

THE BUTTERFLY EFFECT

Struggling to devote enough time and effort to CPD? Perhaps you need to change your approach, suggests Anna Pedroza

Sir Tim Brighouse, the renowned educationalist, speaks regularly about the importance of encouraging low effort but high impact activities in schools. He often describes these as ‘butterflies’ – a reference to the idea that if enough of those winged insects were to flap their wings in the Amazon it could trigger a hurricane many miles away. At a recent event run by the Teacher Development Trust about how best to raise the quality of teaching, Sir Tim encouraged the audience to look out for, and share, their ‘CPD butterflies’.

A CPD butterfly could be something as simple as a small group of teachers discussing teaching techniques and reflecting on their experiences, or someone writing an article for a teaching and learning newsletter to share ideas they’ve been working on. However an interesting influence is digital technology, which is often a key support for this type of high impact, low effort CPD. One area that is being transformed in some schools is the way in which teachers can view each other’s teaching.

At Balby Carr Sports and Science College in Doncaster they have filmed a wide range of lessons that provide examples of practice from teaching the new creative curriculum in humanities to classroom management techniques in year 9.

“The normal procedure would be for a teacher to observe a relevant lesson,” explains history teacher Matt McDonald. “But this needs to be coordinated and a real life lesson can only be watched once. It’s also a distracting experience to sit in someone else’s classroom, and it can be hard to remain a neutral observer. The filmed lessons mean that teachers can

watch a lesson numerous times, at their own convenience and without interruption.”

Balby Carr has also found that the bank of video lessons is invaluable for new staff joining the school and for mentors to use to support NQTs. They have invested in the sophisticated Iris Connect video system – but schools could pilot this approach using more basic technology.

Look and learn

Seeing into other classrooms is also a characteristic of Teachers Media’s free training packs. Many of these have been created from the Teachers TV archive but, unlike at Balby Carr, the content is carefully selected and edited into a series of clips followed by discussion questions.

The University of Hertfordshire has just started using Teachers Media and Sally Graham, who is director, Centre for Coaching and Mentoring, reports that for students it offers a guided way to view a lesson. “These packs give people the opportunity to be the fly on the wall,” she comments. “To go into classrooms and to actually look at their practice.”

Another approach to observing teacher practice using digital technology is used by teacher Genevieve Smith Nunes to support teacher training. Google Hangouts is a relatively new tool, which allows up to nine people to connect in a live video session via the internet.

Genevieve used Google Hangouts to work with four schools that were geographically dispersed. They were all preparing to attend a hackday event, but the staff and students in all the establishments needed to learn a new programming language in preparation. First, she took an hour-long lesson with the four classes. Each teacher sat in with his or her students to



ABOUT THE EXPERT

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observe the lesson and Genevieve was visible to the students on the whiteboard.

Once the teaching session was completed and the students had left, Genevieve facilitated a professional discussion with the teachers. In this they discussed techniques for teaching the programming language, how to deal with specific parts and ideas for resources. It's clear that this was a much better informed and useful discussion because the teachers had been able to observe Genevieve teaching and watch how their own students reacted.

Genevieve feels that Google Hangouts helps overcome geographic issues and offers a highly effective way for teachers to observe each others' teaching. "Using this approach enabled me to teach remotely and to then follow up with teachers in terms of their professional practice," she observes. "Participants were able to talk to their peers and to observe me teaching from their classrooms. It's hard to see how traditional training could have achieved this."

Shared opportunities

Digital technology is also helping teachers to communicate and share ideas beyond their immediate school through the use of the social media platform Twitter. Tracey Bowers, a teacher in Brighton and member of Digital Education Brighton, values the social media platform enormously. "For me Twitter takes my professional development to a new level," she enthuses. "A great deal of information that one learns on a training course is wasted and never implemented but Twitter enables teachers across the country to talk to each other to share ideas, solve problems and support development."

Tracey takes part in the weekly Twitter chat #DLChat set up by Sheli Blackburn to support the Digital Leaders initiative, which is about recognising that students can lead learning in digital technologies. #DLChat takes place on a Thursday evening at 9pm with between ten and 20 participants from the UK and further afield at any chat.

