

INVESTIGATION OF A TEACHER'S CONTINUED PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN A THAI CONTEXT

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When asked, most educators will be quick to stress the importance of their own professional development and cite the necessary stress placed on continued professional development (CPD) by the teaching industry. However, when pressed for details, it might become quickly apparent that only lip service is being paid to the idea; with many teachers not really making much effort to develop their teaching skills, unless there are some coercive external factors to force them to do it. There is, however, in the current climate of educational development, a significant movement towards the encouragement of teacher development and a recognized need to facilitate improvements in pedagogy and ensure that lifelong learning is not just a concept that is only instilled in students.

CPD and lifelong learning is quite a new concept, but it is one that has been accepted by most educators; not all teachers, however, pursue some kind of personal development. Finding out why teachers engage in professional development is vital to ensure that the students receive the best education possible from the best teachers. The role of teacher has changed considerably and now most teachers have to assume a variety of roles distinct from their main (and previously singular) role of teacher. Traditionally, teacher/educators have identified the skills and abilities that teachers need to improve their classroom instruction and, in turn, improve student learning. Courses and workshops are prescribed, set up and implemented for teachers to learn the necessary skills and practice them in the context of their classrooms in order to improve their teaching.

The main questions that need to be asked therefore are: Firstly, what motivational factors lead to the teacher's pursuit of Continued Professional Development (CPD)? Secondly, what do teachers think is the effect of Continued Professional Development on their instruction? Thirdly, is there a pattern in terms of motivation that could encourage CPD? The final question is whether there is a pattern in the perceived benefits/detriments from CPD on instructional ability?

CPD is very important because it is vital for teachers to continually update their knowledge and skills to be better teachers so that they are participants in lifelong learning themselves; so that they are not only paying lip service to the concept. Some states in the US force teachers to do further study; other countries take a more laissez faire approach and leave things to the teacher. What is certain is that some teachers do not pursue any CPD while others do. We, therefore, need to investigate the factors that influence teachers in the pursuit of Continued Professional Development and the positive (or even negative) effects they can have on teacher instruction.

The fact that there should be a multitude of factors that lead teachers to pursue their own Continued Professional Development (CPD) does merit research, as it is already common thinking among foreign educators and educational leaders that professional teacher development and lifelong learning are important criteria for being accorded the status of an educator "As recently as 10 years ago, the idea that teacher knowledge was critical for educational improvement had little currency" (Darling Hammond, Linda 1996); There has recently been a significant paradigm shift so that "Professional development has moved from the periphery of teachers' professional lives to centre stage", (Bain and Roskos, 1998) and with it the dogma of lifelong learning. Both concepts, which are relatively new terminology, have made a triumphant and emphatic entrance into the educational lexicon. As educators, teachers today have a duty not just of instilling the concepts, skills, and appreciation of learning; teachers today, but also to manifest the characteristics of lifelong learning themselves and of applying them throughout the course of their own professional lives.

Professional development has become very important, there is a link between teacher development and what they know (Sykes, 1996) and therefore it is very important to discover what teachers think professional development is, how teachers can be motivated to engage in their own professional development, and what factors effect the motivation for Continued Professional Development (CPD). This

is an essential part of trying to ensure that CPD occurs. The other key element to understand, is how CPD has an effect on the instructional techniques of the teacher; how it makes the teacher more effective at their job of teaching students. The motivation of CPD; once it has been understood is useful for teachers as part of their reflective practice, for administrators in managing teachers, as well as for those who set educational policy, to ensure that the benefits of CPD can be harnessed in a positive and proactive way.

Some argue that attempts to improve teaching practices suffer from unexamined habits and assumptions about what constitutes effective professional development (Tyack & Cuban, 1995). Normally, efforts have focused on upgrading teaching techniques or reorganizing institutional structures and these efforts, with the aim of altering elements of instruction, do not explore, challenge, or extend teachers ideas about pedagogy. Two recent thrusts in professional education make this observation clear: the application of effective schools research to teachers' development and school restructuring to empower teachers. Unfortunately, neither approach grappled with a fundamental element in the teaching and learning interaction--the teacher's mind (Bain and Roskos, 1998).

There is no argument that CPD is important, as it leads to teachers being able to be more productive and effective at work. The motivation for such development needs to come from within the teacher. As Fowler (1996) stated, "Professionals need to update their knowledge and develop their skills continuously, and that the primary responsibility for this lies with the individual, not their employer...Lifetime learning is therefore essential." There is no doubt that motivated teachers are more effective than those who are de-motivated, "highly motivated teachers teach students to become highly motivated themselves", (Czubaj, 1996). Those teachers who do engage in CPD are contributing to the improvement of the quality of education provided in the classroom (Day, 1999).

