Investigating teachers' professional learning from participation in a literacy book study group

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Abstract

This paper examines a literacy book study group as a potentially useful vehicle for the delivery of teacher professional learning in a primary setting. A small group of teachers, in conjunction with a university lecturer, participated in weekly workshop sessions centred around a chosen literacy-based text. The goal of this project was to provide practitioners with a safe space in which to examine, reaffirm and extend their current knowledge base and classroom practices with the intention of engaging with ideas that may be unfamiliar or potentially daunting. At the core of its design, was the desire to provide 'grassroots' professional learning opportunities which recognise and honour the participants' professional acumen and in turn, build their confidence. Data was gathered via the creation of voice files in response to a short post-project questionnaire. This was supplemented by the on-line discussion threads that took place during each weekly workshop session. Overall, the study was found to be affirming while also bringing a sense of welcome camaraderie from across various schools. Encouragingly, it was found that the ideas explored were authentically-applicable to the classroom without the weight of extraneous paperwork or arduous study commitments.

Keywords

'Grassroots' CPD; book study; literacy.

Introduction

It is often said in educational circles, that teachers are preparing pupils for jobs, many of which don't as yet exist. Such is the dynamic nature of our rapidly changing world, made all the more fast-paced by the continual upsurge in technological advancements (Office for Economic and Cooperative Development [OECD], 2018). As a consequence, the need for creative, flexible, thinking learners has demanded an upgrade in practitioners' understanding and application of widening curricular content and pedagogical practice. Although engagement in teacher professional development is widely recognized across the globe as necessary to keep practitioners current, (Guskey, 2002) there is less consensus as to its conceptualization and delivery. Indeed, Holme, Schofield and Lakin (2020) argue that a clearer understanding of what constitutes effective professional development (and what does not), is essential, especially with the evolution of recent initiatives such as TeachMeet, Edcamps and BrewEd. Despite there being an array of professional paths to development that range from in-school collaboration projects to self-directed learning and post-graduate degrees among others (McAteer and McAteer, 2019), Cordingly et al. (2015) caution that not all types of endeavour carry equal weighting in terms of value and effectiveness. Indeed, in their robust and influential 'review of reviews of evidence about effective CPDL' (p.3), they note some common, essential traits that characterise successful professional learning approaches. These include, among others, approaches that:

- clearly focus on pupil outcomes,
- are relevant to teachers' needs,
- involve opportunities for peer support,
- allow for experimentation with new ideas, and,
- are rich in current subject and pedagogical knowledge.

Citation

The use of external experts was also advocated as an effective means of facilitating professional growth.

Broadly speaking, Guskey (2002) proposes that there are three types of impact that can occur as a result of teachers engaging in continual professional development. He makes the point that they necessarily occur in the following order 1.) alterations in teachers' classroom practices, 2.) changes in their students' learning outcomes, and 3.) changes in teachers' beliefs and attitudes (p.381), if lasting progress is to be made. However, the trick is knowing (with confidence) which sorts of professional engagement bring the most benefit, in accordance with teachers' personal and collective goals.

Typologies of Continuous Professional Development (CPD)
In a bid to theorise the underpinnings of a wide range of professional development activities open to teachers, Kennedy (2005) offers a 9-stage typology model. Figure 1 overleaf, presents an updated version of the model which she presented in a later article on the subject (Kennedy, 2014, p.689). Herein, the various approaches are subsumed into three distinct catergories of professional activity, grouped according to their potential to promote professional autonomy and exact change in practice. That is to say, if the purpose of engaging in professional development is to deliver knowledge designed to implement reforms and standardisation, then 'transmissive' models are appropriate to this end. However, if shaping policy and practice are end-goals, then 'transformative' models are a more apt choice as long as they are teacher- and student-led within a shared, local context. Those that reside within the 'malleable' catergory are said to possess the capability to either be transmissive or transformative in outcome, depending on the purpose for which they are being employed.

Purpose of Model		Examples of models of CPD which may fit within this category
Transmissive	Increasing capacity for professional autonomy and teacher agency	Training models Deficit models Cascade model
Malleable		Award-bearing models Standards-based models Coaching/mentoring models Community of practice models
Transformative		Collaborative professional inquiry models

Figure 1: Spectrum of CPD models (adapted) Kennedy, 2014, p.689.

