

## Birds of a Different Feather



### **Building Research Capacity: an investigation into the impact of JPD**

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## CONTENTS

<b>The fuel for my fire</b>	3
The fish and the ocean	4
<b>The frame for my thinking</b>	4
JPD – more than peer coaching	5
Looking down from above	5
Birds of a different feather	6
Critical friends	6
Making it work	7
<b>The methods in my madness</b>	7
Throwing out the net	7
Crossing the start line	8
Examining the pebble	9
Reflecting on the ripples	10
Teaching	10
Learning	11
<b>The wood in my trees</b>	12
Electing and self-initiating	12
Mixing frequently and face to face	15
Engaging interactively	17
Choosing to be positive	19
Catching more fish	21
<b>The not so final curtain</b>	22
Making a difference	22
Taking things forward	22
Recommendations for others	24

*“I forget what I was taught. I only remember what I have learnt.” ~ Patrick White*

### **The fuel for my fire**

An external training consultant was about to trigger a total meltdown in Europe – well, at one college in East Sussex at least! Sweat was pouring from the brows of the forty teachers crammed into a classroom designed to accommodate twenty students. It was three days before the end of the summer term and we had been summoned to a workshop on “delivering outcomes for learners” (Ofsted 2009). As we entered the room we were “entertained” with what seemed like an unrelated Youtube clip (The Two Ronnies “Fork Handles” sketch). Where was this leading? I still don’t know as I write this today.

This sketch was followed by a task which involved us looking at an “exemplar” scheme of work and how the outcomes for learners had been applied. References were made to how the teacher would ensure learners feel safe (Ofsted 2009) etc., but these were just meaningless words on a page. No attempt had been made to bring these to life in the context of that particular subject, nor were we given an opportunity to apply our understanding to our own curriculum areas. Even now, several months down the line, although most of our staff has completed a section entitled “outcomes for learners” on their schemes of work, very few staff are conscious of how they have embedded the sentiment of them in their actual teaching practice. The cost of this consultant’s time to deliver this workshop to just over one thousand staff over a period of four days was undoubtedly huge; the benefit to teaching and learning was arguably negligible. Beware the cycle of minimal impact!

The fish and the ocean

All of the above took place in a large further education college spread across three main campuses and educating just over twelve thousand students. I am one of the five members of teaching staff that came together to contribute to changing the college’s approach to professional development and put an end to teachers sitting there with a mouth full of teeth!

I worked with a community of practitioners from a variety of subject areas.

<u>Practitioner</u>	<u>Subject</u>	<u>Years with college</u>	<u>Years in profession</u>
Leanie	Business Studies	5	8
Sam	Accounting	10	10
Paul	English	5	8
Simon	Sports Studies	8	9
Justin	Health and Social Care	7	9

Inspired by Michael Fielding’s discussion of JPD (JPD) (Fielding 2005) I wanted to investigate how to implement a joint approach to professional advancement successfully within the busy world of teaching. I felt that success would be evidenced by improved quality of teaching and learning; a better education for our students, which equates to more than the achievement and retention rates that are typically measured (Biesta 2009).

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**The frame for my thinking**

My interest in investigating JPD is linked to my involvement with my “research-engaged” Professional Development Manager. He shares my view that the more traditional approaches to staff development such as workshops may not always meet my learning needs. In recent years he has been actively involved in leading a variety of different approaches including peer coaching and embedding reflective enquiry through action

research. My desire to lead an investigation of my own was music to his ears and he has played a vital role in helping me connect my thinking to relevant literature and to other development activities going on within the college.

With his help I recognised that my main qualm with some of my development to date was that there was too much emphasis on transmission of knowledge. I wanted to find something more aspirational; something that would create opportunities for staff to work together to create new understandings.

### *JPD – more than peer coaching*

JPD as discussed by Fielding (2005) seemed to capture the essence of what I was looking for; ‘replacing the notion of transfer of good practice because that omits the essential collaborative work that needs to be done jointly by the partners of practice’ (2005:6). Not all my previous professional development experiences were like the cycle of minimal impact discussed at the beginning of this paper. I have been involved with peer coaching before and recognised the value of working with other professionals, but the model as I experienced it fell short of my expectations.

