

Teachers' Perceptions of the Impact of Continuing Professional Development on Their Professional Practice in a Further Education College in the West Midlands

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Abstract

This paper explores stakeholders' views on the impact of continuing professional development on teaching practice in further education. 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 educational establishments (Pedder and Opfer, 2011). Michael and Watson, (2015) see the underpinning the strength of CPD in that it allows teachers as professionals to take responsibility for their own learning and development, exercising their own professional autonomy, thus enabling them to embrace change and better meet the needs of the students they teach. In this study data was collected using the qualitative methods of semi-structured interviews and questionnaires to explore perceptions of the usefulness of CPD in a further education college. The key findings show the overall benefits of CPD to teachers and learners and the impact this has on current teaching practice. This leads to the conclusion that teachers recognise and value CPD as it facilitates the updating of subject knowledge, helps share good practice, provides opportunities for collaboration and is seen to aid reflection and future progression. However, this research found that CPD did not realise the potential for raising standards of achievement due to the prescriptive nature of CPD as it is currently undertaken.

Keywords

Teachers' Perceptions, Continuing Professional Development, Professional Practice, Further Education

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 during the course of a career and are designed to enhance their work. However, this is a deceptively simple description of a hugely complex intellectual and emotional endeavour, which at its heart is 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 creating a divergence of approaches to CPD (Bubb and Earley, 2004). (Campbell and Elliot (2013) state teachers' CPD plays a significant role in education because it is recognised that the quality of our education system is dependent above all on the quality of our teachers. 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 (Pedder and Opfer, 2010).

Bollington and Craft (1996) assert that 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 quality improvement, teachers now have a need to update and improve their skills through in-service training, attendance at external courses and through the process of reflective practice. Southworth et al. (1994) concur, emphasising that the world of education has undergone rapid change and that the in-service training of teachers is of great importance. Additionally, they recognise it is important that CPD is seen by teachers to be beneficial to their role as teachers and not just as extra work to be undertaken.

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

A recognised 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. Bubb (2006) identifies good teacher professional development as containing key ingredients encompassing a clear and agreed vision, 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 reduced. Programmes based on high-quality meaningful professional teacher development can positively affect teachers' skills and attitudes in the classroom, further increasing the quality of the education that the students receive (Beavers, 2011).

There is therefore a need for good quality CPD to support teachers' growth and improve educational establishments. Teachers generally acknowledge this and recognise the need for continued training on new technologies, classroom practice, assessment and updates on educational policy. High quality and effective teacher enhancement can affect teachers' skills and attitudes, thereby increasing the quality of education students receive (Hien, 2008 cited by Beavers, 2011).

Uncertainty of the benefits of CPD in relation to pupil achievement

Sachs and Day (2005) define successful professional development activities as those that help teachers acquire new knowledge about learning and how to enhance their subject specialisms. This helps to develop an effective base of knowledge and the skills to teach students in more powerful and meaningful ways. They conclude that teachers acquiring knowledge on ways to fully engage students in learning which is of paramount importance in achieving learning outcomes. Campbell and Elliot (2013) support this viewpoint, stating that CPD helps teachers identify specific development

opportunities that encourage their personal growth. This enhances their professionalism and maximises their strengths which in turn helps student achievement. Likewise, Bubb (2006) states that there is clear evidence that good CPD results in teachers' performance being improved and consequently raises the standard of pupil achievement. This is debatable however and Pedder and Opfer (2010) researching a random sample of primary and secondary schools in England contradict this claiming there is little indication that CPD raises standards or narrows the achievement gap. They conclude that CPD was most effective in developing individual teachers' professional skills and knowledge in but only 59% teachers felt this had an impact on students' performance and learning practices. Opfer and Pedder (2011) recognise the complexity of student learning and achievement and the difficulty in measuring student achievement in ways that accurately identify the contributions made by the education establishment. Thus, while it is clear that the education establishment influences teacher learning through effective CPD, and that teacher learning influences student learning, assessing the effect of these improvements on student achievement is more difficult. Literature indicates CPD can help teachers, and this might in turn help students, but research showing there is a positive effect on student attainment is inconclusive (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 (Bathmaker and Avis, 2013) but policy approaches to CPD have been inconsistent. In 2001, The Further Education Teachers Qualifications Regulations, were set by the Secretary of State for Education and Employment, advocated for the first time that all new teachers in the sector hold a teaching qualification (Broad, 2015). A training bursary was introduced in 2000-2001 with the stated goal of attracting high quality teachers into FE (Bathmaker and Avis, 2013). The 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), an equivalent to Qualified Teacher Status in schools which allowed them to teach in the secondary teaching sector (Bathmaker and Avis, 2013). To achieve QTLS, one of the requirements for teachers is to produce a portfolio of evidence identifying the CPD

