Joint Practice Development
a different approach to CPD?

Jamie Mortimer
Community Learning and Skills Development
Abstract

Just over 2 years ago Ofsted visited our organisation and inspected the computer curriculum. They observed that tutors were not setting learners with smart targets and therefore our achievements were overstated and as 60% of our provision was unaccredited, we got the requires improvement grade.

A year and many interventions later regular auditing demonstrated we were no further forward. We needed a different approach to our CPD and we needed to gain support from senior management that the different approach was effective.

The main purpose of the research was to evaluate the contexts to which Joint practice development can contribute towards improving the quality of teaching, the quality of learning and the quality of assessment. Pilots were carried out and the impact of the interventions on tutors teaching, learning and assessment were evaluated and the tutor pod model was born.

Joint practice development has proved to be an effective and sustainable approach to CPD, but only if these tutor pods are directed and facilitated, only if there is a structure and only if the research is carried out based on robust and credible educational theory is there success.

From an organisational point of view, it is only worth doing if relationships are nurtured and professional discussion is embedded and encouraged in the pod model. Oh, and Ofsted now think we’re good.
Introduction

This research has been carried out within the context of an Adult and Community Learning\(^1\) provider in the large rural county of Suffolk. Community Learning and Skills Development\(^2\) has recently been divested\(^3\) from Suffolk County Council as part of a social enterprise, Realise Futures CIC\(^4\). The Skills Funding Agency\(^5\) still have the contract for adult learning with the Local Authority on the condition that the CLSD be the single provider for delivering the contract.

In May 2011 CLSD were inspected by Ofsted\(^6\) and a dedicated Inspector was sent to review Sector Area 9, ICT\(^7\) for users. The review concluded that the provision was satisfactory because of 2 areas for development; the quality of teaching and learning and the unsatisfactory setting of SMART\(^8\) targets indicating overstated achievement within unaccredited provision which at the time accounted for 60% of SA9.

During the period between June 2011 and September 2012 many interventions were planned to address the skills gap of tutors in setting challenging and stretching SMART targets, none of which yielded satisfactory results. We needed a different method of truly engaging tutors and developing their own brand of best practice.

The reason for researching Joint Practice Development\(^9\) as a method of professional development amongst tutors is as a result of continued attempts to get a cohort of teachers to change their practice of a very specific skill. Two pilots were carried out; the first where tutors were invited to take part, had tight but loose objectives and we armed with lots of quality pre-reading on sound educational theories. A second where they were told to attend and left to develop their practice on their terms in their own way.

---

\(^1\) ACL
\(^2\) CLSD
\(^3\) define divestment
\(^4\) Community Interest Company
\(^5\) SFA
\(^6\) Office for Inspections
\(^7\) Information Communication Technology
\(^8\) Specific Measurable Achievable Realistic Time-bound
\(^9\) JPD
So, is JPD an effective approach to CPD? Absolutely, tutors feel valued, have ownership of their CPD and are collaborating with peers and the management team. There has also been wider engagement in all types of CPD.

Only if these tutor pods are directed and facilitated, only if there is a structure and only if the research is carried out based on robust and credible educational theory is there success.

And from an organisational point of view, none of this is worth doing unless the relationships are nurtured and professional discussion is embedded and encouraged in the pod model. Oh, and Ofsted now think we're good.

As the FE guild is about to be born and as they claim part of their 18 million is earmarked for practitioner research. They need to know JPD works and they need to allocate funds to build these communities of learning!
Joint Practice Development

Joint Practice Development\textsuperscript{10} isn’t new. It’s practitioner led research with the comfortable blanket that is a community of learning to support you when times are tough, when no one is listening or when you struggle to put pen to paper. It’s what we might call research conducted by the sector, for the sector; not research bestowed on the sector by HE\textsuperscript{11}. When practitioners first embark on such research it needs to be done sensitively, they need to tread carefully, they need their SMT\textsuperscript{12} on side. The earliest documented account of practitioner research can be attributed to the young Hungarian doctor Semmelweis who studied 2 maternity wards and the mortality rates of newly born babies; one was 2% and the other was up to 30%. He eventually concluded it was directly linked to doctors not washing their hands after handling cadavers before delivering babies. He later died for his beliefs after his peers had him committed to an asylum and the medical world neglected his claims;

‘the medical fraternity, protesting all the time that Semmelweis had interesting data \textbf{but no theory}, took an inordinately long time to accept the breakthrough’ (Coffield, 2010).

Coffield believes that the the worlds of education and medicine are not so dissimilar when it comes to the need for theory, he poses the question;

‘Are professional thinking and practice as difficult to change in education as they appear to be in medicine?’ (Coffield 2010).

