

MTPT Reflection

Introduction

Prior to starting my maternity leave, I was a dedicated and well respected third year teacher holding a temporary TLR 3 position in my school's Teaching and Learning Team. I was ambitious, but struggling to get ahead in a large department, and indeed school, containing lots of equally ambitious, but more experienced teachers. I started maternity leave eagerly anticipating the arrival of our new baby, but soon after he arrived, relatively safe and well, I began to struggle. I found being a new mum quite isolating and missed my independence. I loved my son enormously, but felt as though I had become solely a "mummy" rather than an individual who has talents and abilities outside of parenting. After feeling this way for a few weeks, I began to try to help myself to take control of things that I had power over. My husband was in the middle of completing his teacher training qualification, and would frequently ask for my advice on teaching styles and behaviour management – I enjoyed listening and helping him, and soon started to pick up an interest in mathematics teaching again. I started to look at blogs and books in an evening when my husband was working and our son was in bed, which gave me time to myself without feeling like I was missing out on seeing our son. Improving my personal confidence through looking at this inspired me to take up running, and join an orchestra, as well as making me into a better, more refreshed parent. It gave me the independence and self-pride that I wished for, and boosted my confidence at home and in the workplace. I hope to use this reflection to summarise what I have done, the advantages and disadvantages of different CPD formats whilst on maternity leave and describe what I hope to take from the CPD completed.

CPD Completed

Before starting maternity leave, I had set up a blogging platform which aimed to draw together maths problem solving resources online and categorise them into topics to aid with teaching the new GCSE. This a popular site, although I rarely publicise the site it gets at least 50 views a day, and is linked to on many of the most popular maths teaching websites. I had not done much maintenance on the site since setting it up in 2015, however maternity leave allowed me to update the formatting of the page, as well as fixing many broken links and replying to relevant tweets about its resources. This gave me a refreshed interest in problem solving resources, and I look forward to continuing to use and develop my site when I return to work.

6 weeks into my maternity leave, I received an email from the editor of TeachWire who asked me to write a blog on an aspect of mathematical teaching for their website. I gladly agreed, but advised him that I might take a while to write something. He was extremely happy to extend my deadline as long as I needed (it ended up being several months!). I was given the option of writing on a topic that I felt passionate about, and I decided to write about the current issues with maintaining the skills of Year 7 students during their primary school transition. I felt that many secondary schools go back to basics with Year 7 – our scheme of work goes right back to simple addition and subtraction for all pupils - which can be very disengaging for them, and does not frequently revisit some of the other content that they learnt at primary school, meaning that times tables and more advanced mathematical skills are often forgotten, which reinforces schools' views that we should go back to basics with Year 7. I feel that the a very different approach is needed, which requires secondary schools familiarising themselves more with the KS2 national curriculum.

I was also able to continue reading through the blogs that I had subscribed to before starting maternity leave, I found the JustMaths blog good for keeping me up to date with how the new GCSEs (which were sat for the first time whilst I was on maternity leave) were progressing and with analysis of the year's examination results and grade boundaries. Similarly, the Resourceaholic blog was excellent at informing me about the new A Level content and sharing resources for the teaching of a variety of topics at various ability levels. I was also able to read some teaching books, including Ed Southall's Teaching for Understanding in Mathematics, which is a summary of all of the subject knowledge needed for the KS2-4 mathematics syllabus, and includes some interesting facts which would be useful to share with students. I also read Battle Hymn of the Tiger Teachers, written by the staff of Michaela School, which made me think about the differences between the very strict approach to

mathematics syllabus, and includes some interesting facts which would be useful to share with students. I also read Battle Hymn of the Tiger Teachers, written by the staff of Michaela School, which made me think about the differences between the very strict approach to behaviour management at their school, and the much more pastoral, individual led discipline at my current school – which is better for the students in the long term?

