

**Professional Development for Professional Learners - Teachers' experiences in Norway,
Germany and England**

Gerry Czerniawski

The Cass School of Education and Communities

University of East London, UK

Abstract

Proposals made by the European Commission in 2007 have led to the Education Council adopting, for the first time, a European agenda for improving the quality of teaching and teacher education. Interviews carried out in this small-scale longitudinal study with teachers in England, Norway, and Germany demonstrate that while professional development opportunities are increasing in all three countries, widespread dissatisfaction is expressed by most teachers in relation to its quality and outcomes. The aim of this article is to reflect on professional practice in three European countries in order to provoke and stimulate further discussion and critical enquiry in relation to teachers' Continuing Professional Development (CPD) in a wider arena.

Keywords: Continuing Professional Development (CPD); teacher education; Norway; Germany; England; longitudinal study; European Union; in-service teacher development; mid-career teachers.

Introduction

Discourses related to teacher professionalism and economic globalisation, it is argued, shape government policies for education provision in general and teachers' Continuing Professional Development (CPD) in particular (Day and Sachs 2009). And yet how these discourses

emerge, and the practices emanating from them, within different national borders vary despite the European Council's agenda for improving the quality of teaching and teacher education (European Commission 2010a).

Teachers' Continuing Professional Development is situated in a complex amalgam combining teacher biography, identity work and the values embedded within different communities of practice (Wenger 1998). It is, with varying degrees, also situated within wider international discourses reflecting the marketisation of public sector work and the development of an audit culture (Apple 2005) in which the performance of professionals is increasingly measured by externally-determined targets (Wilkins and Wood 2009). Through an analysis of interviews and semi-structured questionnaires with mid-career teachers this article revisits the professional lives of twenty-seven participants from cities in Germany, Norway and England, nine years after they qualified as teachers in three distinctly different public welfare regimes (Esping-Anderson and Myles 2009). Exploring the variety and depth of experiences these teachers have had of CPD the article examines the extent to which these experiences have addressed their professional needs and/or the professional needs of the institutions in which they work. By doing so the article reflects on professional practice in three distinctly different northern European countries in order to provoke and stimulate further discussion and critical enquiry in relation to teacher professional development in a wider arena. The findings reveal a disparity between what activities these teachers engage in and the value they place on their own professional development.

The article begins by establishing the context for teachers' CPD in Europe, before familiarising the reader with competing definitions associated with teachers' professional development. The Norwegian, German and English education systems are introduced, with a

particular focus on CPD. After outlining the research design for the study, findings are then presented and discussed in light of a European agenda that seeks to homogenise the professional development of teachers.

A European Context for teachers' Continuing Professional Development (CPD).

The contexts for the professional development of teachers are ones in which many countries in the 'developed world' are engaging in what has been described as a systemic reform of their education systems (Furlong et al. 2000), due in part to the competitive economic pressures of globalisation. Significant change affecting European societies in the last twenty years include the impact of the information society, greater internationalisation and changes in the scientific and technological fields (Persson 2005). Driven by a desire to improve world rankings in educational league tables changes have included attempts at enhancing the quality of education in schools, securing greater value for money, making education systems more responsive to the requirements of industry and commerce and raising the levels of pupil achievement (Livingston and Robertson 2001).

The extent to which the professional learning of teachers can adapt to these changes has received significant international commentary (see: Asia Society 2011; OECD 2009). In response to changes in their education systems many countries are developing more systematised approaches to teachers' CPD. Proposals made by the European Commission in 2007 have led, for example, to the Education Council for the first time adopting a European agenda for improving the quality of teaching and teacher education. Ministers at the time recognised that "the quality of teaching is the single most important within-school factor affecting student attainment" (European Commission 2011: 11). Included within this agenda is a particular focus on professional development with the requirement that teachers

undertake regular reviews of their individual development needs; that education systems provide professional development quality assurance systems; and that there is an improvement in the supply and variety of professional development “including formal, informal and non-formal learning including exchanges and placements” (European Commission 2010a: 2). However it should be noted that systematised approaches often bring with them unforeseen and perhaps unintended externalities. In England, for example, there have been substantial moves across all professions towards greater accountability, with an emphasis on outcomes and national standards of performance (Livingston and Robertson 2001) and, in many schools, the socialisation of the teaching profession into ‘cultures of compliance’ (Kelly 2004: 38).

Despite these homogenising tendencies, Jones and O’Brien (2011) note that the “education systems of the individual nations have arguably remained stubbornly independent” (p.645). A European Agenda (European Commission 2005) for teacher mobility across all European countries with a potential one-size-fits-all agenda is, therefore, problematic when considering teachers’ CPD. Differences in the constellations, configurations of influence and patterns of professional relationships are sufficient to ensure that being a teacher as an experience can differ considerably for different individuals even within broadly similar contexts and settings. Tensions exist therefore between centralisation of policies determining the sorts of professional development activities that are strategically beneficial for schools and the individual freedom of teachers to determine their own learning needs (Jones and O’Brien 2011).

