

We need to talk about subjects: findings from a review of subject-specific professional development and learning for teachers

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A case in point

- Take a moment to identify:
 - A natural enthusiast colleague/pupil you like to use as a champion/ cheerleader for change
 - A convertible sceptic who always questions and challenges new approaches but, when convinced, tackles them well
 - A “Skilled disappearer” someone whose role suggests they should be a champion for change but who seems to slip / keep below the radar
- Keep them in mind through this presentation as a way of thinking through how you might apply it



- Key findings
- Our own good practice
- Barriers to subject specific CPDL
- Ways of overcoming them
- Implications
- An example of applying them from St Mary's
- Why it matters



Why does it matter?

- It isn't that we are saying that teachers don't know enough. Many do. Or that only subject knowledge matters. Far from it.
- But in a fast-changing world subject knowledge grows rapidly, teachers are being asked to teach beyond their specialisms and skills/capacities flourish in the context of deep knowledge.
- By locating CPD in different subject contexts we give teachers chance to:
 - enrich their own and their pupils' learning.
 - consider and make deeper links between subjects, skills and capacities and the wider world. E.G. learning to deepen thinking through Geography or History creates powerful stepping stones into demanding pedagogies whose full potential is rarely realised.
 - explore the skills and capacities that subjects enhance and depend upon.
- Above all SSCPD helps teachers push beyond narrow assessment requirements to work in ways that bring knowledge and subjects to life for their pupils.



Subject specific versus generic CPD

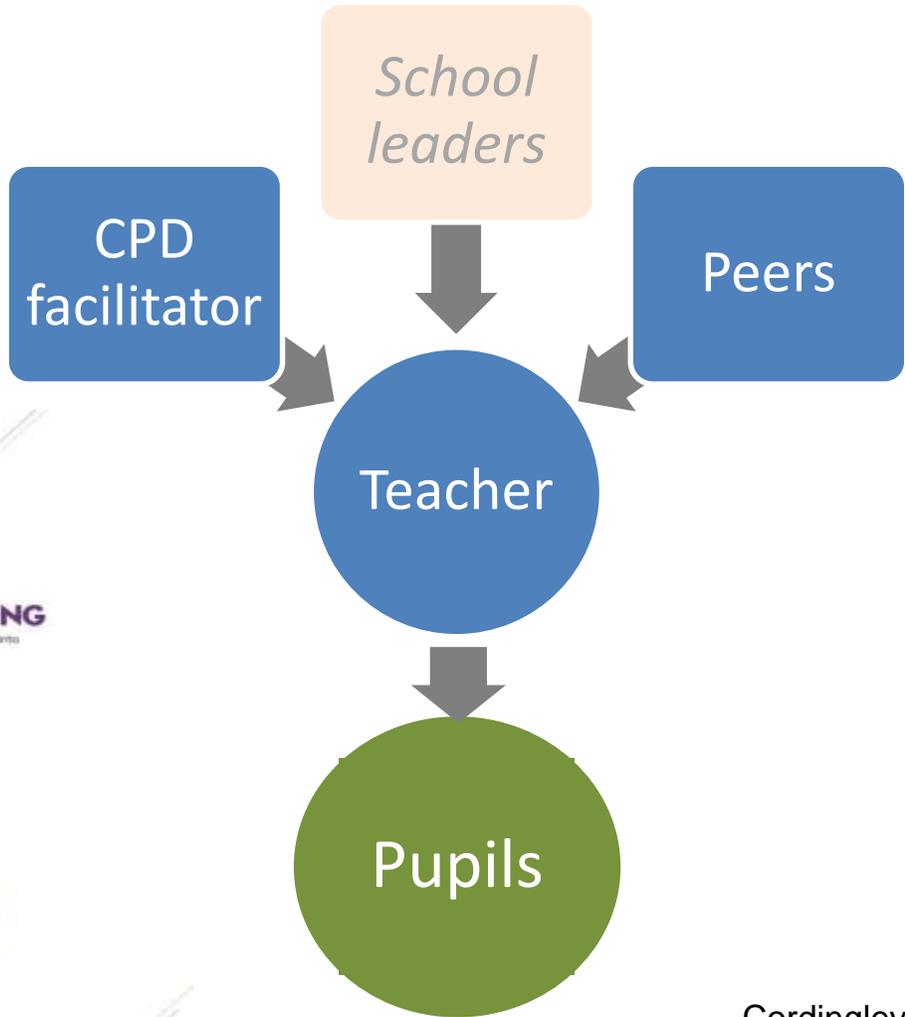
Subject specific CPD - programmes and activities which focus on:

