

TAILORED CPD: EXPLORING STUDENT ENGAGEMENT AND ASSESSMENT

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List of acronyms and abbreviations

CPD: Continuing Professional Development

JCT: Junior Cycle for Teachers

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Introduction

The provision of effective and meaningful CPD for teachers and principals is a critical issue in exacting educational reform, such as is currently being rolled out with the Junior Cycle Framework (DES 2012). Much of the past CPD provision would have traditionally taken the form of once-off standalone sessions delivered on-site or elsewhere. (Frost 2012, Huber 2011, Jones & O'Brien 2011, McDonagh *et al.* 2012, Sugrue 2011) Insofar as every student is unique in terms of his or her educational needs, so too can the same be said for every teacher in terms of his or her professional learning. One would argue that it would be foolhardy to exclusively apply this one-size fits all model of CPD delivery in order to bring about mass educational reform (Frost 2012, Jones & O'Brien 2011, McDonagh *et al.* 2012). Fortunately, this is not currently the case, whereby the Government and NCCA have set up a dedicated teacher support service in the form of the JCT – Junior Cycle for Teachers. This service employs a variety of CPD models in a multi-faceted approach.

To this end, this study aims to explore a more tailored and meaningful approach to the delivery of CPD and in particular the training of teachers in the running of research. As the main researcher in this study, I recognise in myself and my own teaching colleagues the incredibly rich and varied levels of professional and research experience. As a result, the study encompasses two perspectives on the CPD process – that of someone delivering CPD and that of teachers engaging in CPD. Thus the study will employ two research methodologies. In guiding three participant teachers in their own Practitioner Inquiry studies I will explore and develop my own professional experience in devising and delivering CPD by applying a participatory case study method.

Research Methodology

As detailed above this study employs the use of a case study methodology in order to explore and develop my own professional experience. I am studying the benefits and challenges of this model of CPD from my own perspective as well as the perspective of the participant teachers.

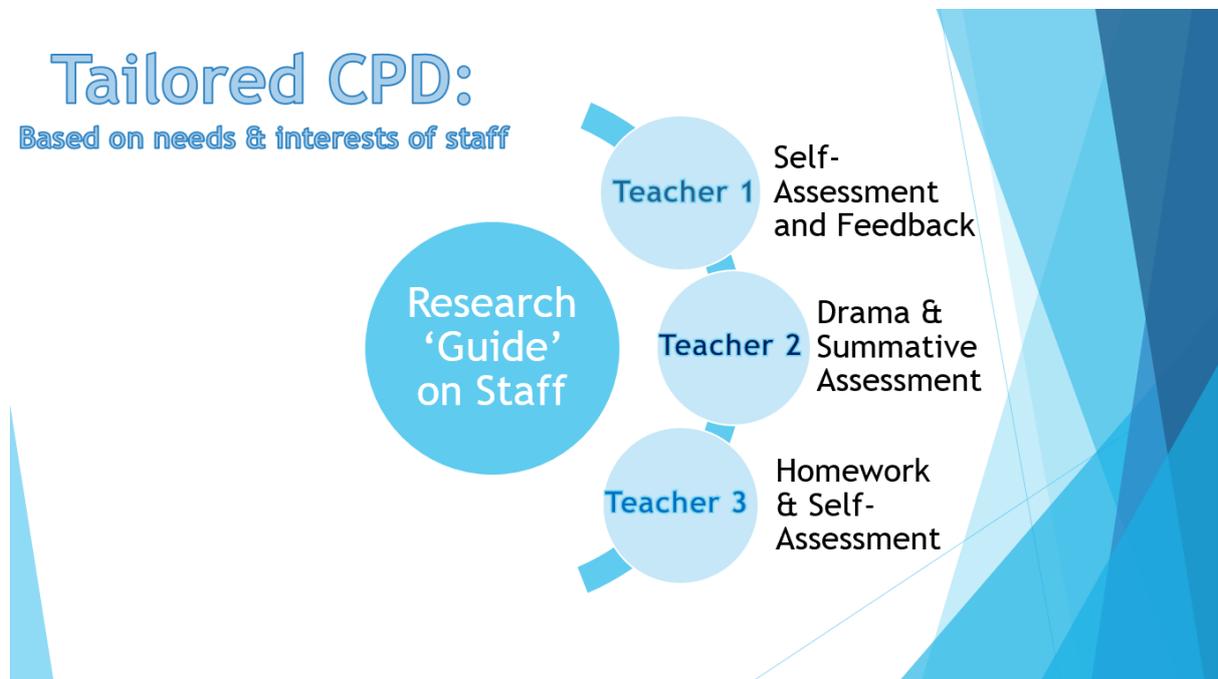
In addition, the three participant teachers are employing a Practitioner Inquiry methodology to their own individual studies. I find the Practitioner Inquiry method of particular interest as a flexible framework with which any teacher can work with. This methodology aims to foster professional development and improve practice from a meaningful, measured and structured way and importantly from a self-directed position (Cochran-Smith & Lytle 1992, Fichtman Dana & Yendol-Hoppey 2014, Wells 2001). The participant teachers chose their research focus based on a particular question or issue that arose in their own practice and are seeking to explore this area in order to improve teaching and learning in their classroom.

