

# WALK the WALK

**DR NICOLA DAVIES** EXPLAINS WHY SLIPPING INTO YOUR STUDENTS' SHOES FOR A WHILE COULD BE ONE OF THE BEST CPD DECISIONS YOU EVER MAKE...

**I**n 2013, Sir Tim Brighouse, former Schools Commissioner for London, and Bob Moon, Professor of Education, published *Taking Teacher Development Seriously: A Proposal to Establish a National Teaching Institute for Teacher Professional Development in England*.

In their proposal, they stress the importance of continued professional development (CPD) for teachers, while also citing evidence that current in-school CPD is "unstrategic, disjointed and erratic." Teachers are increasingly expected to be the proverbial 'Jack of all trades', instructing on their specialist subjects while also offering pastoral support and being organised and efficient administrators. However, how many teachers remember what it's like to see things from the

other side of the classroom, as learners? Could studentship be the ultimate CPD? Indeed, it could be argued that a teacher who doesn't learn is like a film director who won't watch films, or a singer who can't listen to music.

Whether attending a class specifically designed to improve teaching skills or a recreational course like yoga or cooking, as long as teachers are engaged in learning, they can directly enrich the quality of their teaching. Sarah Chadfield, a part-time English teacher at a comprehensive school in East London, attends silversmithing classes. Taking a personal approach to her CPD, Chadfield has felt the effects of studentship on her teaching. "It reminds me of the way that students are motivated by creating something they have ownership over," she says. "Finding

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Nicola Davies is a psychologist and freelance writer with a passion for education. You can follow her on Twitter (@healthpsychuk) or sign up to her free blog:

<http://healthpsychologyconsultancy.wordpress.com/>

ways to give students a sense of their own ability, or potential ability, is crucial."

When in the shoes of their students, educators can better understand what it means to be an effective teacher. Taking non-career centred learning classes can help teachers develop new strategies they can employ in their own classrooms. They might learn to use a more hands-on approach, or realise the benefits of providing more student resources. The possibilities for skills improvement and innovative teaching, through the use of non-professional classes, are unparalleled.

## CPD opportunities

Of course, there is an abundance of 'traditional' CPD available. A simple Google search produces hundreds of opportunities, from part-time free lessons, to full-time paid courses. Face-to-face workshops, for example, are offered all over the world for improvement of teacher-student communication. Joanne Philpott, deputy head teacher at the comprehensive City of Norwich School (CNS) in Norfolk, says, "It never ceases to amaze me how willing teachers are to attend conferences and workshops." Philpott herself undertakes individual CPD sessions and reads professional pedagogy publications and forums.

There is no shortage of online CPD courses for teachers. 'Visible LearningPlus,' for example, is a professional development programme, which explores how gathering, analysing, interpreting and using information about students' progress and achievements can facilitate innovation in the learning environment – subsequently improving teaching and learning. The key aim is to encourage teachers to ask questions of themselves about the impact they are having on

## WHAT COULD YOU DO?

### Face-to-face workshops:

Small workshops are a great opportunity for teachers to discuss, reflect, collaborate, and debate different issues, as well as find useful ideas for classroom activities.

### Online communities:

Interactive virtual conferences, forums, and blogs allow teachers to participate and discuss a myriad of educational topics with teachers from around the world.

### Informal discussions:

Informal conversations with colleagues are a practical way of learning about new and effective

teaching methods, techniques, or materials.

### Reading groups:

Formal discussions about an assigned text can bring about greater insight and new perspectives.

### Action research:

Action research is a systematic form of self-reflective inquiry where a person actively engages in using evidence to improve teaching strategies and make a positive impact. It can be individual or in collaboration with other teachers to find solutions to problems or develop methods of best practice.

### Writing:

Keeping personal reflections is a good way to monitor personal and professional development. Additionally, writing articles or books allows teachers to apply what they learn from their teaching, studentship, and research.

### OUTSIDE THE BOX:

- Learn new activities
- Experiment with different approaches in class
- Train to be a teacher trainer
- Take an online e-tutoring course
- Form a local interest group – related or unrelated to teaching.



student achievement. The BBC-sponsored forum 'TeachingEnglish' offer less formal, discussion-based professional development.

Beyond these resources, teachers can simply talk to colleagues, spend some time reading instruction-enhancement literature, or even observe colleagues. The teaching community is massive, and merely communicating with one another is a form of CPD.

### The future of CPD

The theoretical National Teaching Institute offered by Brighouse and Moon in their proposal focuses on the development of career-long teacher development programmes and the promotion of innovative thinking in teachers. Teachers are designated as the creators of CPD – in recognition of their voice and their role in their own personal and professional development.

It can, however, be difficult for teachers to fit CPD into their schedule – let alone design it! Philpott says, "CPD would be easier if schools fit more time into the working day to promote such activity and have adjusted models of CPD at school." In particular, she feels schools need to start thinking differently about how they use CPD time. She says, "It is commonplace to disaggregate Inset days but at CNS we have moved to a model of disaggregating days to create a range of bespoke CPD courses which have 3 x 90

minutes concurrent sessions, with a gap task every session – equating to a full day of Inset. Courses are directly linked to appraisal targets driven by the School Improvement Plan."

This model is popular and allows CPD to be relevant and have immediate impact in the classroom. "Our CPD room also allows time for colleagues to use Planning, Preparation and Assessment time to work with other colleagues in small groups during the working day on a specific area of interest or development, as highlighted through lesson observation and appraisal targets," she says. "This makes CPD integral to the working week rather than a day bolted onto the start or end of term, when other more routine jobs are more pressing and probably more necessary at that time. I would suggest that the key to effective CPD is the opportunity to make immediate use of the training with reflection time built in."

Clearly, there are many CPD opportunities available for teachers – both face-to-face and online. However, until new models of CPD are incorporated into the working day, they remain a challenge for teachers to utilise. Fortunately, 'outside the box CPD' – unorthodox course, which might not be considered CPD at all, such as Zumba or flower arranging – can be undertaken during teachers' personal time and can improve

their skills and abilities in unexpected ways.

Philpott says, "The ease of being a student is determined by many factors, including the quality of your teacher." With this in mind, it is difficult to dispute that the best way to understand the impact of quality teaching is for teachers to stay in touch with what it is like to be on the other side of the classroom.

## ★ COURSES AND CLASSES FOR SECONDARY EDUCATORS

- The National Portrait Gallery and National Gallery offer fun and interesting workshops and classes for art teachers.
- The National Science Learning Centre provides high quality science courses for teachers of science.
- Creative Education Consultancy offers classes on leadership.
- The British Library has comic book appreciation classes specifically for teachers.
- Annual online conferences are held by the International Association of Teachers of English as a Foreign Language.