



What is Didagogy?

Exploring the Discipline of Teaching Teachers

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About us and our work

When Teachers Thrive, Children Succeed.

The Teacher Development Trust (TDT), founded by teachers and school leaders in 2012, is a national charity dedicated to helping leaders to build stronger schools through effective professional development.

Through evidence-based approaches and key principles drawn from international research, TDT works at both practice and policy levels to empower educational leaders - providing tools, training, and networking opportunities that enable them to implement and sustain effective professional development cultures in their settings.

By developing and delivering programmes, influencing policy, and conducting research, TDT ensures that teachers receive the highest quality professional development, helping to create environments where both educators and children can experience the most effective learning.

Our values



We are SMART

All of our work is deeply rooted in evidence. We want to know what works and seek out the brightest and the best minds to help shape our programmes, research and advocacy.



We have HEART

Teaching and learning is about people and connection. Even the strongest evidence for improvement will be ineffective if not implemented by expert, empowered teachers at the front of the classroom.



We are HUMBLE

We are always curious, we are always learning. We are led by the evidence, but we also have the humility to keep testing our understanding and adapt.

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Section 1: Purpose and Rationale

“... my heart is so simple that it makes no difference to me whether I teach or am taught, whether I exhort or am exhorted, whether I am the teacher of teachers, or the scholar of scholars.”

John Amos Comenius, *Didactica Magna (The Great Didactic)*

“Teachers are not empty vessels waiting to be filled; they are professionals shaped by years of practice, strong identities, and a **deep moral purpose**.”

Sam Gibbs,
Greater Manchester Trust

► Why does this work matter?

Language matters. It shapes how we think, what we value and ultimately how we act. When it comes to the practice of teaching children, we use the term pedagogy, a concept that is fundamental to the teaching profession, underpinning both training and ongoing discussion. In comparison, in generic adult education we refer to andragogy, acknowledging the different needs, motivations and assumptions that guide adult learners.

However, when it comes to teaching teachers, we find ourselves without a widely shared language or conceptual foundation. There is no clear term, no established discipline, and no coherent framework for teacher educators to operate within. Despite its vital importance, much of the body of theorisation in this area has been unevenly or inadequately translated into practice. In many cases, attempts to simplify teacher learning into something uniform, quick, or easily measurable have overlooked its inherent complexity. This has then led to inconsistent approaches in teacher education, which in turn contributes to

“The challenge is no longer simply about acquiring competence but about **surfacing and interrogating ingrained practices, assumptions, and professional identities.**”

Professor Tanya Ovenden-Hope,
Plymouth Marjon University



variable quality in classroom teaching. At a policy level, this tendency towards simplification has often resulted in prescriptive ‘one size fits all’ models of teaching, reducing professional learning to compliance rather than growth.

Teacher Development Trust (TDT) believes this matters and has real-world consequences. Without naming and exploring the unique nature of teaching teachers, we risk delivering professional development that is fragmented, ineffective, or even counterproductive. We risk spending too much time reviewing the content of professional development offers, including the underlying evidence, and far too little time considering *how* that content is best delivered.

Part of this challenge is also linguistic. While there are traditions and vocabularies - such as “practical theorising” in England, or international approaches like “lesson study” and the role of “master teachers” -

that explicitly connect theory with practice, these languages have not always been sustained or widely adopted. This raises important questions about why certain framings dominate while others diminish, and how this shapes our ability to recognise and develop teaching teachers as a distinct discipline. With this in mind, this paper proposes a new term to name, frame and provoke debate about this overlooked discipline.

didagogy

/'daɪdəgədʒi/
(DIED-uh-goj-ee)

The discipline of **teaching teachers**; the study and practice of how teachers learn most effectively.

Pedagogy and andragogy - where does teaching teachers fit?

In the Western context, the historical roots of pedagogy can be traced back to the monastic schools of medieval Europe. As Knowles (1980) explains, pedagogy - 'the art and science of teaching children' - emerged from a context where learners were seen as passive recipients of content, dependent on the teacher.

