‘Peter Earley and Vivienne Porritt have the eyes to see and the skills to describe vividly and compellingly outstanding Continuing Professional Development (CPD) practice. In doing so, they increase the likelihood of ensuring that schools get the best out of staff and that staff get the best out of school. Here they assemble and describe ideas that every school will find invaluable: a ‘must have’ for the staff library.’ — Professor Tim Brighouse, Chief Adviser for London Schools and previously Chief Education Officer of Birmingham and Oxfordshire

‘This book is a really useful tool that colleagues who are at different stages of developing their professional learning offer can use for themselves, the teams they work in and the organisations they are part of. It helps them to celebrate all the hard work that is currently happening in the area of professional learning for the whole school workforce or as a stimulus to help probe personal thinking about how Headteachers/CPD leaders can move professional learning forward in their own school or organisation.’ — Rebekah Iiyambo, Headteacher, Kaizen Primary School

Effective Practices in CPD presents a collection of case studies of schools’ journeys towards effective CPD practice as part of a TDA national project. They present the story of the goals set and achieved, and the challenges and successes along the way. Each case study makes specific reference to the nine factors or approaches to CPD identified in the book as underpinning effective practice, such as how they established a clarity of purpose at the outset of CPD activity and how the London Centre for Leadership in Learning’s clear and rigorous impact evaluation framework supported and challenged projects to develop their thinking and practice. The lessons are contextualised within the wider literature about the successful leadership of CPD and what we know about the effective practice of school workforce development.

The editors introduce why effective CPD matters, and conclude with the lessons learnt and ways forward. Among the many cases provided by leaders in this field, Sara Bubb writes how coaching in a special school was used to make teachers and support staff feel more valued. John Tandy describes how primary school heads came together with the Local Authority to jointly develop a Leadership Charter that was a summary of effective leadership practice in the Borough.

This book will interest practitioners and professionals who design and develop CPD opportunities and practice within all sectors of education, as well as all working within the strategic leadership of CPD. It also complements the TDA’s national development programme for the leadership of CPD by showing how the strategic implications of the nine CPD approaches identified can improve the overall quality and impact of professional development, and so enhance the learning for all children and young people.
Effective Practices in Continuing Professional Development
Lessons from schools

Edited by Peter Earley and Vivienne Porritt

When quoting from this chapter please use the following citation:

Chapter 3

Engaging teachers in action research
Sara Bubb

Context
This project involved a very successful 11–18 secondary school: it was deemed outstanding by Ofsted in 2007 and for 14–19 provision in 2009. It exists in very challenging circumstances in that the number of students taking up free school meals, speaking languages other than English and with learning difficulties and disabilities is well above national average. Its contextual value added is one of the highest in the country.

This school has very strong staff development, which has been well led for many years. Its Ofsted report says, ‘Leadership and learning are bound together in the sense that the adults in the college community are regarded as learners’ (2007). The school is involved in many projects which bring with them extra funding. It has long held training school status and is an accredited provider with 20 places for the Graduate Teacher programme. Many CPD activities that are seen as cutting edge in other schools are well established here. For instance, there is a team of eight advanced skills teachers (ASTs) who support and develop staff. People have been part of the General Teaching Council Teacher Learning Academy (GTC TLA), and one teacher is accredited to award TLA levels 1 and 2. Observation of teaching is well established and there are three teaching spaces (a classroom, a gymnasium and a science laboratory) equipped with video cameras and microphones which enable mentors to communicate with teachers as lessons progress.

Phase 1 project
In such a school, it can be hard to know where to go next in order to further improve professional development. The deputy responsible for professional development felt that there were two areas which needed strengthening and saw the Effective Practices in CPD project as a means of doing this. They were:
• Provision for people in their second year of teaching who were feeling a little at sea after the strong organised support in their induction and training years.
• About a quarter of teachers had been or were engaged in action research or practitioner enquiry. This had helped to develop much good practice in departments, but this was not disseminated effectively more widely across the school.

