

PRIMARY TEACHING

EDITED BY

CATHERINE CARDEN

LEARNING
& TEACHING
IN PRIMARY
SCHOOLS
TODAY

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CONTINUING PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT: WHAT DOES IT REALLY MEAN, AND HOW CAN TEACHERS BEST ENGAGE WITH IT?

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- CPD – WHAT IS IT ALL ABOUT?
- THE IMPACT OF CPD ON TEACHERS
- HOW TEACHERS LEARN

- WHAT THE RESEARCH SAYS ABOUT REFLECTION
- LEARNING FROM CRITICAL INCIDENTS

KEY WORDS

- Continuing
- Professional
- Development
- Career
- Critical
- Incident
- Impact
- Learning
- Research
- Reflection
- Opportunity
- Journey
- Skills
- Knowledge
- Standards

INTRODUCTION

The sense of achievement on qualifying as a teacher is well earned, but may be short-lived. I remember well, and have often seen, the challenges faced by NQTs, as they begin to develop their own professional identity and skill. It becomes evident to most teachers early on in their new career that there is still much to learn. Indeed, to embark on a career in teaching is to also embark on a journey of life-long learning. Throughout this learning journey, teachers' needs change as their practical knowledge grows and develops. The first year in practice brings with it many challenges as well as opportunities. Many of the challenges are recognised in the support mechanisms provided for new teachers. Strategies such as mentoring, peer-support and in-service professional development are of particular importance during this early career stage.

This chapter explores the professional needs of teachers as they embark on this journey of life-long learning. It will outline some of the opportunities that teachers can both take, and make, in their professional learning journey. As authors of this chapter, we bring a unique and authentic dynamic to it. One author is an experienced teacher, researcher and lecturer in Higher Education, having spent 40 years working as a teacher, the past 18 of which were on teacher professional learning programmes. The other author is an NQT who, at the time of writing, is just over halfway through his induction year. Together, we bring differing perspectives on professional learning in theory and practice, and authentic voices from our experiences.

We start by exploring the nature and purposes of Continuing Professional Development (CPD), exploring its relevance to beginning teachers and those with more experience. This brings us to a consideration of both the intended and unintended ways in which CPD impacts on teachers. Finally, we look at tools that teachers can employ in their everyday practice, to bring systematicity and rigour to their reflections, turning them into rich and deep learning experiences with the opportunity to transform practice.

CPD: WHAT IS IT ALL ABOUT?

There is an expectation that, after qualifying, teachers will continue to update and upgrade their professional skills and knowledge throughout their career. This CPD takes place in many ways and serves a variety of purposes. In some cases, it happens through formally organised activities and courses, which, for a beginning teacher, may be compulsory as part of their induction. There is an explicit recognition that beginning teachers should have access to high-quality professional development opportunities. During the initial phase of a teacher's career in the United Kingdom, there is an entitlement to an Induction Programme, which supports the new teacher in achieving full Qualified Teacher status. For many newly qualified teachers, this may happen through their engagement with the various CPD/INSET activities that are scheduled within their school and/or local area. It is often the case that the completion of these activities serves as part of the induction assessment; identifying and measuring their progress against Teachers' Standards (DfE, 2013; GTC, 2012; GTCNI, 2007). Successful completion of the induction year (including participation in relevant CPD events) leads to full recognition as a qualified teacher.

More experienced teachers also undertake CPD as part of their continued professional updating. Changes in the curriculum, for example, mean that teachers may require either updated content knowledge, or pedagogical skills, or both. The move towards Mastery Teaching in Mathematics in England is one such example,

where there is a large-scale offer of professional development activities to address subject knowledge and pedagogy 'gaps' in practising teachers. Other systemic change, such as different record-keeping requirements, new assessment practices, child welfare and safeguarding, for example, may all be the focus of INSET activities for teachers. Also, as teachers progress in their career, it is often the case that they take on middle and senior leadership roles, requiring a whole new set of skills and knowledge. Again, this is often gained through planned and formal CPD activities.

