



(RE)SHAPING THE FUTURE OF RESEARCH IN FE

Guerrilla CPD

The power of informal teacher networks in professional development



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How can teachers regain a sense of agency in these troubling times?

During the height of the pandemic, and inspired by the critical pedagogies of Freire (1970) and hooks (1994), a grassroots collaboration developed between an FE institution and an HE institution, leading to meaningful pedagogical change. This case study highlights how informal collaborations rooted in shared values can revitalise CPD.

This initiative was ‘guerrilla’ in nature – teacher-led, born out of friendship – leading to a more organic and playful approach. Workshops happened across multiple sites, providing spaces for educators to share ideas and disrupt fixed ways of thinking. For example, using the comedic discourse of Mary Poppins, teachers were encouraged to think about the ways in which their idiosyncratic approaches nurtured passion and motivation in their work.

One popular activity was ‘freewriting’ – a technique that encourages teachers and students to write without worrying about structure, grammar or correctness. Inspired by Elbow’s (1973/1998) work on writing, Gilbert adapted this method to help teachers across different disciplines. Another key technique was ‘diagramming’ (Gilbert, 2021), which blended diagrams, art and dialogue to encourage critical thinking and knowledge-sharing.

A major focus of these CPD sessions was decolonising the curriculum. Drawing on the ideas of Fanon (1961) and others, participants explored ways to challenge Eurocentric perspectives in their subjects. One of the most exciting outcomes of this initiative was that teachers started engaging in their own research. Inspired by the ‘teacher as researcher’ model (Stenhouse, 1975) and Schön’s (1983) ideas on reflective practice, many participants began documenting their pedagogical

experiments, sharing findings and publishing, for example Hart and Hughes (2024). This approach shifted CPD from a passive process to a collaborative endeavour.

Sustaining such initiatives remains a challenge. Without formal recognition or funding, grassroots CPD efforts rely on committed individuals. We invite FE leaders to support and celebrate these efforts. By valuing teachers as practitioner-researchers, and providing space for professional friendships to evolve into substantial pedagogies, together we can create a more democratic and sustainable education system.

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