



Teacher learning in the context of a continuing professional development programme: A case study



Linda van den Bergh^{a, *}, Anje Ros^b, Douwe Beijaard^c

^a Fontys School of Teacher Training for Special Educational Needs, The Netherlands

^b Fontys Teacher Training School for Primary Education, The Netherlands

^c Eindhoven University of Technology, Eindhoven School of Education, The Netherlands

H I G H L I G H T S

- The learning- and self-regulation activities of two teachers were examined in-depth.
- Teachers' learning patterns during a PDP differed greatly from each other.
- Although one teacher's learning pattern was undirected, she still learnt from the PDP.
- The trainer's feedback seemed to compensate for a lack of teachers' self-regulation to a certain extent.

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The purpose of this study was to gain insight into characteristics of teacher learning in the context of a successful continuing professional development programme (CPD programme). An in-depth case study of the learning activities of two teachers, the problems they encountered and the way they regulated their learning was conducted. Results show that these teachers differed greatly from each other: one teacher showed a meaning directed learning pattern, while the other teacher's learning pattern was undirected. Still, positive effects of the PDP on classroom behaviour were observed for both teachers. It appeared that the trainer could compensate for a lack of self-regulation.

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1. Introduction

The importance of continuing professional development (CPD) for teachers to improve or change their teaching practice is widely acknowledged. Kelchtermans (2004) defines CPD as “a learning process resulting from meaningful interaction with the context (both in time and space) and eventually leading to changes in teachers' professional practice (actions) and in their thinking about that practice” (p. 220). Although meaningful interaction with the context takes time, under certain conditions relatively short CPD programmes can have long-term impact on those involved (Van den Bergh, Ros, & Beijaard, 2014; Lydon & King, 2009). Several

review studies have been conducted in order to identify the features that increase the chance of CPD programmes for teachers resulting in effective professional development (e.g. Garet, Porter, Desimone, Birman, & Yoon, 2001; Van Veen, Zwart, & Meirink, 2012). Important features include integrating new knowledge teachers develop in their classroom practice, learning together with colleagues, and being actively engaged in meaningful discussion. Although knowledge of such features is very helpful for developing CPD programmes, and even though some positive results of well-structured CPD programmes have been found (Van den Bergh et al., 2014; Lydon & King, 2009), research on teachers' professional development generally yields disappointing results. Professional development activities have often been found to be ineffective or to be perceived as irrelevant by teachers (Lieberman & Pointer Mace, 2008; Opfer & Pedder, 2011). Especially changing teachers classroom behaviour sustainably remains a challenging endeavour, while this is the intended learning outcome of most

* Corresponding author. Goossenslaan 1, 5022 DM, Tilburg, The Netherlands. Tel.: +31 651112140.

E-mail address: LvandenBergh@fontys.nl (L. van den Bergh).

CPD programmes. Several researchers have argued that many CPD programmes lack recognition of the need to embed teacher learning in teachers' own professional practices and working conditions (e.g. Borko, 2004; Timperley & Alton-Lee, 2008). Teaching and learning to teach are contextually situated. Professional development activities must therefore build on teachers' own knowledge and beliefs, perceived problems, and classroom practices (Opfer & Pedder, 2011). Mansour, Heba, Alshamrani and Aldahmash (2014) emphasise the significance of teachers' reflection on and assessment of their own professional needs and of their views of a CPD programme.

Several learning activities that teachers can undertake at their workplace have been described, including problematic aspects of teacher learning that can play a role in teacher learning (Bakkenes, Vermunt, & Wubbels, 2010). In a recent study, Endedijk, Vermunt, Verloop, and Brekelmans (2012) describe self-regulation activities that teachers use to direct their learning activities. These authors have shown that there is a large variation in these self-regulation activities among teachers. Different teachers may furthermore need different amounts and types of guidance, because of differences in the learning patterns they prefer and adopt (Vermunt & Endedijk, 2011). So, teachers' learning processes within the context of a CPD programme may vary considerably.

Relations between teachers' learning activities, their regulation of learning and learning outcomes have not yet been studied extensively, while insight in these relations can be helpful to enhance the effectiveness of CPD programmes. Differentiation between teachers who participate in a certain CPD programme seems important to enhance each teacher's learning process and learning outcomes, just as it is for students. An in-depth case study of two teachers who participated in a well-structured CPD programme, was conducted to investigate these relations and to examine the effects of differentiation between teachers by the trainer. Before describing the study in more detail, we will elaborate on the central concepts of this study: learning activities, regulation of learning, and learning patterns.

