

Teachers' Continuing Professional Development: A New Approach

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The concept of continuing professional development (CPD) in education is often ill-defined, with the separate notions of formal training and on-the job learning serving to confuse the issue further. However, Day's (1999) definition of CPD encompasses all behaviours which are intended to effect change in the classroom:

“Professional development consists of all natural learning experiences and those conscious and planned activities which are intended to be of direct or indirect benefit to the individual, group or school, which contribute, through these, to the quality of education in the classroom. It is the process by which, alone and with others, teachers review, renew and extend their commitment as change agents to the moral purpose of teaching; and by which they acquire and develop critically the knowledge, skills and emotional intelligence essential to good professional thinking, planning and practice with children, young people and colleagues throughout each phase of their teaching lives.” (Day, 1999, p.4)

Teachers' perceptions of what activities constitute CPD is frequently limited to attendance at courses, conferences and whole-school INSET days, often to meet national requirements. Professional learning, or “on the job” learning is regularly seen by teachers as separate from CPD, and something that is just done as part of the job (Edmonds and Lee, 2002; Hustler *et al*, 2003; Robinson and Sebba, 2004). However, the literature points to several facets of effective CPD, many of which are far removed from the commonly-held perceptions of CPD as one-off events.

Models of CPD

Lieberman (1996) classified CPD into three types: direct teaching (such as courses, workshops and so on); learning in school (such as peer coaching, critical friendships, mentoring, action research, and task-related planning teams); and out of school learning (such as learning networks, visits to other schools, school-university partnerships and so on). Kennedy (2005) described nine models of CPD, which are outlined below.

- *Training* - focuses on skills, with expert delivery, and little practical focus
- *Award Bearing* – usually in conjunction with a higher education institution, this brings the worrying discourse on the irrelevance of academia to the fore
- *Defecit* - this looks at addressing shortcomings in an individual teacher, it tends to be individually tailored, but may not be good for confidence and is unsupportive of the development of a collective knowledge base within the school
- *Cascade* – this is relatively cheap in terms of resources, but there are issues surrounding the loss of a collaborative element in the original learning
- *Standards Based* – this assumes that there is a system of effective teaching, and is not flexible in terms of teacher learning. It can be useful for developing a common language but may be very narrow and limiting
- *Coaching / Mentoring* – the development of a non-threatening relationship can encourage discussion, but a coach or mentor needs good communication skills

- *Community of Practice* – these may inhibit active and creative innovation of practice, although they have the potential to work well through combining the knowledge bases of members
- *Action Research* – This is relevant to the classroom, and enables teachers to experiment with different practices, especially if the action research is collaborative.
- *Transformative* – the integration of several different types of the previous models, with a strong awareness and control of whose agenda is being addressed

Kennedy suggested that the first four of these were essentially transmission methods, which give little opportunity for teachers to take control over their own learning. The following 3 are more transformational, giving an increasing capacity for professional autonomy, with the action research and transformative models being able to provide even more professional autonomy, and giving teachers the power to determine their own learning pathways.

Direct teaching or training, the traditional perception of CPD, is often perceived as a top-down delivery model of CPD, where information on methods is passed on to teachers for them to implement. Such lecture-style teaching has proved unpopular with teachers, who tend to prefer more active and practical styles of learning (Edmonds and Lee, 2002). Dadds (1997) described how such top-down delivery could reinforce the idea of the teacher as a technician, uncritically implementing externally imposed policies. Dadds rejected the idea of a “guru culture”, with teachers being told how to teach by the experts, and instead suggests that teachers see themselves as a resource, and use their own experience and background to develop their own critical and reflective practice over the course of their professional lives. An awareness of less formal and traditional forms of CPD is slowly growing, with calls for teachers to become more creative in their approaches to their own professional development, and move away from more traditional transmission-based methods (Muijs *et al*, 2004).

Peer Support

While few teachers would want to completely forgo “expert advice”, it is evident from the literature that common features of successful CPD include a variety of methods. Recommendations highlight that CPD should no longer be comprised solely of short courses; teachers need opportunities to reflect, engage in professional dialogue, work with pupils, and engage in peer observation, coaching and feedback (Livneh & Livneh, 1999). In their review of collaborative CPD, Cordingley *et al* (2003) noted a number of features of successful interventions, including classroom observation and feedback; consultation with experts from outside the school in conjunction with internal peer support; encouraging, extending and structuring professional dialogue; teachers having ownership of their CPD focus; an emphasis on peer support rather than a top-down managerial approach; and sustained support for CPD to allow for new practice to become established.

The opportunity to observe other teachers, and to be observed has long been acknowledged as a beneficial process, and observation is now seen as an integral part of coaching and sustained learning (Da Costa, 1993; Joyce and Showers, 2002). The process of observation and feedback facilitates discussion and exchange of practical and relevant ideas, which many teachers report as being crucial to the fruitfulness of the CPD experience (Armour and Yelling, 2004; Cordingley *et al*, 2005b; Edmonds and Lee, 2002; Hustler *et al*, 2003). However, it is important that such activities take place within the context of secure and trusting relationships (Fielding *et al*, 2005; Wood and Anderson, 2003), particularly in the

current climate where classroom observations are so closely associated with the stressful evaluation of OFSTED inspections.

