
The Dimensions of Continuing Professional Development

Rod Bolitho

ABSTRACT

Continuing Professional Development (CPD) as a term is now better understood than was the case a decade ago. However, in the field of education, it remains open to different interpretations by those who have a legitimate stake in it. In this article, I will attempt to clarify some of the aspects of CPD that are most important for teachers and managers in educational institutions and also for those who shape policy. I have also included examples from the field.

Key Words: continuing, professional, development, process, training, INSET, obstacles

INTRODUCTION

The concept of Continuing Professional Development (CPD) has been around for a long time in a number of professions. However, it has only recently begun to take root in the field of education, and there is still no common, shared understanding of the term amongst the stakeholders involved in educational institutions and authorities. I will therefore start by exploring the concept of CPD with the help of some quotes from teachers.

“I feel as though I’m standing still. Since I came back to teaching three years ago, I’ve been using the same textbook with a class at the same level and I’m really getting bored with it. I really need some new ideas....”

For this teacher, there is no sense of progression in her career, and she is looking for ways of rediscovering her motivation and her commitment to her job. She has obviously lost the thread of her career to some extent when she dropped out of her job to raise her children.

“I worked hard to get my teaching qualification, but I don’t really feel respected. When I meet people socially and tell them I’m a teacher, I get comments like “Lucky you! All those long holidays!” or “Schools aren’t what they used to be.” Doctors and lawyers don’t have to listen to comments like that, so why should we, as teachers?”

This teacher feels that his professionalism is being questioned. It sometimes seems as though everyone is an “expert” on education, and has the right to comment critically on any aspect of what goes on in schools.

“Our head teacher used the school budget to buy computers and interactive whiteboards but we’ve had no chance to learn how to use them.”

Here, the teacher is pointing out that new technology is of little use if its introduction is not supported by training. Neither the teachers nor the school as a whole will be able to develop further or meet new challenges without some kind of commitment to professional development.

To look at the three parts of the term CPD, the first teacher has no real sense of *continuity* or development, the second teacher is annoyed that he is not seen as a *professional*, and the third teacher feels the need to *develop* professionally by engaging with new technology. These three cases remind us that CPD needs to be seen as integral to the life of teachers and institutions. In a fast-changing world, education, which is traditionally seen as a conservative area of activity, should not be seen to be falling behind, and CPD is an important means of guarding against that.

CPD AS A PROCESS

The word “continuing” emphasizes the nature of CPD as a process. Ideally, it should be seen as a career-long process. Despite setbacks and breaks in our career, we can all get a sense of the professional development and where it has taken us when we think back to the way we taught and behaved at the start of our career and compare it with how we teach and behave now. There is bound to be a difference. This difference may be characterized by changes in any aspect of teaching: classroom practices, routines, beliefs, attitude towards the job or confidence levels. Not all the changes will be positive, but when we think about what has changed, we may also try to think back to why and how these changes have taken place. Positive changes in any of these aspects may have been triggered by a promotion, a salary increase, or a useful training course for example, whereas negative changes in attitude or confidence may be attributed to management decisions, additional workload, or poor pay and working conditions.

All of these changes represent steps or phases in our development, and taken together, they represent who we are as professionals. However, different people react in different ways to the events and personalities that shape their careers, and so professional development is first and foremost an individual process, but fortunately one over which we have a good measure of control.

The individual nature of development leads us to consider its relationship with training. In-service training (INSET) courses are sometimes termed “teacher development courses” and this can sometimes cause a misunderstanding. Indeed, Phil Riding (2001) has harsh words for the way some INSET courses are planned and delivered, describing them as “fragmented, unproductive, inefficient, unregulated ... and lacking in intensity and follow-up” (p. 283). From the course participants’ perspective, he is probably right. For them, a course is usually an isolated event, not an on-going process. While it may be seen as a development opportunity for the participants, there is no guarantee that all of them will see it as such and benefit from the experience. For those who do, it may be characterized as a milestone in the process of development. The relationship between training and development is therefore similar to that between teaching and learning. The decision to develop or learn rests with the participant or learner, not with the trainer or the teacher. As the proverb reminds us, “You can lead a horse to water, but you can’t make it drink”.

CPD AND CHANGE

Michael Fullan very neatly related development to the way we are affected by change in our professional lives. He stated: “Change is mandatory; growth is optional” (1993, p. 135).