Teachers’ Continuing Professional Development – a portmanteau term

‘Continuing Professional Development’, ‘Professional Development’ and ‘in-service education’ are concepts often used synonymously within the literature and it is therefore important to acknowledge that while these terms often coalesce in meaning, different writers define them differently. In this article teachers’ ‘Continuing Professional Development’ is therefore used as ‘strategic shorthand’ recognising its limitations (Robinson and Taylor 2006: 6) and its multiple contestations. ‘CPD’ is often used as ‘a portmanteau term’ for what has been described as a “hugely complex intellectual and emotional endeavour” (Day and Sachs 2009: 43). But, typically, activities cited include teacher observation, on-the-job coaching, team teaching, self-directed study, in-service courses, job shadowing and rotation, membership of working groups, collaborative learning, professional reflection and action research. Many of these activities become formulaically commodified, concretised and institutionally embedded. Much has been written, for example, about the repositioning of teacher-led action research, formally oriented towards practitioner emancipation and its increasing instrumental function as a strategy for school improvement (Elliot 2007; Mills 2003). Factors, within the literature, said to nurture successful CPD for teachers include its long-term facilitation within collaborative school cultures; its strong relationship to the curriculum; its focus on pupil learning and the degree to which it is school-based (Lipowski et al. 2011).

Earley and Bubb (2004) draw a distinction between ‘hard’ economic utilitarianism where professional development addresses the strategic goals of schools, and a ‘softer’ developmental humanism in which professional development caters for valued, confident and motivated staff. Discussing the professional development of teachers Lipowski et al. (2011) draw a distinction between two sorts of practices. The first goes under the banner of *in-service programmes* (i.e. the provision of organised programmes for practising teachers within

the institutions they work), considered by many to be the primary way in which teachers receive continuing support (Loucks-Horsley et al. 1998). The second, under *continuous experiential learning* accommodates the more informal learning opportunities that contribute to the professional lives of teachers (Day 1999). The importance of informal learning experiences (Eraut 2004) cannot be underestimated when trying to understand the work teachers do in different national locations.

The relationship between teacher professional development and professional cultures is one that has received considerable attention (see, for example, Guskey 2002; Wermke 2011). ‘Communities of practice’ (Wenger 2002), ubiquitous within the literature on teachers’ CPD, and more recently, ‘nested cultures’ (Doherty 2004) associated with subject disciplines, or other peer groups that exist within any institution can “vary dramatically in the beliefs and values that underpin the ways of speaking, acting and interrelating which they deem normal or ‘proper’” (Wells and Claxton 2002: page 22). These communities, along with the institutions and the ideologies that inform the professional values that circulate within them, can engender very different understandings of what worthwhile teacher CPD is. For example, collaboration and collegiality are terms often positioned as processes, which are assumed to be benevolent and effective, underpinning effective professional development (Hargreaves 1994). However, in England these terms have also been used to describe a form of contrived collegiality (Hargreaves 1992) said to exist in highly regulated, compliant and audited school systems as a more efficient way of introducing externally imposed changes.

Other writers (for example Watson and Beswick 2011) argue that professional development aims to effect change in teachers’ beliefs and knowledge and hence their classroom practices

in the expectation of a positive bearing on pupil learning. However for such change to take place Wermke (2011) argues that there needs to be shift in thinking from:

Forms of CPD in one-shot afternoon courses that regard teachers as knowledge receivers in top-to-bottom relations, to seeing teachers as agents in a self-determined and individual professional development [Wermke, 2011:666]

Such a shift, however, necessarily entails movement away from the instrumental positioning of teachers as simply passive or active component parts within their own professional development. This bifurcation oversimplifies and exaggerates the importance of the latter at the expense of the former and sidesteps the wealth of literature exploring the complexities, ambiguities and tensions that teachers' CPD generates within any educational setting. Building on some of this literature, this article therefore conceives teachers' CPD as the formal and informal processes that enable teachers to improve their professional practice throughout their careers with a commitment to transform education for the better. Such a commitment entails raising schooling as sites of development of social justice, equity and democracy.

Three National Contexts

The three countries examined in this article fall into Esping-Anderson and Myles's (2009) three welfare state types: namely, the social democratic approach to welfare policy as in Norway; the more conservative, corporatist welfare approach associated with Germany; and finally, the more free market liberal approach to social welfare that they characterise as typical to the English welfare state. Two public sector employment models identified by the OECD (2005) are also significant when comparing professional development opportunities in these three countries. The first, common to Germany and Norway are career-based models where teachers are generally expected to stay in the public service throughout their working life. The second, more common in the English context are position-based models which

focus on selecting the best candidate for each position and offering more open access to a wider variety of candidates including those moving into teaching from other professions. These differences formed the basis for the selection of these three northern European countries. For an article of this nature what follows is inevitably an overview tailored to the specific comparative nature of this longitudinal study.

