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PERRY, Emily <<http://orcid.org/0000-0003-3413-1159>> and BOOTH, Josephine

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The practices of professional development facilitators

Emily Perry  and Josephine Booth 

Sheffield Institute of Education, Sheffield Hallam University, Sheffield, UK

ABSTRACT

Research into schoolteachers' professional development often focuses on its subject and pedagogical content, delivery model and mechanisms for and evaluation of professional learning. However, the role of the professional development facilitators who lead, plan and deliver professional development activities is under-researched and their importance is therefore undervalued. To address this, there is a need for a greater understanding of how professional development facilitators learn, practice and develop their roles. This study contributes to the evidence base about professional development facilitators through a small-scale study of the facilitators of a teacher professional development programme in the Further Education and Skills sector in England. Using qualitative data drawn from facilitators and participants we identify three areas of practice used by the facilitators: content, pedagogy and embodiment. We describe the facilitators' choices in relation to these practices and how these choices interact, identifying modelling as an important practice where content and pedagogy overlap. We show how facilitators' choices were supported by previous experience, ongoing learning and feedback from participants. Drawing on this evidence we suggest ways in which professional development facilitators might be supported in their own professional learning by exploring and improving their knowledge and understanding of the three areas of practice.

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Introduction

A significant body of research exists in relation to teachers' professional development. This bulk of this has focussed on its content (the planned subject, curriculum, pedagogies and other topics covered) and delivery models (the scheduling and structure of professional development activities), and mechanisms for and evaluation of professional development activities and teachers' professional learning. This has led to widely-used findings, such as the identification of characteristics of professional development which are likely to generate changes in practice and/or educational outcomes (for example, Desimone 2009, Cordingley *et al.* 2015).

Professional development sits at the heart of improving teachers' skills, knowledge and practice (Darling-Hammond 2017), and so professional development facilitators (PDFs), those practitioners who lead, plan and deliver teacher professional development activities such as workshops, programmes and courses, play a key role in the education system (Elliott *et al.* 2009, van Driel *et al.* 2012, Margolis 2012, Ince 2017, MacPhail *et al.* 2019). However, the role of PDFs has been paid relatively little attention so far (Kennedy 2016, Whitworth *et al.* 2018).

CONTACT Emily Perry  e.perry@shu.ac.uk  Sheffield Institute of Education, Sheffield Hallam University, Sheffield, United Kingdom

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Therefore, we lack understanding of how PDFs learn, enact and develop their role, the nature of their expertise and the extent to which their role can be separated from the professional development content or delivery model itself (Meijer *et al.* 2017). This gap in the evidence base means that we are in danger of undervaluing the contribution of PDFs to teacher professional development and neglecting opportunities to support them to better understand and improve their practice (van Driel *et al.* 2012, Lange and Meaney 2013, O'Dwyer and Atli 2015, Kennedy 2016).

This paper forms part of an ongoing series of studies into the roles, practices and learning of PDFs (summarised, including an overview of the findings detailed in this paper, in Perry 2020). In this series, we have previously categorised the knowledge and skills used by PDFs, explored the importance of alignment of PDFs' epistemologies with the content and aims of professional development and identified models for supporting the professional learning of PDFs (Perry and Boylan 2018, Perry and Bevins 2019).

In this paper, we make a further contribution towards understanding PDFs' roles, practices and learning. Through a small-scale study, we explored the practices of a group of PDFs as they facilitated a professional development programme for practitioners in the Further Education and Skills sector in England (Perry and Boodt 2019). Our focus is on the equivalent of PDFs' classroom practices (Wang *et al.* 1993), that is the routines, actions and procedures used as they carry out their roles in facilitating professional development with teachers, and their choices and learning relating to these practices. The next section summarises existing research into the roles and practices of professional development facilitators. We then briefly describe the professional development programme, in order to give context to the study, and the methods used for data collection and analysis, before exploring our findings in relation to three areas of practice: content, pedagogy and embodiment. Each of these areas of practice appears to contribute to the overall success of the facilitation of professional development. We found that PDFs drew on prior and ongoing learning, experience and knowledge to support their choices, more or less explicitly, in each area of practice, and that each of the three areas of practice can influence the others. We end by offering some suggestions to support PDFs in learning more about and developing their practice through models which help them to understand and gain knowledge of the three areas of practice.

