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**School culture and postgraduate professional development: delineating the ‘Enabling School’.**

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**Introduction**

The government Department for Education (variously named DFEE, DfES, DCSF) perceives continuing professional development (CPD) as intrinsic to school improvement: a means of providing teachers with the skills and knowledge to raise standards in the classroom. CPD has also been explicitly linked to performance management, thus “combining pressure and support” (DFEEa, 2001: 20). At the same time, teachers’ CPD was intended to increase their professional status: “It's actually the essence of what we mean by improving the station of the profession, by giving teachers more standing in the community and amongst other professionals” (Morris, 2001). Morris’ focus on professionalism, here, is problematic. Professionalism is characterised by specialist expertise, autonomy and service (Eraut, 1994). Yet some believe teachers’ professional autonomy and status has been reduced by a combination of performance management, the development of competence-based standards training and government agendas for CPD, rather than individual preferences (Brown, Edmonds and Lee, 2001; Whitty, 2000). This apparent tension has been challenged with the new Professional Standards for Teachers (TDA, 2007) embedding on-going professional development as an essential element of the professional profile. Moreover phrases such as ’critical understanding’ are being interpreted as encouraging teachers to undertake accredited routes and specifically postgraduate professional development (PPD).

In an earlier paper we explored the barriers and enabling factors that teachers experienced as they endeavoured to complete postgraduate awards (Arthur et al 2006). We became aware that some schools appeared to provide an enabling culture that sustained the teacher while researching, while other school situations dampened enthusiasm and slowed progress. However, the features of an enabling school culture remained unclear and have become the focus of this follow-on study.

Criterion seven of the Funding Application for the postgraduate PPD programme 2005-8 asks providers how they will evaluate and report on the impact and effectiveness of their programmes on practice in schools (TDA 2004). There is here a tacit assumption that positive school impact *implies* an enabling school culture.

School improvement has been the raison d'être of professional development policy for many years. Policies for school improvement are based on the assumption that schools are rational organisations which will respond predictably to planned policy initiatives, whereas the reality is very different: individual schools are both unique and, to some extent, chaotic (Ouston, 1999). Technical-rational approaches assert that professional skills development requires systematic, specialised and standardised knowledge (Calderhead, 1987). For example, government policy interventions such as the literacy and numeracy strategies presuppose a single preferred method of teaching. Some people in educational organisations may question the extent of rational practices, and whether their outcomes are beneficial, or whether rational explanations account for what goes on in their organisations (Weick, 1988). Hence, an examination of cultural patterns in some schools which have proved to be successful enabling schools may be important in helping us understand how these schools are functioning.

We assume that positive school impact *implies* an enabling school culture. Glover and Coleman (2005) call for greater clarity and consistency in the usage of the term culture and associated terms. They identify a tendency “to use climate when objective data is under consideration, ethos when more subjective descriptors are involved, and culture when these two are brought together” (Glover and Coleman, 2005: 251). We believe this is useful clarification and intend therefore that our use of the term school ‘culture’ will be in line with this.

**Cultures which delineate enabling schools**

We have identified four types of culture relevant to our study in the literature: the leader/led culture, the mentoring/coaching culture, the collegial culture and the practical imperative culture. These are described in more detail below.

**The leader/led culture**

Direct involvement of the school leadership group (SLG) is often seen as of paramount importance in ensuring professional development impacts on school practice. Clement and Vandenberghe (2001) argue that school leaders are best placed to create structural and cultural enabling conditions. Glover and Law (1997) tell us that the experience of any continuing professional development (CPD) can be adverse, neutral or supportive. But they identify one recurring key issue. That is, how the SLG manage the scenario to create a culture of purposeful professional development. “The openness with which both senior leadership in schools and teaching staff seek, experience and sustain professional development may well relate to the attitudes of providers, whether for measurable outcomes, interpersonal problems resolution or sustained organisational development”, (Glover and Law, 1997: 266). ‘Providers’ is an interesting concept here. Are these the SLG in the school, HEI tutors and representatives, Local Authorities or the government? NB Is it possible to check the meaning in the original article?

There has been a suggestion that the SLG should also *model* engagement with professional learning. “…if leaders want teachers to learn, they too must learn, be seen to learn, and model the kind of learning they expect to take place” (Stoll, 1999, p.35). One means of doing this is through mentoring other staff (Hancock, 1997).