He answers his own question by concluding that ‘in education, the evidence tends to be more blurred and confusing and yet we are still dealing with life chances, lack of opportunities and the well-being of millions of people’. So how do we ensure that we learn from the mistakes of the past? We need to create an environment and a culture where it is safe to challenge current and established practices.

\textsuperscript{10} JPD
\textsuperscript{11} Higher Education
\textsuperscript{12} Senior Management Team
A ‘Community of Learning’ (Fielding et al, 2005) can be defined when an organisation embraces the following five characteristics;

- Learning is not just another task for the SMT but the focal point of everything.
- Tutors and learners have a ‘collective responsibility for outcomes’ (Fielding, 2006).
- ‘Staff at all levels are encouraged to challenge and tell the truth, SMTs embrace difference, debate and disagreement as the foundation stones of improvement’ (Hargreaves, 2003).
- ‘Tutors have the intellectual and physical space to experiment with ideas, techniques and resources, and to make mistakes in the constant search for improvement’ (Coffield, 2010).
- Teaching, learning and assessment are improved by being informed by research, reflective practice and JPD.

CPD tends to be ‘expert led and involves new knowledge being bestowed upon the tutors who are considered to have a deficit in respect to the new ideas’ (Gregson, Nixon, Spedding & Kearney, 2013). JPD is different, it suggests that by collectively putting research findings into practice learners, tutors, managers and organisations can real changes can be made. JPD is an approach that can be used to improve teaching, learning and assessment that;

‘takes account of the existing practice of teachers who are trying to learn new ways of working and acknowledges the effort of those who are trying to support them. It also underscores the necessity of mutual engagement, which lies at the heart of the complex task of opening up and sharing practices with others’ (Fielding et al, 2005).

The four guiding principles of JPD as cited by Gregson, Nixon, Spedding & Kearney are;

- Make space for trust, openness and honesty.
- Establish a shared understanding of the educational problem and how it makes educational sense for it to be addressed.
- Share the experience of trying out innovative practices.
- Critically review overall progress together.
The introduction of JPD will not mean that an organisation has become a Community of Learning nor will it mean that an organisation has good teaching, learning or assessment. JPD is a tool for encouraging collaboration between learners, tutors, managers and organisations to try out new ideas, adapt or validate current practice. This is achieved by wrapping everyone in a structured process that ultimately elicits collective critical evaluation and reflection. Therefore producing reliable evidence that can be measured and therefore allows everyone to be able to assess the impact that the intervention has had on the teaching, learning and assessment.

The four guiding principles need to be realised if a potentially effective intervention is to occur. The importance of building the relationships between learners, tutors and managers is vital to the success and without it sharing the experience of trying out the innovative practice and critically reviewing it’s impact will not happen honestly. Fielding et al claim;

‘most tutors were keen to learn from other tutors in cultures characterised by realism, cooperation, constructive criticism, honesty and mutual respect’

Therefore good teaching, learning and assessment can be realised by JPD underpinning CPD and SMTs focusing on building their organisation into a ‘Community of Learning’.

...

The effectiveness of joint practice development is not in question; there is a plethora of research that has used joint practice development as a methodology for CPD and there is also research available that analyses it’s effectiveness as a model its self.
Methodology

I initiated bringing together two groups of tutors from within the Computers and Technology curriculum to consider two different educational issues; one issue to be consider by one group only. I recorded data for analysis in the form of tutor interviews, field notes captured while observing group meetings, further field notes when discussing progress or issues with tutors on a one to one basis and the final report sheets that tutors created and brought to the final group meeting.

The two groups were formed and ran in two very different ways. Group one was to be the group that used our sustainable interpretation of JPD and the second group was essentially chaired and ran as the tutors involved saw fit.

**Group One**
This pilot was assembled by inviting tutors to join a project to address the barriers to learning that existed in the classroom of our Computer Skills to Gain Qualifications courses; a course that is accredited with ITQ\(^{13}\) units. This project was initiated because learner attainment of ITQ units over the course of a year had previously been on average 1.7 units (11/12 academic year) and CLSD strategy meant increasing the Computers and Technology curriculum targets by 400% in the following academic year (13/14). It was deemed a valid educational issue for CLSD to address such low levels of attainment by developing learners to take more responsibility for their learning and become independent learners.

Three tutors were selected to be participants from the four that had expressed an interest. A fourth member, the group facilitator, was appointed by myself and their role was to organise and coach and mentor the tutors throughout the project.

When they were invited to attend the first meeting they were provided with pre-reading on the teaching theories that 'could' be used to inform their choices and decisions on how they would address the educational issue in question. Part of the pre-reading they were supplied with was also information on JPD and specifically how I expected it to support the project that they were about to begin.