One of the most time consuming but worthwhile CPD opportunities that I have had is listening to many of Mr Barton's Maths Podcasts – there are around 30 available, usually lasting 2-3 hours. I have found them fascinating and they have really changed the way that I think about teaching. I have listened to podcasts by examination writers, primary maths specialists, staff from the maths hub who have written our department's Year 7 scheme of work, as well as some notably well-known educationalists such as Dylan William, Daisy Christodoulou and Tom Bennett. Each of these were useful, however the podcasts which inspired me the most were the ones by Greg Ashman, Will Emeny and Dani Quinn who discussed the educational research around cognitive load theory, the research supporting direct instruction and the value of using low stakes testing to increase student knowledge retention. In each of these discussions were reasoned arguments using educational research explaining how those methods of teaching were the most effective at helping pupils recall their knowledge and they have all changed the way that I will teach when I return to the classroom; I intend to spend less time planning resources and more time planning well thought out questions, and increase my use of mini whiteboard based assessment and regular low stakes tests. These podcasts have engaged me with research and being on maternity has allowed me to reflect on how I could implement these changes in my classroom, what specific success criteria I would be looking for (both from myself and pupils) and to think about how I could influence department policy if the changes are successful.

One thing that was concerning me about returning to work was the large changes that were being made to the Year 7 scheme of work; the school was adopting a very structured mastery course. I was worried that by missing the department meetings and the start of the year with the new scheme of work that I would feel less confident about teaching it this year. However, a member of staff from the White Rose Maths Hub, who had written the scheme of work, came into the department to teach a model lesson, and give time for a debrief afterwards so I decided to use this as a Keeping in Touch day. I found her lesson very interesting - it was not a perfect lesson, but had some key features which I know that I will try to include in many of my lessons when I return, for example multiple representations of mathematical concepts. The multiple representations really helped to tie together areas of maths which initially do not appear to be connected, but allow students to develop more fluency in maths by linking more topics together. I found the feedback and debrief session afterwards very useful as it allowed me to delve deeper into her reasoning behind the order of tasks and her style of questioning. It also allowed me to make some suggestions as to how I might adapt it in my lesson, which were responded to positively by her. The day gave me much more confidence for teaching Year 7s when I return, and I enjoyed being back in the classroom environment.

As I was a relatively inexperienced teacher when I went on maternity leave, I had not had much experience of teaching KS5 mathematics; I had taught one year of Year 12 AS Level Maths and Level 3 Core Maths, but I had not taught any of the applied mathematics topics at A2 Level. I had always found Mechanics more challenging than any other part of mathematics, and I knew that the new A Level changes (for first teaching September 2017) had made Mechanics a compulsory part of the course. I decided to apply for the FMSP's Teaching Mechanics 1 course which is primarily a subject knowledge enhancement course for A Level Mechanics, with some pedagogical guidance. Although I am only halfway through the course, I am finding it to be fantastic at developing my subject knowledge, primarily because I can concentrate on exactly why everything works, I feel that this will make me teach it better. When my TM1 course finishes in January I am hoping to do the TM2 course which covers the Mechanics content of A Level Further Maths. Next academic year I am also considering doing Teaching Statistics 1 and 2.

The coaching that I have received as part of my MTPT accreditation has been an excellent source of support and encouragement, and has provided me with CPD ideas that I had not previously considered, such as starting tutoring, visiting local schools, and looking into Lead Practitioner courses. Even the ideas that I have decided not to do have made me think about other options – for example the Middle Leader course (details below). The monthly Twitter chats have been another source of support and ideas, and I have found the discussions around

Practitioner courses. Even the ideas that I have decided not to do have made me think about other options – for example the Middle Leader course (details below). The monthly Twitter chats have been another source of support and ideas, and I have found the discussions around family friendly schools particularly informative.