### *Looking down from above*

Joyce and Showers (2002) describe peer coaching as an active approach to collaborative planning, development and implementation of teaching strategies. They do not discuss the importance of collaborative reflection as part of their model; and for me this was a serious omission. In addition to having some experience of peer coaching, I had carried out individual action research projects before and found reflection on practice to be central to my approach. Both Coffield (2008) and Fielding (2005) mention reflection when discussing

JPD. Coffield (2008) talks about the importance of 'developing expertise through systematic reflection with colleagues' (2008:25) and Fielding (2005) suggests that 'shared practice develops and extends itself over time through mutual interplay and reflection' (2005:103).

### *Birds of a different feather*

One element of peer coaching I was keen to hold on to and adapt was the notion of working in teams. However rather than being restricted to subject groups (something encouraged when following LSIS' Subject Learning Coach model), I was eager to explore the impact of working as part of more 'expansive teaching communities' (Coffield 2008: 20). As discussed in the introduction I am one of five teachers from five different subject areas. I do not normally work together with these teachers, but we wanted to join forces as a 'community of practice; a group of people informally bound together by shared expertise and passion for joint enterprise' (Wenger and Snyder 2000:139 in Coffield 2008).

### *Critical friends*

Our experience as peer coaches threw some light on the kind of relationships we wanted to nurture and see grow. As members of peer coaching teams, teachers bring a willingness to work with others and adopt an active approach to doing so. A coach offers non-judgemental questioning and support and is advised not to give feedback (Joyce and Showers 2002). We wanted more than that; a trusting relationship which fostered an equal investment in our work and allowed room for the constructive criticism we felt would be key to our development. So rather than coaches we wanted to become critical friends; 'trusted people who ask provocative questions, provide data to be examined through another lens,

offer critiques of, and become advocates for, the success of the joint work' (Costa and Kallick 1993: 49).

Making it work

For us JPD would involve stepping beyond the boundaries of our subject specialisms. It would be about coming together as trusted peers to work equally on our shared endeavour to improve our teaching and learning. Our aim was to contribute to our college's changing approach to professional development; to investigate the impact of a collaborative approach to planning, development, implementation *and* reflection of our teaching strategies. But how to put it all into practice? Coffield (2008) warns that some staff may be resistant to change but we did not anticipate this would not be a problem for us as we were actively seeking to bring it about. It may be an issue later on however when trying to widen participation to others. Should that be the case we will need to explore the reasons behind such resistance: 'there may be a range of different and legitimate motives, that, if explored together, could be a learning journey for all parties' (Coffield 2008:24). Possibly more pressing at first is Fielding's (2005) recommendation to create common time for the work and to allow space for teachers to identify their own priorities. He suggests that doing so would 'make engagement more appealing and straightforward for all' (2005:17). We agreed to meet once every two weeks for a whole academic year (and hopefully beyond) and to offer each other a 'structured but emerging way of working' (Fielding 2005 104); creating new practices in acting on our own individual priorities (Cunningham et al 2000).

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## The methods in my madness

### Throwing out the net

My journey began six months ago with me presenting my idea at a staff briefing. I encouraged my colleagues to consider investing in their teaching by taking ownership of their professional development. My aim was for teachers to join me voluntarily in a “community of practice” (Fielding 2005) to foster a culture of self-initiated improvement (Cunningham et al 2000). More than forty fish were swimming in the sea that day, seven bit the hook but only three were reeled in!

The five of us ploughed on and met once every two weeks to reflect on the aspects of our teaching we wanted to improve and to formulate the strategies we could adapt and implement in our classrooms.

