
What Potential Does an Individual Professional Development Plan (IPDP) Have in Addressing the Learning Needs of Educators in Malta?

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Abstract

This paper reveals the potential benefits and challenges of using the Individual Professional Development Plan (IPDP) to support teachers' learning needs. The IPDP is used by human resources management across different industries including education to assist in the planning of professional development and career paths. This strategic tool is used to recognise and document skills, knowledge and training options required to achieve short-term and long-term goals. Results of this study exposed potential benefits as being improved reflective practice; exposure to strategic planning; motivation to learn; and consideration of students' needs. The potential challenges were recognised as being teachers' negative attitudes towards PD; lack of experience in self-reflective practices and goal-setting; time restraints; imposed union directives; and teaching conditions during the COVID-19 pandemic. This study also examined the potential use of the IPDP by senior leadership teams. The results show that the IPDP could potentially promote community learning; goal-setting alignment with school development plans; alignment with student needs; and different forms of PD.

Keywords

Individual Professional Development Plan (IPDP), Continuous Professional Development (CPD), Personalised Professional Development, Strategic Tool, Goals

Introduction

In 2017, a sectoral agreement between the Ministry of Education (MEDE), the Malta Union of Teachers (MUT), and the Industrial Relations Unit (IRU) was signed whereby CPD was to be presented in a new format. Educational leaders

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were given autonomy to organise Community of Professional Educator (CoPE) sessions. These would take the form of a maximum of 40 hours of “management-driven” school-based PD, and educators were encouraged to take part in “self-sought” professional learning opportunities (MEDE, 2017, p. 31). It was further stated that as from 2018, teachers could benefit from accelerated progression to a higher salary scale in 6 years instead of the full 8 years by attending 360 hours of CPD within a period of 6 years (MEDE, 2017). The National Curriculum Framework (NCF; Ministry of Education and Employment, 2012) acknowledges the need for the “up-skilling and re-skilling” of teachers in order to deliver the innovative pedagogies suggested in its framework (p. 12).

The central focus of this study is the evaluation of a professional development plan (PDP; Rubens et al., 2018) that was created purposely for this study as a reflective tool for educators. The main function of the PDP is to assist individuals in strategically setting goals to address gaps in their professional knowledge, skills and competencies whilst considering possible career paths (McPhail & McPhail, 2020; Tantawy, 2020). With the multiple modes of PD training available to choose from (OECD, 2019) and the lack of this tool in Malta, I set out to design an original PDP to offer educators a strategic focus for planning their CPD. I propose that this lacuna is addressed by using the IPDP as a reflective tool. Considering teachers as professionals, the IPDP could lead to improved personalised professional learning experiences for teachers and could be used by SLTs to organise PD with a bottom-up approach. A particular interest was taken in considering the *mode of being* of a professional as per the *componential structures* of professionalism and professional development of Evans (2011) whereby PD can have considerable influence in changing a teacher’s behaviour, attitude and intellect.

Literature Review

This literature review considers the relevance of the use of the IPDP with teachers in the Maltese educational context of professional development. The relationship between teachers as professionals, their professionalism, and continuous professional development was analysed against the *componential structures* of Evans (2011) and adult learning theories like *andragogy* (Knowles, 1978), and *transformational learning* (Mezirow, 2003). The literature available on the use of the IPDP was reviewed, highlighting the self-assessment, reflection and goal-setting processes undertaken for it to be completed.

Teachers as Professionals in Malta

The Education Act (1988) established the professional status of teachers with the validation of a teacher's warrant and Code of Behaviour. Presently teacher warrants are issued by the Council of the Teaching Profession (CTP) within the Ministry for Education. The following definition of a teacher (in Malta) is taken from Chapter 327 of the current Education Act under "The Teacher's Profession":

'teacher' means a person trained in the science of the educational process and in the use of the pedagogical skills in such manner that such person has the skill to create an environment which motivates every student and succeeds to teach such student effectively by motivating his aspirations for the highest values in life and help him develop creative and thinking skills according to his age, his physical, moral, social, emotional and intellectual development and according to the potential of his skills and talents with the final aim that the student is trained to become a lifelong learner.

Further to this definition, teachers in Malta are bound to adhere to the six principles of the Teachers' Code of Ethics and Practice, which were drafted by the CTP together with academic members from the University of Malta and the Ministry for Education in 2012. These are an updated version of The Code of Behaviour of 1988 and are found as a subsidiary legislation of the Education Act (Government of Malta, 2012). The key principles are listed below.