Other traditions around the world, however, approached learning in different ways. In Ancient Greece, education aimed to develop both the mind and body - reflecting a more holistic vision of learning. Vedic philosophies in India emphasised self-knowledge and insight, whereas Roman education leaned towards a skills-based education, preparing young people for the adult world of work. In West African countries, pedagogical traditions extended beyond intellectual training to include empathy, intuition and emotional understanding as essential forms of knowledge.

In the early 20th Century, as adult education began to develop into a more distinct field, educators increasingly recognised that the assumptions underpinning pedagogy did not align with the characteristics of adult learners. In response, andragogy emerged, a term popularised by Knowles to reflect a model based more on self-direction, experience

and intrinsic motivations of adult learners. Knowles went on to clarify that pedagogy and andragogy should not be viewed as opposite concepts, but rather points along a spectrum, with learners moving along the continuum depending on content and context.

However, even this spectrum does not fully account for the needs of specific groups of adult learners - particularly the teachers themselves. Whilst teachers are technically adult learners, they have distinct characteristics, including a professional understanding of the purposes and science of learning that must be factored into how they are themselves trained.

They bring a blend of professional identity, systemic pressures, ingrained habits, and high-stakes accountability. Together, these shape how they engage with learning, influencing both their experience and the impact it has on their practice. It is therefore essential that teacher educators recognise and adapt to these factors. Too often, this is not the case. As Exley and Ovenden-Hope (2013) highlight, it is naive to assume that subject expertise alone qualifies someone to teach others how to teach. Doing so overlooks the specific demands and needs of the teacher learner (Robson, 2006, cited in Thompson & Robinson, 2008).

Teachers and Professional Development

So, while models of both pedagogy and andragogy offer valuable insights, neither fully captures the complexity of teaching education professionals who are simultaneously experts and novices, practitioners and learners.

Too often, professional development is viewed as a transactional process - a series of sessions, inputs, or workshops delivered to teachers with the expectation that they will change what is potentially deeply ingrained in their practice.

This approach assumes that learning is linear from input to impact, often ignoring the deep complexity of teacher professional learning and disconnecting it from context and identity (Strom et al., 2021 cited in Salo et al., 2024).

As Salo and colleagues (2024) recognise, teachers' learning is iterative and deeply contextual. When professional development reduces teachers to passive, compliant learners, it risks not only being ineffective but also demoralising. This aligns with Knowles' (1980) observation that adults often carry deeply embedded assumptions about learning roles based on their own educational experiences. The use of such outdated approaches can trigger internal conflict between a teacher's need for professional autonomy and the more passive roles imposed on them.



The uniqueness of teaching teachers

The practice of teaching teachers is shaped not only by adult learning but also by ethical and professional dynamics, school cultures, and systemic factors. Therefore, it requires a richer, more in-depth understanding than is currently applied across much of the sector to ensure it considers identity, responsibility, and care, while also supporting sustainable development in practice.

In basic terms, this means spending significantly more time considering the way teachers are trained, inducted, and developed, rather than just focusing on the content of courses or the institutions involved.

It means recognising that teaching is a profession with its own distinct challenges and responsibilities, and that those engaged in teaching should be expected to act to the highest standards of ethics and efficacy. Teaching teachers - didagogy - is about framing this sense of moral purpose.

Although the Teachers' Standards attempt to define what it means to be a teacher, they do so in terms of actions and standards - what a teacher should do, rather than who a teacher might be. In 2021, the Association of School and College Leaders (ASCL) undertook some work to consider codifying an ethical approach as an additional layer of thinking for leaders, using the Nolan

principles as a foundation. But perhaps the clearest articulation is the Comenius Oath taken by teachers in Finland, named after John Amos Comenius, a 16th-century education advocate, sometimes referred to as the 'father of modern education'. The oath deliberately mirrors the language of the Hippocratic Oath for medical professionals, underscoring the moral purpose of being a teacher. In addition to calling for prioritisation of integrity and learner growth, the oath also references the importance of continuous reflection on both impact and the development of professional skills. When applied to the teaching of teachers, it highlights the need to look beyond the technical challenge, while also keeping in mind the moral and professional responsibility, which requires a specialised understanding and consideration. Teachers should continue to learn and develop, as it is part of what it means to be a teacher. And that means we need to ensure that support is delivered as well as possible - that we consider the didagogy of any teacher professional development programme.