### Crossing the start line

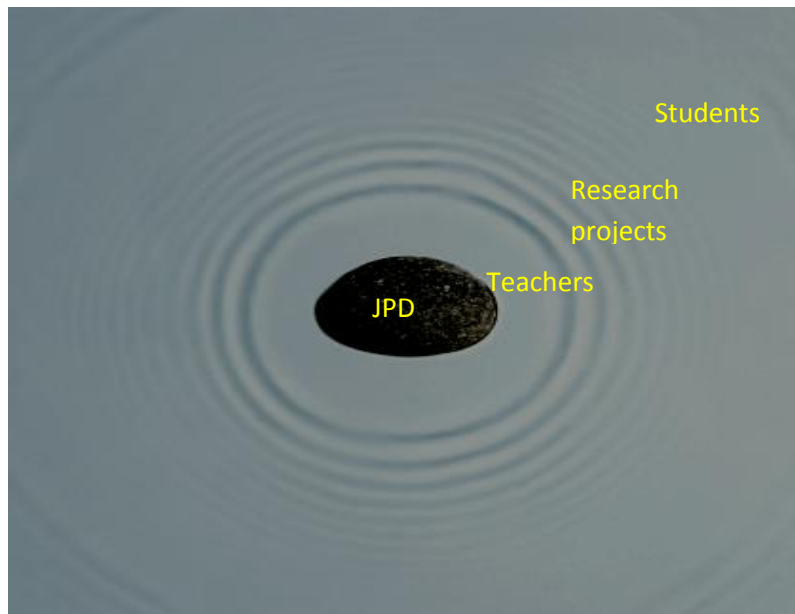
For us it was vital that the process involved some action (Mc Niff 2002). We tried out these strategies with our students and shared our experiences at the next meeting. As professionals we respected each others’ ability to prioritise what was most important to us and our students. What we investigated was not dictated by management or each other, there was no hidden agenda which explains why each teacher researched something slightly different.

<u>Teacher</u>	<u>Investigating how to..</u>
Leanie and Sam	Engage students with feedback
Paul	Support students with extended writing
Simon	Manage students’ learning anxieties
Justin	Make use of students’ experiences



We recognised the need to gather feedback on our progress from a variety of sources (Bell 2010) as doing all this and having no impact on teaching and learning would be pointless.

What does the pebble look like and what ripples does it cause?



### Examining the pebble

To better understand our process of JPD I gathered feedback from the five teachers involved using a questionnaire. I used open ended questions because I did not want to restrict what my colleagues had to say (Patten 2002). I felt that I would learn most from their detailed narrative, though was mindful of the complexities involved in analysing qualitative data (Wellington 2002). The questionnaire facilitated self-reflection on three aspects of our experience: the benefits, constraints and recommendations on how to open it up to others. The responses to the questions varied greatly as two teachers wrote very detailed answers, one gave concise statements and another created their own structure. Poor response rate can often be an issue when using questionnaires (Cohen et al 2000) and even with my small sample of five I struggled to get a 100% return. In the end four were completed with the

fifth teacher explaining that lack of time prevented him from answering the thought-provoking questions I had raised. This did not prevent me from benefitting from his views however, as the same questions were used to frame a discussion where all of us clarified our thinking with our Principal and Professional Development Manager. Impressively, given that she had only been at the college a few weeks and was undoubtedly very busy, she had willingly freed up forty five minutes in her hectic schedule to meet with us. It was an excellent opportunity for us to explore and add to our thinking, and most notably it threw light on how we could take our work forward.

### Reflecting on the ripples

- teaching

In addition to gathering feedback on JPD as a process I wanted to reflect on its impact on teaching and learning. The whole point of meeting every two weeks was to explore possible solutions to problems we had identified in our classrooms. As discussed earlier each teacher was investigating something different. To gain a deeper insight into the impact of our projects on our teaching we initially discussed observing each others' lessons. Peer lesson observations seem to be the current recommendation in education (DfES 2010) but I questioned the value of these in our circumstances. I felt that though they have their place they were not necessarily the best way to foster joint and equal working. The observer's role can sometimes be quite passive and often they do not have an equal investment in the particular class being taught (Marriott 2001). Three of us felt that discussions with other teachers, within and beyond our community, were the best way to make sense of what was happening in the classroom. The two of us from the same subject area shared our

understanding of the impact on learning by team teaching three lessons. This involved joint planning, delivery and reflection (DfES 2010).

I felt that the discussions were less valuable than the team teaching. In the discussions the teacher presented their view of what happened but this was a view through one lens. With hindsight we should have done peer lesson observations after all (!), as this may have led to a more meaningful and balanced review (Marriott 2001).

