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CPD begins at home

by **Touria Jouilla McKee** (Assistant Director of Studies, Swan)

The ELT (English Language Teaching) landscape in Ireland has seen the growing significance of the CPD (Continuing Professional Development) paradigm for novice and experienced teachers. CPD is an essential element in quality assurance processes for teachers as well as institutions.

CPD is a strategic approach that operates with views to generate awareness and professional progress (Freeman, 1989). It requires a continuous shift toward awareness and the maintaining of one's pedagogical and practical improvement.

Continuing professional development can be in the form of in-house training provided by employers, academic managers, or senior teachers/ trainers. It can also be external, such as attending conferences and education events aimed at broadening teaching skillsets. Ultimately, most teachers are likely to undertake specialised diploma and higher degree courses to further enhance their career prospects and develop areas of expertise in their chosen subjects.

In this article, the focus is on three major areas:

- in-house professional development typically carried out in the form of training sessions offered to novice and experienced EL teachers,
- a proposed CPD training cycle acting as a starting framework in the implementation of in-house CPD,
- a suggested reflective model that could benefit teachers and institutions in making professional development more relevant to teachers' needs and institutional involvement.

1 Challenges for teachers and employers

1.1 For teachers

In-house CPD can pose a challenge to teachers and employers for a variety of reasons. It presents several inhibitors that prevent teachers from feeling motivated to participate in institutional training. Teachers may find the idea of engaging in further training time-consuming or difficult to manage, due to external factors influencing the balance between the demands of classroom teaching and personal commitments.

Teachers may attend CPD training sessions and feel that they could just as easily gain content and pedagogical knowledge 'on the job'; most teachers would argue that a significant proportion of contents delivered in a CPD session is something they have encountered in class and have been exploring as part of their daily work. The key is to embed subjects that offer an equal amount of new content and meaningful practice.

1.2 For employers

For employers, CPD can prove challenging in its complexity when it comes to the design of relevant training and its practical planning. In addition, there is a degree of scepticism surrounding CPD, in that it can seem like a box-ticking task, restricted by external factors, such as quality standards set by education governing bodies. In its complex make-up, the implementation of in-house CPD requires time, resources and, more importantly, a systematic framework for both teacher and employer.

2 CPD begins at home

Teachers' own classrooms can serve as experimental platforms offering the means for professional evaluations and the exploration of attributes at a more meaningful level. This means that CPD should develop from the classroom, combining individual and institutional participation.

Successful CPD must incorporate opportunities for reflection and feedback, as this process places the teacher in the position of a learner (Giraldo, 2014). If a constructivist approach is applied at the institutional level, the teacher is more likely to feel motivated to seek further training to improve best practice and contribute to educational quality standards. Ultimately, this creates a collaborative principle upon which internal CPD can expand to benefit everyone involved.

2.1 What is the teacher good at? What are his/ her fields of interest?

Most experienced teachers and academic professionals would agree that one way of determining specific areas for teachers' CPD training can be drawn from classroom practice. Many teachers, upon reflection on what happens in the classroom, may wish to seek further training in areas they wish to improve. This can range from taking a short Online course involving teaching methodologies in practice to more specialist ELT subjects. An alternative to this could be the focus on what the teacher is passionate about or good at before determining areas for development. For instance, if a teacher enjoys teaching English through drama, further training in materials design or courses specifically tailored for English through drama would present better opportunities to explore a subject they are passionate about. The teacher would be able to expand their pedagogical and practical knowledge in a variety of ways with increased motivation, since this approach would be more personable.

This is not to say that teachers should not seek training in areas that need to be improved. Instead, it could be beneficial to begin with personal strengths, qualities, or exceptional skillsets to generate self-motivation and interest in CPD. It is also extremely likely that teachers whose strengths are acknowledged and enriched, would discover elements of their teaching that require further development after this initial process.

3 First steps to implementing in-house CPD planning: CPD training cycle

Most CPD training relies on a variety of models that are effective and have been used by countless institutions and training providers worldwide (Giraldo, 2014). A simple starting point in designing a plan for in-house CPD can be in the form of a training cycle that allows teachers and academic directors to fully reflect on the nature and content of training materials.