Key Principle One: Maintain trust in the profession

Key Principle Two: Maintain professional relationships with students

Key Principle Three: Respect the uniqueness and diversity of students

Key Principle Four: Work in a collaborative manner with colleagues, parents, guardians and carers

Key Principle Five: Act with honesty and integrity

Key Principle Six: Keep their professional knowledge and practice up to date

Teacher Professionalism

There is much debate in scholarship as to what signifies teacher professionalism. In the TALIS 2018 report (OECD, 2019) five pillars were highlighted as underpinning teacher professionalism: 1. knowledge and skills base; 2. the status and standing of the profession; 3. peer control; 4. responsibility and autonomy; and 5. the societal value of the profession. A representation of teacher

professionalism that is relevant to my research, and which encompasses the five pillars described in the TALIS 2018 report, is that of Evans (2011). The significance of Evans's model is the link she offers between teacher professionalism and professional development, which is portrayed as something observable, a "mode of being" (Evans, 2011, p. 855). Moreover, a teacher will enact the preferred professionalism if they experience development in their *behavioural, attitudinal and intellectual* beings – when their "hearts and minds are won over" (Evans, 2011, p. 867). Evans offers a componential structure to professionalism and professional development. In simpler terms she claims that the "tri-partite" professionalism of a person can be conveyed in

what they do (in the context of their working lives); how and why they do it; what they know and understand; where and how they acquire their knowledge and understanding; what (kinds of) attitudes they hold; what codes of behaviour they follow; what their function is; what purposes they perform; what quality of service they provide; and the level of consistency incorporated into the above. (Evans, 2011, p. 855)

Korkmaz and Unsal (2020) discuss the relationship between teacher professionalism and attitude towards the teaching profession, specifying three features to teacher professionalism: knowledge, skills, and attitudes. They describe these as "willingness to train students, readiness to increase their professional knowledge in cooperation, sensitivity to innovations and developments in teaching, and disposition to follow developments related to the teaching profession" (Korkmaz & Unsal, 2020, p. 4).

Historically, professional development for teachers in Malta has been a way for educational authorities to introduce new government policy and reform. According to Evans (2011), when government want to reshape professionalism according to new initiatives, it is important for them to understand how individuals develop professionally by internalisation termed as "micro-level" professional development, which she defines as "the enhancement of an individual's professionalism" (p. 864).

Adult Learning Theories

Adult learning theories such as Knowles's *andragogy* and Mezirow's *transformative learning* support the notion that educators who embark on self-sought professional development will be more motivated to engage in learning that is relevant to their current life situation (Ajani, 2019; Guskey, 2000; Knowles, 1978; Merriam et al., 2007; Mezirow, 1990, 1997, 1998; Trotter, 2006). Knowles (1978) presents *andragogy* as a theory where adult learning considers five key elements that differ to "conventional" learning or pedagogy: 1) motivation to learn must address their needs and interests; 2) learning is related to their life situation; 3) adults draw on their vast life experience to learn; 4) learning has to involve an element of self-direction; and 5) adult individualism in "style, time, place and pace" must be taken into consideration (p. 12).

Mezirow (1990, 1997, 1998) presents a constructivist theory of *transformative learning* for adults, which refers to changes made within a "frame of reference" that consists of two dimensions: "habits of mind" and "point of view", that together encompass "cognitive, conative and emotional components" (Mezirow, 1997, p. 5). The crux of this theory is the acknowledgement that adults have preconceived assumptions of understanding of their life experiences, which form their frames of reference or predispositions. Therefore, an adult learner would need to consider changing their preconceived ideas, or else they would reject anything that does not fit their frame of reference. Once the right learning circumstances are offered, a transformative learner would be willing to move towards an altered frame of reference (Mezirow, 1990, 1997, 1998). Mezirow (1997) insists that it is "through critical reflection of assumptions" and "validating contested beliefs through discourse" that an adult learner can alter their habits of mind and point of views (p. 11). In this way, individuals challenge their belief systems and are subjected to a mental and behavioural shift (Christie et al., 2015).

The relevance of referring to *andragogy* and *transformative learning* theories in my study and the local context, lies in their relation to the importance of recognising that as adult learners, teachers can be made aware of the "paradigmatic, causal and prescriptive assumptions they hold" (Christie et al., 2015, p. 21). Furthermore, it is essential to encourage a critically reflective practice on teachers' viewpoints, offering them the possibility to discuss these in a safe and receptive forum where change may be enticed to happen.