The team teaching however had a dual purpose (Goetz 2000). Not only were we able to gather feedback on the impact of that particular project on teaching and learning; we also benefitted from creating new practices together (Fielding 2005). Although we felt that team teaching added value to our approach to working jointly and equally, we recognised that it may be difficult to sustain due to timetable constraints (Coffield 2008) and would require the teachers involved to share the same subject specialism.

- learning

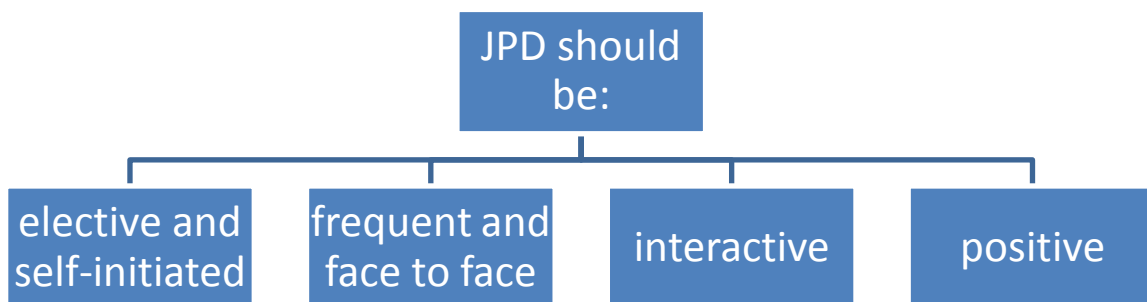
I was keen to find out whether the changes we had made to our teaching as a result of JPD were having any impact on students' learning. For one of the projects I distributed questionnaires and held a structured forum with one class of twenty six students. I then interviewed four volunteers from that class to add more depth to their contributions so far. The questionnaire was completed anonymously in class time which enabled me to benefit from 100% return. However the students' comments were brief and in some cases needed clarification (Walford 2001). This was why I felt the need to follow up with a whole class forum. The intention was to gather more in-depth feedback (Krueger and Casey 2000) from everyone in the class but the forum was dominated by the more outspoken members of the

group. The interview with the four volunteers was not planned – these students were so keen to tell me their views they stayed behind at the end of the forum. These students benefitted from having their opinions listened to but they did not provide any new information as they were the ones that had dominated the forum. With hindsight I should have asked to interview the quieter students. With the other three projects informal discussions with students took place due to time constraints. These conversations are ongoing and are uncovering useful feedback.

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### **The wood in my trees**

When I analysed all of my data, everyone's comments seemed to be suggesting that..



### **Electing and self-initiating**

It is important to re-emphasise the fact that all five teachers involved volunteered to engage in the project. None of us were given remission from our teaching commitments to carry

out these investigations into our work. As reflective professionals we identified for ourselves areas of practice we felt we needed to improve (Fielding 2005). This is in contrast to some professional development activities where the focus is determined by management and not necessarily connected to what is most pressing in our individual classrooms (DfES 2010). In line with Fielding (2005) all of us agreed that the main key to the success of working together was the fact that we had chosen to do it and had been given the professional space, trust and freedom to drive our own practice-based enquiries.

*“JPD must be elective. If you’re forced to be there, forced to come up with some aspect of practice you are supposed to improve, if it has to be monitored, if you feel there’s a threat to your job in not doing it, it will bring bad-blood to it, box-ticking behaviour, grudging and ineffective impressions of work, much sighing and huffing.” (English Teacher)*

*“Having ownership of a project has given me a sense of pride and purpose. I have been driven to see it through to the end because I started it.” (Business Teacher)*

Allowing staff such flexibility with their development may cause some managers to feel that the carpet has been ripped from under their feet. They may fear letting go of control and be concerned that individual staff’s priorities do not align (Coffield 2008) with those of the college as a whole. Comments from two of our senior managers highlight our college’s priorities.