Previous research has characterised the Norwegian education system as one in which equality is valued over and above cultural and academic achievements (Stephens et al. 2004). Norwegian teachers experience greater degrees of professional autonomy than many of their European colleagues, in part, due to less emphasis on formal testing and greater flexibility for teachers in terms of the taught curriculum (Czerniawski 2010). An anti-authoritarian stance is embedded within the teaching profession (Korsgaard 2002) and setting and streaming run contrary to the Norwegian cultural belief that everyone should be treated equally (Stephens et al. 2004). This means that, generally speaking, Norwegian schools are ‘schools for all’ i.e. comprehensive and represent the same system of education that the Norwegian teachers interviewed in this study experienced when they were pupils. It also means that the Norwegian teacher is trained to be a ‘guide/supervisor’ (Stephens et al. 2004: 114) rather than the more authoritarian notion of teaching not uncommon in the English or German school settings (Kron 2000). Since 2005 there has, by Norwegian standards, been an overwhelming focus on international comparisons and tests with a requirement that each municipality and county carry out competence development measures for its teachers. Norway’s recent ‘pedagogic crisis’ as a result of its performance in the OECD international PISA tests in reading, mathematics and science have resulted in a ‘panoply of initiatives to raise the competence of teachers and head teachers’ (Ure 2007). The *Strategy for Competence Development* (2005-8) is indicative of this focus and has provided 160 million Euros for the

development of teachers, school leaders and trainers in primary and secondary education (Lloyd and Payne, 2012). Surveys have however indicated that while Norwegian teachers are highly motivated by the thought of CPD they are often disappointed with its facilitation and outcomes (Lloyd and Payne 2012).

Making generalisations about teachers' CPD in Germany is even more problematic not least because of its post-war history as a politically divided country and its federal structure. Previous research has characterised the country's education systems as hierarchical and fragmented (Kron 2000). The majority of German *Länder* (federal states) have a tripartite system of schooling containing the following types of school: the *Hauptschule* (providing a basic education with preparation for employment in manufacturing industry or manual work), the *Realschule* (providing preparation for employment in the technical, financial, commercial and middle management sectors) and the *Gymnasium* in which teachers in this study were not only trained to teach but also attended as pupils. *Gymnasium* pupils are generally considered in Germany to be the most able pupils within the German tripartite system. The *Gymnasium* consists of lower and upper secondary schools. Teachers are trained and employed by the *Länder* and since 2003 receive a minimum of sixteen hours CPD per year. In-service training for teachers in Germany is compulsory albeit dominated by individual participation and mostly organised into short, one-day courses (Lipowski et al. 2011) although some teachers also embark on private study.

Teachers' CPD in England takes place within a highly regulated system (Furlong et al. 2000), under a variety of pathways and within a much greater diversity of types of school than those found in either the Norwegian and German contexts. Mahoney and Hextall (2001) argue that teacher education and training in England have resulted in an increasingly tight system of

teacher surveillance and regulation controlled largely from the centre but also by means of internal, localised controls. Once qualified, teachers have to pass 'Induction Standards' within their first year of qualification although at the time of writing these professional standards are being re-written. A variety of professional development pathways (e.g. coaching and mentoring, Advanced Skills Teachers, Master's accreditation and the 'Excellent Teachers Scheme') do exist for teachers, once qualified, and are, in most cases, rewarded with certification and salary differentials although it is also worth noting that the majority of CPD for teachers in England is driven increasingly by school imperatives. Professional development programmes have, for example, escalated in schools catalysed by the dissemination of National Literacy and Numeracy strategies (DfEE 1998a: 1998b). However despite this intense regulation there is no legal minimum requirement for teachers to spend on professional development. Five days of the statutory 195 days required for teachers to be available to work is, nevertheless, allocated for non-teaching activities including CPD (Eurdice 2011).

Research Design

This interpretive small-scale exploratory case study draws on established qualitative research methods associated with longitudinal studies (Elliot et al. 2008). This study revisits the lives of mid-career teachers (Hargreaves 2005) nine years after they were interviewed in research examining their professional socialisation into teaching (*name deleted to maintain the integrity of the review process*). In the original study a purposive sample (Winne and Alexander, 2006) of thirty-two teachers from Norway, Germany and England were interviewed three times during the course of the first two years of their professional careers. In this study, nine years later, the views of ten Norwegian, nine German and eight English teachers from the original sample explore the variety and depth of experiences they have had

of CPD and whose interests are being satisfied by the proliferation of these activities. Specifically these teachers' views shed light on the extent to which these experiences have addressed their professional needs and/or the professional needs of the institutions in which they work. In so doing their views address two research questions:

