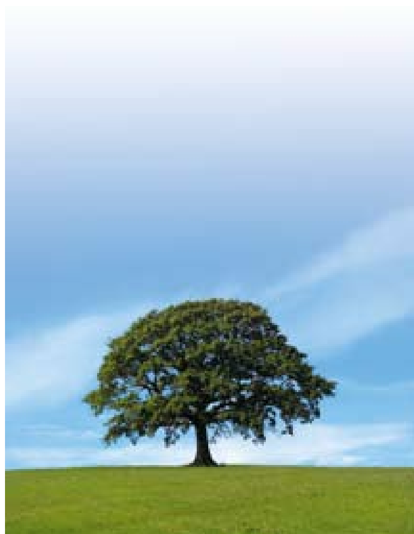
Sauce for the Goose

Learning entitlements that work for teachers as well as for their pupils

Philippa Cordingley



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CUREE Ltd

4 Copthall House
Station Square
Coventry CV1 2FL
Tel: 024 7652 4036
Fax: 024 7663 1646
E-mail: info@curee.co.uk

Sauce for the Goose – Learning entitlements that work for teachers as well as for their pupils

What do we know about how teachers learn? How does teacher learning compare with pupil learning? How does support for professional learning compare with the evidence? My aim in this pamphlet is to provoke thought and debate about these questions.

Since the creation of the National Framework for Mentoring and Coaching in 2005 CUREE has continued to develop coaching practice. We have translated research into practical summaries, tools and protocols and worked with several thousand teachers, and with those who lead and facilitate their learning in schools, Local Authorities (LAs) and Higher Education Institutions (HEIs). Over the past ten years this work has strengthened our belief in the power of professional learning to transform teaching, pupil achievement, and the status of the profession as a whole and enriched our understanding of how this works on the ground. I am taking this opportunity to share our ideas and experiences with you and to connect them with the findings from three new reviews of research about:

- the nature of specialist contributions to teacher learning where evidence demonstrates benefits to pupil achievement (Cordingley et al, 2007);
- the nature of professional learning and CPD (Timperley et al, 2006); and
- what leaders contribute to pupil achievement (Robinson, 2007).

But this is also a party piece. I am launching the pamphlet at our tenth birthday party as we celebrate a decade of learning with and from practitioners.

Finally, although my suggestions are based on both practice and research, I believe we need more, much more, of both.

The argument in outline

Current knowledge about teaching and learning is much richer than current knowledge about CPD. The gap is bigger still between knowledge about continuing professional *learning and CPD*. It's true that recent years have seen much progress in collecting together and using evidence about CPD that impacts positively on pupils and teachers. But it is probably inevitable that researchers, and those who have commissioned and provided CPD, have focused on the most visible and easily altered variable: the *inputs* to teacher learning. As yet, evidence about professional learning is embedded in light-touch ways in the literature about CPD and about professional learning communities.

Just as the evidence base for supporting professional learning is patchy, so is practice. There are trends and approaches pulling in different directions. Traditionally, schools, like researchers and funders, focussed on the inputs to CPD which were largely understood as external, frequently one-off, courses and programmes. This is changing through increasing recognition of the importance of school-based, collaborative development. But an unhelpful side effect of this otherwise positive trend has been a reduction in contributions to CPD from colleagues with specialist knowledge of both the content and process of professional learning. Effective learning for teachers, like effective learning for their pupils depends on deep understanding of the learning content and goals brought to bear through planning and dynamic interactions between learners and those who support them. In the context of CPD this includes including other professional learners; we need a pedagogy for CPD just as much as we need one for pupils.

Ensuring all teacher can access the best possible CPD means clarifying the evidence that *does* exist about professional learning and learners and using this to explore the strategic opportunities and challenges that lie between current practice and a future in which teachers take increasing control of, and responsibility for professional learning.

In short I am arguing that a clearly understood focus on *professional learning* is key to self-directed professional development, expert specialist support, improved pupil learning and professional agency.

