**Can we work together and still be friends?**

*If the economic downturn means more CPD is being undertaken ‘in house’ then what are the implications for building and sustaining working relationships between teachers, says Val Poultney.*

**Introduction**

Recently at my institution, the University of Derby, we have recognised a burgeoning increase in the number of academic staff undertaking postgraduate courses which requires tutoring or supervision from other academic colleagues. Increasingly the postgraduate team is undertaking ‘colleague to colleague’ supervision for Master’s and Doctoral programmes. While this may be nothing new in Higher Education (HE) institutions I was interested in some of the ways in which this pedagogy impacted on professional relationships. There appeared to be little written in the academic literature at least about ‘colleague to colleague’ supervision, but at a recent University Council for the Education of Teachers (UCET) conference the theme was widely recognised by many university staff. There are increasing constraints on the CPD budgets in secondary schools that goes nowhere near covering professional development requirements for all staff. Schools must therefore turn ‘in house’ and make full use of existing teacher capacity to cover the shortfall perhaps under the auspices of coaching and mentoring. This drive for getting ‘value for money’ would require teachers to work more closely together, perhaps on a one to one basis over longer periods of time. How do teachers manage one to one professional relationships; which can be improved when they work but difficult to sustain if they do not.

**What is the nature of CPD in Secondary Schools?**

A survey on behalf of the TDA in 2008 found that traditionally CPD is still delivered through courses, workshops, lectures, presentations and discussions which are not routes that are sustained over periods of time. They tend to take place on an ‘ad hoc’ basis, perhaps linked to improving classroom skills and often adapted by teachers once back in their school context. Historically CPD events are not ‘cascaded’ effectively to other teachers or disseminated on a wider basis across departments and therefore their effectiveness can be brought into question. Additionally, teachers usually seek out courses related to the type of training they feel they need or coupled with their next career step emerging frequently from performance management review. So, while there might be some overall management of CPD in school related to the budget, development plans and performance review, the overall picture appears fragmented, certainty not universal professional development and not linked to any on-going professional standards beyond QTS. CPD is not managed in stages, but on a more ad hoc basis controlled by many variables such as teacher maturity, experience, career priorities, school context and similar.

So what CPD is most effective? Not surprisingly CPD where the activity has been of the ‘reform’ type, such as study groups, teacher networks, mentoring, teacher research (very often seen from teachers undertaking masters study) which if sustained over a period of time can begin to pay dividends. However, schools have to foster a culture of CPD and to do that CPD awareness and participation needs to be embedded in all aspects of school life. The rhetoric and the reality can be very different if there is no structure for CPD (CPD that is led, organised and implemented) or has any substance of the activity: the opportunities for active learning, which is content focused and which promotes coherence in teachers’ learning.

**What type of CPD courses do educators value?**

Research has indicated that secondary teachers have a propensity to focus on CPD that serves two purposes: first professional development that promotes professional learning for improving pupils’ learning and second, courses that maximise career development opportunities. Senior leaders meanwhile go for the ‘quick-fix’ courses (in-school workshops, mentoring and teacher networks) as more important than the non school-based CPD events. Where Universities are noticing growing markets are accredited Masters Programmes especially where TDA funded provision is still in place. However, the future of such funding now seems in doubt, which may mean a substantial reduction of teachers enrolling on such programmes.

It might also be worth considering that involvement of a range of teachers in schools means investing in collaborative ways of working. Primary teachers value the collective ways of working compared with their secondary counterparts who demonstrate a propensity to focus on what is not important in terms of their CPD route rather than seeking out the benefits first. Secondary teachers must also be convinced the CPD will ‘work’ before they engage with it and are prepared to make changes to their practice. Teachers’ beliefs are a very important part of their professional development and these belief systems act as a type of filter for ideas to be considered, accepted or providing reasons for resistance to change. Teachers shape their pedagogy around their core beliefs and their choice of CPD is determined by their sense of commitment. In another school of thought, it is believed teachers need to be encouraged to change their teaching behaviour after which an alteration in their belief systems will follow. Teachers who wish to improve practice typically show four characteristics:

1. They accepted it was possible to improve;
2. They were readily self-critical;
3. They could recognise better practice;
4. They were ready to learn what had to be done in order to sustain better practice.

**Working together: some implications**

There is a broad range of terms associated with co-working; unfortunately no generic term to cover the multiplicity of scenarios associated with professional working relationships. Terms such as mentor, coach, facilitator and others often abound and are used interchangeably and with no agreed definition. Take the example of the word *mentor* – mentor as role model, mentor as sponsor, mentor as acculturator are just a few examples of the range of possible tasks associated with this role. Additionally, the combinations of teachers co-working are multiple and varied:

* Teacher is supported by more experienced colleague from same sector;
* Teacher is supported by expert from another sector;
* Teacher is co-supported by a peer from another sector
* Co-mentoring between teachers where each party is equal in the reciprocal peer learning partnership;
* Pairs of teachers pilot new approaches to teaching
* Interagency coaching and mentoring schemes;
* Peer mentoring between parties of equal standing.

What is interesting to note in all these models and classifications is the lack of context, mutual support networks and overall collaboration/collegial style of working vital in sustaining quality CPD. If ASTs and Excellent Teachers are to lead on more CPD then they too need support as the capacity for professional development is grown. Research has demonstrated that it is vital to build capacity for quality CPD provision that is based within a culture of trust, mutual support and organisational conditions that encourage teacher networking. Overall, there are 6 conditions to its establishment:

1. Headteacher leadership;
2. Development a professional learning community;
3. Provision of technical resourcing;
4. Instructional programme coherence;
5. Knowledge, skills and understanding of individual teachers;
6. Learning opportunities for teachers.

