

Can CPD in Tertiary Education Stand Up and be Counted?

Sabina Pillai

ABSTRACT

Almost every profession prides itself on incorporating CPD initiatives for growth in individuals' careers. Professionals also pursue higher knowledge and new techniques in their domains in order to improve on their quality of service. However, in the field of English teaching in tertiary education, most CPD courses seem to be a formality, indicative of an eco-system that is not professionally demanding. Teaching does not seem to incorporate the important aspect of making students employable. The writing on the wall is clear—to be treated with respect like other professionals, we need to deliver effectively on our remit. This paper stems from a research project on CPD in India that I conducted as a member of the British Council English Think Tank in 2011-2012. The objective of the project was to understand the status of CPD amongst tertiary level teachers of English. Through this paper, I will attempt to investigate their perception and practice of CPD, besides making some suggestions towards its implementation.

Key Words: CPD in Tertiary Education, Personal Development Plan, Teacher Narratives, Reflective Practice

INTRODUCTION

In this paper, I will attempt to understand CPD in the context of English language teaching in tertiary education in India. My paper is based on qualitative data collected in early to mid-2012. CPD, in this case, is assumed to be an entirely self-initiated and on-going activity undertaken by college and university teachers. It is based on informal self-development processes such as reflective practice and the agency of the individual teacher, and excludes participation in formal, mandated courses or activities. For the purposes of my research, I focused on the

sensibilities of a small cross-section of tertiary level teachers. I asked them what they thought about CPD, and whether they had considered using tools such as a Personal Development Plan (PDP) to further their CPD. A PDP may be defined as a portfolio, which could be online or offline that helps a teacher to initiate or sustain CPD by recording and reflecting on his/her performance, learning and achievements. It could also serve as a planner for his/her future professional development. The following triangulation method was used to increase the reliability of the findings:

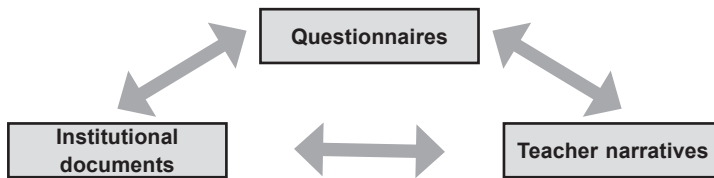


Figure 1: Triangulation of Data Collected

To collect data for the research, fifty teachers across the country, from both government-aided and privately-funded institutions were approached with a Summary of Intent. Out of fifty, thirty-two teachers agreed to participate, and asked for the questionnaire to be sent to them. However, only fifteen teachers returned completed questionnaires from the states of Kashmir, Punjab, Uttar Pradesh, Delhi, Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh, Haryana, Tamil Nadu and Karnataka, establishing a response rate of approximately thirty percent.

In the second method of recording evidence, informal narratives were gathered from five teachers in Delhi who are personally known to me, which increased the total responses to twenty, thereby raising the overall response rate to forty percent. The Summary of Intent was not shared with these teachers. Lastly, relevant institutional documents from two leading universities—Delhi University and Mumbai University—were examined to locate CPD and PDP in their official statements. The respondents included senior professors, one retired professor, associate professors and young assistant professors.

There were two underlying factors that determined the quality of responses. Firstly, the ethical position of complete transparency about purpose was maintained by invoking the goodwill and cooperation of the respondents. This worked both ways as the transparency about the purpose generated confidence and goodwill among the participants. Secondly, the challenge of remaining objective as an outsider while researching a cohort of which one is also a member, was also kept in mind. The comments and responses gathered from the teachers have been presented under the sub-heading “Results”.

BACKGROUND

According to Blackwell and Blackmore (2003), most higher education systems “have very low entry requirements for teaching expertise” (p. 25). Also, teachers continue to prefer teacher-centric classes based on what Lortie (1975, p. 61) calls, the 13000 hours of “apprenticeship of observation” of their own days as students observing their teachers. Given that “staff expertise is the most important asset in a university; without it literally nothing can be achieved” (Blackwell and Blackmore, 2003, p. 23), the rationale behind my research was to gauge how teachers were dealing with the twin challenges of assimilating new knowledge and technology in their practice and facilitating optimal learning in students for their gainful employment. Further, it has been argued that “faculty, as scholars, are also learners ... While well prepared lectures surely have a place, teaching, at its best, means not only transmitting knowledge, but transforming and extending it as well. Through reading, through classroom discussion, and surely through comments and questions posed by students, professors themselves will be pushed in creative new directions.” (Boyer, 1990,p. 24)

