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Lessons for Leadership for Successful Professional Development in Schools: A Systematic Literature Review

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The importance of Professional Development

- Professional Development is considered an effective mechanism through which the quality of learning and teaching can be improved;
- Professional Development has been operationalised as one-off training sessions or as a learning journey taken by teachers and leaders together;
- Alternative models of professional development have been trialled as complementary to, or instead of, the dominant models in a bid to prove more effective;
- My ideas have been gleaned from a SLR of relevant texts.

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What is a systematic literature review?

- A systematic literature review (SLR) identifies, selects and critically appraises research in order to answer a clearly formulated question (Dewey, A. & Drahota, A. 2016);
- It explores the research already conducted in a structured, logical and ordered fashion so that conclusions about a topic can be made;
- A total of **583** studies was initially screened, until inclusion and exclusion criteria resulted in **48** studies being used in this review.

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Systematic Literature Review

- To explore studies on professional development and on alternative models of professional development to discover what lessons leadership could glean from their implementation and promotion;
- Submitted as part of the requirements for the degree of Master of Science in Educational Leadership;
- Revealed that effective professional development is inextricably linked with good leadership;
- Provides **seven lessons for leadership** for the success of Professional Development in schools.

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Interest and motivation

- As a principal, I am interested in understanding how the PD experiences of my staff can be improved;
- Stems back to 2008 – Senior Teacher in charge of Staff Development
- Exceptional closure days or “days of exceptional boredom”?
- Involvement in Research Lesson Study (Galanouli, 2010) with Queen’s University, Belfast, and General Teaching Council, NI;
- Came as a result of inability to carry out primary research during COVID pandemic;
- “High quality professional development is a central component to...improving education” (Guskey, 2000a).

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The problem of Professional Development in Northern Ireland (?)

- Professional development is linked directly to pay scale progression – high stakes;
- Performance Review and Staff Development (PRSD) can affirm poor practice – your colleagues don't want you to have less money;
- PRSD becomes a fulfilment of an “administrative requirement” (Shewbridge et al, 2014a);
- No validation/moderation of decisions made locally by schools;
- Continual political instability has led to smorgasbord of PD initiatives that co-exist with PRSD and this, coupled with segregated nature of teacher training means there is no consensus as to what works best (Craft, 2012).

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Discussion of Central Concepts

- As a result of deficiencies in the statutory PD model, principals try to tailor PD to their context or employ alternative models;
- But, what they do is driven by how they conceptualise PD in their context;
- So, what are the main ways that PD is conceptualised?

The following 4 conceptualisations were used as the lens through which the findings of research papers would be examined. The conceptualisations are informed by qualitative papers and therefore, quantitative interpretations were not considered.

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Conceptualisation 1: ‘Something other’

- This is where PD is conceived as “purposeful endeavours” (Guskey, 2000a) that sit outside of a teacher’s job – something other from it, not interwoven or embedded within it;
- Teachers don’t work in a vacuum: teaching and the role of PD operate in a social arena, so context is important.

Conceptualisation 2: Situative Perspective

- Kang et al (2013) say that cognition is rooted in the context in which learning happens and this places importance on the situation, suggesting that experiences of a qualitative nature may be appropriate for a SLR.

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Conceptualisation 3: ‘Learning Leaders Strategy v. knowledge deficit

- DE in NI produced a ‘Learning Leaders strategy’ – assumes that something will evolve through “building professional learning communities” not necessarily through the filling of deficits in teacher knowledge.
- Should we believe that teachers, without necessary knowledge, will acquire it by virtue of sharing discourse or social space with colleagues?

Conceptualisation 4: Collaboration or individual solutions

- This promotes collaboration with colleagues, but recognises deficits can be filled from beyond the room eg: RLS (promoted by Stigler & Hiebert, 2016).

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Methodology

- Systematic reviews offer an unbiased review of a subject (Bryman, 2016);
- But this study was exploratory and interpretative where **validity** and **transparency** were the guiding principles;
- This enabled literature to be evaluated on the level of individual cases, people and situations in a flexible manner (Flick, 2008).
- Qualitative focus, not quantitative: Objectivity is prized by positivists and subjectivity is treated as suspicious or deficit.

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Design

- Two research questions framed the study:
 - a) What lessons can be learned by leadership in the promotion and implementation of PD in schools?
 - b) What can leadership learn from the implementation of alternative forms of PD such as Research Lesson Study?
- Multi-stage process was designed in order to collect appropriate published academic studies from databases using keywords and set inclusion and exclusion criteria.

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Design continued...

- Databases used: British Education Index; Education Abstracts; Educational Administration Abstracts; ERIC (Subscription version); ProQuest Education Journals; ABI/Inform Global and Business Source Premier
- Chosen due to coverage of range of business, leadership and educational disciplines
- Initial Search strategy used and then refined to yield manageable number of articles;
- Inclusion/exclusion criteria set. Eg: articles produced between 2009 and 2020 included: articles that were not peer reviewed excluded.

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Search Results

- Databases yielded varying numbers of articles amounting to **583** in total;
- Further screening took place: **Screen 1** - title and keyword; **Screen 2** - abstract sections read to exclude irrelevant studies. This reduced the total number to **124** so **Screen 3** examined Findings/Conclusion section of texts within the corpus. This resulted in **48** texts to be read in full.
- Full reading of the 48 texts took place. Themes and concepts were emerging from the literature, therefore it was useful to **codify** the studies under the emerging concepts.