Mezirow (1998) considers the act of critical reflection of assumptions (CRA) and discourse essential to meaningful adult learning.

The Individual Professional Development Plan (IPDP)

An original IPDP was created for use in this study, developed from the review of examples of PDP templates used in other institutions (Guzder, 2019; Loveland, 2012; Parding & Liljegrin, 2017; Rubens et al., 2018; Peine, J., 2007; Rhode et al., 2017; Rodman, 2019). The IPDP is divided into four main sections: skills assessment using the self-SWOT analysis; personal interests and interests related to education; long-term goals; and short-term goals.

Self-SWOT Analysis – Self-Assessment and Reflection

The IPDP gives rise to what Schon (1987) refers to as “reflection-in-practice” whereby teachers assert critical analyses of their own practice (p. 26). Addams & Allfred (2013) speak of “self-SWOT analysis” (p. 43), through which a professional evaluates their strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats in their industry. Including a self-SWOT analysis in the first section allows educators to take time to analyse their own individual skills and competences in order to identify areas they would like to explore in their professional development (Addams & Allfred, 2013, 2015; Rubens et al., 2018).

Personal Interests and Interests Related to Education

According to the adult learning theory of Knowles (1978), in order for adults to learn, there needs to be a factor of personal interest and life situation. This section is to encourage the educator to think about interests, personal talents and/or hobbies that they may be able to further develop or link to their educational context (Ajani, 2019; Guskey, 2000; Knowles, 1978; Merriam et al., 2007; Mezirow, 1990, 1997, 1998; Trotter, 2006). By considering these areas of interest, an individual may be prompted to choose professional development training that is more suited to their personal context.

SMART Goal-setting

The main section of the IPDP is where the teacher sets SMART goals. Doran (1981) originally presented the acronym SMART in an article concerning management excellence and setting objectives. The acronym is defined as

“Specific – target a specific area for improvement; Measurable – quantify or at least suggest an indicator of progress; Assignable – specify who will do it; Realistic – state what results can realistically be achieved, given available resources; Time-related – specify when the result(s) can be achieved” (Doran, 1981, p. 36). For the purpose of the IPDP developed for teacher professional development, the A in SMART stands for Attainable. Following the SMART criteria, goals can be set for the short term or the long term.

In the absence of regulatory professional standards, the Maltese teacher can choose to set SMART goals for their personal and/or professional development related to the SDP and/or Action Plans of their school. These could be area-specific, such as literacy, numeracy, STEM subjects, or project-based. Their options should be personal to the individual teacher but the idea is that they are achievable within a set timeframe. The time allocated to each goal could be short term or long term. As an option, it is suggested that teachers consider how their professional development can benefit their career path, looking into upskilling their qualifications (Sugarman, 2011).

Goals need not be linked to formal professional development alone. Informal professional development can lead to beneficial professional learning experiences as well. These can form part of a joint learning endeavour as a professional learning community (PLC). Hargreaves and Fullan (2012) speak of “building human capital as social capital” and the benefits of teachers attending professional development as a team (p. 157).

In countries where IPDPs have been successfully introduced, teachers are encouraged to consider national teacher standards for their self-assessment and goal-setting (Bourke & Ryan, 2018; Clarke & Moore, 2013; Evans, 2011). These offer benchmarks for key knowledge areas and key competencies expected of teachers. The closest Malta has to teacher standards are the Key Principles of the Code of Ethics and Practice (Government of Malta, 2012), which do not set any benchmarks for Maltese teachers to compare with. The six principles of the code refer largely to a teacher’s *behaviour* as a professional. It is only the sixth principle that indicates that a teacher should keep up to date with professional knowledge and practice considering the *attitudinal* and *intellectual* being of the individual that was referred to earlier by Evans (2011). Initially, these six principles seem quite broad and open to interpretation. However, as seen in countries that have established professional standards for teachers, there is open discourse in their effectiveness to improve and regulate the quality

of teaching and learning (Clarke & Moore, 2013; Bourke & Ryan, 2018). The counterargument is that standards fail to address the “multidimensionality” (Clarke & Moore, 2013, p. 491) and “reflexive agility” (Bourke & Ryan, 2018, p. 182) of the teaching profession. It was not my intention to delve into the pros and cons of official teacher professional standards in this study, nonetheless it might be a recommended area of deliberation for future research.

