

A Case study of teachers' perceptions of the impact of continuing professional development on their professional practice in a further education college in the West Midlands

A Case study of teachers' perceptions of the impact of continuing professional development on their professional practice in a further education college in the West Midlands

A Case study of teachers' perceptions of the impact of continuing professional development on their professional practice in a further education college in the West Midlands

Abstract

Continuing professional development (CPD) is a broad term that describes the activities, learning and support that teachers undertake throughout their professional career. The importance of teachers' professional development is that it should enhance the quality of teaching and learning in all educational establishments (Pedder and Opfer, 2011). A theoretical concept underpinning the strength of CPD is that it sees teachers as professionals taking responsibility for their own learning and development, exercising their own professional autonomy enabling them to embrace change and better meet the needs of the students they teach (Michael and Watson, 2015). This paper explores stakeholders' views on the impact of continuing professional development on teaching practice within the further education sector. The data was collected using the qualitative methods of semi-structured interviews and questionnaires. The key findings focused on the overall benefits of CPD and the impact this has on current practice. The analysis concludes that teachers' cite CPD

has significant benefits in terms of updating subject knowledge, sharing of good practice and the opportunities it provides for collaboration, reflection and future progression. However, the potential it has for raising standards of achievement remains largely unrealised

Introduction

Continuing professional development (CPD) is defined by Sachs and Day (2005) as a term used to describe all the activities in which teachers engage in during the course of a career which are designed to enhance their work. However, this is a deceptively simple description of a hugely complex intellectual and emotional endeavour, which is at its heart concerned with raising standards of teaching, learning and achievement in all educational settings, each of which poses its own set of challenges. The aim of the research was to discover the impact that participating in continuing professional development is perceived to have on overall teaching practice. The views on the subject were collected from a sample of teachers and senior leaders working in the further education sector within the West Midlands. Importantly, the research explores their perspectives on the benefits of undertaking professional development.

The improvement of training and development of heads, teachers and support staff is high on both national and local educational agendas, particularly as delegated budgets and devolved funding have enabled settings to become self-managing and increasingly autonomous (Bubb and Earley 2004). Teachers' CPD plays a significant role in education, mainly because it is recognised that the quality of our education

system is dependent on, above all the quality of our teachers (Campbell and Elliot, 2013). A review of literature on CPD suggests that well-structured, appropriately organised CPD can lead to successful changes in teachers' practice, improvements at institutional level and significant improvements in student achievement (Bolam and Weinding, 2006 in Pedder and Opfer, 2010).

Bollington and Craft, (1996) assert, professional development and in-service training have attracted increasing attention since the early nineties. Faced with rapid change, demands for high standards and calls for improving quality, teachers now have a need to update and improve their skills through in-service training, attendance of external courses and through the process of reflective practice. Southworth, Connor and Bradley, (1994) concur emphasising the world of education has undergone rapid change, in-service training of teachers is of great importance, it is paramount that these changes are of benefit to teachers and do not pose further challenges to teachers in the undertaking of this requirement.

The benefits of teachers undertaking CPD and the impact this has on their professional practice

A resounding benefit of CPD is the opportunity that it provides to empower and stimulate individuals, it is a process whereby dreams and aspirations can be realised and people can move towards their future goals. CPD should make individuals thirsty for more knowledge, to learn new skills and create opportunities to build on what they already know (Whitaker and Megginson, 2007). However, this could be perceived as a somewhat idealistic view of CPD for all professions. Bubb (2006)

identifies good teacher professional development as containing key ingredients encompassing a clear and agreed vision, taking into account a participant's previous knowledge and promoting continuous enquiry and problem solving. Additionally, it should involve opportunities for staff to develop subject knowledge, expand their range of teaching strategies and stay updated with advances in new and emerging technology. Bubb (2006) further asserts that if any of these key elements are absent then the impact of CPD is further reduced. Clearly, programmes based on high-quality meaningful teacher professional development can affect teachers' skills and attitudes in the classroom, further increasing the quality of the education that the students receive (Beavers, 2011).

It is evident that there is a need, and a place for teachers' CPD in particular, for the growth, and improvement of our educational establishments, most teachers would acknowledge the need for continued training on new technologies, classroom practice, assessment and updates on educational policy. Certainly high quality and effective teacher enhancement can affect teachers' skills and attitudes in the classroom, which is undoubtedly a fundamental benefit to further increasing the education that students receive (Hien, 2008 in Beavers, 2011).

The benefits of CPD in relation to pupil achievement

Sachs and Day (2005) define successful professional development activities as those that help teachers acquire knowledge regarding newer ways of thinking about learning and about how people learn, building on their subject specialism, therefore, developing a sound base of knowledge in order to teach students in more powerful

and meaningful ways. Thus, suggesting that what is of paramount importance is teachers acquiring knowledge on ways to fully engage students in learning with the objective of improving outcomes. Campbell and Elliot (2013) support this viewpoint, stating via CPD, teachers become equipped with specific development opportunities that encourage personal growth, enhance their professionalism and maximise their strengths with the key outcome of improving quality of teacher learning and maximising pupil achievement. Likewise, Bubb (2006) cites that the evidence is clear that good CPD results in teachers' performance being improved and consequently, raising the standards of pupil achievement. However, Pedder and Opfer (2010) concluded from their research that there is little indication that CPD is effective at raising standards or narrowing of the achievement gap, through analysing results of a survey they conducted of a random sample of primary and secondary schools in England. Conclusions drawn suggested that CPD was most effective in developing individual teachers' professional skills and knowledge in 77% of cases. However, in comparison just over half 59% identified any impact on students' performance and learning practices. Opfer and Pedder (2011) recognise that the complexity of student learning and achievement and the difficulty in measuring student achievement in ways that accurately identify the contributions made by the establishment. Thus, identifying in the context of achievement if the establishment influences teacher learning, teacher learning then influences student learning. Ultimately, settings must build in systems of support for CPD, to promote a professional learning environment that fosters improved learning both for teachers and students. It is therefore a concern that very little seems to be known about what students learn as a

consequence of CPD and the changed practices that it strives to engender (Fishman, et al, 2003).