Data collection tools for both methodologies encompass questionnaires, semi-structured interviews and observational notes.

Study Overview

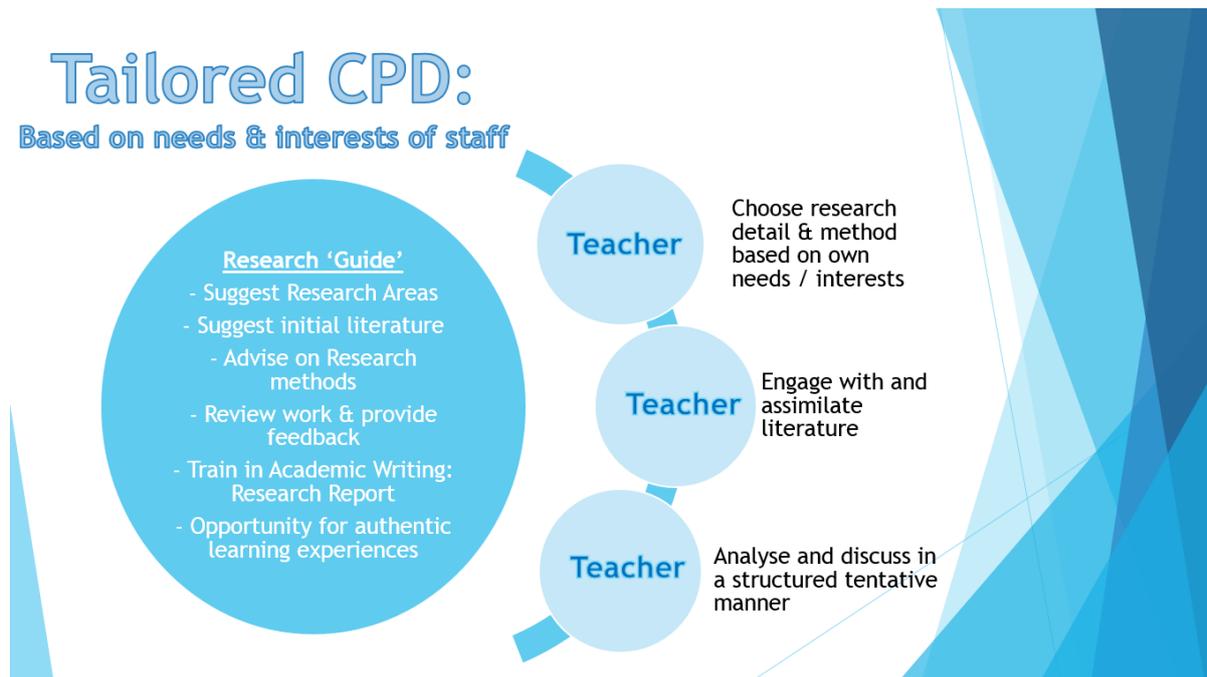
Focus

The study's main focus, is the guiding of teacher participants in their own research studies. It is argued that teachers who engage in research have a better understanding of their own practice and ways to improve it (Cochran-Smith & Lytle 1992, Fichtman Dana & Yendol-Hoppey 2014, Wells 2001). It is also a fundamental way of developing and improving critical thinking and fostering objectivity, while also encouraging ownership of self-developed teaching and learning strategies.