- enhancing teachers' understanding of the subjects they teach, how pupils learn in those subjects and how to teach them – encompassing both subject and pedagogic content knowledge; or
- helping teachers understand how pedagogic issues and approaches might apply to specific learning issues in the subjects they teach, in explicit and structured ways.

Generic pedagogic CPD - activities and programmes which seek to develop teaching and learning approaches which can be applied across any subject area.



Developing Great Teaching review - 2015



Consistent finding across all reviews

Carefully designed/aligned teacher CPDL with a strong focus on pupil outcomes has a significant impact on student achievement

Generic pedagogic CPD does not work - effective CPD is contextualised for subjects

DEVELOPING GREAT TEACHING
Lessons from the international reviews into effective professional development

TEACHER DEVELOPMENT TRUST



International comparisons

Teachers in England engage in less CPD overall and are less likely to engage in SSCP CPD than in most other high performing countries. E.G.

- Under **50%** of teachers in England experienced curriculum-related CPD in the 12 months before TALIS - but almost **90%** of teachers in Shanghai and **80%** of teachers in Singapore did.
- English teachers **three times less likely** than international peers to say they need more subject-specific CPD
- Why might that be so?



Possible explanations/questions

- Some teachers reported feeling that their professionalism is slighted if they are invited to participate in CPD related to their subjects - does that apply more broadly?
- Has the appetite for internalising CPD in school to reduce costs and build capacity through SLT-led CPD, led to generic pedagogic approaches providing an HCF or LCD diet of pedagogic CPD geared to consistency and getting everyone delivering “outstanding” lessons?
- Perhaps our teachers know their subjects better and/or feel it’s their responsibility to stay up to date with their subject as it develops?
- Perhaps teachers in England don’t know what they are missing?



Key findings from review in England/UK

- **Existing subject knowledge of teachers is often weak** – compounded by recruitment challenges
- **Needs differ between schools** – especially in relations to e.g. size, phase and stage on improvement journey
- Subject Specific **CPD is mostly restricted to English and maths in primary schools**
- Changes in **curriculum and assessment policies** are key drivers of demand for SS CPD, but are often limited to assessment/exam board briefings etc



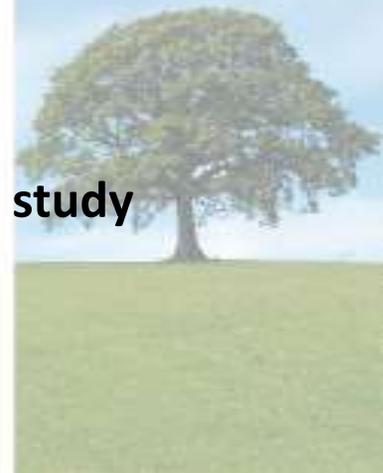
Subject specific differences

- There are important **differences between different subjects** (maths, science and English) in terms of how the effective CPD in these areas is designed for impact.
- Differences relate to:
 - how the **subject content connects with the curriculum and pre-existing teacher knowledge;**
 - **how new approaches** and new subject/pedagogic content knowledge **are supported through classroom materials for different subjects; and**
 - **how CPD content reflects the values and nature of the subject discipline** in question.



Key findings from review in England/UK

- **School cultures and levels of expertise** shape how far subject specific needs are identified and addressed. Some schools, especially those under pressure post OFSTED, don't know what they don't know about subject specific CPD
- **Performance review** is widely used to **identify and balance individual and whole school CPD needs.**
 - Schools with a strong CPD offer put a lot of **effort into doing this systematically**, using different evidence sources and aligning analysis of individual needs including in relation to subjects, with school self-evaluation, improvement and CPD activities
- **Strategies for achieving balance include**
 - **Offering choices** to teachers and ensuring a range in the CPD offer
 - More individualised CPD processes such as **collaborative enquiry, coaching and lesson study**



Key findings from review in England/UK

- **School leaders** have a big role in setting CPD expectations and shaping how far SSCPD is prioritised, supported and aligned/integrated with other internal initiatives.
- Middle leaders, heads of departments and senior leaders:
 - **Enable staff to participate** in CPD and to implement what they learn from it,
 - **Create the necessary conditions** for effective SSCPD to flourish.
 - **Determine the level of control** that individual staff have over their own CPD
- This varied across school case studies and phases, but in general **teachers had less control in lower performing schools.**



Discussion – in pairs/threes

- What is your best experience of subject-specific CPD – what does ‘good’ look like in your view?