The practices of professional development facilitators

In this section, we consider what is known about professional development facilitators' (PDFs) roles and practices. Our focus is those practitioners who design, lead and deliver formal professional development activities for teachers, including workshops, courses, programmes and similar activities, whether online, face-to-face or blended. We acknowledge that other types of professional learning take place, such as through collaborative teacher networks, and that other PDF roles exist, such as coaches and mentors (Boylan 2016, 2018). Further, we recognise that a distinction can be made between professional development and professional learning (see, for example, Labone and Long 2016, MacPhail *et al.* 2019, Osmond-Johnson *et al.* 2019); for simplicity we use 'professional development' here to encompass both.

Many PDFs operate in multiple professional roles including as teachers, teacher educators, researchers and independent consultants (Lange and Meaney 2013, Perry and Boylan 2018). The PDF role itself includes various functions, such as acting as critical friends, consultants, planners, coaches and mentors (Banilower *et al.* 2006, Higgins 2008, Krell and Dana 2012, O'Dwyer and Atli 2015, Cordingley *et al.* 2015, Ince 2017). PDFs, especially those working in 'hybrid' roles as both classroom teachers and PDFs, have 'a significant capacity to serve as a bridge between multiple subgroups within the larger educational system' (Margolis 2012, p. 311), and may act as mediators between academics and researchers, schools, local governments and communities (MacPhail *et al.* 2019). PDFs support teachers in ways which are different from school leaders, through less evaluative relationships and provision of content-specific approaches and feedback (Whitworth *et al.* 2018).

The ‘second order’ (Murray and Male 2005) nature of the PDF role, one step removed from classroom teaching, has parallels with that of initial teacher educators, and, in some studies, the roles are conflated. Teacher educators also have complex roles with multiple functions, such as: teacher of teachers, researcher, coach, mentor, curriculum developer, gatekeeper and broker (Lunenberg *et al.* 2014). PDFs and teacher educators are both shown to act as role models (Meijer *et al.* 2017) and are likely to teach subject content and use ‘metateaching’, that is teaching about teaching (Field 2012, Shagrir and Altan 2014). However, the facilitation of professional development involves working with experienced teachers, rather than beginning teachers, bringing with it the additional challenge of managing the learning of a group of teachers with varying prior knowledge and experiences. PDFs must consider and respond to these diverse needs, eliciting teachers’ prior knowledge in order to bring new perspectives, using a variety of techniques, such as modelling pedagogies, showing the benefits of new approaches and providing opportunities for critical reflection (Byington and Tannock 2011, Collinson 2012, Linder *et al.* 2016, Ince 2017).

A variety of practices, that is, the actions and procedures used by PDFs as they carry out their roles (Wang *et al.* 1993), are employed. These include: building relationships; treating participants as peers and co-learners; sharing values, understanding, goals and beliefs; and initiating and encouraging peer support activities (Cordingley *et al.* 2015). PDFs ‘play devil’s advocate, mediate conflict, provide encouragement, raise issues, share expertise and resources, relinquish authority, and support the process’ (Krell and Dana 2012, p. 380–381). They may offer teachers a ‘better way’, in relation to their professional knowledge, behaviour or attitudes (Evans 2014, p. 187). PDFs build their credibility by ‘acting wisely’, showing that they have relevant experience and understanding of the realities of teachers’ practice (Lange and Meaney 2013, Linder *et al.* 2016). They demonstrate authenticity, use thoughtful decision-making and appear to be knowledgeable, open and humble, building a safe, respectful environment which balances control with space for participants (Byington and Tannock 2011, Margolis 2012, Meijer *et al.* 2017).