The current picture of further education provision in England

The further education (FE) sector in England involves a wide diversity of provision, spanning vocational, academic and occupational education (Batchmaker and Avis, 2013). The Professional standards for Teachers and Trainers in Education and Training recognise the desire for FE practitioners to maintain and update knowledge through research, reflection and engaging in CPD with the aim of developing their practice (Thomson, 2017). Between 2008 and 2012, teachers in the FE sector were required to engage in 30 hours of CPD, this is reflective in the ways in which historically policy interest in the CPD of FE teachers has increased and decreased over time (Broad, 2015). In 2001 The Further Education Teachers Qualifications Regulations required for the first time that all new teachers in the sector hold a teaching qualification (Broad, 2015). This move towards professional development of FE teachers was strengthened in 2004 when it was announced that FE teachers could attain the designation Qualified Teacher Learning and Skills (QTLS), matching Qualified Teacher Status in schools (Bathmaker and Avis, 2013). In order to achieve this professional formation, teachers are required to produce a portfolio of evidence of which identifies the CPD activities that they have undertaken to update subject specialism and enable them to demonstrate the application of occupational and professional standards required of a teacher. Accompanying these reforms, a training bursary was introduced in 2000-2001, with the stated goal of attracting high

quality teachers into FE (Bathmaker and Avis, 2013). However, driven by legislative requirements CPD has tended to be undertaken in instrumental and performative ways, targets and measurable outputs then become the rationale for action (Broad, 2015).

Funding for CPD was previously distributed by local authorities, colleges themselves are now solely responsible for the planning and provision of staff development (Broad, 2015). Currently, the Further Education workforce data for England report has identified that almost two-thirds of FE teachers do not spend any time on CPD (Belgutay, 2017). This low attendance could be attributed to cost implications also the high proportion of casual and part time staff the FE sector employs could impact on this decline as the intensity of workload could result in them having little time to engage in activities outside of their teaching role (Broad, 2015). However, the need for further development of FE staff is clear, the UCU general secretary Sally Hunt stated that CPD for staff is an essential part of post-school education that benefits both the recipient and their students (Belgutay, 2017).

Effective CPD strategies that inspire and engage teachers

CPD is seen as enhancing teachers' subject knowledge and improving their practice within the classroom. However, if student learning is to be improved then more effective professional learning activities need to be adopted, ones that result in positive change for teachers and students (Opfer and Pedder, 2011). Teachers' participation in traditional approaches of standard based CPD are described within the literature as viewing the teacher as a technician. Thus, meaning that teachers

are given instructions to follow and the student is cast into the role of a passive receiver, there is then little provision within the school context for reflective practice to take place (Sachs and Day, 2005). Teachers must move away from technical strategies of CPD towards more practical strategies and use critical reflection by the conclusion of their own experience, where their transition moves from descriptive within the technical paradigm towards a more dialogic or critical form of reflection (Hagevik, Aydeniz and Rowell, 2012). The discourse around reflective practice is that it assists teachers to make sense of their practice by broadening their perspectives and helping them to address challenges they face, it plays a significant role in promoting self-awareness and provides teachers with a greater understanding of themselves (McGarr and McCormach, 2014).

The most productive conditions for informal workplace learning is a teacher and school culture that encourages and values collaborative learning (Avalos, 2011). Thus, suggesting, that the culture within a setting can empower teachers to talk freely about their teaching and learning approaches and thus able to share good practice, contributing to collaborative learning which research has shown is an effective form of CPD (Kennedy, 2011; Pedder and Opfer, 2010; Campbell and Elliot, 2013). Teacher development often involves the sharing of ideas and experiences, working together to find solutions to common problems encountered (Avalos, 2011).

These collaborative groups are also referred to as 'communities of practice', groups of people who share a concern or passion for something they do and learn how to do this better as they interact and collaborate regularly with each other (Wenger, 2006

in Campbell and Elliot, 2013). The notion of collaborative CPD is increasing in popularity and recent research suggests that it is more effective than individual CPD especially when undertaken over a sustained period of time rather than a one off session (Cordingley, 2005 in Kennedy, 2011). Therefore, appropriate strategies of CPD must engage and inspire teachers, there are clear benefits to teachers participating in sustained levels of CPD that provide opportunities for collaboration and reflective practice.

CPD must be recognised as beneficial and have a positive impact on practice, raise personal growth of teachers and improve outcomes for students. Nevertheless, without senior level support for teachers the usefulness of professional development as a mechanism for raising standards and overall school improvement is lost (Opfer and Pedder, 2011). Importantly, government and senior leaders must set aside any preconceived ideas and beliefs on the suitability and impact of CPD, they should consult and be receptive to change with the ideal to create a climate in all aspects of education that allows teachers to fruitfully learn (Merriam in Beavers, 2011). Senior leaders must consult with staff to create a pedagogical model of CPD that responds to the needs of their staff rather than a managerial model of CPD that ticks boxes to satisfy the demands of policy makers.

