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A Co-Constructed School-University Partnership Model of Professional Development for Teachers

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Abstract: This article analyses an innovative model of school-university partnership to deliver effective professional development for teachers. The university engages in partnership with a school (either primary, secondary or a group of schools) and then they co-construct and co-deliver a programme based upon what improvement the school requires for its teachers. The teachers get access to the university's resources and gain a postgraduate qualification, usually a master's degree or a postgraduate certificate. This model has produced mutual benefits for all the parties concerned. The university has boosted reputation in the field and such partnerships with schools in professional development have led to other collaborations. Schools have benefitted from creating learning communities in their organisations and they have an upskilled workforce which impacts on pupil outcomes. Ultimately, the collaboration of partners has led to best practice professional development, which in turn has benefitted teachers and the pupils in their care.

Key Words: continuing professional development model, school-university partnership, mutual benefits, teacher education.

NAPDS nine essentials addressed:

1. A comprehensive mission that is broader in its outreach and scope than the mission of any partner and that furthers the education profession and its responsibility to advance equity within schools and, by potential extension, the broader community;
2. A school–university culture committed to the preparation of future educators that embraces their active engagement in the school community;
3. Ongoing and reciprocal professional development for all participants guided by need;
4. A shared commitment to innovative and reflective practice by all participants;
5. Engagement in and public sharing of the results of deliberate investigations of practice by respective participants;
6. An articulation agreement developed by the respective participants delineating the roles and responsibilities of all involved;
7. A structure that allows all participants a forum for ongoing governance, reflection, and collaboration;
9. Dedicated and shared resources and formal rewards and recognition structures.

Introduction

Professional development of teachers is a crucial component of progression in schools not only for teachers but also for the pupils that they serve. It is an important and growing aspect on the international stage (Kennedy, 2005; Kennedy, 2014; King, 2014). The raising of teacher standards is paramount for pupil achievement and there is an understanding about the impact of professional development and the fact it is not a one –off activity but a constant regenerative activity throughout the career of a teacher. Teacher quality can be enhanced by professional development (Kennedy, 2014; OECD, 2005) and effective professional development can lead to permanent changes in teaching practices (Whitehouse, 2011). Professional development of teachers impacts upon teachers, school improvement and pupil standards (Soulsby & Swain, 2003). At the heart of such professional development lies school-university partnerships. Although such partnerships are well established for initial teacher education (ITE) to train newly qualified teachers into the profession, this has not been as profound for the needs of qualified teachers undertaking further study.

Professional development for teachers can be structured in many ways (Kennedy, 2005) and in the United Kingdom this has taken many forms over the past two decades. Local Government provision provided by Local Authorities (LAs) for their schools, which tend to be one day courses and non-accredited, was once the mainstay of such an activity. It was supplemented by universities offering accredited longitudinal programmes usually in the form of postgraduate degrees i.e. master’s degrees, postgraduate certificates etc. Master’s level professional development can be liberating, enhance criticality and empower (Kennedy, 2014). For a number of years at the end of the 20th century and the beginning of the 21st century, such postgraduate professional development was subsidised for teachers in England by the Government, although in many cases that did not lead to partnerships with schools but more one of individual teachers embarking upon a postgraduate certificate or an MA, sometimes without much support from the school at all. However, due to cuts in government spending this funding ceased in 2011. In recent times due to the decline of local authorities and government policy, schools have been charged with providing professional development for their own staff, as well as teachers in other schools in a region.

This paper will examine the development of one such model of school –university partnership for accredited professional development, that originated in the early days of government subsidy for Postgraduate Professional Development (PPD) and then evolved as partnerships with schools and local authorities became stronger. The model continued to flourish despite the termination of the government subsidy and the increase in university tuition fees. The model analysed here started in one particular university in the United Kingdom and then moved to another university, however, due to the impact and success it was a model that some other institutions have embraced either in full or part and replicated to suit their needs and those of their partner schools.

This paper will present the model of professional development partnership delivered, the origins of the model and the research findings from analysis of this model. This analysis will be undertaken in the context of mutual benefits to both schools and the university and will be conceptualised and analysed using the impact themes for professional development from Cordingley, Bell, Thomason & Firth (2005), as the theoretical framework.