Starting the conversation with teaching and learning

When I work with colleagues from schools and local authorities to build coaching capacity, I start with a 'Rolf Harris-type' portrait (sadly in words not pictures) of 2-3 examples of excellent teaching and learning developed and researched by teachers. I choose examples from the growing banks of high-quality teacher enquiry that are likely both to connect with and extend the perspectives of the practitioners I meet (http://www.standards.dfes.gov.uk/ntrp/). I select them because they illustrate

many key ingredients in facilitating learning that the increasingly mature evidence base identifies as being closely linked to benefits for pupils (Bell et al, 2008). I paint the portraits. Colleagues in pairs or small groups unpack them, use their own knowledge, expertise and judgement and he examples as analytic tools. Plenary feedback adds detail and additional perspectives for deeper understanding. Within forty-five minutes we create a rich and interconnected picture of knowledge rooted in practice, and the public knowledge base, and my job is simply to identify and fill in any gaps. Everyone enjoys discovering and rediscovering their knowledge and beliefs about pupil learning. So far so good. Then comes the challenge.

How does what we know about pupil learning compare with what we know about teacher learning?

This is tougher. Participants set to with a will to unpack key ingredients of continuing professional learning from pen portraits, armed with recent encapsulations of their own and the system's knowledge about pupil learning which might include:

- offering pupils the chance to explore why things work the way they do;
- peer support between pupils, including taking on the role of mentor, coach or even teacher; and
- setting ground rules collaboratively and building skills in using them to create a learning environment.

But their experiences of professional learning are slighter than their experiences of facilitating pupil learning. So there are always significant gaps between the picture they build and, for example, the principles which underpin the National Framework for Mentoring and Coaching - a Continuing Professional Development (CPD) tool created to distil the public knowledge base about what makes a difference to teachers and their pupils.

In our experience:

- few groups seem to see it as significant that specialist colleagues are involved in helping teachers think about the underpinning rationale for new approaches as well as showing them

how they work. Conversations about how things work are still much more prevalent than conversations about why they work, even though it's understanding the rationale that helps teachers interpret and adapt new approaches to their own context;

- few pick out, unprompted, the importance in the examples of teachers' learning to coach other teachers. The emphasis in most colleagues' minds is on coaching by experts rather than the usefulness for teachers of *learning to act as a coach*; and
- few focus on the different ways in which specialists go about building a learning environment for teachers.

Some don't notice the importance of a thoughtful relationship that handles sensitively the strong feelings and beliefs involved in professional development. For these colleagues, development seems to be concerned with acquiring and then using specific specialist information.

Why don't colleagues make the connections and seek out the same conditions and processes for their own learning? The answer might be that many of us are unused to thinking about professional learning – especially our own. The cobbler's children, it seems, go once again unshod.

I am not arguing that pupil and teacher learning are exactly the same. There are differences as well as similarities. Some contain tensions. Most heads and many teachers see CPD as an extrovert process whose ultimate goal is to make a difference to young people's learning. Some see it, at least additionally, as being concerned with the development of the teacher as an individual, leaving the interpretation and application of whatever has been learned as a matter for personal professional judgement. But it is difficult to argue that CPD should be solely focused on personal growth. That is a valuable enterprise but hardly a professional one; the term 'professional' in CPD entails a professional purpose. Learning for pupils is, by contrast, concerned with preparing them for their own lives and for making a contribution to society and the economy. The learning sits directly in the service of the learner.

Notwithstanding England's standardised testing regimes, it is also important to remember the broader expectations and roles laid on teachers by society, by government – and by teachers' and parents' own experiences as pupils. The starting points for teacher learning are more complex than those for pupils because they involve an already established set of skills, knowledge, values and beliefs that will have been internalised. Such internalisation is important for managing complexity. It isn't possible to make the second-by-second judgements that dynamic classroom interaction demands without having assimilated a wide range of knowledge, ideas and skills in a tacit form. But this means in turn that changing such knowledge and skills requires both a process to make them explicit and some challenging unlearning.