1. What sorts of CPD activities did teachers engage with?
2. To what extent did teachers find these activities useful?

Drawing on the literature related to teachers' CPD, semi-structured questionnaires were constructed to gather information about the types of formal and informal professional development these teachers had received. Face-to-face and telephone interviews (Kvale 1996) were then used to capture and elaborate these teachers' perceptions about their experiences. In adopting a suitable analytical framework to illuminate the formal and informal processes associated with teachers' CPD in three countries the author has drawn on Layder's (1998) adaptive theory. Informed by the grounded theory tradition associated with Glaser and Strauss (1967) the author utilises its more recent interpretations (Charmaz 2006). Part of the analysis also draws on Wengerian notions of 'communities of practice' (Wenger 1998). The study has been conducted along ethical guidelines (BERA 2011). In consideration of the small sample-size and the potentially sensitive nature of the data all participants were given guaranteed confidentiality and anonymity and it is for this reason that pseudonyms for institutions and individuals have been used.

Findings

The table below represents a summary of the results from semi-structured questionnaires initially sent electronically to teachers prior to being interviewed. Drawing on the literature

above on teachers' CPD the questionnaires asked teachers to describe professional development activities they had encountered since they had qualified as teachers:

Table 1 – Results from the questionnaire indicating the CPD experiences of German, Norwegian and English teachers.

Teachers' CPD	Germany (n=9)	Norway (n=10)	England (n=8)
Participation in school courses	7	7	7
External courses attended (short 1 day courses or less)	2	3	5
External courses attended (more than one day course)	2	2	5
Experience of working with other colleagues in classroom (e.g. team teaching)	2	2	6
Working with colleagues collaboratively outside of the classroom (e.g. joint planning, curriculum projects, action research etc)	2	3	7
Annual appraisals	2	5	7
Classroom observation of other staff	0	1	3
Classroom observation by other staff	2	2	7
Currently involved in further training (formal study)	3	2	3
Plans for further training	1	3	3

Awareness of external bodies providing professional development	5	4	7
Opportunities for future promotion	3	3	6
Experience working in different schools	3	5	6
Involvement in any form of research activity	0	2	3

The results from these questionnaires alone would seem to indicate that in most cases, these teachers in England experienced a wider range of professional development opportunities than the sample in Germany and Norway. However data gathered from interviews with each teacher *after* completion of the questionnaire revealed a somewhat more complex and nuanced exploration of the CPD experiences in these three countries. The following are extracts of interviews carried out with teachers in Germany, Norway and England in which they are asked to elaborate on the responses they gave in their questionnaires.

Germany

All nine teachers were aware of the statutory requirement to engage in professional development, although this was interpreted in a variety of different ways. Five teachers, for instance, referred to the ‘voluntary’ nature of CPD in German schools, typified by one teacher, Dagmar, saying that this ‘had to be done on a voluntary basis, both in and outside of the school and to be honest, most of us [Gymnasium teachers] have spent so many years qualifying that the thought of more studies is horrible’. It is worth noting that teachers in Germany take on average between six and nine years to qualify making the prospect of further study for many unlikely (Czerniawski 2010). Four other teachers referred to the ‘statutory’ requirement for them to engage in CPD, as highlighted by Claudia: ‘we have to attend a minimum of 12 full days of training in a period of three years and I have received

more than 24 days in that time'. For Magda, however, this meant that 'very often these activities are not done for the right reasons but to fulfil this requirement'.

Only two members of the German sample received any formal annual appraisal or formal discussion related to their professional development by a colleague, senior teacher or school head teacher. Some teachers said 'this simply does not happen', 'not in this school' and one teacher, Elsa, angrily said that 'I have never met or discussed anything about my professional development with my Head or any teacher – highly motivating! [laughs]'. Similarly Nikolas said that 'in theory there is such a thing but I haven't had any formal meeting since I started working at the school nine years ago'. If and when any sort of developmental discussion with a senior teacher did take place it tended to be with school head teachers and on a 'voluntary', 'ad hoc' basis. Asked to what extent these meetings were useful most teachers believed they were a 'formality', a 'ritual' and only in a couple of cases were they described as 'beneficial' or 'helpful'.

Most teachers believed that observations played little or no role in their professional development with one teacher laughing and saying 'what observations?', another that she had received 'none whatsoever' and a third, Ursula, stating that:

I have never been observed, not since I qualified as a teacher and this makes me angry. I never thought that after such training we would feel so completely alone.
[Ursula]

Those observations that did take place tended to be carried out by the school head teacher and linked to the meetings described above. In general teachers acknowledged that these took place 'every three to four years'. This was not to say that observations by peers did not happen, however with this sample of teachers this was a rare event and tended to be on a voluntary basis.