#DLChat offers an opportunity for teachers involved in digital leader initiatives to share ideas and to learn from each other. Those with more experience can support and coach others who are just starting to set up their own digital leaders initiative. Through this, Tracey has also built her own personal advice network that she can call on when she needs help. She values the support she gains, which is timely and relevant because it is driven by her engagement.

David Weston, Chief Executive of the Teacher Development Trust welcomes the role that tools like Twitter can offer – although he also calls for wider changes to improve the professional development received by teachers in line with the Trust's aims (see Additional Resources). "Digital technology has transformed teacher CPD, particularly by facilitating an exponential increase in the number of informal learning opportunities," he comments. "However, it is also clear that technology is increasingly allowing more formal pooling and sharing of expertise whether in the form of video, document sharing, webinars or forums. This is a welcome trend, although increased flow of information can never be a substitute for the hard mental work needed to change long-established practices."

Seek and find

A key point about CPD butterflies is that it's as much about looking for them as it is about creating them. Many schools could be treasure troves of brilliant high impact low effort CPD ideas that simply need to be uncovered and properly recognised. David believes this is key. "School culture is paramount when it comes to teachers' professional development," he confirms. "Nothing crushes professionalism and teacher growth as much as a top-down view that there is one mould for perfect teaching in to which every member of staff must be forcibly trained to fit."

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

+ SIR TIM BRIGHOUSE'S SPEAKING ABOUT CPD BUTTERFLIES:
[HTTP://BIT.LY/UX6GZZ](http://bit.ly/UX6GZZ)

+ INFORMATION ABOUT TEACHERS MEDIA'S FREE TRAINING PACKS:
[TEACHERSMEDIA.CO.UK](http://teachersmedia.co.uk)

+ TEACHER DEVELOPMENT TRUST:
[TEACHERDEVELOPMENT TRUST.ORG](http://teacherdevelopmenttrust.org)

+ TWEETING FOR TEACHERS: HOW CAN SOCIAL MEDIA SUPPORT TEACHER PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT? BY JULIE MCCULLOCH, EWAN MCINTOSH AND TOM BARRETT
[TINYURL.COM/TSTEACH](http://tinyurl.com/tsteach)
TWEET

+ INFORMATION ABOUT GOOGLE HANGOUTS:
[TINYURL.COM/TSHANG OUT](http://tinyurl.com/tshangout)

+ DIGITAL LEADERS:
[DIGITALEADERNETWORK K.CO.UK](http://digitalleadernetwork.co.uk)

Sarah Imbush, who is head of maths at Southend High School for Girls, agrees that getting the environment right can really help the CPD butterflies to flourish. For example, two younger teachers in her department developed a model for encouraging students to lead learning and unintentionally created a new CPD opportunity. The pair undertook a lesson swap, which involved them each teaching their own class two distinct topics within maths. Once each class had a good grasp of the subject they split their classes in half and mixed them up for the next lesson. Students then led the learning, teaching each other about the topic that they'd learnt.

Although the focus was on student led learning it also led valuable professional development. "It gave both teachers a student perspective on how well their own teaching had been absorbed," reports Sarah. "It also let them see the results of each other's teaching styles and to take on new ideas for teaching specific topics."

Embracing Sir Tim Brighouse's idea for high impact, low effort CPD butterflies needs to happen at a school level if at all possible. This enables easy-to-implement ideas to lead to dramatic results across the school. Of course ideas abound, and ex-teacher David Weston can't resist one suggestion: "Lots of school conversations between staff are about pupil behaviour or administrative tasks. A low-effort, high-impact change that is vital, is for everyone to make an effort to have at least one discussion about 'the best way to teach X to students like Y' every day. These pedagogical discussions are key to improving practice, and once the culture becomes established then CPD focused on pupil learning becomes a natural part of every day work."

So, as the first signs of spring start to show, how about investing in a butterfly net of your own to find some of the potential CPD gems in your school?