

DIDACTICA LIMBILOR

NEW APPROACHES TO CONTINUING PROFESSIONAL GROWTH FOR ENGLISH TEACHERS

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Rezumat: *Didactica limbii engleze este un domeniu dinamic, ce înregistrează apariția numeroaselor abordări, metode ale procesului de predare. Cunoașterea acestor inovații este o necesitate a timpului, care garantează un proces educativ eficient. În acest context, prezentul studiu abordează importanța formării continue a profesorilor de limbă engleză. În articol sînt analizate modelele principale ale formării continue, precum și factorii ce contribuie la eficacitatea procesului de formare continuă.*

Cuvinte-cheie: *formare contunuă, conștientizare, abordare modernă, noi strategii de predare, metode, modele de formare continuă, abilități profesionale.*

With the extensive use of the English language across the world, it has definitely become indispensable to raise English language teachers' awareness concerning the approaches, strategies, methods and techniques they need to use while planning their activities, as well as adjust their own teaching practices, so that they are in conformity with the European Framework of Languages that will definitely increase the current status of English as an international language.

Despite the fact that most of these practices are, as a rule, learnt at University first, later obtained and reinforced through practice in class, they need permanent updating. It could be done only through continuous professional development (CPD). It is considered that efficient CPD should consider the following perspectives – teachers' individual needs and aspirations, the needs of the institution and last but not least, national policies and priorities.

This article is intended for professionals working in the English language teaching domain who want to find the best ways to develop and progress as language teachers. Professional growth (PG) gives teachers looking for new career pathways unique opportunities to further develop their skills and prospects. Foreign language teachers understand that PG should go beyond personal contemplation how to comprise new tendencies and theories in modern foreign language teaching.

Firstly, it would be reasonable to clarify the specific terminology itself, as educators use various terms to describe, in fact, the same process of improving teachers' professional skills. While researching the topic we came across the following terms: Continuous professional development=CPD; Continuous professional growth = CPG and Continuous education = CE. In this article we will use the term CPD as it is more widely used in specialised literature. Experts consider that the term CPD was first used by Richard Gardner in the mid-1970s. "His intention was the introduction of a framework of professional development that sought to re-establish the links between education and practice, which he saw as lacking in post-qualified practising professionals" (*Abbott 2014: 169*).

The term CPD was chosen because "it did not differentiate between learning from courses, and learning 'on the job'. [...] CPD embraces the idea that individuals aim for continuous improvement in their professional skills and knowledge, beyond the basic training initially required to carry out the job. In teaching, such development used to be called 'in-service training', or INSET, with the emphasis on delivery rather than the outcome. Arguably, the change in terminology signifies a shift in emphasis away from the provider and/or employer, towards the individual. In other words, the individual is now responsible for his or her lifelong career development, under the umbrella of the school or schools that employ the teacher" (*Gray 2005: 5*). Furthermore, the issuer of CPD definition also seems to be controversial, and several definitions of CPD should be considered, but, in our opinion, Day's definition is the most precise and comprehensive. According to Day continuous "professional development consists of all natural learning experiences and those conscious and planned activities which are intended to be of direct or indirect benefit to the individual, group or school, which contribute, through these, to the quality of education in the classroom. It is the process by which, alone and with others, teachers review, renew and extend their commitment as change agents to the moral purpose of teaching; and by which they acquire and develop critically the knowledge, skills

and emotional intelligence essential to good professional thinking, planning and practice with children, young people and colleagues throughout each phase of their teaching lives” (Day 1999: 4).

David Hustler et al. defined CPD as “activities...that increase the skills, knowledge and understanding of teachers, and their effectiveness in schools and also promotes continuous reflection and re-examination of professional learning. This includes, but goes well beyond, training courses and a wide variety of other on and off the job activities” (Hustler 2003: 1).

We can conclude that continuing professional development is a word used by professionals to describe the multitude of activities in which teachers get engaged in during their teaching career, that aim at improving their daily work. In our opinion, the key characteristics of an effective CPD process that develops and updates one’s professional skills and knowledge should be a self-directed documented practice designed by the teacher him/herself, not by the employer. It should definitely be based on reflective learning, on a fundamental review of resources, and focus on the best practices of more experienced colleagues. The teacher him/herself should set long-term aims that will include formal and informal learning. Such clear-cut objectives will definitely demonstrate the employers that the teacher has got a clear perspective of his/her career growth. At the same time the administration should create certain conditions and opportunities for teachers to improve their professional skills.

Sandra Leaton Gray has provided an interesting comparison of the characteristics of good versus poor quality CPD provision. According to her research results, *good quality provision* is:

- “economical in terms of time and money;
- carefully researched, in terms of teacher needs;
- well-presented, preferably by a teacher or a cutting-edge research scientist with relevant teaching experience;
- giving plenty of fresh, relevant information;
- offering opportunities during the day for reflection upon what was being learnt;
- likely to have immediate impact upon their return to the classroom;
- likely to improve general subject knowledge and understanding;
- offering scope for later follow-up, support and networking;
- offering scope for feedback both during the session and later on, beyond the feedback form usually provided on the day” (Leaton Gray 2005: 20).