Extending peer observation and discussion to peer coaching and mentoring is increasing in popularity. The opportunity to discuss and experiment with new ideas, and receive feedback is seen as useful (Gersten *et al*, 1995). Many projects have shown that, with training for mentors, this type of process can be effective in improving practice for both the coach / mentor and the coached / mentored (e.g. Cordingley, 2003, 2005a; Jones and Moor, 2005; Joyce and Showers, 2001). Peer coaching has been found to work extremely well when used in conjunction with classroom observation (Da Costa, 1993), with the coach either teaching and being watched, or observing (Livneh and Livneh, 1999). Modelling of techniques and methods is often appreciated by teachers (Harvey, 1999; Kimmel *et al*, 1999). Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1999) describe three types of knowledge: “for practice knowledge”, or the use of formal theory about practice; “in-practice knowledge”, or the use of interaction and communicating in teaching; and “of practice knowledge”, or the awareness of knowledge-generation which tends to be beneficial for teachers in directing their own learning. They suggested that those teachers who have strong “in-practice knowledge”, and are very good at interaction and the practice of teaching, tend to make good coaches. A strong subject and pedagogy knowledge is essential in a successful coach, although the hierarchical nature of a relationship where the coach is more experienced than the coached may hinder the development of a secure and trusting relationship that allows for open discussion (Fielding *et al*, 2005).

Peer support and collaboration plays many roles. Many teachers are likely to be more comfortable discussing their practice with peers than with senior management, where issues surrounding performance management may hinder honest and open discussion (eg Kennedy, 2005). When there has been input from outside the school, continuing peer support can provide a forum for discussion which would not be so easy to access were teachers entirely reliant on the outside expertise (Livneh and Livneh, 1999), with the additional benefits that come with familiarity of context. A supportive, blame-free environment that encourages and facilitates professional dialogue, and provides opportunities to extend and experiment with new practice can further the benefits of peer collaboration and support (Eraut, 2001).

While peer observation is currently evolving into programmes of peer coaching and mentoring, there is little evidence in the literature that any further CPD activities or practices are based on the findings of such observation. Tailoring external support, and collaborative activities, to what is happening in the classroom before any input or activities does not seem to have been adequately explored as an approach for professional development, and this paper explores the development of a link between classroom practice and CPD provision.

External Support

The use of external expertise can result in provision of knowledge and ideas, and be useful in terms of the external expert acting as a catalyst for and agent of change. Small schools in particular can benefit from bringing in outside expertise, to widen their pool of knowledge that they can draw on. Teachers may need help in determining their own CPD focus, and how to access different types of support that may be available. It may be that discussions of this type with people from outside the school could reduce anxieties about performance management issues. External support, particularly when it comes to delivery of CPD, should be pedagogically expert, and flexible enough to fit in with the varying demands of school life.

Peer support and discussion can contribute towards the development and take-up of new practice, but sustained contact with any external parties who were involved in any initial input enables issues to be addressed as they arise, and can facilitate motivation, feedback, further discussion and progression. (Cordingley *et al*, 2003; Ross *et al*, 1999). Following release time for any initial training, time is also needed to reflect on, consolidate and plan implementation of any new ideas, and to experiment with new ideas. Several successful interventions have used negotiated non-contact time for teachers as part of the CPD process (Brown *et al*, 2003; Cordingley *et al*, 2003, 2005a; Edmonds and Lee, 2002; Fielding *et al*, 2005), and in recent years funding for continued support, rather than one-off activities, has been emphasised as a requirement of effective CPD (Kirkwood, 2001).

Collaborative CPD

The importance of ownership is reiterated throughout the CPD literature. Teacher ownership of CPD is a feature of highly effective schools, as are creative CPD opportunities (Connolly and James, 1998). Teachers selecting their own CPD focus or activities can have a hugely positive effect on motivation, enthusiasm and take-up of any new ideas, with frustration resulting from the school-level direction of CPD, and compulsion being seen as having negative consequences in the impact of CPD (Edmonds and Lee, 2002; Hustler *et al*, 2003; Jones and Moor, 2005; Smith *et al*, 2004). Where CPD activities are imposed, collaboration in small groups can increase feelings of ownership (Cordingley, 2005a), with the process of discussion and consensus giving professionals control over how they take any input forward.

The benefits of collaborative CPD for teachers have been well documented. Collaboration is thought to have advantages over individual work, with sustained collaboration over the duration of around 3 months appearing to lead to greater teacher confidence, improved self-efficacy (with teachers feeling that they are able to make a difference to pupils' learning), an openness to new ideas and changing practice, greater enthusiasm for collaborative working, including an increased willingness to be observed, and providing an opportunity for reassurance when teachers are faced with problems and issues of concern (Cordingley *et al*, 2003, 2005a; Ross *et al*, 1999). However, the literature suggests that extending the period of collaboration past 3 months does not appear to result in any significant additional benefits.