As a culmination of the research conducted, a revised and enhanced IPDP template and accompanying guide are presented in Figure 1 and Figure 2.

Figure 1

New IPDP guide

Individual Professional Development Plan
Guide for Step 1

STEP 1: Self-SWOT Analysis

Use the SWOT matrix to reflect upon your personal traits, qualities and areas you would like to improve.

STRENGTHS

- What qualifications/certifications do you have?
- Are you an expert in a particular area?
- What do you do better than others?
- What are your best qualities?

WEAKNESSES

- What areas do you need to improve on for your role or future role?
- What do you find challenging?
- Which of your current practices do you need to bring up to speed?

OPPORTUNITIES

- What training opportunities are available? (E.g. seminars, webinars, conferences, courses)
- What are the career opportunities available that match your skill set?
- What projects/activities interest you within your organisation?

THREATS

- What are the factors hindering your continuous improvement?
- What policies or reforms do you think affect you negatively?

Interests in education:

- Which areas in education interest you?
E.g. subject area, STEM, experiential learning, PBL, IBL, diversity, philosophy, sociology, learning through the arts, literacy, numeracy, multiculturalism, well-being, technology, etc.

Personal interests and talents:

- What personal interests and talents do you have that could be useful in your current role?
E.g. music, art, craft, sports, drama

Individual Professional Development Plan

STEP 2: Set SMART Goal/s

Set short term or long term goals that are Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Realistic and Time-bound.

SMART Goal/s	Competencies to work on and action to be taken	Deadline to achieve goal
GOAL:	COMPETENCIES: ACTION:	DATE:
GOAL:	COMPETENCIES: ACTION:	DATE:
GOAL:	COMPETENCIES: ACTION:	DATE:

Reflection upon completion of goal/s:

Figure 2

Revised IPDP template

Individual Professional Development Plan

STEP 1: Self-SWOT Analysis

Use the SWOT matrix to reflect upon your personal traits, qualities and areas you would like to improve.

STRENGTHS	WEAKNESSES
OPPORTUNITIES	THREATS

Interests in education:

Personal interests and talents:

Individual Professional Development Plan Guide for Step 2

STEP 2: Set SMART Goal/s

Set short term or long term goals that are Specific Measurable Attainable Realistic and Time-bound.

SMART Goal/s	Competencies to work on and action to be taken	Deadline to achieve goal
GOAL: ◦ Set a short term goal (0-12 months) or a long term goal (12+ months) ◦ Align your goal with one or more of the following: • School Development Plan (SDP) • Students' needs • National policies • educational area of interest • personal interests • personal needs	COMPETENCIES: (knowledge, skills, attitude) ◦ What competencies do you want to improve? ACTION: ◦ What training will you attend? E.g. formal, non-formal, informal.	DATE: ◦ Set a realistic date to achieve the goal.
GOAL:	COMPETENCIES:	DATE:
GOAL:	ACTION:	DATE:
GOAL:	COMPETENCIES:	DATE:
GOAL:	ACTION:	DATE:

Reflection upon completion of goal/s:

Reflective prompts:

- What have you learnt during the process of achieving your goal/s?
- Are there other avenues you would like to explore?
- What troubled you during the process?
- Would you like to further your studies?

Role of a Mentor

A mentor, Head of School, or a significant other could play an important role in assisting teachers to complete their IPDP (Körkkö et al., 2020). Although this should be a personal and individualised exercise, guidance and support can improve a teacher's attitude towards professional development and the strategic planning process (Hargens, 2010; Janssen et al., 2013; Körkkö et al., 2020). Having a mentor or peer to discuss the progress and outcomes of their goals can help teachers stick to the original plan and keep them accountable (Hargens, 2010; Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012; Loveland, 2012).

Although IPDPs have been reported as supportive of reflective practice, innovative practice, collaboration, self-management and achievement, there have been mixed reviews of their use. Negative responses by teachers were reported, where IPDPs were mandatory for teachers to complete (Rubens et al., 2018; Janssen et al. 2013). According to Janssen et al. (2013), teachers in a Dutch school felt pressured because it added to their already-heavy workload. Hargens (2010), in his doctoral study, offers evidence of teachers fearing judgement and appraisal from other teachers and school leaders in their self-confessed needs and goal-setting. Notwithstanding this, there is evidence that informs the claim that time spent on strategizing personal professional development using the IPDP will assist teachers in becoming actively involved in self-directed learning that is meaningful and relevant to their current and future practice (Hargens, 2010; Sugarman, 2011).

