Helping good ideas to become good practice: Enhancing your professional practice through Joint Practice Development (JPD)

By Maggie Gregson, Patricia Spedding and Lawrence Nixon

This reading draws upon five years of empirical research at the University of Sunderland’s Centre for Excellence in Teacher Training (SUNCETT). This work engages practitioners from across the further adult vocational education (FAVE) sector in HE-supported practitioner research, which aims to improve practice.

It offers insights into the practicalities of using a collaborative approach to improving teaching, learning and assessment, described as Joint Practice Development (JPD).

Focusing upon a six-stage cycle, it illustrates different stages in using JPD as an approach to the improvement of teaching and learning. It also points to the importance of measuring the impact of JPD through both hard and soft indicators of change and improvement.


Why should education leaders and teachers use the JPD approach to CPD?

It is customary for leaders of education to use continuing professional development (CPD) budgets to update the subject and pedagogical knowledge of their staff. Usually this involves attending time consuming, often expensive, courses, conferences or other events where someone who is considered (or considers themselves) to be ‘an expert’ tells everyone else in attendance what to do.

While such CPD events and networks might be helpful in raising awareness of new developments, exchanging ideas and sharing resources – arguably a necessary first step in improving practice, it is not enough to guarantee it. This is because a lot more ‘new learning’ (Eraut, 2004) has to take place before knowledge is ‘transferred’ well enough to bring about real changes in practice. Eraut uses the metaphor of an iceberg to explain how practice really changes. He argues that abstract, theoretical knowledge and information about a ‘good practice’ constitutes only one eighth of the knowledge needed to put a ‘good idea’ into practice and that the remaining seven eighths represents the amount of new learning needed to bring about real changes in practice. In view of this, education leaders need to think carefully about the extent to which existing, taken-for granted approaches to CPD can be justified in terms of value for money.

Central to Joint Practice Development (JPD) is the recognition that changing and improving practice involves more than the simple transfer of information. The JPD approach to CPD acknowledges that change takes time. It recognises that the reality of putting ideas into practice places greater demands upon the relationships of those involved in the processes of change and those responsible for the practices of improvement (Fielding et al., 2005).

How can JPD be organised and used to improve teaching, learning and assessment?

This reading deals with the practical issues of how to go about improving teaching, learning and assessment (TLA) in straightforward, cost-effective and sustainable ways using JPD as an integral part of an organisation’s CPD strategy.

We describe a sequenced series of six workshops each with a distinct aim. We summarise the sequence in the six-step cycle diagram below. This outline has been developed to help leaders of education and teachers get a further sense of what JPD could look like in practice. It is designed to stimulate and focus the discussions required to put JPD into practice. As such it is not a template or a ‘recipe’ but a stimulus and focus for discussion which can and should be adapted to suit particular circumstances.

Figure 1: The six-step cycle for putting JPD into action

(Each step should be supported by a workshop)

**Step one: Creating conditions for the collaborative improvement of practice**

**Step two: Sharing experience of practice and making room for improvement**

**Step three: Identifying improvement priorities**

**Step four: Developing and implementing improvement priorities**

**Step five: Interim evaluation of impact and adaption**

**Step six: Final evaluation of impact and identification of the next priorities for improvement**

**Workshop one:**

**Creating conditions for JPD**

This first workshop will enable you to explain the need to take a new approach to CPD and help you to introduce ideas about JPD to colleagues in your organisation. This is why it’s a good idea to think about how you can use existing collaborative relationships to lay the foundations for new ones and decide who might be responsible for the introduction, development and co-ordination of the project.

**Workshop two:**

**Sharing experience of practice and making room for argument and improvement**

This workshop can help participants to begin to talk about aspects of practice they would