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Emerging themes/concepts

- Leadership and PD;
- Alternative PD;
- Conditions of the context;
- The success of PD;
- Perceptions of PD;
- Methodological matters.

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Limitations and Ethical Considerations

- Inclusion and exclusion criteria were applied manually;
- Primary school studies were excluded;
- Exclusion of quantitative studies;
- Personal experiences may have shaped my perception of what is relevant in terms of study selected;
- Work chosen in English (excluded research in Japanese eg: RLS);
- Approaching the texts with emergent understanding – calls into question the degree to which study would be repeatable;
- However, large corpus (48 studies) and so therefore fair to say saturation point was reached and RQs could be answered.

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Seven Lessons for Leadership for the Success of PD

Some texts focused on the themes to a greater or lesser extent, so holistic view was adopted. Seven clear lessons can be drawn from the analysis of the literature:

Lesson 1: Leadership is central to the promotion of successful PD

- The principal and leadership play key roles in the promotion and implementation of good PD;
- Principals need to IDENTIFY the PD needs of staff and MOULD these to become organisational goals of the school;
- IDENTIFICATION will come through meaningful CONSULTATION with teachers, governors, leadership team and pupils;
- The Principal must ensure that their own PD needs are met if they are to deliver PD to teachers in their context: only then will they be perceived as knowledge providers;
- Principals need to participate in PD with staff to ensure that it's taken seriously;
- Principals have the power to promote collaboration which is largely held as the preferred model for PD.

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Lesson 2: Leadership is central to the promotion of both collaboration and useful one-off workshops

- For the most part, collaborative approaches to PD, sustained over a period of time, have **greater chance of being adopted by teachers**;
- Collaboration should be 'organic', not imposed, if 'buy-in' is to be achieved;
- Once collaborative frameworks have been established explicitly, implicit growth of the model can be stimulated through support, resources and encouragement to take risks;
- One-off workshops are fine for introducing new concepts or sharing of information, **but they have no lasting effect in schools**;
- Leaders need to monitor the impact of workshops in classrooms.

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Lesson 3: Leadership is central to the promotion of viable alternative models of PD

- PD is generally conceptualised by practitioners as something additional to the role of the teacher – not seen as being part of the everyday job;
- Alternative forms of PD are regarded as complementary to the dominant model in that context. Eg: RLS in NI is seen as additional to PRSD;
- Some alternative models are more successful than others in both improving subject pedagogy and whole-school issues;
- If PD works best over period of time, then principals have responsibility for driving forward a re-conceptualisation of PD as part of a teacher's job;
- If possible then RLS for example could be absorbed into the teacher's role.

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Lesson 4: Leadership is central to the creation of conditions that foster good PD

- Leadership should manage resources correctly to allow for the promotion of PD opportunities;
- This mean managing the financing of good PD, creating planning time for PD and creating infrastructure to allow for the promotion of PD;
- Could involve creative timetabling solutions or creative use of twilights/professional development days;
- Generally, the body of literature did not offer practical solutions to this problem so there is scope for further research in this area.

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Lesson 5: Leadership is central to the creation of a PD culture

- Many of the texts highlighted the need for PD to be linked to research findings and encouraged greater links with Higher Education Institutions – this will help to clarify the practical and ethical rationale for improvement;
- If principals participate in the PD, they can address power dynamics with staff and recognise the importance of relationships within collaborative groups;
- Understanding stakeholder input, the role of perceptions (including gender differences and/or career stage) and ensuring that PD is **NOT LINKED** to teacher evaluation will help PD be accepted as something helpful – as ‘part of the job’;
- PD culture is created when the needs of teacher, leaders and the community are reconciled.

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Lesson 6: Leadership is central to the implementation & evaluation of PD

- The corpus demonstrates that *how* PD is implemented in individual contexts is down to leadership: the form, participants, duration and level of support;
- Leadership has responsibility to ensure these are correctly gauged;
- There must be proper evaluation of PD – not just ‘lip-service’ paid to it;
- Principals have moral obligation to ensure mistakes are not repeated;
- All PD *should* be aligned to pupil outcomes – if outcomes do not improve, desist from that form of PD;
- Evaluation needs to involve both pupil outcomes and stakeholder satisfaction – where there is no marriage between the two, PD approach should be changed.

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Lesson 7: Leadership is central to the conceptualisation of PD

- PD is only strong when it is NOT seen as 'something other': PD is best when it is woven into the fabric of a teacher's job;
- PD works best when the purpose it serves for leaders, teachers and pupils is aligned;
- There is little evidence practically in the literature where this has been achieved in the school setting;
- To date, only RLS seems to offer a viable alternative form of PD that allows a synchronicity between leader, teacher, pupil. Its reciprocal nature allows to serve classroom and whole-school objectives;
- All PD is social and cognitive, and principals must consider both dimensions in their context when designing PD.

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Final thoughts...

- Good PD is central to improvement, and it is the role of leadership to ensure that it is of a high quality. Leadership, teachers and PD are inextricably linked: without quality leadership, teachers cannot participate in quality PD and without quality PD, improvement can neither be envisaged nor enacted.