The gains from sustained collaboration extend to moral support through the stress of change, and sharing of tasks to ensure better use of time. Such gains are likely to be more evident in pairs or small groups, rather than large groups, and also when carried out in school, rather than at off-site events. Active experimentation, as opposed to just reflection and discussion, will also yield greater rewards from sustained collaboration (Cordingley *et al*, 2005a).

The Impact of CPD

Teachers often cite the need for CPD to be useful, relevant and appropriate if they are to take valuable time out of their classrooms. However, the impact of CPD is rarely assessed over the long term, and is often based on self-reports by teachers of the CPD experience itself, rather than the outcome. Evaluation does not tend to differentiate between the different purposes of CPD, and take account of the intended outcome. An emphasis on the purpose of CPD before any activities take place may enhance the CPD experience, and improve both individual and school-level outcomes (Harland and Kinder, 1997; Muijs *et al*, 2004). Muijs *et al* described an inter-relationship between teacher, pupil and school outcomes, and suggested that CPD can meet the needs of all of these, so long as there is an awareness of those needs throughout the

CPD process. Smith (2002) suggested that evaluation should play an integral role in CPD, and will become part of a cycle: while it provides feedback on the success of the process, it can also help to determine further CPD needs. The use of data, both quantitative and qualitative, is essential for teachers in terms of learning about their practice and drawing conclusions (Knight, 2002), but it still remains easier to assess the impact of CPD on teachers than the impact of CPD on pupil's learning (Edmonds and Lee, 2002).

Teachers appear to find it difficult to articulate definitions of CPD impact, discuss causal relationships between a change in practice and a change in pupil attainment, and describe whether CPD encouraged them to change their practice, or whether it was a desire to change their practice that encouraged them to participate in CPD in the first place (McAteer *et al*, 2005). It is rare to find hard evidence of pupil improvement resulting from CPD: numerous problems surround this area, and evaluations of CPD are often more subjective, or based on "gut feeling". In practice, it is often easier to consider the impact on teaching than on learning (Edmonds and Lee, 2002). Nonetheless, a greater awareness of positive impact of CPD can increase teachers' enthusiasm to become more involved in the CPD process (Cordingley *et al*, 2005a), so the communication of impact is of crucial importance to take-up of CPD opportunities.

Harland and Kinder (1997) suggested the following nine possible types of outcomes of CPD:

- *Materials and resources* – provisions for teaching, such as worksheets or activities
- *Informational outcomes* – fact-based information, e.g. about new policies or schemes
- *New awareness* – a perceptual shift, teachers becoming aware of new ideas and values
- *Value congruence* – the extent to which teachers' own values and attitudes fit in with those which the CPD is trying to promote
- *Affective outcomes* – how teachers feel emotionally after the CPD, may be negative (e.g. demoralised) or positive (e.g. confidence).
- *Motivation and attitude* – such as enthusiasm and determination to implement changes.
- *Knowledge and skills* – both curricular and pedagogical, combined with awareness, flexibility and critical thought
- *Institutional outcomes* – on groups of teachers, such as consensus, collaboration and support
- *Impact on practice* – The ultimate aim of CPD: what effect does it have on the pupils?

Harland and Kinder suggest that these outcomes are non-hierarchical, and teachers have a unique "outcome profile" from each CPD, with varying amounts of each type of outcome. Some CPD events may result in only one or two of these types of outcome (indeed, some may only be designed to result in one or two of these types of outcome), and some may result in a much broader pattern of outcomes. Certain outcomes can have far-reaching effects. Value congruence is a big challenge for CPD events, with delivery often having to focus on how best to change pre-conceived teacher beliefs. This can be a very significant factor in how effective CPD is, and needs to be considered when only one or two members of staff attend the event and cascade it to the rest of their school. In such cases, the majority of teachers at the school will not have had the exposure to input which was designed in such a way as to induce value congruence, so those staff who cascade the CPD may face issues in the acceptance by other teachers of the material. Affective outcomes can be short-lived, but a short-term increase in confidence may help when embedding knowledge and skills into practice. Motivation can also help with self-concept and participation in future CPD, but for

the effects to last this needs to be backed up by knowledge and skills. While Harland and Kinder suggest that these outcomes are separate, they acknowledge that certain outcomes may have knock-on effects on other outcomes. For example, the supply of provisions and resources may have knock-on effects on motivation, affective outcomes may impact on the take –up of new knowledge and skills, and so on.

In contrast to Harland and Kinder’s outcome profile approach, Joyce and Showers (1980) suggest a more linear model of CPD outcomes. They describe the first outcome as awareness (or a recognition of the importance of the chosen area of CPD), the second outcome as concepts and organised knowledge (an awareness of the processes of knowledge acquisition), the third outcome as principles and skills (acquiring the tools needed for pupil teaching) and finally the fourth outcome as application and problem solving (transferring the skills to the classroom). They suggest that a standard linear route is taken through these outcomes, with the successful completion of one outcome being a pre-requisite for the next. Harland and Kinder disputed this model, and it seems that their 1997 model does allow for a wider definition of CPD.

