

Viewpoint Article

Whither PPD? Towards a theoretical framework to guide long term teacher development in England

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The introduction of government funded Postgraduate Professional Development (PPD) in England has raised many questions about the true political purpose and agenda of such accredited continuing professional development (CPD). There are conflicting aspirations for a Master's level teaching profession between educators and the government albeit agreement that this represents a new gold standard. Without a proper professionally agreed theoretical framework to guide long term teacher development it is difficult to resolve these conflicts. In this paper we offer a view of what such a framework could look like and suggest a useful direction for CPD policy.

Introduction

As a consequence of funding offered by the Training and Development Agency (TDA) for schools in England, many teachers have engaged with what is known as Postgraduate Professional Development (PPD). This has raised questions about the purpose of PPD and the impact upon teachers. The TDA believes that accredited CPD has the capacity to change behaviour and improve professional practice. Another belief is that PPD should be linked to performance management and the achievement of school based targets. This suggests a potential ethical conflict of interest. It is likely that the purpose of PPD (if not its demise) will become even more complex with the phased introduction of the TDA's fully funded Masters in Teaching and Learning (MTL) in England from January 2010.

Hoban (2002) identifies “*the need for a coherent theoretical framework to guide long term teacher learning and support educational change*”. In this viewpoint article we suggest a CPD framework to support teacher educators engaged in long term professional development. We recognise that teaching is a complex activity, principally concerned with developing student relationships. We argue that teaching cannot be simply “mastered” – because it is a creative learning process requiring specific support systems.

Hoban (2002, p. 39) states that:

The bottom line is that efforts for educational change need a long-term approach to support teachers through the non-linear process of change requiring the schools to be reconceptualised as learning environments for their teachers.

He goes on to argue that the literature on teachers' professional learning is inadequately theorised (Hoban, 2002). In response to this suggestion we ask what framework(s) could guide long term teacher professional learning?

Outlining a theoretical framework.

We believe that a theoretical framework to guide long term teacher development needs to take into account three different factors:

1. The external global factors that influence educational change. These include the need for an appropriately skilled workforce to meet the global needs and challenges of the 21st century. We call these the **drivers** of educational change.
2. Specific programmes are developed in response to these global factors or drivers, which constitute as the **agendas** of educational change. In England, examples include: the national literacy strategy; the introduction of a national curriculum, and the Masters in Teaching and Learning initiative.
3. The ways in which these educational agendas are introduced to the teaching profession are what we would refer to as the **modes** of dissemination.

Drivers: making learning our first priority.

The principal driver for our theoretical model is an assumption of the deep benefits that professional learning brings to individuals operating within learning organisations. Education in the 21st Century should be “*to help young people to develop this generic capacity to learn*” (Claxton 2006a: p2).

‘Learning to learn’ is not a new idea. The term “meta-cognition” was created in 1976 and since then gained common usage (Watkins 2001: p.1). In recent years the concept has gathered some momentum, principally through the writings of Claxton (1999, 2002 & 2006b); Deakin-Crick et al (2004) and Deakin-Crick (2006). The practice of ‘learning how to learn’ is derived from a definition of intelligence that is attentive to “habits of mind” (Resnick & Nelson-Le-Gall, 1997) and that robust habits can be nurtured and developed. Claxton (2002) has identified the habits deployed by effective learners and expresses these as four main dispositions, or the Four Rs, that are broken down in 17 capacities as outlined in Table 1.

Table 1: The Four Rs and 17 capacities

Dispositions	Capacities
Resilience	Absorption Managing distractions Noticing Perseverance
Resourcefulness	Questioning Making links Imagining Reasoning Capitalising
Reflectiveness	Planning Revising Distilling Meta-learning
Reciprocity	Interdependence Collaboration Empathy and listening Imitation

Source: Claxton (2002)

By explicitly identifying and strengthening these “learning muscles” teachers and other educators can support learners to develop greater independence. Claxton does not view learning as a passive, receptive activity (receiving and acquiring knowledge, skills and understanding). His view of learning engages with Piaget’s view of intelligence: “knowing what to do when you don’t know what to do” (Claxton 1999: p.11). This definition demands a new classroom culture, one where getting stuck and facing problems is to be encouraged. This approach requires a radical shift in the culture of the classroom and a change in pedagogy. Indeed, we would argue that the classroom of the future is in fact a learning organisation; governed by the epistemological philosophy of critical thinkers such as Guy Claxton and Peter Senge’s (2006) five disciplines approach towards the incorporation of a task management systems thinking situated curriculum.

Agendas: supporting the shift of mind

Agendas are the specific programmes that emerge in response to the drivers. One of the consequences of the political control of education is that there are multiple agendas that all teachers have to confront. These agendas dominate schools’ CPD programmes and are the consequence of schools having to continually cope with externally imposed change, and this issue now appears to be an international global phenomenon. The government-imposed national agenda policies in England are numerous: the 14 – 19 initiative, the new Key Stage Three curriculum, workforce reform; the list is endless.

Many of these political agendas are short term, whereby a specific initiative has to be introduced by a certain date. There is clearly a need for *a long-term approach to support teachers through the non-linear process of change* (Hoban 2002). In a previous research paper we identified a four phase model for teacher development (Sorensen and Coombs, 2007) as laid out in Table 2. This provides a long term view of teacher development and is concerned with introducing a carefully planned and phased pedagogical paradigm shift that moves from a teacher-centred to a learner-centred classroom.

Table 2: The four-phase model of teacher development.

