

The Engagement of Teachers of the Deaf in Continuing Professional Development

Helen Nelson

Mary Hare Courses Department
(affiliated with the University of Hertfordshire)



Introduction

- A well-trained workforce of Teachers of the Deaf (ToDs) who are in possession of current knowledge and skills is essential for improving outcomes for children and young people (CYP) who are deaf. Within the teaching profession the maintenance and extension of expertise is typically achieved via engagement in Continuing Professional Development (CPD). However, as ToDs make up a small proportion of the overall teaching workforce, the CPD of this professional group has received little attention at either a governmental level or within academic research. This exploratory study sought to assess the engagement in CPD of ToDs in England who undertook a peripatetic role. The inquiry was undertaken on the premise that exploration of CPD opportunities would also facilitate evaluation of the current and future state of the profession.

Objectives

- The aims of the study were to:
 - Identify the types of CPD that are undertaken by qualified ToDs.
 - Assess the factors that motivate ToDs to engage in CPD.
 - Evaluate the elements which may restrict or facilitate participation in further training and development opportunities.
 - Analyse the perceived benefits of engagement in CPD for the participants.
 - Assess whether the types of CPD undertaken related to key themes identified within a literature review.
 - Explore issues related to the current status of the profession.

Methodology

- The study comprised a two-phase enquiry using a mixed methodological approach. An opportunity sample comprising five specialist support services for the sensory impaired was used in the study, which included 28 ToDs and four service managers.

Phase 1:

- Completion of an on-line questionnaire by ToDs undertaking a peripatetic role with subsequent collation and evaluation of the responses provided.

Phase 2:

- 2.a. Semi-structured interviews with the managers of the services within which the initial respondents are employed, to gain insight into CPD from a managerial perspective.
- 2.b. Semi-structured interviews with selected ToD respondents to the on-line survey to explore responses in more detail.

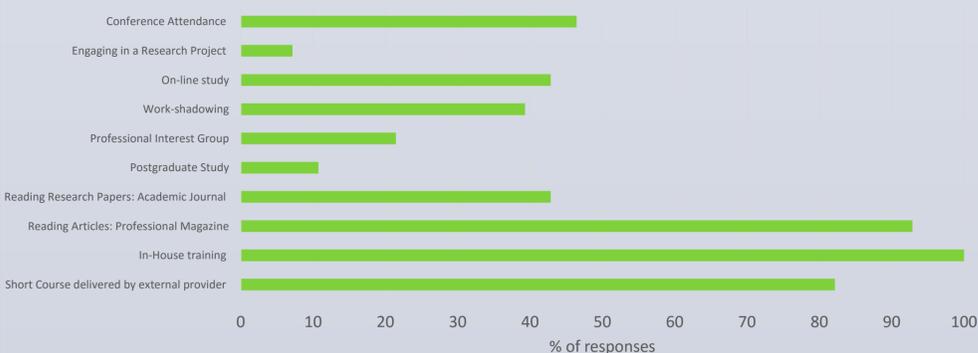
Demographic Profile of Respondents

- Analysis of demographic factors supports the profile of an aging workforce (Andrews & Covell, 2006; CRIDE, 2014) as 57.15% of respondents were 50 years of age or above.
- Typically respondents had long-standing experience in the field of deaf education with 50% of respondents having been qualified as a ToD for 15 years or more.
- This age and experience profile will potentially result in:
 - a decline in numbers of ToDs overall, if the training of new entrants to the profession does not keep pace with the numbers retiring
 - a decline in the relative level of experience within the profession as a whole.