The case of the beginning teacher is a good example of the ways in which formal CPD serves a range of core purposes such as the following:

- Complementing and building on Initial Teacher Education, through additional training in skills such as Behaviour Management, Lesson Planning, Pedagogy and Assessment (some of which will be subject specific), Support and Challenge for Learners, Inclusion, and so forth. These are normally provided through one-day training sessions provided in local networks.
- Providing evidence for an Induction portfolio, which forms part of the assessment of progress towards relevant standards or competencies. This is the evidence a teacher uses in order to satisfactorily complete the statutory induction period.

However, as any teacher will attest to, much CPD happens in unplanned and informal ways. Some of this is demonstrated in the Learning Conversation below:

LEARNING CONVERSATION 1

Mary: It's interesting to hear you talk about your early days in teaching, and the way in which you began to develop your practice as an independent teacher, with full responsibility for your class.

Conor: One of the main things I had to develop early on was how to keep the day running in a fluid way. Transitions between lessons were an important area to work on, but this seems to be gained from experience and by the discipline needed to decide that a lesson needs to be continued later rather than have it overrun.

Mary: So trial and error, and a conscious disciplined approach to your practice?

Conor: That's right. And of course, the very simple step of effective timetabling helped enormously.

Mary: I guess that felt very different when you had your own class?

Conor: Yes – and also to add to this, the experience you have going into your first teaching job is very limited. You find you are almost constantly in new territory with your teaching – you are teaching the vast majority of curricular areas for the very first time. So, on top of basic scheduling, there's a lot of curriculum to learn.

Mary: I guess that's particularly true in a primary setting where you have to cover all subject areas, and may have a year group different to the ones you experienced while training. It must have been a real challenge to get to grips with it all.

Conor: Well, I was very lucky. I had a senior member of staff who was generous with her time and support. I also talked a lot to other, more experienced staff, asking about what was expected, how best to approach new topics, for example, or when to move to something new. What really helped me here was that I felt trusted and the atmosphere was supportive. I also attended some courses, which helped, though some were less help than I'd hoped they would be. In some cases, the link with the curriculum wasn't made clear, or delivery was not very engaging, which was disappointing. That said, I did find that often there can be unintended learning from all courses. It is only later that some of the learning becomes obvious, that you can make an explicit connection with your teaching.

Mary: Ah yes – a supportive atmosphere and trust must be great at this stage in your career.

Conor: What was really important to me was that my mentor also recognised my strengths, and helped me build on them, while at the same time helping me identify where and how I needed to improve. I knew I could talk about my development needs without feeling judged. For example, I was recommended a really good book on behaviour management that helped me enormously with this aspect of my work.

CRITICAL QUESTION

Do NQTs benefit more from formal or informal CPD opportunities?

While it is beyond the scope of this chapter to discuss all the ways in which teachers learn about and improve their practice, it quickly becomes evident that the list is large and varied.

INFO 34.1

INSET courses

- focused staff meetings
- Reflective diary/critical reflection
- Teacher (action) research
- Collaboration with colleagues
- Lesson study
- Coaching/mentoring
- Further study (e.g. MA)
- Leadership training
- Self-directed, such as reading, sourcing videos, etc.

THE IMPACT OF CPD ON TEACHERS

Reviewing Conor's conversation, we see evidence of his attendance at formal CPD events, his deliberate engagement with informal support and, also, the unintended learning that occurred after he had taken part in a formal, planned CPD event. You may also have now realised that CPD takes place in many ways and, therefore, its impact is often hard to predict. This illustrates the complexity of the ways in which professionals learn about practice, and the learning journeys they undertake, particularly during the induction year. It also raises questions about the nature of professional development and learning, the role of the individual within that, and the role of the school context. Much of the early learning may be at an operational level; what to do and when to do it are key drivers in getting through the school day for an early career teacher. In primary schools, where teachers tend to have a little more flexibility in scheduling of the school day, ineffective timetabling can have serious ramifications for pupils and teachers alike. It is clear also that much of the early learning in practice that occurs for beginning teachers, complements, supplements and extends the knowledge gained during the training period. The importance of an encouraging learning environment, where strengths are amplified and learning needs effectively, but supportively addressed, would seem to be significant here in supporting the early stages of a teacher's career. In this way, both formal and informal CPD can support the development of subject and pedagogical skills, and the building of general classroom craft.