Given the complexity in their roles, PDFs draw on diverse sets of knowledge. An evidence review focussed on teacher professional development identified the knowledge of PDFs as including ‘specialist content knowledge and in-depth knowledge of effective professional development processes, and evaluation and monitoring’ (Cordingley *et al.* 2015, p. 6). A study of teacher leaders of professional development suggested that they need subject expertise, the ability to facilitate a learning community of teachers, and personal dispositions including confidence in their own knowledge and skills and the ability to reflect on their role (Groothuisen *et al.* 2019). In a previous study, we categorised the knowledge and skills used by PDFs as knowledge and skills for teaching, facilitation skills and knowledge, and knowledge about professional development (Perry and Boylan 2018) and suggested that this categorisation could be used to design approaches to supporting PDFs’ ongoing learning and development. Other studies have proposed that PDFs need to understand teachers’ backgrounds, learning needs and their contexts, encourage participants to contribute their own knowledge and know how to respond to and adapt professional development activities, while sharing their own expert knowledge about teaching (Krell and Dana 2012, Lange and Meaney 2013, Linder *et al.* 2016).

The ways in which PDFs learn their roles are under-researched (Kennedy 2016, Whitworth *et al.* 2018). A range of possible learning activities may be appropriate. For teacher educators, models of inquiry such as self-study have been shown to support increased understanding and development of practice (Murray and Male 2005, Berry 2009, Vanassche and Kelchtermans 2016). These models have not been widely reported with PDFs, but a few studies have proposed, investigated and/or tested models for PDF development, including: a model of support for teachers seconded into leadership roles, including professional development leadership, in which participants reported learning through engagement with professional reading, time for reflection, working in networks and formal support such as mentoring (Taylor *et al.* 2011); collaborative self-study for teacher educators (Vanassche and Kelchtermans 2016); video-

facilitated peer observation (Perry and Boylan 2018); co-delivery with more experienced facilitators (White 2014, Perry and Bevins 2019); and collaborative and work-embedded learning, engagement with research and formal activities such as conference attendance (van der Klink *et al.* 2017).

There appears to be wide agreement about the complexity of the role of professional development facilitators, and some models and proposals of the knowledge and expertise needed and used by PDFs. However there is a lack of understanding of the practices used by PDFs as they facilitate professional development, the choices they make in relation to these, and how they learn and develop their practice. This study, therefore, contributes to our understanding of these.

Context

The context of this study was a programme of professional development for initial teacher educators operating in the Further Education and Skills (FE) sector in England. The programme was funded by the Education and Training Foundation, a government-funded organisation whose role is to support those working in the sector (Education & Training Foundation 2019). The delivery model of the programme was determined by its professional development facilitators, using guidance from external sources and by agreement with funders: a multi-day programme blending face-to-face and online sessions (Perry and Boodt 2019). The programme ran initially as a small-scale pilot and was then rolled out to further, larger cohorts. The data used in this paper derived from PDFs working with the first two cohorts.

Briefly, it is worth highlighting the diversity of contexts of the participants and their roles as 'hybrid' practitioners: teachers and teacher educators (Margolis 2012). The FE sector in England is complex, encompassing education for a broad range of students, including 16–19 year olds, higher education learners, those operating in third sector organisations and learning in the context of professional practice such as prison and police educators (Perry and Boodt 2019). Meanwhile, the provision of professional development has been relatively under-prioritised compared to the rest of the education system (Crawley 2013, Springbett 2018, Perry and Boodt 2019). The participants in the programme were representative of the breadth of the sector, and the PDFs were therefore required to manage a variety of contrasting experiences, learning needs and backgrounds within the participant groups.

The programme had many of the features which appear to support impactful professional development: it was sustained over time, provided opportunities for reflection, collaboration and active learning, and its content was coherent with its aims (Desimone 2009). A formative evaluation of the programme (Perry and Boodt 2019) showed that participants had positive experiences: they were highly engaged, enjoyed the programme's activities and reported learning about their practice through working with other participants and with the facilitators. As a result of the programme, the participants described feeling more confident in their practice and many had made or were planning to make changes to their practice, including sharing learning and new approaches from the programme with their colleagues.

Data collection and analysis

Semi-structured interviews were carried out with the programme's four professional development facilitators (PDFs). Interviews with PDFs explored their perceptions of their role in supporting participants' learning and the skills and knowledge they used in facilitation. Interviews with participants were carried out as part of a wider evaluation of the programme (Perry and Boodt 2019) and used here to explore participants' perceptions of how the PDFs managed the programme and supported their learning. Using opportunistic sampling, the 34 participants in the programme's first two cohorts were invited to take part in interviews; nine volunteers were interviewed.