activities that they have undertaken to update their subject specialisms and demonstrate the application of occupational and professional teaching standards. Between 2008 and 2012, teachers in the FE sector were required to engage in 30 hours of CPD but Broad notes that over time requirements for CPD have rarely been consistent and there has even been a varying necessity for FE teachers to hold formal teaching qualifications (Broad, 2015). In 2014 the Professional Standards for Teachers and Trainers in Education and Training were issued (Education and Training Foundation, 2014) which recognised the need for FE practitioners to maintain and update their knowledge through research, reflection and engagement in order to improve teaching practice (Thomson, 2017). However Broad (2015) argues that due to legislative requirements, CPD has tended to be undertaken in instrumental and performative ways which gave a prescriptive approach to teaching and provided no scope for creativity. Targets and measurable outputs appear to have become the rationale for CPD action rather than innovation and good classroom practices to facilitate and encourage learning.

In 2013-2014, colleges took over the responsibility for the planning and provision of staff development from local authorities (Broad, 2015). However, in 2017 the Further Education Workforce Data for England Report (2017) identified that almost two-thirds of FE teachers do not spend any time on CPD (Belgutay, 2017). This low uptake could be attributed to cost implications, the high proportion of casual and part time staff in FE colleges or be a feature of the intensity of workload resulting in teachers having little time to engage in CPD activities (Broad, 2015). However, the need for further development of FE staff is clear and the UCU general secretary Sally Hunt stated that CPD for staff is an essential part of post-school education, benefitting both the recipients and their students (Belgutay, 2017).

CPD can therefore be seen to enhance teachers' subject knowledge and their practice within the classroom, but if student learning and attainment is to be improved Opfer and Pedder, (2011) argue effective professional learning activities for teachers need to be adopted that result in positive change for teachers and affect student achievement.

Effective CPD strategies that inspire and engage teachers

Teachers' participation in standard based CPD using traditional approaches are often described within the literature as viewing the teacher as a technical trainer. This can mean that teachers are often given instructions to follow and the student is cast into the role of a passive receiver. This approach leaves little provision for reflective practice to take place (Sachs and Day, 2005). Hagevik, Aydeniz and Rowell (2012) think teachers must therefore move away from standards-based strategies of CPD towards more practical strategies. This could involve teachers considering their own teaching strategies from within the classroom and then using critical reflection to re-consider their teaching and learning. This would enable a transition from a training or descriptive approach within their technical paradigm to a more dialogic or critical form of reflection, perhaps identifying their current strengths and limitations within their teaching practice and making their own recommendations for improvement. This could be extended outside their own sphere of practice by observing of other staff, further training or research. The discourse around reflective practice shows it helps teachers to make sense of their classroom approach by broadening their perspectives and helping them to address the challenges they face which plays a significant role in promoting self-awareness and a greater understanding of themselves (McGarr and McCormach, 2014).

To facilitate CPD through reflective practice Avalos, (2011) suggests that a learning culture within a FE college can help empower teachers by encouraging them to talk freely about their teaching and learning approaches and enable them to share good practice. Avalos thinks the most productive condition for an informal workplace learning culture is one that encourages and values collaborative work and an uncritical, open and discursive environment. This contributes to collaborative learning which 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 by enabling them to work together to find solutions to common problems (Avalos, 2011).

These collaborative groups are also referred to as 'communities of practice'; groups 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 (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 rather than a one-off session (Cordingley, 2005, cited by Kennedy, 2011). It would seem therefore that appropriate CPD strategies not only instruct teachers but continually engage and inspire teachers to work together and engage in open critical reflective practice.

To be effective, CPD should be recognised as beneficial to teaching practice not only by teachers but by managers too. Without senior level recognition for teachers, the usefulness of professional development as a mechanism for raising standards and overall school improvement is often lost (Opfer and Pedder, 2011). To engage Senior Manager in FE CPD, it is probably important to re-examine government policy and move away from a prescriptive standards based instructional approach and consult teachers on approaches to create a climate in all aspects of education that allows teachers to learn both the techniques of reflection and ways to improve practice (Merriam in Beavers, 2011). Senior leaders would find it beneficial to work 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.