Despite this, the system often continues to treat the teaching of teachers as if it were merely another form of adult education, or even adopts a child-centred approach that is repackaged for the CPD sessions. The consequences of this are significant and can include under-serving teachers, wasted resources, and a failure to bring about meaningful, sustained improvement for both the children they serve and the profession as a whole.

“There’s definitely something **unique and individual** about this discipline... it’s complex... But that doesn’t mean we shouldn’t tackle it. We should embrace the messiness of it to create, perhaps, a more personalised approach.”

Emma Hollis, NASBTT





Naming this discipline

In response, TDT and the Expert Working Party (EWP) propose the term Didagogy. Coined by Louise Worgan (Professional Learning Lead at TDT), this term mirrors the structure of pedagogy and andragogy but replaces the beginning with something derived from the Greek didaktikos meaning ‘apt to teach’. It also reflects the work of Comenius himself, whose most famous work, Didactica Magna (known as The Great Didactic in English) laid the foundations for much of the thinking behind modern education.

The word didagogy creates the space for a more nuanced understanding that helps us think and talk with precision about the specific discipline of teaching teachers.

Didagogy acknowledges the complexity of teacher learning and, by having a term to reference, it recognises the importance of a clearly thought-out, research-informed, and practice-driven approach to teacher education. Naming this discipline is the first step in elevating its status, enhancing practice, and expanding the knowledge base.

This paper is not the conclusion of the conversation - it is the beginning. It does not aim to offer a finalised framework or

model; it offers a starting point. Through offering the term didagogy, we invite others to challenge, refine, and co-construct this concept. Through this work we aim to:

- Bring research, practice and lived experience together
- Make visible the assumptions and practices that underpin teacher development
- Spark debate across the sector about how we best support the professional

We achieve this by outlining the collective thinking of an External Working Party and by including individual think pieces from each of its members, offering diverse perspectives on what makes teaching teachers distinct, to spark reflection and consideration for those immersed in the world of teacher education.

As Salo et al. (2024) remind us, authentic professional learning is complex, dynamic, and context-rich. If we want to meet that complexity with integrity, we must first understand it, and to understand it, we must begin by naming it.



Pedagogy	the teaching of children
Andragogy	the teaching of adults
Didagogy	the teaching of teachers



Section 2: Insights from the Sector

“It is important that initial teacher education starts by **deconstructing trainees’ (mis)conceptions about teaching.**”

Dr. Lisa-Maria Müller
Chartered College of Teaching

TDT’s core mission is to support school leaders in building stronger schools through high-quality, effective professional development, which is why we convened a group of sector experts to explore a fundamental question:

► **Does the practice of teaching teachers constitute a distinct discipline, and if so, how might we begin to define it?**

To address this question, and to reflect our values of being Smart, Heart and Humble, TDT brought together a carefully selected Expert Working Party (EWP), comprising highly experienced individuals from across the spectrum of teacher education. The group represented academic research, CPD leadership, teacher education, teaching school hubs and ITT provision.

We are deeply grateful for the curiosity, generosity, and openness with which members engaged. Their willingness to share, challenge, and co-create has not only shaped this work but has also modelled the very ethos of collaboration that sits at the heart of effective professional learning; working with them has embodied TDT’s values in practice, and we hope these principles will continue to inform the next stages of this work.

EWP Members



Professor Tanya Ovenden-Hope

Dean and Professor of Education, Plymouth Marjon University



Sam Gibbs

Director of Education, Greater Manchester Trust



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Lead Adviser for Professional Learning and Commercial Engagement, Education Durham

Leadership of the Expert Working Party (EWP) was provided by **Andrea Bean**, Research and Evaluation Manager (TDT), supported by the insights and contributions of **Gareth Conyard** (CEO, TDT), **Bethan Hindley** (Director of Design and Delivery, TDT), and **Anne Cameron** (Director of Partnership and Impact, TDT).

“For teachers, learning new skills, knowledge, and strategies is not an optional extra but a **core professional responsibility**.”