<p>Phase 1</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Classroom management – including behaviour management • Lesson planning – preparing a 3-part lesson • Creating effective learning objectives • Starting your lesson - the first ten minutes • Partnerships in practice – working with LSAs • Creating the learning environment – room layout, seating plans, displays to support learning, displaying students’ work 	<p>Teacher perception of learners:</p> <p>Students seen as imitative learners</p>
<p>Phase 2</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Using questions to develop thinking skills • Assessment for learning • Using data to identify individual learning needs • Differentiation • The self-reflective teacher 	<p>Teacher perception of learners:</p> <p>Students seen as learning from didactic exposure: the acquisition of propositional knowledge</p>
<p>Phase 3</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Using active learning strategies and group work • Using ‘learning-to-learn’ strategies • Coaching in the classroom 	<p>Teacher perception of learners:</p> <p>Students seen as thinkers: the development of inter-subjective interchange and focus on students perspective on learning</p>
<p>Phase 4</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The learner-centred classroom • Teaching creatively and teaching with creativity • Developing creativity in students • Teaching “outstanding” lessons 	<p>Teacher perception of learners:</p> <p>Students as knowledgeable: the management of “objective” knowledge. A paradigm shift from lesson plans to learning plans.</p>

	Teachers help students to grasp the distinction between personal knowledge and “what is to taken to be known” by embedding a new systems thinking culture.
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Source: Adapted from Sorensen & Coombs (2007, pp. 11 - 12)

This model provides a framework for teacher development organized into four phases. Progression from one phase to the next is informed as much by a changing mindset as by any notion of “competence” or evaluation against the criteria established by the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted), which is the organisation responsible for inspecting and regulating education and training in England. This view of teacher development is less about accumulating skills and techniques and more about developing a “*shift of mind*” (Senge, 2006) that requires a readjustment of teachers’ relationships with their students. The focus of teaching is concerned with understanding and developing the dynamic relationship within the classroom that changes with different students and real-life contexts. Teachers need to be able to make intelligent *holistic judgments* (Day, 1999) about what, when and how to teach in a particular social and learning context.

The process of teacher development can be seen as a pedagogical adjustment with diverse strategies moving along a continuum from teacher-led to student-led interactions that are depicted in Table 3.

Table 3: The range of teacher / student interactions

Lead interactions	Pedagogical nature
Teacher-centred	Transmission pedagogy
Teacher-led interaction	Whole class pedagogy
Student-centred interaction	Learner-centred pedagogy
Student-led interaction	Learner with peers and teacher as facilitator/scaffolder of situated learning

Modes

Developing new curriculum opportunities for teachers to both create and experiment with these diverse learning opportunities can be enabled through appropriate CPD support modes. Such CPD modes place an emphasis upon situated action learning, enquiry and research. This CPD approach supports the work-based professional learning agenda as a means of both enabling and delivering curriculum change through such *professional empowerment*.

We also recognise that building a learning community of educational practice is a key concept in any programme development (Ibbotson, 2008). A characteristic of effective

professional development is the exchange of good practice and a willingness to critically reflect within a group of professionals.

We would add a further mode that appears to have been overlooked. This is ensuring that with CPD and PPD programmes there is the explicit development of “learning to learn” skills with teachers. For many teachers their academic engagement with PPD is the first time they have operated in this ‘student’ role since they were at university or college. Thus, many are initially unfamiliar with the necessity and disposition to readily engage with critical reflection, reading theoretical literature and writing about their work. Our combined CPD programme experience going back many years has informed us that many teachers are willing to participate in the sessions, but do not want to take the step towards gaining accreditation. One of the reasons for this, we believe, is their uncertainty and unfamiliarity about themselves operating as learners at this perceived academic level. Clearly, this is a real challenge for all CPD PPD programme leaders to make their programmes accessible and progressively inclusive of all teachers finding themselves initially with this experiential ‘deficit’ conundrum.

Claxton’s (2002) Four Rs model provides an opportunity for *all* teachers to build CPD learning confidence through participating in meaningful activities that help to establish a shared vocabulary to explain, analyse and develop meta-cognitive skills. We advocate this approach as a valuable addition to the current repertoire of best practice in PPD and would seek to develop practice-based critical and creative thinking scaffolds (Coombs, 2000 & Coombs, Penny & Richards, 2003) to enable the Four Rs framework to succeed.

Summary and conclusions

Our theoretical model is summarised in Table 4

Table 4: A proposed theoretical framework to guide Postgraduate Professional Development.

Drivers	Recognizing the central importance of learning in a rapidly changing and complex world. Perceiving learning as an essential and learnable skill Recognising learning as a lifelong activity Defining learning as “knowing what to do when you don’t know what to do” Understanding teacher development to be a long-term and complex activity
Agendas	Explicitly developing the skills of learners Changing the mindset of teachers (towards a learner centred culture)
Modes	Action research Learning communities Learning to learn skills

This model acknowledges the complexity of teaching, the primacy of learning and the importance of relationships. We believe in the principle that the quality of learning is dependent on the quality of social relationships between the teacher and students. However, Sarason's (1990, p.xiv) view is that:

...teachers cannot create and sustain the conditions for the productive development of children if these conditions do not exist for teachers.

We would like our CPD theoretical framework to suggest that the quality of student learning is dependent (or functional) upon the quality of the learning of teachers. Hence, high quality teachers are high quality learners that possess critical and creative thinking skills and social dispositions that can be enabled through appropriately designed master's level CPD programmes. Such programmes move away from the traditionally perceived academic nature of a campus-based master's programme and are instead understood of as a vocational professional learning master's programme situated within the workplace and helping educators to solve real-life challenges. We think that validating the development of teachers as situated reflective learners, systems thinkers and problem solvers is the best way to generate a climate of genuine professional learning curiosity and creativity in the present and future classroom.

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