The quarter of teachers who had experienced classroom-based action research felt positive about it. The CPD leader was keen to encourage its wider use and for it to become an important part of the school’s culture because it would encourage ongoing professional dialogue before, during and after research experiences. The school had worked towards becoming self-evaluative; it now wanted to be ‘research engaged’.

Aims

The aim of the initial Effective Practices in CPD project was to develop the opportunities for 16 second-year teachers through an Early Professional Development programme. Each term had a specific focus:

Term 1: Paired collaboration on lesson planning across departments, with a shared aim to teach Ofsted grade 2 (good) lessons.

Term 2: Work scrutiny whereby teachers were invited to collect information on a particular issue of interest through observations, questionnaires, interviews, etc.

Term 3: Small-scale action research where teachers chose a focus, conducted a very small piece of action research and presented findings at the celebration event at the end of term.

Impact of phase 1

Overall the project was very successful with full participation and engagement from the 16 second-year teachers at each stage:

• The first term’s work was welcomed as teachers had an opportunity to focus on their own classroom practice as well as working across departments – a rare opportunity at the school. This enabled other benefits such as sharing good practice from one department to another.
The structure of the second term’s activities enabled teachers to begin to unpick issues they had come across in their own lessons. Ideas included ‘Why do boys dominate discussions in BTEC Business?’ and ‘Why don’t Year 8 do homework?’ The collaborative approach to the investigations led to real professional dialogue and some enquiry.

The third term’s action research, although on a very small scale, engaged teachers in unpicking their own practice. The enquiries, implementation of an idea and subsequent evaluations began to encourage teachers to become more risk taking and enquiry oriented.

Staff made clear learning gains from their peer observations and were able to add value to their own teaching. This fitted in with the school’s improvement plans. Their action research increased the involvement of students, who shared their views. The celebration event gave teachers a date by which they needed to complete their work, and raised their status with each other and across the school. It left the second-year teachers and their mentors wanting more – and made the project leader more convinced that all the teaching staff would benefit from even more structured enquiry and research taking place in the school. Research engagement was beginning to take off!

**Phase 2 project**

The next phase of the project aimed to embed and extend the achievements of phase 1 through engaging more staff in practitioner enquiry and action research. It was ambitious: now all teachers in their third year and beyond – about 60 teachers in total – were to work in ‘action learning sets’ (ALS).

**Aims**

The aims were to:

- embed the notion that this is a ‘learning-centred’ school
- engage all members of the teaching community in learning in small groups
- ensure that all teachers have a ‘learning target’ in their performance management (PM), linked to the action learning; recording a lesson which would show their progress
- provide opportunities for staff growth
- continue to raise standards of learning and teaching.
These aims would have benefited from being more tangible and focused on specific outcomes, including some related to pupil learning. It also seems an omission that there was no explicit aim about wanting to be a research-engaged school: the school was already learning centred and the new challenge was the action research or practitioner enquiry element.

The plan was that a small group of up to eight professionals with a shared interest in an aspect of teaching and learning would form an ALS. Each group would be facilitated by a ‘learning leader’. The group would discuss the aspect they were focused on, try out a few things in the classroom, reflect and feedback. The learning leader would then add some theory such as reading an article by a leading light on the topic and share some practice or case studies carried out elsewhere. At the end of the experience, new ideas, proposals and policies would be put forward or further research carried out. Essentially the plan provided an opportunity for high-quality professional development, led by staff, for staff based in classrooms to improve the quality of teaching and learning for students.

In lieu of three professional development days (thus giving them three extra days’ holiday), all teachers (except trainees, newly qualified teachers and those in their second year who had their own activities) were expected to participate in two action learning sets a year. Thus, participation was not voluntary. Each ALS was a six-week programme comprising four Thursday twilight sessions lasting between 60 and 90 minutes, with an expectation of about three hours of action research and reflection (see Table 3.1). The sessions were held at the end of the school day.

