Why we cannot ignore classroom collaborative professional learning – a research rationale

1. It is hard to develop pedagogy because we have an historically poor technical language to describe it
'The profession lacks a shared language that allows them to be clear and precise. They get by of course, but the flaw is exposed when teachers talk about those aspects of teaching and learning that are new or difficult.' (Hargreaves, 2004)

2. Teachers make 1000s of decisions each lesson at speed and alone – so their practice knowledge remains 'tacit' and unseen
'Unlike the doctor, lawyer, engineer or architect, the teacher cannot discuss with colleagues the priority decisions that need to be made before making them so there seems little point in discussing them afterwards. Since there is no apparent point in talking about their classroom expertise, the inherently tacit nature of that expertise is compounded by the lack of need to articulate it.' (McIntyre, 2000 p. 87)

3. The problems of moving practice knowledge from a to b are not confined to teaching. Practice knowledge is described as 'sticky' in knowledge management literature
'Good ideas and imaginative, effective practices that emerge within organisations often do not 'flow' in ways which many would wish.
Locally produced knowledge is difficult to share within organisations, and one reason for this is that the knowledge that is produced has embedded in it a substantial tacit dimension'. (Fielding, Eraut et al., 2003)

4. International research now agrees that the nature of CPD which most impacts on classroom practice involves teachers working together in classrooms to develop practice or solve a teaching problem and then share this with others. Collaborative classroom professional learning develops practice and the language to talk about it (EPPI, 2003, 4, 5; TLRP, 2006)

5. Sharing practice in this way is capacity building – a coach improves in performance at least as much as the person being coached. (EPPI, 2004)

6. Transferring practice needs to involve peer professionals working together
'Transferability depends not just on the practice itself but also on the character of its source as well as the recipient. Where the recipient sees the source as both credible and trustworthy, transfer is easier – and this is particularly so when the transfer is peer-to-peer and the respect and trust are mutual.' (Hargreaves, 2004)

7. So … we need to create opportunities for all this to happen and where people are prepared to take some risks in order to learn together
'"You must fail intelligently", says the great Thomas Edison. "One fails forward towards success". Headteachers and teachers need to believe that they are allowed to fail …, provided that they take very carefully calculated risks based on professional experience and judgement, and if they do nevertheless fail, lessons will be learned and shared with others.' (Hargreaves, 2004)

8. Lesson Study – one answer
'A good example is the Lesson Study programme … The focus on collaboration is a shift from making teaching completely private to realising how much you can learn by letting your teaching be public and talking about it with your colleagues. It's scary but the value is instantly apparent to teachers who do it.' (Stigler, 2003)

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