Models and Types of Continuing Professional Development of Foreign Languages Teachers in the USA

Maryna KRYVONIS
Luhansk Taras Shevchenko National University
Oboronna Street 2, Luhansk
91011, Ukraine
marine2503@mail.ru

Summary

It is written in the paper that the continuing professional development of teachers is a priority of the whole education system and teachers alike. Teachers like other professionals need to update their knowledge, competences, pedagogical skills and erudition. In this paper three building metaphors will be used to describe current approaches to the continuing professional development of teachers such as retooling, remodelling and revitalizing. Also, the fourth one – reimagining – would be added to indicate the need for teachers themselves to have some agency in identifying priorities and needs for their own professional learning.

Keywords: continuing professional development, types and models of CPD, competence, personal development, American foreign languages teachers, professional learning.

Prosperous development of modern society based on sound knowledge suggests that their creation and spread are the main factors of social and economic live. Getting knowledge today supposes new models of education, professional training and development of teachers. Such a conception is known as continuing professional development.

The method of research used in the paper was a comprehensive review of the literature in the field.

The concept of continuing professional development (CPD) in education is often defined inaccurately, 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 covers all aspects of the notion: “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, 4).

Teachers’ perceptions of what activities constitute CPD is frequently limited to attendance at courses, conferences, 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 (Hustler et al, 2003). However, the literature points to several features of effective CPD of teachers in the USA, many of which are far removed from the commonly-held perceptions of CPD as one-off events.

According to Lieberman’s classification (1996) there are three types of CPD:
1. direct teaching (courses, conferences, workshops, consultations);
2. learning in school (mentoring, peer coaching, action research, critical friendships and task-related planning teams);
3. out of school learning (visits to other school, learning networks, school-university partnerships and so on).

Kennedy (2005) outlined nine models of CPD:
1. training – focuses on skills, with expert delivery, and little practical focus;
2. award bearing – usually in conjunction with a higher education institution, this brings the worrying discourse on the irrelevance of academia to the fore;
3. defecit – this looks at addressing shortcomings in an individual teacher, it tends to by individually tailored, but may not be good for confidence and is unsupportive of the development of a collective knowledge base within the school;
4. cascade – this is relatively cheap in terms of resources, but there are issues surrounding the loss of a collaborative element in the original learning;
5. standards based – this assumes that there is a system of effective teaching, and is not effexible in terms of teacher learning. It can be useful for developing a common language but may be very narrow and limiting;
6. coaching / mentoring – the development of a non-threatening relationship can encourage discussion, but a coach or mentor needs good communication skills;
7. 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;
8. action research – this is relevant to the classroom, and enables teachers to experiment with different practices, especially if the action research is collaborative;
9. transformative – the integration of several different types of the previous models, with a strong awareness and control of whose agenda is being addressed.

Kennedy (2005) inclined to regard the first four of these models as essentially transmission methods, which gave little opportunity for foreign languages teachers to take control over their own learning. The following 3 models are considered to be more transformational as they give an increasing capacity for teachers’ professional autonomy and the power to determine their own learning pathways.

Direct teaching or training as the traditional perception of CPD is often discerned as a top-down delivery model of CPD of teachers in the USA as ready-made ideas on teaching methods are imparted to teachers for them to carry out. Such lecture-style teaching appeared to be unclaimed with American foreign languages teachers, who choose more active and practical styles of learning (Edmonds and Lee, 2002).

A strong competence in less formal and traditional forms of CPD is slowly increasing, with firm necessity for teachers to have the ability to create, long for new approaches to their own professional development, and move away from more traditional transmission-based methods.

Knight mentions in his interview phase that teachers distinguished the value of observation and professional discussion as effective forms of their CPD as they were considered by them to have the greatest impact on their professional growth and personal development. On the ground of both the survey and the interview data it is quite clear that the most effective types of CPD were considered to be those that directly met individual teachers’ needs, as well as responding to school based needs. Teachers showed high levels of dissatisfaction with CPD facts that did not meet their needs and necessities or failed to come up to their expectations. (Knight, 2002).

Nevertheless, under certain circumstances Grundy and Robison (2004) single out three interconnected purposes of CPD: extension, growth and renewal. Extension is discerned through introducing new knowledge or skills to a teacher’s repertoire, growth
is achieved through the development of greater levels of expertise and renewal is attained through transformation and change of knowledge and practice.