With the study being run in my own school of St Joseph's college Lucan, three teachers on the staff volunteered to join the study as participants, as detailing in the figure above. Each teacher chose an area specific to their own CPD and teaching and learning needs. Within the three projects there was broad overlap between the themes of assessment and engagement; Self-Assessment & Feedback, Drama & Summative Assessment, Homework & Self-Assessment.

Participant Roles



The figure above illustrates the roles of the participants from the two perspectives i.e. that of the Research Guide who delivers the CPD and that of the participant teacher who engages with the CPD. From my perspective as the research guide, so-to-speak, I initially suggested research areas that may be of interest to the participant teachers. Based on their decisions in terms of their research foci, I provided some literature for them to get their reading started. The devising of data collection tools was next, upon which I advised and reviewed extensively. As the study is currently on-going I am still active in the role of reviewer and advisor. We envisage that the individual studies will be completed by April 2017 upon which, the participant teachers will participate in a research-report writing workshop in school. This will be devised and delivered by myself and the aim of which will be that participant teachers will draft their own research report based around their own research study and findings.

Individual Study Titles

Case Study: The benefits and challenges of providing tailored CPD for training teachers in Practitioner Inquiry.

Practitioner Inquiry Study 1: Exploring the use of Drama to engage students and better prepare for answering exam questions

Practitioner Inquiry Study 2: Exploring the use of key skills to improve student progress and colour-coded feedback to foster self-assessment

Practitioner Inquiry Study 3: Improving student engagement with Maths through varied methodologies and self-assessed homework rubric

Interim Findings and Discussion

As previously mentioned, the study is still ongoing with much data still to be collected and analysed. As a result, what will now follow are brief points that highlight the current position of the case study research as it appears. (Participant Teachers are still analysing data in order to summarise findings to date. These will be reported to me in the coming month.)

Benefits (but not limited to):

- Participant teachers greatly welcomed the opportunity to direct their own CPD and personally choose the theme of the research.
- For all three participants, their studies focus on themes they have already encountered in previous CPD sessions.
- One teacher participant also voiced that he is in the positive position of being able to run this research as a pilot study in order to apply any knowledge gained to conducting a Masters research study next year.
- Teacher participants have expressed how advantageous it is to have a 'CPD trainer' onsite and available to advise them as and when the occasion arises.
- Teacher participants welcome the opportunity to develop themselves on an intellectual level through developing critical thinking skills, innovating and devising their own data collection tools.

Challenges (but not limited to):

- It was originally envisaged that the participant teachers would operate as a Teacher Learning Community in the School. However, this proved very difficult from the outset to accommodate joint meetings where all the participant teachers were present.
- The everyday professional responsibilities of the participant teachers have, as expected, taken priority over the running of their studies. Hence for some it has caused interruption to the implementation of interventions and collecting of data.

- Teacher participants have alluded to the challenges of finding the time to read up on literature in their chosen areas.
- Initially, two teacher participants found it difficult to narrow down the focus of their research into a manageable and succinct study.

Next Steps

It is envisaged that all studies will be completed and research reports written by the Summer of 2017. In addition to this, it is also important that study participants find a format for disseminating their findings. A few opportunities are being explored which include the possibility of teacher participants presenting to 2nd year PME students in the 2017-2018 academic year. Therein lies the opportunity for the teacher participants to further expand their professional skills and experience in teaching third level students who would be embarking on their own and probably very first forays into the world research.

In facilitating this form of dissemination of research findings, it is my hope to explore how and if there may be the opportunity for post-primary schools and third-level institutions to forge stronger bonds in supporting the conducting of research. In my own work as a research supervisor of PME students, it has come to my attention that PME students would benefit greatly from more support and experienced advice when conducting their own research on a daily basis in their cooperating schools. Perhaps therein lies a need to be addressed whereby greater numbers of qualified teaching staff should be supported in conducting structured and meaningful research based on their own interests and the teaching and learning needs of their own classroom and their school.

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