

Chapter 11: Leading professional learning and development

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Aims

In this chapter we aim to:

- explore what is meant by professional learning and development (PLD)
- consider forms of PLD, including evidence informed approaches
- discuss the role of leading PLD and its purpose and challenges
- explore the value of evaluating the impact of PLD.

The need for shared definitions

School leaders often struggle to ensure that professional learning and development makes a difference to teachers and students. The English Department for Education's (DfE) consultation, *A world-class teaching profession*, states 'There is currently too little robust evidence on the impact of different types of professional development for teachers' (2015:10). To ensure that PLD improves teachers' practice and has an impact on students' learning, we need to establish a shared understanding of what effective professional learning and development looks like, how to achieve it and how to evidence its impact. The language is used and understood in different ways by practitioners and throughout the literature. The OECD Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS) refers to CPD (continuing professional development) which suggests that this term is in use internationally. Some schools in England refer to In-service Training or Inset; universities often refer to Teacher Education. Helen Timperley from New Zealand promotes a focus on professional learning

because ‘much professional development has little meaning for teachers’ (2011:2). Cordingley et al., (2015) offer CPDL – continuing professional development and learning. This variation reflects some of the tensions in thinking that exist in this field. If we do not yet have a sharply defined and agreed language, it is no surprise that we are still working towards an understanding of what quality looks like, how best to lead this and how to evaluate the impact of PLD.

What is professional learning and development?

It is worth exploring what we mean by the related terms professional learning and professional development. In working with leaders of professional development in schools, both nationally and internationally, we have found that re-conceptualising these words can lead to better design, strategic leadership and, fundamentally, more effective learning and impact for teachers, leaders and learners. We argue that the design and implementation of learning and development may have greater impact, and so improve learning and impact, by being seen as two distinct and yet interconnected processes.

Professional learning (PL) encompasses all the *opportunities* offered for teachers and leaders to learn something new, update skills, be informed of new developments, explore new techniques or resources, and refresh subject-specific knowledge. Such opportunities can be offered in a wide range of ways; courses, seminars, reading articles, visits to other organizations, lesson study, enquiry and action research, masters qualifications, peer observation. Such opportunities can be facilitated in-house by colleagues in the same or another school, a university, commercial organization or an independent consultant.

Professional development (PD) then becomes the *process* that builds on what has been learned to effect a change ‘in the thinking and practice of our colleagues so that such change

improves the experience and learning for pupils' (Earley and Porritt, 2009:139). This improved practice needs to become embedded in a teacher's everyday interactions with learners before we can say there has been professional development. Whilst agreeing with the importance of professional learning as the process for 'solving entrenched educational problems' (Timperley, 2011:5), we argue there has to be another stage after learning something valuable. It takes time to test out new understanding, skills, techniques and strategies and takes longer for improved practice to become habitual and embedded. We see professional development not as the opportunity or learning activity being offered but as the embedded practice leaders look for as a result of professional learning. As O'Brien notes 'there is clearly a need to follow-up and follow-through CPD interventions so that clear links are established between CPD provision for teachers leading to enhanced teacher quality and the attainment and achievement of students' (2011:106). This is where innovation is needed in PLD and its leadership. Whilst learning and development are clearly integral to each other, by reconceptualising the two stages schools are more able to put in place the organizational processes and systems by which this learning is converted into developed practice and raised standards.

Evidence informed professional learning and development

Drawing on evidence from research will improve the quality of all professional learning opportunities and supports the potential for impact on teacher practice and students' learning. Significant convergence in the literature offers school leaders clarity over the elements that can support the design and development of high quality professional development (e.g. Timperly, 2007; Earley and Porritt, 2009, 2013; Stoll et al., 2010; Nelson et al., 2015a; Cordingley et al., 2015; Jenson et al., 2016). These studies emphasise active and

collaborative professional learning sustained over time, follow up opportunities to apply learning in practice, a focus on student learning and outcomes, external support and expertise and the importance of evaluation. A failure to apply these principles to the design of professional learning means many learning opportunities offered to teachers still consist of traditional designs such as a conference or a short course (OECD, 2014).