Identity is another complicating factor. The identity of pupils as learners is widely understood. Although, in a knowledge society, many now understand that the role of teacher is no longer simply that of communicator of knowledge, facts and ideas, there is nevertheless strong pressure to appear 'expert'. In one sense this is right and proper. It is deep expertise that enables teachers to *hand over* increasing control of learning processes to learners. It is deep knowledge and understanding that enables teachers to locate active learning strategies within clear frameworks and objectives. Such knowledge and expertise gives teachers confidence to build on their pupils' ideas and experiences and connect them with frameworks and goals. The problem, if there is one, lies in misunderstanding the real value of deep subject knowledge and insufficient recognition of its importance in freeing up learning.

So, while many aspects of professional learning, and thus of the activities that support it, have much in common with those we put in place for young pupils, there are important differences too. What evidence do we have to help us unpack these differences?

Continuing Professional Development (CPD) – a help or a hindrance?

CPD has been the main mechanism for supporting professional learning. Although there are signs that practice and ideas are changing, the Logical Chain thematic review by Ofsted (2006) tells us that progress is patchy. Many colleagues in schools still see CPD as one-off courses, whole-school, one-size-fits-no-one INSET days, or largely serendipitous and unstructured learning derived from wrestling with the complex business of teaching on a daily basis. This is a shame.

I'll have what he's having!

The evidence base about CPD offers much richer possibilities. It highlights the importance of:

- specialist contributions to structure CPD and root it in evidence;
- peer support to embed specialist contributions in everyday contexts, encourage experiments beyond the comfort zone, and enable teachers to interpret and refine programme goals in their own context;
- activities to structure dialogue that makes practice and beliefs explicit and so enables review and reflection;
- activities to help teachers build on their own starting points;
- support for approaching and evaluating teacher learning through the lens of their hopes and aspirations for their *own*, as well as their students', learning; and
- creative use of resources and time to sustain learning.

I would argue that the teaching profession is brilliantly placed to take advantage of this evidence base and, at the same time, to take increasing control over its own professional learning if it focuses on and integrates:

- what's known about facilitating pupil learning; and
- what's known about CPD; with
- the emerging evidence base about the nature of teacher learning.

What is sauce for the goose, in this case the pupils, is sauce for the gander – the teachers. The point is to ensure that the sauce is piquant and fresh, perhaps with an enlivening hint of chilli, ginger and coriander (Dimbleby, 2007) rather than an over-sweetened mass of canned fruit. If we are able to apply what we know about pupil learning to teacher learning we need to be sure that the knowledge base we refer to is strong and the process of interpreting and contextualising it is undertaken with care. Pupils learn in order to act increasingly maturely, knowledgeably and powerfully as individuals. Teachers learn in order to influence actions of future generations.

Why the focus on the inputs of CPD rather than the intended goal?

There are other reasons why school colleagues are unused to talking explicitly about how to support professional learning. Inevitably, the public knowledge base and public policy about CPD has focused predominantly on the features of CPD that can easily be observed, investigated, influenced and funded.

Many studies that provide evidence about CPD give either lots of detail about the impact of CPD on pupils or about the nature of the inputs made by facilitators; rarely both. Happily, the situation is

changing, and increasing numbers of studies of the implementation of new initiatives contain fine-grained evidence about both. However, relatively few explore, in any depth, the learning experiences of participants. As we've already noted, many key features of learning involve internal processes, and the challenge of creating research tools for exploring such development is enormous. Even when the focus is on the learning of pupils, the processes are largely internal and subject to complex intervening variables. The challenge of creating reliable tools for exploring the learning of the professionals who support them is even greater – not least because of exponential growth in the number of intervening variables. Nonetheless systematic reviews are highlighting a range of research that is starting to wrestle with these challenges and beginning to succeed (Cordingley et al, 2007; Timperley et al, 2007).