The research design

The research project was undertaken as a small-scale study conducted with a selected sample of teachers working within a further education college in the West Midlands whereby, their views and perceptions were analysed on the subject of

CPD. The research fits with the case study phenomenon, as it is a detailed examination of a single example (Flyvbjerg, 2006). The great strength of a small-scale case study approach is that it allows the researcher to concentrate on a specific instance and identify the specific interactive processes at work. These processes may remain hidden in large scale survey but may be a crucial element in the success or failure of organisations (Bell, 2010).

Firstly, initial data was collected by the dissemination and completion of questionnaires, the information obtained from the use of these questionnaires is to do with attitudes, beliefs and preferences on CPD. In this case, respondents were required to reveal information about feelings, to express values and to weigh up alternatives and challenges, in a way that calls for a judgement on the subject rather than facts (Denscombe, 2010). The gathering of data produced from information to observe patterns and comparisons is usually obtained through the method of a structured questionnaire (Cohen et al, 2011).

A semi-structured questionnaire was used. A series of questions, statements and items were presented and the respondents were asked to tick the statements that matched their own opinion. There is a clear sequence, structure and focus to this style of questionnaire, but the format is also open ended. The semi-structured questionnaire sets the agenda but does not presuppose the nature of the response (Cohen et al, 2011). Therefore, respondents had an opportunity to voice their individual opinions and tailor their answers to their own individual assumptions and beliefs around the subject. The questionnaire consisted of twelve questions, which

focused on gathering information on respondents' views on the benefits of CPD, and importantly, participants were invited to give examples of where they had used their learning from CPD in their teaching practice. To elicit a more personal approach and also with the hope of encouraging greater response rates, paper questionnaires were distributed and collected in.

Secondly, semi-structured interviews were undertaken with two learning coaches and two managers to gather information about their circumstances, preferences and opinions of CPD, to investigate the ideology that may exist within the macro systems of the organisation. In addition, to explore their experiences and motivations of the impact of CPD to improving staff practice (Drever, 1995). The interviews were recorded verbatim using field notes and the interviewees' responses to the questions were read back to them to verify their answers as a true account, this was to ensure that what was said did not become open to interpretation and a matter of recollection (Denscombe, 2010). The undertaking of four interviews with the management team provided a good amount of usable data and comparisons could be made with the responses provided by staff. This was found to be a strength of the study, these interviews again were carried out exclusively within the department of Health and Public Services. However, this could have been investigated further and similar questions asked of the two different sets of respondents. Moreover, further comparisons could be made to analyse if the views generally on the overall benefits of CPD on current practice differed or were similar between teachers and senior leaders within the college.

The use of a questionnaire as a data collection tool can at times be subject to poor response rates. However, this was not the case with this study and response rates were good with twenty seven out of a possible thirty questionnaires returned. This could have been attributed to the fact that these were distributed within the researcher's own department. Therefore, familiarity served as an advantage, however, an argument could be made that the professional relationship may have led participants into providing desired responses. The questionnaire was distributed individually but not collected personally. Respondents were asked to leave completed questionnaires in a neutral place within a shared office, with no form of identification on the questionnaires. Therefore, this problem had been addressed in the design of the questionnaire as none of the information requested could be sourced back to any of the participants.

The option to offer the exclusivity of anonymous feedback was not possible with the interviews. However, a disclaimer was read prior to interview and complete objectivity was the aim of the interviewer (Bell, 2010). All of the staff interviewed gave their time freely and made themselves available at mutually convenient times. The research took place at the end of the summer term when teaching commitments were reduced. Thus, the timing of the study contributed towards a positive response rate. Upon evaluation of the data collection tools used, they were fit for purpose as usable data was obtained. The adoption of semi-structured questionnaires and interviews, gave numerical data to compare but also subjective data to view consistencies with comments, both in terms of comparisons within the college and

comparisons with the research and literature. However, the option could have been provided for the senior leaders to complete questionnaires as the anonymous element may have yielded a different set of responses. Likewise, interviewing some of the teaching staff may have provided them with an opportunity to elaborate further with their responses. The research conclusions are valid as they are based upon all of the data produced and not simply utilised selectively to justify a pre-determined conclusion (Silverman, 2011). The data collected can be deemed as reliable in that stable measures were used to elicit the responses, all data collection methods were consistent and none of the findings were distorted in any way (Denscombe, 2010).

Sample

The research used a convenience sample of thirty teachers and four managers, this type of sample strategy can pose a problem as it can be deemed impossible to generalise the findings (Bryman, 2008). Therefore, the sample size was not determined by the need to ensure generalisability, but by a desire to investigate more fully the chosen topic and provide information-rich data (Grbich, 2004). However, these participants were not simply selected; they were chosen from a sub group of the college, focusing on one cluster. This was to ensure that a combination of male and female participants of varying ages and who teach on a range of subjects were included with the aim of establishing a representative sample (Bell, 2010).

Response rate

Overall, response rates to the study were excellent, four interviews were undertaken and response to participating in the interview process was good, teachers and managers freely gave their time and allocated slots in their busy schedules to attend the interviews. Thirty questionnaires were distributed amongst teaching staff within the cluster and 27 were returned, with no follow up response required as the amount of questionnaires received represented a good cross section in line with the proposed sample.

Ethical considerations

Prior to commencing the study, permission was sought from the college management team to undertake the study on their premises. Therefore, initially an email with an outline of the research proposal requesting written consent to conduct the research was sent to the principal of the college and a return email of authorisation obtained. It is important to obtain the consent of the host and provide them with clear information on the purpose and nature of the study (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2011). Furthermore, an application was submitted to the University of Wolverhampton ethics committee in order to obtain ethical clearance to proceed with the study. This was to ensure that the proposal conformed to approved principles and conditions (Bell, 2010).