Sarah Botchway
London South Teaching School Hub

The approach - initial collaboration

The EWP first met to share their experiences of teacher education across varied contexts and to reflect on the distinct nature of this work. The initial discussion centred on four guiding questions:

1. Is this work important?

2. Why is it important?

3. What does it look like?

4. How do we define and develop it as a discipline?

Discussions addressed the limitations of existing models and practices of teacher learning, the relationship between research and practice, as well as the contextual realities faced by teacher educators, leaders and classroom practitioners. This initial dialogue laid the foundation for more focused exploration of the conditions and characteristics that might define this emerging, distinct discipline.

Sector consultations and refining thinking

Recognising the importance of anchoring the work in lived experience, the EWP identified the need to engage directly with both teachers and school leaders. As a result, various individual consultations were held with leaders and teachers as well as two small consultation groups: one with classroom teachers and the other with school leaders.

Teacher consultation - teachers were asked to reflect on their identities as learners, the environments and approaches that most effectively support their professional growth, and development models that enable both the retention of knowledge and its practical application in the classroom.

School leader consultation - school leaders were asked to reflect on their perceptions of how teachers learn, from their experiences as teachers and from their observations as leaders. They explored the factors they believe influence learning outcomes and identified the conditions they view as being most conducive to impactful professional development.

These consultations provided valuable insights into the realities of teacher learning and its facilitation across different contexts.

Following the consultations, the EWP reconvened to explore the key themes that emerged to ascertain how, and if, the teaching of teachers differs from both pedagogy and andragogy. These discussions considered the following:

- Defining the characteristics of effective teacher learning
- The roles and responsibilities of teacher educators
- The interplay between the system structures, professional identity, and learning conditions.

This process of collaboration did not intend to produce a framework, but has created a space for critical reflection, sector-wide engagement and identification of next steps. The following sections present the emerging themes and insights from this work, offering a foundation for continued discussion on effective “didagogical practice”, setting it aside as a distinct and necessary discipline.

Section 3: Emerging Themes

Teacher learning is distinct from the learning of other professionals who don't face a **widespread belief that everyone is an expert**, based on the strength of their own years as a pupil.

Professor Philippa Cordingley, CUREE



What makes this a unique discipline?

Across the EWP discussions and sector consultations, one consistent message emerged: The teaching of teachers is a unique discipline and a purposeful concept to pursue if we are to ensure that the professional development of educators is as highly effective as possible. It requires its own discipline. Using the term didagogy enables educational professionals to discuss the specific principles and practices that underpin effective teacher learning and further develop the work that has been carried out in this space.

From the consultations and the EWP discussions, a number of key themes emerged as contributing to effective didagogy:

Continuous Professional Development (CPD) is effective when it is contextualised and nuanced - not a one-size-fits-all solution. CPD needs to reflect the diversity of school settings, career stages,

and individual teacher needs.

All teachers have been learners - as children and as professionals - and this has shaped them, both personally and professionally, and their identity, impacting the way they engage with learning. Those in other professions do not always have as deep an experience of being a recipient or beneficiary of the professional practice they are developing.

Teachers engage most deeply with learning when their professional identity is aligned and when it is able to demonstrate a clear, tangible impact on pupil outcomes.

Learning is most powerful when driven by dialogue and collective sense-making. This allows teachers the opportunity to reflect on new ideas and practices, using discussion to test and refine their understanding rather than passively absorbing information.

While research provides essential insight and theoretical evidence around developing teacher practice, teachers value practical application - they want to know how it will realistically translate into classroom impact or meaningful shifts in their professional approach.

Learning opportunities need to be flexible and accessible, recognising the demanding schedules and realities of schools and their staff.

How learning opportunities are identified and facilitated at a school level determines the time teachers spend on it as well as how they engage with the learning they are undertaking. Equally important is what happens next. Learning that is nurtured, shared and revisited has a greater impact, not only in continuing to shape the identity of the teacher but also on the practice they undertake within the classroom.



“Professional learning isn’t about reinventing teaching, but deepening our understanding of how to do it well and ensuring it **meets the needs of today’s learners.**”

Jane Kennedy,
Education Durham

Alongside this thinking, some key challenges for “didagogical practice” became clear:

While all teachers navigate significant workload and cognitive demands, those with greater experience bring both a wealth of expertise and the additional pressures that come with sustained responsibility and professional expectation. When professional learning is closely aligned with school contexts and teachers’ specific challenges, it can help reduce this burden by supporting solutions resulting in greater impact.

