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CPD: Leadership and Opportunities for Professional Learning

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Abstract

This short paper outlines developments in continuous professional development for teachers, within the Scottish context. It discusses some examples of both bottom-up and top-down structures, approaches to, and opportunities for CPD within Scotland, contextualising the importance of professional learning within issues of leadership, school and teaching effectiveness, appraisal and student learning outcomes. It highlights that leadership is not only the domain, right or responsibility of Head Teachers or education managers and that CPD activity and partnership work offer real opportunities for teachers to develop professional learning and their capacity for leadership. The paper concludes with the discussion of some current issues and opportunities related to CPD.

Key Words

continuous professional development; leadership; school effectiveness; learning

Introduction

This paper looks at continuous professional development (CPD) for teachers, also termed professional learning, and CPD leadership, within the Scottish context. Within Scotland, the profession is a graduate one. In May 2000, the report of the McCrone Inquiry into professional conditions of service for teachers was published. It outlined the agreement reached to improve the professional conditions of service and pay for teachers. This included a commitment to CPD – that teachers should have an ongoing commitment to maintain their professional expertise through an agreed programme; that they would have an annual plan agreed with their immediate manager; and that they would be required to maintain an individual CPD record (Scottish Executive Education Department, 2001). With the advent of the Scottish McCrone Agreement taking the teaching profession into the twenty-first century, continuous professional development needs, issues and responsibilities became a key feature of all teachers’ statutory responsibilities, a condition of service, with teachers expected to undertake a contractual, additional 35 working hours per year, focused on CPD activity.

CPD is defined by the Scottish Executive as ‘anything that has been undertaken to progress, assist or enhance a teacher’s professionalism.’ (SEED, 2004, p.3). It can be spread out over the course of a year in various ways. Appraisal also increasingly
underpins CPD activity, the latter being recorded in individual teacher profiles and records. Concomitant to such developments, was the establishment of the Continuing Professional Development Framework (SEED, 2003), together with a national register of CPD providers, in order to provide a nationally coherent structure and process for CPD support and direction.

Additionally, Learning and Teaching Scotland, an organisational arm of the Scottish Executive Education Department and Scottish Government, funded by the latter, provides further direction and support at both the national and local level for teachers and schools, including in terms of CPD opportunities. Further, especially within larger local education authorities in Scotland, such as Edinburgh and Glasgow, in-house CPD service teams, together with Department of Education Quality Improvement Officers, Advisors, Development Officers, some school seconded teachers and some contracted, private CPD providers, offer various CPD opportunities to teachers at the local level. This may be in the form of twilight courses run in conjunction with local education authority (LEA) staff and teachers, together with private CPD providers, or short courses tailored to generic pedagogical themes, learning, teaching and assessment strategies, or subject-specific and specialist topics. Other significant CPD providers for teachers are universities, such as Glasgow University, which offers a range of CPD courses, pathways and further professional qualifications. CPD is viewed as enhancing leadership opportunities, professional knowledge and skills, and, therefore, can contribute towards school improvement, teaching effectiveness and improved learning experiences and outcomes for pupils.

CPD strategies and opportunities have, therefore, grown in Scotland over the last decade, and brought benefits, as outlined above and discussed in the findings below. There are, however, also issues surrounding access to, and time and money for, such CPD, as well as those related to equity. These are also outlined in the conclusions.

**CPD in Scotland Overview: Findings**

Structurally, CPD leadership in Scotland has taken both a national and local approach. It has also been led, at both levels, in both a bottom-up and top-down way. Furthermore, CPD activity, and as a contractual, professional responsibility, is also interpreted broadly within the Scottish context. It can equally take the form of involvement on a school working party, to the mentoring, or shadowing, of a colleague, through to leading curricular development, or participation on an actual CPD course or accredited programme of study.