Table 1. Three areas of PDFs' practice.

Practice	Description	Examples
Content	ideas, theories and pedagogies presented to participants	approaches to feedback, managing challenging situations, the use of technology, ways of designing the curriculum for beginning teachers
Pedagogy	strategies used to engage participants with the content and with each other	group discussion, action planning, questioning, reflection, roleplay, modelling
Embodiment	social and relational interactions with participants	knowledgeable, enthusiastic, relaxed, approachable, a good teacher, inspirational, treating participants as equals

Institutional ethical approval was sought and obtained for the study. Consent was obtained from all participants and PDFs. In keeping with consent agreements, names have been changed for confidentiality.

Interviews were transcribed and analysed through an inductive approach of thematic analysis (Clarke and Braun 2013), coding, categorising and reviewing each text to identify emerging themes relating to the practices used by the PDFs in enacting their roles successfully. The two data sets from PDFs and participants were initially analysed separately, then brought together through an iterative process of comparison, cross-referencing and collation. Findings from the analysis of PDFs' and participants' data were largely complementary, leading to broad consensus on the practices used by the PDFs in their roles.

Findings: the practices of professional development facilitators

The four PDFs involved in this study held or had held various roles in the Further Education and Skills sector, including teaching across a range of subjects. All were experienced in initial teacher education. At the time of the programme, none operated solely as a PDF, instead combining this role with other positions in Further or Higher Education as teacher and/or teacher educator. In the findings below, we use pseudonyms for the PDFs (Emma, Francis, Antony and Sonia), and classify participants in the programme by their cohort (1 or 2).

Through our analysis, we identified three areas of practice used by the PDFs: *content*, *pedagogy* and *embodiment* (Table 1). The three areas of practice interact and influence each other. The choices made by PDFs in relation to each practice appeared to vary in terms of their planning, from explicit and pre-planned choices of *content*, for example, to more tacit and unplanned choices relating to *embodiment*. Next, we consider each practice in turn, including examples of how the PDFs and participants described them, the choices made by the PDFs and the learning which supported these choices.

Content

We categorised as *content* the ideas, theories and pedagogies which were shared with or presented to programme participants for them to reflect on, analyse and/or use: the 'what' of the programme (Philpott 2014). Practices relating to *content* included: approaches to feedback for beginning teachers, managing challenging situations, the use of technology, and ways of designing a curriculum for beginning teachers. These appear to be aligned with the aims of the programme and its participants: supporting initial teacher educators in the Further Education and Skills sector.

In planning the programme's content, PDFs drew on their knowledge of practice and theory as it related to the aims of the programme, including from their own experience, research literature about the learning and development of initial teacher educators, and external guidance such as the Professional Standards for Further Education Teachers (Education & Training Foundation 2014).

Mirroring other studies of professional development (for example, Desimone 2009, Cordingley *et al.* 2015), participants perceived effective content as: relevant to their learning needs; interesting; contextualised in their practice; and balanced between theory and practice. The value of the balance between reflection on existing practice with the introduction of new ideas was identified by a participant in cohort 2: *‘Having been in the sector for quite a while, it reinforced a lot of what I knew, but it came at different issues from new perspectives, which helps you to refresh and challenge your thinking and helps you think “why do we do it like that?”’*

Of the three areas of practice identified, *content* appeared to be the most consciously planned. The PDFs adapted the content both before and during sessions in response to feedback, participant engagement and their increasing knowledge of the participants’ learning needs, as described by Antony:

‘It was about putting in additional things that they were coming up with that weren’t on the agenda that were clearly issues. So we did a lot more around one-to-one feedback for students that were not performing as required, so it was a lot more directive techniques. That’s partly a reflection of the experience of the room on the day . . . it was responding to what they wanted really.’

Where particular content was perceived by participants to be less useful, this appeared to derive from a mismatch with either their professional context and/or their prior experience (Perry and Boodt 2019). Emma identified this challenge:

‘The thing I found difficult was achieving the right pitch between not assuming they knew things that they didn’t, and therefore letting them feel lost, or not telling them stuff that they already knew and therefore wasting their time . . . There were times when I didn’t think I’d got it right, but they told me I had, and . . . there were times when I thought I’d got it right and they told me I hadn’t.’