Methodology

A qualitative research approach was taken for this study, following an embedded single-case study design (Yin, 2018). Four units totalling 26 participants were engaged to offer their perspectives of what they perceive as the potential benefits and challenges of the use of the IPDP as a reflective tool. The four units consisted of the following educators: Unit 1 – primary teachers and SLT members of a church school, Unit 2 – SLT members of a state school, Unit 3 – PD experts employed with an entity that provides PD courses, and Unit 4 – educators that completed PD courses with the aforementioned entity. Semi-structured interviews were used as the main research tool. An original IPDP was presented to all four units, and participants forming Unit 1 completed the IPDP and offered their feedback.

Research Findings

The analysis of the raw data, collected in the form of semi-structured interviews with educators, exposed educators' perspectives of PD, the potential benefits of using the IPDP, and the challenges of introducing the IPDP as a strategic tool for planning personalised PD.

Potential Benefits of Using the IPDP

Analysis of the raw data in comparison with literature suggests that the potential benefits of using the IPDP could be improved reflective practice, exposure to strategic planning, motivation to learn, and consideration of students' needs.

Reflective Practice. Schon (1987) advocates a reflective practicum in professions such as teaching. He refers to "professional artistry" (Schon, 1987, p. 22), which includes the knowledge, skills and competencies one possesses in their profession, together with the confidence in which one applies them. The level to which professional artistry is used can be reflected upon when faced with a problem, which Schon refers to as reflection-in-action. The IPDP has been reported to be a tool that promotes *reflection on reflection-in-action* for teachers, meaning that when used properly, the IPDP can enhance reflective practice. Three participants from Unit 1 completed the IPDP presented to them in this study. One educator had this to say about the self-SWOT analysis section: "The benefits of having a form like this is that you have to stop and think about it. Usually we think about our weaknesses and what we need to work on" (CSE2).

Strategic Planning. Participants from all four groups agreed that the IPDP offers teachers a visual strategic planning tool to follow step by step. Positive comments were made about goal-setting, timeframe, accountability and how the template also includes a section on personal interests. In her study of the IPDP, Hargens (2010) suggested that teachers who use the IPDP are "more likely to set higher goals and maintain an ongoing commitment to those goals" (p. 64), amongst other learning outcomes.

Motivation to Learn. Rodman (2019) refers to intrinsic motivation being harboured when teachers choose their own professional development path. Furthermore, she claims that if "teachers are to own their professional growth,

their agency and voice need to be affirmed in the process" (Rodman, 2019, p. 64). One educator said that she was more engaged in the learning process from beginning to end due to the fact that she had a say in the courses she chose:

I realized that I'm more open to learn. I'm more willing to learn because I chose [the course] and I am ready to do the sacrifices because it was my choice ... when you take a course that really interests you and you think that you will benefit from it the motivation is bigger and the results are bigger as well. (E7)

Motivation to learn falls under what Evans (2011) refers to as the *attitudinal component* of professionalism and professional development. Supporting this notion, the IPDP could be used as a tool towards developing this important component in the learning process of individuals.

Students' Achievements. As portrayed in local policy, the state and the educational sector are concerned with offering the best quality education to Maltese students and improving their achievements (Ministry of Education and Employment, 2012; MEDE, 2014a, 2014b, 2017). The IPDP promotes a focus on personalised professional development, which can increase a teacher's efficacy and confidence in the classroom according to Hargens (2010). Participants viewed the IPDP as a tool that could help them to keep their focus on goals that would improve their teaching skills and competencies for the benefit of their students. An educator from the church sector claims that "with this [form] I don't just apply for courses haphazardly, I apply for courses which would help me teach better" (CSE3). Another participant from a state school argued that "not all teachers are the same and I believe that this would be beneficial for the teachers as well as for the students and for the whole educational system" (E1).