**The mentoring/coaching culture**

It is widely claimed that mentoring and coaching are advantageous for changing practice (Chivers, 2003; Day, 1997; Hancock, 1997; Kennedy, 2005; Rhodes and Beneicke, 2002), but this seems to fall short of direct consideration of how to mentor in terms of engaging with research-based enquiry leading to PPD. Robinson and Sebba (2004: 8) tell us that “one of the key factors enabling teachers to develop research and problem-solving skills seems to be the provision of effective mentors. Requiring participants to find mentors in their schools to assist them in their studies, was noted by Ofsted (2004) as a strategy adopted by providers to secure involvement of senior managers in supporting participants and creating a positive climate”. There are also many warm and wistful references to Best Practice Research Scholarships as a model involving mentors to support research (Furlong, 2003; McLaughlin and Black-Hawkins, 2004; Wood, 2003). In our experience, however, such mentors were HEI-based, rather than school-based and perhaps provide models of academic tutor/teacher collaboration, rather than a means of enabling CPD in schools.

**The collegial culture**

The benefits of a collegial culture in which colleagues can be self-questioning, critical friends are strongly represented in the literature (Cordingley et al. 2003; Clement and Vandenberghe, 2001). Clement and Vandenberghe see peer support as paramount in providing an enabling culture and stress the need for teachers to be collegial or cooperative in their research. One study found that collaborative CPD was “linked with a positive impact upon student learning processes, motivation and outcomes” (Cordingley et al., 2003: 8). Ironically, collaborative CPD is not necessarily supported by accredited courses, which tend to examine the work of individual teachers and may require that a collaborative project is presented as separate papers for assessment. In some ways our earlier research into the factors which support or inhibit completion of accredited work (Arthur et al. 2006) fits this ‘organic’ collegial model, as we found few references to SLG or even specific mentors as key supporters for teachers in completing their assessed work. Teacher colleagues were more commonly identified as a support. One of Burchell, Dyson, and Rees’ participants describes the benefits gained from continually discussing with colleagues, altering practice, sharing ideas and engaging with the imperatives of communication at informal, rather than formal, levels. The two teachers in this case study “… define another set of characteristics, perhaps less tangible, but nevertheless equally important, both to them as course members and to providers. These include outcomes that are more affective, motivational, and rooted in personal and professional values. It is these qualities that continue to drive them towards making a difference, sustaining their engagement two years on from completion of the course” (Burchell, Dyson, and Rees, 2002: 227).

In a sense this might be considered an alternative viewpoint to the more hierarchical models emphasising the leading role of the SLG or mentor discussed above. However, Clement and Vandenberghe (2001) sustain the hypothesis that CPD not only depends on individual teachers’ commitment but also on workplace conditions, which they broadly described as ‘collegiality’. Teachers’ perceptions of leadership function are influential in their evaluation of in-school influence on CPD. Leaders perceived as ‘initiators’ are seen as sustaining development; ‘responders’ inhibit it. They conclude that the two crucial concepts of learning opportunities and learning space underpin collegiality. The school (and here Clement and Vandenberghe emphasise the SLG as crucial) needs to first create the learning opportunities and then support outcomes through a positive ‘learning space’ in which the teacher can trial, extend and embed ideas. Collegial cultures are an important part of such learning communities.

A learning community has been defined as “a group of educators committed to working together collaboratively as learners to improve achievement for all students in a school. A learning community is one that consciously manages learning processes through an inquiry-driven orientation among its members” (Cibulka and Nakayama, 2000, p. 3). Aspinwall (1996: 8) describes four characteristics of a learning school:

1. Commitment to lifelong learning for all those within the school
2. Emphasis on collaborative learning and the creative and positive use of difference and conflict
3. An holistic understanding of the school as an organisation

4. Strong connections and relationships with the community and the world outside the school.

Schools which are learning organisations are not just committed to ensuring the professional development of their staff. They also need a learning ethos for everyone at the school, collaborative approaches to decision-making and a strong sense of shared vision (Coleman and Earley, 2005). These are not easy to achieve. As Quicke (2000) points out:

* Schools are complex organisations, embracing diverse cultures, which makes the idea of a single vision problematic
* Collaboration may be limited to safe areas, encouraging complacency, rather than challenge
* “Contrived collegiality” (Fullan and Hargreaves, 1992) may produce the appearance of collaboration while maintaining the existing power of the Senior Management Team. Teachers are rarely encouraged to challenge the status quo: “managements aiming to establish collaborative cultures do not take individual agency seriously; they want individuals to identify voluntarily with the organisation” (Quicke, 2000: 311).

Whether we accept a model of collegiality processed by strong SLG direction, or as something more organic, the importance of teachers’ involvement in designing and evaluating their own CPD rather than just taking on priorities set by others whether department, school or government has also been emphasised (MacPherson, Brooker, Aspland, and Elliott, 1998).

