

What Water Works? – A case study of a department’s practice in CPD

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Work in progress.

The author continues to refine and develop this submission.

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Introduction

The saying goes a little like this: You can take a horse to the water, show it to them, get them to splash about in it a while, watch other horses drink it, review the OFSTED (Office for Standards in Equine Drinking) inspection criteria with them, ensure they are qualified with their level 5 water drinking qualifications, set up training sessions on the drinking of water, engage in professional dialogue on the act of drinking, send them to conferences and workshops, carry out peer observation of drinking and slurping. However, there remain questions about the water: do the horses drink? And if they do, which drink is the most thirst quenching? And what exactly is stopping the horse from drinking?

Waterhole: The Context

The water in question here is staff development, and these particular horses (many of whom are willing and enthusiastic imbibers) are teachers in an ESOL department in a what was, at the time (2010-2011) a relatively newly merged college. As a result of the merger, two departments with different approaches and working practices had to work together to develop their own shared practices through both managerial directives and individual CPD activity. There were (and remain) barriers to this, not least the simple geographical distance between centres – technically only a ten minute train journey, or 30 minute drive, but in many ways the major barrier. The merger led to what might have been perceived as impositions of practice from one centre as appointments to managerial levels came primarily from one centre, although the balance was redressed by the appointment of a department head from outside the pre-merged colleges. However, issues around practice change developed from this also (for example, the introduction of a new qualification).

The Plumbing: How does CPD get distributed?

Staff development in the college has two main drivers: cross college priorities, and departmental priorities as highlighted through the lesson observation process, which distils the essence of the lesson observation feedback into 4 or 5 areas for development by the Head of Department. As can be seen already the emphasis here is on top down feeding of priorities for development, drawn against OFSTED measures and criteria.

Muddying the Water

At the time of this study there were further issues here pressing ESOL teachers with regard to future job prospects following recent government cuts to ESOL funding, roughly equivalent to 60% in real terms (www.actionforesol.org) which at the time were perceived to almost certainly be leading to redundancies and competitive interviews. This may have placed a far higher focus in teachers' minds on activities such as formal observations and qualifications over general CPD.¹

Water Tables: Literature Review

What is CPD?

The whole topic of CPD is enormous and what it constitutes has been widely debated in the lifelong learning sector (LLS) for some time, particularly since the introduction of a compulsory 30 hours (pro rata) of CPD each year as a condition of membership of the Institute for Learning. (See www.ifl.ac.uk for further information on this). There have been a number of attempts to codify and analyse the types of CPD activity (e.g. IFL's "Brilliant Teaching & Training in FE & Skills" – IFL 2010), and Eraut (1994) cites a distinction between CPE – Continuing Professional Education and CPD – the former being "formally organized conferences, course, or educational events rather than work based learning" (1994:10) whereas CPD would cover both possibilities. However for the purposes of this study I have chosen to look at the more clearly identifiable activity of *institutional* CPD, that is, CPD developed and supported by the institution, which in some cases fits in with the former – professional education, and sometimes with more personally driven CPD.

The area of ESOL is quite a challenging one, drawing from a range of disciplines. Firstly there are the generic teaching practices in LLS in the UK as laid out by LLUK in the "New overarching professional standards for teachers, tutors and trainers in the lifelong learning sector" (LLUK, 2007). These refer to "the skills, knowledge and attributes required of those who perform the *wide variety* of teaching and training roles undertaken within the sector"

¹ Since then, it should be added, a last minute change to the funding rules, in this case the day before main enrolments at college, led to better than expected learner numbers, although not without some voluntary redundancies, and with not a little effort on the part of the ESOL team to re-recruit learners who had been turned away.

[my italics]. They are (relatively) brief and necessarily so – perhaps in order to be fitted into this wide variety of contexts. Accompanying these were two publications – one the “Application of the Professional Standards for Teachers of English” (which also forms the backbone of many integrated teacher training courses and contributing in no small part to what Eraut refers to as the “notoriously overcrowded” (1994:11) syllabuses of these courses. This aimed to specify the needs of ESOL & Literacy tutors and bring them in line with the standards. There is also “Literacy & ESOL: shared and distinctive knowledge, understanding and professional practice” (LLUK 2009). As far as these standards are concerned, teacher is seen as either having or not having these competences “no gradations such as ‘just competent’ or ‘highly competent’ are recognized” (Eraut, 1994:118)².