Pedagogy

The PDFs used a variety of strategies and techniques to engage participants with the content of the programme, which we categorised as *pedagogy*, the ‘how’ of the programme (Philpott 2014). The approaches used within *pedagogy* included group discussion, action planning, questioning, reflection and roleplay. These might be categorised as ‘active learning’ pedagogies, identified in many studies as a key component of professional development (for example, Birman *et al.* 2000, van Driel *et al.* 2012, Osmond-Johnson *et al.* 2019). This approach is evident in Antony and Francis’ descriptions:

‘It was more facilitation than lecturing without a doubt . . . getting up and moving, not just sitting with each other, so physically up and active.’ Antony

‘It was key for me that there was going to be lots of active reflection, that there was going to be lots of opportunity to share my experiences of ITE, but also for the participants to share their experiences, whether that was from their own ITE or any element they’ve been involved with.’ Francis

In addition, the PDFs modelled approaches to teacher education and to teaching. Modelling has been identified as important in initial teacher education since it offers a way of making explicit to learners the hidden or tacit components of knowledge and practice (Berry 2009, MacPhail *et al.* 2019). In studies of professional development, there is some evidence of the importance of modelling (Cordingley *et al.* 2015); our findings suggest that it played a significant role in the practice of these PDFs. This is described by Francis: *‘We were obviously using delivery models and techniques that we’d want teacher educators to go and use with their own students . . . modelling was a really key thing again for the delivery, not only to deliver the content, but then to say how might this kind of delivery be used with ITE students.’*

PDFs did not always make their modelling explicit, but the participants recognised when modelling was happening, and later adopted some of these approaches in their own practice. This was described by a cohort 1 participant:

‘They would use a variety of teaching and learning strategies and then always have a discussion with us about why did we use those strategies and what impact did they have. They were modelling what we would do with our trainee teachers and with other practitioners, to just point out and make explicit the strategies we would use and why . . . I implemented that almost immediately.’

As with *content*, the PDFs drew on knowledge derived from their prior experience of teaching and of professional development, supporting findings from other studies (for example Collinson 2012, Perry and Boylan 2018). Further, as Sonia described, their learning included observation of other practitioners:

‘You often learn by seeing others and you emulate the ones that you value really . . . You do see what works and you capitalise on that, you learn from experience, all those sorts of things . . . You take your inspiration from certain people and that somehow gets stored away really and that’s how we all started teaching right at the very beginning.’ Sonia

PDFs’ choices about *pedagogy* combined advance planning with in-the-moment responsiveness. In common with *content*, the PDFs adapted their approaches based on prior and developing knowledge of the participants, including making ongoing changes, which were often noticed by participants. For example, when a PDF noticed the pace of a session slowing down, they might reorganise an activity to make it more active, described by this cohort 2 participant:

‘When you can see the energy levels dropping, we’d get up and do something or we’d move around or they’d say, “Right we’re not going to do this little bit now, I’m going to pull something else in to get you all a bit more active, „ and make us swap seats with somebody or move tables or whatever, do a different task and then go back to what we were going to do at a later point.’

Embodiment

The third area of practice, *embodiment*, is a broad grouping which relates to PDFs’ relationships with the participants, their dispositions and their physical presence. In a previous study, the term *embodiment* was used to describe the physical presence of the PDF: their body language and movement (Perry and Boylan 2018). Here, we extend it to include social and emotional aspects of PDFs’ practice.

The PDFs felt that appearing to be confident and having an authentic presence were important and that building an atmosphere of trust would support participants’ learning. They were aware of the challenges of working with experienced teachers. These views of this aspect of the PDFs’ practice are illustrated by Francis:

‘You need to be a good communicator, a great facilitator, confident, able to communicate with adults, particularly with teachers, who can be a difficult bunch sometimes. So yes, you’ve got to have the confidence to be able to handle some of that.’