Structurally and strategically, CPD activity in Scotland has had various successes. A notable national development, dependent on and underpinned by successful CPD, for example, is in terms of the promotion of formative assessment strategies for more effective learning and teaching, a national development initiative which built on the research work of Paul Black and Dylan Wiliam (1998), as well as of Shirley Clarke (2001), through the national ‘Assessment is for Learning’ (AifL) development programme. For example, within Edinburgh’s Department of Education, development work in this area was rolled-out in 2003-2005 and progressed by various LEA personnel,
including a Scottish Executive Education Department (SEED) funded Development Officer for AifL across the education authority, seconded from school, who, in conjunction with other CPD providers, offered teachers of all sectors short, linked, twilight CPD courses and school based in-service courses on formative assessment strategies for the classroom, in order to develop the AifL programme in both a top-down and bottom-up way. AifL initiatives were then taken forward by class teachers themselves, from the bottom-up, at the chalk face, as evaluation reports of the programme highlight (Hayward, L., Simpson, M. and Spencer, E., 2006).

As a national initiative, priority and set of strategies related to raising learning engagement and achievement, SEED funded similar Development Officer posts for all of Scotland’s 32 LEAs. Every school was also provided with a copy of Black & Wiliam’s user-friendly booklet, ‘Inside the Black Box’, which outlined their research findings, key underlying principles of formative assessment and the translation of this into classroom strategies.

Other initiatives to lead CPD in a top-down way are in the form of dissemination conferences for Head Teachers and other school leaders. Many schools have formed working parties for AifL and other more recent learning and teaching developments; schools then, in turn, in a more bottom-up way, finally draft related school policies, in collaboration with class teachers, and support understanding and implementation of initiatives, such as formative assessment principles and techniques, amongst teachers and in classrooms, to benefit pupils’ learning and student outcomes. Additionally, SEED funding has given financial support from above to various school cluster projects for AifL and, more recently, A Curriculum for Excellence (ACfE). This helps lead teaching, learning and curricular developments from below, creating a strong sense of ownership and agency for teachers, as well as CPD opportunities, including the development of leadership skills. Class teachers’ work can also be celebrated and disseminated at LEA level, by events initiated and run in partnership with LEAs’ CPD units and Development Officers. Similar CPD models in Scotland have been utilised in order to progress various initiatives and to build leadership capacity; such structures and strategies are features of the Scottish approach to leadership, which takes a top-down and bottom-up view of leadership processes and the people involved in them. Leaders are not only those occupying Head Teacher positions but other practitioners who may be project, team or strategic leaders and who are involved, not only in classroom teaching and leadership, but professional action related to such leadership roles (SEED, 2003). However, there is variation in terms of the capacity, opportunities and organisation of this from one local education authority to another.

National bodies, such as Learning and Teaching Scotland (LTS), ‘a principal curriculum body for Scotland’, also offer CPD leadership and support for professional learning on a range of educational matters within and across subject areas and school sectors; by July 2011, LTS and HMIe will combine to form ‘a new executive agency, the Scottish Education Quality and Improvement Agency’ (LTScotland.org.uk/homepage, 2010). The new, on-line National Assessment Resource is the latest example of both a top-down and bottom-up strategy, related to ACfE, adopted to progress new curriculum and assessment
priorities and to support the management of change. This organisation also regularly liaises with teachers, including school and LEA leaders, such as Quality Improvement Officers, and Higher Education personnel, such as University Teachers, through national conferences, joint projects, both cross-curricular and subject-based, and via other network events. These network events often include workshops which show case good local practice, led by class teachers themselves, who serve as models of good practice, in order to promote effective pedagogy, curricular development and improvements in the learning experiences and outcomes of Scotland’s school pupils.

Learning and Teaching Scotland is notably staffed by many seconded teachers, including Head Teachers or former LEA staff, who work at both local and national levels. Hence, even national educational initiatives are led by teaching practitioners themselves, which allows for the merging of top-down and bottom-up strategies for development programme planning, including CPD for teachers. This often takes the form of national conferences, organised by Learning and Teaching Scotland, with speakers from Scottish Government and bodies such as Her Majesty’s Inspectors of Education (HMIe), together with workshops and seminars led by teaching practitioners from all school and education sectors and LEAs across Scotland. Moreover, with increasing technological innovations, national organisations, such as Learning and Teaching Scotland, have increased CPD and support opportunities for teachers via their main website, an on-line learning and information environment, with related web links to teaching resources, on-line podcasts, initiative developments, curricular guidelines, case studies and policy documents.