Autonomy and collective responsibility need to be carefully balanced. Teachers engage more fully when they have ownership over their development, but both teachers and leaders agree that this must sit within school structures and development planning that reinforce shared accountability for pupil outcomes.

Effective didagogy involves working with teachers to shape learning, helping them

understand their own beliefs and drivers and creating explicit opportunities for reflection and improvement.

Conditions: Leadership and culture matter. Teachers in schools where learning is modelled, encouraged, and valued are more likely to engage meaningfully in professional development. In such environments, they can practise and refine new approaches without fear of judgement. A strong learning culture also fosters ongoing dialogue and collaborative knowledge-sharing, enabling teachers to learn together and collectively work toward better outcomes for their pupils.

Practices: Teacher learning is rarely linear. The need for learning to be cyclical, experimental, and reflective - rooted in dialogue - highlights its iterative nature. Didagogical practices that prioritise careful design and facilitation skills, rather than relying solely on subject expertise, ensures teacher learning connects to the

reality of classroom challenges and therefore meets the teacher’s needs more effectively.

Identities: Effective didagogical practice recognises that teachers are not passive recipients of knowledge, but professionals whose engagement in learning is shaped by their identity, context and purpose. For professional development to truly impact practice, it should move beyond content delivery and connect with the emotional, social and contextual aspects of teacher learning as well as the technical.

As a collective, these themes begin to outline discussion points when considering the foundations for effective didagogical practice. They carve the way for the expert reflections that will follow in the next section. These will explore how this discipline might develop in practice and further considerations that need to be taken into account.

“The quest to name the teaching of teachers is symptomatic of a **deeper challenge** – of the need to address the under-appreciation of the complexity of what it is to learn this expert practice (as opposed to training for curriculum delivery).”

Professor Caroline Daly
UCL

Section 4: Expert Reflections

To deepen this exploration of didagogy, each member of the EWP was invited to contribute a short reflective piece. These responses offer perspectives shaped by their different roles and experiences - academic, practitioner and policy. They highlight both shared themes and distinct insights.

Members were asked to reflect on three guiding prompts:

- What do you see as distinct about the practice of teaching teachers?
- What's missing or overlooked in current CPD models?
- What should come next for the development of didagogy?

The following contributions provide a multi-dimensional view of the emerging discipline and help shape questions that might guide its future development.



**Professor Tanya
Ovenden-Hope**

Dean and Professor of
Education, Plymouth
Marjon University

The Complexity of Teaching Teachers – Here's to the Rise of 'Didagogy'!

One of the greatest disservices to teaching as a profession is the absence of disciplinary status to the field that prepares and develops teachers. This omission could be because teacher education is complex. It includes the training of teachers new to the profession, the development of those early in their careers and the engagement of experienced teachers in continuing professional development and learning. But there is commonality too in the shared continuous, recursive relationship that exists between theory and practice in the teaching of all teachers. Teachers are not just acquiring knowledge; they are learning to enact and adapt that knowledge in unpredictable, relational, and highly contextualised environments. And this learning is bound in turn to their level of experience, experiences in life and sense of identity.

Teacher learning is therefore a deeply nuanced process. Trainee and early career teachers typically benefit from explicit guidance and scaffolding, such as structured mentorship, opportunities for guided reflection, and protected space to make mistakes. Here, the challenge is supporting the move from procedural compliance to adaptive, reflective practice. With experienced teachers, the developmental arc shifts. The challenge is no longer

simply about acquiring competence but about surfacing and interrogating ingrained practices, assumptions, and professional identities. At leadership level, teacher learning becomes as much about unlearning and critical reflection as about the acquisition of new knowledge. The work of teaching experienced teachers is therefore necessarily dialogic, facilitative, and provocatively disruptive.