WHAT DOES THE RESEARCH SAY?

There is a range of research in relation to the 'effectiveness' of teacher CPD. We will explore two examples below, one that reflects the impact of subject-specific CPD, and the other that explores the 'pedagogical' structures of CPD.

First of all, there is evidence that well-targeted CPD, and in particular, that directed towards subject knowledge is particularly valued by teachers, and may aid teacher retention.

A study conducted for the Wellcome Trust in 2017 suggests that 'science teachers who participate in CPD courses through STEM Learning (www.stem.org.uk/) are much more likely to remain in teaching'.

At a time when there is a retention crisis in teaching, this is important. Daniel Muijs, head of research at OfSTED, suggests that this is true for subject-specific CPD in general, not just STEM subjects. Speaking at a recent DfE conference in London, he added, 'We know from research that professional development that is subject-embedded is more effective than generic CPD' (Ward, 2018). It is also the case that high-quality, subject-specific CPD has the potential to 'lead to more engaging and effective teaching' for young people (Wellcome Trust, 2017: 5).

KEY READING

You can read the report from the Wellcome Trust here: *Improving Science Teacher Retention: Do National STEM Learning Network professional development courses keep science teachers in the classroom?* Dr Rebecca Allen and Sam Sims. Education Datalab, 2017. Available at:

wellcome.ac.uk/sites/default/files/science-teacher-retention.pdf

In relation to the ‘pedagogical’ structures of CPD, the work of Aileen Kennedy (2005) is significant in this respect. She suggests a nine-part typology of professional development activity, which belongs to three categories, as follows:

Model of CPD	Purpose of model
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • training model • award-bearing model • deficit model • cascade model 	Transmission
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • standards-based model • coaching/mentoring model • community of practice model 	Transitional
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • action research model • transformative model 	Transformative

Increasing capacity for professional autonomy

Source: Kennedy, 2005: 248

‘Transformative’ aligns with the capacity for professional autonomy and changed practice. Of particular significance here is her definition of professional autonomy, suggesting that the activity requires ‘teachers to be able to articulate their own conceptions of teaching and be able to select and justify appropriate modes of practice’ (p. 236). She uses the term ‘transformative’ as an overview one, recognising that transformative activities have a range of features, but will normally have an enquiry focus, an awareness of issues of power, and a consciously proactive approach.

Other analyses of the ‘effectiveness’ of CPD have similar findings.



KEY READING

You can read a literature review in relation to mathematics CPD here:

www.ncetm.org.uk/files/387553/RECME_Literature_Review.pdf



CRITICAL QUESTION

Is ‘transformative’ CPD the best kind?

HOW TEACHERS LEARN

The ways in which people learn are complex and often unpredictable. Teachers soon learn that careful planning of learning outcomes and associated learning activities is no guarantee that each pupil will actually learn what has been planned. For some children, the learning may not happen at the time, but may happen later. For others, the learning activities may not have been engaging, while for yet others, factors external to the classroom, such as socio-economic status' (OECD, 2017), may have impacted on their ability to engage and learn. Kennedy's models of professional development suggest not only a change in the professional autonomy, but a change in the nature of what is learned or gained through the experience. As teachers, we often describe the learning that is 'reproductive' (for example, the mindless repetition of times tables or the learning of lists for examination purposes) as surface learning. This type of learning is often done in short bursts, in a fragmented, instrumental way, to be retrieved only for the purposes of assessment tasks. It is depersonalised, in that it rarely leads to deep and personal reflection, which makes connection to other aspects of knowledge. On the other hand, however, 'deep' learning is characterised by a more holistic, intellectualising approach to learning, where learners reflect on what they are learning, its relationship to other knowledge, and begin to construct their own knowledge maps and structures. This type of learning is more likely to lead to changes or transformations in behaviour.

