



Helen Moore, project leader of the Early Professional Development evaluation

From new recruit to the point of promotion

'I have applied for heads of year jobs because I quite enjoyed the pastoral stuff ... I have gone for a second in languages and second in IT ... I have applied for any promotion that's going really and I am confident I can do any of those roles.'

This is the buoyant position of a languages and ICT teacher from a West Country secondary school at the end of his third year of teaching. Rewind back two years, however, and his situation was quite different. Having '*struggled for a lot of it*' during his NQT year, at the start of his second year his confidence was low and his future, uncertain: '*I am still really just trying out being a teacher ... if it doesn't get better ... I will probably find something else to do*'. Two years on and his conviction and career were flourishing. His progress was attributed to his involvement in a scheme that made Early Professional Development (EPD) available to teachers in their second and third years of their careers.

About the Early Professional Development scheme

The EPD scheme was set up by the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) and ran from 2001–2004. It was established amid fears at the time about the number of new entrants leaving the profession within their first five years of service. Plus, there were concerns about a potential gap in teachers' professional development in the time between the end of their NQT induction year and prior to middle-management leadership and headship training. Thus, funding was made available (a total of £3,150 per teacher) to support profession development over the second and third years of their careers.

About the research

I, together with a team of researchers from the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER), investigated the impact of EPD on participating teachers and their schools in the 12 local authorities where the scheme was running. The professional development landscape has changed since the scheme and its funding concluded, with a shift in emphasis at national level away from ring-fenced grants (like EPD) and a move towards building schools' capacity for effective professional development. None the less, during the course of the research, key

lessons emerged about the professional development of early career teachers. In this article I relay some of what the hundreds of second and third year teachers involved in the study told us about:

- the impact of EPD
- how they achieved maximum benefit through professional development and
- the professional development practices they found most effective.

The impact of EPD ...

What was made plain by the teachers that we spoke to or surveyed for the research was the substantial impact of EPD on themselves. For example, in the final year of the research, more than three-quarters of the 1,400 teachers in the sample reported that EPD had impacted on their professional practices and attitudes to a considerable degree. In addition, not only did they benefit, but the positive effects radiated to those they taught and worked with, and to the profession overall.

... for the teachers themselves

Chief among the outcomes that teachers experienced were effects on their teaching practice and focus on career and professional development. Around 75 per cent of those surveyed experienced considerable impacts in these areas. Enhanced confidence was also a key gain. Instilled with this greater confidence, teachers reported having implemented new teaching practices and of being able to pursue their chosen career paths, and these, in turn, helped them feel more content in their chosen profession.

... for pupils

Pupils were also beneficiaries. The vast majority of surveyed teachers reported that improvements in their own practice as a result of EPD had considerably enhanced their pupils' learning. This was the top-rated impact in the final year of the study. Interviewed teachers commented on improvements in their pupils' behaviour, motivation and enjoyment of lessons, too.

... for their colleagues and school

The early professional development of teachers led to them becoming more effective members of their school communities, with more than 70 per cent of teachers and those who mentored them acknowledging that the impact had been considerable. Teachers performed leadership or coordinator roles more effectively or took them on for the first time. They implemented key school systems, e.g. initiatives like Healthy Schools, new courses, schemes

of work and extra-curricular activities. They disseminated their learning, leading to the advancement of other teachers' practice.

... for the profession

The teaching profession also gained. The research included a comparative group of second and third year teachers who were not in receipt of the EPD experience. EPD teachers expressed their conviction that they would remain in teaching in greater numbers (70 per cent) than this comparative group (59 per cent). Thus, the potential to aid retention was underlined.

Achieving maximum benefit through EPD

How were outcomes of the range and scale set out above achieved? Analysis of teachers' questionnaire and interview responses identified the following factors as pivotal in maximising impacts from professional development for second and third year teachers.