The EPPI Centre reviews (e.g. Cordingley et al., 2007) and Earley and Porritt (2009) argue that individual design principles are more likely to be effective when they are linked in combination, and rooted in the teacher's classroom practice. Both Hargreaves (2011) and Sebba (2012) make the case that the dominant approaches to CPD, characterised as professionals passively receiving information or knowledge from a perceived expert, rarely result in lasting improvements either in teacher practice or pupil learning. Hargreaves (2011:10) argues that professional development needs to focus on 'improving what teachers do, not merely what they know'.

The first imperative is therefore, for leaders and teachers to draw on research and engage in professional learning that has the potential to improve practice. We have collated the approaches for high quality professional learning and development as suggested by four studies in the Annex. They offer a source for educational leaders looking to maximise the impact of professional development. Does the professional learning offered in your school start from, and always include, these factors?

Effective approaches to professional learning and development

The studies cited suggest schools need to design PLD which shifts from a model based on knowledge transmission to a model where knowledge gained is applied and tested in classrooms and consequent new knowledge leads to improved practice which is embedded

over time. This notion of joint practice development (JPD), is defined by Fielding et al., as ‘...learning new ways of working through mutual engagement that opens up and shares practices with others’ (2005:1). It encompasses a range of collaborative, mutually beneficial, school based forms of professional development such as peer-to-peer observation and coaching; within school and cross-school professional learning communities; research-informed approaches such as collaborative enquiry and lesson study. In England, these forms of professional learning and development formed the focus of enquiry for partnerships of schools designated as teaching school alliances (TSAs) which were involved in the National College for Teaching and Leadership’s (NCTL) research and development (R&D) network. Thirty alliances of schools worked on theme two: ‘what makes great professional development which leads to consistently great pedagogy?’. The findings of the literature review are included within the Annex (Stoll et al., 2012). Some alliances considered forms of joint practice development such as peer observation while others investigated coaching. Nearly half of the theme two alliances explored two approaches that have significant potential to apply the research evidence to design high quality PLD which makes a difference to teacher and student learning, namely lesson study and collaborative enquiry.

Lesson Study originated in Japan where it is long-established as a method for initial teacher training and career-long professional development (Fernandez and Yoshida, 2004). Following analysis of data, teachers work together to identify a research theme and explore current research in relation to their theme, a process known as ‘kyozai kenkyu’. Once they have an enhanced understanding of what is known about their issue, teachers engage in repeated cycles of planning and teaching, closely observing the impact of a co-designed research lesson on student learning. Observations are followed by focused post-lesson discussions and a summary of learning before the cycle begins again. A group of six primary

schools participating in the NCTL Research Themes project found that the collaborative discussion that occurs within lesson study provided a 'rare chance to really unpick the most tricky or difficult concepts to teach' (Nelson et al., 2015a:7).

The British Education Research Association/Royal Society of Arts Inquiry highlights that teachers' experience of professional development in most parts of the UK is 'fragmented, occasional and insufficiently informed by research' (2014:12): the final report stresses that 'the development of a research-rich culture is vital if schools and colleges are to develop and sustain the capacity for self-improvement' (ibid.:27). As well as applying research into what makes effective PLD, a growing body of evidence suggests that professional development which draws on high quality research and evidence results in positive improvements in teacher practice and student learning (Greany, 2015). Nelson and O'Beirne (2014) argue that teaching practice and learner outcomes can potentially be enhanced by identification and application of the evidence around the most effective approaches to teaching and learning. How and where such evidence is sourced, as well as how it is shared and applied, remains a challenge for schools and practitioners. Debate about the accessibility and relevance of academic educational research for school practitioners has spurred the Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) in the UK and researchers such as John Hattie in Australia to bridge the gap (see Chapters 1 and 12).

Furthermore, movements such as researchED in the UK and internationally, are seeking to address the issue by establishing a 'grass-roots, teacher-led organization aimed at improving research literacy in educational communities'¹. Though research into the effectiveness of such fora is limited, increasing participant numbers at researchED events and

practitioner-initiated TeachMeets speak of a growing enthusiasm for engaging in classroom-focused, research-informed professional development (see Chapter 18). Also contested is the relationship between practitioner enquiry and academic educational research. Nelson and O’Beirne (2014:27) cite Geest (2010) who asks ‘when does trying out new ideas in the classroom and reflecting on the effects of the changes become research? What are the boundaries between reflective practice and ‘doing research’?’ For Geest, enquiry involves engagement with a variety of different sources of evidence, information and expertise, and does not necessarily involve primary research (although it sometimes does).

