

# **Creating a Culture of Learning or (Making Sure They All Do Their 30 Hours CPD)**

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**Work in progress.**

**The author continues to refine and develop this submission.**

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## **Introduction**

Since 2004 there have been many initiatives and policy levers which further reinforce the need for teachers to commit to continuing Professional Development (CPD) reform. Most recently, Lifelong Learning UK (LLUK), describe their vision in the Workforce Strategy for the Further Education Sector in England, 2007-2012 as a vision which is:

To have a workforce that is highly skilled, qualified and committed to continuing professional development.

(LLUK 2009: 4)

By 'They' I refer to the 337 lecturers in a general FE College in the North East of England and the 30 hours continuing professional development (CPD) relates to the statement on the Institute for Learning (IfL) website,

As a member of IfL, you commit to recording your continuing professional development (CPD). This demonstrates that you are improving relevant knowledge and skills in your subject area and teaching or training.

IfL being the professional body for teachers, tutors, trainers and student teachers in the further education (FE) and skills sector and the body to which all 337 lecturers must belong.

This commitment to ensure our lecturers undertake CPD can be traced back to a DfES publication, Equipping Our Teachers for the Future (2004):

We want all teachers to commit to lifelong professional development, so that their skills are always up-to-date as the needs of the learners change.

(DfES 2004: 4)

This drive towards the regulation of the FE sector in as far as the commitment to a specified number of hours of CPD is usually accompanied by the expectation that the workforce will embrace this opportunity to belong to a 'professional body' and are equally committed to driving forward their own levels of expertise to meet the changing needs of the learners and employers. Is this true?

*'When we teach they learn' is this always the case*, is often a question which teachers are asked to consider. It could also be argued that *'When staff undertake CPD they always become better teachers'* is this always the case. If this was always the case, then surely there would be little resistance by teachers to participate in CPD activity and yet there continues with many staff a reluctance to participate in CPD and see CPD as something that is 'done to them' and which is driven by the organisation. How then, can we create a culture of learning and indeed what does a learning organisation look like.

## **A Learning Organisation**

In order to develop a culture of learning, surely we must be part of a 'learning organisation'.

In order to define a learning organisation the following definitions have been discussed:

Learning organisations are organisations where people continually expand their capacity to create the results they truly desire, where new and expansive patterns of thinking are nurtured, where collective aspiration is set free, and where people are continually learning to see the whole together (Senge 1990:3).

The Learning Company is a vision of what might be possible. It is not brought about simply by training individuals; it can only happen as a result of learning at the whole organisation level. A Learning company is an organisation that facilitates the learning of all its members and continuously transforms itself (Pedler et. Al. 1991:1).

Learning organisations are characterised by total employee involvement in a process of collaboratively conducted, collective accountable change directed towards shared values or principles (Watkins and Marsick 1992:118).

According to Sandra Kerka (1995) learning organisations provide continuous learning opportunities, use learning to reach their goals, link individual performance with organisational performance and one which is of particular interest in regards to this research, a learning organisation fosters inquiry and dialogue, making it safe for people to share openly and take risks.

I can relate many of these references, as referred to by Kerka, to our organisation and to this project particularly. However, the findings of this research would indicate that one particular reference is lacking in the organisation and it is worth considering whether this one reference is so important that with that missing the college cannot consider itself a learning organisation. This reference will be discussed further in the report and is certainly one which must be addressed by senior managers if we are to create a learning culture within the college.

It can be argued that a strategic approach to CPD at the highest levels is essential for the core business – the improvement of teaching and learning. A strategic approach does not simply mean a CPD policy that has been signed off by the senior management team, but an actual, actively managed strategy that is used to drive improvements in performance.

... it is simple to content that the best way to improve teacher quality if through supporting the development of individuals. This requires a fully strategic approach if the organisation as a whole is to continuously improve. Rethinking continuing professional development in further education  
(Villeneuve-Smith, West and Bhinder:)

## **Background**

I will focus this research on one particular aspect of CPD which is being driven by the senior managers of the college and consider why this is embraced by some and not by others.

A recent Ofsted Inspection reported that teaching and learning in the college were satisfactory with some good aspects. Findings from student questionnaires supported Ofsted as learners advocated that lessons were often dull and boring. One solution put forward by a senior manager is that the focus should not be on teaching but on learning and learning outcomes.