Guskey (2000) described five levels of outcomes or effects, and suggested ways in which each might be evaluated. Participants’ reactions are best assessed in focus groups or interviews, as this allows for expansion into thoughts about cause and effect, deeper explanations of outcomes and so on, which would not be possible in a questionnaire. Participants’ learning is harder to measure, although it could be assessed with pre-intervention and post-intervention questionnaires. Organisational support and change can be considered with in-depth case studies, and Guskey notes that if schools are supportive of CPD in general then change is likely. Participants’ use of new knowledge and skills can be measured using structured classroom observations over a period of time. Drawbacks to this include the cost of training observers, the need for several observations to enable a fair profile of behaviours to be constructed, and teacher resistance to being observed. Finally, student learning outcomes need to be considered, although measuring these is fraught with problems.

While teachers appear to struggle to discuss impact in terms of pupil outcomes, they appear to be more willing to discuss the perceived direct affective and attitudinal benefits of CPD. Cordingley *et al* (2003, 2005b) reviewed key teacher-reported outcomes from collaborative CPD, including greater teacher confidence and motivation, improved self-efficacy, openness to new ideas and changing practice, and more enthusiasm for collaborative working with a greater willingness to be observed. Harland and Kinder (1997) suggested that enthusiasm and motivation resulting from activities are indicators of high quality CPD, and this was reflected in Edmonds and Lee’s (2002) finding that teachers felt the most effective CPD was that which resulted in increased confidence and enthusiasm. More generally, reported gains from CPD include: development of reflective and critical practice, and an enquiry-based approach to pedagogy; development of practitioner dialogue; development of problem-solving skills with reference to teaching practice; increased links, collaboration and cooperation with other teachers, with modelling and sharing of best practice; opportunities for promotion; and personal satisfaction. The opportunity to continue learning and rediscover an interest in the profession, and in education in general was valued, teachers appreciated the time to develop different ways of thinking, and postgraduate studies in particular were reported as pushing intellectual boundaries and encouraging a more critical, questioning approach to practice (Burchell *et al*, 2002; Davies and Preston, 2002; Lyle, 2003; McAteer *et al*, 2005). Many of these factors are likely to have a knock-on effect on teaching and learning. More specific gains that teachers have reported include: updating of skills and knowledge; curriculum

development and planning; diagnosing and catering for needs of pupils; and moving on to deliver training and lead projects (McAteer *et al*, 2005).

In a few cases pupil outcomes have been considered, but these are usually in terms of affective and behavioural outcomes rather than academic achievement or attainment. Robinson and Sebba (2004) suggested that a clear focus on pupil outcomes when embarking upon a program of CPD may result in a greater change in teachers' practice. However, there are potential problems using test scores to measure pupil outcomes. The timescale of CPD can cause difficulties, whereby not only do teachers have to carry out CPD activities, they then need time to embed any changes in practice, and the changes in practice need time to have any significant impact on pupils attainment. Over extended periods of time, there are also the potential confounding effects of multiple initiatives (Robinson and Sebba, 2004). Cordingley *et al* (2003) reviewed various outcomes reported by pupils themselves, after teachers' CPD. Pupils reported that their teachers' change in behaviour had affected them in the following ways: greater pupil enthusiasm and motivation; increased confidence and improved performance in their work; higher self-esteem; greater participation in lessons; and better organisation of work. Teacher reports of effects on pupils include: better pupil attitudes; improved behaviour; increased interest and involvement with lessons; and greater empathy between teacher and pupils (McAteer *et al*, 2005).

The Project

This pilot project, funded by the Innovation Unit at the DfES, developed a programme of CPD for primary school teachers which was designed to take into account the above findings from the literature. The focus of this paper, and the main feature of the project, was an observation system, developed by Schaffer *et al* (see Appendix 1) from the literature on effective teaching. The project aimed to relate the benefits of peer-observation to an instructionally-focussed approach to CPD activities, where teachers could decide on a direction for their professional learning based on the lived reality of the classroom experience. Relevance to individuals' practice is a key issue, and by looking at and discussing their own practice, it was hoped that teachers would be able to determine a personal CPD pathway that would be useful, relevant, and rooted in their own experiences, while still enabling the main aspects of high quality CPD, as outlined in the literature review, to be realised. As such, use of the peer-observation system was intended to

- Root CPD activities in the classroom
- Develop a ongoing cycle of peer support and observation
- Increase ownership and motivation in CPD, by allowing teachers and their peers to create their own CPD pathways
- Enable teachers to assess the impact of their own CPD at practice level.

