

# WALK the WALK

**DR NICOLA DAVIES** EXPLAINS WHY SLIPPING INTO YOUR STUDENTS' SHOES FOR A WHILE COULD BE ONE OF THE BEST CPD DECISIONS YOU EVER MAKE...

**I**n 2013, Sir Tim Brighouse, former Schools Commissioner for London, and Bob Moon, Professor of Education, published *Taking Teacher Development Seriously: A Proposal to Establish a National Teaching Institute for Teacher Professional Development in England*.

In their proposal, they stress the importance of continued professional development (CPD) for teachers, while also citing evidence that current in-school CPD is “unstrategic, disjointed and erratic.” Teachers are increasingly expected to be the proverbial ‘Jack of all trades’, instructing on their specialist subjects while also offering pastoral support and being organised and efficient administrators. However, how many teachers remember what it’s like to see things from the

other side of the classroom, as learners? Could studentship be the ultimate CPD? Indeed, it could be argued that a teacher who doesn’t learn is like a film director who won’t watch films, or a singer who can’t listen to music.

Whether attending a class specifically designed to improve teaching skills or a recreational course like yoga or cooking, as long as teachers are engaged in learning, they can directly enrich the quality of their teaching. Sarah Chadfield, a part-time English teacher at a comprehensive school in East London, attends silversmithing classes. Taking a personal approach to her CPD, Chadfield has felt the effects of studentship on her teaching. “It reminds me of the way that students are motivated by creating something they have ownership over,” she says. “Finding

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR



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ways to give students a sense of their own ability, or potential ability, is crucial.”

When in the shoes of their students, educators can better understand what it means to be an effective teacher. Taking non-career centred learning classes can help teachers develop new strategies they can employ in their own classrooms. They might learn to use a more hands-on approach, or realise the benefits of providing more student resources. The possibilities for skills improvement and innovative teaching, through the use of non-professional classes, are unparalleled.

## CPD opportunities

Of course, there is an abundance of ‘traditional’ CPD available. A simple Google search produces hundreds of opportunities, from part-time free lessons, to full-time paid courses. Face-to-face workshops, for example, are offered all over the world for improvement of teacher-student communication. Joanne Philpott, deputy head teacher at the comprehensive City of Norwich School (CNS) in Norfolk, says, “It never ceases to amaze me how willing teachers are to attend conferences and workshops.” Philpott herself undertakes individual CPD sessions and reads professional pedagogy publications and forums.

There is no shortage of online CPD courses for teachers. ‘Visible LearningPlus’, for example, is a professional development programme, which explores how gathering, analysing, interpreting and using information about students’ progress and achievements can facilitate innovation in the learning environment – subsequently improving teaching and learning. The key aim is to encourage teachers to ask questions of themselves about the impact they are having on

## ★ WHAT COULD YOU DO?

**Face-to-face workshops:** Small workshops are a great opportunity for teachers to discuss, reflect, collaborate, and debate different issues, as well as find useful ideas for classroom activities.

**Online communities:** Interactive virtual conferences, forums, and blogs allow teachers to participate and discuss a myriad of educational topics with teachers from around the world.

**Informal discussions:** Informal conversations with colleagues are a practical way of learning about new and effective

teaching methods, techniques, or materials.

**Reading groups:** Formal discussions about an assigned text can bring about greater insight and new perspectives.

**Action research:** Action research is a systematic form of self-reflective inquiry where a person actively engages in using evidence to improve teaching strategies and make a positive impact. It can be individual or in collaboration with other teachers to find solutions to problems or develop methods of best practice.

**Writing:** Keeping personal reflections is a good way to monitor personal and professional development. Additionally, writing articles or books allows teachers to apply what they learn from their teaching, studentship, and research.

- OUTSIDE THE BOX:**
- Learn new activities
  - Experiment with different approaches in class
  - Train to be a teacher trainer
  - Take an online e-tutoring course
  - Form a local interest group – related or unrelated to teaching.