If CPD is about being responsive to the needs of learners then surely this is a prime case for senior managers to commit to a strategic approach to bring about improvements by ensuring that the learners have a more positive experience in the classroom. This links to the LLUK Workforce Strategy (2009-2010) in which designed not only to equip staff to meet today's demands of the further education sector, but also to look ahead and anticipate what employers, communities and learner will want from the sector over the next five years.

In terms of teaching and learning, the cultural approach, according to Coffield, (2008) the cultural approach does not limit itself to a number of specific targets such as the retention and attainment of students. Rather, the general aim is for learners, tutors, managers, institutions, the sector and the education system itself to get better at teaching and learning; and that means that at each of these levels there is a need for expertise in teaching and learning.

It was agreed by senior managers that the focus of forthcoming staff development days would be on 'developing the skills of the expert learner' by introducing more active learning strategies into the classroom.

This research project is about how the CPD theme was received by the teaching staff and our progress to date in attempting to overcome some of the barriers and developing a culture of learning within the organisation.

## **Methodology**

Qualitative data was gained in order to portray the perspectives and convey the feeling and experiences of senior managers and lecturers in the college, video diaries and semi-structured interviews were carried out to share moments in the everyday practice of teachers in a general further education college. The video gives a snapshot of how teaching and learning is viewed from a management and teacher practitioner perspective. The real strength of the video is that it provides a narrative platform which shapes how the teacher thinks and feels about teaching and learning. This experiential approach, it is argued places the teachers 'voice' and 'experiences' within the context of an organisational framework. Exploring the nature of pedagogy and cultures in learning and teaching within the college will generate a theoretical framework which is grounded in the social activity it purports to explain (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). The video gives a snapshot of how teaching and learning is viewed from a management and teacher practitioner perspective. The real strength of the video is that it provides a narrative platform which shapes how the teacher thinks and feels about teaching and learning.

Ethical considerations taken into account were that of voluntary participation and the video diaries/semi structured interviews were facilitated by an independent person who had access to semi-structured questions which they could draw upon.

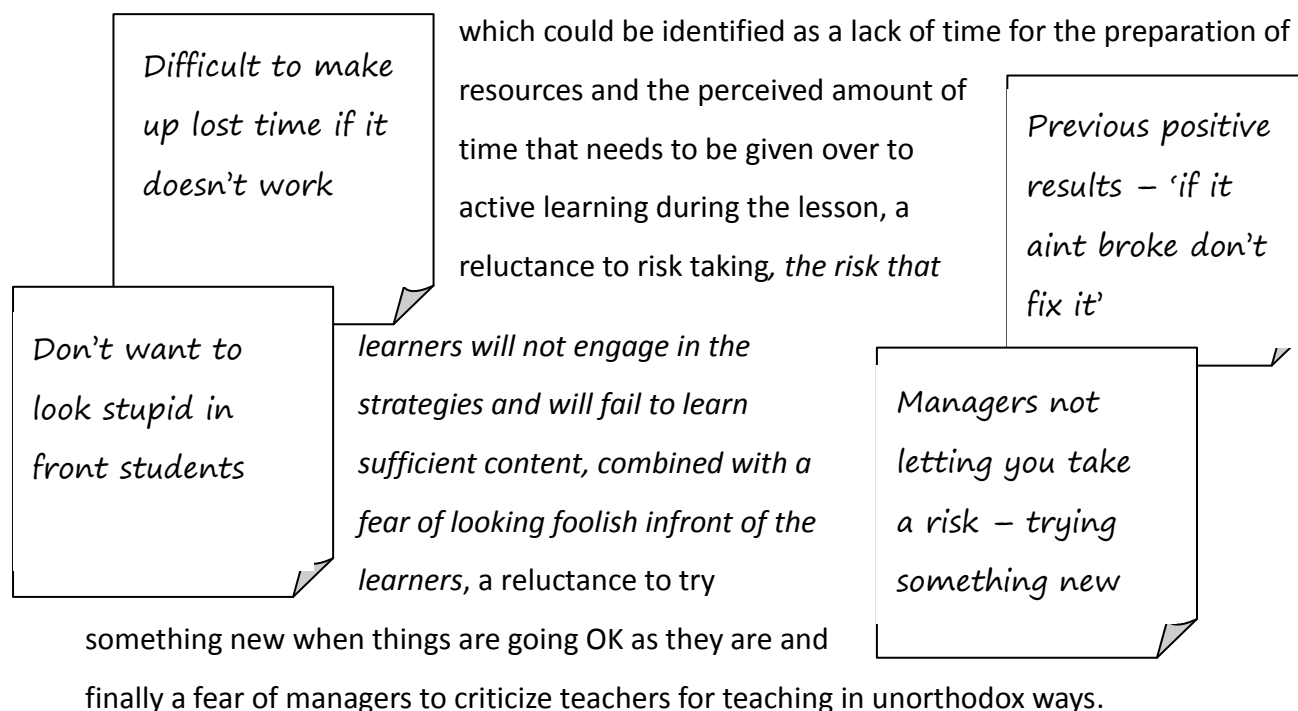
Quantitative research was carried out during a staff development event to measure how people felt about risk taking in the classroom. Data was collected from around 250 teachers using post-it notes.