Study Background

The current CPD model within the researched organisation mainly consists of staff undertaking CPD activities during a mandatory two-week block at the end of the summer term. Activities range from mandatory training courses such as safeguarding, and enrichment activities such as sport and holistic therapy. During this period, teachers are required to spend days in industry known as *industrial upskilling*. Here they experience new workplace initiatives and practices to update their knowledge so students are aware of current employability practices in their subjects. Developing teachers' subject knowledge and teaching methods is currently a core element of CPD and staff can learn new ideas to incorporate in their teaching practice, try out new initiatives and be updated on current educational policy and changes to legislation. The type of CPD activities carried out by the college and the numbers of staff participants are shown in Figure 1 below.

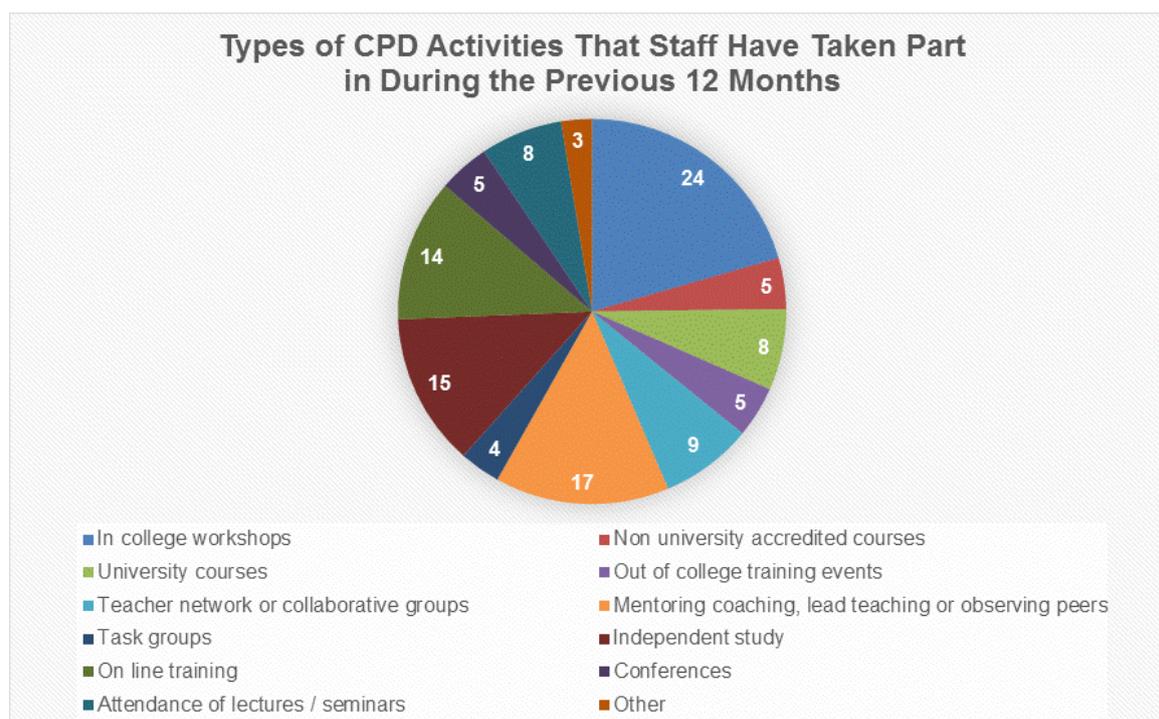


Figure 1: CPD activities that the staff at the college have taken part in during 2017/16

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 and their views and perceptions were analysed on the subject of CPD. The aim of the research was to acquire an understanding of how teachers value CPD as a process of improving their current practice. Prior to carrying out the study, I began to consider any ontological and epistemological assumptions that may influence aspects of the research (Arthur, 2012). Ontology has been identified as outlining the different beliefs that people hold on a subject, concerning the relationship between knowledge and reality (Smith, 2003). Therefore, establishing knowledge and reality and how these are constructed can impact on the research process. This in turn will have an influence on epistemology which is concerned with how we come to know about ideas and knowledge. Epistemology is known as the study of knowledge and, importantly, it is how researchers gather knowledge about social reality (Grix, 2004). It is important to consider that our opinions regarding this will be influenced by our own ontological beliefs. My own ontological position could be perceived as a belief that CPD is seen as a necessity to progress within the teaching profession, not only as a way of

developing one's own knowledge and understanding of current policy and practice but also a method to ensure progression to justify any increases in pay.