It is clear that for teachers, the need for scholarship of teaching and learning has become as important as domain expertise. The importance of such “quality teaching” and the need to “enhance” it (Henard & Leprince-Ringuet, 2008, p. 3) can evolve only when teachers are made aware of the importance of CPD and they accept it as part of their profession. In my research, I validated the contention that CPD is an ill-defined term, especially in the field of tertiary education. This is unlike its wider acceptance in professions such as engineering, medicine and law (Glazer, 1974). I also observed that school education frameworks cater for formal teacher training, even though such one-off training sessions are known to deal largely with matters of curricula and school policies, and rarely focus on reflective practice. In fact, school teachers equate CPD to formal pre-service training, random courses or conferences and mandated in-service training.

The status of CPD in tertiary education appears to be even more flimsy. This is ironic because these teachers, being the arbiters of knowledge for every other profession, are found wanting in this critical area of professional advancement. They seem to be less aware of the power of CPD in their praxis. Some of the respondents scoffed at the idea of CPD and considered it inconsequential to their work which exalts research and publication. They also talked about attending indifferently conducted Orientation and Refresher courses as a testimony to having done some CPD and argued how little they had gained from it.

Clearly, CPD as a term is undergoing a crisis of identity. Almost two decades ago,

Day (1999, p. 4) defined it in the following manner:

Professional development 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, which contribute, through these, to the quality of education in the classroom. It is the process by which, alone and with others, teachers review, renew and extend their commitment as change agents to the moral purpose of teaching; and by which they acquire and develop critically the knowledge, skills and emotional intelligence essential to good professional thinking, planning and practice with children, young people and colleagues throughout each phase of their teaching lives.

His definition remains as valid today.

RESULTS

CPD and PDP Dimensions

The questionnaire with twenty-five questions was sent to the respondents along with a Summary of Intent to help demystify terms such as CPD and PDP. The first set of questions was designed to probe their vision and mission regarding their practice. As Chen (2008) posits, these kinds of questions help the respondents describe their feelings, attitudes or preferences regarding their work, well-being and satisfaction with life. Here are some responses, quoted verbatim:

“No vision as such. But sure, I want our students (most of whom belong to rural areas) to be communicatively competent to get success in today’s global world. I try my best to let my students ‘speak’ in the class. Have seen the difference in the confidence level of the students.”

—Respondent No. 14, female, Associate Professor, Government College, over 24 years of service.

“Yes, like all thinking people in this world, I too have a mission for my life. My aim is to achieve the [*sic*] sense of harmony in human relationships through [*sic*] improving our ways of teaching and learning and I think I have been counseling my students accordingly, apart from their academic syllabus.”

—Respondent No. 11, female, Associate Professor, Government College, over 18 years of service

“My mission has been by and large accomplished. I hope that I am a good teacher, good father and good husband.”

—Respondent No. 6, male, Professor, Government University, over 30 years of service

When asked about their job satisfaction, it was found that most respondents had merged their personal and professional identities, thus displaying “emotional attachment to and engagement in their work” that Hargreaves (as cited in Day and Sachs 2004, p. 34) posits. Research tells us that this attachment is vital for good performance and productivity. According to Price (2001), it underlines the affective orientation that employees have towards their work. Here are some representative answers that bear testimony to this attachment:

“Personal satisfaction means contented, peaceful and serene life with family. It also means delivering a thorough and substantial lecture when I am in the classroom. It makes my day.”

—Respondent No.10, female, Assistant Professor, Private University, over 6 years of service

“Thorough preparation for the classes; manifestation of excitement among students in different forms; giving much more than is expected; professional position and responsibility; self-esteem; sense of autonomy.”

—Respondent No.12, female, Associate Professor, over 16 years of service

“The sense that I have served society faithfully and well. Monetarily little [*sic*], but the rich friendships I have with my students is proof enough. My Facebook page is like an alumni association and I continue to read and discuss ideas with my students, who are studying abroad or working.”

—Respondent No.13, female, Professor, retired, now consulting, Private University, over 37 years of service

“Yes, teaching was my first and last choice for [*sic*] career, as my father was a teacher of English and I desired to become just like him.”

—Respondent No.11, female, Associate Professor, Government College, over 18 years of service

“Yes, because it gives me the opportunity to continuously update my knowledge of the subject and explore new arenas. It also gives me the opportunity to balance work and life.”