With the teaching profession awash nowadays with various standards-raising initiatives (e.g., Department of Education [DE], 2021; DE, 2022), accountability remains high on the school improvement agenda, particularly in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic. However, funding and context-specific teacher professional development opportunities are in scarce supply, especially in this current climate of austerity (UTV News, 2022). For that reason, school leaders are having to prioritize which apsects of provision in which to invest. Consequently, individual teachers are seeking out on-line courses and study pathways to augment their present competence and confidence levels. Availing of a plethora of commerically available approaches is one thing, but measuring the impact of

these offerings can be problematic, since in the past, levels of teacher satisfaction tended to be taken rather than more objective measures of impact on teacher learning, pedagogy and pupils' learning outcomes (O'Sullivan, 2011). Consequently, King (2013) has crafted an evidence-based framework to this end. Specific elements from this model will be visited in the discussion. Therefore, it is unsurprising that some teachers are endeaviouring to 'build strength from within' so-to-speak, in developing their own personal practice on-site (DE, 2016).

Acquisition Through Participation
Sfard (1998) uses two different but potentially overlapping metaphors to describe one's engagement in professional learning, namely the 'acquisition' metaphor and the 'participation' metaphor. The former suggests that learning is about the accumlation of knowledge and facts while the latter places emphasis on the social interactions that occur within the particular learning community. Following a deep and complex discussion of each, highlighting differences and drawing comparisons between the two, she reaches the conclusion that elements of both, reduce the inherent weaknesses in the other. That being the case, it would appear that a book study group approach to CPD operates along these combined theoretical lines.

From the acquisition metaphor stance, such a venture allows, especially long-established teachers to share their tacit knowledge with others (Casonato and Harris, 1999 cited in Dampney, Busch and Richards, 2002, p.3) while gaining new subject and pedagogical knowledge from the field. In this instance, the knowledge upgrade was facilitated by the university lecturer. In complement to that, from the participation metaphor angle, teachers can explore learning experiences and mediate the cultural and specific contexts within which they are operating, to reach shared understandings of practice. As noted by Sfard (1998), knowledge transfer is difficult to achieve and measure, therefore it was stressed that participation in this particular book study group hinged on members seeking to renew and revitalise their practice by examining their lived teaching experiences in the light of evidence-based research, rather than only doing what seems right or feels good personally.

What's a Book Study Group and Why?
Book study groups in the educational context, are usually made up of teachers and school staff who share a professional interest that they wish to investigate more fully, collectively and in many cases, in-house. Blogging on the subject, Zepeda (2019) explains that book study groups,

> ….promote conversations among teachers and school staff that will lead to the
> application of new ideas in classrooms and improvement of existing skills. It is a
> great way to focus on issues related to school change and also helps to build
> community in schools.

She advises that membership is inclusive and participation voluntary, to prevent any sense of coersion or discomfort. Logistical issues such as drawing up a schedule of meetings, deciding on a meeting place/platform, choice of text, forms of engagement with the text as well as follow-up ideas are negotiated. A facilitator is appointed to help maintain focus and momentum. Zepeda (2019) dispels the notion that being part of a book study group is a pedestrian endeavour by outlining some fundamental expectations for participation, namely:

- providing insightful, informed remarks on the subject under scrutiny,
- asking questions of the text and of each other,
- learning from other members' perspectives,
- directly applying ideas to the classroom,
- identifying and resolving potential barriers to implementation, and,
- capturing powerful learning e.g., through journaling etc.

A CPD model such as a book study group, represents the type of approach advocated by Easton (2008) who argues for a greater drive toward teacher professional learning where activist teachers are placed at the heart of the learning process (General Teaching Council for Northern Ireland [GTCNI], 2007) as opposed to professional development which casts teachers in more passive, receptive roles. For that reason, book study groups have been shown to be fruitful spaces in facilitating teacher agency in the classroom. This is because their collaborative nature 'holds the potential to build community, provide contexts that support risk-taking, and foster inquiry' (Steeg and Lambson, 2015, p.478). Specifically, this model enables teachers to 'work together and engage in continual dialogue to examine their practice and student performance and to develop and implement more effective instructional practices…sharing their individual knowledge and expertise.' (Darling-Hammond and Richardson, 2009, p.48).