One way of achieving this is through employing proven theories for learning cycles. Since the teacher is likely to be in a continuous cycle of professional development as they make progress through various stages in their ELT career. Kolb's theory of experiential learning applies to the process of learning for teachers in many ways. Kolb's experiential learning cycle theory (Kolb, 1984) highlights 4 essential steps:

- ◆ Concrete experience: the learner encounters a new learning experience or concept
- ◆ Reflective observation: the learner reflects on the experience and its relation to his/ her understanding
- ◆ Abstract conceptualisation: a new learning process may emerge, ideas may arise from the learned skill or experience
- ◆ Active experimentation: The learner uses the knowledge gained from the experience and applies it to an aspect around them or in a chosen context

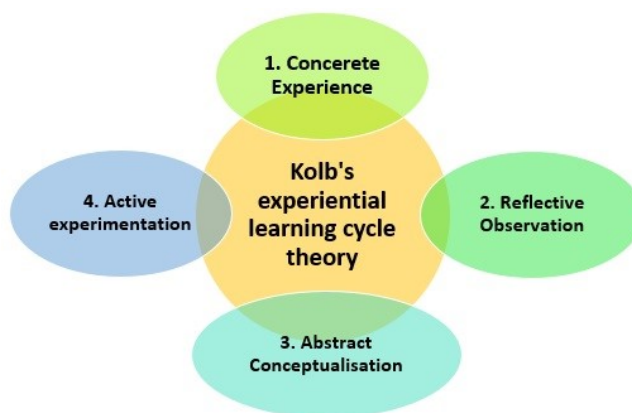


Figure1: Kolb's experiential learning cycle theory, Abdulwahed & Nagy, 2009

3.1 Applying Kolb's learning cycle for teachers

The adaptation of Kolb's theory for teachers can follow the same above steps, with adjustments for reflective practice and the application of the theory in the classroom (see figure 2).

For instance, following a CPD session, teachers can be invited to reflect on the taught content and carry out their own research. Next, they can engage in abstract conceptualisation by assessing emerging ideas against the training they received in the CPD session. During this process, a teacher thinks of adjustments, adaptations and ways to employ any theories or skills learned to their own teaching context.

3.2 Applying Kolb's learning cycle for employers

Most CPD proformas are designed for teachers and presented by academic/ senior trainers or employers. These frameworks serve as a useful skeleton for institutions to follow individual progress and review teachers' performance as they continue in their CPD cycle. Such processes can be used during teachers' appraisals or performance reviews. They can also serve as a guided tool for the individual teacher to plan action points for further development. The same process could be extended to those offering in-house CPD, whereby an adaptation of the experiential learning cycle at the institutional level (see figure 3) would serve as an invaluable tool and, in turn, benefit the employer in:

- ◆ keeping a detailed, systematic record of individual achievements and progress
- ◆ assessing CPD outcomes against the chosen training cycle and adapting the latter accordingly
- ◆ using the training cycle as a tool for internal assessments of procedures: by identifying areas for improvement to meet quality assurance standards
- ◆ contributing as much effort as the teacher during the reflective process and engaging in collaborative comparisons of the said cycles for both teachers and institutions.

Kolb's experiential learning cycle theory

Abdulwahed & Nagy, 2009

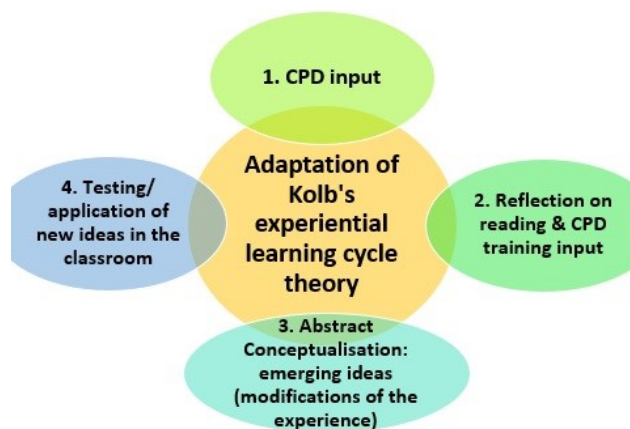


Figure 2: Adaptation of Kolb's experiential theory cycle for in-house CPD

4 Post CPD reflective Reading

Dewey defines reflection as the 'active, persistent and careful consideration of any belief or supposed form of knowledge in the light of the grounds that support it and the further conclusions to which it tends.' (Dewey 1933, p.9)

4.1 Proposed reflective reading for teachers:

One way of ensuring teachers fully benefit from in-house training can be through reflective background reading. If, prior to CPD sessions, teachers are asked to read related scholarly sources on a subject, they can be invited to write a brief reflective summary about what they have taken away from reading materials, relate it to their own teaching context and draw a structured action plan to achieve their CPD outcomes.

The focus on reflection is not a new concept, however it remains a crucial element of self-development, and has been used in a wide array of specialist fields outside the world of ELT. There is a plethora of CPD reflective frameworks in most disciplines, systematically used and applied to maintain the continuing development of specialised knowledge. In the nursing profession, for example, practitioners keep a reflective record of their career development training to enable structured and effective progress in their daily work (Bulman, 2013). One of the proposed frameworks used by nurses focusses explicitly on reflective practice entailing the reading of scholarly articles and relevant medical literature, reviewing findings against individual professional contexts and drawing action plans for future development.