I still have some plans to complete CPD during the last few weeks of maternity leave – there is an evening training course spread across the year entitled “Aspiring Middle Leaders” run by my school’s Teaching School which I hope to be able to attend. The course has sessions on chairing meaningful meetings, performance managing colleagues and data analysis. These are all aspects of teaching that I have little or no experience of so I think that this would be a hugely beneficial course to attend.

I am also planning on visiting local schools to observe some of their best practice teaching for higher ability pupils at GCSE and the teaching of the new A Level. This will be fantastic CPD since our department is quite stable, so it will be refreshing to see different teaching styles. It also gives me a chance to make a positive first impression at local schools which would hopefully be beneficial if any potential jobs become available in the future.

Advantages and Disadvantages of CPD Formats

As to be expected, reading books and blogs has been an easy way to keep up to date with mathematics education as I could read them whilst my baby was asleep. Blogs have the advantage of being free and emailed straight to your inbox, whereas education books can often be quite expensive. This limited the number of books that I was prepared to read, however I am already in discussion with my school about starting up a CPD library when I return to work, allowing colleagues to freely borrow and read education books.

The podcasts produced by Mr Barton were superb in their quality and delivery, they were incredibly easy to access and I took a lot of notes from almost every single one. Again, they are completely free and easy to listen to when I was feeding my baby or when he was sleeping. Although they were quite lengthy podcasts, Mr Barton always did a 10 minute “takeaway” at the end of each podcast in which he summarised the key points and explained what he would be using in his classroom; I found this useful if the podcast was not fully relevant to me as I could still get the best ideas from it without investing hours of my time into listening to it.

Whilst on maternity leave I did not attend any education conferences for a variety of reasons. I would have considered attending some of the LaSalle Maths education conferences; these are usually £25 and run on Saturdays (which is easy for me for childcare as my husband could have looked after our baby) all over the country, however most of the dates ended up clashing with our pre-planned arrangements. I have noticed that many conferences, including ResearchEd, have started to run creches at their conferences which is a fantastic way to make weekend conferences more family friendly. I also find it helpful when conferences share slides and occasionally livestream the talks which would be great to see more of, in a more structured way – slides are often only put on the speaker’s own website, not the conference’s site. The LaSalle conference dates and locations are published years in advance though, which is helpful for future planning.

The Mechanics course run by FMSP has been another excellent CPD format – it is a long course so it is more detailed and impactful, but consists only of live online videos every three weeks (after baby’s bedtime!), some practice questions which can easily be completed within three weeks, and two study days. Although the study days are quite far away (either Warwick or London), the course leader was able to reserve my preferred dates which was incredibly helpful as I could plan in advance to ensure that logistically this could be managed. The course leader, Sue de Pomerai, was very welcoming when I approached her about doing the course on maternity leave and said that they were keen to help people do the course who wouldn’t typically do it. The course is £300 initially but as I work in a state secondary I will get the fees refunded upon completion of the course. I self-funded the course but I could have approached my school for the money and may do for future courses.

Summary

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My maternity CPD has been fantastic this year; it has helped to boost my confidence personally and professionally, allowed me to refocus my career ambitions and given me a multitude of ideas to try out in the classroom. I could not be more grateful for the support from Emma and the MTPT project in general, and my school is very interested in its developments as it continues to grow. It has allowed me to reflect on the CPD that I have completed which is something which is difficult to do when at work due to the workload pressures. This reflection has allowed me to think about what teaching techniques and ideas that I think are helpful and valid, and which are not, as well as giving me opportunities to read further into (or listen to more podcasts) on themes such as direct instruction, that I would like to know more about. Although I will have taken a year out of work, I feel that I will be returning as a more knowledgeable and confident teacher with more information on how to get the most out of my classes.

My key takeaway CPD will be focussing on improving student recall and retention using mini quizzes (more detail in my Action Plan) and improving my range of formative assessment in lessons as well as using more direct instruction techniques and a larger range of questioning styles. I will also be returning to work more confident in my delivery of A Level Mechanics ready to teach Year 7 with their new, more challenging, scheme of work.