Effective Practices in Continuing Professional Development – Lessons from Schools

This research and development project seeks to understand what constitutes effective Continuing Professional Development (CPD) and to improve the capacity of schools to evaluate and provide effective CPD.

Key words: continuing professional development; professional learning; impact evaluation

Key findings

Key findings derived from the experience of the projects were that for Continuing Professional Development (CPD) to be effective the following were needed:

- clarity of purpose at the outset in CPD activity;
- a specific focus and goal for CPD activity aligned to clear timescales;
- a focus on pupil outcomes;
- participants' ownership of CPD activity;
- engaging with a variety of CPD opportunities;
- time for reflection and feedback;
- collaborative opportunities for CPD.

Two key messages underpinned these findings:

- the importance of strategic leadership of CPD;
- the successes and challenges in evaluating the impact of CPD.

Figure 1 shows how the impact of CPD can be maximised through effective leadership.
What we did

The Effective Practices in Continuing Professional Development (CPD) programme (2007 to 2008), funded by the Training and Development Agency (TDA), had the twin aims of helping schools improve their provision and evaluation of CPD for the school workforce and the TDA to increase its understanding of the nature of effective CPD.

Phase 1 of the research involved over 670 schools as well as local authorities and higher education institutions. Of the projects involved in Phase 1, 68% submitted proposals successfully for Phase 2 and were awarded grants of up to £10,000. All of the projects were related to one or more focus areas such as: science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) subjects; 14−19 provision; schools facing challenging circumstances; early professional development; and impact evaluation.

The projects helped schools improve their practice and led to a deepened understanding of effective CPD and its impact, and gave rise to many interesting and exciting projects, a selection of which became case studies.

Figure 1: Maximising the impact of professional development

The effect of professional development activity is maximised if its leadership:

- Understands how prof dev makes a difference
- Approaches prof dev strategically
- Improves the quality of the prof dev opportunity

Schools and clusters need to:
- Develop strategic leadership of prof dev
- Understand how to evaluate the impact of CPD

Leaders and staff need to:
- Establish clarity of purpose before engaging in prof dev activity
- Specify clear timescales for achieving such purpose
- Include a focus on pupil outcomes in prof dev activity

School staff need to have:
- Ownership of prof dev activity
- Engage with a variety of prof dev opportunities
- Time for reflection and feedback
- Collaborate with colleagues in prof dev opportunities
How we did it

Schools reported to regional consultants and to the project directors via questionnaires and pro-formas. From the large sample of schools a small number of case studies described and analysed the journeys that the projects had made: what were their starting points and baselines; how far had they progressed (and how did they measure that progress); what were important milestones on the way; and what impact had they achieved. An approach to impact evaluation is also presented. A total of 20 were completed for the TDA and a sample of these published (see Earley and Porritt 2009).

Further information

The research resulted in a final report for the sponsor:


A book of the case studies was published as:


Articles for academic and practitioner journals were also published:


Contact

Principal Investigators: Professor Peter Earley and Vivienne Porritt, London Centre for Leadership in Learning, Institute of Education, University of London
Email: p.earley@ioe.ac.uk, Phone: +44 (0)20 7612 6824
Email: vivienne.porritt@ioe.ac.uk, Phone: +44 (0)20 7612 6824