**The practical imperative culture**

Successful completion of accredited programmes may increase professional standing, improve recruitment and retention (Soulsby and Swain, 2003) and widen teachers' career options (Ofsted, 2002). There is, however, little concrete evidence that accredited postgraduate courses lead to improved pupil outcomes (Ofsted, 2002; Soulsby and Swain, 2003). Robinson and Sebba, in a desk review of 76 articles on CPD published since 1994, found “very little reporting of pupil outcomes” (Robinson and Sebba, 2004: 3). This is partly due to the problem of the time scale, that changes in teaching practice will take longer to impact on pupil outcomes (Robinson and Sebba, 2004), and partly because, in the complex world of the school classroom, it is difficult to isolate one aspect (such as CPD) from the combination of factors which may be helping improvement (Cordingley et al., 2003). Moreover, despite the potential impact of postgraduate professional development on professional status, many teachers’ expressed preferences for CPD are for practical approaches related to the school (DFES, 2001a) and some have a low interest in accredited courses which do not provide this (Brown et al, 2001).

We feel it is easy to overstate a tension here as the desire for high quality PPD *and* practical solutions may not be mutually exclusive. The need for rapid impact of PPD courses back into each participant’s own classroom situation has been observed by Baumfield and Butterworth (2005). They point out that there is “… evidence of the difficulty of transferring aspects of knowledge and experience not rooted in the immediacy of the classroom from one context to another. It is the immediacy of teaching and the potency of pupil feedback that drives inquiry and this privileges learning about students’ learning above learning about teachers’ teaching, which requires a switch of focus and a level of resource difficult to achieve within the daily routine of schools,” (Baumfield and Butterworth, 2005: 308). This supposes a pragmatic and practical sieve for PPD, which is, we feel, entirely fitting.

In March 2007 the TDA published a summary report of the responses by providers to the TDA’s requirement to evaluate impact. This provides a fascinating insight into the conceptualisation of impact by providers across the UK and the processes they utilise in order to gather this information. Most importantly though, the wealth of information about impact presented within the report adds great weight to the argument that high quality PPD can be scholarly without failing in terms of the practical and pragmatic:

*There is growing evidence to indicate that effective PPD provision is significantly empowering teachers to influence and drive changes in school to the benefit of pupils other than those they teach directly. This helps to embed improvements in practice.*

(TDA 2007: 5)

**Research approach**

There is some justifiable questioning in the literature of the traditional research tools employed to establish sustained impact of professional development. Such approaches typically include the survey (Davies and Preston, 2002), the case study (Lewis, 2004) or a combination of survey with qualitative data (MacPherson, Brooker, Aspland, and Elliott, 1998). Recently there has been some encouragement for narrative inquiry exploring teacher’s individual life stories and personal perspectives as a way of capturing the affective and nuanced results. There are those who present a convincing case for using life story as evidence in sociological and educational research (Clough, 2002; Goodley, Lawthom, Clough and Moore, 2004). Burchell, Dyson, and Rees (2002) champion life story as evidence in their work on impact. Their two case studies of teachers who completed MAs in Education, interviewed on completion and one year later, focus on the participants’ perspective. Burchell et al. (2002) argue that self-reports and reflections are a valuable source of evidence of impact. This is contested by Glover and Law (1996 or 1997? See bibliography) who seem dismissive of such qualitative data as evidence of impact *because* they rely on self-reports and self-reviews.

Our reflections on our previous work on teachers completing award bearing courses (Arthur, et al. 2006) illustrate our thoughts about the drawbacks of such a traditional approach. Then, we attempted to collect quantifiable data from a number of PPD participants through a postal questionnaire, balancing this with richer and more varied data gleaned from telephone interviews with a small number of participants. Throughout our research the questioning agenda remained firmly with us, the researchers. Few participants had the opportunity of elaborating on their initial paper answers to our questions and none had the opportunity to shape the agenda of the questions. Huron (1981) writes about research that lets both the experience and the participants speak for themselves, which he calls ‘experiential research’. We believe a research position and methodology that preserves, values and privileges the voices of the participants in our research project is both ethically justifiable and evidentially robust. In this project, therefore, our preference is to move towards a less pre-determined and less structured form of talking with participants, through semi-structured interviews. Lawthom (2004) presents her interviews with Colleen Stamford as relaxed, informal occasions, which Colleen calls “chats” (Lawthom, 2004: 73), over which the participant has as much control as the researcher. This is a position to which we aspire.

From our earlier work we each identified one school or college that had shown commitment to engaging above average numbers of staff in postgraduate professional development. Our assumption was that this commitment would imply an enabling school culture where teachers were encouraged to engage in practitioner research that would reflect and impact upon practice. Our research forms an illuminative evaluation (Parlett and Hamilton 1977) of a small opportunity sample. The school contexts of our four case studies are described below.