There are many terms used to describe professional development for serving teachers. This paper will refer to it as Continuing Professional Development (CPD).

The Model

The current model is the result of 17 years of evolution from its earliest incarnation in 2001 to the present day. In essence, it is a true and equitable partnership between a university and school with trust at the heart of the whole operation. As a mechanism for CPD it is effective and impacts not only upon teachers and the school, but also the learning of pupils.

The university works in partnership with a school or a local authority to ascertain the CPD needs of the school, what they want to achieve, the staff they want to target and the rationale behind why they want to target them. Using the knowledge of the practitioner (the school) and that of theory (the university), they put together a bespoke programme to meet the needs of the school and the group of teachers. The university has a range of validated programmes from leadership, to teaching and learning, to special educational needs such as autism and dyslexia, that have very broad based modules allowing the school partner not only to shape the programme they want, but also the type of content they want in the modules of delivery. The accredited programmes used are master's degrees or postgraduate certificates as they are an effective form of professional development for teachers (Seabourne, 2009; Soulsby & Swain, 2003). Following the creation of this individualised pathway for the school, the university team and school team plan the delivery to meet the needs of the school. It is crucial that professional development should meet an identified need (Whitehouse, 2011). The partnership can be shaped in a different way depending on the partner as high quality practice is not necessarily the same in every context (Parker, Parsons, Groth, & Brown, 2016).

The programme is delivered at the school's premises, which makes it much easier for the teachers to access, especially after a long day in the classroom. The model of delivery can also be negotiated and in most cases this tends to be in the form of twilight sessions after school for each module but it can be delivered in blocks if the school requires and has timetable space for such provision. Thus, in all aspects of the course, the community has control over the programme (Kennedy, 2005; Wenger, 1998). Schools tend to gain more from a practice-based master's degree and collective CPD is stronger for the school than staff undertaking such provision on an isolated basis (Burstow & Winch, 2013).

Following design of the programmes and agreeing delivery logistics, the university and school teams look at which organisation is best placed to undertake the delivery of the programme. This is a true partnership with no hierarchy between the two organisations. In general, the more practitioner-based aspects of the programme are delivered by the school and the more theoretical concepts and the marking of scripts are delivered by the university. This means that both organisations are working to their strengths on the programme and the teachers receive high quality provision, which has a greater impact upon their practice or leadership skills.

With no government subsidy the funding for such provision could be prohibitive given that master's programmes stand at approximately £5,995 per student (\$8,333). However, due to the collaborative nature of the provision and the fact it is delivered on the partner organisation's premises, the university enters into an enterprise partnership agreement with the school, which then takes into account the input of the school to the teaching, the hosting of the programme and the recruitment of the participants. This then can reduce the cost significantly to approximately £2,400 (\$3,336) for a full master's degree and £800 (\$1,112) for a postgraduate certificate. In most cases the school pays for its staff, or in some cases, the individual teacher pays the school and the university invoices the school. This is not only good professional development at a vastly reduced cost that is directly targeted at the school's needs or their development plan; it is also excellent CPD for the members of the school team

who co-deliver on the programme. It has multiple impacts upon the participants, school, teacher deliverers and ultimately pupils. It fosters a learning community culture within the school and a self-support peer network due to the number of staff all undertaking a master's degree. Learning in communities can produce a powerful creation of new knowledge (Boreham, 2000). The university staff also gain from close working with the school, seeing up-to-date practice in action and any potential future research links. Such communities of practice can be quite transformative, collective knowledge and experience enhances the learning (Kennedy, 2005). Thus, it is a very strong and mutually beneficial model of school- university partnership and professional development.

The Origins of the Model

The origins of this CPD model can be traced back to 2001. In this period, Universities, also known as Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) had their grip on Initial teacher training systematically loosened by the Government with schools playing a greater role for the previous 10 years (Childs, 2013). The last two decades have seen continual government changes to education policy (Burstow & Winch, 2013). However, in contrast postgraduate level CPD for teachers had received a boost by government funding which had appeared in the late 1990s. The new Labour government had brought in 'In-service training funding' to help subsidise teachers undertaking master's level programmes. Institutions bid for this money using their programmes on offer and were allocated a certain amount of funding which was based upon recruitment.