---

\(^{13}\) Information Technology Qualification
**Group Two**

This pilot was assembled in a very different way; three tutors were selected as domain experts from within the Computers and Technology curriculum and requested to attend an initial meeting. The purpose of which was to review the existing **Digital Photography** course; to specifically devise a standard portfolio for evidencing the course outcomes and to also devise a more advance course as a progression route for existing and previous learners. These two issues had been highlighted in the Internal Verifiers report as areas for development so there was a clear need to carry out the piece of work.

In this group there was no facilitator or chair provided or appointed; I attended the first meeting and took extensive field notes and initial interviews with the tutors. All further field notes were recorded from emails sent between the group members and myself; I requested that they copy me in on emails bot so I could check up on them but so that I had data to analyse as part of the research. This group was not provided with any pre-reading and they did not have JPD explained.
The timeframe that the research was carried out within meant that both groups were not going to complete their full lifecycle before the research was carried out. To mitigate the potential loss of data I decided to have group one begin first as that group would complete and the evidence was only being captured at the project meetings. Due to the ‘no management intervention’ of group two the evidence was being captured throughout the process and therefore there would be more data available at the time the research was carried out. Further sources of evidence were collected indirectly from learner interviews and ILPs by the tutors and reported in their feedback in meetings, emails and final reports.

**Ethical Considerations**

Both groups understood that they were involved in the research but neither group knew the other was being operated in a different way. All tutors informed and obtained permission of their cohorts of learners that may be influenced by the actions agreed within their projects. Tutors also provided consent to be involved in the projects. Both learners and tutors had the right to withdraw permission at any point. Learners and tutors were encouraged to ask questions about the project and no covert observations or experiments were carried out which would put any learner or tutor at a disadvantage.
Success Criteria
It was anticipated that the use of JPD in the adapted form would:

- Increase collaboration between tutors and the management team.
- Engage tutors in a collective critical evaluation of their practice.
- Tutors actively taking control of their CPD.
- Improved quality of teaching.
- Improved quality of learning.
- Improved quality of assessment.
What happened

JPD isn’t complicated or difficult to introduce. In fact it was very straight forward to initiate our two pilot groups. One was instigated by sending out an open invitation to all tutors within the Computers and Technology curriculum and then recruiting three tutors to join myself and a Senior Tutor. The other group

**Group One**
Observer JM
Senior Tutor; facilitator EB
Tutor LN
Tutor CD
Tutor JH

Group 1 were initially prepared by being sent a presentation and some background reading on Assessment for Learning. When the members attended the initial workshop Emily introduced the teaching theory concepts that we were proposing could be used in our Computer and Technology classrooms and to redevelop some of teaching tools such as ILPs, Skills checks (for initial or diagnostic assessments) and more general teaching resources.

The members were then actively encouraged to discuss the teaching theories and how they might be transferred to level 1 and level 2 courses in Computer and Technology classrooms. An area traditionally perceived as skills based and very much requiring most of the learning to be carried out by learners independently, which relies on the use of workbooks and therefore a lot of reading and then practicing skills. Something I have felt quite uncomfortable about, especially after successfully introducing ICT Functional Skills at entry levels 1 to 3 on our beginner courses and developing learners to be creative and solution focused only to progress on to a higher level course and return to learning in a very prescribed way.

The discussions were really animated and you could see how inspired the members were becoming talking about teaching theories and how they are present in their classrooms already or how they could be if teaching resources were redeveloped and used in a different way in the classroom. The facilitator had a clear, but very loose, set of objectives
that the members were to focus on; quality of teaching, learning and assessment and improving learner attainment of number of units within the ITQ\textsuperscript{14}. Each member, including the facilitator, took away actions that they were going to contribute towards the group objectives. The members were briefed to carry out the changes to their teaching practice immediately, they could discuss ideas with the group, seek support but they did not need permission to change something within their classroom.

The ideas that came out of the initial discussion were truly inspiring and in fact there were too many to action within the project timescales or in time to positively impact on courses about to begin. Some actions were taken away from the meeting and added to the curriculum quality improvement plan to be completed by the dedicated curriculum team. The ideas that the group were most passionate about and that the individual members could own from conception through to changed delivery were actioned.

The members took their actions, researched relevant teaching theories and methodologies and implemented the changes agreed. All members were then expected to report back on the impact of their changes specifically on teaching, learning and assessment as well as making some judgements on potential impact on retention, achievement and success. The group would then discuss critically analyse the impact of the actions. LN and JH are tutors that have always demonstrated great potential. Empowering them to look at educational issues from a different view point and with a different focus.