**A**

School A is a specialist sports college and an extended school positioned in a small market town with a rural catchment area. Over 99% of the pupils are white with English as their first or only language and the proportion of pupils entitled to free school meals is below the national average. The percentage of pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities is slightly lower than that found in other schools. However, the proportion of pupils with a statement of special educational need is higher.

There are 935 pupils on roll, 54 full time equivalent teachers and 30 non teaching, support staff. The head teacher joined the school eight years ago, but most of the senior staff have been there far longer. The longevity of tenure of many teachers is a feature of this school.

Eight teachers were undertaking 30/60 credit masters modules in 2005/6 with the local university, as part of a partnership ongoing for three years. In 2004/5 six teachers began masters level PPD, but only one of these completed her investigation (see ‘Janice’, below.) Two others are doing masters with another university in the geographical area, but this is not such a strong link, more individual motivation. The school also has access to external speakers by buying into the Local Authority programme.

**B**

This college is a large open access sixth form college with over 2000 students including 382 part time adult learners and 110 international fee-paying students. The proportion of students from a minority ethnic heritage is consequently double that of the local area at 5%. The college mission to ‘be a centre of excellence for 16-19 year old students’ is substantiated by its Beacon College status (1999) and Queen’s Anniversary prize for further and higher education. The most recent full Ofsted report (2007) recorded that the college’s ‘approach to social and educational inclusion is outstanding’ and it has ‘successfully raised the aspirations of students who have previously not succeeded in education and gives them a sense of genuine accomplishment’. Staff are relatively static in the area but there have recently been a number of internal promotions including the Principal, promoted from Vice Principal.

In recent years there has been a deliberate focus on staff development through sharing best practice amongst colleagues within the college itself, buying in selected providers for bespoke courses. One strand of this has had a teaching and learning focus. The other main strand of professional development concerns leadership skills. In 2005 the college began to work with a local Higher Education partner to provide pathways where teachers’ innovative work could be further developed and presented for accreditation within a Masters programme. Six have completed a postgraduate certificate through learning and teaching and in 2006 a further fifteen enrolled for a module entitled ‘leading educational change’. Participants include two assistant heads and several heads of department, as well as teachers without such responsibilities. In addition to designated CPD funds the college actively seeks external funding too.

**C**

The school is a primary, on the outskirts of a small city, with a mixed catchment area. Most pupils are of white, British heritage, although a small number are from other ethnic backgrounds, some of whom speak English as an additional language. The proportion of pupils entitled to claim free school meals is relatively low (around 12 per cent), while the percentage with learning difficulties and disabilities is slightly above average.

The school was rebuilt in 2000, which meant a lot of extra work for the head teacher and staff. The new buildings have helped to generate additional revenues through community use.

There are 190 pupils in seven classes, including foundation. No class is allowed to go above 30, in order to ensure teachers’ well-being and a reasonable workload. The key stage 2 results in 2006 were the best ever for the school.

The reason the school was chosen as a case study was that six out of its eight teaching staff, including its head teacher and deputy head teacher, undertook the same MA module, ‘leading improvements in learning’. This seemed to demonstrate a strong commitment to postgraduate professional development. Three of these six students successfully completed the assessed work for the module, and one of them has continued onto a MA programme. The course was offered free of charge and took place in the evenings, so there were no supply costs.

**D**

This large 11-16 comprehensive school with 1100 pupils on role is situated on the edge of a market town. It is a specialist school in technology and was designated as a training school in 2004. Pupils come from a wide range of socio-economic backgrounds and attainment on entry at 11 is slightly above average. Eligibility for free school meals is 5.1% which is below the national average, 1.4% Is this the right figure? It seems low to be above the national average pupils have English as an additional language which is higher than the national average but none are at the early stage of learning English. 17.2% pupils have Special Educational Needs which is below the average nationally; most of these pupils are classified as having specific learning difficulties, moderate learning difficulties or emotional and behavioural difficulties. The percentage of pupils with statements is 3.3% which is in line with the national average.

The School is described in the most recent inspection report (2001) as ‘a very good school’*.* Over sixty teachers were employed by the school at this time and evidence from the inspection indicates that they are well led and supported professionally.The CPD budget is shared between faculties who predict their CDP costs on an annual basis, bid for monies and then take responsibility for funding the CPD of staff in their particular area.