*“Currently, alongside other sixth form colleges we are satisfactory and therefore there is need for continuous improvement. The value we add to learners is of vital importance. I’m particularly interested in how we use the project to promote higher A level grades.” (Business Development Manager)*

*“As a college we need to focus on enhanced outcomes especially student achievement. I think the open approach you have taken, including an open invitation to staff and the wide brief and focus are a starting point. The challenges will be a) ensuring sufficient focus to the range of projects to ensure a sense of ongoing mutual*

*relevance/interest and b) moving this initiative beyond the confines of the pioneers to other staff who haven't yet engaged.” (Professional development Manager)*

As mentioned before we all chose to focus on something different but although the entry points were not the same, the intended outcomes were similar. Ultimately we were all concerned with increasing student engagement and achievement. This is clearly aligned with the college's priorities. We also found that the many of the strategies we discussed and developed addressed more than one of our projects. For example a similar approach to engaging students with feedback was also used to assist students with their extended writing. In both cases it involved simplifying the relevant processes, making them visual in the classroom (with wall displays) and getting students actively involved in tracking their progress. In addition peer assessment strategies were relevant to all of our investigations. This was one of the many reasons why we were genuinely interested in each others' developments.

How to motivate others to self-select and drive their own development is something I have given a lot of thought to. It is also a concern of senior management.

*“We are keen for others to engage with JPD as we believe that the dialogues that form part of it are one of the most effective ways of disseminating learning. It's the experimentation and creation of practice that has proven to be most effective.” (Professional Development Manager)*

*“I see this as an extension of peer coaching and from my vast experience of working for Ofsted I have found this to be most effective in improving quality.” (College Principal)*

*“The efficiencies that we will be required to make in future means that this type of project is going to be valuable i.e. spending relatively small amounts of money on research but with the potential for bigger gains.” (Business Development Manager)*

In my opinion forcing people to participate would have an adverse effect on joint working so I felt it would be better to follow the advice of Coffield (2008) and investigate why some of the teachers who showed an initial interest did not join our group.

*“I didn’t get involved in the project because I do not have enough time. I may have got involved if it was launched at a less stressful time of year.” (Psychology Teacher)*

*“I didn’t get involved because of lack of time due to new role as Course Leader of Science. I was also involved with other similar projects like STEM” (Science Teacher)*

As Fielding (2005) warned time is clearly an issue and is something I pick up on when making my recommendations.

### Mixing frequently and face to face

Another key ingredient to the mix that emerged was the need for physical and frequent contact.

As mentioned earlier we met for an hour every two weeks – taking the advice of Fielding (2005) and finding a common time when we were all free to focus on our professional development. This is a big commitment to ask of teachers with various curriculum demands on their time, especially since none of us were given any remission. Surprisingly what at first we felt may have been too burdensome turned out to be something we valued.

*“I have valued the ongoing nature of JPD. It’s not a snapshot workshop...it has been more of a cycle. We have got ideas, tried them out, reflected on impact...and gone round again!” (Accounting Teacher)*

*“The real benefit for me is getting with like-minded and committed colleagues that are seeking to constantly improve as professionals – meeting with them often and in person. It has been very beneficial to freely discuss what things work and don’t work without the concern of there being some sort of agenda. It is also great to hear people are feeling the same pressures and concerns. To hear the same stories from staff certainly stops you feeling isolated.” (Sports Teacher)*

Even the one member of our group that was not able to attend all the meetings recognised that the physical contact was the coal that fired the engine.

*“The meetings were really productive – a lot of the learning seemed to happen there. I missed a couple and felt out of the loop at times.” (Health and Social Care Teacher)*

Recognising that time constraints could prevent the essential face to face meetings from happening led us into discussions with management. Their comments show that this is an area yet to be resolved.

*“In the current economic climate with the imminent cutbacks it would be very difficult to reduce teachers’ contact hours. And creating time may not necessarily foster JPD. My fear is that the time would be encroached upon by other duties like seeing students. I am considering creating opportunities for teachers to bid for funding for professional development activities like JPD.” (Principal)*

The fact that the college Principal is prepared to fund JPD is impressive, given the current pressures to make cuts, and shows that she values this well-researched and robust approach to professional advancement (Coffield 2008). Her commitment to invest in the process of change, the engine of improvement, is forward-thinking. Such an initiative is broad and adaptable and arguably more sustainable than investing in the ‘dishes of the day’, some of which like neuro-linguistic programming, go so quickly out of date. What is most attractive about her strategy is that it creates opportunities for teachers to initiate improvement with a problem, rather than a pre-determined solution; stoking not smothering the fire of the reflective practitioner (Coffield 2008). I may need to be mindful that teachers could need guidance when linking their problem to relevant literature. As I have found, this resource is already available within the college due to my research-engaged Professional Development Manager.



