

From restaurant to supermarket: how Teachers' TV can promote a more collaborative and interactive CPD network

Abstract: *Teachers' TV is the new professional development channel for teachers, governors and support staff in England. The channel is wholly funded by the government but is editorially independent. This article describes the way in which the channel reflects an alternative CPD model, helping to move from top-down transmission to a more flexible and self-determining peer-to-peer approach and thereby helping teachers to take more control of their own learning.*

At a recent event to explain Teachers' TV to a large group of potential CPD partners, one advisory team leader told us that she was worried that if Teachers' TV was a success it would put her out of a job. It was a flattering projection of our impact, but even if we do prove to be very popular and make a real impact on teachers' professional development, she should stick with the day job. This is a good time to be in CPD and if it works Teachers' TV should make her life easier.

Teachers' professional development is changing fast and everyone wants a part of it. As the LEAs have fewer resources, many agencies including the NCSL, the QCA, the GTC, the Specialist Schools Trust as well as the NUT have stepped into the breach by offering an even greater range of continuing professional development programmes. At the same time, the DfES continues to invest heavily in training to help deliver the National Strategies. With so much CPD going on, it is not surprising that there is a heightened interest in identifying the most effective ways of delivering that training, especially at a time when the profession is re-discovering its confidence (thereby becoming more demanding) and the technology is opening up more ways for teachers to control their own training. Teachers' TV is certainly making use of some new technology, but will it allow teachers to take control?

Ask most teachers what they understand by continuing professional development and they will say 'courses and training days'. The one-, two- or three-day training course has been an effective staple of in-service training programmes and has delivered some impressive improvements. It works when there is a need to share a particular approach or explain changes. It is an efficient way to disseminate the 'voice of the expert'. It brings teachers together, usually outside the workplace and, where the pedagogy of the course-giver has had an impact, it does promote dialogue and real learning. It is however still a top-down 'transmission' model of training: what the Americans tend to refer to as 'drive-by' training. It offers only a momentary engagement, outside the context in which teachers work. Because it usually requires absence from the classroom, supply cover, travel and, for some, accommodation, it is also expensive.

Teachers' TV offers an alternative: what we might call the 'supermarket' model of CPD. If the 'external course' model is rather like eating out - getting away from your own kitchen and letting someone else do the cooking - Teachers' TV is much more like shopping at a supermarket. Since many supermarkets, like Teachers' TV, are open 24 hours a day, the decision about when to go shopping is up to the shopper. For some, this means a regular weekly visit at a time that suits them. In the same way, the channel makes training accessible round the clock and allows teachers to partake at a time that suits them. The schedule is highly repeated, with programmes appearing up to six times a week at different times

during the day and across the weekend. The schedule has been carefully structured to encourage a regular appointment to watch programmes that meet a particular need. This is a profoundly different power relationship between CPD provider and consumer, which heightens the consumer's ownership of the training experience.

You may be free to buy what you want, but you do need to know where to look, which is why the layout and labelling on the channel is just as important as the carefully planned layout of a supermarket. In our case, we divided the schedule into three zones: Primary, Secondary and General. Targeted CPD programmes go in the Primary and Secondary Zones, where they are clearly labelled according to Subject, Role and Key Stage. Once you are in the right zone, there are programmes labelled, for example, KS3 Science or Primary SENCOs for you to sample. And to make it easier still, when you find the label that matches your requirements you will find three or four short programmes all relating to that subject, topic or role. This is the block approach based on clusters of 15-minute programmes, a length which is proving very popular.

In marked contrast to the 'restaurant' model CPD, where you are committed to a day, half-day or two hours of training planned by someone else, the supermarket model means that you can pick just one 15-minute event. Early audience research suggests that although teachers initially said they would not watch more than 15 minutes at a time, in fact they are putting two or three 15-minute snacks together and turning them into a meal. Because it feels easy to make a 15-minute commitment, the next 15 minutes seem worth a try and then perhaps the next: "After all it's only another 15 minutes". Several teachers have described the current schedule as 'strangely addictive'!

Another advantage of the Teachers' TV model of CPD is that it encourages teachers to move out of their direct area of professional interest. When the choices are laid out and easily accessible, you do try things that you would never normally eat. Primary teachers seem to learn from watching secondary programmes. English teachers get fascinated by maths lessons and find that there is more transferable technique than they were expecting. The traditional models of CPD rarely allow this cross-over. Our approach promotes a more democratic and holistic approach to school improvement. The senior manager watching the programme about the struggling NQT may as a result become a more responsive mentor and more sensitive manager generally. The SENCO watching a programme on how to organise parents' evenings might realise how her specialist expertise could improve the whole-school parental access policy.