—Respondent No.2, male, Assistant Professor, Private College, over 4 years of service

“My career is both profession and vocation for me[*sic*]. I am passionate about my subject, Linguistics and ELT, and am contented while teaching postgraduates, guiding doctoral research and training teachers.”

—Respondent No.3, female, Professor, Government college, over 24 years of service

Some of the factors that made the respondents aware about the quality of their teaching included:

“When I am able to inspire and excite the curiosity of my students so that not only does the class become enjoyable but the depth of understanding is also enhanced.”

—Respondent No.7, female, Associate Professor, Government College, over 30 years of service

“I take tremendous satisfaction in two things: getting students from a vernacular background to be successful in their communicative use of the English language, and helping students from English medium backgrounds to improve upon their writing skills.”

—Respondent No.5, female, Associate Professor, now freelancing ELT consultant, over 18 years of service

The third set of questions dealt specifically with CPD, the proverbial fourth leg of the well-known three-legged stool of academic life—teaching, research and service, as Altany (2012) states. The responses of the respondents indicated that they were intuitively drawn towards CPD, even though they did not really think about it much. Some of their responses are as follows:

“I believe in continuous learning. Everyone concerned with my life and profession should know about it.”

—Respondent No.4, female, Assistant Professor, Private University, over 12 years of service

“Teaching as an adjunct has helped me clarify and improve my methods of teaching to a large extent. I have definitely grown as a professional during the past three-odd years.☺”

—Respondent No.1, female, Assistant Professor, Government College, over 3 years of service

“Yes, a lot. Through the courses that I have studied, and my experiences as a teacher and a teacher educator.”

—Respondent No.9, female, Assistant Professor, Government University, over 30 years of service

“Yes, there has been a great development since I joined this profession. I have grown in my teaching, research and administrative capabilities, which are being appreciated by all.”

—Respondent No.6, male, Professor, Government University, over 30 years of service

However, there was a general reluctance to doing a SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats) analysis. One voice of dissonance with regard to the question of goal-setting for the future stated:

“To be brutally honest it just happened (without any goal setting).”

—Respondent No.15, female, Assistant Professor, Government College, over 2 years of service

The answers to questions on lifelong learning indicated that the respondents were in favour of it:

“I always keep my mind open. Therefore, I am ready to acquire any skill. I have a fair knowledge of the subject but I want to have more. I want to know, learn new things in teaching/learning.”

—Respondent No.6, male, Professor, Government University, over 30 years of service

“Yes—Leadership, motivating, decision-making, pedagogy, technology especially internet usage.”

—Respondent No.4, female, Assistant Professor, Private University, over 12 years of service

“Yes. Learning never ends as long as one lives [*sic*].”

—Respondent No.15, female, Assistant Professor, Government College, over 2 years of service

“Definitely. (i) Knowledge in any field keeps growing so staying updated on subject knowledge is necessary; (ii) Teaching is a skill which improves with time, so pedagogically one has to keep improving; (iii) Need to update myself more on technology. Use of technology for language teaching.”

—Respondent No.9, female, Assistant Professor, Government University, over 30 years of service

The last three questions in the questionnaire dealt explicitly with Personal Development Plans (PDPs). Responses ranged from gratitude about learning about such a tool for development, to alacrity in supporting it. The first question had as many as eleven respondents affirming the value they could see in a PDP; three were skeptical of PDP as a tool; and one was dismissive of it:

“I cannot comment upon this right now. I have no idea whether this will work for me or not.”

—Respondent No.10, female, Assistant Professor, Private University, over 6 years of service

“It might, if I had CPD in mind, which I don’t.”

—Respondent No.5, female, Associate Professor, formerly permanent, now freelancing ELT consultant, over 18 years of service

“I do not think maintaining a bundle of papers will anyway[sic] help me. That will only be an exhibitionist collection which I cannot use but to[sic] show others. I do not believe in showing what I do till I am satisfied with my work. People automatically know one’s value through his or her work rather than through the papers you maintain.”