Barriers – findings from the review

- **Budgets and resources** - most significant?
- **Teacher workloads** – managing rhythm and suitably elapsed time for CPDL as well as quantum
- Lack of **quality assurance in the market place** - schools rely on what is familiar and focus on codified knowledge ('best practices')
- **Perceptions of CPD quality** - a vicious circle of low expectations v healthy reliance on in-school and school:school support models?
- **Competing improvement priorities** – impact of the accountability framework



Overcoming barriers – findings

- **Networks** – have grown in importance in England as LA support reduced. Some Multi Academy Trusts (MATs) developing subject-specific expertise in core teams and Teaching Schools often have subject networks
- **Secondary schools with strong CPD** do still seek out external SSCPD support
- Many **primary schools seek out SSCPD for English, maths, and** (less so) science



Implications

- **Changes in curriculum and assessment policies are key drivers of demand** - but need to move beyond exam board briefings and raise the quality bar
- Low expectations are not universal – but **need to identify and share what great – and poor – practice looks like.**
- The **current CPD market isn't providing this, so need government to step in** to create some stepping stones – though consultation on QTS and funding for SSIF/TLIF etc are helping to introduce some evidence based quality bars.



Implications

- Schools and CPD leaders need help in understanding **the real costs of CPD** and to be able to spend their money more effectively on things that last and work. The accountability system and CPD market focusses on inputs and fails to encourage this.
- There is a need **for more CPD for school and CPD leaders** to help them:
 - understand the evidence about what effective CPD looks like, especially the evidence about the nature and impact of subject-specific CPD;
 - how to judge the quality of CPD opportunities provision suggested by heads of departments/phase and/or external providers.



A case study - What applying these findings looks like in St Mary's Blackpool?

- **A student facing goal** would be to
 - ensure students can make strong connections between their learning within subjects and the learning beyond to school in order to deepen their engagement and accelerate progress
- **A staff facing goal** would be to
 - deepen subject specific CPDL and give priority to it to ensure that teachers feel able to contextualise the learning they are doing in response to analysing progress for specific subjects
- **A leadership facing goal** would be to
 - help Middle leaders recognise and support research informed, subject specific CPDL by identifying and analysing existing strong practices and barriers to such practices in other contexts.



What might success in applying these findings look like in St Mary's?

This might mean:

- identifying and ***enquiring into how subject specific CPDL works*** in faculties/ departments where this is already working well; and
- helping colleagues involved ***distil the CPDL principles, activities and assumptions*** on which this approach depends and the benefits it bring to students and staff
- identifying ***areas where curriculum structures and or staffing patterns make this more difficult*** (e.g. areas with specialist teachers working solo or where leaders are inexperienced)
- ***exploring ways of adapting and transferring successful practices*** in one subject area to others, with appropriate support, including and especially work around progress tracking and use of the research route maps; and
- identifying ***areas needing new approaches or additional support***, e.g. for time working and learning in other schools, is needed



Questions

- Are we ambitious enough about developing SS CPD?
- How far does the “study-for-your-subject-first-and-learn-about-teaching-and-learning second”, PGCE model help to explain England’s distinctive position?
- Would our teachers value the overseas experience of cross examining subject, curriculum, pedagogy and patterns in the way pupils learn side by side? Would critiquing text books for sub groups of pupils help?
- What are the challenges/issues we need to address to raise expectations?



Methods

- Rapid practice and research review across the UK
- Analysis of grey literature including extensive new evaluations and surveys
- Update and extension of Developing Great Teaching
- Phone interviews
- Comparison of patterns in UK with high performing countries
- Analysis and synthesis for Wellcome's questions and patterns in data



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