This then gives us our second influence on ESOL – the development of *literacy* teaching and learning in adults. Issues around language, literacy and power, for example, have a more profound influence on ESOL teaching, than perhaps on the teaching of international English. From a policy perspective, since 2001 ESOL has been lumped in with literacy and numeracy as part of the *Skills for Life* programme, which introduced a number of different elements to teaching, as well as contributing to the increased professionalism of teachers in the field.

Finally there is the wide international field of English Language Teaching and applied linguistics. Unlike vocational areas where there is a clear subject knowledge/teaching knowledge distinction (the *dual professionalism* of IfL), this is much harder to define in ESOL – at what point does subject knowledge end and teaching knowledge begin? It does, however, mean that there is wide body of research into T&L which is drawn from this international field which while generally complementing practice in teaching ESOL, does occasionally clash.

One area which is definitely consistent, however, is the area of teacher development. Richards & Farrell (2005) refers to this as “teacher learning” identifying that we are looking not just at what practices are effective, but *repositioning the teacher as a learner* through questions such as “What is the nature of teacher knowledge and how is it acquired? What cognitive processes do we employ while teaching and while learning to teach?” (Richards &

² From a development and training perspective this pass/fail standard puts these standards at odds with the stratified and potentially more punitive OFSTED system of grades.

Farrell 2005: 6). Fielding et al also equate teacher development with the learning process: “‘joint practice development’ ... explicitly articulates a more learner-centred approach” (2005: 72).

Richards & Farrell also raise important issues with regard to the impact of collaborative teacher development, pointing out one particular barrier to this being that “teaching is generally seen as an individual activity”, (Richards & Farrell 2005: 12) as well as identifying that “for a culture of cooperation to develop...opportunities need to be provided for teachers to work and learn together through participation in group-oriented activities with shared goals and responsibilities, involving joint problem solving” (ibid: 12). This has a parallel with Fielding et al. (2005) who also found that teachers were more likely to describe the extension and refinement of their existing repertoire of practices, through collaborative and affirming work with other teachers.” (Fielding et al. 2005:40). Similar parallels can be seen between Richards & Farrell and Coffield (2008) in the critical view that “traditional models of staff development often ignore principles of adult learning, such as that with adults development is linked to their self-worth and efficacy, they learn through active involvement, learning must connect with what their current understanding, and that it is a continual process of identity formation and re-formation.”(Richards & Farrell, 2005: 46) Compare this to Coffield who says “If ‘personalised’ learning is the new government aim for all students, then it should apply equally to staff, who have their own learning needs, gaps and aspirations.”, (2008:24) as well as to the finding by Hustler et al. (2003) that some 63% of teachers agreed with the statement “CPD generally meets the needs of the school rather than me personally” and that 72% of the teachers in that study agreed with the statement that “too many training days are driven by national agendas”. Teachers then need to have their individual needs met, rather than having development which places them all at a level on the development ladder, that teachers may be “proficient rather than competent in some elements, while remaining advanced-beginner in others” (Eraut 1994:118)

To return to Richards & Farrell, however: they list a range of activities, the majority of which would be generally described as collaborative and/or reflective in nature, making only passing reference to a more traditional input session, which even he describes as “workshops” rather than input. Of the rest of the activities he suggests, self-monitoring, keeping a teaching journal, teaching portfolios, critical incidents, & case analysis are

reflective, although still potentially collaborative (for example, the use of blogging on teacher development as a form of shared reflective journal – see Clarkson & Scurfield (2007) for an example of teachers doing this as to support collaborative action research). Then there are more clearly collaborative (yet, of course, still reflective) activities – teacher support groups, peer observation, peer coaching, team teaching and action research.

It is quite striking that none of these activities, not even the workshops, would fit the description of cascade training. Hayes (2000) is an interesting case study of the impact of cascade training on teacher development in a school in Sri Lanka, and comments that “the cascade is often reduced to a trickle by the time it reaches the classroom teacher”. Whilst Hayes acknowledges that “cascade training programmes will remain a feature of educational systems for some time to come” he also adds that if so it should be “experiential and reflective... open to reinterpretation... [and] diffused through the system as widely as possible, not concentrated at the top.”