Probably one of the most important aspects of building such ‘learning communities’ is the establishment of ‘dialogue’ that is both candid and vibrant. Research by Silvers (2000) showed teachers who had access to each other in a regular and systematised fashion and to other experts made good progress towards their development goals. However, at some point teachers will need to work together and therefore it is important to establish the nature of the relationship and how that might work out over time.

One of the problematic areas related to working with other professional colleagues is that of risk – risk to both individuals and to the professional relationship in particular. Broadly if you work in the same school then preservation of your working relationship will be paramount; as will the reputation of both teachers. There will be both personal and professional ‘risk’ in the success (or otherwise) of the professional development at stake, thus it is vital to have all CPD opportunities planned and organised within a culture of trust and mutual support, both for those being developed and those undertaking the development. Professional lives are becoming ever more complex as Barnett 2000: 6 notes:

*...professional life is increasingly becoming a matter of not just handling overwhelming data and theories within a given frame of reference (a situation of complexity), but also a matter of handling multiple frameworks of understanding, of action and of self-identity. The fundamental frameworks by which we might understand the world are multiplying and are often in conflict.*

**Fractured Identities and issues of Power**

The complexity of professional life invariably means that teachers will take on multiple roles in school and therefore experience ‘fractured identities’. Managing your own identity as you undertake your multiple roles may give rise to feelings of stress. It is important to understand that for CPD to be successful colleagues working together need to make clear to each other what the ‘terms and conditions’ are and how they will be actioned as the work progresses. The nature and role of the partnership can also be thought of as a ‘power relationship’ especially where one teacher holds knowledge ‘as expert’ and who also may be in authority over the other person. One might hope that teachers working closely together would develop a personal/professional relationship that was built on referent power where power issues become equal and there is a feeling of ‘oneness’ or ‘togetherness’ that emerges as the relationship matures. This should emerge into an equal peer to peer relationship.

Some of the issues that colleagues might face as they work together on CPD issues are:

* **Expectations**
  + Both parties make explicit the shared expectations of the CPD and the nature of the role each will perform;
* **Responsibilities**
  + Ensuring the correct ‘match’ is made between colleagues in respect of those with the expertise and experience to mentor, for example a less experienced colleague;
* **Relationship between professionals**
  + While there should be mutual respect, credibility and trust established early in any working relationship, consider power issues related to leadership roles; for example senior leaders being mentored by subject leaders;
* **How the CPD will be organised**
  + Colleagues should agree when the CPD will take place, how long for and how they will recognise its impact;
* **Professional credibility**
  + Consideration of outcomes is important for maintaining the credibility of each colleague’s professional credibility. The quality of your professional relationship after the CPD has been completed is a key consideration in the planning of the CPD.
* **Managing multiple identities**
  + Especially important for those leading CPD events/programmes, everyone struggles to adopt a different identity especially those who have been in the profession some time.
* **Formal and informal working practices**
  + Because time will be at a premium try to keep CPD events/programmes ringfenced and avoid taking up too much of colleague’s time with informal ‘in the corridor’ meetings. Alternatively, agree how much formal/informal time can be used in the planning stage;
* **The pedagogy of CPD**
  + Be careful of ‘over-managing’ a less experienced colleague; be cognisant of the learning style of the mentee/nature of the pedagogy of the Professional Development.

Teachers undertaking CPD with colleagues should note their position of power (whether that be positional or expert or both) and consider how to move to referent power where in terms of knowledge production both become relatively equal. How this may be achieved is illustrated below:

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| **Power-centred CPD relationship** | **Functions of the CPD relationship** | **Facilitation-centred CPD relationship** |
| The teacher as expert evaluates the training and understands the problem | Problem identification | The teachers agree on the nature of the problem |
| The teacher as expert provides ideas, opinions and means for CPD pedagogy | Problem solving | The teacher as expert uses problem-solving techniques with a view to participation of the peer teacher |
| The teacher as expert offers expert opinion and interprets the nature of the CPD from their own perspective | Feedback on the problem | The teacher as expert welcomes exchange of views with peer teacher and encourages their views. |
| Teacher as expert is concerned the CPD task is achieved and moves peer to more independent ways of working | Support given where needed | Peer teacher is brought into a more collaborative relationship with expert teacher |
| Teacher as expert assumes formal authority based upon power of the expert and position of power perhaps related to position in school | Legitimate basis of power and authority | Recognition of more equal professional relationship that moves to a participative basis for review and further action as necessary. |

**Conclusions**

Working with other colleagues can be a hugely rewarding experience for both parties and one would hope both learn something from the experience. Developing CPD capacity through well-appointed partnerships and collaborative ways of working will enhance the school’s learning culture and ‘feel-good factor’ in times when budgets are tight. However, a ‘grow your own’ culture has to be developed with care, on two fronts. First, a lack of external expertise will only serve to drain the school’s CPD resource so think carefully about balancing in-house and external provision according to the needs of the school and the staff. Second, there are challenges and tensions arising from colleagues working together in close proximity. There are challenges to professional identity, credibility and mutual respect which are at best fragile and at worst make for difficult working relationships. The fragility of these relationships is further exacerbated by leadership hierarchies and traditional ways of working in secondary schools. An understanding of power issues are crucial to maintaining healthy working relationships where both parties will benefit from the experience if planned and managed appropriately.

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