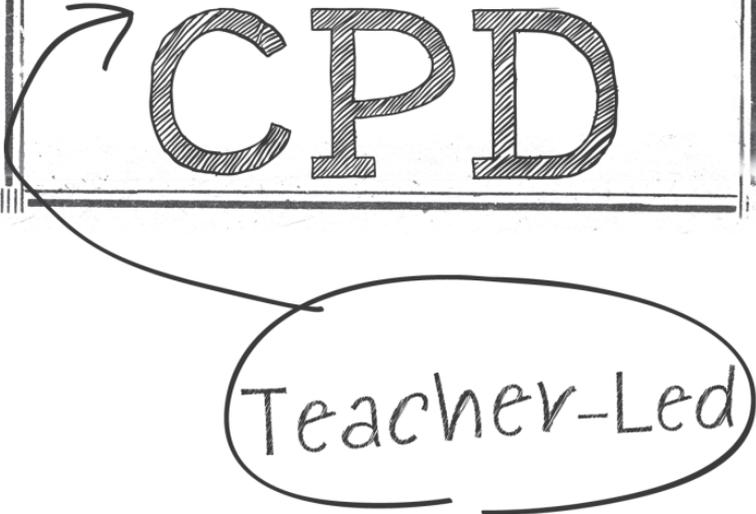


PERFECT
CPD



Shaun Allison Edited by Jackie Beere



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My gorgeous wife, Lianne, and my four wonderful children, May, Finn, Eve and Jude, continue to inspire me and make me smile every day. Lastly, of course, a huge thank you to my lovely mother, Joyce Allison, who always told me that school was important!

Shaun Allison @shaun_allison

Introduction

Schools are enigmatic. They are complex communities that are both unique and similar. Mission statements will vary from school to school but ultimately they all have the same aim: to produce happy, confident and successful young people. So, the key question has to be, why are some schools better at doing this than others? School cohorts, local communities and buildings may differ, as may resources, the use of innovative technologies, class sizes and a whole range of other factors. However, the very best schools all have two things in common: great leadership and a large number of great teachers. The very best schools, then, have a relentless focus on making sure that even more of their teachers become great.

[T]he main reason that most system-wide educational reforms have failed is that they have ignored (1) the importance of teacher quality for student progress; (2) the fact that it is highly variable; and (3) that teacher quality has differential impact on different students.

William (2010: 1)

There is much research evidence to back up this assertion, but anyone who has worked in schools for any length of time will know that there is a direct correlation between the success of a particular school and the number of talented teachers in the staffroom. What do these great teachers look like? Well, while preparing a leaving speech for a very well-respected colleague recently, I asked Andrew, a Year 8 student, what made my colleague such a great teacher. His response summed it up brilliantly:

He likes us, makes it fun, but still makes us work really hard and expects us to do well. He's much cleverer than some of the other science teachers, but still makes it easy to learn. He lets us know how we're doing.

I know the teacher that Andrew describes very well and this is spot on. His lessons are always a joy to observe and he consistently secures very strong outcomes for his students. We know that teachers like this make a positive difference to students and that the more teachers there are like this in a school, the better the school. Unfortunately, evidence suggests that after two or three years of teaching, most teachers start to plateau in terms of their classroom performance. Why? Well, being a new teacher is difficult and you have to sharpen your classroom skills very quickly if you are going to survive. Once you have mastered the basic skills to 'get by' in the classroom, the temptation is to sit back a bit. Alongside this, most new teachers have a mentor working with them, giving feedback on their performance and helping them to improve. In most schools, this support is not available

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beyond the first year of teaching. However, without feedback, performance is unlikely to improve.

Teaching has become a very pressured and much-scrutinised profession. However, I still believe very strongly that it is one of the best jobs in the world. Nothing gives me greater professional satisfaction than a teacher coming to talk to me about a new teaching strategy they have tried out in their classroom that has gone well, and which they want to develop further and share with colleagues. To me, this is what the job of school leadership is about – creating a spark that lights little individual fires of great pedagogy around the school, which then gather momentum and become an inferno of excellence! In order to do this, the continuing professional development (CPD) leader needs to:

- Get teachers excited about teaching.
- Get teachers talking about teaching.
- Get teachers planning and evaluating their teaching together.
- Get teachers observing and learning from each other.
- Get teachers sharing what works with each other.

I love a challenge, and there are few things better than celebrating others overcoming challenges.