In contrast, according to Gray, *poor quality provision* is wasteful in terms of resources such as time, money and teacher enthusiasm. It has undertaken insufficient planning and tailoring to teacher needs, and it proves poor presentation skills, mainly when the presenter is not familiar with current classroom practices or curriculum content. It is also characterised by duplicated or irrelevant information, and it overloads teachers with information. Moreover, teachers are unclear about the quality and relevance of the information given to them. It also involves unclear or dubious relevance to classroom practice, duplication of teachers’ initial teacher training, isolated event with no subsequent opportunities for discussion or communication, and teachers have little ‘ownership’ of process via their own input (Leaton Gray 2005: 20).

Many of the above mentioned features seem to mirror CPD characteristics proposed by Riding in one of his articles in which he claims that a good CPD should be on-going, provide opportunities for individual reflection and group enquiry, be school-based and embedded in teacher work, be collaborative, be rooted in a knowledge base of teaching, be accessible and inclusive (Riding 2001: 283-284).

A key factor in ensuring effective CPD is matching appropriate professional development provision to particular professional needs. This ‘fit’ between the developmental needs of the teacher and the selected activity is important in ensuring that there is a positive impact at the school and classroom level. It could be achieved through several ways, i.e. there are a number of CPD models to follow.

According to Lieberman, the main CPD models could be divided into:

1. *Direct teaching* – courses, workshops, etc.;
2. *Learning in school* – peer coaching, critical friendships, mentoring, action research, and task-related planning teams;
3. *Out of school learning* – learning networks, visits to other schools, school-university partnerships, etc. (Lieberman 2002: 321)

Another classification, provided by Kennedy, outlines nine models of CPD:

1. *Training* – focuses on skills, with expert delivery, and little practical focus.
2. *Award Bearing* – usually in conjunction with a higher education institution, this brings the worrying discourse on the irrelevance of academia to the fore
3. *Defecit* – this looks at addressing shortcomings in an individual teacher, it tends to be individually tailored, but may not be good for confidence and is unsupportive of the development of a collective knowledge base within the school
4. *Cascade* – this is relatively cheap in terms of resources, but there are issues surrounding the loss of a collaborative element in the original learning
5. *Standards Based* – this assumes that there is a system of effective teaching, and is not flexible in terms of teacher learning. It can be useful for developing a common language but may be very narrow and limiting.
6. *Coaching / Mentoring* – the development of a non-threatening relationship can encourage discussion, but a coach or mentor needs good communication skills.
7. *Community of Practice* – these may inhibit active and creative innovation of practice, although they have the potential to work well through combining the knowledge bases of members.
8. *Action Research* – This is relevant to the classroom, and enables teachers to experiment with different practices, especially if the action research is collaborative.
9. *Transformative* – the integration of several different types of the previous models, with a strong awareness and control of whose agenda is being addressed (*Kennedy 2005: 240*).

The first four of the above mentioned methods should be considered transmission methods, as they give little opportunity for teachers to control their own learning. Methods 5-7 are more transformational due to the increasing capacity for professional autonomy. The last two models enable the teachers to determine their own learning pathways.

It could be observed that teachers are more aware of less formal and traditional forms of CPD nowadays, thus they are trying to become more creative in their own professional development.

Teachers often ask themselves what real CPD opportunities they have got in their institutions, whether they are adequate or not and in what activities they should get involved in order to keep up their continuous professional development paradigm. Teachers' professional growth is continuous, i.e. they should permanently be looking for new ways to improve performance. It is teachers' own responsibility to identify their needs and ways of satisfying them. Teachers should understand the impact of the activities they get involved into. They should also be aware that CPD is an essential component of every teacher's professional life, not an extra one.

Luckily, there are numerous ways to keep up a teacher's continuous professional development in English language teaching. There is a lot to be learnt through taking advantage of all the experience of expertise of the professionals in the field of ELT, by attending their classes, public lectures, sessions they give at conferences. Such activities give teachers the chance to:

- upgrade their knowledge of English and its usage in today's multicultural UK/US society
- deepen their knowledge of language learning/teaching methodologies and assessment for UNIVERSITY level
- review available learning resources
- discuss with colleagues and develop their own course materials for use in class
- observe and evaluate general and subject specific English classes taught by language lecturers
- share their experiences as both language learners and language teachers.

However, educational institutions should have a CPD framework concept that would involve such principles as critical reflection, development, and strengthening of the teaching practice, flexibility and relevance to the teachers' professional practice. The administration should create conditions for teachers' CPD. Perhaps one should start with teachers' CPD needs evaluation, at least once in five years, in order to make it more effective.

All things considered, we could affirm that teachers both novice and experienced should keep learning from their own practice as well as from more experienced colleagues. Being a long-term process CPD includes systematic possibilities to promote and guarantee growth and development in the profession. Without a doubt efficient professional development can be regarded as a well-balanced programme conducted in educational settings aiming at keeping connected to school realities.

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