

- a short podcast;
- a publication of case studies; and
- a self-access training course.

She creates her own action plan which involves learning about special needs using content found on the Internet, putting what she has learnt into practice in the classroom and reflecting on her experiences in a personal journal or blog. She may also have questions and doubts and so makes contact with others in order to develop a personal learning network via the online Facebook group. As a way to consolidate her learning and share her knowledge, she decides to give a training session at her school.

Conclusions

Teachers have never before had access to so many (often) free resources and we are lucky to be part of a very generous and active online community. Lifelong learning should contribute to sustained motivation in our careers, which are becoming longer as the retirement age rises. Taking control of and planning our professional development in a meaningful way will help teachers to be more empowered, successful and happy.

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Reference

Davidson, G., F. Dunlop, D. Soriano, L. Kennedy and T. Phillips. 2011. 'Going forward: continuing professional development for English language teachers in the UK'. *EnglishAgenda*. <http://englishagenda.britishcouncil.org>.

10.4 Implementing teacher portfolios for professional development

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Teacher portfolios are instrumental for professional development because they enable teachers to reflect on their beliefs and practices, and enhance their knowledge and skills. A portfolio allows teachers 'to develop a record that documents improvements in performance and professional knowledge, and which by its nature asks them to provide documentary justification for their practice' (Crookes 2003: 200). Nonetheless, the successful use of this professional development tool requires an effective implementation strategy.

Implementation

In 2012, Malta's EFL industry adopted a system of teacher portfolios; this formed part of a CPD policy devised by a regulatory body in collaboration with the main stakeholders.

Using a case study approach, we explored the effects these teacher portfolios are having on professional development. Nine teachers working at an EFL school were asked to complete a questionnaire, and a semi-structured interview was held with each one.

Subsequently, the portfolio of every interviewee was analysed with the intention of identifying how it was being used for professional development purposes.

Significance

The teachers use the portfolio as a means of organising various professional development records, including CPD attendance certificates, self-evaluation reports and classroom observation feedback. The latter two documents show that the portfolio is an important means of engaging in self-reflection. In fact, one interviewee stated that the portfolio is 'a method to reflect on how I've progressed as a teacher.' For these teachers the most important documents in the portfolio are the observation feedback they receive from the director of studies, the self-evaluation reports they write on their professional development and observed lessons, and the profile they write about themselves as educators. The opportunities afforded by the portfolio to reflect on beliefs and practices were indicated by most interviewees. One of them explained, 'You could have been teaching for many years but it's still essential for you to reflect because there is always something you can improve on.'

Contribution

For almost all the interviewees the implementation of teacher portfolios has contributed to professional development. They mentioned that the portfolio acts as a log of their participation in various forms of CPD as well as a record of professional growth. One teacher claimed, 'The importance of having a portfolio is that you can use it to look back at the way you were in the past, to reflect on where you are now, and to think about where you would like to be in the future.' Another interviewee maintained that the portfolio 'imposes a certain discipline and commitment to take part in educational seminars'. The teachers affirmed that the portfolio has led to professional change by providing them with an instrument for self-reflection, a structured approach to classroom observation and the incentive to attend CPD events more frequently. They also indicated that as a result of the portfolio there has been a positive change in their attitude towards teaching and CPD.

Moreover, the interviewees remarked that they have noticed a change in the school's CPD culture due to the fact that teachers now have a heightened sense of accountability and professionalism, give more value to self-reflection and manifest pride in professional development. One teacher declared, 'The direction is more professional now. It no longer feels as if you're just a housewife who comes in to teach for a couple of hours to fill in your time... Your development as a teacher is acknowledged. It's more concrete.' For these teachers the portfolio seems to operate as a locus of professional development.

Challenges

Besides various benefits, our study highlighted a number of challenges associated with teacher portfolios that need to be taken into account in developing a strategy for effective implementation. The main challenges indicated by the teachers were the time needed to keep a portfolio, the specific writing skills required to engage in self-reflection and concerns with the portfolio's audience and purpose. One teacher confessed, 'I find it difficult to write about myself... I'm not used to it, and I find myself in an uncomfortable

position having to write about myself.' Her colleague explained that 'teachers agonise over the purpose of the self-reflection and who is going to read it'. These challenges seem to suggest that for successful implementation of a portfolio system teachers need to be provided with more than just training that targets the knowledge and skills they need in order to use this tool effectively. Training must also provide them with ownership over the portfolio by convincing them that it is not primarily a means of appraisal but a testament to their professional development.

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Reference

Crookes, G. 2003. *A Practicum in TESOL: Professional Development through Teaching Practice*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

10.5 One teacher's journey towards self-efficacy and professional development

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An important quality of good teachers is the desire to continuously improve and develop professionally. This presentation looked at the ways an experienced English teacher challenged herself, explored new areas and furthered her professional development. Her story is a good example of individual action research which involves reflective practice, peer networking and feedback from a 'critical friend'.

Background

The key constructs which provide the basis for this narrative study are reflective practice, self-efficacy and continuing professional development (CPD). Reflective practice is based on a process of learning from experience in order to evolve as a practitioner. Self-efficacy is the belief in one's own ability to complete tasks and reach goals. Lastly, continuing professional development can be any relevant learning activity, formal and structured or informal and self-directed, undertaken by an individual to further his/her professional development.

The teacher in this study has been teaching English to young learners for over 10 years. We met regularly during the school year to reflect and discuss issues of her choice. We recorded the sessions and used them to kindle further thought and questions between sessions. My role as a 'critical friend' was to listen, provide feedback and ask provocative questions to take her further in her reflection. The teacher examined her teaching in multiple ways: through oral and written reflection, through trying out new teaching approaches and by reflecting on recordings of her own teaching.

Professional development

At the onset of the study the teacher was very preoccupied with the idea of professional development. She had given it a lot of thought, both her own development as a teacher