Hence, innovations in teaching, learning and assessment, as well as leadership, come from that which is directed and led by the LEA officers and Head Teachers, as well as that which is led by classroom teachers themselves. This model allows for unpromoted practitioners to take the lead in various school projects or aspects of school improvement planning. Key benefits are that not only professional learning opportunities and obligations are pursued by the individual, and that professional and personal ownership of initiatives is increased, but that leadership skills are developed, since leadership is democratised through a bottom-up approach and responsibilities are distributed.

Indeed, at a structural level, also emanating out of the McCrone Agreement, teaching career and promotion pathways include opportunities for classroom teachers to not only stay in the classroom but to also develop their knowledge, skills and qualifications further through CPD opportunities in the form of Chartered Teacher programmes, also offered by Glasgow University and others, leading to a Masters qualification, Chartered Teacher status and enhanced salary payment points. More recently, since session 2008-09, Glasgow University offers ‘an innovative new PG Certificate in Professional Development in Education which aims to provide a coherent, accredited pathway for teachers’ continuing professional development’, which its short CPD courses can count towards. (University of Glasgow, Faculty of Education, CPD Development, 2009, p.2). Glasgow University, as a recognised CPD provider, offers a range of day and half-day CPD courses, several of which offer practical course content and strategies immediately applicable to subject areas, leadership skills or the effectiveness of classroom teaching
and learning. For example, short courses related to national initiatives in assessment, including formative assessment strategies, in ‘A Curriculum for Excellence’, and courses for primary and secondary English language and literature teachers, in particular those focused on the teaching of imaginative writing and creativity, are offered, as well as other professional learning opportunities and qualifications. Hence, the PG Certificate in Professional Development in Education is a flexible programme which maximises the benefits of short courses for teaching professionals since it offers:

‘a unique opportunity to obtain a formal qualification for their professional development. For the first time it provides a pathway for credit accumulation through attendance at standard CPD short courses.’

(University of Glasgow, 2008, p.2)

Findings ii: Issues & Conclusions

However, despite the significant strides in improving CPD leadership and opportunities for professional learning in Scotland, to create a teaching profession for the twenty-first century, such developments in CPD responsibilities, strategies and opportunities are not without their issues. Some key issues exist, particularly given the current economic climate in both Scotland and the U.K., within a context of global recession.

The roll-out of the new ‘Curriculum for Excellence’, Scotland’s most recent national development, despite utilising some of the structures and strategic CPD activities which were a key feature of the Assessment is for Learning national development initiatives, has been highly problematic. By contrast, for instance, AifL developments were underpinned by widely disseminated research, unlike ACfE, which practitioners could both access in an easily digested form and apply to classroom teaching, learning and assessment practices. Black & Wiliam’s seminal text was widely circulated, read and applied on a national scale. Research leadership, as well as teaching, was palpable, as proponents such as Black & Wiliam themselves gave talks at national and local conferences (as well as internationally), along with others such as Shirley Clarke. Formative assessment was linked to underpinning, constructivist principles but simultaneously provided busy practitioners with a set of strategies and various techniques, leading to palpable learning benefits and outcomes for students. Classroom resources emanated out of the process, too, on the back of CPD activities led by Development officers, classroom teachers and other practitioners from all education sectors, in a bottom-up and top-down way.

(Hayward, L., Simpson, M. and Spencer, E., 2006). This relative clarity of leadership, process, pedagogy, policy and practice is something that the more recent and on-going ‘A Curriculum for Excellence’ (ACfE) national development lacks, or has lacked at least until more recently, by comparison. This is evidenced by tensions and some lack of support over its recent introduction to the secondary school sector in 2010, mainly over lack of clarity of content, inadequate implementation time and resources, general bad press on a national scale, the need to rewrite documents, as late as summer/autumn of 2010, at further expense, on the new curriculum due to earlier versions being ‘vague, woolly and impenetrable’ (Buie, 2010) to many teachers, and even fierce political debate.
regarding ACfE, its leadership and its implementation, within the Scottish parliament itself.

