



Developing Great Leadership of CPDL

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Forewords

Geoff Barton, General Secretary, Association of School & College Leaders

“As Einstein may have said: “Everything should be made as simple as possible, but no simpler”.

In the world of education, it can sometimes feel as if we do the opposite – complicating things, clogging our world with systems, institutions, layers and myriad forms of accountability; or reducing complex evidence to simplistic nostrums.

That’s why I like this analysis so much. It takes what matters most in education – learning about teaching and learning – and helps us understand the evidence or the lack of it. It does so, as CUREE’s work always does, by synthesising all the research that’s out there, serving up the essentials of continuous professional development that will help leaders to lead and teachers to teach – better.

At a time when there are so many polar arguments about what matters and what doesn’t, so much ideological snarkiness, here’s a document that lifts itself above such approaches and, with hugely reassuring clarity helps guide us to an evidence-base that will help to improve teaching.

And because it’s simple but not too simple, I suspect Albert Einstein would approve”.

Nick Brook, Deputy General Secretary, NAHT, Chair of NAHT School Improvement Commission

“It is often repeated, but no less true for it, that schools are only as good as the people that work in them. Yet this simple fact has, at times, appeared forgotten in recent years.

In 2018, NAHT published the report of the Accountability Commission, ‘Improving School Accountability’. In it, we reported that top down, high stakes accountability in England had driven a tick-box culture in too many schools, where compliance with what Ofsted was perceived to want had become the overwhelming driver of improvement activity. In short, fear of falling foul of a poor inspection judgement had skewed leadership priorities.

The Commission recognised that to improve our education system further we need to unleash greatness and therefore concluded that we must urgently rebalance holding schools to account with helping them to improve.

Great teaching is at the heart of all great schools. School improvement is more likely to be found through day to day, week to week, small-steps improvements to practice than from big-ticket system or structural reforms. Improvement comes from school leaders creating a supportive professional climate, investing in expert ‘teacher educators’ to provide practical in-school support and mentoring, and by affording sustained priority and focus to CPD over the long-term.

This paper from CUREE, that sets out the evidence on how schools can best embed effective professional learning in day-to-day practices and what research tells us about the leadership of CPDL, could not be more timely.”

Alison Peacock, CEO The Chartered College of Teaching

This pamphlet summarizes key findings from the research literature about the impact of leadership on teachers' continuous professional development and learning. The teaching profession in recent years has recognized the importance of high-quality professional learning. CUREE's work shows that most often, this has greatest impact where teachers work together in a collegiate manner, over time.

The Chartered College of Teaching has been established to support professional learning for all teachers throughout their career. The findings highlighted here show how important it is for leaders to build teams where teachers embrace school development and improvement as a collective endeavour. Continuous professional development and learning should always be relevant, purposeful and offer practical application. Where school leaders are able to provide this in a positive climate, where teacher agency is understood, the impact is most likely to be strong. Here we also have positive recognition that when teachers develop and build their expertise collectively, wellbeing of both teachers *and* pupils improves. This is an important finding. When teachers and their pupils are well prepared and experience high challenge in a supportive manner, the outcome is an affirming sense of collective achievement.

Developing Great Leadership of Continuing Professional Development and Learning

Why should I read this?

School leaders the world over carry greater responsibilities than ever before. Most are responding to major changes in society and the backwash of their governments' responses to comparisons of national test results. Closer to home, academisation in England means many schools have no support between them and the secretary of state and school leaders in Wales are currently tackling significant reforms on every front. They want (and need) their leadership to be well informed and, by this stage of the 21st Century, there is a lot of information to choose from. The authors of this paper think systematic research reviews represent a best bet in sorting the wheat from the chaff for particular contexts. So, they have created a map of evidence from research reviews that updates their previous work about the vital role of teacher Continuing Professional Development (CPD) and the learning teachers take from it (CPDL) to enhance pupil outcomes.

First up is some helpful new evidence about how schools best embed effective professional learning in day-to-day practices. Crucially, we have also turned our attention to mapping the high quality, reliable research about **leadership** - of CPDL and of how that connects with curriculum development – to see if it tells us anything of worth. This paper summarises the resulting map, identifying what we can reliably conclude and where the evidence is weak or absent. We highlight the key findings and outline some implications for leaders. There is a longer, more detailed form of this paper which can be downloaded from here which also includes implications for researchers. For the very brave there is an even longer technical report.