Table 3.1: Structure of ALS sessions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Session 1: 1hr</th>
<th>Session 2: 1hr</th>
<th>Session 3: 1.5hr</th>
<th>Session 4: 1.5hr</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Socialisation</strong></td>
<td><strong>Externalisation</strong></td>
<td><strong>Combination</strong></td>
<td><strong>Internalisation</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A ‘catalyst’ – discuss something that you think is happening.</td>
<td>If something is ‘found’ or said to be ‘true’, it gets written down.</td>
<td>Find others (e.g. literature/theory) to ‘back up’ what you say.</td>
<td>Possible change to practice, e.g. new strategies/policies.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 weeks action research</td>
<td>1 week reading</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Engaging teachers in action research
The action learning sets focused on 20 interesting topics, such as:

Promoting the learning mind set
Solving the problems of the ‘I can’t do it’ student. The aim of this ALS was to develop strategies to create learning mindsets, which would improve the behaviour, motivation and academic success of students.

Body language
The sessions looked at practical ways of uncovering habitual or unknown trends in teachers’ personal body language that can either be harnessed or adapted to make sure classroom behaviour and student engagement is maximised.

Partnership teaching
Thinking of ways to embed the practice of students teaching each other in the classroom.

Mobile phones as a learning tool
All students have mobile phones. Currently they are banned, but shouldn’t this technology be embraced?

Surprising students out of the classroom
Exploring ‘thinking outside the box’ and presenting core concepts in unusual and thought-provoking ways.

Teachers could choose which half-term during the year they would do their action learning in, as seen in Table 3.2.

Each set was led by a ‘learning leader’. Eighteen teachers offered to take on this role. They had a range of experience (from between three to 30 years) but they all had a passion for and an interest in the topics which they offered. An external consultant worked with the learning leaders on establishing professional learning communities and coaching. The project director trained them in the ALS process as a group for two hours and as individuals for about 20 minutes. This was the structure of the four ALS sessions:

Socialisation
• Begin by explaining the principles of the ALS and its main theme.
• Examine the reasons why people are attending your session.
• Brainstorm what the theme means to individuals. Ask for examples of practice that teachers already have.
• Discuss why the theme of your ALS is important in education and in your school.
### Table 3.2: When action learning sets were to run

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Autumn 2</th>
<th>Spring 1</th>
<th>Spring 2</th>
<th>Summer 1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Promoting the learning mind set</td>
<td>Pupil voice</td>
<td>Dilemma-based learning</td>
<td>Accelerated learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Body language</td>
<td>Emotional intelligence</td>
<td>Learning styles</td>
<td>Learning styles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SEAL (Social and emotional aspects of learning)</td>
<td>SEAL</td>
<td>Surprising students out of the classroom</td>
<td>Making use of mark schemes and examiners' reports in teaching</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vertical tutoring</td>
<td>Enterprising learners</td>
<td>Partnership teaching</td>
<td>(and some later additions)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partnership teaching</td>
<td>Using MLE in the classroom</td>
<td>Accelerated learning</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mobile phones as a learning tool</td>
<td>Linking specialisms to teaching and learning</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Five principles that underpin Fresh Start delivery</td>
<td>Strategies for effective teaching</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- Ask teachers to consider what they would like to have achieved at the end of the four sessions and what sorts of things they might do over four sessions.

**Task:** teachers to consider what they will do in their classrooms for the two-week action research.

**Externalisation**
- Discuss outcomes of the socialisation session, i.e. what they thought about.
- Each teacher to explain the small-scale action research they will be carrying out over a two-week period and what they would expect to find.
- Ask them to make a basic action plan – action/impact/evaluation – and share in pairs.
Task: teachers to carry out the two-week research.

Combination

• Share some literature/theory. This could include a clip from Teachers TV, an article, a paper, an extract from a book, research findings or case studies from elsewhere. This is an opportunity for you to supplement what your group thinks or believes to be true with some real evidence. This supports your CPD as well as theirs.

• Enable a discussion about what you have produced. Discuss initial thoughts and findings from action research.