In addition, the PDFs were keen to be seen as co-learners who treated participants as equals, described by Emma:

‘You need to be supportive and non-judgemental, so that people are not afraid to take risks; they’re not afraid to get it wrong . . . You need a level of modesty and humility . . . If you are there as the big “I am „, the font of all knowledge, you’re going to be scary, so you’ll be intimidating rather than facilitating, and in a CPD [continuing professional development] activity you need to acknowledge that there is a level of experience and expertise in the room and your job is to draw that out so that others get to share it and build on it. You can’t do that if you set yourself up as the only person who knows what they’re talking about.’

For the participants, it appeared to be important that they liked the PDFs and felt a rapport with them. They described the PDFs as knowledgeable, enthusiastic, relaxed, approachable and inspirational, identifying and admiring their expertise and their ability to manage the group. These perspectives are illustrated by these two cohort 2 participants:

'I think [the PDF's] personality had a lot to do with it for a start. I just thought she was really upbeat . . . she was really willing to listen and take ideas from us as well . . . I liked her a lot.'

I don't know what it is about [the PDF]. She's the kind of tutor that I think would make anything interesting. She's vivacious, she's enthusiastic, she's passionate. She's also extremely knowledgeable.'

Some similar sociorelational aspects of PDFs' practice have been identified in other studies of professional development (for example, Margolis 2012, Krell and Dana 2012, Linder *et al.* 2016). In this study, the PDFs used their presence in the room, including their body language and relationships with participants, as a way of encouraging and assessing participant engagement, helping ongoing decision-making about all three areas of practice. Sonia described this feedback process:

'You can sense it, can't you? You see people's body language, you see the way they're sitting, the way they're engaging with you. You get the eye contact with people; you get those conversations going and it feeds itself really, doesn't it, when things are going well, which I'm very fortunate to say generally that's the experience I have with people over the years. It's been really positive I guess. That's a great feeling and it makes you keep on.'

Embodiment could be perceived as inherent personality traits and dispositions rather than conscious choices. However, our findings suggest that PDFs adapted their approaches in this area of practice, influenced by factors including their prior experience, their choices of content and pedagogy, and in-the-moment responses to the participants.

Discussion

This study examined the practices of a small group of PDFs working on a professional development programme in the Further Education and Skills sector in England, using qualitative interview data from the PDFs and professional development participants. The practices, by which we mean the actions and procedures used by PDFs (Wang *et al.* 1993), identified in this study were grouped into *content*, *pedagogy* and *embodiment*. We have assumed that, because the participants reported that they found the professional development activity to be effective, each area of practice contributed to this. However, it may be that the three practices did not make equal contributions to the programme; some may have made little overall contribution, and different or additional factors, unidentified through our data collection, may have also contributed to its success. Our findings derive from interviews with PDFs and participants; we did not observe any professional development sessions or activities in the programme. Further, these practices may not represent those of PDFs in other contexts, phases or subject areas. Notwithstanding these limitations, we next discuss how PDFs made choices within the areas of practice and the ways in which they interact, illustrating where this study supports and adds to others. Later, we consider how understanding these practices might be used to support development and learning opportunities for PDFs working in all contexts.

In common with other studies, (for example, Collinson 2012, Perry and Boylan 2018), we found that the PDFs made choices about each type of practice by drawing on their previous and current experience of teaching and of professional development, and by responding to ongoing participant feedback and emerging needs. This responsiveness has previously been identified as a key part of a PDF's role (for example, Linder *et al.* 2016). Here, we show that, within each area of practice, PDFs adapted their approaches, with varying levels of conscious and/or tacit awareness: choices relating to *content* were the most consciously planned and those relating to *embodiment* the least.

In our analysis we have focussed on the practices of PDFs in the act of facilitating professional development, rather than in the design of the programme's overall delivery model, structure or duration. However, these operational features are likely to also influence the choices made by PDFs. Different professional development models may enable or restrict PDFs' choices, and this in turn may influence participants' experience of the professional development activity. In the programme at the heart of this study, the PDFs were given, by the funder, high levels of freedom to choose the practices they felt were appropriate in meeting the programme's aims and the participants' learning needs (Perry and Boodt 2019). This may have contributed to its apparent success (Cordingley *et al.* 2015, Keay *et al.* 2019). By contrast, in some professional development contexts, PDFs' choices are constrained by external factors, for example local or national policy, funder preferences or professional development designers. In these more restricted situations, PDFs may have limited opportunities to choose and adapt their practices in response to participants' learning needs and contexts. Our findings suggest that allowing PDFs to make and adapt their choices within each area of practice may contribute to more effective professional development.