News from the research front

In the English context, in late 2019, the extensive demands placed on school leaders, are wide ranging and create dynamic cycles of activity which may be vicious or virtuous. This short paper summarises research which can help school leaders avoid the former and achieve the latter. Wholesale delegation of responsibility to them, a rising tide of financial regulation and the cumulative effects of austerity coupled with high stakes accountability systems and reforms in the inspection framework, make it imperative to make the best possible use of all resources; above all of time and resource for Continuing Professional Development and Learning (CPDL).

In the last three years, new research reviews have emerged which provide important insights to support school leaders in such contexts. This evidence builds on and significantly extends evidence from a review of the research reviews about CPDL, *Developing Great Teaching* (Cordingley, P., Higgins, S., Greaney, T., Coe, R. and Crisp, B., 2015). At that point it was becoming clear that it was as important to plan for professional quality **professional learning experiences** as was to plan for high quality **specialist contributions**. The new reviews captured in this map, tell us quite a bit more about what effective school leaders can do to ensure CPDL is effective and is powerfully connected with pupil and teacher well-being, curriculum development and school improvement.

Key principles and evidence for action

This short pamphlet summarises what school leaders can learn from a map of research reviews about ways of refining school systems to design CPDL activities and policies which maximise opportunities for translating CPD support into embedded professional learning, including in the context of curriculum development. It is based on a systematic process for mapping research reviews relating to CPDL and leadership and CPDL and curriculum development reported here.

Effective leadership of CPDL in school

The evidence from reviews of research about leadership and about CPDL are inevitably less concrete and rigorous than reviews of research about teaching and learning because of the greater number of variables between leadership and CPDL and pupil achievement and well-being and the greater costs of research at whole school level. Nonetheless, systematic research reviews have started to address these issues and are starting to build a newly detailed textured picture of the kinds of support school leaders need to provide to secure and maximise the benefit of high quality CPDL and link it effectively with school improvement. This evidence suggests several priorities and activities and two core CPDL principles for effective school leadership. The principles are that school leaders should:

- **Model and orientate CPDL systems and activities towards building shared accountability for pupil achievement and well-being; and**
- **Model and use openness to professional and leadership learning as a way of securing this and ensuring that CPDL, similarly focuses on teacher development *and* well-being.**

Key priorities and activities for effective school leaders highlighted by this evidence include:

Key priority	Achieving this through, for example
Promoting and modelling evidence-rich professional dialogue which is open to the learning in day to day activities	Engaging with – and seeking to align – the underpinning beliefs and values we all hold about teaching, learning, professionalism and education throughout, for example, the process of developing new policies
Reinforcing openness to professional learning in school systems and routines	Setting at least one goal for performance review as an enquiry question and or making it clear how enquiry oriented goals for teachers relate to enquiry oriented goals for leaders
Emphasising shared accountability in day to day accountability processes	Organising phase and/or departmental and staff meetings work as collective enquiries designed to evaluate planned activities together, debriefing what has been learned by all group members, <i>as well as</i> what has been achieved
Focus on accelerating pupil progress <i>and</i> well-being side by side	Ensuring that planning for CPD events, schemes of learning or phase or departmental development has specific pupil well-being goals alongside achievement goals
Focus on enhancing teachers' development, professional growth <i>and</i> well-being when planning CPDL	Ensuring that the design and or commissioning of CPDL events, processes and tools for embedding learning help teachers to navigate complexity and take account of the cognitive, practical and emotional demands that those tools and activities make on teachers

Activities	This involves, for example
Using their own and senior colleagues' specialist knowledge to identify and recognise the contribution of specialist expertise (including, but not just subject knowledge) to CPDL in securing depth in professional learning	Careful commissioning (whether internally or externally) of CPDL activities and tools and protocols for embedding new learning in day to day school practices
Understanding and accessing the skills and pedagogic content knowledge of CPDL leaders and facilitators	Providing or commissioning training for coaches, mentors or lesson study or enquiry leads and departmental, phase or subject leaders have training in the CPDL processes they are supporting, as well as the content of their area of specialism
Recognising in practical ways, that CPDL is enacted through professional relationships and cannot be divorced from them, even if workshops and opportunities to work with specialists have to happen elsewhere	This means ensuring that the types, depth, intensity and quality of interactions between individual teachers and their pupils and the partnerships between teachers, leaders and CPD facilitators are central to professional learning
Helping teachers: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • navigate complexity and overcome the day to day, whilst also: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • challenging them to develop an understanding of underlying theories and assumptions • giving them the opportunity to use those practical theories in making choices around which strategies to adopt and refine for particular pupils and contexts 	This means: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • designing and/or commissioning tools, protocols and systems surrounding CPDL that take account of practical, cognitive and emotional challenges they face and/or those imposed by the CPDL content, tools and protocols • giving teachers choices about which strategies to adopt in which contexts