The evolution of this CPD model lay in two critical factors. The first being that the institution was given the funding in year 1 but if they did not recruit this was clawed back in year 2 leaving institutions that had not ring fenced the money making losses from year 2 onwards, if they had not recruited to target number. This particular HEI institution, where the model began, had such funding targets but could not recruit to them and thus faced this deficit problem. The second factor was that either the programmes were not appealing to prospective students or they were not aware of them. Programmes on offer tended to fit the training model of CPD where the participant was in a passive role (Kelly & McDiarmid, 2002; Kennedy, 2005; Little, 1993). At this particular HEI, the programmes were offered by academic staff in a busy city centre on weekday evenings and had no input from key stakeholders in the sector such as schools and local authorities (LAs). This created a decontextualised setting (Kennedy, 2005) although they did supply new knowledge (Hoban, 2002; Kennedy, 2005). A solution was required to improve the recruitment to these programmes. Analysing the provision of the HEI, it appeared that the fact the programmes were delivered on campus in isolation of schools was a significant problem affecting the provision. Thus, the best solution was to build relationships with key partners and locate delivery in the locality in schools or local authority (LA) premises. This would enhance accessibility, recruitment and status. Thus in 2001, this outreach/partnership model of CPD was born and would continue to evolve over the coming years.

The effect of working in partnership and having outreach delivery was instant, recruitment increased dramatically and as a result the HEI solved the clawback problem and could draw down the finance to fund the provision. Evaluations of programmes also improved through the manifestation of taking the needs of the participants into account with times and delivery sites to suit the participants. Although Gardener (1996) argues that schools were not historically supportive of HEIs, in this situation they seemed very ready to accept involvement on such programmes for the development of their staff. It was probably a rare event for them to be involved in shaping a programme to meet their needs and it was readily and warmly received. However, partnership does need to be driven as school-university

partnerships are complex and need to be worked at in order to sustain (Burns, Jacobs, Baker & Donahue, 2016). This development coincide with a period of time when Initial Teacher Education (ITE) was becoming far more school-centred (Furlong, Barton, Miles, Whiting & Whitty, 2000) and there was a growth in school based forms of CPD such as coaching and mentoring (Furlong, 2005).

This model of CPD was then taken to a larger HEI, which on the surface had greater provision, but in reality it had significant clawback deficits. The model was applied to this HEI in 2003 and CPD partnerships were built with local schools and LAs which resulted in the beginning of delivering programmes in the community.

Despite improvements due to the implementation of this model, it was felt that if only the HEI could operate on a bigger scale in the region then it could meet the needs of the teachers, raise the status and awareness of the activities and protect the programmes. As a region, the HEI was competing with other providers such as other universities and LAs. The HEI approached these other bodies with regard to working together and a Regional Consortium, which featured 12 local authorities (LAs) and 4 universities (HEIs), was created. The consortium bid for the next two rounds of In-service training funding, now called Postgraduate Professional Development (PPD), in 2005 and 2008. The CPD school partnership model was freely shared as part of the consortium arrangements and although one university started a small -scale approach in this area it was the HEI institution which had continued the development of the model that delivered the vast majority of this type of activity.

The Masters of Teaching and Learning (MTL) was the Labour government's plan in 2008 for a master's level teaching profession (DCSF, 2008). It was the last attempt by that government to stimulate a funded CPD structure for teachers. In keeping with the move to school led CPD (Childs, 2013), schools were to play a significant role in the delivery of this award with school coaches being trained to support teachers undertaking this degree. Schools and HEIs were to be equal partners (TDA, 2009; Burstow & Winch, 2013). For the first time, the consortium had an opportunity to deliver a single joint programme across the region led by the HEIs and schools.

Following the election in 2010 of a Conservative-Liberal coalition government, they introduced a white paper in November 2010, 'The Importance of Teaching' (DfE, 2010) which terminated both the PPD and MTL funding programmes. The white paper proposed the setting up of teaching schools with part of their remit being CPD and signalled another shift from HEI to school in terms of both ITE and CPD (Child's 2013; DfE, 2010; Gove, 2009; Gove, 2010).