Potential Challenges to Introduce the IPDP

With every new incentive, such as the IPDP, there will be challenges to its implementation. Participants were asked about what potential challenges they feel could hinder the use of the IPDP. The main challenges mentioned concerned teachers' negative attitudes towards PD, and a lack of experience in self-reflection. Other challenges included lack of experience in goal-setting, time restraints, union directives, and teaching conditions during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Negative Attitudes Towards Professional Development. Attitudes towards PD can be varied and are linked to the composition of an individual's professionalism (Evans, 2011). According to Tantawy (2020), an individual's PD process is complex and requires "cognitive and emotional involvement" (p. 181), which can be associated with their schools' culture and philosophy towards professional learning. The negative attitudes participants mentioned in their responses to the question about potential challenges refer to what they have observed in their colleagues during PD sessions and/or during informal conversations. Negative attitudes include resistance to change and apathy. One participant working in state secondary school stated:

There are those teachers who, unfortunately, have kind of given up, to be honest, and they won't really change, so they're the ones who complain about everything. So with teachers like that, I think it would be very hard to encourage them to get to seek out their own professional development, which is why having it at school level that it is easier. (E8)

On the apathy they have witnessed in their school, another participant stated:

... teachers tend to rely on the school to provide professional development, and then if it's something that they're not interested in, you know, they tend to sit there at the back of the hall, or not be involved and the worst thing is to make them write. They hate it. I find that the best thing to implement [PD] is when I meet them in small groups. (E6)

Although negative attitudes can be damaging to a professional community, Hargreaves and Fullan (2012) warn against eradicating individuality. "Voicing of disagreement, opportunity for solitude, and outright quirkiness" can lead to "dynamic group learning and improvement" (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012, p. 111).

Lack of Experience in Self-Reflection. Critical reflection on one's practice is reported to be a key aspect of professional learning and growth (AITSL, 2012; Ajani, 2019; Evans, 2011; Gibbs, 1988; Hargens, 2010). Teachers who reflect on their pedagogical practice are more likely to have an effect on the improvement of students' outcomes (Tantawy, 2020). Notable in this study is that once qualified teachers enter the workplace, there is little or no opportunity for them to be accountable for their self-reflective practices. Albeit, even if self-reflection takes place on a personal level, it is not a formal action that is required. One educator shared their thoughts about completing the IPDP:

I think what maybe others might find really difficult is the self-SWOT analysis. I think it's hard for us to see our strengths and our weaknesses. Also when I was filling it in like I was asking myself. So what are my strengths, and there were my LSEs that were saying, 'Well, we can give you plenty of strengths and some weaknesses'. But like we don't realize them. (CSE1)

A Head of School argues that "there is no notion of the reflective practitioner. That's the problem. We want to squeeze everything during school hours during the time of work, but we don't allow ourselves the time. We have no culture of reflection" (E11).

Potential use of the IPDP by SLT Members

The study's results show that the IPDP could potentially promote community learning, goal-setting alignment with school development plans, alignment with student needs, and different forms of PD. The SLTs of Maltese schools are responsible for organising and formulating PD for their staff in order to improve student learning outcomes (Ministry of Education and Employment, 2012). The initial phase of designing PD from the ground up for the benefit of the school community would mean that all educators need to be involved. This would include LSEs, KGEs, teachers, support staff, and the SLTs themselves. The IPDP would need to be introduced in a safe setting, possibly individually at first or in small groups, for example, teachers and LSEs of the same year group. A number of participants suggested the idea of sharing the IPDP. One PD expert suggested sharing amongst year groups:

Ideally, this plan could be shared maybe with teachers of the same year group ... they would feel safe and they can share this plan. Maybe at primary level we're talking about teachers or LSEs in the same year group or at secondary level, the same subject. They have departmental meetings and this could be shared. It could also help the school to plan. (PDE4)

Rodman (2019) mentions how school leaders must take into careful consideration how adults make choices. She makes the comparison of sharing and evaluating professional learning experiences to the way adults pore over all types of reviews on social media before buying a product. In this sense, Rodman (2019) sees potential in individualised PD as a collective social construct.

One aspect that needs to be mentioned at this stage is that IPDPs should be kept personal and used more as a mentoring tool than an appraisal tool. This was emphasised by Hargens (2010) and Janssen et al. (2013), who reported teachers' fear of judgement when the IPDP was introduced as a mandatory practice. From the review of participants' conflicting views on this point, SLTs should listen to their staff members as to what they are comfortable in sharing either on a one-to-one basis or in a group situation.