The three areas of practice overlap with and influence each other; for example a choice of *content* may lend itself to a particular *pedagogy*, or vice versa. Modelling is an area where *content* and *pedagogy* combine: when PDFs model a pedagogical approach, this pedagogical approach forms part of the *content* and the *pedagogy* of the professional development. Here, we add to evidence of the importance of modelling in professional development (Cordingley *et al.* 2015, Meijer *et al.* 2017), an area that has so far received relatively little attention in professional development compared to initial teacher education (Berry 2009, MacPhail *et al.* 2019). For PDFs operating as 'hybrid' teacher leaders (Margolis 2012), direct modelling of practice might be possible in the classroom (Groothuisen *et al.* 2019). For those working outside the classroom, as in this study, modelling enables PDFs to exemplify pedagogies and to demonstrate their expertise as a teacher and professional development facilitator, thereby contributing to building authenticity in the role (Margolis and Doring 2013).

The practice of *embodiment* is complex, bringing together physical, emotional and social aspects of PDFs' interactions with the participants. These practices could be seen as inherent dispositions and traits, equivalent to characteristics identified for teachers such as empathy, warmth, genuineness, agreeableness and conscientiousness (Hattie 2009, Kim *et al.* 2018), and for teacher educators, leadership skills, the ability to maintain good relationships and a charismatic personality (Shagrir and Altan 2014). However, it appears that PDFs do make choices within the practice of *embodiment*, and that these are influenced by factors including their prior experience, their choices of *content* and *pedagogy*, and in-the-moment responses to participant feedback.

Further, PDFs' *embodiment* conveys a sense of purpose (Owen 2016) about professional development, teaching or learning, which is influenced by and influences choices of *pedagogy* and/or *content*. This acts as a signal to participants about what they might expect from the professional development activity and how they might respond to it. In this study, the PDFs built a collaborative, positive, trusting atmosphere through their *embodiment*, thereby demonstrating a largely tacit commitment to building the professional capital (Hargreaves and Fullan 2013) of the participating teachers. This maintenance of a comfortable relationship with participants appears to have been well-received. However, an alternative approach might be to build an atmosphere of 'productive discomfort' (Vanassche and Kelchtermans 2016, p. 118), where participants' existing views and practices are challenged and new, alternative approaches are recognised as 'better' (Evans 2014, p. 187).

The PDFs in this study built and developed their practice based on their prior experiences and continued to do so during the programme. However, in common with other studies (for example, van der Klink *et al.* 2017, Perry and Boylan 2018), they noted that they had few formal opportunities to learn or develop their practice as a PDF. Since our findings suggest that each of the areas of practice may be important to the overall success of this professional development programme, it is possible that, if an element of these practices is less effective, or perceived by participants to be less

effective, then the professional development activity overall might meet with less success in supporting teachers' learning. Therefore, supporting PDFs to learn more about any or all of the areas of practice may be an effective way of supporting their ongoing learning and development.

Referring to teacher educators, Berry (2009) suggests that they 'may not "know what they know" at a conscious level and may have had few experiences of articulating their knowledge of practice for themselves or for others' (p. 307). Therefore, teacher educators benefit from examining their knowledge by engaging in reflection that 'involves scrutiny and clarification of their own educational beliefs, values and mission' (MacPhail *et al.* 2019, p. 849) and opens up possibilities for thinking and acting differently. For teacher educators, a mix of learning activities is highly valued, including collaboration with peers and colleagues, attending conferences, courses and workshops and engaging with research (van der Klink *et al.* 2017). The same is likely to be true for PDFs, and so they might also be supported to develop their knowledge of the three areas of practice through inquiry- and research-led models such as collaborative design and delivery, peer or self-observation, engagement with research and self-study.