The study was carried out within the perimeter of ethical standards; to ensure informed consent from all participants an explanation of the purpose of the study was outlined in an introductory paragraph at the beginning of both the questionnaires and interview schedule. This gave the participants an explanation of the nature, and

purpose of the research. The issue of respecting the confidentiality of all participants was considered, anonymity was guaranteed to all participants by assuring that no individuals' names will be disclosed during the course of the study (BERA, 2017). Additionally, during the data collection process, participants' responses were recorded by the use of a number or a letter to substitute their name.

Findings

The data gathered is qualitative in nature and was obtained from semi structured interviews and the dissemination of questionnaires. All of the data gathered was then coded according to particular themes. Thus to help understand the phenomenon of staff perceptions of the benefits of undertaking CPD. The raw data was categorised into similarities and differences of opinion. A careful scrutiny was undertaken of the interview transcripts and written responses contained within the questionnaires, in order to ascertain whether the data refers to the same issue, involved statements about the same emotion or used the same words or phrases, which could be grouped together and tagged to a broader category (Denscombe,2010).

A breakdown of the respondent population demonstrates that the intended representative sample was achieved. The selection of teachers that responded to the questionnaire were of varying ages ranging from 21-59, with the highest number of respondents falling into the 50-59 category as shown in figure 1 below:

Age range	Responses
19-20	0/27
21-29	4/27
30-39	8/27
40-49	6/27

50-59	9/27
60-69	0/27
70 or older	0/27

Figure 1: Age Group Breakdown of the Questionnaire respondents

The representative breakdown was heavily female dominated with 22 out of the 27 respondents being female in comparison to 5 males. However, the teachers that completed the questionnaire demonstrated a cross section of subjects taught within the cluster of Health and Public services as is shown in figure 2: Therefore, this ensured that the respondent population provided a good deal of variety in the resulting sample and one that obtained key characteristics relevant to the research questions (Bryman, 2008).

Subjects taught	Responses
Early Years	8/27
Access to HE	4/27
Health and social care	12/27
Public services	3/27

Figure 2: Breakdown of subjects taught by the Questionnaire respondents

The semi-structured interviews were conducted with 4 of the senior leadership team within the college who undertake various roles, included in the sample were 2 learning and development coaches whose main responsibility is to devise and disseminate CPD activities across the college and 2 managers attached to the cluster of Health and Public Services.

The current CPD model within the organisation

The current CPD model within the organisation mainly consists of staff undertaking CPD activities during a mandatory two week block at the end of the summer term once teaching commences. Activities undertaken range from mandatory training courses such as safeguarding and prevent. These are supplemented with enrichment activities, such as sport and holistic therapy. Also during this period teachers are required to spend days within industry, known as industrial upskilling, viewing new initiatives and working practice to update knowledge. Importantly, ensuring that the knowledge transferred to students is current. Therefore, developing teachers' subject knowledge, which is a core element of CPD.

What are teachers' perceptions of the impact of CPD on their current practice?

In analysing the results from the data sources, the aim was to establish overall perceptions on the benefits of CPD on current practice from both teachers and senior leaders' perspectives. Firstly, the results from the teaching staff were analysed to discover their perceptions as to the benefits of participating in CPD. Furthermore, how they used the learning resulting from CPD activities undertaken within their teaching practice.

In obtaining opinions on the most useful forms of CPD, collaborative activities and the sharing of good practice was identified as the most beneficial strategy with 23 participants choosing this option, alongside reflective practice where participants are able to reflect on their learning and identify ways to improve their practice. These results are consistent with the findings of the research where it was identified that teachers felt more motivation to learn and gave active involvement when sharing ideas as part of a group. Furthermore, the opportunities that collaborative learning

provide, the sharing of ideas and modelling of best practice contribute to the retention of teachers within the profession. Networking is seen to add value and expands horizons for teachers' practice (Bubb, 2006; Campbell and Elliot, 2013; Whitaker and Megginson, 2007). Participant 25 stated, "I would like more networking opportunities to share good practice." Likewise, participant 19 concurred "I would like more opportunities to share ideas." Participant 1 also emphasised;

"I would prefer CPD to include more collaboration with my colleagues to share ideas and good practice and consider the role of teaching and learning in general."

Research suggests that reflective practice, as a process within CPD activities is beneficial. Teachers can develop their own ideas and thinking and modify these to meet the individual needs of their students. The thinking behind reflective practice is that it assists teachers to make sense of their practice and supports them to address any challenges they may face, (McGarr and McCormach, 2014; Galea, 2012; McGarr and McCormach, 2014). Sixteen respondents agreed with this notion as they selected reflective practice as a beneficial CPD activity. In agreement all of the senior leaders' identified strategies of CPD that involved collaboration, sharing of good practice and provided opportunities for reflection as being the most effective and beneficial.

The attendance of workshops, lectures and seminars were highlighted from the questionnaires as the least beneficial of CPD strategies, identifying a further consistency with the research as these types of activities were seen as passive strategies that provided very little evidence of sustained learning and do not

effectively inspire or engage teachers. (Pedder and Opfer, 2010; Opfer and Pedder, 2011).