It is worth examining the complex links between change, development and INSET a little more closely with the help of a case study based on a real project.

The Ministry of Education in country X decides that new English textbooks are needed as the existing ones are out of date. They want the books to be written by local teachers and to be printed and published locally, as imported British or American books would be too expensive and would moreover not reflect the needs and realities of the school learners. The Ministry advertises for teachers to constitute a team to write the books under the guidance of an experienced consultant, and after a careful selection process, the team is put together. As few of the teachers have little experience in writing for publication, they are put through a training course by the consultant. After the training, they begin to write the new books, which are produced one by one, over a period of several years. For the writers, this turns into an immense process of development.

But that's not all. As each book is completed and published, it is made available to schools. Teachers of English are confronted by a need for a complete change in their practices as the new books are very different from the old ones. Regional training courses are organized to familiarize teachers with the working principles of the new books. These courses focus on the shift from grammar-based teaching, and emphasize on the importance of developing language skills and communication. Teachers are required to attend these courses, but they react in different ways. Some see the new course and books as a development opportunity, to be seized with both hands, while others grumble about the new materials and the training because, for them, it means moving out of their long-established comfort zones.

Here are the voices of two professionals who experienced this change:

“This was undoubtedly the turning point in my professional career. I learned so much, about methodology, about working in a team, about writing and rewriting, about managing my time, and so much more. I'm now a proud professional instead of a tired teacher.” (a member of the textbook writing team)

“I had been teaching from the same boring textbooks in a teacher-centred way for 11 years when these new books were introduced. At first I didn't understand how to use them, but a training course and the teacher's guide provided by the publisher really helped. Now I enjoy my English classes and I think my pupils enjoy them too.” (a practising teacher)

This case study and the results summed up by these two quotations demonstrate how a top-down decision to mandate change and an enlightened strategy to implement it, can lead to professional development in those who are involved both as innovators and as recipients of the innovation.

INDIVIDUAL AND INSTITUTIONAL PERSPECTIVES

CPD embraces the idea that individuals aim for continuous improvement in their professional skills and knowledge, beyond the basic training initially required to carry out the job. In teaching, such development used to be called “in-service training”, or INSET, with the emphasis on delivery rather than the outcome. Arguably, the change in terminology signifies a shift in emphasis away from the provider and/or employer, towards the individual. In other words, the individual is now responsible for his or her lifelong career development, under the umbrella of the school or schools that employ the teacher. (Leaton Gray, 2005, p.5)

In this quotation, Leaton Gray has captured the shift in thinking associated with current definitions of CPD, while at the same time reminding us that teachers work in institutions, not in isolation. However, both the individual teacher and the institution have a legitimate interest in CPD; indeed they should be seen as its primary stakeholders. The most positive view of CPD sees teachers benefiting from its opportunities by improving their professional skills and reflecting productively on their classroom practice, and institutions benefitting by having motivated and skilful teachers who contribute to the overall quality of its education. However, for this kind of optimum outcome to be achieved, there is a need for a commitment to CPD and a balanced and equitable CPD policy which both parties agree to and actively support. However, achieving this is often easier said than done. An institution's priorities may not always match those of its teachers. School-based development or training initiatives may focus on procedural issues and legal requirements that need to be fulfilled, such as health and safety requirements, open days and parents' meetings, cross-curricular issues, or examination results. Individual teachers are much more likely to see their needs in terms of teaching materials, subject-based methodology, syllabus content and what happens in their classrooms.

In order to ensure good practice at the whole school level, there should be a senior teacher or manager who would be responsible for looking into all aspects of CPD. This should ideally be someone who understands the priorities of the school as well as the individual teachers, and has the vision and skills to ensure that there is provision for both in the school's approach to CPD. Typically, the institution's concerns can be addressed through appropriately planned school-based events, while teachers' subject-related needs may better be met through training courses or conferences, or in some cases studying for higher qualifications such as a master's degree.

The interface between the two sets of priorities is often an annual appraisal meeting in which the individual teacher reviews her performance and her future plans with her line manager. Here is an extract from such a meeting:

Head of English: Thanks for coming along today. How do you feel things have gone for you over the last twelve months?