## **Sharing the Vision**

Many lessons were often didactic being very teacher led with many learners having a passive role. Senior managers wanted the teaching staff to try strategies in the classroom which would ensure learners were actively engaged in the learning process. Furthermore, the vision was for learners to engage in higher-order thinking tasks where they were engaged in

challenging activity in the classroom. At a cross college staff development day staff were exposed to many strategies which would encourage active learning to take place. The sessions, although well received in many areas were received with scepticism by others. It was at these sessions, where staff who were reluctant to try something new, were given the opportunity to write on a post-it the reason why they were reluctant.

Once collated, the barriers identified on the post-its could be put into one of four themes



The findings of this research were interesting and in the main not surprising, however the sheer number of staff who indicated that they did not take risks out of *fear of looking foolish in front of learners if it didn't work* was surprising. This is a barrier which is not one which can easily be overcome by attendance at a staff development event and this will be discussed later in the paper. According to Kerka, the fear of managers to criticize teachers for teaching in unorthodox ways is not a feature of a learning organisation. These barriers were also referred to by Bonwell and Eison (1991):

... certain specific obstacles are associated with the use of active learning including limited class time; a possible increase in preparation time; the potential difficulty of using active learning in large classes; and a lack of needed materials, equipment or resources.

The findings are further corroborated by Conwell and Eison:

Perhaps the single greatest barrier of all, however, is the fact that faculty members' efforts to employ active learning involve risk – the risks that students will not participate, ..... that faculty members will feel a loss of control ... or be criticized for teaching in unorthodox ways.

Charles C Bonwell and James A. Eison:

There appears to be a clear dichotomy in as much as the senior managers see the organisation as one which foster inquiry and dialogue, making it safe for people to share openly and take risks and yet the views of the staff indicate that part of their reluctance to try active learning strategies is the fear of being criticised for trying something new, for teaching in an unorthodox way. How then can senior managers share their vision of a learning organisation with the staff. Senge (1990) argues that when there is a genuine vision (as opposed to the all-to-familiar 'vision statement'), people excel and learn, not because they are told to, but because they want to. But many leaders have personal visions that never get translated into shared visions that galvanize an organization...

## Sharing the Vision

A senior manager of the college and a number of teachers agreed to be interviewed to share moments of their everyday practice in college (appendix 1). In the video the senior manager shared his vision of the future of the college and indicated that he wanted teachers to take risks and try something new. He also stated that presently there is too much focus on the teacher and insufficient focus on the learner and the learning outcomes.

Although the teachers who took part in the video were generally of a very positive and enthusiastic nature and this is probably why they volunteered to take part in the video, they also identified barriers as to why they were

at times reluctant to take risks in the classroom. Some of these barriers were the same of those identified on the post-its ie lack of time to prepare and deliver courses (staff were particularly concerned about the number of delivery hours which were being taken off their courses). Staff taking part in

*"It's the paperwork ... you don't have time to prepare new resources."*

*"I used to take students outside to work on a hot day – I wouldn't dare do that now ..."*

*"I used to deliver this course in three years, now I've got one."*

*"The IT it's not working and I don't want to look foolish in front of students."*

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the video also commented on their reluctance to try something new with technology as they saw the technology as being unreliable and outdated.