Teachers identified that they felt improving outcomes for students as having the most relevance and benefits to them undertaking CPD activities. However, there is little evidence within literature to suggest that teachers undertaking CPD raises attainment or improves standards (Pedder and Opfer, 2010; Opfer and Pedder, 2011; Fishman, et al, 2003). Upon questioning, the senior leaders during the interview process to ascertain whether they felt the CPD activities that the staff participated in raised standards and helped to narrow the achievement gap within the college. A mixed response was received, with participant B stating that:

“The idea of CPD is to directly develop staff, I don’t think this has a direct impact on achievement, however, we have seen progression year on year within the college which CPD is part of in terms of the bigger picture and would therefore attribute to student achievement.”

Participants C and A felt that CPD in terms of pupil achievement were not tracked sufficiently and there are still gaps in the data to be able to demonstrate sufficiently if CPD does raise student achievement. Conversely, participant D felt that CPD did indirectly contribute to student success via the strategies taught within CPD, such as the use of IT in lessons, which may consequently raise standards of achievement, however again this is not measured. Ultimately, suggestions were made from the senior leaders that it was something that the institution could work towards. These findings clearly identify a discrepancy in the teachers’ beliefs and understanding of the relevance of undertaking of CPD to improving levels of student attainment.

Respondents to the questionnaire identified key areas of relevance for CPD as updating subject knowledge and improving current performance in their job. This view is consistent with how CPD is defined within the research as having the main objectives of helping teachers acquire knowledge regarding newer ways of thinking about learning. Also, building on their subject specialism and knowledge (Sachs and Day, 2005; Campbell and Elliot, 2013; Bubb, 2006).

The achievement of accreditation and certificates was mainly seen as low priority, CPD was seen as more beneficial to new teachers with eight out of twenty seven respondents making this claim. Participant 13 notes:

“CPD for me as a new teacher for the first few years was great, I found it really useful, now it is repetitive and uninteresting it just confirms what I do daily.”

Respondents provided various examples of where they had used their learning from CPD activities in their teaching practice. These included, supporting student teachers and the sharing of new ideas to support them in a mentoring capacity. Obtaining guidance through CPD around how to reflect on their own practice and applying the suggested strategies to further develop themselves as effective educators. Furthermore, when questioned about effective and beneficial strategies that they had undertaken, observation of colleagues was shown to be an effective strategy by six out of the twenty-seven respondents. They stated that they had developed resources and new teaching and learning strategies because of undertaking this form of CPD. Peer observations are common practice within the college and are generally carried out on an annual basis. Respondents' highlighted practices such as peer marking

and assessment, which they had used with their students because of observing others, carry out this practice. In addition, the use of IT and E learning was highlighted with 9 out of the 27 respondents making reference to IT based CPD training. Participant 29 notes:

“CPD sessions that improved my knowledge of new technology which helped me to engage my students in more interactive learning.” Likewise participant 9 stated: *“I have implemented new IT activities in my lessons such as QR codes.”* In agreement, participant 22 concurs: *“Improving my knowledge of technology has helped me to engage my learners in more interactive ways.”*

A CPD strategy, which is used and encouraged within the institution, is industrial upskilling. Eight out of the twenty seven respondents drew on this learning as being used effectively within their practice. Participant 12 stated:

“I gained a great deal from my time spent in a dementia setting this enabled me to write case studies relating to this experience for use within my teaching.” Also Participant 8 notes: *“Vocational CPD allows me to pass on new information to my students”.*

Other participants cited upskilling within a hearing-impaired unit directly linked with units taught to students and therefore, updated knowledge relating current practice to theory taught within the classroom. In agreement another teacher emphasised that industrial upskilling informs delivery of key subjects. Thus, highlighting the significant benefits this style of CPD has on teaching practice. Furthermore, this practice was also identified as a CPD activity that is most relevant to the needs of the teachers within this particular organisation.

The charts below indicate teachers' overall perceptions on the benefits of CPD on their current practice. Alongside the overall perceptions of senior leaders on how they view their staff value continuing professional development as a process to improving their teaching practice:

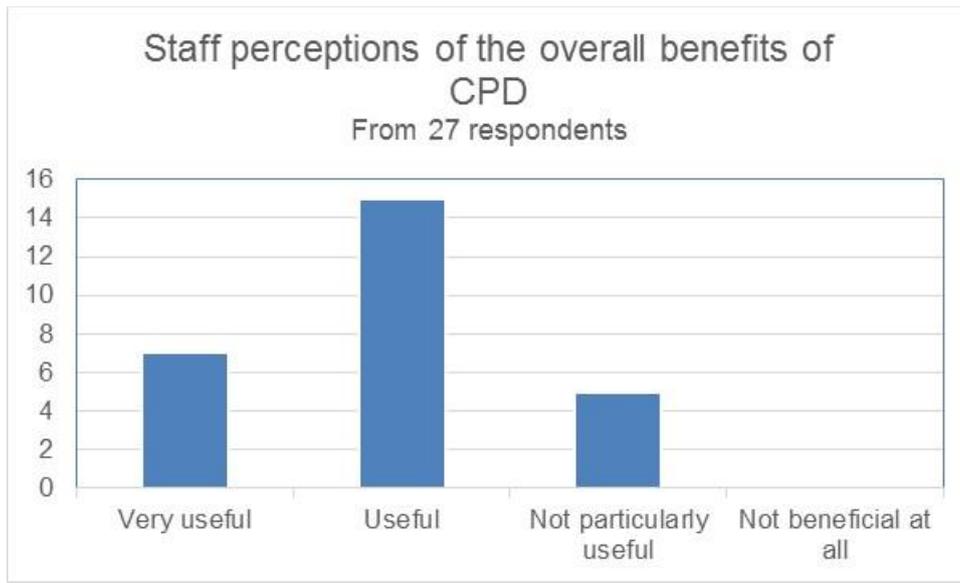


Figure 3: A bar chart representing staff perceptions of the overall benefits of CPD