Enthoven and de Bruijn (2010) contend that part of the answer lies in the extent to which schools and individual teachers engage with the external evidence base when trying out new ideas and reflecting on their practice: this is where a description of the process as enquiry rather than research becomes helpful. The national research themes project enabled schools to relate their investigations to robust literature reviews and provided a structure for collaborative enquiry (Harris and Jones, 2012). Summary case studies and impact reports from this project provide powerful testament that enquiries centred on the difference teachers wanted to make for students in their classrooms were highly motivating, helping to ensure that changes in practice were closely evaluated and sustained over time (Nelson et al., 2015b).

Strategic leadership of professional learning and development

The landscape in which leaders of PLD work is continually evolving; whilst some work exclusively within one school, others lead within and across multiple organizations. In some schools, one senior leader has strategic oversight for PLD, others distribute this leadership role across middle leaders, offering opportunities for career development and for the school to build capacity. The role of the PLD leader has also shifted from being mostly a management

one to a role focused on strategic improvement and the alignment of PLD with internal school improvement priorities, as well as the demands of external policy changes. Cordingley et al., (2015:10) describe the role as ‘promoting a challenging learning culture, ... knowing what content and learning activities were likely to be of benefit and promoting evidence-informed, self-regulated learning’.

To be successful, the strategic leader of PLD needs to be aware of the external research base outlined above. The leader of PLD also has a responsibility to ensure senior leaders see professional learning and development as a significant improvement process so it is not vulnerable to the challenges of reduced budgets and external pressures. Professional learning and development needs to be ‘underpinned by senior leaders who recognise the potential of professional development for enhancing pupil outcomes, give it a central role in school improvement planning and reflect it in their policies’ (Stoll et al., 2012:8). This means PLD is embedded within a culture of learning and an unswerving commitment to promoting and participating in teachers’ development (Robinson, 2011) based on a clear understanding that school improvement happens in classrooms with high quality teachers. To make the right decisions about what professional learning and development opportunities will be supported, the PLD leader needs to have a deep understanding and rich evidence base about the improvement needs of the school, its groups and individual learners (Earley and Porritt, 2013). By this, we mean an ability to be clear about:

- the difference we need to make for our student learners and how to achieve this
- the change/difference we therefore need our teachers/support staff to bring about
- what staff need to learn to bring about this change and effective ways to do this
- what support will be needed and from whom, both internal and external
- Implications for line managers and middle leaders

- systems, processes and resources which need to be in place in order for change to be successful, evidenced and sustained over time.

There are clearly implications for understanding the adult learner's baseline in terms of existing skills, knowledge and practice and the next steps in their development. Those who have responsibility for the leadership of PLD need to be able to map the personalized needs of teachers/support staff onto the school's priorities.

Thus the challenges for the strategic leader of PLD are considerable and grow when the school begins to distribute the leadership of PLD across phases, teams, faculties or departments. It is clear that middle leaders (e.g. heads of department and subject coordinators who are also teachers) and other informal teacher leaders do have an increasingly important role (Stoll, et al., 2015). Middle leaders are a vital link between teachers and a school's senior leaders and are perfectly positioned to support the learning of their colleagues. However, Stoll et al., (2015) make it clear that if middle leaders are to take such a leading role, they need on-going development to enhance their skills in working alongside others to investigate their practice, articulate and share their knowledge, ask the right questions about evidence, trial new strategies and evaluate impact. They also have to 'be able to understand and facilitate professional learning, access, critique and share the "external" knowledge base..... practice coaching skills, and develop trust with colleagues' (Stoll et al., 2015:87). This requires a shift from a middle leader role that emphasises improving student achievement through intensive intervention strategies designed to bring about immediate results, to one that supports deeper learning over time, leading to greater student independence. Jenson et al., (2016:13) offer three dimensions to developing strategic leadership as seen in high performing systems:

- ‘Professional learning leaders at the school
- System leaders of professional learning, and
- School principals developing school improvement plans around professional learning’.