It is likely to be beneficial for PDFs to observe both their own and others' practice. Previous studies have shown that co-delivery and mentoring can be effective, in which less experienced 'hybrid' teacher leaders (Margolis 2012) work alongside more experienced facilitators (for example, Perry and Bevins 2019), or for teacher educators, a mentor (van der Klink *et al.* 2017). This study illustrated that working with and observing others was significant in PDFs' learning about their practice, particularly in relation to *pedagogy*. Therefore, supporting PDFs to learn together, through collaborative planning and delivery, is likely to be valuable in developing their practice.

An earlier study described the value of video-mediated observation of practice in supporting PDFs to inquire into their practice (Perry and Boylan 2018). Our findings here suggest that observation, as part of a self-study or a collaborative peer group, could support PDFs to 'notice' (Mason 2002) their practice and the choices they make. In this way, PDFs might develop a 'self-consciousness of practice' (Murray and Male 2005, p. 137), particularly in relation to *pedagogy* and *embodiment*, through which they learn more about relationships between the areas of practice, the knowledge used and developed, and the choices made.

Engagement with research may benefit PDFs in building their knowledge of professional development. Since the PDFs in this study engaged with research to support their choices of content, it seems likely that engagement with research could help to improve knowledge of other aspects of their practice, such as models and theories of professional development (Perry and Boylan 2018). Journal clubs (Turner *et al.* 2020) or similar activities which support engagement with research might be appropriate here.

Finally, self-study has been advocated for teacher educators as a model of inquiry which prompts reflection into and investigation of practice (Loughran 2007). Self-study enables comparison of practice with beliefs and values, leading to better understanding of what constitutes professional knowledge (Murray and Male 2005, Vanassche and Kelchtermans 2016). PDFs, then, might engage in self-study to gain understanding of any or all of the three areas of practice, to examine the choices they make and how these align with, or indeed undermine, their beliefs and purpose.

Each of these models of professional development has the potential to support PDFs to learn about and develop their practice relating to *content*, *pedagogy* and/or *embodiment*. Each could be combined with others to form sustained, individualised approaches to learning. While PDFs might engage with any of the models informally, formalised support, with structure and facilitation, may help to overcome barriers to professional learning, such as lack of time, resources and access (van der Klink *et al.* 2017).

Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to investigate an under-researched area in professional development: the roles of professional development facilitators (PDFs). Through a small-scale study of a group of PDFs working together on a professional development programme, we identified three areas of practice – *content*, *pedagogy* and *embodiment* – used by PDFs as they enacted their roles, and suggested that each is important to the overall effectiveness of the professional development. Previously published studies have indicated the importance of *content* and *pedagogy* as parts of PDFs' practice. Our study supports these, and goes further, identifying a third area of PDFs' practice: *embodiment*.

We have illustrated how the three areas of practices interact, so that a choice in one might lead to a particular choice in another, and have highlighted the importance of modelling as a specific example of interaction between *content* and *pedagogy*. We have shown that PDFs draw on prior and ongoing learning to make choices about each area of practice, with choices made through pre-planning and in-the-moment adaptation to participant feedback.

Our study was of a particular context: a group of PDFs working together on a programme of professional development for 'hybrid' teacher leaders (Margolis 2012) in the Further Education and Post-16 sector in England. However, it seems likely that the three areas of practice are transferable to PDFs in other contexts. Therefore, drawing on this, and on studies of teacher educators, we have proposed some models of professional development which could support PDFs in other contexts to learn more about their practices, including collaborative design and delivery, self- and peer-observation, engagement with research and self-study.

To end, we suggest some areas for further investigation. Firstly, the three areas of practice could be tested through studies of professional development in varying contexts, whether subject areas, age phases or aims, or with PDFs of differing backgrounds and experiences. Studies might shed further light on the importance of modelling, interactions between the overall design and delivery model of professional development and the different areas of practice, variations in practices between PDFs within a single context or across different contexts, and the ways in which different subject-specific pedagogies might influence the practices. Further research in these areas, particularly in relation to the overlaps between the three areas of practice, would support our understanding of the facilitation of teacher professional development and the important role of professional development facilitators.

Disclosure statement

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ORCID

Emily Perry  <http://orcid.org/0000-0003-3413-1159>

Josephine Booth  <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-4553-6402>

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