Teacher: Not too badly, I suppose, but there have been some difficult moments too.

Head of English: We'll come to that in a moment, but I wanted to start by saying how pleased I am that you have started to get to grips with new technology in the classroom.

Teacher: You mean in the class you observed?

Head of English: Yes, but not only. You had some really good feedback from students about your use of PowerPoint presentations.

Teacher: Yes, I feel quite proud of that. I even had Maria sitting in on one of my classes to find out how to use PowerPoint.

Head of English: I'm glad you were able to do that. I remember you used to be very wary of visitors to your classes.

Teacher: That's right, but I'm not so nervous now. But I'm still concerned that my classes' exam results are not as good as they should be.

Head of English: Why do you think that is?

Teacher: I'm not completely sure, but I'm still struggling a bit with the changes in the College English curriculum. I just can't get through all the units in the time I have with my classes.

Head of English: Yet there are other teachers who seem to be managing without difficulty.

Teacher: So maybe there's something I could learn from them....

Head of English: You might be right. Let's come back to that when we plan for the year ahead. Is there anything else from the last year that you'd like to discuss?

Teacher: Yes ...do you remember that I went to a conference about a month ago?

Head of English: The one in Bangalore?

Teacher: Yes.

Head of English: How did it go?

Teacher: It was really inspiring. We learned how to set up a Teacher Development Group in a school or college.

Head of English: Oh, what's that?

Teacher: It's a forum for discussing teaching and learning in an informal way, and a chance to share problems and ideas.

Head of English: That sounds good....

Teacher: Yes, but I don't know where to start here in the college. I'd like to share the experience with colleagues in the department. Do I need your permission ...?

(Source: Padwad & Bolitho, 2018)

This extract shows a middle manager (Head of English Department) leading the appraisal, but starting by putting the teacher at ease, and then working with her priorities and concerns, without losing sight of the school's priorities. This becomes more evident in the conclusion to the appraisal, as follows:

Head of English: I think we've covered a lot of useful ground in looking back over the year. Now let's set some goals for the year ahead. What would be your first priority?

Teacher: Well, as I said, I'd like to see if I can form an informal Teacher Development Group.

Head of English: That sounds good. Will you let me know how it goes? I might even come along if that's OK.

Teacher: Of course!

Head of English: And what about your problem with getting through the coursebook?

Teacher: I wondered about observing Padma's classes to see how she manages. She always seems to be on top of things.

Head of English: I think we could manage to arrange that, but I'll need to find a substitute for you as you and Padma both teach at the same time. If I can do that, please let me know what you gain from the experience and remember to make an entry in the peer observation log book in the staffroom.

Teacher: I will.

Head of English: Thanks a lot. I'll write notes on what we have covered and agreed for you to check; then we can both sign and we'll use that as a starting point for our next appraisal meeting.

It is clear from this extract that there is a balance between the school and the individual teachers' priorities, but there is also a clear focus on the teacher's CPD. This is evident from the willingness of the Head of the English department to find and pay for a substitute teacher, as she understands that this will be money well spent if the teacher learns from the experience and improves her performance. The Head is also wise to keep an eye on the teacher's plans for a Teacher Development group as she represents the school's interests as well as the teacher's.

An appraisal meeting therefore needs to be carefully planned and sensitively handled. It should be aimed at raising the teacher's awareness of the institutional needs as well as her own needs in relation to those of the institution. It is a chance for the teacher to articulate his/her needs to a line manager, who may otherwise

not be aware of them. Keeping a record of the meeting is a means for both teacher and the line manager to keep track of the teacher's developmental priorities and to assess her progress with regard to those priorities.

PATHWAYS TO CPD

It has become clear that CPD is multidimensional and that training courses are just one aspect of development, albeit an important one. Here are some of the other possibilities for CPD:

- getting involved in projects
- learning from colleagues
- observing colleagues
- attending in-house seminars
- following an established individual or author in the domain of CPD
- writing materials
- taking on a new professional challenge (e.g. teaching at a different level or joining an in-house working party)
- taking on a training or mentoring role
- attending a conference
- presenting at a conference
- learning from one's students
- reading books and journals
- enrolling for a course leading to a higher qualification (Diploma, MA, PhD)
- joining a teachers' group, club or association
- being observed and getting feedback
- reading from English teaching websites and blogs, and attending webinars

Some of these activities can be undertaken autonomously by teachers, with little or no cost involved; others will require financial or organizational support from the school.