This is also borne out by Fielding et al. (2005) who found that “the transfer model seems to be associated with the delivery of ‘validated’ packages of pre-formed practice seen by others to be good for the recipient.” (Fielding: 80), as well as the IfL research into effective CPD which also found that “the CPD most likely to lead to the desired impact is based on learning from others...peer support and working together and through formal and informal networks.” (IfL, 2010: 10).

Eraut (1994) also picks up on the top down nature of much CPD, describing a difference between the approaches of “academic” development of teaching and learning – that the knowledge to be gained is to be gained by all members of the institution, as opposed to a school environment where new knowledge “increasingly sought to cope with external demands for change but rarely for the ongoing improvement of practice.” (Eraut: 30) Decisions about CPD in many colleges are driven through the graded observation of teaching and learning based on criteria drawn from the Common Inspection Framework (OFSTED 2007) – in effect meaning that CPD planning and models are based on the policy demands of the grading process, rather than a focus on the individual.

Implementing Staff Development Activity

Of course, implementing these ideas and activities also has its challenges – both in terms of the institution and the individual. A major role for many colleges now is that of teacher development manager or similar who has a key role in setting up and running these activities. For the individual, for example, there are issues such as those identified by Hustler, et al, 2003, including their attitude and the perceived benefits of CPD, time in which to do it, but inevitably, as Coffield says: “The vast majority of tutors are willing to learn and improve their teaching, but wonder where the time is to come from, if nothing is done about increasing workloads and endless, repetitive administration.” (2008: 23) Coffield is also less than positive about some of the approaches set up by institutions in order to enable staff development: “A smorgasbord approach where individuals chose from a long list of options whatever suits them is unlikely to have much effect on the work of teams; and teams need time after the training session to assimilate what new ideas and practices they have been exposed to in order to work out their joint response.” (2008:23)

The Impact of CPD

“In all but one of the studies the teachers involved in the CPD interventions changed or substantially developed aspects of their teaching.”

Cordingley et al. (2005) “developed some very tentative hypotheses about the nature of effective collaboration based on what we found out about the interventions.” These were:

- Classroom based CPD is more effective than off-site CPD, even where this involved teachers working together.
- Collaboration between teachers, focused around active experimentation, may be more effective than reflection about practice.
- “Collaboration may be an effective vehicle for securing teacher commitment and ownership of CPD in cases where it is not possible for the teachers to select a CPD focus of their choice.”
- Small group collaboration may have a greater impact on CPD outcomes than larger groups.

These principles have enormous parallels in the studies by Hayes (2000) and by Fielding et al in that the more effective CPD is that which is shared between and by teachers, if you like a bottom up rather than top down attitude to what works. As such they form an effective set of guidelines for planning and implementing effective CPD.

Measuring the Water: Summary of Methodology

What, then, is the impact of staff development activity on teaching and learning? What is effective and why? Conversely, there is also the issue of what is ineffective, or less effective, and what are the reasons for this? There are also a number of barriers to CPD – and it is also interesting to note what these are and how, if at all they could be lifted.

There are a range of elements to the research.

In the first instance, there was the setting up of a range of activities (such as action research networks, co-coaching & peer observation, mentoring and “input” sessions). This yielded some surprise events – including the establishment of a shared blog space where “challenges” were posted for teachers to carry out and then reflect on online, which took off surprisingly well. (<http://esolchallenges.posterous.com>).

The data gathering took the form an online survey to get an overall picture and some initial comments. The survey was sent to the entire department, and about 60% of the intended recipients completed the questionnaire. This was then supported by 5 one to one interviews, which explored the themes of the questionnaire in more detail, including with some people who didn't actually undertake the questionnaire until after the interview had taken place, or indeed at all. The interviewees were chosen to represent a cross section of the team, from a relatively newly qualified teacher with only a few years' experience, working as a term time only tutor, to a full time course tutor with many years experience. People were also selected from both centres, to represent the range of backgrounds in the team.³

³ Where quotes are drawn from the questionnaire, these will be marked as (S). Data from teacher interviews will be marked as T1, T2, etc.