Internalisation

• Each teacher to present their findings. Are there any overall lessons or conclusions? Do they need to review or change practice? Are there any proposals?

• Discuss what’s next for individuals.

Impact of phase 2

By the end of March 2009 the project director felt that the project had only been partly successful and that it was too early to be certain of its impact (although the TDA funding was due to end in March, the project was due to run until the end of the school year). The development sessions for the learning leaders had gone well and these 18 people felt they had learned a great deal. However, they were also aware of how much more they needed to know and do. Some sets had been more successful than others and some participants had put more into them and gained more from the experience than others. Overall, there was clear evidence that most of the teachers involved had:

• attended an action learning set
• read materials (theory and research) they wouldn’t have otherwise
• mixed with teachers they didn’t normally speak with, from different subject areas
• discussed issues
• linked theory to their own practice in the classroom
• thought more deeply about what they do and why – as one teacher said, ‘The best thing about them is that they create reflection’
been innovative – they tried out new strategies and learned from the experience.

The extract below from notes made from an ALS discussion on principles of effective teaching (see Boxes 1 and 2) illustrates all these points. However, the reading chosen by the learning leader was rather dated and intended for university teaching. There are many, more appropriate works that might have stimulated greater thinking. This raises issues about the learning leaders’ knowledge base.

Box 1: ALS – Strategies for effective teaching

**Summary of discussion after reading an article about principles for good practice**

- ‘A’ identified frequent student–instructor contact in and out of classes as an aspect of effective teaching, especially in relation to her Year 10s who are challenging to teach but would clearly benefit from this level of attention and interest. B felt her Year 10s could benefit from this as well.
- Group discussed the possibility of making this happen within their context.
- All agreed that time presented the most significant issue.
- All could identify groups where they felt this kind of intervention would have a positive impact on the effectiveness of the teaching and learning process.
- ‘C’ identified learning is not a spectator sport as an important issue for effectiveness and ‘M’ mentioned the need for teachers to stop talking and start listening.
- There was further discussion about reflective time and thinking time. ‘A’ suggested making use of a ‘thinking group’ – people who you could email with your difficulties who would reflect objectively. This needed to be investigated further and could be the basis for a further ALS.
- The constraints were discussed and a plan agreed.
Box 2: Outcomes of discussion

The teachers decided ‘to make time for student–teacher contact away from the classroom in order to better impact on effective teaching’ over the following fortnight. Specifically, they agreed to:

- make use of support staff to facilitate 10-minute interviews with a small number of students about coursework and how they’re getting on
- make appointments with students away from class time and monitor uptake and effectiveness
- do research on work done so far to identify key areas of success and/or development
- develop ‘prompt’ questions
- make the interview balance 60:40 student talk:teacher talk
- keep a learning journal
- create an appropriate student voice to monitor impact.

As a result of another action learning set on partnership teaching, one teacher tried something innovative: asking one Year 7 class to teach another. Her reflection on this can be seen in Box 3.

Box 3: Action research by a Science teacher

ALS: Partnership teaching

Activity
My Year 7 top set had to work in groups to research an energy resource, find out how it works, the pros and cons of using it and then teach another Year 7 class (bottom set) about it.

What were you trying to achieve?
I chose the top set so that we could push the gifted and talented pupils: some pupils would do in-depth research into things like nuclear physics which they would not usually encounter at KS3 level. I also required pupils to take some responsibility for their own learning and teach themselves about their chosen topic. Lastly, I hoped to develop the pupils’ confidence and give them experience of speaking in public.
What happened?
Pupils researched their topic and prepared resources for the class that they intended to teach. We had two lessons when they practised teaching the topics to their own class and their peers provided constructive feedback and suggestions for improvement. I graded them on their posters, the materials and resources they had created and the quality of their presentation. All of the pupils worked extremely hard on their projects: most did extra work at home and developed fantastic resources. What was even better is that most of the pupils did all of the research on their own: all I had to do was steer them in the right direction on where to find the best resources. They accessed a huge range of resources, from things on the internet to A-level and GCSE textbooks, so that they could learn as much as they could about their energy resource.