‘I feel so empowered to try things and I’m thinking about them in a different way’ (LN).

After they tried out one idea and collectively critiqued the impact of the intervention they both all of a sudden saw what success was and once they had discovered success and how to find it they were trying out more and more different interventions. The evidence points to the fact that once a tutor can feel and taste what success is they begin to know what it looks like and how to recognise it.

‘I want to reproduce that again, I want to feel that again’ (JH).

\textbf{Group Two}

Observer JM

\textsuperscript{14} Information Technology Qualification, nationally recognized standard qualification
Group two were all specifically requested to attend the meetings but were given very little direction with developing their practice at the initial meeting. They were given an overall objective to standardise learner portfolios and consolidate their teaching resources for an Introduction to Digital Photography course they were all delivering. The group met in a very informal setting (the learning centre cafe) as tutors had often remarked that they didn’t like meeting in the classrooms as it felt that management were teaching them best practice. DP also held the post of Learner Support Technician and was able to discuss any technical or hardware issues that might arise as tutors had often commented they didn’t have good enough access to support.

The tutors in group two tackled the objective in a very task focused style. They broke the objective down into tasks and divided them out amongst themselves. They took the opportunity (of being paid to attend a meeting) to collectively review the most recent Internal Verifier report and discussed the validity of the comments. The tutors decided which comments they needed to reflect on and used this knowledge to allocate the tasks to tutors.

They did collectively determine what actions needed to be completed and they did collectively agree who would complete what. However, without a facilitator no timescales were set. The email communications between them once the meeting was over was limited and not at all regular. No further collaboration was evidenced, a few emails asking each other to ‘take a look at this’ (GM) or ‘please can I have you feedback on this document’ (AP). Neither of the two tutors ever requested DPs help or support but he never offered them any either, he didn’t engage in the email conversations at all.

There was no collective ownership of the educational issue and there was certainly no relationships built.
Findings

Learners
The learners effected from group ones activity demonstrated real ownership of their learning goals. There was real evidence that learners were critically evaluating the mode of learning that tutors were using to teach particular topics and learners were beginning to identify when a mode of learning was not going to be effective for them.

There were no learners effected from group two as none of their developments reached conclusion. It would not be fair to say that there was going to be no impact on learners as a result of the project as a progression course was nearing completion.

The impact on learners was far greater by group one, but not only that it had a far quicker impact on the learners.

Tutors
In both groups the tutors felt much more valued by the management team and the organisation its self. However, the tutors from group two had limited success and that impacted on their confidence and their self worth. Both groups of tutors felt they had contributed towards curriculum development but it was only tutors from group one that believed they had successfully improved practice and not only contributed to curriculum development but had also improved practice within the curriculum.

As a direct result of the tutors from group one collectively critically evaluating the changes and adaptionts to practice really owned their learners progress and achievements. They could actually tell you why one learner achieved X and why another learner achieved Y. Only group one achieved collaboration between tutors and management; group two didn’t even achieve any level of collaboration between anyone.

Organisation
The interventions that tutors carried out in group one yielded improved retention, achievement and success and they yielded improved quality of teaching, learning and assessment. Group two had no impact on organisational targets or objectives.
The most unexpected finding of all was that through initiating the projects within the curriculum there has been a much higher level of engagement in all forms of CPD. All tutors that are required are attending standardisation events for the courses they deliver. 10 out of 24 tutors recently attended and achieved on a week long intensive assessors course during half term. It doesn’t just stop with the teaching staff, the member of staff responsible for the curriculum administration also completed and achieved the assessors course and has now started a PTLLS\textsuperscript{15} course.

**Recommendations**

The Tutor Pod model developed and adapted from JPD and implemented in the group one project has been a successful model for bringing about effective change to tutor practice and has

1. The quality of facilitation within the tutor pod is vital to the effectiveness of the success of the tutors.
2. The facilitator needs to have excellent coaching and mentoring skills.
3. The changes the tutors make to their practice need to be based on robust and credible teaching theories.
4. The management participation is crucial in connecting proposed changes to practice to organisational targets, objectives and the quality improvement plan.
5. A relationship of trust and openness between all members of the tutor pod is needed to get active and honest engagement from everyone.
6. A template tutor report should be used to ease eliciting discussion points in the final meeting of the tutor pod and also to disseminate findings to tutors across the organisation.
7. The whole process is only worthwhile if room for open and honest professional discussions can take place; which will then lead to collective critical evaluation.

\textsuperscript{15} Preparing to Teach in the Lifelong Learning Sector
References


Coffield F. (2010) Yes, but what has Semmelweis to do with my professional development as a tutor? London: LSN.


Stoll L (2011) Leading Professional Learning Communities. London:


