

Outlining How Evidence-Based Practice Can Be Extended to Teacher CPD

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Outlining How Evidence-Based Practice Can Be Extended to Teacher CPD

Dr Emily Perry, Deputy Head of the Centre for Development and Research in Education, Sheffield Hallam University shares her thoughts on how the 'evidence-informed' agenda, present across the education system, can be extended to also influence CPD models.

In teaching we have an ongoing move towards an 'evidence-informed' system, in which teachers and schools draw on evidence from research to make informed choices about 'what works'. However, in teacher professional development, we are lagging behind. National and international studies have built up our collective knowledge of effective professional development and the impact that this can have on teachers' practice, careers and retention in the profession, and the characteristics of effective professional development are well-established enough that the DFE has drawn them together in the CPD Standards.

These lists of characteristics can be helpful as a checklist when planning, evaluating and quality assuring CPD. However, they tend to lack a focus on a vital component of CPD: the facilitators. By facilitators I mean the people who plan, develop and deliver workshops, courses and other CPD activities for teachers. They may be teachers, consultants, academics or combinations of those and other roles. From numerous studies we know that the role of facilitator is complicated. It covers multiple activities including teacher, coach and critical friend and involves tricky balancing acts between supporting teachers as peers while still providing challenge and being a knowledgeable expert.

My own research has confirmed this complexity, showing that facilitators acknowledge but don't appear to struggle with these potentially competing roles. They describe facilitation as including teaching and being more than teaching. Working with experienced teachers is substantially different from working with children (or with inexperienced teachers), and facilitation often includes modelling of teaching approaches, and using active learning with lots of teacher talk.

These approaches reflect the evidence around effective professional development. But while facilitators use their knowledge and experience of teaching and of facilitation, they rarely draw on the evidence about professional development itself. For example, they don't often appear to consider the evidence from research about particular evaluation models, such as whether a phone call to a sample of participants might provide more useful feedback than a written form completed by everybody. Nor, apparently, would they often reflect on whether particular models of CPD, such as collaborative curriculum development, might lead to greater learning and impact than, say, action research.

Few formalised development programmes exist for facilitators and most draw on their existing skills and knowledge, their experiences as a teacher and a facilitator, and on (rare) opportunities to work in collaboration with others; they tend not to look for the evidence from research.

This is not a criticism of facilitators. As a CPD facilitator myself I appreciate its many challenges and constraints. But it does highlight that, while we are hoping for teachers to use evidence to inform their practice in the classroom, we are not yet aiming for facilitators of

CPD to do the same. We need to work together to find ways to help facilitators to gain access to evidence from research and to support them to share experiences, collaborate, learn from other experts, challenge and be challenged. In other words, we should ensure that our CPD for CPD facilitators models the evidence about effective CPD.