The observation system comprised class details and layout, space for a descriptive account of the lesson, including different types of teaching employed and interim measures of number of pupils on task, and a 50-item scale of effective teaching behaviours, with frequency measures and space for comments following each behaviour. The project aimed to train teachers in the use of the observation system, and for them to use it as a basis for peer observation and discussion to enable them to decide on an area to focus on within their CPD. Personal or group programmes of CPD to address over two terms would be designed with the project researcher, including a specific means to assess the impact on their class of any intervention. Use of the observation system to assess the impact on their teaching of any CPD, and to help

determine further areas for development, would continue after the end of the project. Thus the key issues of ownership, peer support and observation, sustained and supported programmes of CPD, and self-evaluation of pupil and teacher outcomes were addressed in the design of the project.

Sample and Methods

Recruitment

Initially, letters were sent out to selected schools in North Somerset Local Education Authority (LEA). Schools were selected from a cross-section of Free School Meal (FSM) percentage, percentage of Level 4 and above at KS2, and percentage of ethnic minorities. After follow-up phone calls only one of the fourteen selected schools agreed to take part in the project, with other schools citing lack of time to commit to extra initiatives. Further recruitment targeted all schools in North Somerset LEA, and a selection from Bristol and Somerset LEAs. The final sample consisted of five schools (See Table 1), all catering for ages 4-11. These schools provided a cross-section of profiles in terms of size, geographical positioning and intake.

Table 1: Sample details: Pupil numbers, Area and Intake

	Pupils	Area	Intake
<i>School A</i>	390	Urban	Deprived
<i>School B</i>	112	Rural	Middle-class
<i>School C</i>	305	Small town	Mixed
<i>School D</i>	279	Small town	Middle-class
<i>School E</i>	412	Small town	Deprived

Project outline

Once schools had been recruited, a number of planning meetings were held with head teachers to determine a realistic project implementation timetable, as shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Planned Project Timetable

<i>September 2005</i>	Training in use of observation system at INSET days
<i>September 2005 – December 2005</i>	Peer observation in schools
<i>January 2006 – February 2006</i>	CPD planning, in consultation with project researcher
<i>February 2006 – July 2006</i>	Ongoing CPD activities
<i>September 2006</i>	Teacher conference for sharing of experiences
<i>September 2006 onwards</i>	Peer observation in schools continues

At the beginning of the 2005 / 06 academic year, three separate INSET sessions were held, as school timetables did not allow for all schools to meet together. Schools A and B had separate

school INSET days, and Schools C, D and E met together as a group. The purpose of these days was to outline the project to the teachers, present the observation system and train the teachers in its use, and to provide a forum for any concerns or queries to be aired. Three different videos of class teaching were used at the meetings to enable the teachers to practice using the observation system, and standardise responses.

Discussion with the teachers at the separate meetings, resulted in various alterations being made to the observation system. For Schools A and B, the numbers representing the frequency of observed behaviours (1 = rarely, 2 = occasionally, 3 = often, 4 = consistently) were replaced with the relevant words. For all 5 schools a “comments” box was included after each of the listed teaching behaviours, to allow for notes on the appropriateness or quality of a behaviour, it was agreed with all staff present that the completed observation sheets would remain confidential between the observer and the observed.

Following these meetings, all schools agreed that during the first 3 months of the academic year, all teachers would have been observed and if possible would have observed others. Each observation would be immediately followed by a discussion between observer and observed. It was agreed that by Christmas, teachers would have decided which area of teaching they would like to address in their CPD.

Data Collection

Four focus groups were held with fifteen teachers from School A after the peer observations had been completed, to obtain feedback from the observation system. Interviews with individual teachers at the end of the project also included discussion on the observation system. Data from these focus groups and interviews are the focus of this paper.

Further data collection included: SATs results from 2005 (before the project started) and 2006 (towards the end of the project); head teacher interviews to obtain detailed contextual information about the schools, teacher questionnaires at the start and end of the project which covered attitudes towards and experiences of different types of CPD, self reports on teaching methods used, and measures of self-efficacy; class data collected by the teachers for them to assess the impact of any CPD activities they were carrying out; ongoing project progress notes by the project researcher.

Results

Focus Group and Interview Feedback on the Observation System

Focus groups were carried out with fifteen teachers from School A, following the peer observations. The peer observations were also covered in the post-project interviews with 52 of the teachers, from across all the schools. Similar issues were raised about the observations in both the focus groups and the interviews, and key themes included:

- The purpose of the observation
- The conversation after the observation
- The exchange of teaching strategies

- The structure of the observation

Other themes which emerged included:

- Being observed by colleagues
- Difficulties with the observations

The Purpose of the Observation

The main purpose of the observation was to help teachers identify an area for their own professional development. Many teachers felt that the observation was useful in helping to identify an area to focus on (11 teachers in the focus groups, and 7 in the interviews):

“For focussing ideas, defining an area to address, I think it worked very well.”
(Year 4 teacher, Focus group 2)

“The way that it worked, that observation sheet was so useful. And it really highlighted the areas that needed to be worked on, and they linked up with everything else.” (Head Teacher at School D)

“Certain things cropped up which I knew that they would, but it heightened awareness of those things. One of the things we were looking at was questioning. And we saw we were using a great range of questioning, but we could refine it more, even more. So we had some way to go.” (Teacher TD at School E)

However, some teachers also commented that the observation served to confirm what they already felt about their own teaching (11 teachers in total):

“I found it very useful. And I feel I gained from it. But in identifying where I need help, I already knew, personally. I suppose it confirmed it.” (Year 3 teacher, Focus Group 3).