Richard Branson, [@richardbranson](#) (15 August 2013)

Perfect Teacher-Led CPD

In their book, *Switch: How to Change Things When Change is Hard* (2011), Chip and Dan Heath describe what successful institutions do: they find what is working and do more of it. They refer to this as ‘finding the bright spots’. This simple but very important idea is the principle behind this book – find the bright spots in your school, that is the great teachers, and share what they are doing. Furthermore, find the bright spots from outside your school and bring them into your school.

This book aims to give you some ideas about how a range of CPD opportunities can be set up within your school to light your own fires of great pedagogy.

Chapter 1

Why Teachers Matter – Why CPD Matters

In his book, *Outliers: The Story of Success* (2008), Malcolm Gladwell suggests that it takes about 10,000 hours to become an ‘expert’ at a particular skill. For teachers, this amounts to about ten years of classroom practice. Now, the accuracy of the 10,000 hours as a definitive timeline for achieving expertise in teaching is open for discussion. However, very few of us would argue against the fact that the very best teachers refine their skills over a number of years, and certainly beyond the second or third year of their careers. However, as discussed in the Introduction, most will plateau at this point and just stick with ‘what they’ve always done’ in the classroom. This presents us with a problem. If most teachers stop getting better after two or three years, whereas in fact they should be developing their skills over ten years in order to reach an ‘expert’ level, what should we be doing as school leaders to address this ‘professional development deficit’?

The answer to this problem is relatively straightforward. We need to give staff a range of CPD opportunities that will

Perfect Teacher-Led CPD

engage, enthuse and motivate them. By this, I don't just mean the traditional model of courses and INSET days – sat in a hall and listening to an 'expert' who hasn't stepped inside a school for years. I mean a rich and varied ongoing programme of activities that staff can engage with on a number of levels and which will support them to reflect upon and develop their own practice. Teachers are the most important asset in a school, so they should be professionally developed and nurtured in a way that interests and inspires them.

As well as providing CPD opportunities, we also need to develop a culture within schools of 'continuous improvement'. This means a school where teachers want to take risks (and feel safe in doing so), seek and try out new ideas and strategies, and discuss their work openly. It's a school where teachers are happy and positively thrive on collaborating with and learning from each other. Providing CPD opportunities to facilitate this collaboration is the starting point. The best indicator that you're on the right path is when it's happening informally and frequently – at breaktime, in the corridors and by the kettle in the staffroom.

School leaders need to think about how they will achieve this within their schools. A successful CPD model uses a layered approach in which three distinct strands of CPD are operating.

A layered approach to CPD

BLANKET

Important development work that all teachers need to be involved in and which aligns with whole-school improvement priorities

Delivered through: INSET days, staff meetings, appraisal, etc.

OPTIONAL

A range of developmental activities that teachers can opt into, with a view to personalising their CPD and so allowing them to follow their own interests

Delivered through: 15 minute forums, IRIS observations, lesson study, peer observations, action research, coaching, school visits, etc.

DIRECTED

When staff are underperforming they are directed to engage in specific developmental, support work

Delivered through: mentoring and coaching

This approach ensures that everyone experiences the same CPD and aligns their practice with the whole-school vision, while also providing opportunities for those who want to engage at a deeper level. It also addresses the issue of under-performance. The school leadership team then needs to be committed to putting in place a range of creative activities to

Perfect Teacher-Led CPD

fill in the layers using the expertise that exists within the school. The CPD needs of any school can be met by the good practice that is already present within it. It's just a case of seeking it out and using a variety of mechanisms to share it – and, in doing so, inspiring others.

In order to do this effectively, school leaders need to ask themselves a number of key questions:

- Does your school have a shared understanding of what great teaching looks like?
- Do you actively encourage all teachers to engage in an ongoing cycle of reflection and improvement?
- Do leaders within the school (at all levels) discuss teaching and learning and how to make it better?
- Do you know who your best teachers are? Do you know why they are so good?
- Do you know who your weakest teachers are? Are you supporting them to get better?
- Do you provide opportunities for other teachers to learn from these expert teachers?
- Do you have a range of CPD opportunities that staff can engage with and that allow them to learn from each other?
- Do you encourage your teachers to seek best practice from other schools and then bring those ideas into your school?
- Do you provide opportunities for teachers to follow their own professional development priorities?

Chapter 1

- Do you provide the opportunities for your teachers to engage in action research?
- Do you expect all of your teachers to strive for excellence in the classroom?

Working through this series of questions would be a good 'health check' for a school leadership team. Developing the quality of teaching and learning with a view to reducing any within-school variation should be the number one priority for any school leadership team. A varied and innovative CPD programme is the answer to achieving this.

