components of the STAR, highlighting on the professional development needs as it relates to the qualities of the STAR teacher. This could also be used as part of the criteria in accessing teacher’s competency or quality.

The STAR model can be grouped into four levels. Level one would be focused on developing the key skills through a range of activities like collaborative workshops, seminars, which enhance the key teaching skills. A teacher will only attain level two having undergone training as a professional and certified teacher. Part of the training will include ICT as this has become necessary to remain relevant in the contemporary society. In level three the teacher will be educated on the developing the right attitude even though a major part of a teacher’s attitude is based on personal interest and commitment. Level four will comprise of developing the reflective practice and research potential of teacher with regards to their profession. At this level the emphasis is on reflective practice and the use of evidence based research to improve upon their practice. Reflective practice is actually required as a researcher in teaching as it requires asking questions such as illustrated in Gibbs model. Teacher researchers should be concerned with ways to improve the practice, change working conditions and understanding their practices within the larger society.

Hence, the teacher will need to possess the key skills, have the appropriate training, right attitudes and be a reflective practitioner and researcher to attain the four levels of the STAR teacher. Some of these qualities are observed and identified during staff appraisals and performance management. However, skills like class management communication skills and attitude can be identified through observation. Training can be monitored if the teacher possesses the relevant training and qualification and is involved in any form of CPD. Criteria like reflective practice and research could be identified through evidence based inquiries which can be explored during appraisals. Depending on the school policy or organisational structure, the STAR concept could serve as a basis for promotion, rewards, pay rise which is a form of motivation for the teachers.

**Conclusion**
The STAR concept is only focused on specific attributes which are priority in determining teacher effectiveness in contemporary society. The teacher’s impact on their profession hinges on their attitudes towards their personal and professional development. Teachers ought to develop their pedagogic skills, update their professional knowledge, teaching and learning styles and communication skills. McDonald (2004). The researcher argues that through effective and relevant CPD, teachers can develop the essential pedagogic skills, continuous professional training, and made more aware of their potentials as researcher in a reflective approach with the right attitude. It is important to note that no simple formula exists for measuring teacher competency, or any new methods guaranteed to improve teacher’s quality of instruction. Different schools tend to adopt different approaches towards improving the quality of their teachers, and ensuring that they are well motivated. The model is being developed and refined and will be used in a research project as a guide for assessing the quality of teachers in Nigeria.

References:


**Glossary**

CPD  Continuing Professional Development
GTC  General Teachers Council
ICT  Information and Communication Technology
PGCE Postgraduate Certificate in Education
NCE  National Certificate in Education
NPE  National Policy on Education
NQT  Newly Qualified Teacher
TDA  Teacher Development Agency
TERN  Teacher Education Research Network
TLRP  Teaching and Learning Research Programme
TRCN  Teachers Registration Council of Nigeria
TTC  Technical Teachers Certificate
QTS  Qualified Teacher Status

*This paper was added to the Education-line collection on 9 September 2009*