It was generally believed that opportunities for developing teaching and learning strategies by working with other colleagues in or outside of the classroom were ‘few’ and far between. For example, team teaching was referred to as ‘non-existent’, ‘not possible’, only taking place ‘during training’ or during the ‘first year as a paid teacher’. When asked to what extent collaborative work existed in other ways (e.g. through action research, curriculum projects etc) responses included ‘not really possible’, ‘we do not have the time for such things’ and ‘my job is to teach children, not carry out research’. A tendency to value relatively high levels of autonomy while rejecting certain forms of collaboration was emphasised by Elsa, saying that: ‘We do have the opportunity to work on projects with other colleagues but quite often they either lose interest or cannot be bothered – German teachers like their independence’. In general, the onus for professional development for teachers interviewed was on the teacher rather than the institution in which they worked, which was a source of frustration for many, typified by the following response from Katarina:

I am lucky in that I have built up a good collection of resources from my colleagues...but I did not think it [formal professional development] would stop here!
[Katarina]

Despite the tendency to reject collaborative working, when asked what sorts of CPD activities they valued, German teachers consistently referred to the benefits of ‘out of school activities with colleagues’, ‘regular discussions with other teachers’ and the ‘sharing of teaching ideas and resources’. Informal meetings with other colleagues were often deemed ‘very useful’, an arena where ‘ideas are swapped’, and ‘assessment methods exchanged’.

Less consistent were expressions of value placed on in-school, whole-day activities. For some, this ‘hardly ever happened’, or ‘took place but are frankly speaking generally a waste

of time'. Teachers referred to these days as being opportunities, often, to 'collect', 'brainstorm', 'share' practice although for Harald the outcomes were less than satisfactory:

I cannot remember what we do in most of these days. We seem to sit around on tables with large pieces of paper, sharing our ideas and when I first took part I thought "oh good, this is like training again" – but actually we are never receiving anything afterwards and I wonder what is happening with all these paper tablecloths.[Harald].

Of greater value for these teachers was training that was 'more practical' including 'use of the internet', 'learning about new technologies', 'new resources' and, in the words of Nikolas, 'something we can immediately use in the classroom'. Awareness of opportunities for CPD outside the school was limited with most believing that provision came from 'the state', 'some publishers', and in some cases the 'teaching unions'.

Norway

Despite Norway's recent *Strategy for Competence Development* described above, five members of the Norwegian sample (n=10) reported never having had any form of appraisal or annual meeting to discuss professional development with a senior member of the school staff. The remaining five did receive an appraisal with a senior member of staff (usually the school's head teacher) with three saying that this was on a voluntary basis. In three cases these meetings were thought to be 'helpful', 'supportive' and 'helped me to reflect carefully on some of my areas for development'. In all but one case, meetings were preceded by an observation by the same member of staff who carried out the appraisal. Two teachers however were critical of this process. Beate, for instance, stated that 'two of these meetings were not helpful, with no clear targets or goals and my manager has never even seen me teach'.

The role that observation played in these Norwegian teachers' professional development was described variously as 'non-existent', 'lacking' and 'not taking place in our school'. Most

teachers reported not having been observed (other than in relation to those who had appraisals) since they had qualified as teachers. Most teachers reported wanting ‘more observations’ by ‘experienced colleagues’ with the opportunity, expressed by Jakob, to ‘sit down and discuss how I can improve my teaching’. For Rita the lack of emphasis on the importance of observations in the professional development of teachers was a significant weakness in the Norwegian system:

I think many of us [Norwegian Teachers] are not prepared for the lack of support we experience when we were training to become teachers. I learnt so much from observations and discussions afterwards and this now never happens. You can ask but I feel bad about asking a colleague when everyone is so busy and I wonder how they know who is doing a good or bad job. [Rita].

Six of the ten teachers interviewed reported that their school did provide whole-day staff development. Although in many cases this was given over to teachers so that they could ‘plan lessons’ for the coming year or term rather than any specific developmental activity. Those teachers that did report some experience of more formal developmental activities said that these related to ‘improving social behaviour’, ‘technology’ and the enhancement of ‘subject knowledge’. However they were critical of the one-off nature of these sorts of activities. Svend, for instance said that he did ‘not find them useful as they are not implemented after the courses are finished so you wonder why you started them. We need to work these practices out together, not in isolation’. For Jakob frustration was born out of the mismatch between the rhetoric of current educational policy on CPD and his experience of it:

Unfortunately this [professional development] is not a school priority when it comes to our [Norwegian teachers] education and courses although the change in government has led to “calls for continuing education of teachers”. But in the end it is our principal who decides these things and what the school needs. [Jakob].