This data was then compared to evaluations of training events through the college's formal feedback, as well as statistical data such as the uptake of different activities, in particular the ARN and the "ESOL Challenges" blog.

Summary of Findings

What is CPD?

When confronted with a list of CPD types and asked to rank according to their perceptions of CPD the majority of teachers in this study identified the more formal activities as being CPD, such as external conferences & formal training as CPD – one person quoted as saying: "I think of CPD, the set of initials, as a formal development course rather than informal development of any kind". (S)

This is reflected in the interviews where people appeared to place higher value on formal training and development activity, such as formal courses, including the value of qualifications:

"For me, I always think about the external, you know, the ones leading to a qualification as more important, even though they might not be, you know, that relevant or not that necessary for what I'm doing I still think it's something that's going to go on my CV, and I'm going to be recognised for that." (T2) "[Doing the DTE(E)LLS⁴] was great CPD" (T3)

At least some of the value of these formal qualifications can be accredited to the integral value of the course – where the teacher is very clearly and directly situated as the learner, rather than a teacher/worker. One of the interviewees (T3), for example, said that "I think my teaching changed massively." She went on to add that "In some ways while I was doing it, I felt like I was a better teacher in the way...because I was trying out different things, whereas I don't as much now... because I don't *have* to."

⁴ Diploma in Teaching English (ESOL) in the Lifelong Learning Sector – an integrated ESOL initial teacher training course run at college.

Nevertheless, there was still an acknowledgement that CPD was not limited to formal training and observations, however: “It doesn’t have to be a course.” (T3) is indicative of some of the comments, and one respondent (T5) suggested that CPD is something done *outside* the teaching role suggesting that being a teacher was separate from being a learner.

One Size Ticks All the Boxes – Internal events

It was interesting to note that a number of respondents were quite condemnatory with regard to the impact of cross college INSET days in the 12 months leading up to the study, as these were largely focussing on procedural development (i.e. how to carry out college procedures) rather than on teaching development.

Relatively low value was placed on activities around procedural elements, where although the worth of these was acknowledged, “INSET days come near the end [of the scale] as they are more about understanding college procedures.” (S)

The vast majority of formal activity within college was not on teaching and learning, per se, but on how to comply with procedures: to wit: formal input at the start of the year, for example, on new schemes of work, lesson plans and ILPs⁵, the introduction of a new qualifications board and new assessment procedures; cross college equality & diversity and safeguarding training. Almost all the respondents cited something along these lines – which the nature of so much of the training laid on by college, was both very general and very much aimed at familiarity with the procedures and practices within college. “The things that are laid on by the college I have yet to do anything much that is really good development for me” (T3). This issue was cited as a specific barrier by one teacher (T1) who referred to the range of options being limited: “Quite often there’s things on offer that I feel like I’ve done to death. And I feel like I’m just not interested in doing it again and again and again. Internal training courses... every year it’s the same thing.” (T1)

That’s not to say these had no impact or were of no value at all – “The City and Guilds stuff [training & support on using a new qualification] has also been good but has done nothing for my teaching yet. I have really valued these sessions.” (S).