Teacher autonomy

Teachers who had some control over decisions regarding the form and focus of their professional development were much more likely to benefit from it. This was true to the extent that the greater teachers' level of involvement in selecting their professional development opportunities, the greater the outcomes they derived. Above all, teacher autonomy was key in achieving positive impacts for teachers' subject knowledge, pupils' learning, teaching practice and commitment to teaching.

School support

The degree of support that teachers felt they received from their school was a further important factor in enabling them to gain the most from their early professional development opportunities. In particular, the support of their school was linked to advances in teachers' commitment to teaching, their ability to take on leadership roles and their contribution to their colleagues and the school.

Mentor support

What also emerged strongly was the importance of mentoring for early career teachers. The mentoring relationship was particularly influential for second year teachers, with improvements in their teaching practice (especially behaviour management) and their career development (including gaining promotions) attributed to the advice and support they received from their mentor. For third year teachers, mentoring remained valuable in terms of their commitment, morale and desire to develop professionally.

Effective practices in professional development

In prioritising teacher autonomy and mentoring and reinforcing the value of school support, EPD highlights valuable lessons for professional development. The experience also offers evidence for early career teachers on how these work best in practice.

- As regards teacher autonomy, this had the greatest gains when teachers were mindful of school needs as well as their own, and in their decision making ensured that their professional development activities would profit themselves, their colleagues and their school.
- Achieving impacts at school level was as dependent on the teacher as it was on the support of the school leadership team. School-wide outcomes were strongest when teachers recognised the potential of their professional learning to be of benefit to their colleagues, were willing (and were given the opportunity) to disseminate, and took the lead in developing a wider role for themselves in school.
- Although there are time pressures, EPD underlined how mentoring can be a mutually beneficial relationship, with the mentor potentially deriving satisfaction from the role and enhancing their own professional development. To gain the most from the mentoring relationship, the EPD experience shows that teachers should have involvement in selecting their mentor and have the support of regular meetings. Whilst the success of EPD as a scheme in itself was unquestionably aided by the existence of ring-fenced funding, there are elements of it that may be implemented in the current professional development landscape. Mentoring would be one such example.
- The forms of professional development that had most relevance for second and third year teachers and the greatest impact on their practice included: observing other practitioners, shadowing and discussions with specialist teachers, research and using any non-contact time to develop their role in school.

To conclude ...

The strength of the impacts from EPD shows what can be achieved for the individual, the school and the profession when the teacher is able to take a directive role in their professional development with support from a mentor and their school. Finally, to end, further endorsement from a second year teacher in their own words:

'Taking the reins of your own professional development in the school and ... having somebody that you can spend 20 minutes [with] ... fortnightly, but who is saying to you, 'You are doing that really well. What you need to look at now is this ...', someone who has been and done it, I don't think you could cope without that, to be perfectly honest.'

End notes

This article stems from NFER's evaluation of the Early Professional Development pilot scheme. The research was conducted on behalf of the DfES. The evidence presented was collected over three years and is based on 555 interviews in case-study schools, 4,535 questionnaire returns from participating second and third year teachers and their mentors, and 1,530 questionnaire returns from a comparative sample of second and third year teachers who had not been in receipt of the EPD experience. The EPD scheme ran in the following 12 local authorities: Birmingham, Brighton and Hove, Cornwall, Croydon, Cumbria, Hammersmith and Fulham, Hampshire, Kensington and Chelsea, Lewisham, Newham, Stoke-on-Trent and Wakefield.

Report

MOOR, H., HALSEY, K., JONES, M., MARTIN, K., STOTT, A., BROWN, C. and HARLAND, J. (2005). *Professional Development for Teachers Early in their Careers: An evaluation of the Early Professional Development pilot scheme*. Available:

<http://www.dfes.gov.uk/research/data/uploadfiles/RR613.pdf> (full report)

<http://www.dfes.gov.uk/research/data/uploadfiles/RB613.pdf> (research brief)