The most distinctive feature in the schools visited was the commitment of leaders at all levels to using professional development as the main vehicle for bringing about improvement. All had a clear view of how professional development should be organised.

Ofsted (2010: 7)

The first question, whether your school has a shared understanding of what great teaching looks like, is fundamental. It's important to know what works and develop this across

the school. In his book, *The Six Secrets of Change*, Michael Fullan describes the importance of this approach:

The intent is to define the best methods for reducing variation in favour of practices that are known to be effective, identifying the few key practices that are crucial to success.

Fullan (2008: 79)

It is important for teachers and senior leaders to spend time discussing what great teaching looks like in their school. At my own school, we have distilled what we think great teaching is about into four distinct areas of pedagogy, or ‘The Big 4’:

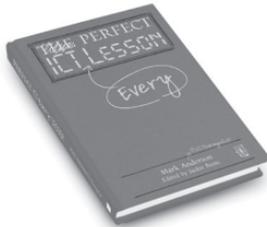
1. Questioning – ask deep, probing questions that encourage and support thinking.
2. Feedback – ensure students get feedback that is specific, helpful and helps to close the learning gap.
3. Independence – teaching should provide students with the confidence and tools to tackle problems with less dependence on the teacher, through explanation, modelling, discussion and practice.
4. Challenge – students of all abilities should be challenged to get better and better.

Chapter 1

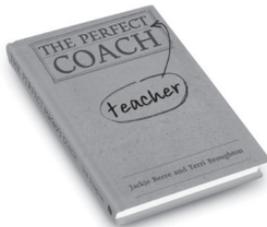
The very best teachers are skilled in these four areas, so it seems perfectly sensible that these should be the areas of pedagogy we should be looking to develop in *all* teachers. As teaching is a creative profession, we adopt a ‘tight but loose’ approach to our expectations: tight because these four areas of pedagogy should be strong features of teaching in all lessons, but loose because teachers can choose to implement them in a variety of ways – as long as it works. As a list, it is also very easy to remember, so there is more chance of it having an impact than a long list of criteria that will be easily forgotten.

Once a shared understanding is in place within a school, the CPD programme should then flow from it. In my school, the CPD programme is focused on developing ‘The Big 4’ with all teachers – with the emphasis on *all*. In your school it may well be something quite different. The challenge for school CPD leaders is to put together a varied and robust CPD programme that will allow teachers to engage with your priorities and at a level with which they feel comfortable. It’s about making sure that all teachers are encouraged to at least try out a few new strategies, while others have the opportunity to take their own personal development further and deeper.

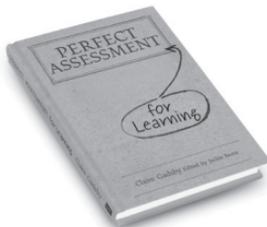
The energy and excitement that came out of the 2012 London Olympics is hard to forget. One of the most successful GB teams was the cycling team, headed up by coach Dave Brailsford. The success of the team was put down largely to the idea of ‘marginal gains’ – looking at every aspect of



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All successful schools have one thing in common – they are full of brilliant teachers.

This doesn't happen by chance. If schools are to develop their teachers into first-rate, reflective and high performing practitioners, they need varied and personalised CPD – based on collaboration and the sharing of best practice. This book looks at how schools can move away from the 'one size fits all' approach to CPD that still exists in a number of schools to CPD that will appeal to a range of teachers, unlocking the potential that exists within the staffroom. It's about excellence from within.

"Whilst all around us the educational world is changing, Shaun Allison articulates with utter clarity the eternal truth – the only thing that really matters to a school is improving teaching – and then shows us how teachers can lead the development of practice. This timely book is essential reading for all school leaders."

John Tomsett, Head Teacher

"Not only has Shaun Allison succeeded in pulling together a superb collection of strategies that are all well worth trying, his book has a fabulous energy about it. He captures the spirit of great CPD in every chapter; teachers as professionals sharing their insights, seeking out evidence, looking for feedback and continually striving to improve their practice."

Tom Sherrington, Head Teacher

"Easy to read, easy to implement and easy to see the instant impact and improvement the strategies will make."

David Fawcett, PE teacher, learning innovator
and educational consultant

Shaun Allison is a deputy head in West Sussex. He has four children, two step children, one cat, one fish, two bikes and a lovely wife. He loves teaching, leading and inspiring. Follow him on Twitter @[shaun_allison](#)

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