Thus we will mark out three metaphors to describe current approaches to the continuing professional development of teachers in the USA which reflect Grundy and Robison’s above purposes: retooling, remodelling and revitalising. Also the fourth definition should be added – which is reimagining to indicate the need for teachers themselves to have some agency in identifying priorities for their own professional learning and growth. Consequently an argument appears – in a sense that CPD needs to incorporate all four of the elements of retooling, remodelling, revitalising and reimagining to have two interrelated effects. The objective of the first effect is to ensure that the goal of improving student learning is achieved, the objective of the second effect is that a strong and autonomous teaching profession is supported.

In that case let’s consider CPD as retooling like a dominant form of CPD. Indeed it is not surprising at a time when American governments want to make teachers more accountable and where standards and competency based regimes dominate education policy. This form of CPD inclines us to the view that teaching can be made better by means of learning and development of new skills. Current outcomes of such types of CPD are that teachers feel inspired and ready to implement their practical ideas.

Kennedy (2005) regards this kind of CPD as training which supports a skill-based, technocratic view of teaching whereby CPD provides teachers with the opportunity to renew their skills in order to be always ready to demonstrate their competence. That is generally ‘delivered’ to the teacher by an ‘expert’, with an agenda determined by the deliverer and the participant in that way is placed in a passive role (Kennedy, 2005, 237).

As retooling CPD is very much based in a practical view of teaching, in which relevance and immediate application within classrooms is a prime objective. It represents teachers as managers of student learning rather than a reflective practitioner who considers how appropriate the pedagogy is for the students he teaches. Observations show that it supports participants to develop the skills and confidence they need to take charge of their own professional learning. However, with its focus on improving instruction it does not give any opportunity to consider the social and cultural factors which influence the teaching and learning patterns and ways of their delivery. As Day (1999) observes “it is likely to promote a limited conception of teaching and being a teacher” (Day, 1999, 139). This form of CPD encourages teachers to see their world in terms of instrumental ends achieved only through the recipes of tried and true practices legitimated by unexamined experience or uncritically accepted research finding (Sachs and Logan, 1990, 479).

CPD as remodelling in the USA is concerned with transmission (Kennedy, 2005) but is more concerned with modifying existing practices to ensure that teachers are compliant with government change agendas. It is concentrated on the expansion of teachers’ content and pedagogical knowledge. Most American teachers evaluate this type of CPD which is about learning something new, which is stimulating, applicable and exhilarating. CPD as remodelling type helps them to “understand more deeply the content they teach and the ways students learn that content” (Guskey, 2003, 748). In these terms teachers are regarded as the uncritical consumers of expert knowledge.

The next approach is to examine CPD in the revitalizing aspect which connects teachers with other teachers and with the needs of students. The difference between this kind of CPD and the two mentioned above is that its’ focus is first of all on teacher learning, in particular professional renewal through opportunities to rethink and review practices and in so doing become reflective practitioners.

Kennedy (2005) regards this kind of CPD as transitional, in the sense that the characteristics of this model have the capacity to support underlying agendas compatible with either the transmission of transformative models. Under Kennedy’s schema a transitional approach to CPD incorporates a standards-based, coaching/mentoring or community of practices models. The coaching/mentoring model emphasizes the importance of the one-to-one relationship between two teachers, which is designed to support CPD. It involves an equitable relationship which allows the two teachers involved to discuss possibilities, beliefs and hopes (Kennedy 2005). One of its major concepts is that of confidentiality. Importantly, members need to create their own understanding of the joint enterprise, therefore allowing members of that community to assert a certain level of control over the agenda. (Kennedy 2005, 245).

Another form of CPD as revitalizing is to be discussed through professional development networks. Morris, Chrispeals and Burke (2003) argue that two linked processes of CPD can create opportunities for teacher learning and transformation. They claim that external teacher networks that focus predominately
on enhancing teachers’ pedagogical knowledge and collaborative and leadership skills in a content area when linked with internal school reform networks and projects can provide the transformative power to alter professional development and teacher learning in power and sustainable ways (p. 764).

Accordingly having presented the main models of CPD for teachers in the USA it is clear that CPD should emphasize teacher learning rather than a deficit based professional development view where professional development is ‘done to teachers’.

Conclusions

1. CPD of teachers in American schools needs to be evaluated more effectively and needs to be extended to include the impact on student outcomes.
2. Evaluation of CPD should be appropriate to the events and experiences evaluated as not all events need formal evaluation.
3. Training and development in the use of tools for effective and appropriate evaluation of CPD should be made available to schools.
4. Evaluation of the impact of CPD should be linked more explicitly to school development and developmental planning.
5. The leadership and management roles of the CPD leader need to be clearly defined.
6. Where possible the CPD leader role should be undertaken by a senior member of staff.
7. Dedicated training for the role of CPD leader should be made available to all who fulfil this role.

Literature

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