

When it comes to CPD, how can we ensure it makes a difference?



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We know that effective teacher CPD improves teaching and learning and has one of the largest impact on student outcomes (Hargreaves, 1994 and Craft, 2000, Cordingley, P. et al, 2015). This means that getting it right is crucial. Without measuring the positive difference that training provides, is it even worthy of the title of 'development'? As a former school leader and in my work with Veema Education, I firmly believe it's a moral imperative of school leaders and external providers to ensure professional development is having an impact and helping teachers to improve.

With any type of teacher CPD activity (whether this is an INSET day/s, twilight, conference or ongoing programme) if time isn't allocated to consider and plan both in the short- term and long-term, as well as the resources needed to be in place to ensure success, then enthusiasm and dedication from staff for embedding change will be short-lived. That is why I ensure that my visits to schools are not seen as achieving a 'quick-gain' or a time filler at the start or end of year and are more about the work that has taken place prior to a visit and the follow-up in supporting school leaders meet the predetermined professional development and improvement objectives. For me, support is most effective as a continuum.

This is why I am so passionate about the type of CPD we provide and the underlying ethos that what we want from our students we should want for (and be able to provide) for our teachers. If we can foster an environment that enables continuous learning, a growth mindset attitude, metacognitive thinking, challenge and respect in our teachers, our schools will always be outstanding world-class institutions. Unfortunately, there are no shortcuts, but the right CPD and robust evaluation of impact is an essential.

Good teaching is not some form of mystical gift. It takes time, hard work, continuous effort and reflective practice to meet your particular goal/s. I have always believed that every single teacher I work with has the ability to improve and get better and this must be part of the culture we embed across schools. If we do not, the danger is that teachers will not engage for the right reasons. Good teaching is not something that appears - the majority of teachers need time, dedication and the ability to step back and be reflective. We are not finished products and there is always the opportunity to be better.

With this in mind, here are some practical Ideas you can adopt when thinking about CPD in your school. CPD that genuinely nurtures talent rather than tick-box activities that often increases teacher workload and leads to superficial quick-fixes.

Effective continuous professional development for today's schools (CPD)

- CPD should be about embedding impact and not simply about 'information giving'. Remember if there is no or little follow-up or support, teachers will soon lose interest in what you are trying to achieve.
- When considering your CPD model make sure this is informed by valid and reliable research and ensure it is sustained with opportunities for staff collaboration with a range of professionals.
- Taking a bottom-up approach to professional development enables teachers to get involved in planning the professional development offered within their schools. Engage teachers in talking about the professional development opportunities they would like to see on offer, and what will have the most impact on their practice.
- Use video technology to improve the quality of classroom observations. Research shows that video technology is a very powerful CPD and tool for teachers– enabling them to engage in deep reflection, where they critique their own practice and engage in effective (coaching) pedagogic dialogues with colleagues (read ['Best Foot Forward - A toolkit for Fast-Forward Classroom Observations Using Video'](#) by Harvard University)
- Do not see professional development time just about in-service training where school is closed to students. Provide teachers with weekly opportunities to engage in professional development. These learning experiences will be more meaningful if staff are given the chance to feedback and reflect on events they've attended. Make departmental and whole-school meetings real opportunities for teachers to come together to learn, share successes, collaborate and reflect. Using meeting time to work through a tick-list of 'to dos' will not have a meaningful impact on pupils and staff.
- Use 'champions' and more experienced teachers to train novice staff – be sure to equip staff in such posts with the necessary skills, expertise and updated subject pedagogical knowledge.
- When considering a particular CPD activity make sure you've thought about what you are really hoping to achieve and how you intend to measure impact.
- CPD should always be seen as a way of 'improving' our professional portfolios and less about proving our capabilities.
- Keep school improvement plans (SIPs) realistic and achievable. Senior leaders should map out the school's priorities over time, and plan CPD around only this. If your focus for the term is 'curriculum', 'assessment' or 'stretch and challenge' then make sure the professional development activities centre only on this. Trying to do everything at once will lead to superficial gains and teachers will soon feel lost, deflated and not know what to do.
- Give teachers the time, resources they need to implement and embed new knowledge, learning and skills. As my colleague Lisa Ashes points out in her recently published book 'Teacher In The Cupboard Self-Reflective, Solution-Focused Teaching And Learning'- we need to be asking questions that provide solutions to a problem like 'how can we master this problem' 'How would you like to be observed to best develop your teaching?'.
- Ensure that professional development is informed by high-quality educational research. If we want to grow great teachers who become expert classroom practitioners, we must ensure that what they do is also informed by the latest research.
- Bring your staffrooms, libraries and offices to life by having display boards or areas dedicated to professional development. Staff should have access to books, blogs, subject resources and literature. Build a team of research champions whose responsibility it is to share snippets of useful subject-specific information across the school. These are all ways to boost morale, build supportive professional networks and enable collaborative relationships amongst staff where novice teachers can work alongside more experienced teachers.
- Create a whole-school climate of reflective practice that supports teacher review and thinking about mastering a particular skill. Setting up a team of pedagogical or T & L coaches can really help support teachers meet their goals.
- Move away from mock Inspection lesson observations. These give little meaningful feedback and are often judgemental. Enable staff to learn from one another by introducing initiatives where subject areas open up their classroom for a week and show their colleagues their best teaching in a non-judgemental way.

- Introduce robust CPD evaluation. Knowing what works and what doesn't is vital for ensuring our teachers have access to the right tools and latest thinking (Earley et al 2013). I highly recommend reading Thomas Guskey 'Evaluating Professional Development' (see book reference below) and my previous article '[What we know about evaluating the impact of continuous professional development \(CPD\)](#)' has inspired to think about better ways to capture the impact of teacher professional development.

Whether you are a school leader, teacher or CPD provider we all have a responsibility to ensure professional development is ongoing, focused on improving pupil learning, builds and enhances teachers' knowledge and expertise, is evidence-informed, and includes reflection and evaluation of what's working. If we manage to achieve

this, this will ensure that our teachers receive the very best support that will help them become truly great practitioners year-on-year.

Kind regards,

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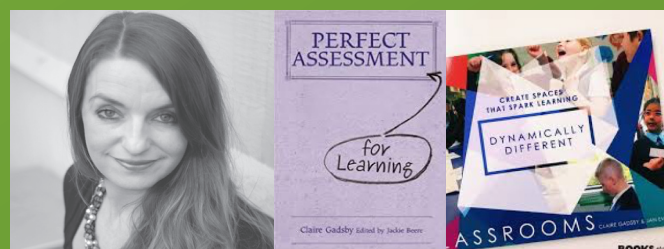
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