

The Future of Teaching; Professional Responsibility or Regulation?

“CUREE’s core purpose is to translate large-scale and technical research findings and resources into materials teachers and policy makers can use in their day-to-day work.”



Making Freedom Count

With the government’s new education agenda come substantial freedoms - **from** central prescription and **to** innovate. Freedom brings responsibilities. For teachers, these include the responsibility for making many more professional judgements about what to teach, to whom, and how. What’s going to ensure that all these decisions actually improve things?

The removal of central prescription will not, in itself, produce a great flowering of innovative professional practice. Freedom needs practice and a sense of direction. In a big scary world, it is very tempting to take refuge in the familiar - 60% of prisoners are back in jail within two years*. Of course, teachers will want to rise to the challenge but they need time to recover from so many years of intensive help!

What is needed to speed the ‘rehabilitation’, to kick start and accelerate improvement, is a vision for the future of the profession with continuing professional learning at its centre. The focus of that professional learning should be the development of the knowledge and skills to draw on the evidence about what does and doesn’t work in different contexts, and why.

The answer is out there

CUREE’s close examination of the international evidence reveals a clear and coherent picture of the kinds of professional development that make a difference to both teachers’ and students’ learning.

Teachers need to become competent users of evidence, from research, from other professionals and from themselves.

This means teachers:

- commanding a body of knowledge about **what** they teach (content or subject) and **how** that content should be taught and learned (pedagogy). Both are necessary for excellence in teaching and learning;
- identifying and using specialist expertise to focus their efforts and to help them understand the nature and size of the change needed to make a difference;
- testing out new approaches rigorously, with good evidence about how far what they are doing works to improve pupils’ learning;
- working in partnership with other teachers to support and motivate them when the going gets tough;
- developing their teaching and learning through structured observation rather than ‘classroom tourism’ and focusing tightly on the specific learning improvements they want for identified groups of pupils.



** not that we think teachers are like prisoners! Figures taken from the Social Market Foundation report on recidivism found at http://www.smf.co.uk/assets/files/publications/smf_prison_break_web.pdf*

Evidence as a discipline

This kind of professional development doesn't happen by accident and can't be handed over to outsiders, though they have an essential part to play. It makes big demands and pays even bigger rewards. It's part of the day job, an ongoing process rather than an occasional side show.

But this isn't how professional development has been managed or understood. So teachers and schools need to raise their own expectations about what CPD, can and should involve and providers – including school CPD leaders - need to respond by offering:

- evidence about what works, why – so teachers can choose what's effective and efficient for their pupils;
- frameworks for evaluating the different schemes, strategies, tools and approaches that the market offers teachers on a daily basis; and
- ways of focussing development through the collection and interpretation of evidence about its effects on pupils

A diet for the intellect

These reforms can put teachers in charge of their own teaching and their own development; a *reintellectualisation* of the profession if you will. But it will be a big leap and the profession needs a springboard to make the jump. Most schools are not used to scoping and organising their own CPD. It is an 'immature' market with too many packaged, pre-digested (and half-baked) training products which look cheap and easy to implement. This is not a diet which will develop the intellectual muscle the profession will need. For that, the profession needs to learn how to use its freedoms and the market needs to be kick started. A Government with a vision for the profession with development at its heart can realise the full potential of its broader agenda for change.

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About CUREE

CUREE works at the leading edge of research and evidence-informed educational policy and practice. Our mission centres on promoting the use of evidence by building bridges between academic research and professional practice. We support practice-driven action research, develop tools for Continuing Professional Development (CPD), for organisational leadership, teaching and learning, and for policy analysis and development. We believe in modelling good practice in everything we do and our work in consultancy, advice, development and training in the use of research and evidence is consistently informed by the principles underpinning effective mentoring and coaching in education.

To find out more about CUREE's work visit our web site at www.curee.co.uk or ring 024 7652 4036. You can register to hear more about the debate this generates by contacting christine.loth@curee.co.uk

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