Currently 16 members of staff are undertaking masters courses, 2 are undertaking the ‘developing leadership course’ and the ‘aspiring heads course’ with the Specialist Schools Trust. Fifteen people have undertaken the National Professional Qualification for Headteachers (NPQH). As well as being funded, staff are given time to undertake CPD. An example of this is the way in which school development days were allocated to support MEd participation. School visits and observation of teaching are also important elements of CPD at this school that require teachers to be released during the school day.

**Discussion**

Aspects of each of the case study schools are discussed in relation to the four school cultures identified in the literature review.

**The Leader/Led culture**

The CPD co-ordinators in two of the case-study schools (A and D) described a culture which seemed leader/led. In both cases, the CPD co-ordinator held a senior management position. At school A, the CPD co-ordinator is an assistant principal and a head of department, as well as being in charge of CPD and performance management in the school. He has been at the school 17 years and is approaching retirement. He talks to the teachers a lot, but more to discover their needs than as a mentor. He sees his role as to organise CPD; to get a feel of teachers’ needs; to see that CPD meets the needs of the school development plan (SDP) and department plans. He says:

*“It’s all about practice based investigation so outcomes impact on individual practice. That way it transfers to the classroom.*

His position in the school, as well as his length of service there, allow him to make effective judgments about the CPD needs of the staff..

At school D, the coordination of CPD is undertaken by the Deputy Head teacher. As CPD coordinator he promotes the school’s philosophy towards CPD, which is that staff should be encouraged to take up opportunities even if this is at a cost to the school. He explains that the school has a ‘Can do’ culture with regard to new initiatives: anticipating change – not afraid of it. “We always ask the question: ‘What will our pupils get out of this?’”. As CPD coordinator he organises the CPD programme, and is responsible for analysing the implications for the School Improvement Plan.

Both these CPD co-ordinators are focused on the needs of the whole school, as well as individual staff. However, teachers at school A do not know if the CPD work they have done is linked with the school’s values and ethos because they are unsure of these. One of them thinks her findings could impact across the school if there was a forum for sharing good practice and results from research, but:

*“at school no one seems interested”.*

This may indicate a weakness in the leader/led culture: where power is primarily invested in one person, there may not be a sense of shared responsibility for ensuring the dissemination of CPD across the rest of the school.

**The mentoring/coaching culture**

School B seems to have adopted a mentoring model in relation to CPD. Learning through mentoring, coaching and work-shadowing has been identified as particularly beneficial in empowering staff at the school to embrace change and learn from tricky situations. One teacher writes that ‘mentoring from senior management is essential when staff take on a new leadership role’ and that meetings to track both needs and progress have been very beneficial. Another has ‘maintained a relationship with my critical friend who acts as an outside agent for me to voice my ideas, concerns and issues with – she offers advice in the form of questions which enable me to reach my own outcome without her persuasion or direct influence’. Several also comment that they have benefited, or would benefit, from visits to other colleges. These are perhaps areas that could be developed systematically as a means of providing learning opportunities to dovetail with existing CPD provision. Mentoring at this school appears to be part of a wider school culture, not specifically linked to CPD, even though it is an important means of support for individual teachers undertaking courses.

A mentoring culture might seem the most appropriate to support a personalised learning agenda, which seemed crucial in our research in motivating teachers to engage with CPD. For example, one of the teachers at school A said that initially, she joined a M-level course in order to consolidate her existing knowledge and skills, apply new ideas to her teaching and to gain personal satisfaction. She also wanted to show the school she was eager to learn. She had found the course deeply satisfying at a personal level (working on a project that was of personal interest) and in applying theory to practice (trying out new approaches in school). When describing their best experiences of CPD, interviewees at school C focused on courses which were of personal, as well as professional interest, for example, a year-long evening course on children’s literature, with weekly stimulating discussions; inspiring local authority courses in English, which encouraged critical debates about different approaches. One interviewee disliked courses focused on government strategies which did not allow a questioning approach – the antithesis, perhaps, of personalised learning.

Although individual CPD needs were a concern in the case study schools, however, it was only if these linked to the school’s needs, that they were prioritised. For example, in School A the CPD Co-ordinator felt that the school development plan and department plans drove CPD, although he tried to get a feel of teachers’ needs as well. In School C, CPD has to fit both the teacher’s and the school’s agenda, and is influenced by national initiatives, individuals’ performance management targets and issues specific to the school context. At School D, the School Improvement Plan and performance management are important mechanisms through which professional development needs are identified, but the CPD Coordinator also noted the value of informal chats with members of staff in identifying CPD.