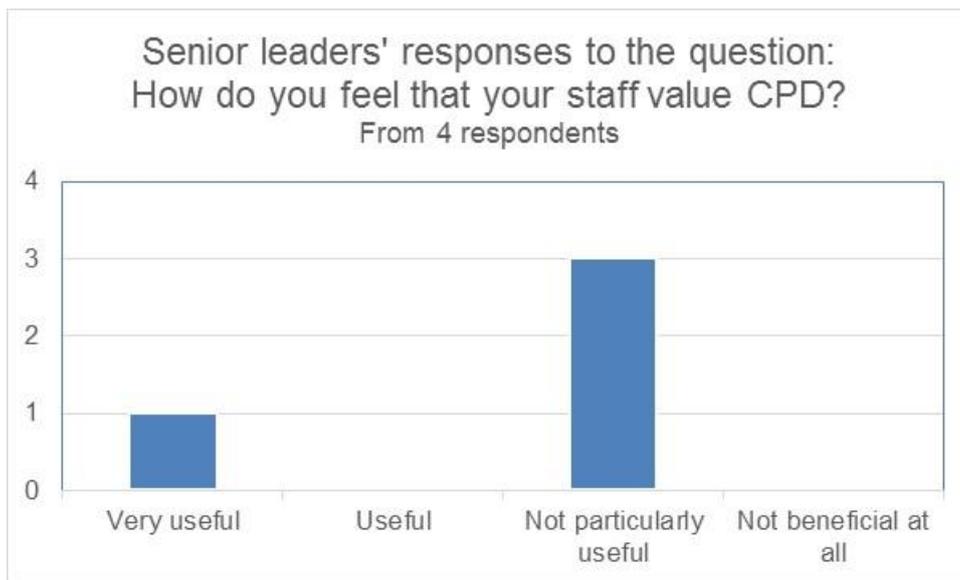


Figure 4: A bar chart representing senior leaders' perceptions of what they anticipated staff would grade the overall benefits of CPD on their teaching practice

The two charts indicate a marked difference in the assumptions of senior leaders of how they felt staff would benefit from CPD activities, to how staff actually felt about this process. Overall, senior leaders' perceived that staff would view the benefits quite negatively as being not particularly useful to their practice. However, in contrast over half of respondents 15 out of 27 teachers stated that CPD was useful to develop their teaching practice and therefore, had a positive impact on their work. This disparity could be attributed to senior leaders' recognition of teachers' increasing workloads and the undertaking of CPD would influence the limited time that staff could afford to partake in these activities. Therefore, this would account for their perception that staff would view the undertaking of CPD negatively. Moreover, senior leaders do identify time as a significant challenge to staff undertaking CPD.

The chart below demonstrates the different types of CPD activities that the staff at the college have taken part in during the previous academic year:

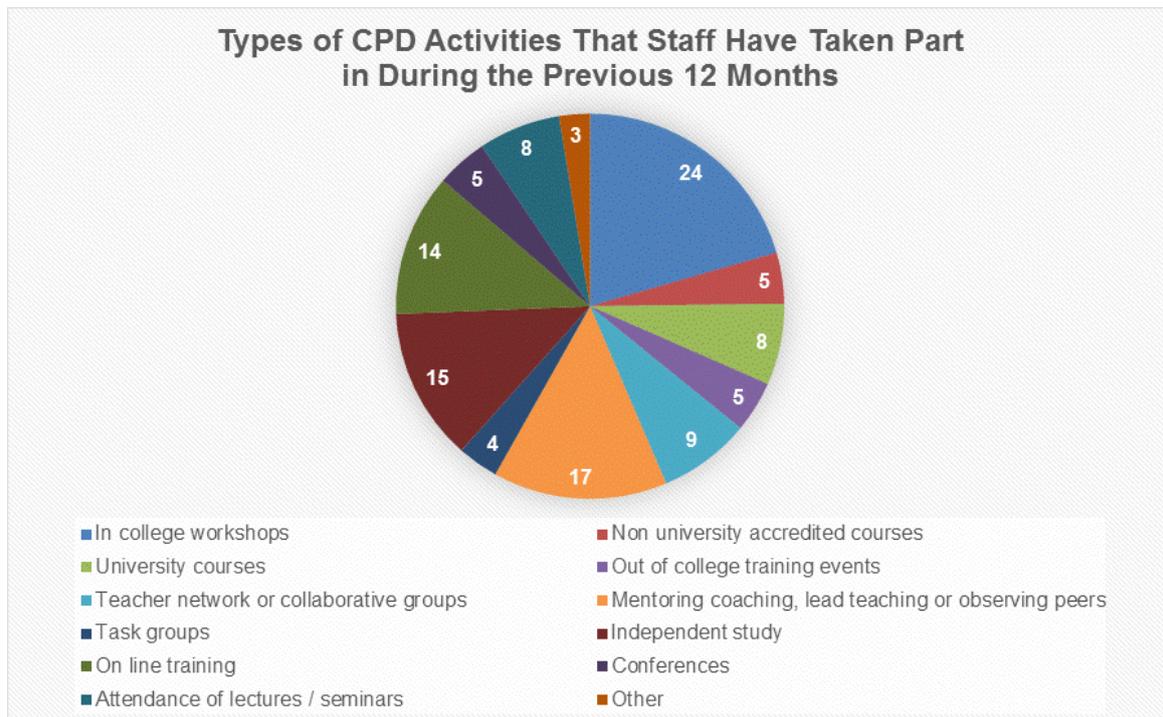


Figure 5: A pie chart representing the different types of CPD activities that staff have taken part in during the previous 12 months

Predominantly, the types of CPD activities that staff have participated in during the previous twelve months have been delivered within the college. These activities were identified as workshops. A further high percentage of training has also been accessed on-line. These types of CPD are seen as passive forms of CPD. However, a proportion of the training undertaken has been facilitated through mentoring, coaching and observation, which in contrast was highlighted by the research as effective forms of CPD. There is a good variety of activities that staff have access to, including the opportunity to undertake higher level, university accredited courses, conferences and out of college training events. This demonstrates that the college is investing in a good range of CPD activities for all staff.