The presentation day was very stressful for the pupils and especially me because they took turns to teach a bottom set Year 7 class who were renowned for poor behaviour and extremely short attention spans. Fortunately, the presentation day went off without any hitches. This activity really did stretch the pupils who gave the presentations – unfortunately, most of it went over the heads of the class being taught.

What would you change and why?
It could have been better if the ‘teachers’ were teaching this lesson to a class of higher ability pupils, possibly an older year group. Overall it was a very positive experience for the pupils who enjoyed the freedom that this task provided for them.

Overall judgement on the project’s success
This was an ambitious project aimed at moving a whole school further down the road of becoming engaged in practitioner enquiry and being a more learning-centred and research-engaged community. As ambitious projects often are, it was only partly successful. About one-sixth of teachers did not do what they had agreed to do within the ALS or did not turn up to sessions that they had opted for. For instance, only one out of six teachers turned up to a session on body language that another staff member had put much effort into preparing. To encourage attendance, the project manager made announcements over the tannoy system on Thursdays after school to remind people that the action learning sets were due to start.
Features of effective professional development

In considering features of effective professional development, the following were definitely in place:

• specifying a focus and goal for CPD activity, aligned to clear timescales
• including a focus on pupil outcomes in CPD activity
• engaging with a variety of CPD opportunities
• including time for reflection and feedback
• ensuring collaborative approaches to CPD
• developing strategic leadership of CPD.

However, the following were not sufficiently in place:

• Establishing clarity of purpose at the outset in CPD activity

The project director was not entirely clear on the purpose, sometimes settling for ‘I just want people to talk more’ rather than doing action research. Learning leaders varied in how clear they were, but participants were not entirely clear about what was meant to be achieved through the action learning sets.

• Understanding how to evaluate the impact of CPD

Although the project director knew how to evaluate impact, the project would have been strengthened by a clearer baseline picture and a greater focus on the intended impact of the project – and what evidence would be used to judge it. The successes and challenges in evaluating the impact of CPD needed earlier consideration; by the end of March no decisions had been made on how to evaluate the project. The project director was planning to meet with a group of learning leaders to decide on success criteria, but this should have been decided at the outset in order to ensure clarity.

• Ensuring participants’ ownership of CPD activity

The compulsory nature of this project meant that not all teachers felt ownership. More needed to be done to win the hearts and minds of the more experienced teachers to this way of working. The compulsory status of the ALS seemed counter-productive to the ethos of learning-centred communities.
Overall, these points would have benefited from further consideration:

- More structured procedures: the project would have benefited from reminders, chasing, getting people to commit to turning up and then doing some action research in the classroom. Early career teachers had been socialised to be responsible and did not need to be chivvied, but it appeared that other teachers needed tighter systems of accountability.

- Common recording systems: ALS leaders made up their own recording systems so these varied from the purely verbal to the over-detailed. Although the project director did not want to be prescriptive, a common paper trail or reporting format would have saved time.

- The value of a specific focus and goal for CPD activity aligned to clear timescales: although these were in place, the timescales of each action learning set were short. Having a longer timescale for each ALS might have resulted in more being achieved. The timescale for the whole ALS – four one- or one-and-a-half-hour sessions over six weeks – was very short, bearing in mind how busy the teachers were.

- Time: making use of development days would have improved the quality of the time given to the ALS rather than holding the sessions after school when people were tired and felt they wanted to do other, more pressing, work or go home.

- Colleagues teaching colleagues: although this had its positive aspects, more could have been done to ensure that learning leaders had strong knowledge of the latest thinking within their topics so that they shared the best and most appropriate theory and research with their action learning sets.

- Realistic targets: the project was over-ambitious in involving all teachers in the time frame.

- Inclusivity: the ALS only involved teachers, but many support staff would have benefited from and contributed to the sets. This seemed a missed opportunity to integrate systems for support staff and teachers.