

Continuing Professional Development (CPD) is about going forward. It's a concept which has taken root as a career perspective in many different professions, not just teaching. Let's examine it more closely, word by word. Most of us see our careers as 'continuing', maybe with interruptions, maybe with some problems along the way, but we can all tell the story of how we started out right up to where we are now. In this way, we can begin to see our teaching career as a narrative, with stages and episodes but nevertheless with a strong element of continuity. The notion of being a 'professional' is particularly important to us as teachers. Social attitudes towards teachers and education vary enormously from country to country, and there is plenty of evidence in the media, especially in the correspondence columns, that teachers are expected to shoulder the blame for everything from poor academic performance to problems such as teenage crime and antisocial behaviour. Yet teachers everywhere would like to be respected as part of a professional workforce that is making a positive contribution to progress in their own context. Finally, 'development'. This is a dynamic noun. It is associated with progress, with something positive that is going on. The adjective 'continuing' adds significantly to that sense of movement. Most of us like to feel that life is taking us somewhere, but development is also about taking a measure of control over the direction we are heading in, rather than just relying on chance to look after us. Education in the 21st Century has to be seen in the wider context of the huge changes that are taking place globally, with the advent of technology, the knowledge explosion and the availability of low-cost travel with its effect on employment and mobility. As teachers, we have to respond in different ways to those external changes, and as we do so, opportunities open up for us to develop professionally, which is an internal process.

One common way of catering for CPD is through participation in in-service training courses, but the term embraces a much wider range of options for a teacher, including:

- professional reading
- studying for higher qualifications
- joining and contributing to a teachers' association such as IATEFL
- taking on training responsibilities
- writing materials
- carrying out small-scale research into one's own practice
- a reciprocal class observation and feedback arrangement with a colleague
- working to improve one's own language proficiency
- giving workshops or seminars at conferences
- writing for professional journals

There are certainly more options, but any of these activities can lead to the kind of changes in thinking and practice which constitute development. The teacher herself makes the decision to make any of these choices, and tacitly accepts responsibility for it, without being pushed into anything against her will. This notion of autonomous control is what makes the notion of CPD attractive to many teachers.

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