A small study dictated a qualitative approach using an interpretivist paradigm, as ultimately the nature of the research was to explore perceptions and opinions of the value of CPD on current teaching practice and to explore teachers' and managers' interpretations and knowledge on this subject. These perceptions may remain hidden in a large-scale survey but may be a crucial element in the success or failure of organisations (Bell, 2010). This research is underpinned by phenomenology as it explores peoples' own experiences at face value and examines behaviour as determined by the phenomena of experience rather than by external, objective and physically described reality (Cohen et al., 2011). Higginbottom (2004) states that phenomenology is a qualitative methodology that seeks to uncover the meaning of a given phenomenon. Subjectivity is a key component of this type of study in eliciting the deeply embedded meaning in everyday life and language; the concern is to make the unspoken spoken and opinions and perspectives both visible and audible.

Sample Population

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). For the questionnaires, the sample population consisted of thirty teachers from the Health and Public services cluster, who teach on the subjects of early years, health and social care, access and public services. They were of varying ages ranging from 21-59 and was female-dominated with 22 out of the 27 respondents being female in comparison to 5 males. For the interviews, four managers were chosen which included the cluster manager, a curriculum manager of health and social care and two learning coaches which form part of the senior management team whose responsibility is to devise and disseminate CPD activities across the college and to managers attached to the cluster of Health and Public Services. These participants were not simply selected; they were chosen from a sub group of the college, focusing on one department. This was due to time constraints driven by the number of respondent questionnaires and interviews which could be analysed within the scheduled research timescale. Conducting the research across the whole of the college was not a feasible task.

Investigation Approach

Firstly, a semi-structured questionnaire (Appendix 1) was issued to the thirty teaching staff members. This sought information about their attitudes, beliefs and preferences relating to CPD. The respondents were required to reveal information about feelings, 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 questions, statements and topics required respondents to tick the statements that matched their 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 with the hope of encouraging greater response rates, paper questionnaires were distributed by the researcher and after completion left anonymously in a repository for collection by the researcher.

Secondly, semi-structured interviews were undertaken with four people in management positions, two learning coaches and two managers (Appendix 2). This part of the investigation explored their circumstances, preferences and opinions of CPD and investigated the ideology within the macro-management systems of the organisation. It also explored their perception of the impact of CPD on improving staff practice (Drever, 1995). The interviews were recorded using field notes containing key parts of their answers and the interviewees' responses to the questions were read back to them to verify their answers as a true account. This helped to ensure that what was said did not become open to interpretation and a matter of recollection (Denscombe, 2010). Interviews with the management team provided useful information and allowed for comparisons with the responses provided by staff. This comparison was found to be valuable to the study.

As the data was collected participants' responses were recorded using a number or a letter to substitute their name. All management interview responses were coded as participant followed by a letter. Teacher responses via the questionnaire were recorded using a number. All the data gathered was then coded according to particular themes. Thus, to investigate staff perceptions of the benefits and challenges 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).

Overall, four interviews were undertaken, and teachers and managers freely gave their time and allocated slots in busy schedules to attend the interviews. These were done in quiet rooms in the College with no interruptions. They were keen to give in depth answers and willing to expand on questions from the interviewer. Thirty questionnaires were distributed amongst the teaching staff and all were returned.

Gazdula (2017) explains that qualitative research can be affected by bias when it is carried out as a reflective exercise within the researcher's own influence as a teacher. Familiarity served as an advantage; 'therefore, places the researcher in a central position in terms of power and authority, and their personal bias and position as an insider in the research will naturally influence the way the research is undertaken and influence results' (Gazdula, 2017: 37). Here, an argument could be made that the professional relationship may have led participants into providing desired responses, but efforts were made to keep the researcher at some distance from the respondents. 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. None of the information requested could be sourced back to any of the participants.

A disclaimer was read prior to interview and complete objectivity was the aim of the interviewer (Bell, 2010). All the staff interviewed gave their time freely and made themselves available at mutually convenient times. On evaluation, the data collection tools used 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. The research conclusions are based upon all of the data produced and not simply utilised selectively to justify a pre-determined conclusion (Silverman, 2011).

