

## Personal Development for Teachers

### **How do we differentiate between the personal and professional elements of teaching? Dot Struthers explains ...**

When asked about their personal development, many teachers would probably think about CPD and associate it with training that they had on an INSET day.

Recent research has shown that 80% of CPD seems to be focussed on the development of the "professional" skills of teaching, ie the broadening of subject knowledge, teaching techniques or the structure of the curriculum.

Conversely the important personal skills, like self awareness, staying in control of ones emotions, being able to coach the best out of people and managing relationships seem to be taken for granted.

Teacher training rarely covers the personal elements like understanding ones personality type and the impact this has on the learning experience, or how to deal with bad behaviour and conflict in the school environment. Yet this is the very knowledge that can help teachers fulfil their potential.

Currently the training model is simply throwing them in at the deep end where they are forced to develop their own strategies as they go along.

So how do we differentiate between the personal and professional elements of teaching? It's difficult and it's like separating out the right from the left brain.

They are inextricably linked and you need both to perform at your best.

Here's a simple definition which may help with the distinction between them.

- professional development focuses on the technical skills and competencies such as subject knowledge, planning/structuring lessons, managing the learning process and transferring knowledge.
- personal development focuses on the personal skills and competencies such as managing your work life balance, your personal efficiency and your ability to connect, build rapport and inspire.

In industry this distinction has taken a while to emerge, and it was factors like the cost of stress in the workplace which have brought the personal side into focus. And now companies go to great lengths to ensure their employees have all the resources they need to help them with their work life balance.

Let's hope we don't have to burn our teachers out before we realise the value of helping individuals to develop the personal skills to manage themselves in their daily routine of work.

The reality is that we still have a long way to go and this statement which came from a teacher reflects just how far that is.

*"Personal development is when you decide what skills you want to learn and professional development is when others tell you what they need you to improve".*

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### Planning your Personal Development

Under the banner of the New Professionalism agenda, the government have introduced revised Performance Management arrangements. Its cycle involves three key steps:-

- Planning
- Monitoring and Support
- Reviewing

Within the planning section, it outlines the requirement for teachers to identify their personal training and development needs which should support the achievement of their objectives and career aspirations.

The personal development process is no different and can be aligned and integrated within the performance management process very simply and easily.

As you define your professional objectives which relate to your job description, so too would you define your personal objectives. It works on a kind of yin and yang basis, where you have both hard and soft goals.

The hard goals are professional objectives and represent "what you do" and soft goals are the personal objectives and represent "the way in which you conduct yourself" in delivering those professional objectives.

So for example, your professional objective could be to vary your teaching methods to suit the different learning styles of your students, and your personal objective could be to improve your self confidence by watching and observing other teachers.

I coached a head teacher recently who was struggling to manage the performance of one of her staff. What we uncovered was that the head was feeling uncomfortable about the fact that this teacher had achieved her professional objectives and yet all the feedback about this teacher's style and behaviour was very concerning.

There is no point in a teacher achieving a professional objective, lets say to plan and manage the curriculum if en route they have upset their colleagues, created conflict, animosity and general havoc.

The only way to improve your skills is to measure them over a period of time. In industry organisations have used competency frameworks for this purpose, which include not only the professional and personal skills but also values and behaviours and are generally assessed annually.

### Some useful resources

- The Professional Standards Framework which can be found on the TDA's website
- The Teachers Professional Learning Framework which helps teachers to plan their own career paths can be found on the GTC website.
- Teachernet is another useful resource where teachers can access CPD questionnaires as well as track their progress in a log.

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## Career Stages

In a recent survey when we asked what the role and characteristics of a good teacher was, one person responded by saying

*"As a teacher I am a policeman, sergeant major, counsellor, aunt, step parent, wise owl, advisor, technician, nurse, ruler, judge, gaoler, leader, stationer, nursemaid and educator".*

Teaching is both rewarding and challenging and teachers are different things to different people within the education system.

As teachers progress through the different stages of their career from becoming a NQT (newly qualified teacher) to growing, maturing and becoming a NRT (newly retired teacher) their personal and professional needs change.

- NQTs – are making new friends, building their confidence, coming to terms with learning methods, designing and planning their classes, being observed, dealing with the politics, learning how to apply themselves.
- Growing – are positioning themselves, getting comfortable with their style of teaching, learning how to be creative and solve problems, taking time out to reflect, adopting efficient ways of working and having the courage of their convictions.
- Maturing – when moving into Deputy and Headship positions are developing their leadership skills, such as planning, managing others, observing others and encouraging the sharing of best practice.

