



## Professional development for the whole staff

*It seems reasonable to assume that any teacher reading MET is concerned with their own professional development. Tessa Woodward, a teacher and teacher trainer at Hilderstone College, Kent, and Professional Development Officer for FIRST, suggests ways of involving all the staff of an institution.*

We spend long hours at work. Long years, too! So the idea of learning from the experience makes sense personally, as well as being a form of investment for the organisations we work in. It pays off for the school in terms of greater depth and efficiency at work as well as in a general atmosphere of interest and well-being. One of my jobs in FIRST (a group of independent language-teaching organisations in Britain) is to think about how professional development can be initiated or fostered. These ideas may echo or add to your own, if you are thinking about ways for you and your colleagues in all departments to stay interested in your school.

### Build a picture of learning in your institution

Many people on the staff will be going to evening classes, doing correspondence courses, going on activity holidays or taking part in other learning experiences. The learning may not be directly relevant to their work but additional confidence or poise in *any* area will enhance a person's work indirectly. So one idea is for staff to tell each other, in a supportive, non-judgemental atmosphere, what they are learning in parallel or unconnected fields. The 'telling' can be at a friendly staff meeting (with food and drink provided) or by questionnaire, mini-poster or other means. This sharing will help staff to perceive each other as both interesting and capable of learning and new behaviour.

### One-off, ad-hoc events

People can travel to one-off events such as lectures, films, conferences. The advantages are the 'away-

day' feeling and meeting people not normally encountered. The disadvantage is the difficulty of remembering to adapt/transfer the ideas gained to the home setting. Staff who go away can be encouraged to share ideas on their return. This works better if all staff know the person is going and are encouraged to negotiate both what can be brought back in terms of photos, postcards and real objects to enliven a talk, and also the topics or headings structuring the talk. Headings can be *The thing I liked best was..., I couldn't understand why ..., One thing I think we do better here is ... There is likely to be more interest* if this pre-event work is done.

### Staying home

Rather than individual staff travelling away to events, events can be run for all staff or for sections of the staff on work premises. This saves travelling costs, except those for a visiting speaker, and means more people can benefit. Sometimes, too, events on work premises force people to be more realistic and relevant in the ideas raised. To prevent the 'same old personalities, same old blockages' syndrome of events involving people who know each other a little too well, a number of strategies can be considered. For example:

- all staff can change roles: the people who normally make tea, who say little or who serve others are invited to chair and run the meeting, while normal superiors make the tea and serve others;
- outsiders with no knowledge of 'local politics' can be brought in to facilitate.

### Cross-fertilising

The time money and energy normally spent on development meetings can be channelled into allowing people to learn from each other in pairs or small groups. This can be done by allowing people to swap tasks for a while, to watch people who do the same or a different job, to share tasks, to meet counterparts in other branches, departments or schools, to job shadow, or to form mentoring pairs. The idea can be to learn more about your own job,



or to find out who else makes your organisation tick - whether this be someone in the marketing, janitor's or managerial department - or to learn totally new skills.

### School focus

A school can decide to raise its energy in a certain area, for example:

- try to get a couple of new teachers in print
- encourage three people to give peer presentations on things they have read recently in publications coming into the school
- effect a twinning or swapping programme with a school abroad
- enable individuals to do research on the school (for example, into how students spend their free time outside school)

- allow roles within the school to rotate for a while (teachers take on some admin functions, admin take on some social functions, etc.).

A school could initiate a school-wide debate on an issue. Someone could find some interesting reading on the topic, a speaker could be brought in, staff be given time to make notes on their feelings and then discuss the topic, with walls and noticeboards available for people to talk to each other on the subject.

### Conclusion

Schools are institutions which exist to aid learning in students as well as to make money. If the institutions are full of staff who are learning too, whether alone, in pairs or in groups, and if all staff see each other as capable of learning, then this, I feel, can only enhance the energy of the whole institution.

*Tessa Woodward*

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