However her proposal may not address the issue of time. The JPD grants would not necessarily buy opportunities for this work. Salaried full-time teachers would have to fund hours beyond their normal working day to avoid squeezing out other commitments. Her proposed initiative may work better with part-time and variable hours staff.

The issue of creating time for full-time teachers without reducing their teaching hours is not a lost cause however.

*“Time is hard to find and cutting back on teaching hours is unlikely in these times but this year there has been more flexibility to use the weekly 90 minute meeting slot for professional development. I have purposefully cut back on whole staff briefings to allow staff and teams time to focus on what matters most to them. I intend to continue with this approach.” (Head of College)*

His comments have given me something to think about and may help me find a way to widen the participation in joint working. Some issues still need further consideration as teachers come from a variety of curriculum areas. Someone wanting to develop their practice with a staff member from a different department may find that they are not freed up by a reduction in team meetings at the same time.

### Engaging interactively

In order to have an impact on teaching and learning you have to be active (Cunningham 2000). Get on and do something, don't just meet up and talk about it! This was another key message coming out of my findings.

*“What's working for me is that I'm taking responsibility for my own development – identifying my own development needs, actively seeking solutions, sharing ideas with others, adapting, implementing and reflecting on them” (Accounting Teacher)*

*“Giving teachers time to do JPD could be abused – some might sign up with an ulterior motive i.e. just to get some remission. It has to be about producing some sort of end product. I have been motivated to go back to my classroom and develop ideas and gather feedback from my students. My end product is new teaching strategies.”  
(Sports Teacher)*

However we also discussed the possible tension between being independent and getting on with things and having to evidence some sort of impact. I felt it would be inappropriate and possibly undermine the spirit of JPD if someone else (e.g. managers) checked our work. We agreed that there was some mileage in considering the idea of self-monitoring the effectiveness of our work; maximising our professionalism and trusting our own judgements (Coffield 2008).

*“It must be OK to find that your adjustments have been completely ineffective but some measure of effectiveness should be put in place. And this should be something we do ourselves by gathering feedback from our students for example”. (English Teacher)*

Then I gathered feedback from students to see whether the changes we made had an impact on their learning.

<u>Project</u>	<u>Student feedback</u>
Engaging students with feedback	<p><i>"I feel much more motivated to try and answer a question because I feel know more now about how to improve"</i></p> <p><i>"plotting my progress on the ladders has helped me realise that my work is getting better"</i></p> <p><i>"because we update our targets every lesson we are forced to focus our work on improving our weak areas"</i></p>
Supporting students with extended writing	<p><i>"in the deep exams were interesting, they let us know what we had to do"</i></p> <p><i>"traffic lighting helps us understand what needs to be revised"</i></p> <p><i>"having wall displays reminding us of the steps involved in extending writing has really helped me"</i></p>
Managing students' learning anxieties	<p><i>"getting me to think about how I revise for my exams has been useful. When you think you've revised all of it, revise it all two more times and you are half way there – it's never enough!!"</i></p> <p><i>"jigsaw reading of examiners' reports was helpful. It helped me see what people were looking for in an answer but also made me realise that examiners seem to be quite generous"</i></p> <p><i>"breaking down how to answer long questions into manageable chunks has made me less scared of my two hour exam. Funnily enough I now quite enjoy the challenge of answering those kind of questions!"</i></p>

Not only did students comment on the impact of what was happening in the classroom, but also on what they thought about teachers developing their practice.