- NRT – are dealing with losing their identity and status as they join the real world where they have to assess what skills are transferable, and perhaps they are thinking about what next or retirement for those who have been teaching all their lives.

Every teacher is unique and their life experiences and knowledge mean that they have different personal and professional needs irrespective of their age or the number of years they have been teaching.

## Lessons from Life

Personal development is a lifelong process which comes from both positive and negative experiences, whether they are in the classroom or at home and it is during these times that both risk and challenge can turn into opportunity and growth.

Teachers like other professionals encounter a number of life changing events such as, the birth of children, divorce or separation, bullying, challenging relationships, depression, illness, accidents, being excluded and bereavement, all of which, can have a profound affect on their professional lives as a teacher and their ability to engage and connect with students and colleagues at work.

It is at these times of complexity and vulnerability when emotions are running high that we are most willing to learn and it is therefore essential that schools provide the necessary support and resources throughout the career of a teacher.

There are many ways to develop yourself, but some of the emerging and exciting new ways to learn are Coaching (featured in the July edition of SecEd) Social Networking, and Teleclasses.

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## Coaching

Coaching is now well regarded and used extensively for personal and professional development in schools for all levels of teachers.

A head teacher once said to me that she felt self-indulgent having coaching but changed her perspective when I reminded her that she was one of the most important assets that the school had and an investment in her skills, could change the overall performance of her school.

Coaching is a non judgemental, non-threatening and enjoyable process which gives you the time to think and share your thoughts and feelings in confidence. Coaching is like Maths – it adds inspiration, motivation and ideas and takes away negative self beliefs.

## Social Networking

Social networking sites like Facebook, Bebo and YouTube are having an undeniable impact on the way people are learning, connecting and sharing information.

People are communicating by writing blogs or stories, creating podcasts, which are audio or video recordings and sharing experiences in chat rooms or forums.

As time goes on teachers are becoming more familiar with these new technologies and beginning to catch up with their students who are used to socialising online, instant messaging and more.

The GTC have three networks

- Achieve – which is for those promoting racial equality and diversity
- Connect – for leaders of CPD
- Engage – for teachers starting their careers

There are also networked communities like talk2learn run by NCSL where teachers can share their ideas around a range of professional topics.

Some schools and colleges have virtual learning environments (VLE) which are good if they are used effectively and encourage debate between teachers and their students.

Social networking is a fast and fun way for teachers to develop themselves in an informal way which is easy to fit around their busy lives, as it can be done at home or at work when the time permits.

## Teleclasses

Schools are political playgrounds where teachers often feel judged and criticised and afraid to say what they really feel. You can feel quite isolated as a teacher and unsure if you are doing the right thing and it can take time to build your self confidence to a point where you feel ok about making mistakes and not being perfect.

A teleclass is a unique way for teachers to explore and share their ideas, thoughts and experiences with a small group of people in a safe environment.

Instead of having to drive, find parking, organise a babysitter and find the place, you simply dial into the teleclass conference number at a scheduled time. It's simple, easy and efficient and they are facilitated by a teleclass leader around a specific topic.

A teleclass program will generally consist of four calls, an hour a week for 4 weeks and can be run at any time of the day and evening, including weekends.

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**Personal Responsibility**

There are a number of factors which influence personal development, but taking personal responsibility is critical.

So many teachers have expectations that their Department Heads or Head Teacher will somehow create their career path and tell them what they should do. But the reality is there are no clear and absolute career paths in education. As in other industries it involves taking personal responsibility and not blaming anyone when things don't go quite to plan.

**In summary**

At the heart of successful schools are motivated, skilled and flourishing teachers, passionate about their job, continually enhancing their capacity to engage and educate and able to stay positive amidst the many pressures and work challenges.

What will make great teachers stand out is their ability to engage both their minds and their emotions.

To get to the next level of teaching success we must build on the intellectual capability and blend it with emotional competencies, because it is these skills that will solve issues such as retention, morale problems, conflict and bad behaviour.

It will also improve creativity, teamwork, speed up the information flow through people networks, drive our purpose and ignite the passion to inspire great performance in our young people.

**Further Information**

Dot Struthers is a freelance HR Consultant and Coach, who has recently set up a personal development business for teachers called MereChats.

MereChats is a new place where teachers can come together to learn, chat and share resources as they go through the different stages of their career.

For an annual membership fee you get access to the following:-

- Personal Journal - where you can assess your skills, create a personal development plan, and capture your thoughts and feelings.
- Tools – which consist of self coaching exercises designed to help you grow at your own pace.
- Chat zone – where teachers can meet others, share stories, expand ideas and learn from others.

If you would like to know more about this please visit website at [www.Merechats.co.uk](http://www.Merechats.co.uk).

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