A conversation between four teachers in the focus groups revealed that two of them had initially found it difficult to observe for this purpose:

“You are looking at observing for a different purpose. I am used to observing about the way pupils learn, not to analyse the teaching style on its own.” (Year 6 teacher, Focus Group 1).

However, these teachers were all experienced teachers who were used to carrying out observations in their role as subject leader, with a different agenda.

The Conversation Following the Observation

The feedback conversation was seen as an important part of the observation process by all 15 teachers in the focus groups:

“I did feel that that was such a valuable part of the process, the discussion. If we hadn’t had that I think, if you want to have a proper session you have to do that really, to go over it properly. And for the person to think back, almost sort of doing a personal review, that’s really nice, they are able to reflect back properly on the time, that way. They were bringing up things I hadn’t actually thought of, just in terms of their own reflection on it.” (Year 3 teacher, Focus Group 3).

In the post-project interviews all 9 teachers who mentioned the conversation after the observation commented on it as a means of receiving feedback:

“The feedback was good, I always like getting feedback. That was good.”
(Teacher TD at School C).

The conversation was used not only to discuss what went on in the lessons, but also to exchange ideas, and to provide a basic level of peer coaching. In this way the observations could be seen as a CPD event in themselves:

“We could bounce off each others ideas and things, so that was good.”
(Teacher IS at School C).

However, some teachers raised concerns about the quality of the conversation and feedback, and discussed the need for training in giving feedback (9 teachers):

“We did that bit of training with you on the observing, but what we didn’t see was the person giving the feedback, sitting down with the teacher going through it and how to reflect.” (Year 6 teacher, Focus Group 1).

Some teachers found that the checklist at the end of the observation system provided a foundation for the discussion (6 teachers):

“Then we did our ticks, not together, and discussed each one as we went through, why we felt that, and then gave them a chance to discuss with us what they felt, whether they agreed or disagreed. It opened up the discussion, what they felt, what they did, reading it and so on.” (Reception teacher, Focus Group 2).

However, others felt that the running commentary provided a more useful basis for discussion than the checklist (four teachers):

“I didn’t find the tick-boxes at all useful actually. I found that once I got used to jotting down, you know, notes, and once I got used to the process of doing that I found that was the most useful.” (Year 3 teacher, Focus Group 3).

Two teachers, however, did not base their discussion around the observation system:

“Some of the questions on the questionnaire, weren’t completely relevant, we didn’t necessarily focus on just the questionnaire, we just tended to talk quite generally afterwards.” (Year 1 teacher, Focus Group 4).

The Exchange of Teaching Strategies

As well as gaining benefits from being observed, teachers found observing their colleagues useful as it enabled them to pick up different teaching strategies. Many teachers in the focus groups commented that the feedback conversation was also useful in promoting a discussion around different ways of teaching different subjects (12 teachers):

“The colleague I worked with I got so many ideas. Um. It was really positive. But I’ve never worked with her before. And I think that is the beauty of it, isn’t it. If you don’t know somebody, then you can go in and think, why don’t I do that.” (Year 3 teacher, Focus Group 4).

In the post-project interviews, teachers tended to make a clear distinction between the conversation afterwards, which was generally seen as a means of providing feedback (see above), and the opportunity to pick up new ideas for their own teaching, which was seen as occurring while watching other people (8 teachers)

“But it also highlights when [my year partner] does something I think oh that’s a really good idea, do you know what I mean, so it brings to the forefront something that I can incorporate in class.” (Teacher QI at School E).

This aspect of the observation process also could lead to teachers considering it as a CPD event in itself, although integrating an exchange of ideas into the conversation afterwards would be a key part of this process.

Four teachers in the interviews commented that peer observation in general in good practice:

“The process of observing though, was good. Always good, to have a pair of eyes, a critical friend.” (Teacher QE at School E).

The Structure of the Observation

There are two main parts to the observation system: a written commentary on the lesson, which includes types of teaching used, with timings, description of activities, and regular checks of how many pupils are on task; and a frequency checklist of observable teacher behaviours. Six teachers in the focus groups said that they found the written commentary useful:

“The observation was useful because you could back up your comments in the ticklist with examples from the written commentary, you had the evidence there in front of you” (Year 4 teacher, Focus Group 1).

The checklist raised a number of comments. Some teachers felt that it was a useful reminder of teaching behaviours that can be used in the classroom (5 teachers in the focus groups, and 6 teachers in the interviews):

“I found it helpful as a personal tool, just to look through to remind myself of what the kind of things were that could be observed.” (Teacher SS at School C)

Three teachers in the focus groups commented that the checklist was very teacher-focused:

“I think a lot of it is about teaching, and not what about what children are learning, more on the teacher, all the checklist is what the teacher does. And I feel what about how the kids are doing. So I thought it was very much on the teacher. And sometimes the lesson is very much child led, the teacher is a facilitator.” (Year 6 teacher, Focus Group 1).