Evidence from the public knowledge base about student learning

A systematic review of research reviews (Bell et al, 2008), encompassing studies designed to map the boundaries of the public knowledge base in relation to QCA's 'Big picture' of the curriculum, highlighted six common themes:

- the effectiveness of learning that is 'context based' i.e. dealing with ideas and phenomena in real or simulated practical situations, most notably in reviews of science and maths studies;
- the importance of connecting the curriculum with young people's experiences of home and community, and the related, but also distinctive theme of parental involvement in children's learning;
- the positive impact on pupil motivation and learning of structured dialogue in group work and of collaborative learning;
- the need to create opportunities to identify and build on pupils' existing conceptual understanding – again, notably in science and maths. Several reviewers also found evidence that poor understanding, or misunderstandings arising from 'teaching to the test' remained unexplored;
- the need to remove rigidity of approach to the curriculum – to allow time and space for conceptual development and encourage integration of cross-curricular learning; and
- the need for excellence and professional development in subject knowledge, without which teachers are unable to seize opportunities for curriculum innovation, particularly in relation to context-based learning.

A subsequent review of the detailed studies underpinning the map highlighted the maturity of the evidence base in relation to the first five themes – in particular to building on learners' starting points and structuring talk and group work.

A commentary on the learning that flows from across the Teaching and Learning Research Programme's projects in the UK schools sector offers a set of ten principles for Teaching and Learning. These emphasise several similar points regarding the scaffolding of knowledge, the broader contextualisation of learning, the recognition of starting points and the importance of CPD.

What might we need to add to this rich picture of mature evidence about teaching and learning to take account of the fact that teachers' professional learning sits astride a much more complex set of roles and purposes?

My proposition is as follows. We know that collaborative learning makes a difference and that pupils' agency in their own learning sits at the heart of the evidence. They are taught to 'learn how to learn' i.e. to build the skills and to take responsibility for learning with and from their peers. Teachers make professional judgements in interdependent work settings, even though their day-to-day work takes place in physical isolation from each other. They too need the chance to learn explicitly about what's involved in learning how to learn collaboratively. What then does research about CPD have to offer in this context?

Research points to a focus on Professional Learning

The evidence base about CPD has been building for some time. There are six reviews of research which explore systematically what is known about CPD to make a difference to young people *and* to their teachers. Three early reviews were carried out by CUREE and quality assured by the Evidence for Public Policy and Information (EPPI) Centre. They offer an increasingly widely accepted evidence base for planning for CPD in the policy community.

In addition, the New Zealand Government commissioned two 'Best Evidence Syntheses', published over the last twelve months which explored the challenge of professional learning from different angles (Robinson, 2007).

Helen Timperley's (2007) review of best evidence about the positive impact of CPD on student learning highlights in particular:

- focusing on engaging teachers in the learning process;
- challenging problematic discourses;
- providing opportunities to interact with a number of professionals;
- school-based learning activities; and
- allowing time for extended learning opportunities and using that time effectively.

Viviane Robinson's best evidence synthesis involved recalculating the effect size of all leadership contributions to pupil achievement. She identified school leaders' involvement in teacher development and learning, and modelling this, as having an impressive effect size of 0.84: twice as great as the next biggest leadership intervention (planning, co-ordinating and evaluating teaching and the curriculum at 0.42). The effect size of establishing goals and expectations was 0.35; that of strategic research 0.34, and ensuring an orderly and supportive environment 0.27. The two reviews cite each other's work as important in interpreting their findings, thus pointing the way towards a sustained consideration of how to understand and scaffold teachers' responses to CPD providers.

The fourth systematic review of CPD (Cordingley et al, 2007) highlighted complementary findings. The review explored what specialists contribute to CPD that is linked with benefits to pupils as well as teachers. We chose this focus first because every systematic review of CPD had highlighted the importance of specialist contributions without casting much light on what form these took or why they mattered.

But we were also struck by the risk that the positive benefits of the drive to support school-based CPD might be undermined without clarity about the nature of this key input. Small schools, schools with significant gaps in the profile of staff expertise, schools lacking access to specialist knowledge and expertise in other schools, LAs and HEIs will all enjoy the increased focus on in-school CPD, but find it difficult to manage efficiently. Interestingly, the review revealed that CPD specialists brought an impressive array of skills and knowledge in relation to programme content, to facilitating adult professional learning and evaluating its impact. They were also highly skilled in handing over control to professional learners. Indeed, facilitators in these studies paid at least as much attention to designing and scaffolding approaches that built teachers' skills in – and control over – their own extended collaborative learning, as to the content of the programme.