Motivation to Engage in CPD

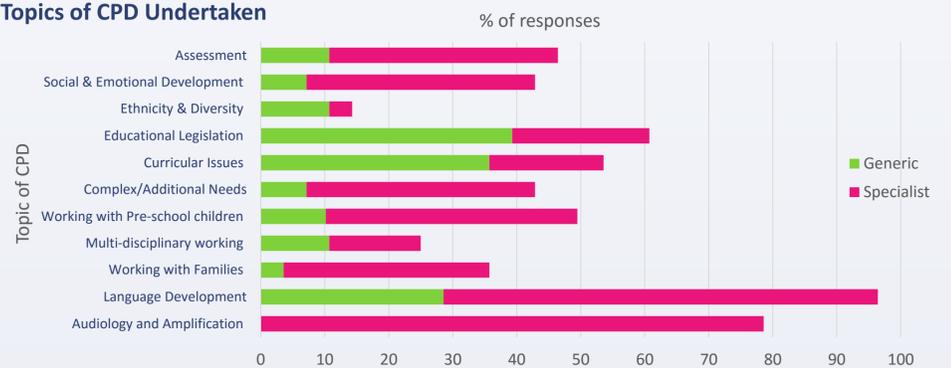
- Individual motivation to engage in CPD primarily related to three key themes:
 - Updating and refreshing skills and knowledge.
 - Achieving a better understand of the needs of individual pupils.
 - Networking and sharing ideas with other practitioners.

Types of CPD Undertaken in a 12-Month Period (September 2015–16)



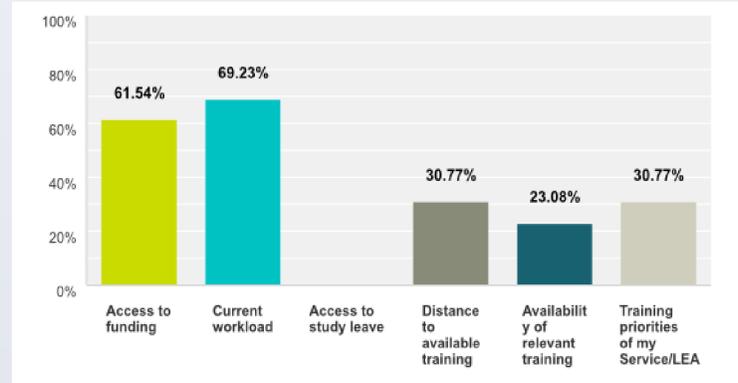
- The main form of activity undertaken by ToD respondents was in-house training.
- Heads of Service highlighted the increased utilisation of skills from within specialist support teams to facilitate training in response to budgetary constraints.
- Significant numbers of ToDs were still able to access externally delivered short courses (82.14%); however, opportunities to do so were perceived to have become more restricted.
- Overall there was a lower level of engagement in activities that involved access to, and engagement in, current research.

Topics of CPD Undertaken



- The two key focus areas for CPD activity were Audiology & Amplification and Language Development. This indicates the central importance of these two aspects to the effective undertaking of the ToD role.

Barriers to Engagement in CPD



- The main limiting factors upon access to CPD were the availability of funding and the impact of current workloads.
- Several respondents commented upon experiencing difficulty in taking time away from their caseloads to attend training and individual caseloads were reported to be increasing as a result of lower overall staffing levels.

Conclusions

- Within the ToD workforce and leadership there was a high level of recognition of the need for, and value of, on-going training and professional development.
- A trend towards lower cost options appeared to be emerging, which related to budgetary constraints.
- In relation to informing future CPD provision, some areas appeared to be under-represented and warrant further attention e.g. ethnicity and diversity.
- The level of access to, and engagement with, academic research was very variable, and supports the need for greater synthesis of research and practice within the field of deaf education as identified by other authors (Beasley & Chilton, 2015; Swanwick & Marschark, 2010).
- Further evaluation of the impact of the current demographic profile of the workforce upon the ability to meet future needs is highly important. This needs to be undertaken in a timely manner to inform governmental decision making and to allow effective action to be taken.
- The current study was exploratory in nature and involved a small scale and opportunistic sample. Whilst the responses of this sample group may be indicative of the situation within the wider population this cannot be firmly established from the current study and further research involving a larger and more representative sample is needed.
- This study focusses upon the role of peripatetic ToDs and therefore does not reflect the full range of ToD roles; comparative studies involving those employed within specialist provision in mainstream schools and special schools would also be important to represent the profession as a whole.

References

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- CRIDE (2014). UK Wide Summary Report.
- Beasley S & Chilton H (2015) *Deaf Educ Int*, 17(4), 231–240
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Contact Information

Helen Nelson, MA, Head of Courses/Principal Lecturer, Mary Hare Courses Department
h.nelson@maryhare.org.uk