Study Genesis
When the Coronavirus pandemic struck the United Kingdom in March 2020, all facets of life as we had previously known them, were changed almost instantly and with little warning. In the midst of this crisis, schools had to reconfigure their delivery systems and teachers had to 'lean in' to these new ways of working, on a daily basis. As a 'goodwill gesture', in recognition of the substantial increase in workload and elevated commitment on behalf of the teaching workforce, the author's institution offered free 'taster' classes in the Summer of that same year. Consequently, the author created a one-day Literacy course which engendered quite a bit of interest. Discussions arising from this workshop, along with other informal conversations with teachers from a range of schools, revealed that there was a hunger for engagement in further study of this nature i.e., short and classroom-based. Capitalizing on this off-chance to work with a mixture of primary teachers, the author extended an invitation to the workshop participants to register their interest if they wished to take part in a literacy book study group. As a result, this small-scale study came into being in the Autumn semester of 2020.

Project Design
This project indeed turned out to an intimate affair. As previously mentioned, 'opportunistic sampling' (Tracy, 2020, p.83) was used. Although all 33 original participants were invited, six self-selected but then one stepped out due to personal reasons. Even though the final number was small, there was quite a good representation from across the primary age phase (See table 2 on page 5). Participants 'met' each week via Google Meet for a period of eight sessions. Each meeting lasted 45-60 minutes. The weekly preparation time commitment was anticipated to be between 30-45 minutes. The time slots were adhered to strictly and the pre-discussion materials were planned carefully in respect for teachers' busy work-life schedules. As a result, this kept the sessions moving apace and on point. Prior to the project being launched, a pilot study of the approach and materials was conducted by the researcher and a colleague who is a former primary school teacher and part-time college lecturer.

The first session was used as an introductory meeting wherein everyone got to know each other a little better. The purpose and design of the study was outlined, along with the name and study focus of the designated text. The author chose 'The Book Whisperer' by Donalyn Millar (2009) because of its broad-ranging address of how to create a vibrant, purposeful and enjoyable reading environment and practice. At this initial meeting, participants were encouraged to seek clarification or ask questions before commencing the project. Each week prior to a session, the participants were given access to various tasks/activities/graphic organisers on the accompanying Google Classroom, to guide their reading. These were diverse in nature and always attached specifically to the participants' individual and collective practices. They ranged from double entry journal responses to comparing and contrasting tasks using a Venn diagram. All participants were expected to share their thoughts and ideas, in whatever way they felt comfortable i.e., orally, in the chatbox or by sharing their screens.

Questions and prompts pertinent to the aims of the study were scattered throughout each session and participants were requested to log their responses in the chatbox for on-going data collection. Further data was gathered through the use of a semi-structured interview schedule which consisted of seven questions. These covered such aspects as their previous experience of book study groups, the potential and pitfalls of such an approach to teacher professional learning as well as how it might be improved if adopted more widely within their schools. Participants voice-recorded their responses to the questions/prompts and either uploaded them to the Stream platform on Microsoft Teams (with accompanying privacy settings) or emailed them privately to the researcher. All ethical procedures and permissions, including continuous, informed consent was procured in line with the researcher's college ethics committee and the British Educational Research Association's [BERA] (2018) guidance. Anonymity and confidentiality were assured by using pseudonyms for the participants (see Table 1.) and the removal of any details that might potentially identify participants' associated schools (Wiles, Crow, Heath & Charles, 2006). In line with research ethics literature (Stutchbury & Fox, 2009), assurances were given that the raw data would be stored on the Cloud-based section of the researcher's password-encrypted computer which only she has access to.

Analysis of the data was completed using Braun and Clarke's (2012) 6-step thematic analysis approach. Firstly, familiarisation of the raw data generated through the semi-structured interview questions and discussion threads occurred. Then, initial codes were generated across the combined data sets. This was followed up by a combing of the codes to identify emerging themes. Cross-checking of the themes was carried out to ensure that all data extracts therein, fitted tightly within their respectively assigned categories. Once this step was secured, all that remained was to clearly define the nature of each theme and then to populate each with vivid examples.

Discussion of Findings

The premise for this study was to facilitate a small cohort of primary teachers in promoting reading as a purposeful and pleasurable endeavour by collectively exploring and experimenting with ideas and practices as advocated by an established author in the field. The hope was that such an approach could be scrutinised with a view to adopting (and maybe also adapting) at least some such practices as a means of positively impacting pupils' reading outcomes. This study was based on the belief that teachers possess a wealth of knowledge and expertise that deserves to be honoured and shared. Therefore, the project was designed around two key commitments, 1.) to entertain new or unfamiliar ideas, and 2.) to be honest about (tentative) pupil outcomes and changes in mindsets. This was deliberate so that they could operate from a 'grassroots' level and hopefully exert some control over the direction of travel in their own classrooms. For the purposes of tracking the spread of opinions and practices, the participants are referred to as follows:

Table 1. Participants' Names and Classes/Year Groups.