The views of the teachers, both those expressed by using the post-its and on the video were fed back to the senior managers. It was agreed by the senior managers that some of the barriers to introducing active learning strategies into the classroom could be overcome and a team of like-minded, enthusiastic teachers (including teachers who were Advanced and Subject Learning Coaches) met to discuss what was needed to help overcome these barriers and how to introduce this teaching and learning improvement strategy to the teachers.

### **The Project Brief**

The results of the research findings as to the reluctance of staff to try active learning strategies were shared with this team, and these have been identified previously.

This led to a number of CPD approaches being discussed including some suggested in the IfL guidelines, including: peer coaching, work-shadowing, team-teaching, action research, whole college staff development events and a departmental approach.

At the outset, it was agreed by the team that the following points would be integral to the success of the project:

Staff should see this as an opportunity and not as something which is being imposed upon them. Too often, the feedback from staff after attendance at a staff development event is that they feel the training is being imposed upon them. Many feel that there is little differentiation in this approach to CPD and as a result are often passive learners in the process – not the approach we would wish to take in this project. It was agreed that staff would be approached to volunteer to take part in the project and where possible there would be staff from all Schools involved. However it was also agreed that no member staff should be made to take part in order to demonstrate cross college involvement.

The project should be undertaken by a sample of teachers and the number of staff involved in the project should be managed to ensure some consistency. There have been previous initiatives to introduce CPD initiative to introduce or to improve the teaching and learning within the college. The college has been successful in the past to gain funding from LSIS to lead on two projects, whilst we have always had willing and enthusiastic participation from

partners ie local schools and training providers, the interest from our own staff has not always been sufficient to make it sustainable. Therefore the number of staff taking part in the project must be sufficient in order to make this sustainable and to grow.

There must be 'something in it' for the staff, the project must address some of the barriers indicated in the research. As indicated in the research findings, the views of many staff were around time issues and how this prevented active learning taking place.

The effectiveness of the project must be evaluated at a pre-determined stage. "So, what's the impact". A common question which is asked of the effectiveness of staff development activity and a question which is always difficult to measure. Who can say that the success of a particular learner or group of learners was down to their teacher attending a particular staff development event. However, we did agree that this was one project which we would ensure would provide us with data we could put to various interested parties.

The senior managers must support the project and that support should be communicated to the whole college. If we are aiming towards a learning organisation then that vision should be shared with the staff. The staff need to know that the senior managers are listening to their views and are informed as to the barriers, perceived or otherwise, to introducing active learning strategies into their lessons.

The practice of shared vision involves the skills of unearthing shared 'pictures of the future' that foster genuine commitment and enrolment rather than compliance. In mastering this discipline, leaders learn the counter-productiveness of trying to dictate a vision, no matter how heartfelt. "  
Senge, P. M. (1990)

Heads of School should be aware of the project and actively engaged in supporting their staff who are take part. The support and encouragement of the Heads of School is seen as instrumental in the success of the project. This is one role which has often been underestimated in the past and one which has been overlooked in its importance. Heads of School have a key role in giving teachers the confidence to try something new in the classroom. Teachers will look to their Heads of School to give them the 'organisational endorsement' to take risks and to try something new.

## **Supported Classroom Experiments – Just Step Back**

The team agreed that time constraint was an overarching barrier to staff preparing new resources or indeed seeking them out. Therefore the 'buy in' would be the provision of a number of laminated resources which could be used by the teachers without any preparation on their part. However, it was a concern that these could be perceived as gimmicks by some teachers. Having been involved in the Subject Learning Coach Programme at the outset I have seen how the teaching and learning resources have been used by many teachers. Whilst one cannot deny the quality of the resources it was often apparent that they were used in classrooms without any understanding of the pedagogical theories behind the resources. They were often brought down from the shelf for a forthcoming lesson observation only to find that they were not effective in engaging the learner or they were used by teachers to demonstrate that 'active learning' was taking place when actually they were being used to 'keep the learner occupied', not quite the same. Most importantly, they were not being used to engage students in higher-order thinking tasks such as analysis, synthesis and evaluation. Each resource was therefore accompanied by a handout to identify how the resource could be used during the lesson and the pedagogy behind this strategy. (appendix 2)

Once it was agreed what physical resources would be made available to the staff taking part, it was then decided that in order to work with teachers to overcome their fear of trying something new, the following strategy was put into place.