However, all three Reception teachers from the focus groups commented that the checklist was not so relevant to teaching at foundation stage:

“I don’t think though that all the observation tick-boxes fitted very well to reception age children. Some of them, we put N/A for quite a few bits, cos that didn’t fit with the approach you use for very young children” (Reception teacher, Focus Group 2).

The checklist covered more than 50 observable behaviours, with space for comments by each item. Eight teachers from the focus groups commented on the breadth of the behaviours covered:

“With other observations, we literally just used a sheet. And so obviously the detail wasn’t there.” (Year 6 teacher, Focus Group 4).

Within these conversations, however, was a desire to focus in closer on fewer behaviours, in order to address those issues specifically (6 teachers):

“We have identified our needs, but now we need to be more explicit, we need to focus on an area to improve.” (Year 3 teacher, Focus Group 4).

Being Observed by Colleagues

The current climate in schools means that many observations take place. However, most of these observations are from senior management teams, or line managers, or subject leaders, or even from external parties such as Ofsted. Peer observation appears to happen rarely and as such, being observed by colleagues on a non-hierarchical basis was a new experience for many. Eleven teachers in the focus groups commented that they felt comfortable with a colleague observing them:

“Being observed, I think by a colleague, is actually, it takes away the threat, it did for me, particularly because it was my year 1 colleague.” (Year 1 teacher, Focus Group 4).

and 9 people in the post-project interviews mentioned the benefits of non-hierarchical observation:

“What I appreciated was that it wasn’t somebody on high, it was somebody who understood all about what it is all about. And therefore it was mutually beneficial, because you weren’t doing it individually. And it wasn’t one way.” (Teacher KT at School E).

However, there was a conversation between three experienced teachers in the focus groups which discussed the issues surrounding over-familiarity with observing partners, suggesting that more beneficial feedback might be received from people you know less well:

“The people you are happy with in the classroom to observe you, are they going to be the most constructive to discuss with always?” (Year 4 teacher, Focus Group 1).

Ownership of CPD

Several teachers (22 in all) commented that they felt the project and the observations had enabled them to take charge of their own learning, for example:

“Well I think that is what it has been about, is been to drive up the ownership of your own professional development, continuing professional development. It is the individual’s responsibility as well as the school’s” (Teacher KL, School E).

although many of these comments referred to the project as a whole, and not specifically to the process of peer-observation.

Difficulties with the Observations

Ten teachers in total in the focus groups and interviews mentioned that they felt the observation system needed to include some focus on pupil learning, as well as giving a detailed account of teacher behaviours:

“I think a lot of it is about teaching, and not what about what children are learning, more on the teacher, all the checklist is what the teacher does. And I feel what about how the kids are doing. So I thought it was very much on the teacher. And sometimes the lesson is very much child led” (Year 6 teacher, Focus Group 1).

However, this was also an issue that several more teachers raised in conversation and at INSET days at the start of the project.

A number of teachers expressed concern that one or even two single one-hour lessons were not enough time for a teacher to display a true picture of their teaching behaviours (five teachers from the focus groups, and three from the interviews):

“For one hour lesson teaching observation that checklist that criteria is made that reflects teaching and learning day in day out, do you know what I mean, that’s what you would expect a good teacher to look like period. And to necessarily see all of those things in one lesson, or two lessons perhaps, is unrealistic.” (Year 4 teacher, Focus Group 1).

Three teachers from the focus groups, and three from the interviews, reported feeling uncomfortable using the full range of frequencies of the teaching behaviours, on the basis that it was too judgemental of their colleagues:

“I was reluctant to put rare because I felt that was me putting a judgement on their practice” (Year 4 teacher, Focus Group 1).

In the interviews, 15 teachers, all from schools C and E, found the full range of teaching behaviours covered in the observation too much to cope with when observing:

“And the forms that we had to fill in for the lesson observations, they were too long in my opinion. They were good, and some of the stuff on them was really good, but I couldn’t do all the parts. All at once.” (Teacher TD at School C).

Summary of feedback from the observations

Overall, the process of peer observation was seen as valuable, both as an exercise in its own right, as a means of receiving feedback and exchanging practice, and as a tool to determine an area to focus on in CPD. Teachers appreciated the opportunity to carry out peer observation that was unconnected with performance management. Teachers in Schools C and E struggled with the number of teaching behaviours listed on the observation system, and some felt that the observation system would be more appropriate when used over a series of lessons, rather than as one-shot observations. However, many teachers commented that the list of behaviours served as a useful reminder of effective teaching methods.

Discussion

The feedback from the teachers and head teachers regarding the observations indicated that the observation system was beneficial to the schools in a number of ways, and problems were few and possible to overcome. Not only did teachers say that the system clarified or confirmed where they felt they needed to improve in their own teaching, but they also reported that the process of peer observation was useful in itself – in terms of prompting a discussion of practice, sharing ideas, and increasing confidence. At the time of the cessation of project funding, teachers had not carried out a second, follow-up round of observations, although the head teachers indicated plans to do so.