So we now have six large-scale reviews to help us, three of which place particular emphasis on focusing on continuing professional learning as well as continuing professional development, and three which illustrate the role of collaboration, coaching, leadership and enquiry in doing so. There are also interesting individual studies taking this as a core focus. For example, Trevor Mutton, Hazel Hagger and Catherine Burn (2008) have recently completed a three-year study of the development journeys of teachers across the first three years of their professional lives. This detailed longitudinal work has

enabled the research team to begin painting a portrait of the learning processes, the attitudes, dispositions and beliefs of the teachers and of how these relate to their growing success and confidence.

Who, in education in England is leading the way in using this evidence?

The Teacher Learning Academy

Perhaps the most obvious starting place is the General Teaching Council's (GTC) Teacher Learning Academy (TLA). Their approach to teacher learning is structured around six core dimensions which have direct roots in the evidence from the earlier systematic CPD reviews. It is organised flexibly to recognise the ongoing and embedded nature of professional learning. Its title, and the principles for implementation, emphasise TLA as a process *for* teachers supported *by* teachers. The six core dimensions challenge teachers to 'engage with the knowledge base, draw down support through coaching and/or mentoring, plan their learning, carry out their plan, evaluate their learning and its impact and share their learning'. Each of these dimensions flows from evidence about supporting CPD and innovation. But they also have potentially strong links to the emerging evidence base about professional learning. So we have another question:

How are those who are bringing TLA to life interpreting the six core dimensions?

How are those who are bringing TLA to life interpreting the six core dimensions? In what ways might a deeper focus on the professional learning process and an increased interest in reflecting on evidence about it help them?

Here is one suggestion. The systematic reviews of research indicate a need for deep engagement with both the public knowledge base and evidence from participants' own practice. They suggest early scaffolding of teacher learning and progressive removal of supporting mechanisms as control of learning is handed over to teachers. In particular, they suggest the need for persistence and care in making existing beliefs and ideas explicit in order to review and refine them in the light of evidence – and an important and sustained role for coaches in securing this. Coaches can:

- enable teachers to explore multiple possible explanations for pupil responses;
- model an interest in theory, and using models as tools for understanding and planning learning and teaching;
- provide tools and protocols to support teachers in connecting their starting points and progress with their aspirations and concern for their pupils' learning; and
- provide tools and protocols to ensure that discussion which unpacks teaching and learning episodes explores the underpinning rationale behind a new approach, rather than just its surface features.

These are challenging tasks and they take time. Interestingly they resonate with the skills, tools and protocols used by pupils working through Philosophy for Children frameworks to build a community of enquiry. What we know from the research about talk and community of enquiry is that the linked ground rules and skills need to be agreed and taught in order to enable pupils to gain maximum benefit. As I remarked earlier, pupils need to learn how to learn effectively in groups. Isn't the same thing likely to be true for teachers?

Perhaps the next challenge for GTC TLA and others who would support an emphasis on continuing professional learning is a serious and sustained focus on building participants' capacity to learn how to learn.

A Masters in Teaching and Learning

Another springboard for development is the commitment in the Children's Plan to develop teaching as a masters-level qualification in Teaching and Learning (MTL). The initiative is framed as a programme for teachers starting out in their careers, built around work-based professional learning and supported by school-based coaching. Access to specialist knowledge is to be brokered by the coach and HE tutor, working in partnership with the MTL participant, each drawing on their respective knowledge and networks and aspirations. From this initial outline, MTL represents a major opportunity for interpreting and applying what's known about the teaching and learning of pupils to the process of supporting adult professional learning. But MTL will only reach new teacher entrants, so there are considerable challenges in relation to the need for peer support and collaborative learning opportunities alongside more established colleagues; after all many schools will only have one Newly Qualified Teacher (NQT) at a time. Why does this matter?

