

Implementing Critical Friends Groups in Schools

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Abstract : Recently, the poor quality of education, low achieving students, low international exam performances and little or no effect of the education reforms on the teaching in the classrooms are the main problems of education discussed in Turkey. Research showed that the quality of an education system can not exceed the quality of its teachers and teaching. Therefore, in-service training (INSET) courses are important to improve teacher quality, thereby, the quality of education. However, according to the research conducted on the evaluation of the INSET courses in Turkey, they are not effective in improving the quality of teaching in the classroom. The main reason for this result is because INSET courses are conducted and delivered in limited time and presented theoretically, which does not meet the needs of teachers and as a result, the knowledge and skills taught are not used in the classrooms. Recently, developed countries have been using Critical Friends Groups (CFGs) successfully for the purpose of school-based training of teachers. CFGs are the learning groups which contain 6-10 teachers aimed at fostering their capacities to undertake instructional and personal improvement and schoolwide reform. CFGs have been recognized as a critical feature in school reform, improving teaching practice and improving student achievement. In addition, in the USA, teachers have named CFGs one of the most powerful professional development activities in which they have ever participated. Whereas, in Turkey, the concept is new. This study aimed to investigate the implications of application, evaluation, and promotion of CFGs which has the potential to contribute to teacher development and student learning in schools in Turkey. For this purpose, the study employed a qualitative approach and case study methodology to implement the model in high schools. The research was conducted in two schools and 13 teachers working in these schools participated. The study lasted two years and the data were collected through various data collection tools including interviews, meeting transcripts, questionnaires, portfolios, and diaries. The results of the study showed that CFGs contributed professional development of teachers and their students' learning. It also contributed to a culture of collaborative work in schools. A number of barriers and challenges which prevent effective implementation were also determined.

Keywords : critical friends group, education reform, science learning, teacher education

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