Designing effective CPDL processes

Not all CPDL that is similarly designed leads to improved learner outcomes. There are more factors at work than simply choosing specific types of CPDL activities. *What matters is how CPDL activities are designed and aligned to support active professional learning focussed on aspirations for pupils.* The research reviews highlight the importance *for designing effective CPDL* by:

- Ensuring that CPDL is understood as a process for supporting pupil progress *and* well-being
- Creating time within activities designed to introduce new approaches - *to enable teachers to plan to incorporate them* within day to day school routines
- Focussing CPDL by:
 - Working from a nuanced understanding of what teachers do, what motivates them, and how they learn and grow to help them develop new practices and practical theories side by side
 - Engaging with and building upon teachers' aspirations for their pupils
 - Recognising the importance of identifying teachers' knowledge, skills and beliefs or assumptions, and building on them formatively
 - Working carefully with teachers' knowledge, ideas and skills rather than setting goals or using routines which attempt to treat teachers as a blank canvas or roll new approaches over them
- Ensuring that collaboration, professional learning conversations and peer support:
 - Are focussed on ambitious goals for pupil achievement and well-being

- Spring from experimenting with new approaches to expand ideas about what is possible and enable review of assumptions and beliefs; and
- Centre around evidence about pupils' responses to the changes teachers are exploring.
- Ensuring that CPDL processes, together with tools and protocols for translating what has been learned into day to day practices, draw on specialist expertise including subject expertise and deep knowledge about the pupils and their community
- Ensuring that CPDL activities help teachers consider how new ideas, knowledge and approaches relate to their school's professional learning environment and its goals, systems and priorities.

As is evident from this list, designing effective CPDL needs to make embedding professional learning manageable, but this is not the same as codifying prescribed approaches in the interest of making life simple – the most effective CPDL enables teachers to question and understand underlying theories and assumptions and gives them choices around which strategies to adopt and challenges them to develop an underpinning rationale for them.

CPDL and the curriculum

There are no systematic research reviews of evidence about curriculum design and development with evidence about pupil impacts. But the reviews about CPDL and its leadership highlight interesting links with curriculum development and the contribution leaders can and should make to CPDL activities, tools, resources, and protocols by:

- Ensuring curriculum development and realisation is supported by effective CPDL and also acts as a vehicle for and driver of professional learning
- Helping to secure coherence and sustainability in curriculum development across phases
- Avoiding focusing on bodies of knowledge through approaches that are divorced from the practical ways in which such knowledge is brought to life in schools
- Selecting curriculum approaches and supporting resources carefully:
 - for the evidence and expertise on which they are based and their relevance to the needs of the communities served by the school
 - their capacity to help teachers manage the practical, cognitive and emotional demands they make on teachers
- Ensuring that CPDL leaders and facilitators have the opportunity to work with subject, phase and departmental leads to align CPDL and curriculum development into a whole bigger than the sum of the parts

The reviews suggest that, to the extent that CPDL support for curriculum development requires external inputs, school leaders need to model taking shared responsibility for testing the expertise on which they are based and ensuring that such external expertise or support is effectively aligned with and applied to enhancing pupil learning and well-being in school.

Priorities for CPDL design and leadership from this evidence suggests that leaders should consider:

- Making it explicit to all, including in SLT, that changes to curriculum development, planning and providing support both provide great CPDL opportunities and depend on it
- Modeling that by asking colleagues to be explicit about they are learning about curriculum development and CPDL at every level

Guidance and Implications

Implications for effective leadership of CPDL across a school

As noted above, the evidence about leadership in general is less robust than the evidence about CPDL. So here we identify implications more as issues to explore than recommendations.

Teacher's professional learning is framed by the values leader promote, the way they root those values in their professional and local community, how they enact them and the systems they design to operationalise them.

We think school leaders will find it helpful to explore how far their own actions and assumptions emphasise the importance of CPDL for their own work and that of their colleagues; and model openness to learning in ways that shape their colleagues' CPDL experiences.