CPD is multidimensional in another sense, too. In their publication, which gives an account of some CPD activities in India (Bolitho & Padwad, 2013), there are reports on some of the tools and means that have been used in local and trans-regional CPD initiatives. These include:

- using school libraries as resources for CPD
- working with teacher portfolios
- using teacher diaries to document CPD
- harnessing the power of social networking for CPD
- using mobile devices to make materials available to teachers in remote areas

It is clear that professional development activities need to keep pace with modern developments in technology, without losing sight of the benefits of more traditional resources. The reports also draw attention to the need to find ways of reaching out to teachers in rural communities who often feel isolated and cut off from developments in mainstream education. For instance the English in Action project in Bangladesh (2009 – 2017) used multiple channels to reach out to teachers and learners of English, and promoted local and school-based CPD initiatives for English teachers in all parts of the country (Power, Shaheen, Solly, Woodward & Burton, 2012).

QUALIFICATIONS AND FRAMEWORKS

In many countries, professional development is viewed wholly or partly in terms of the acquisition of formal qualifications by the teachers. These may include mandatory domestic qualifications bestowed by the Ministry, as in Romania; or higher degrees at the Diploma, Master's or PhD level, offered by a local or foreign university. A number of CPD frameworks have been drawn up in recent years, in which qualifications and advanced teaching skills are included side by side. The British Council has produced such a framework, available at https://www.britishcouncil.in/sites/default/files/cpd_framework_for_teachers.pdf. This framework postulates four stages of development during a teacher's career, and twelve areas of professional practice in which teachers can assess their strengths and weaknesses and plan for the next stage of their development. It also suggests that by gaining higher qualifications, right up to PhD level, the teachers will contribute positively to the quality of their teaching, which is at best a contentious claim. Experience shows that a teacher who acquires a PhD, or in some cases even an MA, is very likely to abandon classroom teaching in favour of a career in academia. However, there is no doubt that a higher qualification such as a Diploma or a master's degree in English Language Teaching will add to a teacher's professional understanding and knowledge. In fact, it may even allow him/her to step back from classroom realities for a while during the course, to reflect productively and to reassess his/her own teaching.

OBSTACLES TO CPD

As the notion and characteristics of CPD become better known and more widely accepted, many of the obstacles to a teacher's professional development are beginning to melt away. However, some of them still remain, and these have been discussed here.

Obstacle 1: Funding

Every country has to ensure that there is a regular supply of teachers to its schools and colleges, and so pre-service training is an absolute priority in funding terms. For this, the minimum quotas have to be met, otherwise the whole education system would be at risk. When a nation's economy hits a crisis, as has happened in a number of countries around the world in recent years, there is a trickle-down impact on education budgets, and schools have to rethink their own funding priorities. The following remarks by a college CPD coordinator, as reported by Leaton Gray, are typical of the problem:

“There's a big squeeze on in sixth form college funding (...) and CPD is the area that's been cut most. So my budget was cut this year by about 20%, and I'm told it will be cut by the same next year again. In a college budget, there's very little to play with, the staffing is most of it, and we abide by national agreements on staffing, on pay deals and so on. The college has very little leeway over that.” (Leaton Gray, 2005, p. 25)

In short, the CPD budget is one of the most vulnerable parts of the school budget, and when times are tough it is one of the first to be cut to finance other pressing needs.

Obstacle 2: Management Decisions and Practices

Evidence from different sources suggests that not all managers in institutions recognize the need to prioritize CPD. They are too often preoccupied with “small stuff” concerned with their administrative role, such as the difficulty of finding a substitute for a teacher who wants to attend a course; and this may prevent them from properly understanding the benefits of CPD opportunities for their teachers. In best practice, a solid appraisal system should help the manager to rebalance priorities and the teacher to understand the manager's perspective on a request for a CPD opportunity.

Obstacle 3: “Readiness” in Teachers

Teachers are sometimes required to attend training courses at times when they may be less open and receptive to professional learning. This kind of an imposed

decision may provoke defiance in the teacher concerned, and so the value of the training is immediately diminished. Research and literature on career cycles (Huberman, 1989; White, 2008) shows that teachers are likely to be more “ready” and open to ideas at certain stages in their careers than at others, and a wise line manager will take this into account when discussing possible CPD pathways with them.