*"I really liked the team teaching that Leanie and Sam did. It was great that they explained at the start how they were trying out a new approach to teacher development. I actually felt involved too. They asked us what we thought about their teaching and what they were trying out." (Business student)*

*“It was great to be asked by Justin to think about how our unit on Care Law could have been done differently. I was happy to be part of making things better for this year’s students. And even though we were mostly thinking a unit we did last year we ended up making similar changes to our units for this year.” (Health and Social Care student)*

What this shows is that some students appreciate teachers making an effort to improve what they do. I found they were keen to give me their feedback and were open to the idea that things might not always go as planned. This may suggest that joint working could also be extended to include learners. Involving them in the process of learning also seems to be having a positive impact on the quality of their work (Watkins, 2001).

### Choosing to be positive

A positive attitude to professional development is something else I felt was making JPD work.

*“I find the meetings inspiring and motivational. We talk about the “little” things we’ve done and we enthuse about it - because it is often the little things that have the biggest impact. It’s great that we are building on what works and adapting what doesn’t. Because we are working together in a supportive environment we still find something good in the bad”. (Business Teacher)*

*“I’m really enjoying coming to the meetings – it feels like being part of a community. I know I am going to come away having learned something”. (Health and Social Care Teacher)*

This positivity has also extended to the classroom – where both teachers and students discuss how they are feeling more enthusiastic about learning.

*“I feel much more confident going in to my lessons – knowing that the students are on board with what I am doing. There doesn’t seem to be any huffing and puffing anymore. The students are hugely involved in the design of the lesson. They just get on with their work – which includes a lot of peer learning and assessment. This is in stark contrast to previous years – where some students have sat there waiting for me to drive the bus and then moaning when it doesn’t stop at their stop!” (Business Teacher)*

*“Because we have linked our work upwards to people like the Principal and the Professional Development Manager I feel it is safe to take risks in the classroom and this is refreshingly invigorating.” (English Teacher)*

*“Breaking down what you have to do has helped me feel more confident that what I have done is good. This has motivated me to get on with my work.” (Business student)*

*“The things on the wall and exam tips are really helpful. I look at them when I get stuck and they give me the sense of direction I need to carry on. I actually really like doing essays now because I feel like I know what I’m doing.” (English student)*

The fact that our various managers have supported and shown an interest in what we are doing has helped to keep us upbeat. We have been encouraged to find that JPD is being valued as an important activity within our curriculum areas. This is evidenced in action plans and quality inspection reports.

Extract from the Accounting area action plan for 2010-2011:

Area for development	Action for improvement (agreed with Curriculum Manager)
<p>AS students exam results were disappointing when compared to students’ expected grades and the national average.</p> <p>Students were given formative feedback on their progress but insufficient improvements were made.</p>	<p>Work jointly and equally with the Business Teacher to investigate ways of increasing students’ engagement with feedback.</p>

Extract from the Business area Quality Inspection Report (2010):

*“the staff in this area have engaged with an innovative approach to professional development – an initiative which is funded by LSIS (Flexibility and Innovation Fund 2010) and clearly linked to the college’s recently updated professional development strategy. Some of the benefits of their work are already evidenced in the classroom. Both of the business lessons observed were graded “outstanding”. I was particularly impressed with the learners’ level of understanding of how they were assessed and what they needed to do to improve. Their evaluation of their and others’ progress was both accurate and constructive”. (Quality Inspection Co-ordinator)*

To think that all teachers are keen to engage in professional development of any kind let alone JPD is naïve. Some staff may show resistance to such a self-initiated, ongoing and collaborative style of working (Coffield 2008). And never was this so apparent than at a recent staff development day when three teachers were made it very clear what they thought of JPD.

*“I won’t have time for that. In fact I have don’t time to be at this workshop today. As nice as it might be to sit around talking to other teachers I need to get on with marking my students’ coursework.”*

*“Why do some teachers think they have a right to tell others what to do. I know what I’m doing thank you. There’s no point discussing things with people from other subjects – they don’t have the same things to deal with as us.”*

*“Not more silly games. I don’t know why they don’t just let us get on with our teaching.”*

The reality that not all teachers were on board with our thinking smacked me in the face like a carelessly discarded garden rake.

Clearly their comments cannot be ignored and I felt that I should contact them as soon as possible to explore their thinking in more depth. ‘There is likely to be a range of different and legitimate motives for their resistance that, if explored together, could be a learning journey for all parties’ (Coffield 2008:24).