These approaches seem to differ from a classical mentoring style, which would focus on the individual rather than the organisation. Our research indicated that a problem may arise if a teacher’s interests in CPD are not aligned with the school’s priorities. In School C, where almost all the teaching staff enrolled on a Masters level course, one of the teachers felt that the course had been foisted on her and did not meet her needs. Unsurprisingly, she did not complete the assessed work. The deputy headteacher at School C felt that, in retrospect, it may not be appropriate for a whole staff group to attend one course, as it is virtually impossible to find a course which will meet a wide range of needs.

The experiences in our case study schools illustrate a tension between coaching and mentoring to support individual staff in pursuing CPD which will interest and motivate them, and the need for CPD co-ordinators to invest in professional development which serves the best interests of the whole school community.

**The Collegial Culture: Schools as Learning Organisations**

All the case-study schools had a clear commitment to professional development. Two of the schools provided both financial support and time, to allow teachers to carry out work on their M-level courses and visit other schools. School B has tried to develop systems to allow staff to develop and gain experience: staff are encouraged to talk about teaching and learning in a generic way across subject disciplines, and are empowered to “have a go” at what interests them, whatever position they hold. School C was interested in developing school-wide initiatives, involving all the staff, for example, through training courses, development of resources and then sharing ideas in order to embed new initiatives in the school’s ethos. At School D, collaborative approaches were noted in an Ofsted report (2001): “The readiness to share good practice leads to a consistency in the quality of teaching across subjects”.

Provision of resources in the form of time, course fees and books was appreciated by the teachers, but they also greatly welcomed an interest in the outcomes of their courses, which was not always apparent. There was little evidence of ‘celebration’ in any of the case-study schools. Providing opportunities for teachers to share their learning and celebrate success on courses would seem a good way for schools to promote professional development without having to invest additional resources.

Learning organisations should have a shared vision, and a clear learning ethos. School B has tried to create a culture in which staff learn from each other, which they have recognised does not otherwise happen in the frenetic day-to-day activities of the school. School D’s philosophy towards CPD is that staff should be encouraged to take up opportunities. Some of the case study schools, however, had not yet reached this stage. At School A, for example, the link between planning for CPD and the school’s values is not clear, but this was seen as something the school would be moving towards in the future.

Several of the case study schools had mechanisms for teachers to present their work to other staff, both formally and informally. School B wanted to encourage sharing and talking in order to create a “vibrant engaged environment where teachers learn from each other”. The CPD Co-ordinator aimed to help staff achieve their aspirations, through professional development. Even here, however, there was an acknowledgement that the school had focused more on external than internal dissemination.

An important element of learning organisations is the establishment of a learning ethos, which extends to all staff, whatever the stage of their career. Collaborative learning is also emphasised. However, there was a noticeable lack of reference within the interviews to the benefits of learning to learn both by participants on accredited courses and senior managers. Where references were made they were inclined to be statements relating to enjoyment of the process or the value of the outcomes:

*When she started she wanted to consolidate her understanding of knowledge and skills and to show the school she was eager to learn; apply new ideas to her teaching and to gain personal satisfaction. The amount of personal satisfaction has been huge and the application of theory to practice very satisfying*

*(Janice: School A)*

*The teacher who did not complete the assessed work, and was quite critical of the course, nevertheless said that she liked the approach of postgraduate professional development, because it was helpful to talk to people who have read the latest research and to be encouraged to question and analyse policies and practice.*

*(Non-completing Teacher: School C)*

This outcome may mean that participating students, whilst understanding that they do benefit from higher level study, are unable to clearly articulate the benefits to themselves as learners of undertaking postgraduate study. This need for implicit or tacit knowledge to become explicit is something that could easily be rectified by HEI tutors during courses, and, at an earlier stage, through inclusion of this information within promotional activity and documentation. It appears that there is a similar task to be undertaken with some senior colleagues in schools, who whilst able to identify some of the benefits to the school of having staff engaged in postgraduate study, appear unable to provide a comprehensive list of these benefits. Perceived tensions between academic rigour and professional relevance also need to be challenged:

*…pupil progress is helped best by practical courses, rather than postgraduate development. It does not need a literature review.*

(Head: School C)

PPD for teachers is required to focus upon school improvement and therefore it must be professionally relevant, yet several responses link professional relevance with CPD rather than PPD. However, some leaders felt that PPD has the potential to empower staff:

*I suppose that one of the things we have found is that the experience has been very motivating for staff that … the remorseless unforgiving nature of the hamster wheel of college life means that often people don’t have the opportunity to take time out and reflect in a supportive environment and that can be quite illuminating to people. ….*

