

A Study into the Benefits and Limitations of Different Forms of Continuing Professional Development (CPD)

People Involved

Jon Pickering
(j.pickering@ioe.ac.uk)

Key Words

CPD, dialogue, collaboration, engagement, learning, autonomy

Description

This research project is a qualitative investigation into the experiences of a group of ten graduates from the mixed-mode Master of Teaching (MTeach) programme at the Institute of Education, University of London, running from September 2005 – June 2006. There is a longitudinal focus on the subjective and reflexive perceptions of these teachers about their experiences of CPD, with particular reference to their 'normal' diet of school-based and external courses, training and INSET over the course of a school year.

'I have sat through so much bad INSET, that I actually find it difficult to differentiate the merely boring from the utterly intolerable.'

The teachers have also been encouraged to reflect on the features of effective and ineffective CPD by describing particular instances of CPD. The project draws on these experiences in the form of individual commentary and as collaborative online and face-to-face dialogue.

Methods

The study adopts an inductive approach to the interpretation of teachers' experiences of CPD. This is based on a reflective commentary about the teachers' CPD, but it is set also in the context of their school's culture of and support for CPD and the sense of what the teachers feel brings about successful professional learning.

'One bad example of CPD came last term, when a guy came to do a whole school INSET. There were a number of things that made it ineffective: Firstly, he spent a lot of time trying to entertain us with jokes, anecdotes and QuickTime videos of sheep saying their times tables - vital in a long INSET, yes, but not at the expense of learning...'

'In short, the INSET had all the elements of a bad or average lesson – a focus on teaching and 'entertainment' over learning, and a lack of ways to ensure any learning there was had been sufficiently embedded by the learners...'

The study takes the evidence of the 10 participants using essentially a learner-narrative approach, in order to capture and record the complexities of human experiential phenomena. These narratives are captured by:

- 10 semi-structured individual face-to-face interviews at the start of the project (November – December 2005);
- online dialogue about the features of effective and ineffective CPD (January – February 2006);
- online 'stories' about key CPD and professional learning episodes (February – March 2006);
- focus group discussions (April-May 2006);
- 10 semi-structured individual face-to-face interviews at the end of Phase 1 of the project (May – June 2006);

Analysis is conducted through rigorous reading of each learner narrative using open coding to identify themes, ▶

which are cross-referenced to establish the key themes. An independent reader has also interrogated the online dialogue, to provide a more 'distanced' analysis of the interchanges between the teachers. The overall analysis has been positioned also against the impact hierarchy suggested by Guskey (2000).

Outcomes

Overall, a re-conceptualisation of the dominant CPD discourse in England, which focuses almost exclusively on a model of skills, performance management and school improvement.

'Another failing of INSET/CPD is that so much of it is not about learning, which is why we all work in schools in the first place.'

This model feeds a CPD process in which the needs of the mass of teachers, needs determined by the delivery of national curriculum and leadership strategies, are foregrounded and delivered in an unstimulating, top-down, best practice way.

'Good INSET is surely about responding to identifiable teaching and learning needs whereas bad INSET is often parachuted into our diaries without real context.'

The results from the project suggest the need for a greater focus on work-based professional learning,

which engages teachers actively and as partners in what Fielding et al (2005) call 'joint practice development'.

'The part of the day that many people did find useful was a set of 'spotlights' from staff on ways they're using ICT already. So why not spend the INSET teaching each other, rather than sitting in front of an 'expert' all day?'

For the wider educational community the findings will be disseminated by:

- a conference on the role of teachers' CPD;
- a contribution to an edition of *Reflecting Education*;
- a symposium at BERA 2007, when Phase 2 of the project is complete.

'Bad CPD/INSET is similar to a manufactured boy/girl band - it might look nice, be catchy and fashionable but will you remember it by this time next year? Probably not, unless it is really awful. This brings me to INSET I endured on Emotional Intelligence or EI, INSET on ET would have been more useful or relevant. This seemed like a really desperate attempt to repackage and resell something that has been around for years. Most of my senior colleagues merely nodded their heads, recognising that this was merely rebranding, and possibly it would have been better.' ■