1.1. Learning activities

In the literature on teachers' workplace learning, several overt, observable learning activities that teachers undertake have been described (e.g. Van Eekelen, Boshuizen, & Vermunt, 2005). These are learning by experimenting, interaction, using external sources, and reflection on one's own practices. 'Experimenting' refers to trying something new in one's practice. 'Learning by interaction' refers to talking or sharing with others or participating in, for example, a group discussion. 'Learning by using external sources' may occur when a teacher reads something or when (s)he attends a seminar. 'Reflection' refers to consciously thinking about the strengths and weaknesses of one's practices.

As all learning activities can occur individually as well as collaboratively, Bakkenes et al. (2010) have refined this classification. Furthermore, these authors add covert or mental activities. Six kinds of learning activities are distinguished by them: experimenting, considering one's practice, getting ideas from others, experiencing friction, struggling not to revert to old ways, and avoiding learning. In this study, these last three mental activities are regarded as problematic aspects of teacher learning that can occur during each of the learning activities. Although teachers may be engaged in the same visible activities, they may use different thinking processes that may also lead to different learning outcomes. Thinking processes that are supposed to direct the teachers' learning activities are called regulation processes (Butler, Novak Lauscher, Jarvis-Selinger, & Beckingham, 2004). Below, we will elaborate on these processes.

1.2. Regulation of learning

There is a large variation in the self-regulation activities that teachers use to direct their learning activities (Endedijk et al., 2012). These authors adopt the definition of Pintrich (2000), who defines self-regulation of learning as "an active, constructive process whereby learners set goals for their learning and attempt to monitor, regulate, and control their cognition, motivation and behaviour, guided and constrained by their goals and contextual features in the environment" (p. 453). Self-regulation activities that need to be performed before the task are goal orientation, assessing one's feeling of self-efficacy, and strategic planning. During the performance of the task, the accomplishment of the goals needs to be monitored by controlling the learning strategy and by monitoring the learning results. After finishing the task, the learner may reflect on the learning outcome, self-evaluate the learning experience and draw inferences for subsequent learning (Endedijk et al., 2012; Zimmerman, 2006).

Two dimensions of teachers' regulation of their learning are found (Endedijk et al., 2012). The first is the active–passive dimension, which describes the activity of the teachers in regulating their own learning. Passive regulating teachers show a lack of self-regulation and need external regulation, while active regulating teachers actively search for information with which they can steer their learning. The second dimension is the prospective–retrospective dimension, which describes the variation in the focus of the regulation. Prospective regulation addresses the planning and goal-setting phase, while retrospective regulation involves the monitoring, reflection and evaluation phases of learning. Several studies on teachers' regulation of their learning have focused on informal learning in the workplace (e.g. Van Eekelen et al., 2005). In the workplace, however, teachers' goals are usually more focused on the achievement and well-being of their students than on their own learning. Clear learning goals for the teachers' professional development are often lacking. Although learning activities that begin as unplanned and non-deliberate activities can still involve active regulation activities, albeit in a retrospective way, evidence has been found that organised learning environments do elicit better learning activities and outcomes than informal learning (Bakkenes et al., 2010; Hoekstra & Korthagen, 2011). The CPD programme that formed the context of the teacher learning examined in the present study was one such organised learning context: well-defined learning goals were set in each phase of the programme, several specific learning activities were organised, and the trainer provided the participating teachers with extensive feedback. Because of the variation in problems with learning that can occur and in the regulation of learning, the learning processes of individual teachers who learnt within this context varied. These learning processes influence the quality of teacher learning and teachers' learning outcomes (Brownell et al., 2014).

1.3. Learning patterns

Teachers' learning and regulation activities relate to each other in a learning pattern, which can be defined as "a coherent whole of learning activities that learners usually employ, their beliefs about own learning and their learning motivation, a whole that is characteristic of them in a certain period" (Vermunt & Endedijk, 2011, p. 295). Three different learning patterns are identified: an *immediate performance directed pattern*, which refers to teachers who are mainly aiming to improve their immediate performance in the classroom, a *meaning directed pattern*, which refers to teachers who are aiming to understand underlying principles and to extend their knowledge of practice, and an *undirected pattern*, which refers to

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