

Professional learning

Attending a course can be a really inspiring event. At the very least, engaging in professional dialogue with colleagues is of great value – especially for those of you working in smaller one-form entry schools where you have limited opportunity for wider collaboration with those teaching the same age group. Looking beyond the sticky notes and marker pens that are often standard issue on one-day courses (and of course secretly we all love them!), we are often inspired to take back ideas and strategies to our classrooms and begin to make changes that will improve some aspect of learning and teaching. There are some really high-quality professional development opportunities for teachers and it is essential that attendance at these is encouraged and fully supported by the leadership team in schools.

The problem ...? Walking back into school the following day, the demands of daily teaching life take over: issues the children have kept just for your return; marking waiting to be done from your day's absence; catching up on the general information that has been exchanged while you were out – the list goes on.

I run a number of courses with science coordinators. One of the things we always return to throughout our discussions is lack of time. *If there was more time* we would be able to focus on science and moving it forward within our schools. *If there was more time* we would be able to share these new ideas with colleagues. *If there was more time* we could try new strategies. *If there was more time* ... All too often the balancing act for teachers is that there is so much to do to keep our heads above water that introducing something new – although potentially better, more effective or ultimately time-saving – may just be one step too far. Despite having the best of intentions when walking into school the morning after the course, the reality of the

demands of teaching is that there is little space to try out and embed new ideas. I think we all know that there is no silver bullet – no one very easy approach that is going to have a great impact on your teaching and the outcomes. If there was, life would be so much easier (and someone would probably be very rich as a result)!

Despite these challenges to developing professional practice this issue focuses on *professional learning*. Throughout the issue there are articles that highlight where teachers have made changes or drawn upon support in order to make a difference – not necessarily the quick fixes but sustainable

changes that underpin all future practice. The notion of *professional learning* is an interesting one: it suggests a far more active process than simply attending a course. It places the teacher at the centre of their development – something

that is *done with* not *done to*. It is about developing an understanding not simply of what works but *why* it works, and that is not necessarily an easy step. Much of this issue considers how those steps can be taken and people share their experience of taking them – often with trepidation.

What I am not suggesting is that you are doing a bad job with your teaching or that your practice isn't effective. I am, however, bold enough to say that I believe there is room for improvement. How dull a job you would have if there wasn't the chance to do more, do it differently, do it better ... and however we describe teaching it is not dull! I am not talking about change for change's sake but I do know that learning is my profession in many ways: I support others in learning but most of all I am a learner myself; I continuously learn more about teaching, teachers, children and the wider education system. With a focus on science my question to you is: what will you learn next?

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