

# Educators' Notebook

## Reviews of Research of Interest to Educators

### **Collaborative Continuing Professional Development for Teachers**

This summary is drawn from a comprehensive review of the research evidence on collaborative continuing professional development prepared for the Evidence for Policy and Practice Information and Co-ordinating Centre (EPPI-Centre). The review was a collaborative effort of the UK Department for Education and Skills, the Centre for the Use of Research and Evidence in Education (CUREE), the National Union of Teachers (NUT) and the General Teaching Council (GTC) for England. The EPPI-Centre is located at the University of London ([www.ioe.ac.uk/eppi](http://www.ioe.ac.uk/eppi)). This report of the review has not been submitted to the EPPI-Centre for approval and therefore should not be taken to represent the views of EPPI or any of the authors; interested readers are encouraged to read the longer summary or the full review.

The citation for the full original review is: Cordingley, P., Bell, M., Rundell, B., Evans, D. and Curtis, A. (2003, June). The impact of collaborative CPD on classroom teaching and learning: How does collaborative Continuing Professional Development (CPD) for teachers of the 5-16 age range affect teaching and learning? London: EPPI Centre. Available at [eppi.ioe.ac.uk](http://eppi.ioe.ac.uk).

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## Collaborative Continuing Professional Development for Teachers

Many initiatives in education depend upon advances in teacher learning, so it is important to learn about how professional development might help develop teachers' knowledge, skills and careers while also enhancing pupil learning.

This review is based on a relatively small set of studies, some of which did not provide all the information that would have been ideal in putting together this synthesis. The findings in the review, while an accurate representation of the available research, should be subject to further verification.

### ***The Nature of the Continuing Professional Development (CPD)***

Collaborative continuing professional development (CPD) in these studies involved teachers working together on a sustained basis. It did not include individual teachers working on their own and excluded one-time or short courses. To be included in the review, studies had to provide evidence about planned opportunities for teachers' learning prior to, during and after specific interventions to enable teachers to relate inputs to existing and future practice. The 17 studies in the review came from 7 different countries.

While the core purpose of CPD is enhancing student learning, it is crucially focused on teacher learning and changes in teachers' beliefs, knowledge, attitudes and behaviours. All the professional development in these studies was focused on the particular needs of the teachers and the impact of the CPD on their work and their students. The work was also located firmly in the school and classroom context.

Most of the research reported here started with teachers' expressed learning needs, took account of different starting points for individual teachers at every level and involved activities to develop and sustain teacher ownership of CPD.

The CPD reported in the review was not about naive discovery or 'curriculum tourism'. It was a structured way of working, involving considerable co-ordination built on clarity about the nature of adult and pupil learning processes. The review pointed to the importance in effective CPD of:

- specialist, expert input,
- a focus on coaching and peer support
- the need to sustain efforts over time so that new approaches can be adapted, changed through experience and integrated into ongoing teaching practice.

### ***Did the collaborative CPD have an impact?***

In all but one of the studies collaborative CPD was linked with improvements in both teaching and learning; many of these improvements were substantial.

### ***In relation to teachers...***

In many studies CPD was part of efforts such as joint planning or team teaching. Finding sufficient time for teachers to work together and getting adequate access to resources were common concerns. The studies reported a range of positive changes in teacher behaviour including greater self-confidence, enhanced belief in their power to make a difference to students' learning, greater enthusiasm for collaborative work (despite initial anxieties), and a greater ongoing commitment to improving one's teaching practice. Sustained and collaborative CPD was also

linked with a positive impact upon teachers' repertoire of teaching and learning strategies and their ability to match these to their students' needs. Among the activities that teachers reported as a result of CPD were more use of technology in instruction and planning as well as efforts to use a wider range of teaching strategies and to pay more careful attention to the diverse learning needs of students.

The CPD reported in this review involved a combination of complex activities in a context where it was safe to admit need and which was responsive to individual needs. At the same time, all the effective CPD programmes had a clear purpose. They incorporated measures for assessing effectiveness, including pupil impact. The CPD in these studies involved a strong sense of accountability to colleagues and to pupils.

Positive outcomes of collaborative CPD sometimes emerged only after periods of relative discomfort in trying out new approaches; things often got worse before they got better. Effective collaboration was important in sustaining change.

### ***In relation to students...***

The positive outcomes for students concentrated on measured improvements in student performance or specifically assessed learning approaches. The studies found improved academic results on a variety of different measures including improved test results, greater ability in decoding, enhanced reading fluency, better organization of work by students, more sophisticated responses to questions, and a wider range of learning activities being used. Students also reported greater motivation and satisfaction, as well as increased participation in classes.

The features of CPD that seemed linked to better outcomes included:

- the use of external expertise to support collaboration,
- observation of teaching followed by feedback,

- emphasis on peer support rather than supervisory leadership,
- scope for participants to identify their own focus,
- processes to encourage and structure professional dialogue,
- processes to sustain the activity over time by, for example, providing enough non-teaching time.

Study of research or action research activities were important building blocks in many of the studies. Building on teachers' existing knowledge and skills appeared to be important as well. Fewer but more intensive activities may be better than more episodic ones.

### ***Implications***

There is evidence in this review that collaborative CPD is capable of supporting successful outcomes for teachers and pupils. Some non-collaborative activities could be followed up collaboratively within the school.

All the CPD being studied involved a complex combination of activities; no one element worked on its own. Observation and feedback or peer coaching and action research were used to enable teachers to work on their own needs and interests, albeit within a framework set by others. There is also widespread use in these studies of a combination of external expertise and peer support mechanisms.

There is evidence that things get worse before they get better but that it is worth getting over initial discomfort or reluctance and shyness about being observed and sharing problems with colleagues. Indeed the benefits spread well beyond the areas targeted by the CPD to, for example, benefits in relation to enthusiasm about professional learning and to increases in confidence.

There may be benefits in several schools clustering together to achieve a critical mass of teachers with peer coaching skills.

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This is a brief review of a complex body of educational research. Since no brief review can capture the subtleties and qualifications reflected in the larger works, readers are urged to consult the references which have been cited. The views expressed in this notebook are those of the author. The sponsors welcome your comments on this issue and your suggestions for future issues of Educators' Notebook.