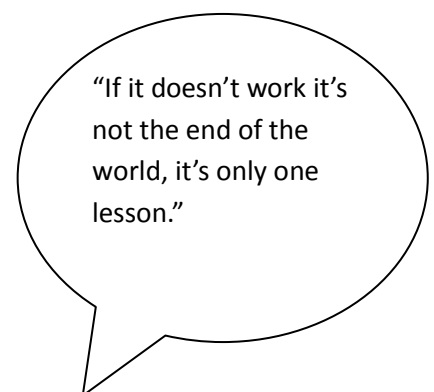
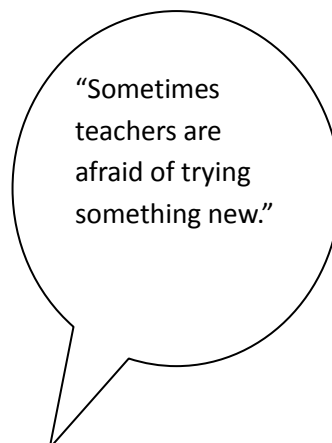
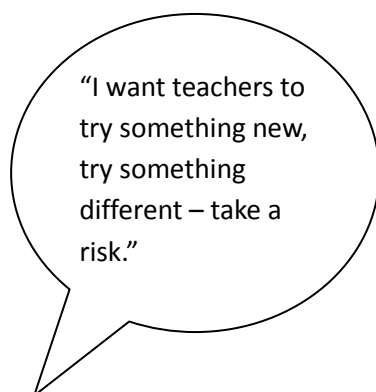
A number of lecturers who indicated that they were keen to try active learning strategies in their classroom were approached by members of the project team to jointly plan how the active learning strategies would best fit into their lessons (we knew that one size doesn't fit all). Each lecturer involved in the project has been given a resource kit containing a number of laminated activities, ready for their learners to use. They have also been provided with a suggestion sheet as to how these strategies can be used at the start, middle and end of the lesson as well as how they can be used to differentiate.

As mentioned earlier, it was important at the outset to identify how the project would be evaluated. It became clear that we needed to have a baseline in order to measure the impact and indeed to formalise the relationship between the teacher and the member of the team who would act as coach (in the loose sense of the word, as not all the team were trained in coaching techniques). However they all did have a history of taking risks in the classroom, of being able to engage learners and more importantly of being willing to support peers. Each member of the team met with the teacher they would be coaching and discussions took place as to what the teacher expected to get from taking part in the project (appendix 3). This acted as an action plan as well as an evaluation at the end of the project. This will allow us to gather evaluative and quantitative data. A second evaluation form which is to be completed ongoing would provide us with data to identify which of the resources/teaching strategies were most effective as well as gaining an understanding as to the level of learners who were being introduced to these strategies and whether the results varied to reflect this (appendix 4).

An outline of the project and all the resources which were being introduced were put onto the college's Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) for all staff to access as well as video clips of students who were already using some of these active learning strategies in order to demonstrate a range of learners and to see how animated and engaged learners can be when given the opportunity.

### **Support by Senior/Middle Managers**

The senior managers responded positively to many of the views of the staff, both the short comments on the post its as well as the more in depth video diaries on the DVD.



However, some managers still see these obstacles as 'perceived' rather than 'real' as suggested by the teachers. This is reflected in LLUK's (2008b:14) research on CPD in the FE sector found a discrepancy in views between teachers and managers, the data indicated 59% of teachers strongly agreed that lack of time was a barrier to "accessing CPD opportunities", against only 25% of senior managers and 10% of teachers strongly agreed that personal motivation was a barrier, against 23% of senior managers. This suggests that managers may be placing blame on individual staff for lack of professional development and ignoring other barriers.