This removal of funding and subsidy for teachers undertaking master's CPD, in a sector that had received it for over a decade, was potentially catastrophic. However, it was actually a catalyst for further evolution to the outreach model of school-university CPD partnership. The academic impact of the school delivery in conjunction with university delivery was appearing to be key in terms of the teachers undertaking the programme and the subsequent evaluations of the impact. It was also good professional development for the teachers delivering on the programmes. Therefore, all future partnership deliveries were looked at using this joint delivery model. Not only did the partner shape a bespoke programme, they then negotiated the aspects they would deliver and those which the university would undertake. As learning is related to practice in this model it would help change and sustain practices (King, 2014). A by- product of this approach was that it reduced the cost of the delivery and as a result a partnership contract was drawn up which agreed a certain fee with the partner which was less than the standard university fee. This, once again made the cost of postgraduate CPD more attainable and in the main the school partner paid this fee for their staff. The

model spread by word of mouth and has resulted in a number of partner schools offering master's degrees to their teachers in the locality.

Once again, this CPD model thrived resulting in a peak of 11 partner MA programmes being delivered simultaneously across the region. The Chief Executive of the National College of Teaching and Learning (NCTL) stated that he wanted a school led system to transform CPD (Taylor, 2013). This CPD model had been fulfilling that role since 2001 and had evolved over the years to become more and more school led. Certainly, from the beginning, the schools had felt like full and equal partners and this relationship has led to a strong, durable and flexible model to meet the needs of their workforce.

Although the consortium officially ended after the demise of PPD and MTL, individual links continued. Following the adaptation of the CPD model to work with schools to accredit the middle leadership development programme (MLDP) provision, which schools were delivering, it appeared that this field of programme could not continue when it became a licensing system. However, in 2014 the original local authority and two of the original universities, re-ignited the consortium on a lesser scale to write leadership programmes for various stages of leadership. The demand came from schools in the region and the principles were based firmly upon the CPD model.

Methodology

Throughout the period of the operation of this professional development model evaluations from the partners, both schools and local authorities, have been collected in order to improve and shape future deliveries. This study has extrapolated data from this longitudinal feedback and has drawn on contemporary reflective accounts of some of the key stakeholder partners from schools and the LAs as well as the university. These accounts were in the form of semi structured-interviews that facilitated a reflection of the experience they had undergone being part of the model. Although over 50 schools have been part of the CPD model at some point in the last 17 years and a number of local authorities the data gathered was from a sample across the programme of 10 school evaluations and 2 local authority representatives. The interviews were conducted with three school and two LA personnel and the university staff member whom had created and led the CPD model.

In order to analyse the data gathered the study utilised a theoretical framework drawn from research into effective CPD. Cordingley et al (2005) identified through research into the impact of professional development, the following themes of location, experimentation versus reflection/programme design, groupings, voluntarism and pupil orientation. Thus, the analysis of mutual benefits will use this as a framework with an additional category of other benefits in order not to constrain the findings.

Findings

School Benefits

Location

Delivery of the programme in the partner school was a key recurring benefit of the model highlighted by the school partners. All the partners both schools and LAs mentioned a key benefit was a flexible delivery model, one school describing it as '*fantastic*'. Another school remarked that a key part of their need was that they '*wanted CPD delivered locally*'. An LA stated that '*they didn't want teachers to have to travel*'. Another school noted that '*it was important teachers can do academic study in their*

own place in their own context'. This supported the findings of Cordingley et al (2005) which stated that CPD is significant when it is in-school. It is important to have such flexibility to meet the needs of partners (Lewis & Walser, 2016).