Top-Down Planning of PD

A high percentage of participants voiced their views about the way in which centrally organised CoPE sessions have been offered since the sectoral agreement was signed in 2017. The 40-hour CoPE sessions that are supposed to be allocated over a scholastic year should be broken down into 15 hours centrally organised by directorates of the Ministry for Education and 25 hours by school management (12 hours related to the SDP/Curriculum time and 13 hours sessions/workshops according to teachers' needs) (IfE, 2019a). There was consistency in opinion across the four groups of participants that there should be more consultation between the state authorities and schools regarding areas chosen for PD, as well as between SLT and educators as to the topics and relevance of the PD being organised. At state level, one SLT member from a state school had the following to say:

I would like that centralized CoPE training sessions get consulted before decisions are taken and before they're implemented across the board, because each school has individual needs. In the case of the Learning Outcomes Framework training we had nowhere else to go, but sometimes training is planned without the school needing it. For example, we had decided to prepare the training for Kinder and Years three and four as a college so that we would have all schools following the same training. Now one of the training sessions which one of the Heads of School decided upon was the difficulties teachers and schools are facing in the great influx of migrants. That is an issue which does not apply to all schools. That does not affect me as a school because we don't have many foreigners. They're mostly Maltese. So I decided to opt out. So as long as we are given the freedom to decide on what works best for the particular character of the school then that is the way forward. (SLT2a)

The following comments encapsulate what Rodman (2019) describes as the “sit-and-get” type of PD where teachers “shuffle into auditorium rows for seminars and workshops that don’t relate to their own experiences, interests, or growth needs” (Rodman, 2019, p. 1). The one-size-fits-all approach was reiterated by several members from Unit 3 and 4. As one PD expert argued,

...I think there is a big distinction between what goes on and the way I define professional development because, basically, what goes on at present, at least in the government sector, is that you get teachers who are given courses. Most of the time these courses are selected from the education division basically, and even the attitude of teachers towards these courses is not conducive to any actual professional development, which is obviously counterintuitive, right? (PDE6)

Although centrally planned PD can be an effective way to promote new policy and reform (Evans, 2011), school-embedded PD such as “peer-learning opportunities” (OECD, 2019, p. 36) has a greater impact on teacher performance and student achievement (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012; 2020; Rodman, 2020). It seems evident that although schools have been encouraged to exercise their autonomy in the organisation of PD sessions, there still seems to be a lack of communication and consultancy on all levels. This can have an impact on active participation and the effectiveness of the intended outcomes (Evans, 2011).

Suggested uses of the IPDP

The findings from this study suggest that IPDP could prove to be a catalytic tool to inform customised planning of CPD on a personal level and at school level. Considering the suggested distribution of the 40-hour CoPE sessions (IfE, 2019), the IPDP could assist in a more bottom-up approach to planning CPD, acknowledging educators as autonomous professional learners and enhancing their motivation for learning. The following are suggested ways in which the IPDP could be used:

By the teacher:

- Alignment with SDP: For teachers to align their PD goals with their School Development Plan
- Considering students’ needs: Setting PD goals in areas to improve teaching practice according to students’ needs
- Career goal-setting: To consider PD required to progress in the education sector
- National policy: To consider PD aligned with latest national policy

By the School Management Team:

- A mentoring tool: To be completed under the guidance of a mentor or a member of the SLT in order to identify areas requiring improvement or further development for the individual teacher
- PD focus groups: SLT can organise PD for year groups or subject areas
- Customised SDP: Distributed to the whole school, the IPDP could assist in the development of the SDP
- Community building: Grouping of teachers from different year groups or subject area who have the same PD goals or interests

Conclusion

This study focused on the evaluation of an original IPDP template and the potential benefits and challenges of its implementation with educators and SLTs in the Maltese CPD context. Consideration was given to a teacher's professionalism and professional development as portrayed in *componential structural models* of Evans (2011) that are based on a teacher's behavioural, attitudinal and intellectual mode of being. The research and data presented suggest that teachers should play an active role in the planning of their own professional learning and have a voice in CPD decision-making. The IPDP could provide a means by which educators feel empowered in their professional career. As educators may not be familiar with such a strategic planning tool, the introduction of the IPDP should be through guidance and mentoring, especially to plan short-term and long-term goals that fit the SMART criteria. Educators who took part in this study expressed the need to embrace a more bottom-up approach to the planning of PD at school level and at national level. It is recommended that schools and educational entities in Malta make this self-reflective tool available to their educators to assist in the self-assessment of gaps in their professional skills, knowledge and competencies.

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