The senior managers have attempted to share their vision and have done so by taking part in the video diaries, along with teaching staff, as part of the DVD. They have also committed to the costs of creating the resources to be shared with teaching staff. At this point in the research, they have demonstrated sufficiently their commitment to the project in terms of resources and belief in the cause ie more active learning in the classroom.

As stated earlier the support and encouragement of the Heads of School are vital to the success of the project and more importantly in being able to develop a culture of learning within the organisation. Yet surely, they do not need to be persuaded to support the professional development of their staff or do they? The college operates an annual appraisal system and as you would expect, the training and development needs of the staff are part of that system. However the training and development needs of staff are all too often linked to the SMART targets which are set and which relate to the organisational needs at the time ie the strategic aims of the college.

At a time of constant government policy changes and the impact of funding regulations on colleges it is easy to see how the annual appraisal can become caught up in ensuring institutional survival at the expense of the individual development of its teachers. Yet, the IfL (2009) states:

The detailed sample of CPD evidence identified the variation in practice that exists between highly supportive and less supportive providers, and clearly demonstrated the impact that this has on teachers and trainer.

Effectively developed and managed CPD can have a significant and positive impact for learners, practitioners, teams and the organisation.

Perhaps the Heads of School should use the opportunity of the annual appraisal to take time out to discuss the CPD which their staff have carried out over the year and to reflect with them on the impact this has had on their practice in the hope that this will lead to a more meaningful professional development plan for the forthcoming year. Indeed, in many cases the Head of School would be surprised at the variety and amount of CPD which has been undertaken by their staff. Although the Head of School is requested to indicate that the member of staff has undertaken their 30 hours CPD it is only in a few cases where this is discussed in any depth and rarely does it reflect the training and development for the forthcoming year. A missed opportunity indeed. It has been the intention to introduce the project to all Heads of School and to seek their support and encouragement for the staff taking part, however this opportunity has not prevailed itself (too many policy changes and funding implications to be discussed at their meetings – again teaching and learning takes a poor second place to policies and institutional survival). However, the support of this line of management is crucial not only to this project but to the development of a learning culture so perhaps they need to be able to see the benefit for themselves and their individual School before they share the vision (another research project altogether).

And finally it seems fitting to discuss at the end of this writing the matter of evaluation, and in particular the evaluation of this project. I would ask you to image the following scene:

A full Ofsted is taking place within the college and as you would imagine a 'Staff Development File' has been prepared. This file is heavily loaded with details of all the courses, from Doctorates, Degrees, Initial Teacher Training Courses to those mandatory courses such as safeguarding which the staff have undertaken. There is also a separate divider solely for details of staff development activities dedicated to 'Teaching and Learning' – of which there was ample. The Staff Development Manager and Quality Manager confidently meets with the Inspector to discuss the contents of the file. However, the one divider which was missing was evidently the 'Impact' section. The discussion went something like this,

“So what was the impact of ....”

“And the impact of ..... was”

“And how did this impact upon the learner.”

Whilst it is difficult to confidently state that increased success rates or student attendance can be solely put down to the changes in classroom practice as a result of the teacher undertaking particular CPD, I can confidently state that we gave too little attention to how the staff development would be measured in terms of impact and personalised accounts of a few teachers did little to satisfy the curiosity of the Inspector.

Therefore this project will provide us with both quantitative and qualitative data. We will be able to assess which strategies were the most effective and with which groups of learners. The evaluation will also enable us to identify how staff feel about undertaking CPD which is shared with colleagues. After all one of the main factors identified at the start of the research was the reluctance to try something new for fear of looking foolish. This project has given staff an opportunity to talk things through with a colleague to try ideas out and to have a sympathetic and supportive ear when it does not go according to plan.

One question on the evaluation asks teachers to state whether they found this form of CPD helpful and whether they are prepared to carry on with supported classroom experiments. The hope is that there will be a growing community of practice developing within the organisation which will lend itself to the improvement of teaching and learning but more importantly this improvement will be brought about by meeting the individual development needs of our teachers to truly establish a learning culture and not sheer compliance of undertaking their 30 hours CPD per year.

At the beginning of June, the experiences of the staff and their learners will be evaluated and it will be interesting to see the difference it has made and how best to take the idea of supported classroom experiments further.

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