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TransformED NI:
Transforming Teaching and Learning



Developing Others:

*Investments in people
pay interest forever*



DEVELOPING OTHERS: INVESTMENTS IN PEOPLE PAY INTEREST FOREVER

By InnerDrive



WHY CAPACITY BUILDING IS KEY

Leadership is not just about delivering results; it's about developing people. When leaders invest in others, they build the capacity to think, act and lead independently, which not only improves performance in the short term but also creates a lasting culture of growth, resilience and shared responsibility. In education, where demands are high and resources often stretched, developing others is not a luxury; it's a necessity and the more we build capacity, the more we set ourselves up for sustainable success.

The EEF's guidance report on effective professional development emphasised the point that high-quality teaching improves pupil outcomes and effective professional development offers a crucial tool to develop teaching quality and enhance children's outcomes in the classroom (EEF, 2020). Leadership development is also crucial, as a leader's impact is vital to the success of most school improvement efforts and improves teaching and learning, indirectly and most powerfully, by improving the status of significant key classroom and school conditions (Leithwood et al., 2019).

A SIMPLIFIED PROCESS OF PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

The complexity of professional development is wrapped up in cognitive science, learning theory and organisational psychology and, sadly, beyond the scope of this article, so we will explore it as a simplified three-step process.

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Step One - NEEDS ANALYSIS

We can't improve what we don't acknowledge and so the first step involves the accurate identification of gaps between current capabilities and agreed models of excellence. Self-assessment, guided reflection and formal feedback processes help individuals understand where their strengths are and what knowledge, skills and experience they need to maximise their effectiveness.

Why It Matters

Alongside the increased awareness and acceptance sits a deeper sense of ownership and accountability that comes with being involved and driving the professional development process. Beyond the individual level, accurate needs analysis at scale enables leaders to increase levels of personalisation and avoid training becoming generic, misaligned or ineffective.

How to Do It Well

Accuracy is key when selecting development priorities and leaders can improve this by:

- Collaboratively developing and agreeing on models of excellence with specific, valid and measurable criteria.
- Creating psychological safety so that individuals are comfortable being honest and vulnerable.
- Triangulating self-assessment data with insights from observation, discussion and outcomes.

Step Two - LEARNING

There is often a sizable gulf between knowing what to change and actually being able to do it and that gap is typically closed through learning. Definitions of learning portray it as the relatively straightforward process of acquiring, obtaining or gaining knowledge, skills and experience, but as we all know it is far from simplistic.

Why It Matters

Our understanding of how something works, sometimes called our mental model, strongly affects our behaviour which in turn affects our impact (Mcrae, 2017). Seeing success through this lens highlights the importance of the accuracy and organisation of our knowledge and

the reduced efficiency and effectiveness that emerge from inaccurate mental models at individual, team and organisation level.

How to Do It Well

Another well-established gap in the professional development process stretches between knowing and doing – this is where really successful processes thrive. History has taught us the benefits of methods such as self-study, observation and coaching. More recently, we have learned more about the mechanisms of effective PD (EEF, 2021) but there may be even more to consider when it comes to developing others.

Andragogy, a term popularised by Malcom Knowles describes the art and science of helping adults learn (Knowles, 1980) and thus distinguishes itself from pedagogy, where the traditional focus is on how children learn. In his work Knowles suggested the following assumptions about adult learning:

- **Self-Concept:** As people mature, they become increasingly independent, preferring more ownership and autonomy.
- **Experience:** As people mature, they accumulate experience that can enhance the learning process if utilised.
- **Readiness to Learn:** As people mature, they seek learning that is increasingly relevant to their lives.
- **Orientation to Learning:** As people mature, they increasingly seek learning that can be immediately applied.
- **Motivation:** As people mature, they become increasingly motivated by intrinsic factors.

In his later work, Knowles focused more on actionable principles for professional development and highlighted the importance of actively involving learners in planning, delivery and evaluation, utilising learner experience, ensuring strong levels of relevance and centring content on specific problems.

Step Three - DELIBERATE PRACTICE

Changing practice and improving performance is worthy of celebration, but mastery and adaptive expertise are the real gold standard and for this we need a different tool. Deliberate practice is a structured and purposeful form of professional development that focuses on improving specific areas of performance through focused attention, feedback and iteration.

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Why It Matters

Introduced in 1993 by Anders Ericsson and his team, it suggested that elite levels of expertise were not possible through just working or playing and that simple repetition was not enough. Deliberate practice reduces cognitive load through its specificity, identifies weaknesses through its feedback, improves understanding via expert modelling and habitualises practice through its cyclical nature.

How to Do It Well

The jury is still out on the precise process for deliberate practice but many models contain the following stages:

1. ***Set a Specific, Well-Defined Goal***
2. ***Intensely and Purposefully Practise***
3. ***Gather Reflections and Feedback***
4. ***Refine and Repeat***

FINAL THOUGHTS

Developing others is not a side project; it's a core responsibility of leadership. It's how we build capacity, grow confidence and create cultures of continuous improvement. It starts with an accurate awareness of what excellence looks like, where the starting point is and what's needed to reach it. The process is then fuelled by learning that is relevant, experiential, intrinsically motivating and owned by the individual. The path to mastery is paved by deliberately practising specific elements, increasing understanding with feedback, reflection and modelling and achieving improvement through iterative cycles of refinement and repetition. Leaders must also recognise that the professional development process is bigger than just the growth of expertise; it builds, trust, loyalty, belonging and well-being and investments made now will pay interest forever.

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ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Blogs

- The transfer of training: Improving the effectiveness of CPD my.chartered.college/impact_article/the-transfer-of-training-improving-the-effectiveness-of-cpd/
- What is Didagogy? Exploring the Discipline of Teaching Teachers tdtrust.org/research/didagogy-the-discipline-of-teaching-teachers/

Book

- Ericsson, A., & Pool, R. (2016). *Peak: Secrets from the new science of expertise*. Houghton Mifflin Harcourt.
- Mccrea, P. (2023). *Developing expert teaching: A practical guide to designing effective professional development, for others and ourselves*. Steplab.



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