Participant's Name	Class/Year Group
Celeste	P1/Year 2
Grace	P1/ Year 2
Victoria	P2/3 - Year 3/4
Suzanne	P3/4 - Year 4/5
Martha	P7/Year 8 & Literacy Coordinator

The findings generated four main themes, each of which will be discussed below with accompanying vignettes from the various participants' contexts. They are:

- *Affiliation*: the need for professional comradeship.

- *Affirmation*: the comfort of being recognised as knowledgeable in the field.
- *Authenticity*: recognition of effective practices that align with one's professional judgements.
- *Agency*: the degree of progress possible as dictated by the relative congruence between what is offered in CPD and the demands of real classrooms.

Affiliation

The first theme relates to the notion of *affiliation* with colleagues and peers who are also seeking similar learning opportunities. This fulfils a need that Cameron, Mulholland and Branson (2013) found in their research, in relation to some teachers experiencing geographical and/or professional isolation in their careers. In fact, most participants in their study agreed that visiting with other teachers and sharing ideas 'outranked all other professional learning opportunities in importance' because each other was seen to be the profession's 'richest resource' (p.381). Suzanne especially welcomed the chance of being in the book study group because she was in a year-long job-share position after quite a few years of substitute teaching. She felt the urgency to 'belong' more fully to a group of peers and to be able to offer worthwhile ideas and affect change in her host school. Being exposed to new ways of thinking about her practice and being supported by colleagues outside of her current place of employment, helped strengthen her confidence.

The wish to connect more with other professionals spilled over into the desire to also get to know their pupils more deeply, both as individuals and as readers. This materialised after our second session wherein we discussed Millar's (2009, pp.19-46) use of reading interest surveys. Martha really embraced the potential of such an instrument to generate valuable insights into her pupils' personalities, pastimes and reading habits. Rather than being defeated by an over-crowded curriculum and little time, she came up with a creative way of using the reading interest survey. Every day, while accompanying her class on their one-mile walk (daily mile initiative) which was part of their timetable, she would chat to them about the kinds of questions/topics addressed in the survey. Each day she would concentrate on a different set of children. She was amazed at just how much she learned about her pupils, especially in terms of their book knowledge and genre choices:

> I have never talked with a class so much about texts, characters, genres....I even spoke with them about the memories we discussed in one of our early sessions and it was heart-warming.

As a result, she (with the children's help) reorganised their class library by genre, began to collate a vocabulary bank for use across the curriculum, collaborated with Martha on comprehension activities around their class novels and issued book recommendations to each other regularly. Suzanne also remarked how she too liked the informative nature of the reading interest surveys. She noted how having such rich data at-hand allowed her to make more precise reading recommendations for individual pupils. The idea of the readers' notebook, especially for a Key Stage two class really appealed to her because she felt that it clearly revealed her pupils' text choices. Closely connected to this, she praised Millar's (2009) idea of exchanging informal letters between pupils and the teacher, regarding books read, because they show the children's reading abilities. These insights led her to state:

> I will definitely be having more open conversations with my pupils in future about their reading and my own love of reading too.

The latter part of this quote alludes to one of the activities we completed in preparation for the first weekly session. It involved the creation of her own reading timeline, not merely as a nostalgic exercise but also as a log of who had been influential in her personal reading development. In turn, she connected this to the major role she has to play in her pupils' reading journeys. Martha touched on

this facet as well by remarking how she valued sharing her reading experiences and choices with her family as well as with her pupils.