If there was relatively little evidence of Norwegian teachers valuing either in-school or out-of-school formal professional development there was plenty of feedback in terms of the usefulness of more ‘informal’, ‘professional’ and ‘friendly’ dialogue with colleagues. Tine

enthusiastically described how ‘we have made formal small ‘guide groups’ approximately six times a year, plus talking about teaching methods once a week when planning our lessons and we find this really helpful’. Others often talked about the ‘need to chat with other teachers about resources and planning’ and how this was ‘more useful’, ‘effective’ and ‘supportive’ than more formal school-based professional development. Hanna explained that:

So many Norwegian teachers work in isolation and so little is available to them that we find we create our own learning opportunities and share ideas, but this really is the best sort of development because we know exactly what we need but it would be good if something more structured existed for us. Something that develops what we had at university when we trained.

Such meetings were reported as ‘frequent’, ‘common’, ‘on a weekly basis’ and ‘essential’. When asked to what extent collaborative work existed in other ways (e.g. through action research, curriculum projects etc) no teacher reported experiencing this.

England

In general these English teachers felt that they were generally tightly monitored in terms of the sorts of professional development activities they could engage with. With the exception of one teacher, all had experienced annual appraisals with a senior member of staff. In most cases teachers said that their annual appraisals were ‘preceded by an observation’ although one teacher, Rob, said that ‘this did not happen last year’. On the whole these meetings were described positively as ‘really helpful’, ‘supportive’, ‘encouraging’ and ‘motivating’ and in one case overtly formative in structure. The opportunity to talk about teaching and future plans was described variously as ‘constructive’, ‘valuable’, and ‘cathartic’, enabling some to ‘talk about best practice without feeling guilty’ or ‘wasting anybody’s time’. In most cases observations were linked to this appraisal process and teachers referred to being observed ‘regularly’, ‘frequently’ and ‘very often’ although Eleanor admitted that in her school ‘classroom observations were encouraged but most avoid it’. ‘Buddy observations’ for Jim

took place once each term and helped ‘significantly improve my own teaching, planning and resourcing’. Sylvia, however, was less positive saying that her school carried out ‘Ofsted¹ style observations that were designed to point fingers rather than support us professionally’.

All teachers interviewed in England referred to ‘INSET’ (in-service education and training) as part of their formal professional experience ranging from ‘three’ to ‘five’ days in the year. Topics for these full days included: fire brigade training; assessment for learning; how to run a successful department; basic first aid; health and safety and exam board training – the latter two of which most teachers interviewed had experienced. Opinions about how effective whole-school INSET days were, as sources of professional development, varied. Those viewed more positively were events where ‘we can work collaboratively with teachers from within our department’; ‘be given strategies to help us raise achievement’; ‘improve behaviour’ or where ‘inspirational speakers’ had been invited to the school. For a number of teachers, however, unease and resistance typified their views of these events. Rob, for instance said that they are ‘designed to help us teach-to-the-test’. Liz’s comments typify the view of most of the teachers that the process tended to make a deeper impression than the outcome, seen by many as a fruitless activity:

I can’t really tell you what we did on any of these days. I can remember one on behaviour. You know the sort of thing, carousels and flip charts and “sharing of good practice” but I can’t remember what we talked about and anyway - nothing ever seems to come out of any of these meetings. [Liz].

Seven teachers talked in different ways about how they worked collaboratively outside of the classroom (e.g. joint planning, curriculum projects, action research etc). Three teachers talked about the benefits of working with other teachers in the classroom. Rob, for instance, ‘really valued working with another colleague in the classroom. It was really fantastic to share planning, and watch each other teach. I think it has had a huge effect on us helping us to reflect and improve’. Liz, describing her experience of team teaching with another colleague

said that ‘it helped me build up new relations and made me feel more confident. I think we both liked the idea of trying out new ideas with somebody you trust. I felt my teaching improved in leaps and bounds’.

Most teachers referred to ‘universities’, ‘professional associations’, ‘private organisations’ and ‘exam boards’ as potential sources of professional development with the latter receiving the most support. Although the instrumental nature of some of these courses was, for Sylvia, problematic:

At my school we do get funding for these sorts of courses but this tends to be anything that is exam based – so it’s good in that we learn about the exams – but not sure it really is about developing me professionally – rather its developing my ability to pass examinations, theirs [pupils], not mine. [Sylvia].

Four teachers received ‘mentor training’ from their university in relation to their work in schools with pre-service student teachers. Described as ‘very helpful’ by one teacher, and ‘thought provoking’ by another, working with pre-service student teachers was viewed as ‘significant’ professional development for those teacher mentors.

Discussion

While this cross-cultural comparative sample is very small, the experiences of professional development articulated by the teachers in these three European locations varies to such an extent as to provoke further critical enquiry in relation to teachers’ CPD in a wider arena. The complex amalgam, referred to at the start of this article, into which teacher professional development is embedded, extends beyond the biographies, identity work and values of teachers. Into this mix one must also add the pressures associated with more economic forms of globalisation and those born from rapid societal transformation. And yet to what extent these pressures determine teachers’ CPD in particular (Day and Sachs 2009) is open to question. It true that the sweeping one-size-fits-all European agenda for teachers’ CPD

(European Commission 2010a; 2010b; 2011) embraces the three countries this study addresses. However in most cases teachers interviewed in this study identified not just a huge variation in their experience of professional development, but confirmed existing literature by registering dissatisfaction with the development they received. According to these teachers, their professional development within these three northern European countries would appear neither systematic nor particularly successful.