The General Zone also encourages the teacher to broaden his or her interest. To extend the supermarket image a little further, what we have done here is to offer those programmes which may not be on your regular shopping list but may tempt you to take something which will provide tangential stimulation or enrichment. It could be the weekly educational news or a documentary about autism, advice on securing a better work-life balance or useful guidance for advancing your career. If the Primary and Secondary Zones are 'appointments to view' then the General Zone is 'drop-in TV'. Or, to use another media metaphor: the Primary and Secondary Zones are 'lean forward' CPD whereas the General Zone is 'lean-back' TV. A documentary about women and Islam may not be on the training syllabus but it makes a good watch in its own right (especially at 10pm, when it might be the only decent documentary on offer across 200 channels). At the same time, a programme like this helps raise multi-cultural awareness and could provide the vital insight that helps unlock a complex dispute around Muslim dress. Finally, the General Zone is the part of the channel that feels most like the other mainstream channels. Even if the CPD payoff here is harder to measure, it is the

place where we hope to generate in teachers a pride of ownership in their channel. As yet no other profession has its own dedicated television service, let alone a profession that has for many years felt itself undervalued and misunderstood.

At risk of working the supermarket metaphor to death, there is still one more analogy to be made. The experience of eating at a restaurant ends when you pay the bill, whereas after shopping at the supermarket, which is just the beginning, you take your shopping home, prepare and it and usually share it. The same model applies to programmes that have been watched on Teachers' TV. Through recording or on-line down-loads¹ it is possible to take programmes into school to share with colleagues. In this way programmes promote peer-to-peer school-based training. The science teacher can share a programme on how to safely perform dangerous experiments with her colleagues in the department, agree to try them out and meet again to discuss successes and failures. The NQT mentor can record programmes on behaviour management and use them as a basis for a mentoring session with the school's NQTs. This sharing is a key aspect of the Teachers' TV model. It is where the channel's output should interact with existing CPD communities.

Increasingly there has been a significant on-line component in CPD. On-line courses offer many of the same elements of convenience and choice that Teachers' TV is able to offer. However, there is also some evidence to suggest that teachers find it hard to sustain motivation when simply working through course materials on line. Teachers' TV aims to provide its narrative-based observational case-studies to spice up the on-line course, and will be looking to collaborate with on-line course providers. Equally there is much benefit to be had from on-line CPD communities. Teachers' TV will soon be actively promoting the creation of on-line communities around certain programmes. However, we propose to take yet another step.

One of the most significant aspects of Howard Dean's hugely successful if ill-fated popular campaign for the American Democratic nomination in 2004 was what he called 'meet-ups'. Individuals logged on, debated and even contributed cash, but people learnt about his position and built up proactive groupings through meeting up in each others' front rooms. In the same way, Teachers' TV is looking to encourage ways which small groups of its audience can be encouraged to gather together, initially through on-line communities using the programmes as a catalyst, but then locally to share their experiences of implementing the strategies described and the lessons observed. As a pilot for this approach we have already set up a partnership with the Science Learning Centres, whose advisers have had input into the programme content. These programmes will then become the focus for small groups of like-minded science teachers to meet at the centres and engage as a group with the programmes. These small-scale learning networks are another way in which Teachers' TV can help develop new dynamic peer-to-peer models of CPD.

The programmes themselves also require a carefully thought-out view on how teachers learn. We know that teachers learn a lot from seeing each other at work. This is one of the channel's strongest selling points because we are able to span the country. A PSHE teacher in Scunthorpe has told us how she watched a programme where a PSHE teacher in Southend uses multiple-learning activities to

¹ Almost all the CPD programmes that appear on the channel are available to stream on line or, once a teacher has registered on the Teachers' Television website, to down-load. This is already proving popular, with programmes ending up on school servers and even in one case being accessed via PDAs for on-the-go in-service training.

teach a KS3 class about drugs. She picked up several techniques that she could put into practice immediately, but the follow-up programme on how the Southend department developed its approach caused her to revitalise her own department's approach to PSHE. That is what Teachers' TV does best and we are constantly developing better ways to observe what happens in the classroom, to encourage straightforward imitation but more importantly to provoke evaluation and analysis of the watching teacher's own practice. We are developing what we call 'the match-commentary approach' to classroom observation, using the best of the televisual armoury to subject lessons to visual analysis, to have expert commentary, slow-motion replays and interviews with the players. In the follow-up programme, we see the teacher concerned offering her own self-evaluation.

As we were putting the channel together, a recurring question was: "If the channel is about sharing best practice, how do you know what best practice is?" Would we make our choices based on intuition, or prioritise evidentially proven practice? The answer was that we will do both. We need to search out the practice that academic research has proven to be effective or Ofsted inspection data point to as effective teaching and school-improvement strategies. On the other hand, we are also committed to showing practice that is less than perfect in far from ideal conditions. Our programmes should be the beginning of a learning journey, not the end.

Finally, I'll return to the concerned advisory team leader with whom I began. Whilst Teachers' TV does offer an exciting alternative to the one-way restaurant models of CPD, we are very much hoping that conventional CPD providers, whether they be individuals or agencies, will also shop at our supermarket. We were recently approached by an LEA wanting us to film its county-wide roll-out of the restorative justice approach to behaviour management. We are keen to record this kind of CPD initiative, but more importantly we were able to tell the LEA co-ordinator that we have two excellent programmes on restorative justice which could become useful resources for spreading the word in that county. In the same way, we hope that the advisory team leader will quickly learn how to plunder our aisles, down-load our programmes and use them to enrich the course meals that she will continue to serve. Teachers' TV is not a threat to conventional CPD but an exciting opportunity.