Affirmation

The second theme is *affirmation*. This relates back to the notion of tacit knowledge, gained over time, experiences and contexts (Casonato and Harris, 1999, cited in Dampney et al., 2002). One such participant (Grace) epitomised this type of teacher. She has extensive experience (30+ years) in the Foundation Stage, and she brought a deep love and passion for children's literature to the book study group. Each week, she shared titles of texts she read to her 4-5 year olds which was a daily occurrence in her class. Being part of this group, confirmed what she 'knew' to be worthwhile practice down through her teaching career. This was supported by anecdotal evidence of individual children's increased engagement with characters, plot lines, humour, and moral lessons. She talked of how her read aloud stories helped her tackle complex social issues such as homelessness, even with children of such tender years, by sharing the story 'Invisible' by Tom Percival. She apologised for 'only being a P1 teacher' and lamented that her love and lavish use of children's books was not shared by her colleagues. She even questioned if it was a waste of valuable time when she could be doing other more measurable activities with her class. Responding in the moment, the researcher took time to briefly explore some of the work of Jim Trelease (Giorgis & Trelease, 2019) whose dedication to the promotion of reading aloud to children extends back decades. We discussed the myriad of benefits reading aloud generates right across the literacy landscape. This allayed her doubts about her on-going practice and gave her confidence to defend her stance if questioned by peers, line managers or parents.

Being acknowledged where they are as educators presently rather than where they might be in the future, resonated with Martha who expressed with confidence:

> The biggest insight was the affirmation, *'I am enough'.* I have the tools to equip the children and I have the opportunity to influence others in a positive way.

This insight reflects the views of Gorodetsky and Barak (2009, p.593) who caution against the tendency of teachers to hand over their power and therefore their confidence to external professional development providers in favour of using their own, often finely-honed knowledge and talents. They discovered in their study that:

> This notion of learning as a hierarchical cascade led teachers to depend on exogenous sources. By doing so, they actually gave up their personal pedagogic resources and personal creativity as legitimate resources of knowledge. The pedagogical discussions revealed that teachers felt trapped between these different conceptions.

Having listened to others' experiences, Celeste 'confessed' to wanting to give her pupils more choice and to make room for reading enjoyment because she knew how beneficial such actions were for her very young learners. Encouragement from the group led her to conclude that her 'gut feelings' were valuable since 'tying so many strings to reading...it becomes schoolwork and not an activity that children willingly engage in.' On a side note, Grace mentioned how she would like to see participation in book studies and similar CPD involvement, leading to accreditation of some kind so that the participants and the activities themselves could be recognised as being valued and valuable.

Authenticity

The third theme is *authenticity*. Malm (2008, p.381) describes authenticity as 'genuine fulfilment' which can be achieved when:

values pertaining to teachers' personal and professional selves are in alignment; when "what I am" and "what I do" are as true to one's nature as can possibly be.

In the latter discussion threads, a flurry of comments ensued around the unpicking of practice that had become engrained within their own repertoires or those of their colleagues'. For instance, reading records were regarded as little more than perfunctory as humorously exemplified by Martha:

> I tried to do away with them last year, but didn't get the go ahead from above. I remember never practising the clarinet when I was young and begging my mum to sign off the false times I had recorded. Reading logs are exactly the same!

Victoria had a similar realisation regarding the need to continually assess the usefulness of elements of established practice. She advised that 'fit for purpose' practices were to be pursued rather than dogged adherence to how business has always been run:

> It Is important to allow children some freedom in choosing reading material and to not be afraid to deviate from pre-planned units of work if these are not engaging for that particular cohort of children.

Such a vignette illustrates in practice, Tang and Choi's (2009, p.10) conviction that, when teachers identify and act upon their own professional judgements, they do so from 'a commitment to the moral purposes of teaching'. It can be argued that following through on one's convictions takes courage, particularly if challenging colleagues' work practices and/or expensive and oftentimes favoured resources and curricular programmes. It must also be emphasised that doing what simply feels good or seems right is not a sound enough reason to abandon collective practices. Instead, it is every educators' duty to stay informed of the research and to diligently seek evidence of positive impact within their own particular context.

Agency
The final theme has to do with how congruent professional development content is with lived classroom practice. Genuine 'buy in' and increased commitment are more easily garnered if what is on offer relates *realistically* to the demands of the curriculum and the needs of those that participants serve. If such fundamental conditions are met, it is more likely that significantly impactful practices will result. However, Cameron et al. (2013) posit that the chances of successful transfer of knowledge and practice to the classroom are increased when teachers themselves identify individual professional needs and are then self-driven to remedy the situation. This appeared to be the case in the book study group, in that the participants self-selected to take part, while already availing of a short-term reading initiative. (Some of them also went on to take part in once-termly 'book tasting' sessions on-line with the author, thereafter. This entailed the sharing of book recommendations, resources and activities).