This model of reflective practice can be applied to ELT in-house CPD for several reasons. Firstly, obtaining background knowledge from proven sources helps teachers to conceptualise topics covered in training sessions, which supports the framework for the proposed training cycles shown in figures 1-3. Secondly, scholarly references would solidify newly learned information and enable the teacher to critically reflect on CPD in relation to classroom practice. In addition, creating a reflective model that requires background reading can mark the beginning of a pathway in individual reflective practice, ultimately promoting a culture of structured CPD that combines theoretical and practical frameworks.

A brief reflective reading log for teachers can be a powerful tool used to revisit what has been learned. It can assist in drawing action plans for teachers to discuss findings with peers as well as generate research opportunities in subjects of importance for teachers and learners.

The reflective model should:

- ◆ place emphasis on whether the teacher found the CPD topic useful/ interesting/ stimulating...etc.
- ◆ ask specific questions relating to the topic and relevant literature
- ◆ be specific and mapped to in-house CPD topics and contexts
- ◆ include questions relating to background reading to ensure full involvement in CPD
- ◆ leave room for feedback from teachers and create opportunities for collaborative work.

5.2 Proposed CPD reflective checklist for employers:

In the same way a teacher would carry out further reading as part of the reflective process, institutions could use a similar approach by having a checklist to reflect on the effectiveness and feasibility of in-house training. Teachers can arrive at findings stemming from post-reading reflection while institutions can use the same principle to improve the quality of the CPD training they offer. Therefore, having a reflective checklist can aid the future implementation of CPD programmes that can benefit students, teachers and employers (table 2). This proposed checklist can be further expanded as a tool for institutional

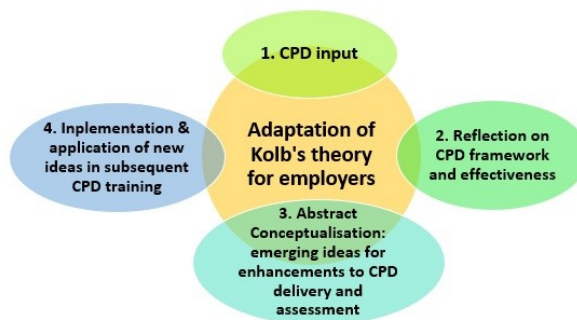


Figure 3: Adaptation of Kolb's experiential cycle theory for employers

Adaptation of Kolb's experiential theory cycle for in-house CPD

By author

Identify areas that interested you in the CPD: _____
List any new ideas or reinforced learning you found useful in the article/blog/chapter...etc. _____
What were the most useful areas from the CPD for your own context? _____
Name 3-5 ideas or concepts you would like to take from the article and apply to your teaching _____ _____ _____
How do you intend to achieve this? E.g. through materials design, peer observations, expansion toward external/ broader CPD...etc. _____
Give recommendations for future CPD sessions that might best meet your needs _____
Things I learned from this CPD: _____
Things I learned from the article/blog/references: _____

Proposed reflective

Proposed reflective checklist for employers

By author

internal auditing to meet quality assurance principles, by revisiting CPD from a subjective as well as objective outlook.

Conclusion

This article sought to present alternative steps to using CPD as a means of bridging the gap between theoretical and practical knowledge for teachers through in-house CPD training.

The proposed adaptations to CPD apply to my own experience and observations in ELT institutions and the further education sector and were a result of ongoing research in professional development in ELT. The adapted training cycle framework could be an initial process benefiting collaborative efforts toward meaningful practice while maintaining quality standards.

The suggested reflective log and checklist (tables 1 and 2), can be further utilised in collaborative CPD involving teachers and employers, which would create a more dynamic partnership among peers and across departments. In addition to reducing any reservations teachers or, indeed, employers may have toward CPD and its applications in the workplace, taking the first steps to designing a framework would ensure the meaningful involvement of institutions and developing teachers, working collaboratively toward better teaching and learning standards.

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CPD Reflective checklist for employers/ managers	Tick where appropriate	Comments
Are CPD materials supported by scholarly references and relevant literature?	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Has the teacher been given enough time to reflect on the CPD and related literature?	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Are there plans in place for collaborative discussions with the teacher and peers to review training and learning outcomes?	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Is there clear evidence of guided reflective practice?	<input type="checkbox"/>	
How will you incorporate relevant literature into the teacher's CPD?		
Have you made revisions/ enhancements/ improvements to the CPD for future training?	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Have you reflected on the planning, delivery, content and implementation of the CPD session?	<input type="checkbox"/>	
List 3-5 things you have learned from this CPD cycle as an in-house trainer/ training provider:		
•		
•		
•		
•		

Table 2: Proposed reflective checklist for employers

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