The comment from some teachers that the observation system focuses solely on teacher behaviours and not enough on teacher learning is an issue that was discussed with teachers at the INSET days. The tool is designed to be used as a measure of teachers’ behaviours, rather than as a measure of the impact of those behaviours on pupils: the literature from which the instrument is developed has indicated that the behaviours listed in the instrument, taken together, have a significant effect on pupil behaviours. However, when carrying out peer observations, it may be useful to acknowledge how pupils respond to different approaches, and in turn how the teacher responds to the pupils, particularly with respect to any discussion afterwards.

From the project, we can conclude that use of the observation system

- Is useful as a CPD tool in itself
- Is useful for clarifying an area for teachers to focus on in their CPD
- Contributes to increased ownership of CPD, when used to help teachers determine an area for their own development
- Needs to include more on pupil learning.

The principle of rooting CPD in the classroom, using current teaching as a starting point from which to work, is a concept that is worthy of further investigation and consideration. The lived experience of the classroom should be at the heart of teachers' professional development, and the principles of this project have gone some way towards achieving this.

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Appendix 1: Observation System

Professional Development and Review

Teacher:

School:

Class:

Observer:

Date:

Time:

Number of Students:

High/low set?

Mixed Years?

Within lesson differentiation?

Class Layout:



Based on: SSOS, Vergilio, ISERP, CAR

Developed by Eugene Schaffer, Daniel Muijs, Catherine Kitson, David Reynolds

<i>Activity Code</i>	<i>Time</i>	<i>Descriptive Notes</i>	<i>Time on Task (every 5 mins)</i>	
			<i>Category</i>	<i>number</i>
			Time: On task: Off task: Waiting: Out of class:	
			Time: On task: Off task: Waiting: Out of class:	
			Time: On task: Off task: Waiting: Out of class:	

Activity Key: 1 = Whole class interactive
 2 = Whole class lecture
 3 = Individual/group work
 4 = Classroom management
 5 = Testing/assessment

a = Collaborative

[4 pages like this, for lesson description]

Professional Development and Review

[Each item has a scale of 1 – 4 beside it, with the following values: 1 = behaviour rarely observed, 2 = behaviour occasionally observed, 3 = behaviour often observed, 4 = behaviour consistently observed, na = not applicable, and a labelled space for comments.]

Classroom Management Techniques

1. Rules and consequences are clearly understood
2. The teacher starts a lesson within an appropriate time
3. The teacher uses time during class transitions effectively
4. The teacher takes care that tasks/materials are ready and papers and materials are collected and distributed effectively
5. There are limited disruptions in the class

Maintain Appropriate Classroom Behaviour

6. The teacher uses a reward system to manage student behaviour
7. The teacher corrects behaviour immediately
8. The teacher corrects behaviour accurately
9. The teacher corrects behaviour constructively
10. The teacher monitors the entire classroom

Focus and Maintain Attention on Lesson

11. The teacher clearly states objectives/purposes of the lesson
12. The teacher checks for prior knowledge
13. The teacher presents material accurately
14. The teacher presents material clearly
15. The teacher gives detailed directions and explanations
16. The teacher emphasises key points of the lesson
17. The teacher has an educational focus
18. The teacher uses a brisk pace
19. Pupils are appropriately challenged

Provides Students with Review and Practice

20. The teacher clearly explains tasks
21. The teacher offers effective assistance to individuals/groups
22. The teacher checks for understanding

23. The teacher or students summarise the lesson
24. The teacher re-teaches if error rate is high
25. The teacher is approachable for students with problems

Demonstrates Skills in Questioning

26. The teacher uses a high frequency of questions
27. The teacher asks educational questions
28. The teacher asks open-ended questions
29. The teacher probes further when responses are incorrect
30. The teacher elaborates on answers
31. The teacher asks pupils to explain how they reached their answer
32. Students are asked for more than one answer
33. The teacher uses appropriate wait time between questions and responses
34. The teacher notes pupils' mistakes
35. The teacher guides pupils through errors
36. The teacher clears up misconceptions
37. The teacher gives immediate academic feedback
38. The teacher gives accurate academic feedback
39. The teacher gives positive academic feedback

Demonstrates a Variety of teaching Methods

40. The teacher uses a variety of explanations that differ in complexity
41. The teacher uses a variety of instructional methods
42. The teacher uses manipulative materials/instructional aides/resources

Establishes a Positive Classroom Climate

43. The teacher communicates high expectations for students
44. The teacher exhibits personal enthusiasm
45. The teacher displays a positive tone
46. The teacher encourages student interaction and communication
47. The teacher conveys genuine concern for students (empathic, understanding, warm, friendly)
48. The teacher knows and uses student names
49. The teacher displays students' work in the classroom (ample amount, attractively displayed, current)
50. The teacher prepares an inviting and cheering classroom