As mentioned from the outset, throughout our encounters, each participant was prompted to attach their discussion of the text and activities to their own classroom practices. They were invited to be critical and curious in their stance and they duly obliged. This is perhaps partially due to the presence of what Lauer, Christopher, Firpo-Triplett and Buchting (2014, p.216) deem as conditions characteristic of successful, short-term professional development. Specifically, these are homework/pre-work, group discussion opportunities along with meaningful practice, set within a 'participant-centred environment' among others. Drawing on her established career experience, Martha spoke of the necessity for teachers to continually seek improvement in their practice rather than unquestioningly perpetuate the status quo:

> When I started my school, there was a filing cabinet with paper activities for thousands of reading books. Needless to say, they made their way to the recycling bin but I was horrified when a teacher asked me for them last year!

She alludes to what Miller (2009, p.122) called the danger of 'unexamined wallpaper'. In other words, reflecting on what works and what might need to be changed in the light of growing research evidence is essential for effective teaching. This view was exemplified by Celeste who began leaving books on her pupils' desks for them to 'discover' when they arrived in the morning. She judiciously chose the titles with each child's interests in mind while also encouraging exploration of new or unfamiliar topics and authors. She adopted a conversational style when a child expressed surprise that a book based on his/her favourite topic just happened to be sitting on his/her desk inexplicably. This engendered a discursive interaction which often led to fact-sharing and subsequent discoveries of new knowledge. Celeste commented on how she would normally expect her pupils to choose a book for themselves when they arrived at school. However, she now felt that being deliberate in picking and discussing texts with her children, she was adding richness to her pupils' repertoires in terms of vocabulary, background knowledge, oral expression and interest.

This chimed with Victoria's view on the importance of being intentional in carrying out one's 'new' practice. For instance, she vowed to facilitate 'book talk' sessions and to supplement these with daily story-reading centred around her pupils' interests rather than regarding these types of activities as being optional extras or end-of-the-day fillers. She commented on how her involvement in the book study group had encouraged her (as an NQT) to seek out ways to promote a love of reading in her class, with conviction. The concept of actively promoting a reading for pleasure ethos was a renewed practice, also favoured by Grace, going forward. Suzanne decided to swap her usual book reviews for 'book commericals' instead since she felt they were more purposeful in their appeal to both the one promoting the chosen text and the recipients.

Martha shared further insights around taking more control of her accumulated experiences and ability to make informed decisions in her practice:

> It was great to know that we do not need to follow every step in the process introduced by the next guru. We can 'doctor' and use the advice and the practice as best we can with what fits for our children. We have such expertise within our own schools which we should trust, and we should build upon.

Again, the thorny issue of being able to measure what has been learned by the various reading opportunities favoured and practised by the participants arose. However, during the last session, Martha concluded that it was key to remember that 'teachers plant in the Fall and harvest in the Spring'. In other words, learning takes time and patience to become embedded and grow.

Having examined the four themes, it is evident that they are interrelated in nature. For instance, education does not occur in a void and therefore, the need for professional connections with others in the field is essential. It is only through such affiliation that true agentic action can occur. This is because, within a professional network, knowledge-building and authentic practice are not only recognised but shaped. Being part of such a structure is likely to lead to feelings of affirmation, at least to some degree. And so, the dynamic relationship between the four themes continues onwards. When compared to other forms of CPD such as action research or a post-graduate degree, a book group allows for a potentially more intimate exploration of texts, theories and praxis, through the facilitatory role of an external expert who has no 'axe to grind' in terms of grade achievement or school data elevation. The participants' experiences foreground involvement in such an endeavour with the added bonus that being part of a community of learners outside one's own institution may allow for freedom

of thought and speech. Finally, being a book group member does not carry the pressure of working toward an award-bearing goal that may bring with it financial and time-consuming obligations.

Conclusion

It would be foolish to make sweeping claims based on such a small-scale project, and indeed, this is not the author's intent. However, it could be argued that such an approach as this, potentially falls within Kennedy's (2014, pp.690) 'transformative' category of teacher professional development. That is to say, it includes:

> an element of collaborative problem-identification and subsequent activity, where the subsequent activity involves inquiring into one's own practice and understanding more about other practice, perhaps through engagement in existing research.

Making small but potentially significant steps as shared by the participants, in moving their practice forward, signifies a promising start. This may be attributed in part to the fact that participants were initially facilitated and supported in experimenting with 'new' or renewed practices, rather than trying to change their beliefs and attitudes first (Guskey, 2002). Of course, in this study, changes were anecdotal and as yet not measurable in quantitative terms.