*(Principal: School B)*

The benefits of interaction between individual teachers and others, i.e. other schools, teachers, LAs and HEIs, were recognised by all four schools, but they placed differing emphasis on different types of external engagement. All valued peer interaction resulting in teachers sharing practices and learning from each other, whether or not they were at the same school. This is very much in line with the views of the participant in Burchell, Dyson, and Rees’ (2002) who describes the benefits gained from continually discussing with colleagues, altering practice, sharing ideas and engaging with the imperatives of communication at informal, rather than formal, levels. The Principal in School B acknowledged the benefits of staff going out to learn from other schools. He also recognised the value of receiving visitors from other schools, but overall he stressed the importance of staff having the time and opportunity to learn from each other:

*Now what we haven’t been good at historically is doing that internal dissemination. We have been good at external dissemination, we have been good at accessing good practices elsewhere but we have not been good at recognising that some people within the organisation have the experience actually to help and assist other people in the organisation so that internal dissemination has been a bit which I think historically has been weak*

School B decided to focus upon ‘internal dissemination’ in order to address this ‘gap’:

…*staff who are talking about teaching and learning for example … managing people to sharing and talking about that in a vibrant engaged environment where they are learning from each other. It is a space that, unless you create it it doesn’t happen because of the nature of how frenetic activity is.*

In School B, both the school and its teachers benefited from the opportunity to take time out and reflect in a supportive environment: this was described as “illuminating”.

School D’s Deputy Head saw advantages to having an external input, but indicated that time to reflect on new experiences, whether those resulting from participation in an MEd or those gained during a visit to another school was essential if colleagues were to get the most out of external engagement:

*In terms of impact [the Deputy Head] considers that the school visits have been most effective and the source of new ideas. In addition he feels the MEd has made an impact – ‘having most of the Heads of Faculty doing it has made them think – the key thing is to have time to think’.*

All four Schools promote external contacts and recognise the importance of enabling this within a working context where collegiality is very important. The views of the interviewees vary in relation to the extent to which they feel this is more effective when it is within the context of accredited (scholarly/theoretical) or practical (tips for teachers) courses. It is acknowledged that many teachers express a desire for more practically orientated CPD (DFES 2001a). The challenge for PPD providers is to bring together the academic and the professionally relevant within the minds of teachers and thus to overcome the perceived theory / professional practice divide.

**The Practical Imperative Culture**

The practical imperative culture focuses on the outcomes of CPD. Ofsted’s recommendation that schools undertake a cost-benefit analysis of all CPD, including PPD, is to ensure that expenditure on CPD has a positive impact on the pupils. We were interested in whether the case study schools linked cost to impact. There were substantial differences in the amount of money the case study schools have to spend on CPD. The comparison measure we have used is to divide the total CPD budget by the number of full time equivalent (fte) teachers. The 2006 figures indicate that the highest (school D) has £1000 per fte, whilst the lowest (school C) has only £170 per fte.

The way the CPD funds are generated is complex. For example, School A’s CPD budget from the local authority is approximately £20,000 per year. In addition to this, specific CPD initiatives in collaboration with a local university generate a further £150 per participating teacher each year. Eight teachers were undertaking PPD modules in 2006/7 giving the school approximately £1200 extra to spend on CPD.

These nominal figures may conceal spending on CPD, however. For example, in school C the supply budget is often raided to supplement the CPD budget, and the school regularly dispenses much more than the nominal amount.

The way the CPD budget is used varies considerably. In school C the teachers requested a change of strategy resulting in a higher proportion of the budget being allocated to subjects, and this has meant less flexibility for viring funds for CPD. In school A the extra funding emanating from the partnership with the university is used to provide teachers with time to work on CPD investigations, to see the tutor, visit other schools or just to write. This is appreciated by teachers involved in PPD, one of whom stated that time off from teaching helped her to complete her first assignment. In school D the funds were shared between faculties who predict their CPD costs on an annual basis, bid for a share of the CPD budget and then take responsibility for funding the CPD of staff in their particular area. However no-one had gone without the CPD they wanted due to lack of money in their faculty budget.

Having taken these differences into account it is difficult to establish causality between the amount of funding for CPD and either the attitude towards CPD or the effect that CPD may be having on the school. Though there seem to be less flexible approaches to CPD and some negative attitudes towards PPD in school C, where funds are most restricted, it is not possible to make a causal link between these phenomena.

Alongside PPD partnership work, school A invites outside speakers by buying into the Local Authority programme of INSET. This is costly as the LA charges £500 to come into school for one day. The Deputy Head in School A valued the external engagement that took place on accredited courses more highly than the individual CPD events that took place outside the school:

*“Some teachers on them became really focused…rejuvenated, I would say. But I don’t like the one days. It is too easy for staff to go out, come back but nothing has happened”*

This is echoed by others.For example, school B began the (PPD) Certificate course to reward teachers.