What are senior leaders' perceptions of the impact of CPD on teachers' practice?

The views of senior leaders were analysed against the differing perspectives of the macro and micro systems. Identifying how staff participating in CPD benefits them as a teachers and impacts on practice within the classroom. In addition, how staff participating in CPD benefits the organisation as a whole.

Senior leaders identified the benefits of their staff participating in CPD as important to improving staff knowledge both within education generally and within the sector that they teach. Importantly, to keep abreast of changes in legislation and update staff with new ideas to improve their pedagogical practice. They identified the benefits of staff sharing strategies and ideas via the method of paired observations and the development of communities of practice. Furthermore, one senior leader *drew on the benefits of collaborative CPD. Participant A noted:*

“CPD takes staff out of their current cocoons, it is important to give them an opportunity to talk to staff in other departments, to obtain different ideas, different perspectives. This allows them to talk about similar issues that concern them and gives them a good opportunity to see what others are doing.”

Research informed that collaborative approaches to CPD are characteristics of effective professional development (Pedder and Opfer 2010). Therefore, senior leaders within the college support the practice of collaborative CPD and view this as worthwhile practice.

Senior leaders placed value on the effects of CPD in terms of their organisation, broadly speaking that staff continually updating their knowledge and practice allows the college to be the best it can be. It was noted that the biggest resource the college

has is its staff, therefore, to meet the needs of the community, to realise the college aims and vision, investment in good CPD opportunities for staff is crucial. CPD must be relevant for staff and provide a bench mark across the organisation. However, the study did discover that fourteen out of the 27 teachers who completed the questionnaire stated that CPD within the organisation needed to be more individualised, relevant to the individual and meet personal training requirements. This is clearly an area for improvement within the college. However, one manager suggested adopting more individualised strategies stating that CPD is most effective when the teachers have planned it for themselves and selected their own courses to attend that is specific to their current needs. All of the senior leaders interviewed identified the most effective CPD strategies as inviting in external speakers from industry to discuss current approaches to working. Attendance at industrial upskilling training to update vocational subject knowledge and development of work related skills. This is consistent with the most beneficial strategies highlighted by staff. Therefore, this type of CPD works well within the establishment and has impact across the college.

A plethora of research identified that senior leaders were required to create a culture where CPD is valued and placed as a crucial element of all teaching practice. Importantly, prior beliefs and cultural values are factors that can affect how teachers' engage with CPD (Nerantzi and Gossman, 2015; Jurasaitė-Harbison and Rex, 2010; Melville and Wallace, 2007; Muijs and Harris, 2006 in Avalos, 2011). It is evident from the study that the senior leaders at this establishment have a belief that CPD is

beneficial to improving practice, do value CPD and recognise its importance. As all 4 respondents stated that overall professional development is beneficial, updates staff knowledge and impacts on improving practice within the establishment.

Conclusion

Teachers have spent their continuing professional development time partaking in on-site training, which takes the form of workshops, and conference style lectures, these strategies have limited cost implications. However, they are seen as passive and research suggests do not have a positive impact, nevertheless, the staff within the study cited these CPD activities as being beneficial to updating subject knowledge and informing them on new initiatives and changing policy. The strength of this type of CPD allows for networking opportunities across college to be facilitated, encouraging the sharing of ideas and knowledge, which staff identified as not only benefiting but essential to their professional development. Therefore, working towards an ideal approach to CPD thereby, creating communities of practice. The sharing of ideas adds to a bank of resources, methods that have been tried and tested, difficulties ironed out. The strength of building a community of practice is that it enables participants to get to know each other, personalise their learning experience and feel part of a community (Nerantzi and Gossman, 2015). Senior leaders recognise the value of CPD and foster a community within the college that supports the continuing professional development of all staff. Therefore, ultimately, recognises the benefits of CPD to the organisation as a whole, ensuring the college

is the best it can be, by investing appropriate time and money in the best resource it has, namely, its staff.

An overwhelming successful strategy of CPD provided within this predominantly vocational college is the opportunity that staff have to partake in industrial upskilling. Staff perceptions of the benefits of this are that it allows them to keep updated within their service industry therefore, ensuring that knowledge transferred to students is current. Importantly, this is wholly encouraged and supported by senior leaders.

Teachers' perceptions generally were that a main benefit of staff participating in CPD was to raise standards, ensure progress and achievement of all students. Furthermore, senior leaders suggest that an ethos exists within the college where CPD is very much an integral part of the improvement effort to raise standards. However, there is little indication from the study that current CPD has an impact on raising standards of student progress. Ultimately, tracking of CPD approaches is required to produce data that is fully transparent and records the impact of CPD on progress made by students, therefore, further work is required to achieve this.