Tensions invariably exist between attempts to centralise policies promoting professional development activities considered strategically beneficial for schools and the individual freedom of teachers to actively determine their own learning needs. Within the logic of a European Agenda (European Commission 2010a) for teachers' CPD, such tensions will be exacerbated if policies associated with one educational arena migrate to the nested cultures (Doherty 2004) of altogether different educational settings without careful consideration as to their efficacy in the first place.

From some of the evidence in this study one might, for example, initially assume that the more systemised approaches to CPD (Purdon 2004), akin to those experienced by staff working in the English context, provide professional development activities that are valued by teachers in elevating their professional practice. Certainly the findings from the questionnaires would seem to indicate that from the three countries that this study explores, the teachers from the English sample receive considerably more CPD opportunities than their Norwegian and German counterparts. The development of an audit culture, so often positioned as oppressive (Apple 2005) in many English schools; the practice of performance enhancing competitiveness (Wilkins and Wood 2009) and a more market driven orientation of all learning institutions within the nested cultures they are located in would seem to

provide a richer, more varied, and accessible stream of teacher developmental opportunities. However, on closer examination the English teachers in this study experienced the harder economic utilitarian forms of professional development referred to by Earley and Bubb (2004) addressing, in most cases, the strategic goals of the school. The wider variety of potential sources of professional development that these teachers reported must be seen within a context where exams are the drivers of a high stakes assessment system. In England, this system expresses early professional development firmly in terms of performance management (Patrick et al. 2010). This leaves many teachers discursively positioned as key elements within their school's improvement plan and subject to professional development that is often imposed and instrumental. Accountability is checked by the sorts of appraisals mentioned by many of these teachers. In many cases these are based on targets and observations, which can be used to apply pressure on individuals to take part in staff development, or indeed be used by teachers as its justification. It is worth noting, however, that for all but one of the English teachers, discussions that took place in these meetings were viewed positively and provided an opportunity for authentic dialogue regarding their professional work. Significant however was the priority placed by these teachers on more informal learning conversations despite clear evidence of the availability of more formalised professional development opportunities. For these teachers their collaboration outside of the classroom tended, surprisingly perhaps, to reflect relatively authentic forms of collegiality (Wenger, 1998) far removed from the contrived variant that Hargreaves (1992) equates with the more regulated and audited school systems found in England.

Norwegian teachers, in this study, were often disappointed with the facilitation and outcome of professional development activities, supporting Lloyd and Payne's (2012) view of widespread frustration within the profession with the lack of meaningful professional

developmental opportunities. And this is despite the recent policy developments in Norway and the panoply of professional development initiatives referred to by Ure (2007: 17) earlier. Several factors account for why these Norwegian teachers seem to experience fewer professional developmental opportunities. There appeared to be no discernible ‘cultures of compliance’ (Kelly 2004: 38). Little pressure, for instance, would appear to have been exerted on this group, since they qualified, to seek further training once employed in their schools and little training provided routinely. And this, in conjunction with demographic differences (e.g. Norway’s considerably smaller population), perhaps partially accounts for why there might be fewer organisations available to Norwegian teachers targeting their professional development. Certainly the findings highlight less awareness of outside agencies. Any ‘collective setting of debate informed by theory, research and evidence’ (Sachs 2001: 156) was limited, in most cases, to informal arrangements by staff rather than through structured whole-school activities. In the Norwegian case collaborative learning (Wenger 1998) was particularly prevalent, in part, because more time was given over to meetings that enable such opportunities. However it was also as a result of individuals creating these learning conversations (Schuck et al. 2008) almost from desperation due to the lack of more formal, organised, school-based activities. Norwegian teachers expressed these informal arrangements as powerful examples of situated learning (Fuller et al. 2005) emphasising the importance of collaboration and mutual support above that of the more formal organised activities they encountered in school. Furthermore, the Norwegian curriculum, although specifying elements that need to be taught, is not as prescriptive as the English National Curriculum, offering, on the one hand greater freedom for Norwegian teachers to choose what and how they teach while simultaneously making it harder for publishers, educational consultants etc to provide support that is commercially sustainable. While this limits the potential commodification of professional development (Bubb and

Earley 2007) by publishers and privatised professional development firms, the ‘ownership’ of professional development opportunities is more likely to stay with the education sector itself. However this ownership creates with it a requirement for the social capital conditions behind successful professional development strategies (Opfer and Pedder 2011) namely those of trust, collaboration and networking opportunities.