Findings

The types of CPD activities that staff participated in during 2017/18 were predominately delivered at the college. These consisted of workshops and a high percentage of on-line training courses. These types of CPD are seen as passive with little interaction. However, a small proportion of the training undertaken was facilitated by mentoring, coaching and observation, and these were highlighted by the research participants as effective. There were also a wider variety of activities that staff could access including the opportunity to undertake higher level university accredited courses, conferences and out of college training events. This demonstrated that the college was prepared to invest in a broad range of CPD activities for all staff.

The Impact of CPD on Current Practice

To establish perceptions on the benefits of CPD for current practice both teachers and senior leaders' perspectives were analysed with the results from the teaching staff done first. This helped to identify their perceptions of the benefits of participating in CPD, how they used what they learned from their CPD activities and how they related it to their teaching practice and attainment.

The most useful forms of CPD were collaborative activities and the sharing of good practice. These were seen as the most beneficial and motivational strategy with 23 respondents choosing these options. Reflective practice was seen as the next most useful CPD activity with 16 respondents stating that being able to reflect on their learning and identifying ways to improve their practice was beneficial. The teachers felt more motivation to learn when sharing ideas as part of a group. They recognised the opportunities that collaborative learning provided and thought the sharing of ideas and modelling of best practice helped to contribute to the retention of teachers within the profession. This type of networking is seen to add value and expands horizons for teachers' practice (Bubb, 2006; Campbell and Elliot, 2013; Whitaker and Megginson,

2007). Respondent 25 stated, "I would like more networking opportunities to share good practice," and respondent 19 concurred, "I would like more opportunities to share ideas." Respondent 1 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."

McGarr and McCormach, (2014) suggest 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 (Galea, 2012). 16 respondents selected reflective practice as a beneficial CPD activity from the list of different forms of CPD activity in the questionnaire. All the senior leaders identified collaboration, sharing of good practice and providing opportunities for reflection as being the most effective and beneficial when asked the same question in the interviews.

Attendance at workshops, lectures and seminars were highlighted from the questionnaires as the least beneficial of CPD strategies with only 8 respondents selecting the workshop option and only 2 identifying conferences as a beneficial CPD activity. These types of activities were seen by the teachers as passive and providing very little evidence of sustained learning. Neither did they appear to effectively inspire or engage teachers (Pedder and Opfer, 2010; Opfer and Pedder, 2011).

When teachers were asked to select what they felt were the relevance and benefits of undertaking CPD activities, 20 respondents thought that 'improving outcomes for students' was the most important. However, there is little evidence within literature to suggest that teachers undertaking CPD raises attainment or improves standards (Fishman, et al, 2003; Pedder and Opfer, 2010; Opfer and Pedder, 2011). After initial discussions with the senior leaders, further questioning tried to ascertain if they felt CPD raised standards. Here a mixed response was received. Participant B stated:

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 was not tracked sufficiently and there is no data collected at the college 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 and this may consequently aid achievement. This suggests managers may have a perception that CPD aids student attainment by indirect methods rather than as a direct consequence of subject or teaching improvements. As this is not measured in statistics, the senior leaders suggested that it was something that the institution could work towards. These findings clearly identify a discrepancy in the views of the teachers and managers in their perceptions of the ability of CPD to improve student attainment.

Respondents to the questionnaire all noted CPD as important for updating subject knowledge and improving current performance in their job. This view is consistent with how CPD is defined within the research, with the main objectives being to help teachers acquire knowledge regarding newer ways of thinking about learning, and building on their subject specialisms and knowledge (Sachs and Day, 2005; Campbell and Elliot, 2013; Bubb, 2006). Accreditation and certificates were seen as low priority and CPD was seen as more beneficial to new teachers than experienced teachers with eight out of twenty-seven respondents making this claim. Respondent 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 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 on how to reflect on their own practice and applying the suggested strategies to further develop themselves as effective educators. When questioned about effective and beneficial strategies 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 after seeing others carry out this practice successfully. 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. Respondent 29 notes: "CPD sessions that improved my knowledge of new technology which helped me to engage my students in more interactive learning." Likewise, respondent 9 stated: "I have implemented new IT activities in my lessons such as QR codes." Respondent 22 agreed: "Improving my knowledge of technology has helped me to engage my learners in more interactive ways."