The best modern employers and organizations are beginning to learn, at last, that sustainable success is built on a serious and compassionate commitment to helping people identify, pursue and reach their own personal unique potential. Motivation to work must be fostered by modern principles and techniques, and not by the old system of rewards and threats. Employees need to be seen as people who have their own needs, desires and values and their self-worth must be maintained or enhanced and this requires an organization of tightly knit and highly effective work groups which are committed to achieving the clearly defined objectives of the organization. Supportive relationships must exist within each work group.

Whilst some emphasis has been placed on the importance of leadership within the work environment (Thomas and Velthouse, 1990); where leaders can nurture intrinsic motivation in the workplace by encouraging collaborative relationships and by facilitating personal growth, the fact is, schools are not the sole factor that influences CPD. Some educational initiatives come from political pressure and contain professional development or technical assistance components to support teachers (Partee, and Sammon, 2001). Studies suggest that knowledge gained from formal CPD often has little effect on enhancing teacher practice unless it is developed alongside experiential, know-how learning and can be integrated with the teacher's knowledge, successful CPD needs to be integrated into practice for it to make any difference (Houle et al, 1987). If CPD can be instituted without forcing teachers and can be integrated into current teacher knowledge and practice, it can improve instructional strategies to ensure that every student can reach the standards, and it can, at the same time, extend teacher's subject area knowledge to include the different or higher levels of content that are now required (Partee and Sammon, 2001).

The crux of the research is to ascertain what factors lead to teachers undertaking their own Continued Professional Development, how any CPD can lead to improvements in teaching, and what types of motivation are being practiced in our schools. This is of importance for not only the benefit of the teachers, but also, more importantly, for the benefit of the students. After all; the job of teacher is one that requires development of knowledge and skill (Pelletier & Shore, 2002), and the maintenance and enhancement of knowledge (Madden & Mitchell, 1993).

CPD does have some issues, not least of which is how it can be made into a meaningful exercise and not just to satisfy a teaching board (Lester, 1995). CPD needs to improve a teacher's professional competence (Fowler, 1996); especially the way in which they undertake their instruction, which is the most important aspect of being a teacher. Several authors claim that ultimately a person accomplishes a task as a means of meeting personal needs such as self-actualization (Herzberg, 1966), self-determination (Deci, 1980), and self-acceptance or social-acceptance (Covington, 1984; Maehr, 1984). Comprehensive supervisory controls should not be necessary to motivate teachers to pursue CPD, (Reiger and Stang, 2000). Teachers nowadays should be able to motivate themselves intrinsically without extrinsic factors being brought to bear, they should understand the nature of CPD, make use of the knowledge and skills that can

be derived from it to improve their own instructional techniques, and thus become better teachers; this should be a process that forms part of a teacher's lifelong learning.

Semi-structured interviews were used as the main method to collect data, using a set of open-ended questions which are carefully worded and arranged for the purpose of ensuring that there is as little variation as possible in the questions posed to the interviewees. Although this method provides less flexibility for questions, following up on issues raised is possible, depending on the nature of the interview and the skills of the interviewers. The questions can be elaborated on and asked in whatever order is appropriate.

Two types of schools were used in the research. The first type of schools were international schools, using an international curriculum and English as the medium of instruction. All international schools are members of ISAT International Schools Association of Thailand. The second type of schools used were Thai Private Schools; Thai Privately-owned schools that have an English program with English being used as the medium of instruction.

The participants in this investigation were fourteen full time teachers who are all employed in teaching in Thailand. Semi-structured interviews focused on interviewing the two groups who had been identified from the large population of foreign teachers working at the secondary school level in Thailand: Seven foreign teachers from an international school and seven foreign teachers from a Thai private school, who are all motivated to engage in CPD activities, were interviewed.

The view of CPD activities produced a consensual majority that most defined as a mixture of activities, both formal and informal in nature, the majority, however, who cited a preference for formal or informal methods of development; cited that informal methods of CPD were foremost in mind when discussing CPD; five teachers citing informal methods; 2 stressing formal methods; and seven preferring a mixed definition.

The teachers in the international schools mostly engaged in a variety of CPD activities (five teachers). Whereas, only two of the teachers in Thai Private Schools engaged in a variety of CPD activities. Formal activities were the most popular individual activity for those teaching in Thai private schools, with three teachers from this sector participating in formal activities. No international schoolteachers participated in formal study alone as a form of Continued Professional Development.

Regarding the informal methods of CPD development, there was a balance between the two types of teachers, with one international schoolteacher following informal methods of development and two Thai Private School teachers doing the same. It would seem that International school teachers follow all methods of development that are available, while the Thai Private School teachers prefer a more formal type of development followed by informal methods.

There is a vast difference in feelings between the teachers in the two types of schools. The teachers in Thai Private Schools were overwhelmingly negative in regard to their schools, while the teachers at the international schools were very positive. International schools are more likely to be motivated by a mixture of factors spread quite evenly over Job Enrichment factors; Equity factors; and Expectancy factors. Teachers at Thai private schools on the other hand are not motivated at all by Job Enrichment factors or Equity Factors, but a small percentage of them are motivated by expectancy factors. The majority of Thai Private School teachers are motivated by vocational factors, which did not feature at all in the motivation of teachers who teach at an International school. International schools teachers are a lot more positive when describing the effects of their Continued Professional Development activities. Thai Private School teachers are more likely to give a mixed response of both positive and negative or just a negative description of the effects of CPD.