It is tempting to suggest that activities that are classified as 'transmission' (Kennedy, 2005) are, therefore, unlikely to cause real transformation in teacher behaviour. However, it is also clear that some of the impact of planned training courses may differ from what was intended, or may happen much later. If we revisit the Learning Conversation at the start of this chapter, we see this indicated when Conor says: 'I did find that often there can be unintended learning from all courses. It is only later that some of the learning becomes obvious, that you can make an explicit connection with your teaching.' As a highly reflective teacher, Conor is keen to improve his practice, and uses a structured reflection process to help him to distil deep learning from his experiences both in and outside of his classroom. Learning Conversation 2 builds on a conversation we had in relation to Conor's concerns that it is 'hard to assess what makes writing good'. Because he feels that there is not enough support for this important curriculum aspect, he has made it his particular development 'project'.

LEARNING CONVERSATION 2

Mary: Tell me more about this project. How are you undertaking it? Is it a formal thing?

Conor: I guess project makes it sound more formal than it is. However, I am being systematic and thorough about it. I have discussed this with my mentor and requested observations of other teachers' writing lessons. I have also identified general areas of development in writing with the class, for example, types of sentence openers. We practise using these for short periods in class several times a week and demonstrate good practice on the board. Pupils are invited to critique and improve sentence construction and it becomes a collaborative process. The area we practise is then part of the success criteria for the next formal writing exercise. Each pupil has been asked to identify a target in their writing – an area they need to develop. I try to ensure my feedback is very specific. What has the pupil done well and what is their next step? I feel that improving small aspects of a pupil's writing will give big results in terms of quality.

This conversation is a practical example of structured teacher professional reflection – a well-recognised tool for deep and critical professional learning. Conor has developed his own systematic approach to this (and the fact that it is rigorous and systematic is key to its potential for transformation) critical reflection on practice. The agentic teacher who takes responsibility for his or her own professional learning not only actively seeks out opportunities for learning, but also is sensitive to the learning potential of their own day-to-day practice. Adopting a systematic and critically reflective approach to practice is something that is available to every teacher without having to undertake a course or leave the classroom. As context-based learning, its relevance to practice is both powerful and immediate. It is an ongoing and transformative model of CPD, built right into practice. McAteer (2013) supports the concept of a ‘more critically reflective practice, which challenges the teacher to move beyond the “normal” evaluation of practice to a more problematising approach; one which raises questions, and seeks alternative perspectives’ (2013: 25). Tripp’s (1993) framework helps teachers make the move from ‘normal’ evaluation to a more critical perspective.

A range of strategies is available to help teachers make this learning more meaningful.

WHAT DOES THE RESEARCH SAY ABOUT REFLECTION?

In this section, we’ll summarise some research around two key resources for reflection – the Reflective Diary and the Critical Incident Technique.

THE REFLECTIVE DIARY

Reflection on practice is widely recognised as one of the core ways in which teachers learn about and improve their practice. McAteer and Dewhurst (2010: 34) describe it as ‘enabling professionals to understand their practice better, and use that enhanced understanding in order to effect changes in practice’. Mason (2002) suggests that sensitivity to aspects of practice help a teacher ‘make informed choices as to how to act in the moment, how to respond to situations as they arise’. He adds that regularly writing a diary improves this sensitivity.