Obstacle 4: Time and Space

Time needs to be set aside for CPD activity within an institution, and teachers need a physical space where they can safely and productively talk about teaching and learning. While both these considerations may appear to be self-evident, in practice they simply cannot be taken for granted. Most teachers work under a certain amount of pressure, and they need to be able to find time to attend to their own development, both within the institution and outside. One teacher I spoke to recently said, “I need to get out of school and go to meetings of our local English Teachers’ Association in order to find a forum to nurture myself professionally. School is too busy and everyone is just trying to survive” (personal conversation).

Having the right space in school is also important. For instance, a CPD-friendly staffroom is one in which talk about teaching is both encouraged by prevailing attitudes and made possible by the physical layout of the room. However, many staffrooms are furnished in ways that make talk difficult, and the recent prevalence of computers and mobile devices has militated sharply against face-to-face communication.

Obstacle 5: Resources

With the availability of widespread access to the Internet, most teachers can now find resources to support their teaching and professional learning. In spite of this, more traditional book resources remain important as they document the changes and innovations in methodology and materials design that teachers often want to keep up with. However, books are expensive and few school libraries, particularly those in developing countries, are able to purchase all the books the teachers might need or want in order to support their professional development. Therefore, the role of local or regional Teachers’ Centres becomes important here, as they can provide a place where teachers can access books, meet and discuss their professional concerns and interests.

CONCLUSIONS: POLICY AND THE BIG PICTURE

Institutions that provide opportunities for teacher development have clear CPD

policies, set aside adequate funding, and organize seminars and workshops. They often have a designated staff member, who is responsible for identifying teachers' CPD needs and for co-ordinating all relevant activities. In the best case scenario, such CPD co-ordinators will have adequate time to support their work. They will also be responsible for reconciling the different understandings and expectations of CPD among its stakeholders. While this kind of work is best carried out at an institutional level, it needs to be recognized and backed by a policy that takes into account both regional and national perspectives, as this diagram illustrates:

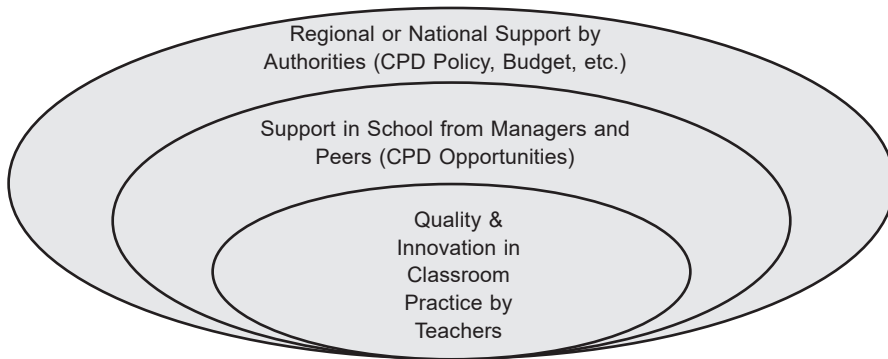


Figure 1. CPD: Policy and the Big Picture

If these relationships function well, there will be much better communication between the different stakeholders, as well as recognition of the positive impact of CPD on educational standards. Most importantly, there will be a healthy two-way flow of ideas and initiatives. In such a case, existing good classroom practice can be recognized and disseminated at the school level and beyond, while changes initiated by the government or school managers can be accompanied by appropriate CPD opportunities for teachers. The ultimate beneficiaries, of course, will be the learners, who will experience the impact of a developing teacher on their own learning and success.

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Rod Bolitho has been Academic Director at the Norwich Institute for Language Education since 2007. Before that he was Assistant Dean of International Education at The University College of St Mark & St John, Plymouth from 1989 to 2006. In the course of his career, Rod worked as a consultant for a number of overseas projects (in Romania, India, Russia, Belarus, Ukraine, Croatia and others) mainly in the field of materials design, curriculum development and trainer training. He is currently actively engaged in a teacher education reform project in Uzbekistan, a vocational sector curriculum project in Romania and a British Council CPD initiative in India.

rodbol44@yahoo.co.uk