Experimentation versus Reflection/Programme design

This theme looked at the benefits from this type of programme design. The key benefit for partners to this model was that the programmes were *'tailor made to teachers need'*. A recurring theme in the data is that the partners felt an ownership of the programme and that they helped to co-construct a bespoke programme to meet their needs. Thus, they could undertake academic study in a way, which suited them. A school in the south of the region stated that *'it was utopia designing courses together'*. Accreditation for CPD was seen as *'important to teachers'* by the main LA involved in the model. One Headteacher felt that involvement in this CPD model created teachers *'who believed in academic study and reading as part of the job'*. Having accreditation as part of CPD was significant as schools felt that it raised its standing amongst the teachers in the school. The academic side was very important to the school partners as it gave professional development rigor in developing teaching and learning in the school. One LA director noted that *'partners recognise the currency of the relationship with the HEI'*. Theory aligned to practice was also a key recurring theme that was seen as a benefit to partners giving a broader knowledge base for the teachers involved. The structure and design of the programmes were significant factors as was the support of school leadership, which corresponded to findings by King (2014). This model helps practitioners to gain self-knowledge which is an important aspect regarding their own professional ability (Burstow & Winch, 2013). It also placed teachers at the centre of their own learning (Daly & Burstow, 2009). Having CPD planned and organised at school level, which this model represents, is crucial to its effectiveness (Whitehouse, 2011) and enabled teachers to change or develop aspects of their teaching (Cordingley et al, 2005).

Groupings

Throughout the data, the theme of collaborative learning emerges repeatedly. Creating a learning community in the schools by having the CPD based there in the location and by having a number of staff members, attending and sharing ideas, according to one school created *'a real learning buzz around the school'*. One Headteacher stated that *'teachers work together for a year which is more in-depth and intense, far better than one day courses and thus has an impact on the teacher the school and their pupils'*. Another remarked that *'teachers were open to new ideas and they now use research to inform practice'*. Teachers felt they learned from each other, which supported the finding of King (2014). Some of the schools joined with other schools to undertake the programme. This produced cross-fertilisation and brought schools and participant teachers together to as they described, *'share ideas and practice'*. Success lies in the fact that the collaboration is teacher driven (Kennedy, 2014). The attitude of teachers is important to ensure engagement and is central to the process of change (Bubb & Earley, 2010; Evans, 2011; Opfer, Pedder & Lavicza, 2011). Teachers' beliefs are instrumental and can lead to change if they are engaged or act as gatekeepers if they are not (King, 2014). Teachers do seem to prefer to work and reflect collaboratively and collaboration brings commitment and ownership and is linked with positive outcomes (Cordingley et al, 2005).

Voluntarism

All the schools that participated in the model and the LAs were volunteers. They chose to be part of the model as they felt it would meet their needs. The fact that they had an input to course design and the teaching on the programme gave them a strong sense of ownership. One senior leader in a secondary school remarked that the university *'did what the school wanted'*. This is also demonstrated by the sense of *'real partnership'* felt by all of the partner schools and LA and the fact they felt the endeavour was *'a joint success'*. They also felt that it was an example of good practice and recommended it to other schools in the region. One LA remarked that *'the university was more creative, innovative and open than other HEIs'*. He felt that the co-created course would gather momentum and be good for both institutions. Change can be influenced by many factors, which results in different ways of impact, but the attitude and beliefs of teachers is significant (King, 2014). As all teachers and schools were volunteers, this created a positive attitude and 'buy in' to the model.

Pupil Orientation

Although it is harder to ascertain the impact upon pupils without complicated processes, there is growing evidence of a link between CPD and pupil outcomes (Barber & Mourshed, 2007; King, 2014; Soulsby & Swain, 2003; Yoon, Duncan, Lee, Shapley & Scarloss, 2007). It is possible to gain an indication from the teacher or partner's perspective about the effect the programme has upon the pupils of the participant schools. One school stated that by looking at theory to inform practice it *'had a direct impact upon their pupils'*. A leadership programme developed with an LA had the intention that future leaders would fully understand themselves and their responsibilities to the pupils in their care. Another Headteacher talked about the programme as one in which it was learning for teaching and thus would directly impact upon pupils in his school. He added that *'the programme does actually change practice'*.

Other benefits

Partner schools and LAs did suggest a range of other benefits that they saw as a direct result of the CPD model. They felt working with a university gave them a partner that could help them achieve other aspects of their development. One stated that the work they did with the university and the support they were given enabled them to successfully bid for Teaching School status which *'wouldn't have happened if they had not been involved with the university through the CPD partnership'*. A number of schools remarked about how participants on the programme grew in confidence. One LA talked about how *'this confidence enabled them to have the ability to challenge in the workplace'*. Another senior leader at a school mentioned that they had held a whole school assembly on metacognition and how that would not have happened prior to the programme. A number of participants had gained promotion during or following the course and they put it down to a causal link with being on the programme. This included knowledge acquisition, being able to use evidence to support their plans/arguments and the confidence they had gained from the programme. Effective CPD provision can empower teachers to influence and drive change (TDA, 2007).