*“But even in the first year we have gained more than our money’s worth! The work has changed peoples’ perceptions. Teachers’ self-esteem has been raised. Initially they were worried ‘Am I capable? Can I cope?’ Now all have developed materials for their whole department. They have grown in confidence and self-belief. They have gained from presentation to peers (in college and beyond) and from the audience dialogue and support. These teachers in school B are now seen as innovators. It has changed the senior management team perception of individuals – more are now seen as having leadership potential and have been offered opportunities for further training.”*

[Assistant Principal, school B]

The impact reviews submitted by participants after completing their project reports also reflect this gain in self-confidence. They acknowledge that they are ‘more reflective’, ‘more confident and assertive’, ‘well read and able to see subtleties in the situation’ in their teaching. Evidence of impact on students is less confidently tracked, due to the timeline of the projects and the multiple influences that affect students’ achievements. However, each participant acknowledges significant impact at a departmental level and has presented the project to colleagues across the college. Several of the ideas have been taken up at an institutional level, and some have also been shared beyond school B.

The deputy head teacher of school C described the two best courses she had undertaken. One was a six week course, full-time, during which she was seconded from the school. It was very intensive, with a lot of expert input from a range of academics, local authority staff. The other was a year-long course on children’s literature. Neither of these courses were at masters level or assessed, but both were long. This suggests that the longevity of CPD provision, perhaps allowing time for complex thinking to take place, is valued.

There is disagreement about shorter, more practical CPD courses. As indicated earlier, School A’s CPD coordinator felt that one day courses had little impact. One teacher in school C said that she did not like courses focused on government strategies, using a power point, which did not encourage a questioning approach. A teacher in school B suggested that ‘most management courses do little other than provide a framework for common sense’.

But many teachers do see some benefit in these courses:-

*“In addition to PPD I have undertaken CPD courses in my subject and in pastoral care. To date I think that CPD has had more impact. It is more focussed and specific – less requirement for theory – easier to link to work already being done.”*

(Teacher school D)

*“I was not able to complete the assessment activity and I don’t feel that the course has had an impact on school improvement. At present and in my case CPD has had more impact than PPD. However PPD has the potential to improve the whole school. Staff completing PPD either gain more responsibility or move on to other schools. I would like to see more PPD linked to subjects, improving subject knowledge as well as knowledge of education.”*

(Teacher school D)

As part of CPD, professional development groups in school B provide a forum for sharing insights, ideas and issues. This opportunity for reflecting, sharing and learning together has been valued by many. As one said “it provides reassurance, challenges your own thinking and offers alternatives which all too often you don’t come to yourself”. A significant aspect here is the element of ‘challenge’ and ‘alternative’ perspectives, alongside ‘reassurance’.

One head teacher was scathing of the PPD approach, comparing it unfavourably with CPD:

*“You can’t treat teachers like children. Universities have to change. Sometimes providers seemed to be just trying to keep themselves in a job, offering INSET that people don’t want to do. Pupil progress is helped best by practical courses, rather than postgraduate development. It does not need a literature review”*.

(Head teacher, school C)

On the whole, however, PPD is valued. One head noted the link between success in PPD courses and career development, and there is evidence that staff in the sixth form college are increasingly ready to apply for leadership positions.

*All Certificate students2005/6 have received promotions and/or career progression opportunities as a result of their involvement. Their status as innovators in the [sixth form] college has led to further opportunities to be involved in college initiatives and they have been excellent role models to other staff..*

[Assistant Principal, school B]

We reject the seemingly anti-intellectual and anti-theoretical stance adopted by a small minority and recognise the place of longer, masters accredited PPD courses, that allow time for the development of critical thinking. At the same time we feel that teachers, as active practitioners, rightly expect professional development to *lead them towards* improving their classroom practice.

**Conclusion**

We feel privileged to have been able to research four enabling schools, each one distinctive in the way in which it is rising to the challenge of empowering teachers to develop. The four different models of enabling teacher development were fascinating to explore, each had its strengths and these should be celebrated. Clearly there are different views of the respective value of CPD and PPD in terms of bringing about worthwhile change in school. This is not surprising and it seems likely that high quality, relevant development activity, whether it is CPD or PPD is of value to schools. Generally CPD activity will demand less by way of a response from teachers and it may be this absence of, or lesser, demand for action in response to the development activity that reduces the potential for impact upon professional practice. Some PPD activity may also be grounded in a ‘transmission’ approach that constrains its ability to bring about meaningful change. Other PPD activity is focused upon impact on professional practice and it is this high quality PPD that leads to transformation.

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