⁵ Individual Learning Plans

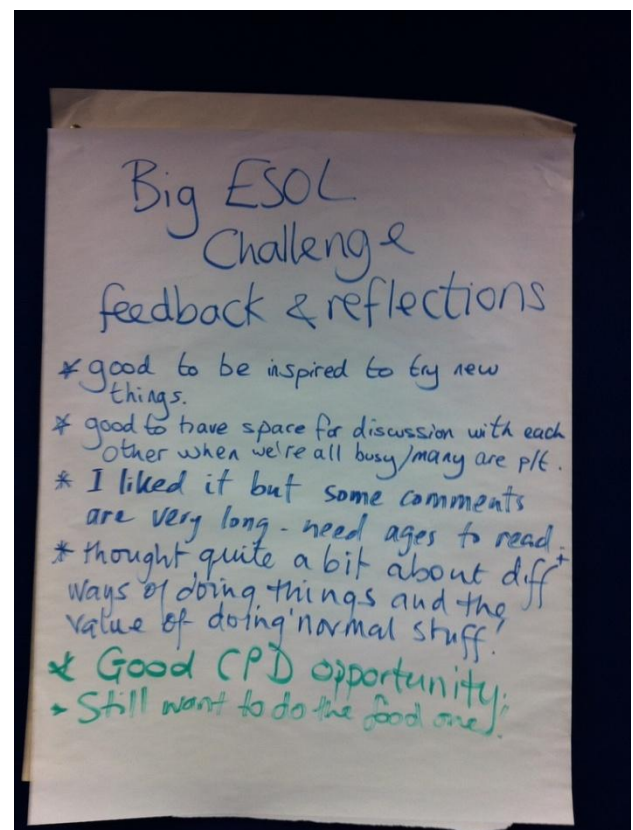
Owning the Learning

Issues around ownership of the professional learning were very clear: “I would *like* it to be things *you* want to do for your development, versus what it sometimes ends up being which is courses or things that other people tell you to go on.” (T3). The value of the observation and managerial input was clear; however, as T3 went on to add “maybe in collaboration with your manager, but something you have some input in”. One of the teachers phrased this as quite a direct question, which was very telling: “Who decides what the training should be on? Maybe they should ask the teachers what they think it should be on?”(T5). “It would be nice to have some input into what’s on offer” (T1).

Perhaps inevitably, training and development which has a practical focus was regularly cited as having a positive impact – a quite telling comment from T2 here: “Training where we are actually taught how to teach. You know, practical activities, or sessions where we are being given ideas, on how to teach. I think they’re always quite useful.” Like any professional learner, a teacher wants to be able to apply their knowledge to their working environment and the more quickly and more easily they can achieve this, the better for them. However, this does still suggest a general perception that there are experts and holders of the knowledge who can pass this down to teachers, perpetuated at least in part by a higher management structure which values (perhaps unsurprisingly) a top down approach to development.

“That was great CPD” (T3) – Two major positives

Two main activities have clearly had major impact on teaching and learning. The activity that has provoked the most comments and feedback from all respondents, both with the online survey and in the interviews, was the benefit that was gained from one to one work



with either one of the college ATLCs,⁶ “one to one support with the ATLC to talk over the SoW and lesson plan before more my observation...was very helpful”(S4)⁷, semi-formalised mentoring, “mentoring with a colleague – that is very valuable” (T3) or more generally sharing across the team in an informal manner. “Sharing ideas in an informal sort of way, having someone come to observe me” (T4). This was very highly valued and very clearly identified as having had a major impact on their teaching and learning

The second of these was the ESOLchallenges blog. This has been very well received, just in terms of uptake – at the time of the study, about 15 people (out of a possible 25) have posted on the blog. There was also some very positive feedback at a recent staff development event, including comments like “good to be inspired to try different things” “[I] thought quite a bit about different ways of doing things, and the value of normal stuff”. “A good CPD opportunity.” One of the interviewees cited it as a direct example of valuable CPD – “to me that is the most valuable type of CPD stuff going.” (T3). This second has allowed teachers to experiment, and across the board, experimentation was valued highly, and the freedom enjoyed most of the time to experiment and improve in that way – informal action research, as it were, “[the blog was valuable] because you’re experimenting, you’re trying different ideas, and what you’re doing is helping you to develop as a teacher rather than to stay in the safe little world that you have.” (T3)

“I was full of good intentions, but something had to give.” (T1) Barriers and Blockers

The Action Research network, which this RDF originally set out to be investigate was interesting in the sense that with the advent of the graded observation “windows” in October 2010, all thoughts about AR went out of said window, with at least two of the participants in the network citing time and workload as drawing them away from the AR process this year. Several teaching staff had participated in action research networks in

⁶ Advanced Teaching & Learning Coach – in some institutions referred to as Advanced Practitioner

⁷ This teacher got a grade 2 for their observation, as did many of the other teachers who accessed the same support

previous years (see Clarkson & Scurfield, 2007) and so felt that “the process didn't particularly strengthen me as a teacher, and decided to take a 'break' from it this year. The intention had been to undertake a personal project of my own.” (S) In some ways this would seem to place a lot of value on the idea of such a process only existing as a “led” activity, rather than AR being something which one can undertake on one’s own. This then would suggest that a joint practice development model would be more effective as this would lead to a shared approach wherein teachers can develop ideas together.