A key consideration in the role of the PLD leader is to ensure that there is alignment of school improvement objectives, appraisal/teacher evaluation/performance management, and professional learning and development. The PLD leader should have strategic oversight of the leadership and management of appraisal and PLD. In our view, appraisal/teacher evaluation/performance management should not be seen as judgmental or bureaucratic: ‘it was done to you...it was a series of numbers really, percentage this and percentage that...it was always about what you’d done and never about how we were going to move forward’ (Spence-Thomas, 2010:31). Rather appraisal should be rigorous, developmental professional learning focused on ‘the desired changes in professional practice that have been identified and which need to occur to have an impact on pupil achievement’ (Spence-Thomas, 2010:32). In some schools, appraisal is indeed called something that better reflects its purpose, such as ‘Learning and Development Review’ or ‘Professional Review’, titles that assert why significant amounts of time are being invested. It’s about learning and development which makes an explicit difference to professional learning and development so that they have an impact on pupil learning.

It remains a challenge for leaders of PLD to find the time and resources to support effective teacher learning and development and Bubb and Earley’s (2013) findings outline the variety of creative approaches that school leaders have taken to address this. *A world-class teaching profession. Government consultation response’* (2015) also notes that time and workload were identified as the biggest barriers to effective professional development with

English schools increasingly reluctant to release staff for PLD. The leader of PLD therefore needs to be creative in finding every opportunity for colleagues to work, plan, enquire, share, collaborate and evaluate in ways that are stimulating and enable teachers to engage in critical thinking about lessons and learning.

Evaluating impact of PLD

The PLD lead must also have the ability to evaluate the impact of PLD on teacher practices and outcomes for learners, without which the commitment of senior leaders to PLD will be threatened. Ofsted (2010) note that school managers often relied on anecdotal evidence and subjective impressions to judge the impact of PLD; even in schools where PLD was good. Research has consistently shown (e.g. Ofsted, 2010; Earley and Porritt, 2009) that schools lack experience, skills and tools to evaluate the impact of PLD. Earley and Porritt (2013) offer a thorough outline of the literature for PLD impact evaluation and note that 'A range of impact evaluation models, theories and frameworks therefore exist yet research and inspection evidence consistently shows that schools and PD leaders are still to employ such tools effectively' (ibid.:115).

School leaders often shy away from rigorous impact evaluation possibly because they believe it will take several years to be able to see the results of PLD. This expectation is based on a traditional view of impact evaluation. The approach to impact evaluation that Earley and Porritt (2009) developed is a very practical one that is simple in concept yet rigorous in the difference it can make. The work undertaken with over 600 schools and colleges in the *Effective Practices in CPD* project explored Guskey's key concept that evaluation issues should be 'an integral part of discussions during the earliest stages of professional development planning when ... goals are defined and activities specified' (2000:250). Impact evaluation in

schools tends to be at the end of a development activity yet ‘all initial planning as to the potential impact of CPD should be undertaken *before* CPD activity starts’ (Porritt, 2009:8). This is a simple concept to agree yet requires a significant change in the PLD practice of many schools. The key is to plan the expected specific intended impact, which involves having a clear picture of what practice is like, before engaging in any PLD activity so that there is a baseline against which to evaluate progress. This difference can best be expressed as impact: the difference in staff behaviours, attitudes, skills and practice as a result of the PLD in which staff have engaged. Ultimately impact must be the difference in the learning and experience of the children as a result of the change in staff practice and the latter becomes possible once there has been impact from PLD. Bringing about an improved outcome in the learning and experience of students is what enables a strategic leader to say that PLD has been effective and then supports the mobilization of such knowledge across the school.

A PLD project (see Vignette 1) set out to test whether a model of lesson study in mathematics, supported by external expertise from a university and combined with the approach described above to evaluate impact, could improve teacher subject knowledge and have a consequent impact on student attainment. The Impact Frame designed by the UCL IOE project leaders supported the schools to see impact evaluation as ‘a learning tool that improves the quality of both the CPD activity and the outcomes achieved’ (Earley and Porritt, 2009:147) and ‘provided compelling evidence of positive impact on pupils’ attainment in mathematics’ (Godfrey and Rowland, 2015).