A common CPD strategy, which is used and encouraged within the institution, is industrial upskilling. Eight out of the twenty-seven respondents felt they used this effectively within their practice. Respondent 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". In addition, Respondent 8 noted: "Vocational CPD allows me to pass on new information to my students".

Other participants cited industrial upskilling as important, specifically mentioning experience in a hearing-impaired unit. This directly linked to one of the units being taught to students and linked current practice to theory taught within the classroom. In agreement, another teacher emphasised that industrial upskilling informs delivery of key subjects. This practice was also identified as one of the CPD activities most relevant to the needs of the teachers in the Health Unit.

Senior Leaders' Perceptions of the Impact of CPD on Teachers' Practice

There was a difference in the assumptions of the senior leaders when asked what they thought staff perceptions of participating in CPD would be. Overall, they felt that staff would view the benefits quite negatively and not particularly useful to their practice - all 4 participants unanimously give this response. However, in contrast the findings showed that 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 can be attributed to senior leaders' recognition of teachers' increasing workloads and their feeling that undertaking of CPD would influence the limited time staff could afford to partake in these activities. Moreover, senior leaders identified time as a significant challenge to staff undertaking CPD.

The views of senior leaders were analysed against the differing perspectives of the teachers. The 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. Their key concerns were that teachers needed to keep them updated with changes in legislation and introduce new ideas to improve their pedagogical practice. They reflected the teachers' views of the benefits of staff sharing strategies and ideas via paired observations and the development of communities of practice. Furthermore, one senior leader (Participant A) drew on the benefits of collaborative CPD stating:

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.

Pedder and Opfer (2010) recognise that collaborative approaches to CPD are characteristics of effective professional development and the senior leaders supported the practice of a more collaborative CPD approach viewing this as worthwhile practice. They also placed value on the effects of CPD in terms of the college as an organisation and felt staff continually updating their knowledge and practice allows the college to be the best it can be. They all felt that the college's biggest resource was its staff, and to meet the needs of the community and realise the college aims and vision, investment in good CPD opportunities for staff was crucial. CPD must be relevant for staff and provide a benchmark 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 to make it 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 as an FE teacher, 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. The senior managers felt this type of CPD works well within the establishment and has impact across the college.

Research has identified that senior leaders are 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 cited by 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, value CPD and recognise its importance. All 4 respondents recognised that professional development is beneficial, updates staff knowledge and impacts on improving practice within the establishment.

Conclusion

Teachers in this study have generally spent their continuing professional development time partaking in on-site training in the form of workshops and conference style lectures. These strategies have limited cost implications and they are seen as passive. Archival research suggests they do not have a positive impact. However the staff in this study found they were beneficial to updating subject knowledge and for information on new initiatives and changing policy. The strength of this type of CPD is that it allows for networking opportunities to be facilitated later and encourages the sharing of ideas and knowledge which staff identified as essential to their professional development. This helps to create communities of practice amongst staff. The sharing of ideas adds to the general level of knowledge in the organisation, creates a dialogue amongst teaching staff and helps to create a shared bank of resources where trusted methods and approaches are used, discussed and improved. 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 recognised that CPD fostered a community in the college that in turn supported the continuing professional development of all staff. Therefore, teachers and managers recognised the benefits of CPD to the organisation

as a whole thus ensuring continuing investment in both time and money was directed to its most important resource – its teaching staff.

The teachers felt the most successful part of the Colleges CPD strategy was the opportunity to partake in industrial upskilling. Staff felt the main benefit was that it allowed them to keep updated within their service industry thus ensuring that knowledge transferred to students is current. Importantly, this is wholly encouraged and supported by senior leaders.

The teachers generally recognised that a main aim of staff participation in CPD was to raise standards and to ensure the progress and achievement of all students. Senior leaders supported this, suggesting that an ethos exists within the college where CPD is very much an integral part of the effort to raise standards. However, there is little indication from the teachers in this study that current CPD is raising attainment. Ultimately, tracking CPD approaches is required to produce data that is fully transparent and records the impact of CPD on progress made by students and further work is required to achieve this.

The study identified a need for a more individualised system of planning of CPD, away from the current technical tick box approach. This should be 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 programme area 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 culture and learning environment in which individual development is planned in a way which contributes to improving the College and gives a meaningful context for CPD activities so that it empowers individuals (Stoll, Harris and Handscombe, 2017). Systems of support at managerial level need to be put in place to help assess the potential of CPD to raise attainment standards and for general educational improvement (Opfer and Pedder, 2010). Only then can the true benefits of continuing professional development on teaching practice be fully realised.