German teachers also appeared to find peer-support, however informal, more valuable to their professional development than formalised school-based activities. Little by way of formalised staff development was made available to the German teachers interviewed in this study. This availability tended to be taken up on a voluntary basis by staff and usually in their own time. The combination of the German federal structure accompanied by a tripartite system of education (each with its own teacher training pathway) and schools possessing relative curricular autonomy means that, as in Norway, it is considerably more difficult to provide CPD for teachers that is commercially viable in the ways made possible in the English context. Meetings take place akin to the appraisals that teachers experience in England, however these are far less regular and are not directly tied into the performance management of the teacher and, for many interviewed in this study, were perceived as a ‘waste of time’. Findings from this study reveal relatively little knowledge amongst the German teachers, of the availability of professional development opportunities outside the school beyond frequent reference to teacher unions and publishers. This limited supply of external CPD courses is matched by relatively low levels of demand for extended professional development (Evans 2012) (e.g. Master’s degree courses). In part, this is due to the length of training that teachers in Germany experience (for many this can be anything from six to nine years) leaving many German teachers balking at the prospect of further study. Wermke (2011) also makes the point that this lengthy period of training can mean that some German teachers “appear more

confident with the competence they have gained in their education” (676). That said, while for some, relatively high levels of professional autonomy were indeed valued, for many others such as Harald, frustration and a desire for more professional development opportunities was clearly articulated. It would appear therefore that, despite changes in government policy regarding the requirement for teachers to engage in professional development, teaching for this sample in Germany is being conducted in relatively isolated environments compounded by the lack of opportunity to engage with experts in subject pedagogy.

Across all three countries findings from this study indicate that the experiences teachers most value are with, and from, their peers in informal groups. The importance to these teachers of these sorts of informal learning experiences supports Lipowski et al.’s (2011) assertion that “teacher cooperation in professional learning communities helps establish a positive environment and to enhance understanding of professional teaching” (689). Furthermore, CPD for teachers that is intensive and sustained has a greater effect on professional practice than the short snapshot sessions (Alexandrou et al. 2005) that many of these teachers reported experiencing. Teachers in all three locations in this study identified few opportunities to develop further or apply what they had learnt and many could not see the long term benefits of many school-based training activities in terms of their own professional development or the impact that this might have on their pupils’ learning. Whilst expressing satisfaction with some aspects of their experiences of CPD (particularly those associated with external courses designed to enhance pupil examination results), considerable attention was drawn to how ‘pointless’, ‘wasteful’ and ‘forgettable’ many school-based activities were.

Research evidence (European Commission 2010b) indicates that the majority of teachers are motivated to participate in further professional development but lack appropriate support. If this is the case, then it is worth remembering that in all three locations, these teachers' motivations would seem to be contingent on the quality and duration of supportive peer learning, rather than the 'flip-charts-and-paper-tablecloths' approach that so commonly characterise teachers' CPD in schools.

Concluding comments

The author recognises that drawing conclusions about the nature of CPD for teachers in these countries on the basis of a small number of interviews and questionnaires alone can be problematic. Teachers' recollections, interpretations and explanations of their professional development reveal little about the long-term impact of CPD on their professional practice. Nevertheless the two research methods deployed do reveal, in all three national locations, similarities in the discrepancy between what activities these teachers engage in and the value they place on their own professional development.

The introduction to this article emphasised the importance of documenting significantly different policy traditions and CPD trajectories. Two European 'one-size-fits-all' agendas are problematic when discussing teacher professional development in Europe. First, the European Education Council's focus on CPD and its determination to increase the provision and variety of formal and informal developmental opportunities is marred by the Council's requirement that education systems provide quality assurance. Not that this requirement is bad in itself – but rather 'quality' in this sense tends to reflect a belief that good professional development equates to narrow, instrumental concerns over school improvement and pupil outcomes. In effect this overrides teacher agency, teacher need and the softer, more

humanistic form of CPD for teachers highlighted in this article. In so doing it ignores, this author believes, the human face of professional development and its place in increasing teacher motivation and career satisfaction. Second, teacher mobility across all European countries would imply a homogenisation of the teaching profession and a unitary understanding of what constitutes appropriate and desirable CPD. As this small-scale, longitudinal, three-country study clearly indicates, this is far from the heterogeneous reality confronting any teacher seeking employment opportunities across, and in some cases within, national boundaries. Seeking a common understanding of what effective teachers' CPD is, risks jumping to the conclusion that there is a common understanding of what being a teacher is, or indeed of losing sight of the fact that teachers are professional learners and not just tools for school improvement.

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¹ The Office for Standards in Education is a non-ministerial government department set up from the schools inspectorate in 1992 to help improve the quality and standards in education. It achieves this through inspection and by providing advice and information to the Secretary of State for Education.