

Ways to continuing professional development

Lifelong learning and continuous professional development in my opinion are much the same thing.

I doubt if many people would say that learning throughout one's life is not a good aim to have. However, as far as CPD (Continuing Professional Development) goes, I have always been disheartened to see how some teachers are happy to go on much as they always have done, doing a reasonable job but not developing to any great extent. Meanwhile, others strive to push their boundaries and actively create challenges for themselves, learning from their experiences and adding to their skills and their self knowledge, often in their own time.

Many of us are somewhere in the middle. We want to develop professionally, and while we are mindful of maintaining a healthy work-life balance, we are prepared to find the time we need within our working lives to learn, develop and thereby improve our practice.

I recently did some research for a conference presentation via an email questionnaire to experienced teachers, to find out about their CPD. Most of the 34 teachers who responded had been teaching for ten years or more, in private language schools, universities and colleges. One question asked if they considered their CPD opportunities to be good, adequate, inadequate or non-existent; more than half of them said they considered their CPD to be good or adequate. Another question asked what activities they had been involved in to keep up their CPD. I also asked those who considered their CPD to be inadequate what activities would be ideal for them.

These were the areas which emerged:

Experts

There is a lot to be learnt through taking advantage of all the experienced and expert practitioners in the field of ELT, by attending sessions they may give at conferences or, if teachers are lucky, talks that are available in their vicinity. Reading readily-available articles and books written by 'experts' and participating in online events or blogs with invited professionals is an alternative if 'experts' are not available in the flesh somewhere near you.

F2F workshops

Similar to the above, but not necessarily with known ELT professionals. Often teachers get a lot more out of smaller, more intimate workshops where there is the opportunity to discuss and debate ideas and opinions and take away ideas for classroom activities and to reflect on.

Online communities

These may include an interactive virtual conference such as the annual IATEFL online conferences sponsored by the British Council, or the blogs on the TeachingEnglish website, or other forums and discussion boards set up to encourage participation around ELT topics by teachers from all over the world.

Talking informally

Joining other teachers in the staffroom discussing their next lesson or the materials they are using is one of the easiest and most effective ways of developing, especially if you borrow the ideas and try them out in your own classes.

Individual reading

Another easy way to learn that can include internet materials and journals as well as actual books, which can be expensive and difficult to obtain in some parts of the world. We can read anywhere in any short piece of snatched free time.

Reading groups

While reading is done individually, what is learnt can be formalised in discussion in a reading group. Set a text to read and come together with colleagues a few weeks later to discuss its content. So much can be learnt through sharing of impressions and discussing issues the reading material raises.

Programmed action research

You may be lucky enough to have a head of department or principal who wants research results which shed light on what is going on in his or her institution, and is prepared to provide time for teachers to provide the evidence. This is one interpretation of programmed action research, though there are lots of others, and teachers cannot help but learn from the experience and the results.

Individual action research

Similar to the above, but teacher-directed and not 'imposed'. Often very small scale, nevertheless so much can be learnt from studying your students or yourself in the classroom, and there is a huge range of aspects of teaching which you can put under an action research microscope.

Giving sessions

This can range from a small in-school meeting where teaching ideas are shared right through to a session at a large international conference. All conference speakers started small and all teachers have something to say. This is a particularly effective way to develop due to the planning and research which takes place before the session as well as the discussion and feedback which it provokes.

Writing

Similar to the above, writing ranges from short articles right through to books. Keeping a

diary and reflecting on your teaching is a good way to start and there are plenty of models out there to learn from, while the preparation and research necessary teaches you as much as the writing and rewriting itself.

Doing a formal course

This is often the first thing people think of when they think about professional development. But it is often the most prohibitive due to time and expense, and often courses do not provide exactly what is needed. If you are lucky enough to be able to follow a course, however, make the most of the time you have laid aside for thinking and learning, because doing a course is a great way to develop.

Membership of professional bodies

This can provide opportunities and facilitation of many of the areas above, and although subscriptions can appear expensive, there is often so much offered by a professional body that it justifies the expense. Prepare to be active though, as so often you will get more out of it the more you put in yourself.

Other ways

The teachers I surveyed also talked about the following things they had done that they found helped their professional development:

- Engaging in new professional activities, doing things for the first time.
- Peer observation.
- Trying out different methods/approaches in class (sort of like action research).
- Reflective and exploratory practice though not programmed or formally monitored.
- Being trained up as a teacher trainer.
- Completing an online course to be an e-tutor.
- Participating in projects in a group with fellow professionals.
- Forming a local group: to discuss issues and take turns to lead sessions.

As you see there are plenty of ways to keep up your continuous professional development in ELT. If a number of these activities are combined into a planned, interlinked programme, with monitoring and evaluation, even if only by the teacher him or herself, there can be real, satisfying results for teachers wishing to keep up and improve their professional development.

Taken from:

Johnson, J. (30 de abril de 2021). *Ways to continuing professional development*. BBC British Council Teaching English. <https://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/article/ways-continuing-professional-development>