—Respondent No.11, female, Associate Professor, Government College, over 18 years of service

Teacher Narratives

The informal interviews with the five fellow teachers, who were not given the Summary of Intent revealed:

- lack of clarity around CPD; no engagement with the “accelerating pace of economic, social and technological change” as observed by Woodward (cited in Crawford, 2009, p. 11); challenges of shifting demographics and an increased demand for accountability (Goertz & Duffy, 2001)
- lack of institutional support or encouragement
- no understanding of peer support and mentoring

Four out of the five teachers interviewed had never considered that CPD was integral to their professional growth. As respondent 16, with 30 years of experience said, she was content to bank on her “rich experience of teaching degree classes”, and did not wish to focus on any kind of professional development. Respondent 17 was dismissive of formative assessments, and convinced that the poor

performance of her students in the summative exams was because of the “riff-raff students” that were being allowed into the system. Respondent 18 revealed that because of her two young children, she did not have any time for “extra” work. Respondent 19, who was physically challenged, was too preoccupied with finding a tenured position to consider CPD. Respondent 20, who was from a newly established private university, was interested and proactive in finding out more about CPD.

INSTITUTIONAL DOCUMENTS

The websites of the two leading universities in the country, Delhi and Mumbai, revealed a complete lack of focus with regard to CPD initiatives. This was despite the fact that the University Grants Commission (UGC) had established 48 Academic Staff Colleges (ASC) in 1987 to provide adequate opportunities for professional development by “an inbuilt mechanism to provide opportunities for teachers within the framework of the knowledge society”.

Delhi University also has the Institute of Life Long Learning (ILL) with a Centre for Professional Development in Higher Education (CPDHE). The aim of this Centre is to provide “strategies for professional development of teachers and prepare modules of training and organize programmes for various groups of teachers as per their requirements and levels of development” (<http://cpdhe.du.ac.in/home.php>). Mumbai University established its Academic Staff College (ASC) in 1987, with the lofty vision “to transform the teachers into inspirational role models for the young and impressionable students, who in turn will create a just and equitable society that will be progressive and secular”, and a mission to “strive continuously to achieve academic excellence through its programmes—equip the teachers with the necessary skills to meet the ever mounting challenges of higher education and inculcate in them the pride of belonging to this noble profession and become role models for generations to come.” (<http://hrdc.mu.ac.in/>). However, according to Yadav (2011), ASCs and University departments organize the orientation and refresher courses in an ad hoc manner for promotional purposes, and not on the basis of the needs and requirements of the teachers.

CONCLUSIONS

The conclusions one can draw from this triangulated baseline inquiry into the status of CPD amongst English teachers in tertiary education can be summarized thus:

- there was a lack of understanding with regard to CPD as a tool for self-development;

- the resistance to SWOT analysis was indicative of the need to build awareness about self-reflective practices and their importance;
- participating in the research cleared ambiguity around CPD for the respondents;
- the implications of CPD in the context of increasing professional accountability was clarified;
- the majority of the 15 respondents responded positively towards CPD and showed a keenness towards charting individual CPD roadmaps with the help of strategies such as PDP;
- respondents seemed to be open to the idea of subscribing to new concepts such as PDPs and e-portfolios;
- the teachers who did not respond to the questionnaire (70 percent of the 50 teachers approached) revealed considerable apathy towards CPD;
- teachers' lack of awareness with regard to reflective practice is detrimental to higher education, especially in an era of growing accountability;
- these results could help institutions and policy makers to incorporate and embed CPD in tertiary education so that it is not considered as "extra work" by teachers;
- all of the above signal an urgent need for more detailed research in this area.

The findings reported in this paper could contribute to reducing the paucity of research in this area. It is argued that the ontological and epistemological basis of the conclusions of this research has to be viewed as subscribing to the humanistic sciences model of interpretivism/constructivism, which is internalized knowledge based on personal experience and insight (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, as cited in Dieronitou, 2014, p. 5). It cannot be seen through the lens of knowledge that subscribes to "positivism" that emerges out of an "objective epistemology and realist ontology". To get a holistic understanding of its significance, Usher (1996, p. 18) explains that in social research of this type, "knowledge is concerned not with generalization, prediction and control but with interpretation, meaning and illumination."

In conclusion, henceforward CPD has to be understood as an organically developed and sustained activity with the practitioner's agency at the forefront, with or without official support. For the teacher, this involves strategies such as those of Schön (1983), which involve the concepts of "reflection-in-action" and "reflection-on-action" that will result in more purposeful practice. As Megginson

and Whitaker (2007, p. 3) assert, it would be, “different” from “other types of training and development” as it would “not be a panacea ... but looked at in relation to the rest of the individual’s life, the organizational context and the wider work environment”.

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Sabina Pillai is Associate Professor at Shahid Bhagat Singh College (Evening), University of Delhi. She is a published author with Oxford University Press and Cambridge University Press.

sabinapillai2000@yahoo.com