Although the evidence about effective CPD and learning emphasises the importance of specialist support, it emphasises equally the need for peer support and collaborative learning. Reciprocal vulnerability speeds up the process of building trust - if you risk looking silly by trying something new then it's easier for me to do so too. Mutual risk-taking helps to even out power differentials and creates a natural environment for making practice and beliefs explicit. It also widens perspectives because in teaching and learning, there is no single right answer. Beginning teachers have new ideas and enthusiasms which can expand the horizons of their more experienced colleagues who, in turn, can offer newer colleagues knowledge and expertise – and thus more choices. In schools where there are many MTL participants mobilising peer support to build a professional learning community develop peer support and 'develop a learning mindset', will happen easily and naturally. But in schools where NQTs are not common, peer support will depend on *all* teachers, ideally all professionals engaged in supporting learning - seeing, contributing to and benefiting from collaborative professional learning as both a right and a responsibility.

The future of the profession – continuing professional learning and agency

There are many good reasons for all teachers to take ownership of professional learning. Evidence from a number of sources, including working on transferring learning and taking it to scale (Cordingley & Bell, 2007) suggests that powerful as coaching may be for supporting learning, working as a coach confers even more benefits.

When I ask groups of practitioners why this might be the case, there is sometimes a puzzled reaction, even an uncomfortable few moments. For a start, the proposition is counter-intuitive to those who are focused on the exciting new ideas and approaches they are trying to open up for their colleagues. They act as coaches because they believe they have something special to offer others. This is a significant ethical issue for many colleagues, so it's not surprising that many are troubled by the idea that they might accrue greater benefit from the transaction. Others are simply sceptical. But, given twenty minutes to think about it, most groups come up with multiple possible explanations – as many as 42 in one instance! Their reasoning starts something like this:

- coaches have to process their ideas and insights;
  - they have to turn them into questions, which means thinking about them more deeply; and
  - they have to consider how to match their ideas to the aspirations, needs and skills of the person they are supporting – and so consider the strategies they identify from a range of perspectives.
- coaches can grasp all the learning opportunities from coaching exchanges, while those *being coached* usually have specific goals which can obscure opportunistic learning moments;

- coaches get very quick, direct feedback on whether their contributions are working and, in the light of this, can rapidly adapt and refine their approach;
- specialist coaches have excellent information about the starting points and aspirations of those they support, and must match their contributions to that evidence; they have to put themselves in the shoes of the person they are supporting, thus building their own self-awareness which is critical for all teaching and learning relationships;
- coaches work with people who are committed to learning and therefore to managing and taking risks, and learning from mistakes. Seeing mistakes unfold and unpacking their causes creates a much richer learning environment than one in which practice is almost perfect;
- coaches usually coach several people – lots more over time. There's always something to learn from other people's approaches, and having a window into other people's ideas and perspectives broadens and deepens thinking and reduces any tendencies to be judgemental. There's no one right answer in teaching;
- and so on.

All of the benefits listed here matter just as much for pupil learning as for adult learning and teachers; magpies all, are usually quick to pick up and apply a shiny new insight gathered in a coaching context on Friday and use it in lessons on Monday - as well as in future coaching sessions.

Once colleagues have developed a clear picture of how the benefits of coaching others work in their own favour too, they are able to consider the implications of those benefits for the coaching relationship itself. Coaches who explicitly recognise their own learning within the relationship offer two additional catalysts for learning to those they support:

- by acknowledging their own learning they start to even up the power imbalances that flow from their greater specialist expertise; and
- they model the kind of proactive professional learning they are looking to inculcate.

Coaches who reflect on and celebrate the learning benefits they accrue from coaching are also inclined to involve others. So they begin engaging professional learners in starting to learn how to be a coach through co-coaching with their peers. Armed with a deeper awareness of the process and strategies for deploying it, initial doubts and concerns melt away.