Similarly, we think school leaders and CPDL leaders will find it helpful to explore how far their actions and assumptions enhance both pupil and teacher achievement and well-being through, for example, exploring how leadership and CPDL in the school, work together to help teachers to:

- experience and understand CPD and CPDL as complementary activities designed to achieve their aspirations for their pupils
- build, with their leaders and their colleagues, a shared and ambitious sense of responsibility for pupil achievement and well-being
- work with their leaders to thread together diverse professional learning experiences into coherent and cumulative personal professional learning experiences
- identify and build upon their current strengths
- use new ideas, knowledge, skills and practices to interrogate and refine existing day to day practices, assumptions and beliefs.

This is just as, possibly more, important for school leaders leading schools at early stages of the school improvement journey as for those leading schools where achievement and wellbeing for staff and pupils is already good. What this evidence suggests is that it is always important to build shared responsibility for pupil achievement and wellbeing and to be explicit about how you are contributing to that shared enterprise as both a leader and a professional learner.

Implications for designing CPDL to support teachers' professional learning

The textured evidence about designing effective, active professional learning alongside the evidence about effective CPD support highlights the importance of:

- Teachers having active opportunities to explore new knowledge, ideas and skills encountered during CPD activities in their day to day working contexts on a sustained basis through:
 - ongoing phase and/or subject/departmental meetings; and/or
 - high impact CPDL processes structured through explicit protocols such as coaching, mentoring, lesson study or collaborative enquiry
- Ensuring that CPDL activities explore and build upon teachers' starting points and their aspirations for their pupils' achievement and well-being. Such formative assessment might reside in the school, in the CPDL activities or a combination of the two. But leaders and teachers should specifically explore how diagnostic and formative assessment will be built into the workshops, seminars etc. and into follow-up active professional learning activities
- Ensuring that the content of CPDL support, tools and resources for sustaining learning are:
 - based on appropriate specialist expertise and evidence related to both teaching and learning and its content and on a sound theory of action

- **Take account of the practical, cognitive and emotional demands being made on them.**

This demands collaboration between different professionals including and especially, school and CPD leaders, CPDL facilitators and teachers and a shared language for exploring those perspectives.

So, teachers and leaders should ask to see and understand the evidence and expertise on which CPDL activities are based and how CPD activities and support for professional learning take account of the cognitive, emotional and practical demands being made of them.

We think the first priority here is to use this evidence to develop a shared language through which school leaders, teachers and CPD facilitators, whether internal or external, can work together to identify win-win ways of reconciling the inevitable tensions. The Guidance that sits behind the DFE standards for CPD and the exemplification of the standards and the guidance that is currently being planned by DFE provide a useful starting point for building an increasingly shared language about effective CPDL and shared goals about how to raise teachers' and school leaders' aspirations.

Implications for CPDL and curriculum development

We also think that the evidence from CPDL and leadership BES suggests that it would be helpful for school leaders to explore how:

- **initiatives to review and refine the curriculum are best supported by CPDL and how curriculum development can act as a vehicle for increasing the effectiveness of CPDL**
- **schools' systems and their own professional learning combine with curriculum development to create a powerful environment for CPDL**
- **using CPDL to link pedagogy and curriculum development could help to build coherence in school improvement.**

The main report includes a description of methods and findings about gaps in the research about implementation of research-based interventions and curriculum development and implications for researchers/ research funders including recommendations to establish dedicated funding for research into curriculum development and a new Best Evidence Syntheses of CPDL and leadership.

List of included reviews

1. Cordingley, P., Higgins, S., Greany, T., Buckler, N., Coles-Jordan, D., Crisp, B., Saunders, L., & Coe, R. (2015). Developing Great Teaching: Lessons from the international reviews into effective professional development
2. Creese, B. Gonzalez, A. & Isaacs T. (2016). Comparing international curriculum systems: the international instructional systems study
3. Darling-Hammond, L., Hylar, M. E., Gardner, M. (2017). Effective Teacher Professional Development
4. Kennedy, M. M. (2016). How does professional development improve teaching?
5. Ofsted (2019). Education inspection framework: overview of research
6. Robinson, V., Hohepa, M., & Lloyd, C. (2009). School Leadership and Student Outcomes: Identifying What Works and Why. Best Evidence Synthesis Iteration (BES)
7. Timperley, H.S., Wilson, A., Barrar, H. & Fung, I. (2007). Teacher Professional learning and development: Best evidence synthesis iteration