The various types of activities focused mainly on Pedagogical knowledge with seven teachers citing that this type of knowledge was improved by CPD activities; three teachers thought that it enhanced their social, political, cultural and physical knowledge. No teacher thought that their CPD activities related at all to their knowledge of subject matter.

It can be seen that the positive effects are quite far reaching and that they can have a long-term effect on teaching behavior, especially the focus on pedagogical knowledge. If the pedagogical knowledge can also be reflected on by a teacher and built on with subsequent development activities, it will have an immediate short-term effect, which can be implemented by the teacher into their long-term teaching methodology. Therefore, all pedagogical knowledge will have a short-term effect, but will only be categorized as being useful in the long term, if the individual teacher actually finds it useful and prudent, in reality, to retain its use in the classroom. The social, political, cultural and physical knowledge on the other hand will probably only be of use while the teacher is still practicing within the cultural context for which it

applies. These values, once learnt in Thailand, for example, will probably not be so useful when applied in China or in another European country.

The teachers at the Thai Private schools reported that the CPD activities which they participated in, did not have much effect, whereas, only one teacher in an International school identified this as an issue. The only teachers, that were negative in relation to the fact that the CPD activities they had undertaken had a restrictive or coercive consequence, were those from the Thai Private Schools.

It can be seen, that the negative effects of CPD, in relation to it being coercive and restrictive on teaching methodology employed in the classroom, culminates in some cases with a “one-size fits all” approach to teaching, this can have an immediate short-term effect, which in some cases might stifle future development or at least the freedom to develop in less conventional directions. Thus in some cases, where this occurs, there will be long term negative effects for some teachers, but these effects could also simply be a temporary aberration that can be corrected with a change of school, a change of management, or even simply further engagement with subsequent Continued Professional Development activities.

Continuing professional development can play a significant role in the successful development of teachers and teaching. There is no doubt that teacher knowledge is an important aspect of what a teacher can bring to bear in the classroom, as stated clearly by Hammond; “When all is said and done, what matters most for students’ learning are the commitments and capacities of their teachers”, (Darling-Hammond, 1997, p. 293). Likewise, when all is said and done, the commitment and capacity of the teaching faculty can only be developed through some kind of Continued Professional Development strategy.

The improved learning of students is, therefore, a direct result of professional development and encouraging teachers, who subscribe to very different types of motivation, which can differ depending on the type of school that is employing them, needs to be a priority. There needs to be encouragement for all teachers, with the provision of trying to take into account teacher ability and experience, and ensure that CPD is a liberating concept and not a restrictive educational straight jacket that is just forced onto teachers with the consequence that teachers are stifled, controlled, coerced, and restricted. A good context in which professional learning could take place could be a professional learning community that could encompass the entire foreign teaching fraternity that is employed teaching in the Thai educational system.

More recent research has also stressed the importance of incorporating other less self-directed methods of CPD, such as a mentor-coaching initiative model, to enhance teacher pedagogical practices (Onchwari G, Keengwe J, 2008). Academic thought is still somewhat divided and a lot of emphasis is placed on an overall approach, which is restricted due to financial constraints. In spite of these financial considerations, however, many countries are moving CPD away from an informal footing and placing it squarely as one fundamental element required if a person wishes to pursue the vocation of teaching. England’s General Teaching Council (GTC) has instigated a scheme to accredit professional development providers under a Teacher Learning Academy (TLA) program. These plans also coincide with changes to performance management regulations that require teacher’s professional development to be tied to salary (Milne, 2007).

We should understand that the professional educator is on a path of learning, just as the students that they are educating are a learning path. CPD is vital to that path of development, then, not just for the teacher alone, but more importantly, for the students as well. To adhere to the concept of “lifelong learning” which teachers attempt to instill in their charges, it is needed for teachers to live and breathe this concept as well; as cited earlier, “the educator’s professionalism entails long-term reflective development of dispositions, knowledge, and skills through a series of stages from neophyte to expert professional” (Pelletier & Shore, 2002). It is clear that educational academic thinking has long lauded the possible benefits of professional development, albeit within a very positive framework. While there is no denying that CPD activities are an absolutely essential element to contributing to the holistic vision of what a teacher is and what they do, there is a dark side which has been long overlooked and which must be understood, so that maximum benefit can be derived from Continued Professional Development Programs. Whichever way the consensus of educational academic theory leans in the future, the laissez faire approach to CPD and the directed and managed approach both have problems. It would seem that the best and most beneficial type of CPD would concentrate on content, be of an extensive and sustained duration, have a connection to practice, and can be facilitated in an environment that is open-minded and conducive to fostering career development. Only then, can schools say they have done their best to positively influence teacher development and therefore teacher practice.

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