The study identified a need for a more individualised system to the planning of CPD that has little to do with current initiatives and moves away from the technical tick box approach to organising activities. This is best set within a culture of professional learning where individual needs are considered and opportunities for CPD are provided according to the respective needs of the team. Therefore, providing opportunities for reflection and research based CPD, this could take the form of

accredited university courses such as Masters Programmes. Senior leaders therefore should work towards providing a learning environment in which individual development contributes to the whole, and provides a meaningful context to the delivery of CPD activities that empowers each individual (Stoll, Harris and Handscombe, 2017). Systems of support at structural level need to be put in place to ensure the macro and micro systems understand the potential of CPD for raising standards and educational improvement (Opfer and Pedder, 2010), only then can the true benefits of continuing professional development on teaching practice be fully realised.

References

Avalos, B. (2011). Teacher professional development in Teaching and Teacher Education over ten years. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 27(1), pp.10-20.

Bathmaker, A.M. and Avis, J., 2013. Inbound, outbound or peripheral: the impact of discourses of 'organisational' professionalism on becoming a teacher in English further education. *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education*, 34(5), pp.731-748.

Beavers, A. (2011). Teachers As Learners: Implications Of Adult Education For Professional Development. *Journal of College Teaching & Learning (TLC)*, 6(7).

Belgutay, J. (2017). *Most FE teachers have no CPD, report shows* | Tes News. [online] Tes.com. Available at: <https://www.tes.com/news/most-fe-teachers-have-no-cpd-report-shows> [Accessed 7 May 2018].

Bell, J. (2010). *Doing your research project: A guide for first-time researchers in education, health and social science*. 5th ed. Maidenhead: McGraw-Hill Professional Publishing.

Bera.ac.uk. (2017). *Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research* | BERA. [online] Available at: <https://www.bera.ac.uk/researchers-resources/publications/ethical-guidelines-for-educational-research-2011> [Accessed 6 May 2017].

Bollington, R. and Craft, A. (1996). *Continuing professional development: A practical guide for teachers and schools*. London: Routledge in association with the Open University.

Broad, J.H., 2015. So many worlds, so much to do: Identifying barriers to engagement with continued professional development for teachers in the further education and training sector. *London Review of Education*, 13(1), pp.16-30.

Bryman, A. (2008). *Social research methods*. Oxford [u.a.]: Oxford University Press.

Bubb, S. (2006). *Helping Teachers Develop*. London: Paul Chapman Publishing.

Bubb, S. and Earley, P. (2004). *Leading and managing continuing professional development: Developing people, developing schools*. London: SAGE Publications.

Campbell, T. and Elliot, D. (2013). 'Really on the ball': Exploring the implications of teachers' PE-CPD experience. *Sport, Education and Society*, 20(3), pp.381-397.

Cohen, L., Manion, L. and Morrison, K. (2011). *Research methods in education*. 1st ed. London: Routledge.

Denscombe, M. (2010). *The good research guide: For small-scale social research projects*. 4th ed. Maidenhead, England: McGraw-Hill Professional Publishing.

Drever, E. (1995). *Using Semi-Structured Interviews in Small-Scale Research. a Teacher's Guide*. 1st ed. Glasgow: SCRE.

Fishman, B., Marx, R., Best, S. and Tal, R. (2003). Linking teacher and student learning to improve professional development in systemic reform. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 19(6), pp.643-658.

Flyvbjerg, B. (2006). Five Misunderstandings About Case-Study Research. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 12(2), pp.219-245.

Galea, S. (2012). Reflecting Reflective Practice. *Educational Philosophy and Theory*, 44(3), pp.245-258.

Grbich, C. (2004). *New approaches in social research*. 1st ed. London: SAGE.

Hagevik, R., Aydeniz, M. and Rowell, C. (2012). Using action research in middle level teacher education to evaluate and deepen reflective practice. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 28(5), pp.675-684.

Kennedy, A. (2011). Collaborative continuing professional development (CPD) for teachers in Scotland: aspirations, opportunities and barriers. *European Journal of Teacher Education*, 34(1), pp.25-41.

McGarr, O. and McCormack, O. (2014). Reflecting to Conform? Exploring Irish Student Teachers' Discourses in Reflective Practice. *The Journal of Educational Research*, 107(4), pp.267-280.

Michael, M. and Watson, C. (2015). Translations of policy and shifting demands of teacher professionalism: From CPD to professional learning. *Journal of Education Policy*, 31(3), pp.259-274.

Opfer, V. and Pedder, D. (2011). The lost promise of teacher professional development in England. *European Journal of Teacher Education*, 34(1), pp.3-24.

Pedder, D. and Opfer, V. (2010). Benefits, status and effectiveness of continuous professional development for teachers in England. *Curriculum Journal*, 21(4), pp.413-431.

Pedder, D. and Opfer, V. (2011). Are we realising the full potential of teachers' professional learning in schools in England? Policy issues and recommendations from a national study. *Professional Development in Education*, 37(5), pp.741-758.

Sachs, J. and Day, C. (2005). *International handbook on the continuing professional development of teachers*. Maidenhead: Open University Press.

Southworth, G., Connor, C. and Bradley, H. (1994). *Developing teachers Developing schools*. London: David Fulton.

Stoll, L., Harris, A. and Handscomb, G. (2017). *Great professional development which leads to great pedagogy: nine claims from research*. [online] gov.uk. Available at:

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/335707/Great-professional-development-which-leads-to-great-pedagogy-nine-claims-from-research.pdf [Accessed 12 Mar. 2017].

Thomson, A. (2017). Supporting practitioner research. *inTuitionResearch*, (2), pp.10-11.

Whitaker, V. and Megginson, D. (2007). *Continuing professional development*. 2nd ed. London: Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development Country = UNITED KINGDOM.