Bolton (2005: 166) asserts that writing a learning journal or diary is to ‘take responsibility for discovering personal learning needs’ and ‘question, explore, analyse personal experience’. Moon (2006) suggests that they promote metacognition and enable writers to learn about their own learning. Their potential can be greatly enhanced by adopting a recognised structure for writing. Ghaye and Ghaye (1998), for example, propose a simple, five-part typology, suggesting that reflective writing should be:

1. descriptive, in that it is personal and retrospective;
2. perceptive, in that it has an emotional aspect;
3. receptive, in that it relates personal views to those of others;
4. interactive, in that it links learning to future action;
5. critical, in that it places the individual teacher within a broader ‘system’.

CRITICAL INCIDENT TECHNIQUE

Tripp (1993) discusses *critical incidents*, which he describes as things that mark ‘significant turning points or changes in a person’ (1993: 8). While teachers may not use this language, they will generally be familiar with the concept, having experienced issues in practice that have had a major impact on the way in which they understand their practice and plan future practice.

What, then, makes an incident ‘critical’? While a number of writers have addressed this, they mainly draw on the early work of Tripp (1993) and Woods (1993) who both emphasise the extent to which their identification is based on the judgement of the researcher after the incident has occurred. In my experience, researchers have found this a very helpful construct in the analytic re-reading of reflective diaries. The identification of critical incidents in their practice, or in their thinking, can be powerful stimulus for further research or action.

Tripp (1993: 8) suggests that critical incidents are not

things which exist independently of an observer ... awaiting discovery like gold nuggets or desert islands, but ... are produced by the way we look at a situation: a critical incident is an interpretation of the significance of an event.

Thus, critical incidents are not characterised as being ‘critical’ due to any drama or sensationalism attached to them. Rather, their criticality is based on the justification, significance or meaning given to them by participants (Angelides, 2001).

CRITICAL QUESTION

How do critical incidents impact on teachers’ learning and professional practice?

LEARNING FROM CRITICAL INCIDENTS

To help you to learn (and learn how to learn) from critical incidents, it is useful to explore your thinking around this a bit more. The following section will help you to do this, and provides a useful structure to apply to all critical incidents for learning.

BEGIN BY UNDERSTANDING THE SIGNIFICANCE, AND INDEED THE CONTEXT OF YOUR CHOICE OF INCIDENT

You may need to include some reference to educational policy here, for example, or some school-/workplace-based policy. Remember, the description here is the vehicle for your reflections (which are the most important part in terms of assessment).

WHAT HAPPENED? WHEN? WHERE?

Give a brief history of the case. Remember to note the timing, the learning environment and the context.

WHAT WERE YOUR IMMEDIATE THOUGHTS?

You can include here both the cognitive and affective responses you may have had. What did you THINK? What did you FEEL? Why are your feelings important here?

WHAT ARE YOUR THOUGHTS NOW? WHAT IS THE ROLE OF EDUCATIONAL THEORY IN DEVELOPING YOUR CRITICAL THINKING?

This should be a more considered and more 'intellectualised/theorised' response. Now that you have stood back from this a little, how have you now come to understand it? How (if at all) did your emotional response affect your judgement? Have you read any theoretical perspectives that help you understand it? What theoretical perspectives seem relevant (or indeed NOT) to your understanding? In what way have they informed your understanding?

(How) does your new understanding now impact on the way you FEEL about it?

WHAT HAS BEEN ACHIEVED/LEARNED FROM THIS CASE?

Can you articulate your professional learning now as a form of summary? Relate this back to the theoretical perspectives explored in the previous section.

PLANS FOR FUTURE PRACTICE

What might you do as a result of what you have learned? What have you learned about yourself as a professional learner, and how might this inform other aspects of your professional development?

How will your learning from this affect future decisions of this sort? How will it impact on other decisions?

CHAPTER SUMMARY

Throughout the chapter, we have drawn on a range of theoretical and practical insights into how teachers learn about and improve their practice through formal and informal CPD. Our shared experiences and insights have, in part, formed a roadmap for this journey. Throughout, however, we have sought to bring insights from research and scholarship into our conversations, exploring the concept of CPD and the impact of it on teachers, and explored the ways in which teachers experience deep learning in and about their practice.

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