Yet, these issues must be addressed, ultimately to safeguard school effectiveness and learning outcomes for students, as well as to realise the great potential of the new curriculum which seeks to promote greater inter-disciplinary practices, creative learning and student enquiry, in order to meet the demands of life, learning and work much better in the twenty-first century.

Learning and Teaching Scotland and its Higher Education and school partners, all who face future budget cuts, have very recently made some positive strides to address some of these issues, not only through further conferences and some CPD support at a local level, but by the establishment of a new, on-line (since September, 2010) National Assessment Resource (NAR). This resource finally provides a set of case studies focussed on the cross-cutting themes and outcomes of literacy, numeracy and health & well-being, developed by school teachers themselves involved in the project, despite issues of restricted funding and tight time-frames for completion, in conjunction with teacher mentoring and resource moderation from LTS and Higher Education partners. The NAR should give practitioners a clearer idea of what the new curriculum might mean in terms of actual classroom and school practices, lesson plans and curricular content, as well as how to gather evidence and assess the new student outcomes of ACfE. It is also another example of CPD and national-scale curricular development initiatives led from the bottom-up by class teachers, in partnership with education managers, officers and SEED itself.

Other issues persist. In a time of global recession, some CPD opportunities are now restricted due to even tighter budgets being imposed on local education authorities and schools. As a consequence, for example, qualifications and standards, such as the Scottish Qualification for Headship (SQH), established only a decade ago, will not be offered or funded for new candidates by their LEA. It will, therefore, no longer be a requirement for Headship, though ‘The Standard’ (criteria for such a post) will need to be met. This will also lead to a loss of revenue for University partner providers involved in its delivery, as well as the delivery of other Masters programmes, such as the M.Ed. and Chartered Teacher programmes, the latter normally funded by teachers themselves, at considerable additional time and cost (Chartered Teacher modules and qualifications programmes are not counted as part of the contractual 35hrs CPD).

Moreover, restricted CPD opportunities may affect both future professional development and standards, in turn potentially impacting on school leadership, teaching and learning, and effectiveness. Mechanisms and processes for assessing ‘The Standard for Headship’, for example, may also vary, as well as the appraisal process for teachers in general, to which CPD, promotion and leadership opportunities are linked. Further, whilst various CPD opportunities can be carried out as ‘school based activity’ (SEED, 2001, p.9), qualifications can not; policy ambitions about creating a Masters level, twenty-first century teaching profession, do not, therefore, always chime with practice or the economic reality of local authority, school and individual teacher’s budgets. Equity of
CPD opportunities may be a further issue, therefore, due to CPD costs, issues over releasing teachers to attend events or courses, such as those run by LTS or universities, during the school day, and variations in CPD capacity, quality, sustainability, provision and practice between LEAs and schools themselves.

Finally, the impact of not only research but knowledge transfer and CPD activity is a vital, current issue. Impact needs to be demonstrated and evidenced. CPD activity has not always related this clearly, or in a measurable way, to future action and later impact. More research is required into this area which could usefully build on earlier research, such as that by Harland, John and Kinder, Kay (1997), carried out in England. They sought to investigate the effects, or impact, of teachers’ CPD or INSET (in-service) education and training activity, in order to more clearly delineate the outcomes of CPD formats. They highlight nine key CPD outcomes, from what they term ‘material and provisionary outcomes’, such as that provided through physical resources, through to outcomes related to ‘information and skills’, and finally ‘motivational and attitudinal outcomes’ (Harland, John and Kinder, Kay, 1997, p.72). Their typology of outcomes, and CPD impacts in general, requires further research and could usefully be built on. Such work could help to professionally justify and safeguard CPD budgets and activity, and improve CPD approaches, enhance professional learning, and, by implication, school effectiveness, through identifying professional benefits and productive impacts, both educationally, socially and economically. It would also be a timely contribution to professional learning and education, its value and impact, as the demands of the twenty-first century march on.

References


LTScotland.org.uk/homepage


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