When applied at the outset of the professional learning opportunity, this approach to impact evaluation enabled schools to design more effective improvement processes that had greater potential to ensure impact was achieved. Qualitative and quantitative data collected revealed that improvements in teacher confidence and skills contributed to statistically

significant improved attainment for their students. Evaluating the impact of PLD in this way is a powerful method to raise the quality of teaching, learning and standards. School improvement happens in classrooms and the professional learning and development of both teachers and support staff in schools must be of the highest priority for school leaders.

Vignette 1: Connecting knowledge

Project: Connecting knowledge

Participants: Twenty primary schools in Lambeth, S London, 38 teachers; 2520 students

Duration: Two years

Funder: London Schools Excellence Fund

Professional learning model: Lesson Study, evidence informed, external expertise, focus on subject knowledge and classroom practice, impact frame

Impact:

- Teachers particularly valued the focus on teaching and learning and the supportive and collaborative nature of Lesson Study
- Teachers reported significant improvement (measured by large and medium effect sizes) in 8/9 pedagogical areas including longer term planning, assessment and inclusivity, consideration of pupil voice and building on pupils' prior experience.
- Teachers increased their subject knowledge, awareness of effective teaching methods, confidence to lead lesson study
- Teachers reported that 94% of desired changes in students' learning (as described in teachers' baseline data) had been achieved
- Student data showed that around 56% of target students met aspirational targets for accelerated improvement with 100% making expected progress
- Students' achievements included:
 - Specific numeracy strategies
 - Confidence, resilience and perseverance
 - Evidence of solving higher-level problems
 - Ability to articulate the learning process or collaborate.

Implications

Schools and their leaders need to develop:

- An understanding of the design principles that lead to effective professional learning and development and how to apply these principles
- A culture that promotes and supports time for evidence informed professional learning and development and enables new practice to be trialled, tested, improved, refined and then embedded
- Processes for supporting professional learning and then the developed practice that emerges over time to enable teachers to embed the practices in their own classroom settings
- An understanding of the value, purpose and processes involved in evaluating the impact of professional learning and development.

Annex: Design principles for effective professional learning and development

Hawley & Valli (1999) (adapted)

Professional development should:

1. Focus on what students are to learn and the different problems students may have in learning the material
2. Be based on analyses of the differences between actual student performance and standards for student learning
3. Involve teachers in identifying what they need to learn and the development of the learning experiences in which they will be involved
4. Be primarily school-based and built into the day-to-day work of teaching.
5. Be organised around collaborative problem-solving
6. Be continuous and ongoing, involving follow-up and support for further learning, including support from sources external to the school
7. Incorporate evaluation of multiple sources of information on learning outcomes for students and other processes involved in implementing lessons learned through professional development

Stoll et al., (2012)

Effective professional development:

1. Starts with the end in mind
2. Challenges thinking as part of changing practice
3. Is based on the assessment of individual and school needs
4. Involves connecting work-based learning and external expertise
5. Learning opportunities are varied, rich and sustainable.
6. Uses action research and enquiry as key tools
7. Is strongly enhanced through collaborative learning and joint practice development
8. Is enhanced by creating professional learning communities within and between schools
9. Requires leadership to create the necessary conditions.

<p>8. Provide opportunities to gain an understanding of the theory underlying the knowledge and skills being learned</p> <p>9. Be connected to a comprehensive change process focused on improving student learning.</p>	
<p>Early and Porritt (2009 and 2013)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participants' ownership of Professional Development activity • Engagement with a variety of PD opportunities • Time for reflection and feedback • Collaborative approaches to PD • Establishing clarity of purpose at the outset in PD activity • Include a focus on pupil outcomes in PD activity • Specify a focus and goal for PD activity aligned to clear timescales • Understand how to evaluate the impact of PD • Develop strategic leadership of PD. 	<p>Cordingley et al., (2015)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The duration and rhythm of effective support • The consideration of participants' needs • Alignment of professional development processes, content and activities • The content of effective professional development • Activities associated with effective professional development • The role of external providers and specialists • Collaboration and peer learning • Leadership around professional development.