"it's better not to be coached at all than to be badly coached"

These benefits, however, are often obscured by the scale of the challenges in learning to coach well. Sadly, the old saying that 'it's better not to be coached at all than to be badly coached' still carries weight. But coaching is teaching in a particular form and, like all teaching, it involves learning; it involves experimenting and benefiting from mistakes. No coaching session is perfect: there will be sticky moments in most coaching conversations. Skilled professional learners acquire a range of strategies for ensuring such moments don't block their progress. The contributions of the professional learners make just as much difference to the quality of the learning experience in a coaching session as the coaches do. Learning to coach is a hugely valuable process in its own right. Yet when I ask practitioners, who gets to learn to be a coach in their school, they often reply that it's the already excellent teachers. To those that hath shall be given; we are often exclusively allocating one of the richest learning experiences available to the people who least need it.

This is an understandable consequence of paying close attention to the important contribution that specialist knowledge makes to professional learning. Specialist expertise matters but the evidence about benefits to pupils tells us it *must* be complemented by opportunities for collaborative learning and peer support. Those who deploy collaborative professional learning strategically, like the teachers who organise and structure group work for pupils so that they can stand back, observe the learning and intervene strategically, leave space for the learners to do

the learning. They are able to make themselves increasingly redundant, thus securing the double benefit of saving scarce resources while supporting growing independence – all within a framework informed by specialist expertise. So, for professional learning to flourish, we need to stop seeing the contribution of specialists and peers as a zero-sum game. The two are interdependent.

Those who fear a 'recycling of mediocrity' through peer learning need reassurance that strategic planning for collaborative professional learning, like strategic planning of lessons, does not mean abrogating responsibilities. It means teaching all concerned how to take responsibility for their different contributions. CPD facilitators need to offer teachers protocols, ground rules and frameworks to structure peer support, peer coaching and group learning, just as teachers develop such resources for and with pupil groups in order to maximise learning.

There are signs that teachers are increasingly interested in this. In their study of a large cohort of new teachers, Milton, Hagger and Burn's study highlighted new teachers' enthusiasm for continuing to learn. The formidable reach of the SS&AT network is a testimony to the appetite of schools to learn from each other. The GTC's Connect network, its work on teachers' own vision of the future of the profession and its annual survey, all reveal an increasing interest in taking charge of professional growth through, among other things, a commitment to continuing learning.

Obstacles and benefits

So where are the obstacles? One potential obstacle is also a potential benefit. The creation of standards and a performance management structure is no doubt contributing a great deal to raising the floor of teaching practice and to building broader respect for the profession. Who can look at the standards and fail to be impressed by the quantity, range and complexity of demands placed on colleagues? But attempting to spell out the complexity of a dynamic process is atomistic: it removes the sense of speed and dynamism with which immediate judgements are made within a stream of long-term and strategic thinking about pupils, about learning, about the school as a whole and the community it serves. Assessment against standards inevitably focuses on things which are demonstrable or can be measured. But teachers' judgements, and the extent to which they are enriched through ongoing professional learning, are not at all easily demonstrated. So, in helping to raise the floor of professional practice, standards and performance management pose a challenge to raising the ceiling. With standards there is a risk that, having met them, one feels one has arrived. With an emphasis on performance there is a risk of focusing only on the moment when it is assessed and on its surface features.

By contrast, a commitment to *lifelong* professional learning makes it clear there are no upper limits. It focuses on the learning process and the responsibilities this brings. Teachers involved in collaborative learning geared to improving their practice and achievement stick at it. They do so because of their commitment to each other and to their students. They can test this because *their* learning is approached through a vision of how they want their pupils' learning to change, and because they engage with evidence about when and under what circumstances new approaches and models do or don't help.

Remembering that no one teacher can know everything there is to know about learning and teaching; that specialists are, effectively, consultants working in the service of teachers' professional learning rather than its controllers, changes the mind frame. It is one thing to approach someone with a learning goal and a request for support in exploring the boundaries of knowledge, understanding and practice – it is another to be told you 'need' specialist help.

There are tangible and direct benefits for pupils at every level. Teachers who are explicit about collaborative learning for their pupils take their own collaborative (and others) learning more seriously.

Teachers who move out of their comfort zone are reminded what lessons feel like for many pupils on a daily basis and are able to use that insight to build more effective classroom communities. Teachers who struggle with the strong emotions involved in trying new things in front of peers and learn to manage them, are more likely to remember to celebrate their students' successes with the same struggle.

