

Looking at March 2004 from December 2015

Time perhaps to employ that well known phrase,

The past is a foreign country: they do things differently there.

Looking back at my column in Breaktime Magazine of more than eleven years ago for part of it I could have been writing about a foreign country. I believe, however, that my warnings remain valid. Especially for people working in England over that period I wonder what you think. Directly and indirectly I worked on all of the initiatives I refer to: a lot of effort! The column follows (with the very slightest of editing).

TIDY OR UNTIDY CPD

In a previous edition of Breaktime I wrote of the emergence of two pictures of CPD. One was a picture of a small group of teachers with post-graduate qualifications, climbing fast up the career ladder and the other was a picture of a whole profession entitled, as of right, to support for their CPD. Today I want to say a little about the issue of whose CPD we are talking about at a time when professional life just might become a little confusing.

By the autumn of 2004 schools in England will have received information from:

- the DfES on how to carry out the role of CPD Co-ordinator and how to use a professional e-portfolio;
- and the General Teaching Council for England on how to join the Teacher Learning Academy.

Schools will also be receiving copies of the Primary and Secondary Strategies. These will involve teachers working collaboratively, as part of a continuing professional development programme, to make decisions about what should be taught, how it should be taught and managed; and what should be assessed and what modes of assessment are appropriate. The National College for School Leadership will, at the same time, be moving forward on NPQH, LPSH, Leading from the Middle and Networked Learning Communities. And it is possible that you will be moving to an LEA that has developed, with the encouragement of government, a CPD Strategy that might be quite different from the one you have just left.

In another part of the CPD forest, meanwhile, higher education will be bidding for funds to set up programmes for teachers leading to post-graduate certificates, post-graduate diplomas, masters and doctorates. The funds to support, but not to cover the full cost of, these programmes are managed by the Teacher Training Agency (the slight edit: TTA). The new title for this is Post-graduate Professional Development (PPD).

Universities within the Universities Council for the Education of Teachers (UCET) will be seeking to establish links between all of the national programmes and initiatives. This will make it possible to present evidence generated while working on, for example, Leading from the Middle in a way that can carry some credit towards a post-graduate award. And if the links between these awards and all the national programmes and initiatives are similar we may hope to reduce confusion. Confusion costs time and energy, though it can also stimulate. But much remains to be done to ensure that schools and teachers are not so overwhelmed by what is happening that a strictly orthodox and institutionalised CPD follows.

What we may neglect is the need of the individual teacher to make sense of a professional life that is often beset by targets, action plans, inspections and prescriptions devised by others. If we are not careful we may find that what is held to count as CPD becomes limited to that which can be measured: to tidy, timed and targeted events.

Tidy CPD is relatively easy to organise, to cost and link clearly with School Development Plans and to present as evidence of a well managed school when Ofsted come calling. But how will we know, in future, when we have discovered professional penicillin? What about the unexpected professional evidence for unintended professional outcomes? What, in other words, about the CPD that does not start at nine o'clock, with planned activities and a well-chosen venue? Many teachers develop as professionals when they are unexpectedly asked to do something they have not done before; or when children and colleagues respond in ways that have not been anticipated; and when they begin to reflect critically about what they do and might do.

It is this untidy, un-costed, unexpected kind of professional development that might need support. Teachers (in fact all professionals) often have very little opportunity to critically reflect upon what they are learning just from doing the job. I now work in higher education so I suppose it is inevitable for me to advocate HE programmes that give value to this kind of activity and, at the same time, allow the development of an individual professional voice, or voices since collaborative work can be so stimulating. A thinking professional will not always work to other peoples' targets or throw away unexpected professional evidence without first examining it for value. And a thinking professional will not always be seeking short-term impact. Much of the work of teachers has a slow burn.

My hope is that we shall, in the next year or so, make sense of the variety of CPD programmes and initiatives that are about to descend on schools. My fear is that, in order to respond, we shall tick all the boxes provided for us, paint by numbers the pictures of our professional lives and fail to question or dispute anything we are asked to do.

Cliff Jones 7th.March 2004

And 5th December 2015 (Acknowledging L.P. Hartley)

Glossary for the people of 2015 (another country)

DfES The Department for Education and Skills (gone)

TLA The Teacher Learning Academy (gone)

NPQH The National Professional Qualification for Headship (now optional)

LPSH The Leadership Programme for Serving Heads

LEA Local Education Authorities (gone)

Almost everything else I mention has also gone. The work, confusion and pressure remain, as does UCET (www.ucet.ac.uk).

Useful link

<http://www.criticalprofessionallearning.co.uk/activities.html#masters>