### Catching more fish

Despite the obvious disgruntlement of those teachers the development day was not a total disaster. I led five interactive workshops intended to share my experience to date and inspire others to do something similar. In a seventy five minute slot I offered my colleagues the opportunity to share their reflections on the strategies they use to check students have acted on their feedback i.e. fed it forward to future pieces of work (one of the college’s

development priorities). I encouraged them to consider how they might work with four or five other teachers over an extended period of time (say six weeks) to 'learn, practice, reflect and adjust' (Thompson and William 2007:23 in Coffield 2008) their current approach to feedback and feedforward. The interest was not immediate but was gently aroused in the three or four out of fifteen staff per workshop that stayed behind at the end to discuss what might be involved in more detail. This was encouraging and led me to believe that participation in JPD could widen beyond the confines of a few pioneers, but only under the right conditions. This is something I discuss when making my recommendations.

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### **The not so final curtain**

#### **Making a difference**

My work is ongoing but after six months of JPD I can already see differences in my world. We have buzzed actively within our group and beyond to create new approaches to our teaching. As trite as it may sound we all agree that as a result of our experience we feel positively reconnected with our profession. We have gained control of our development and as a result have seen improvements in our classrooms. Our students are more engaged with their learning and the quality of their work has fostered have given us increased improved. As a team we have grown stronger and the supportive relationships we have confidence that a joint, equal and active approach to professional improvement can work. Within the security of each other's company we have shared our thinking with senior management and made recommendations to our new College Principal – something we may not have had the courage to do alone.

### Taking things forward

Despite all the benefits to us and our students there is still much to do if I am to move this initiative beyond the confines of a few pioneers to other staff who have not yet engaged. I have tried a few dissemination strategies with varying success. Trying to hook colleagues by making presentations at two staff briefings (one at the beginning of my journey and another part way through) had very limited success. The five of us took the bait at the first meeting; with no further takers at the second. I secured us a prime bit of wall in one of our main corridors and used it to present our work visually. Some teachers commented on the attractiveness of our display but none questioned us about the work it was portraying! My creative endeavours were not all in vain however; they caught the eye of our new Principal on her first tour of the college. Her interest to learn more was so heightened that she tracked me down within one week of her arrival. Our subsequent meeting with her proved very fruitful. She too saw the potential of JPD and was keen to discuss how it might become an option for others. Her plan is to rethink the funding allocated to professional development, breaking it down into packages rather than having it all in one big pot. She agreed that JPD would be given a package and that staff could submit proposals to justify taking a slice of that pie.

I led workshops at a recent staff development day with limited success. At the time of writing this paper I am producing a “menagerie” of teaching ideas (a summary of the new strategies we developed) and a “this was our year book” (a scrap book offering an insight into our process of JPD). We have been asked to present these at the next staff development day but we suspect that doing so will not lead to widened participation in JPD because the emphasis is too much on telling, showing and sharing rather than activating and involving.



Our most successful form of dissemination has come from the informal connections we have made with staff when investigating how best to improve our teaching. Each of us plans to go back to these colleagues and invite them to join us in new communities of practice – perhaps using the advice they gave us and how we adapted it as the starting point for creating new strategies. Getting on and doing something should be more achievable given the flexibility of the Head of College’s meetings schedule and the Principal’s internal JPD grants.

### Recommendations for others

My experience has led me to appreciate the importance of recognising certain issues before steam rolling in with JPD. One of these factors being the need for a central figure, someone like our Professional Development Manager, who is able to connect the work to other college priorities and to relevant research.

Another hurdle to acknowledge in advance is the real possibility of resistance to change. JPD is not something you can introduce overnight; staff are likely to need time to internalise this different approach to professional enhancement.

Creating common time is vital in helping a community of practice to thrive, but doing so could be problematic. One way could be to make better use of all-staff meeting slots.

Last but certainly not least, is the need for trust. The emphasis should be on fostering a culture which respects teachers’ professionalism and allows them to take ownership of what they investigate, how they go about it and how they measure success.

I would like to end with some advice I got from Frank Coffield...*“if you’re not making slow progress, you’re not making progress”*.

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