Increasing numbers of school leaders recognise this in seeking to build professional learning communities. But, for profession-wide change, it is necessary to recognise the power and centrality of professional learning to the achievement of pupils, and so to develop the self-confidence of the profession. This applies to teachers in all schools, *whether or not* the professional learning community is well-developed.

Getting ahead of the game through learning is a tried and tested route to success, and is surely a route supremely suited to the skills and appetites of teachers. It is certainly one which would enable the profession not only to encompass, but also to build on and then move beyond performance management and the standards to raise the ceiling of what we can and do expect for young people and for our colleagues.

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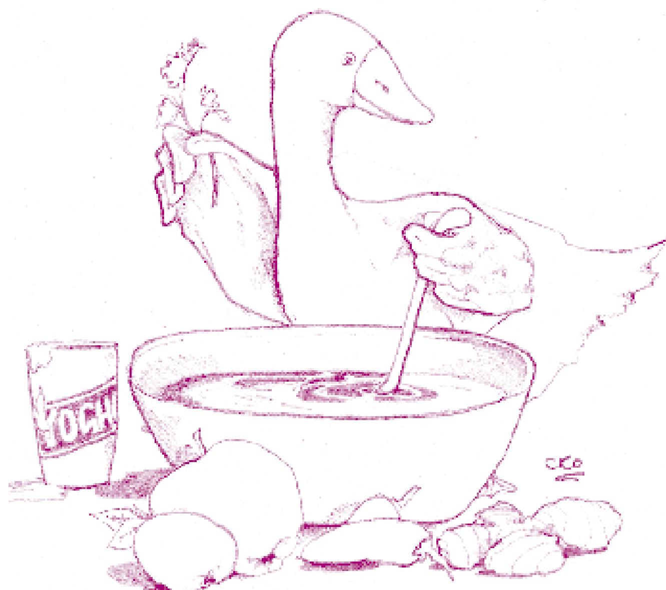

This is one of my favourite sauces in the whole world for adding piquancy, cutting through grease and generally exciting the tastebuds. It is an adaptation of Dimbleby's recipe for Glazed Goose with Apples, Ginger and Green Chillies. As well as goose, I use it with duck and a chestnut roast for vegetarians. Try it, adapt and enjoy!

Apple, Ginger and Green Chilli Sauce

4 large cloves of garlic, peeled

1-2 inch (2.5-5 cm) piece of fresh ginger, peeled

2 fresh green chillies, seeds removed

1.5lb (675g) cooking apples (usually Bramley)

juice of 1 lemon

6 tablespoons (6 x 15 ml spoon) natural yoghourt

2 tablespoons (2 x 15 ml spoon) caster sugar

2 tablespoons (2 x 15 ml spoon) soy sauce

a handful of chopped fresh coriander (mint or parsley can be used instead)

60-75 ml goose or duck fat (or any vegetable oil)

Chop the peeled garlic, fresh ginger and chillies together finely.

Peel, core and slice the apples.

Take 4-5 tablespoons (4-5 x 15ml spoon) goose (or duck) fat (or vegetable oil) and heat this to medium heat in a flameproof casserole dish or heavy saucepan.

Add the chopped garlic, fresh ginger and chillies and stir for 30 seconds.

Add the sliced apples, stir and then cover the dish.

Add the lemon juice, and season with salt.

Cover the pan again and cook over a low heat for 20-25 minutes, until the apples are fairly mushy.

Stir in the yogurt and remove from the heat until ready to eat.

When ready to serve reheat the apple mixture gently and stir in the chopped coriander, mint or parsley leaves. If eating this with a roast, pour off any more fat from the pan juices; then season them to taste and use as gravy.

The apple mixture should be spooned on top of the carved goose (or duck or chestnuts!) on your plate.

The Centre for the Use of Research and Evidence in Education

CUREE Ltd
4 Copthall House
Station Square
Coventry CV1 2FL
Tel: 024 7652 4036
Fax: 024 7663 1646
E-mail: info@curee.co.uk

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