



Teacher Professional Learning and Development

Midlothian Council Educational Psychology Service

"Long term and sustained improvement which has a real impact on the quality of children's learning will be better achieved through determined efforts to build the capacity of teachers themselves to take responsibility for their own professional development, building their pedagogical expertise, engaging with the need for change, undertaking well-thought through development and always evaluating impact in relation to improvement in the quality of children's learning. That is the message from successful education systems across the world."

- Teaching Scotland's Future (Scottish Government, 2011)

Key areas for the ongoing development of effective practice in Midlothian:

- The language of learning
- Cognitive skills
- Learning intentions
- Success criteria
- Mindsets

Further Reading:

Timperley, H., Wilson, A., Barrar, H. & Fung, I. (2007). Teacher professional learning and development: Best Evidence Synthesis Iteration (BES)

Allison, S. (2014). Perfect Teacher-Led CPD.

Borko, H., Jacobs, J. & Koellner, K. (2010). Contemporary approaches to teacher professional development.

Earley, P. & Porritt, V. (2009). Effective Practices in Continuing Professional Development: Lessons from Schools.

Ofsted (2010). Good Professional Development in Schools: How does Leadership Contribute?

Penuel, W. R., Fishman, J., Yamaguchi, R., & Gallagher, L. P. (2007). What makes professional development effective? Strategies that foster curriculum implementation

Why professional learning and development matters

Teachers are one of the most important assets in a school, and therefore, in order to succeed and to keep knowledge and practice current and relevant, it is essential that growth is supported by finding ways to broaden potential and create opportunities for development. Quality teaching has a significant influence on a range of student outcomes and while teachers' influence is moderated by a number of other factors, such as students' prior learning and family contexts, it is teaching that is the greatest system influence. If teachers are to exercise this influence effectively, then they, like their students, need opportunities to deepen their understandings and refine their skills.

Within the pressures of a constantly changing agenda, schools have the chance to take control of their own journeys of development. This means developing a school where teachers want to take risks (and feel safe doing so), seek and try out new ideas and strategies and discuss their work openly.

How can we do it?

Historically, the outcomes of professional development have focused more on the changes in the teaching staff and not the impact of professional development on student outcomes. However, research has found that in order to be effective, we need to re-focus our thinking. Most importantly, teachers need to gain effective knowledge through cycles of enquiry into their practice.

Starting with the evidence of their students, they need to think about: what do they know? and what do they need to know? This information comes from assessments, curriculum and a number of different sources.

The next step involves thinking about their own professional knowledge and whether they know how to improve and develop learning for students, particularly those who are struggling. Are there things that they need to know in order to teach them differently? Are they teaching those students in the most effective way possible? This can then be extended to encompass the school, building a picture of practices that are effective in raising outcomes for all pupils in the school.

Research

Over the past ten years there have been a number of systematic reviews and analyses of the research evidence about teachers' continuing professional development and learning. Research has shown that there is an implementation gap in teachers' professional development. They may learn, understand, and agree with a new idea or technique presented in a workshop, but it is hard for them to implement that idea without ongoing support.

A study featured in John Hattie's research that was conducted by four researchers (Timberley, Wilson, Barrar & Fung, 2007), explored 72 studies that assessed the effects of professional development on student outcomes. The overall effect on academic outcomes had an effect size of 0.66. Furthermore, the researchers used effect sizes to ascertain seven themes about what works best in professional development:



- Learning opportunities for teachers occurred over an extended period of time.
- The involvement of external experts was more related to success than within-schools initiatives.
- It was important to engage teachers sufficiently to deepen their knowledge and extend their skills in ways that improved student outcomes.
- Critically, professional development needed to challenge teachers' prevailing discourse and conceptions about learning (when this discourse was problematic, it was usually based on the assumption that some groups of students could not, or would not learn as well as others).
- Teachers talking to teachers about teaching (involvement in a professional community of practice) was necessary, but not sufficient in itself.
- Professional development was more effective when the school leadership supported opportunities to learn, where there was access to relevant expertise, and where opportunities were provided to process new information.
- Funding, release time, and whether involvement was voluntary or compulsory were unrelated to influences on student outcomes.

The research presented provides themes to consider for achieving effective professional learning and development, however, in any educational context, suggestions or guides for practice must be responsive to that context and open to continuing evaluation in order to have impact. Evaluation and evidence gathering of the impact of professional learning is important in informing next steps. This will develop the teacher as an agent of change and help towards achieving transformational change at all levels.

Teacher Professional Learning and Development in Midlothian



All of the educational psychologists working in Midlothian are committed to supporting professional learning and development in schools. As well as providing opportunities for professional development, we are supporting schools in developing a culture where every member of staff becomes continuously curious about learning and engaged in action research about what works best to help Midlothian learners.

For more information on the training and professional development Midlothian Educational Psychology Service can support, and resources that are available, please contact your link EP.