Another key benefit for school was the access that their teachers had to resources. Being a participant on the programme gave the teachers access to the university library and the vast range of resources that it held. This enabled them to share such resources with colleagues in the school and support or generate up-to-date and innovative ideas.

One school saw the CPD model as progressive allowing them to structure the professional development of their teachers from initial teacher training through various stages of a teacher's career to headship. Involving a university was seen by the Headteacher as enabling teachers *'to access a resource'* (both staff and literary) *'to enable them to learn things they do not know'*. He felt universities were *'uniquely placed to provide CPD for schools'* and he pondered where else could school get this type of support from. A local authority felt that using this CPD model helped them with recruitment and retention of teachers and leaders within their schools.

One of the key factors was the link person at the university. They all mentioned that this role was crucial and they had always found the person to be open and helpful. Such successful partnerships do require individuals whom can work across the school-university boundary (Burns et al, 2016).

University Benefits

Analysis using this framework covers mainly the benefits of the model for the schools and LAs. The schools tended to talk about the benefits they received from the partnership. However, there were a number of benefits from the model for the university which would be expected given the origin of the model came from the university. The data gathered regarding these mutual benefits comes from a reflective interview with the founder and instigator of the model whom created the partnerships.

Location

A university that prides itself in teacher development needs to be able to access teachers in order to work with them to support teacher and school improvement. This model enabled the university to have a closer relationship with schools and be of greater relevance in the CPD sector. Following a decline in campus based numbers a new model of CPD for teachers was needed in order to make this form of CPD attractive to teachers and to stay as a provider of such programmes. The model created a win-win situation as it met the needs of the schoolteachers and the university recruited student numbers. This allowed the university to expand its portfolio of provision so that it met the needs of a wider group of teachers and schools. The hub of learning created in schools turned into learning communities, which created a brilliant resource for schools with many, and in some cases, all staff engaged in looking at different aspects of school life.

Experimentation versus Reflection/Programme design

An important and clear driving benefit from the university was that fact this was a true partnership with all partners involved in planning and needs analysis. The courses were designed and shaped to meet the needs of what the partner wanted. The university felt that they were not the experts on what a particular school needed and thus asked what the schools wanted and then co-created the programme. The school felt ownership and the participant teachers got the best of both worlds when it came to input, from a theoretical and practitioner perspective. The university felt this made the impact greater and was good practice, which in turn enhanced the reputation of the university programmes. The model then spread by word of mouth (not advertised) to other schools and this became a virtuous circle for the university.

Groupings

A professional development cycle was created in the schools, which was supported by the university but the relationship became wider than this. Another benefit for the university was that the school came to see you as the university of choice. Thus, they came to you first if they wanted to embark upon/ bid for initial teacher education training routes or teaching school status offered by the Department for Education. The also involved the university in their wider partnerships such as learning trusts and teaching school alliances. This has helped to create a loyalty and trust between the partners.

Other benefits

The university gains in reputation, esteem, status within the region and it helps sustain student numbers. Partner schools can also help the university when it is subject to a quality review. The partnership of schools with a university for professional development has a greater effect and impact on professional development for teachers than if the respective organisations had decided to go it alone. It enables the partnership to draw on the knowledge of university lecturers, school leaders, teachers, researchers and pupils.

Conclusion

The findings demonstrate the success of this scheme from both the school, local authority and university perspective. There have been mutual benefits for all the parties concerned. The university has boosted numbers and reputation in the field and partnerships with schools in CPD have led to other partnership in teaching school alliances, learning trusts and ITE. Schools have benefitted from creating learning communities in their organisations and they have an upskilled workforce that impacts on pupil outcomes. Local authorities have also been reinvigorated in their offering of CPD to their schools with it now leading to accreditation through their links with HEIs. Ultimately, the collaboration of partners has led to best practice CPD that in turn has benefitted the teachers and pupils in their care. A cycle of professional development has been created to which all organisations contribute as equal partners in an environment of mutual respect. It is mutually beneficial for schools and the university but ultimately it gives teachers an enhanced professional development experience, which has a greater impact upon practice.

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