Ethical Statement

Prior to commencing the study, permission was sought from the college management team to undertake the study on their premises and ethical processes adhered to. 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 et al., 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 and anonymity was guaranteed to all participants by assuring that no names of individuals names would be disclosed during the course of the study (BERA, 2017).

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Appendices

Appendix 1: A of the questionnaire used in the study

Questionnaire to establish your perspectives on the benefits of CPD on your teaching practice.

My name is Lisa Bartleton and I am a research student currently studying for an MA in Education at the University of Wolverhampton. Thank you for agreeing to help with my research. The aim of my study is to find out what teachers' perceptions of the impact of continuing professional development (CPD) on their professional practice

All of the information I gather will be anonymous and you will not be identified in any way.

1. What is your gender?

- Male
- Female

2. Which category below includes your age?

- 19-20
- 21-29
- 30-39
- 40-49
- 50-59
- 60-69
- 70 or over

Which subject area do you teach? _____

3. Which of the following CPD activities do you find most useful / beneficial to your practice?

- Collaborative activities with colleagues sharing of ideas and good practice
- Reflective practice where you reflect on your own learning and identify ways to improve your practice
- Online short courses
- Interactive workshops
- Accredited courses
- Conferences
- Attendance at seminars/lectures
- Other _____

4. What do you feel are the relevance and benefits of undertaking CPD activities?

- CPD will help develop my career into other jobs
- The achievement of accreditation / certificate
- CPD will help improve outcomes for my students
- CPD will update my subject knowledge
- CPD will improve my current performance in my job
- CPD will inform me of current educational policy
- It is a requirement for me to complete CPD
- Other _____

5. What do you feel are the challenges to you undertaking CPD activities?

- I do not feel that I have the time to undertake CPD activities
- I do not view CPD as relevant to my job
- The CPD activities I undertake do not fit with my own training needs
- I do not receive enough funding to undertake CPD activities that are relevant to me
- Other _____

6. How do you think that the challenges that you have identified can be overcome?

7. What type of CPD activities would be relevant to your needs?

8. In which area of your practice do you think that CPD has had the most impact?

- Improving student outcomes
- Changed student learning
- Changed student behaviour
- Improved my knowledge and skills
- Prompted me to use new teaching strategies / materials / resources
- Made me more aware of teaching & learning issues
- Caused me to seek further information or training
- Changed my beliefs about student learning
- Changed my beliefs about teaching
- Other _____

9. Can you provide examples of where you have used your learning from CPD activities within your current practice?

10. Please indicate which types of CPD activities you have taken part in during the previous 12 months

- In college workshops
- Non-university accredited courses

- University courses
- Out of college training events
- Teacher network or collaborative groups
- Mentoring coaching, lead teaching or observing peers
- Task groups
- Independent study
- On line training
- Conferences
- Attendance of lectures / seminars
- Other _____

11. Please state which has been the most beneficial type of CPD activities that you have undertaken and why.

12. Please tick the statement that rates how you feel that CPD has been beneficial to your current teaching practice

- Very useful
- Useful
- Not particularly useful
- Not beneficial at all

Thank you for taking the time to complete my questionnaire; your participation is appreciated.

Appendix 2: A blank interview schedule

Interview schedule for the management team

My name is Lisa Bartleton and I am a research student currently studying for a MA in Education at the University of Wolverhampton. Thank you for agreeing to help with my research. The aim of my study is to find out what teachers' perceptions of the impact of continuing professional development (CPD) has on their professional practice.

All of the information I gather will be anonymous and you will not be identified in any way. You have the right to withdraw from the interview at any time and you are free to refuse to answer any of the questions that I ask.

What do you feel are the benefits to your staff of participating in professional development?

How do you feel that staff undertaking CPD benefits your organisation?

How do you feel that your staff value CPD: very useful, useful, not particularly useful, and not beneficial at all?

What are the challenges to engaging staff in CPD activities?

How do you propose that these challenges can be overcome?

What do you determine are the most effective CPD activities and why?

Do you think that CPD activities within the college raise standards and help to narrow the achievement gap? How is this measured, what evidence do you have to support this?