With almost inevitable predictability, following on from Coffield’s quote above, time was the main cited barrier to CPD activity: “It’s just having the time to do it. Because you think oh, it would be really nice to do that, but then you’ve got lessons, paperwork to do and all the rest of it, and hopefully a life to lead as well. That’s the biggest thing... time.” (T5) *Timetable* issues were also raised by T1 where the specific spread of their teaching week is weighted so that it makes attending sessions challenging.

Other issues that were raised:

- Issues around team interactions during CPD activity:
 - “They just get bogged down in their past and their frustrations. It’s just such a waste of a day. We have such little time to spend on development, and what little time we have I want to spend on my development.” (T3)
 - “Other people can sometimes take over, a little bit, which can, you know, have a bit of a negative effect sometimes.” (T5)
- Training getting cancelled for no good reason. (T1)
- Personal commitments (T2& T5)
- Graded lesson observation (not taking risks, reduced time to experiment) (T3)
 - “I was really motivated to do AR until the graded observations” (T3) “They get in the way of you doing things you want to do for your development” (T1)

This list presents no surprises, perhaps, but the presence of these barriers is a major hurdle to overcome in order to facilitate and improve CPD activity within the team. The first issue is perhaps quite a concern – having facilitated some sessions myself where disgruntled staff had a particular axe to grind, which can be very damaging from a professional development perspective.

Gaps in the Research

The majority of the data gathered here, with the exception of the individual case studies referred to data contributed by only one half of the team. For the online survey, for example, only two of the contributors were based at a different centre. This has implications for the findings of course, but is also indicative in itself of the differences in culture that continue to exist across the department. This is another barrier that only time can solve perhaps, particularly, as Eraut says, “institutional change is an enormous task and the introduction of new knowledge is extremely difficult in this context.” (p.31)

Conclusions& Recommendations

The main driver behind decisions on CPD is made through the development of the LO5 form – a summary of key areas for development (and strengths) held by a particular department. This is drawn from a summary of the graded observation process, through a kind of frequency count done by the department head resulting in a single document listing key strengths and areas for development. There are whole ranges of subjective elements influencing these processes – the priorities and needs of the observers – Eraut’s “conservers of the status quo” (1994:37) – as well as the decisions of the department head in selecting those key areas which require work. These same forms feed into cross college teacher development activity meaning that large scale planning decisions on CPD activity across college are based on a small number of action points from each department, and that these are then further reviewed and amalgamated into policy documents.

These findings, however, would suggest that this should not be the only driver behind institutional change – suggesting that all teachers need to develop these areas when these areas may in fact have been listed as a particular strength for some teachers, and areas of strength can be listed as particular weaknesses by another. The kind of CPD which is wanted and preferred by many of the teaching staff is that which is led by their own experiences and needs – although the role of the observation itself was cited as a useful thing by many of the interviewees in terms of identifying those areas for development, the follow up activity was not.

It would be sensible then to further develop the kind of joint practice development activity, for example team teaching⁸, coaching & peer observation, both online and off, but within a strict framework. It is hard to move from a top down approach to a bottom up approach, and indeed this may even be resisted at all levels, and so some sort of leadership or control of these processes would perhaps be in order in the first instance. The role of an ATLC here would be to take the lead in the first instance in further developing these approaches but also to later step back, and support the role of these activities in developing culture change in the two centres.

CPD remains a controversial topic, as an imposition against the backdrop of government cuts to funding and salaries, the introduction of a paid fee to IfL, and teachers' own perceptions of what is and isn't good practice. In terms of practice, teacher development is often a case of do as we say, not as we do. Yet one of the things this study highlighted was that any distinction between learning and teacher development is essentially false: by repositioning teachers as learners, emphasising the development of individual needs in a collaborative and supportive manner: we can move CPD from being a policy tool to being the useful and supportive act it should be.

⁸ As CPD, not as good practice for teaching and learning, per se. This comes very low down Hattie's (1999) list of effect sizes

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