An additional appeal to this approach might have been the 'absent' author (represented by the text choice) which could be viewed as a welcome third party, whose ideas could be played around with, in the context of one's own school. This may well have been strengthened by the fact that the choice of text was thoroughly research-evidenced while being firmly grounded in the classroom. In a sense, using a professional text as an interpretative point of reference for discussion, exploration, and practical experimentation, removed the authoritative mantle, if you will, that can come with a more decided top-down model of professional development. The fact that the researcher was the facilitator but with no direct links to any of the schools, likely contributed to the participants' sense of freedom to share and experiment around the edges of their practice without being held accountable, as yet, for measurable growth (or lack of it) in pupil attainment.

Alongside the use of pupil progress monitoring and responsive teaching, Guskey (2002) and others (e.g., Lauer et al. 2014) note the centrality of sustained follow-up, support and if necessary, pressure to 'stick with it', especially when setbacks occur and confidence wanes. Gorodetsky and Barak (2009) go further, arguing that simply replacing internal pedagogical practices with externally imposed ones, fail to challenge schools' present infrastructures or reasons for operating as they do. Critically, King (2013, p.7) cautions that 'school re-culturing' may be necessary to sustain meaningful change since individual innovations are rarely the solution to long-term school improvement.

Reflecting on the book study data discussed in this paper, there is reason to be hopeful that some 'green shoots' of promise have shown themselves, which is encouraging for future investigation. The question now is one of 'how can such humble beginnings be supported from without and nurtured from within the different school environments?' The answer might lie within the pages of the Learning Leaders Strategy (DE, 2016) which is the Department of Education's most recent policy directive on galvanising teacher professional development. Notwithstanding the collapse and subsequent three-year hiatus of the Northern Ireland Executive in January 2017, such an initiative was relaunched in 2020, only to be scuppered by the onslaught of Covid-19 in March of that same year. However, in between these two significant events, a discursive document on the out-workings of the strategy was produced (Education Training Inspectorate [ETi], 2019). At a granular level, it outlines a comprehensive road map across the teacher continuum, on how to develop and evidence growth for teachers, school managers and pupils. All of this is embedded in the expectation that changes to practice will directly and tangibly impact pupil outcomes.

In complement to this, using King's (2013) evidence-based framework, designed to measure the impact of teacher professional development approaches, could act as a safeguard to ensure that what is offered by way of professional growth opportunities and pupil progress are clearly linked and measurable. Herein, she emphasises the need to address systemic factors such as contextuality, teachers' roles, their individual professional identities and unique dispositions which are crucial to ensuring real, nuanced and sustained change rather than merely assessing teacher satisfaction. Considering the deeply complex and messy entanglements that exist between teachers' lives and their career paths, especially as they gain tenure, perhaps DE could make good use of further detailed models that have been thoroughly researched in this area. For instance, Cameron et al. (2013, p.390) propose the Phase Shift Framework for Teacher Learning which helpfully highlights the 'idiosyncratic stressors' that are exerted on teacher-learners throughout their careers'. They claim that paying attention, especially to teachers' personal growth needs has the potential 'for moving teacher-learners from a position of compliance to authentic engagement.'

Looking Forward
Once the initial book study is over, Lauer et al. (2014) recommend various follow-up support mechanisms such as email correspondence, on-line discussions, booster group participation and individual coaching sessions, among others. In line with grassroots policy, Zepeda (2019) advocates that the participants continue meeting to examine and measure changes in their practice and their pupils' progress. Additionally, she extends the connections to working with parents, creating staff reading areas within schools as well as reviewing professional texts within faculty newsletters, to name a few. Most importantly, she places the role of the principal at the heart of such an on-going endeavour, if it is to succeed in the long-term. Building internal systems by utilising multiple voices and sharing various practices and resources, offers the potential to at least reduce what Gorodetsky and Barak (2009, p.598) term 'the invisible glass walls' that can serve to constrict teachers' ways of working. Finally, Zepeda's (2019) ideas were mooted in this study by inviting participants to take part in a second phase of the book study. Whilst still under construction, it is anticipated that there is much room for growth, both in terms of text content to be explored but also regarding the 'gradual release of responsibility' (Pearson and Gallagher, 1985, p.35) to the participants so that their individual professional needs may be more closely served. Hopefully this will help put the power back in the hands of the practitioners.

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