The teaching of teachers requires an understanding of how teachers simultaneously hold expertise in some areas while developing in others, requiring flexible approaches that recognise the complex, non-linear nature of professional development. Teacher education confronts distinctive epistemological challenges that justify a disciplinary status. Teacher educators must make the implicit explicit, articulating the often unconscious decisions and judgements that characterise effective teaching. This meta-cognitive dimension requires sophisticated understanding of how professional knowledge is constructed, applied, and transformed in practice. Effective teaching cannot be reduced to scripts or routines, it requires flexible, contextually responsive professional judgement. This pedagogical complexity demands its own theoretical frameworks and research methodologies.

Establishing teacher education as a distinct discipline would enhance both theoretical

development and practical effectiveness. It would provide a coherent framework for research, enable more sophisticated training and development programmes (and elevate the professional status of teacher educators). Too often teacher education falls back on generic professional development models borrowed from business or social sciences. Such approaches flatten the distinct world of teaching into a focus on measurable targets or transferable skills. Medicine and law both recognise distinct specialisations in their training and development programmes, yet we persist in treating the teaching of teachers as an extension of practices used in the classroom. The formation of teaching professionals is arguably one of our most consequential educational practices, yet we continue to marginalise it as a secondary consideration rather than recognising it as the sophisticated, theory-informed discipline it should be. Here's to the rise of 'didagogy'!

**Sam Gibbs**

Director of Education,
Greater Manchester
Trust

Culture, Coherence and Collaboration: Conditions for Teacher Learning

My work leading teacher development at scale has reaffirmed for me that the value and impact of professional learning is deeply connected to the system conditions we create. Too much CPD is still conceived as something delivered to individuals rather than something designed with and through the collective. In reality, teacher learning flourishes when it is rooted in culture, coherence, and collaboration.

Teachers are not empty vessels waiting to be filled; they are professionals shaped by years of practice, strong identities, and a deep moral purpose. Yet they are also learners, expected to reflect, adapt, and sometimes unlearn. Teacher education has to hold that tension. It is not just about the content of programmes but about the conditions that make learning meaningful: alignment with the improvement journey of the school, agency for teachers to set meaningful goals, and trust that enables genuine professional risk-taking.

Trusts and systems have a responsibility here. If we treat professional development as a competitive marketplace, we fracture energy and duplicate effort. If, instead, we design for generosity - sharing expertise across schools, pooling capacity, and aligning professional learning with a clear moral purpose - then CPD becomes more than a programme. Instead, it becomes the

way we build a stronger, fairer, and more sustainable system.

That is why I see teaching teachers as a discipline in its own right. It demands expertise in design and facilitation that is rarely acknowledged. The most effective teacher educators I work with are those who can weave research into practice, align professional growth with school priorities, and still honour the agency of the teacher in front of them. These colleagues are as attentive to culture as they are to content.

What excites me about the idea of didagogy is that it gives us a shared language to name and value that expertise. It recognises that professional learning is not a side activity but a core act of leadership. And it challenges us to think about equity - not just within a single school but across the system.

The next step must be to deepen collaboration: Trusts, schools, and researchers working together to surface what works, test it in context, and refine through dialogue. If we get this right, we move towards a profession where teachers experience growth as part of their everyday work, where learning is collective rather than competitive, and where the system sustains itself through its own expertise.

**Emma Hollis**

CEO, National
Association of School-
Based Teacher Trainers

Holding Space for Emotional and Intellectual Work of Teaching Teachers

When I think about what makes teaching teachers distinct, my mind immediately turns to the mentors and teacher educators I work with every day. Unlike teaching children, or even leading more generic adult learning, teaching teachers involves engaging with people whose professional identity is already deeply shaped. Teachers do not arrive as blank slates; they bring with them their experiences, beliefs, emotions and sometimes even scars from their own classrooms.

Supporting their learning means honouring that complexity. It is not just about delivering content but about creating space where teachers feel safe to be vulnerable, to ask difficult questions, and to try things out without fear of judgement. That requires trust, empathy, and a level of design expertise that is too often overlooked. The best mentors and facilitators I know are not just experts in their subject or phase — they are skilled at reading people, noticing the unspoken, and knowing when to challenge and when to nurture.

For me, this is where theory and practice meet. Evidence and frameworks are enormously valuable, but they only come alive when mediated through human relationships. A beautifully written piece of research will not change practice on its own, nor will a checklist of “what works.”

What makes the difference is the teacher educator who can translate that evidence into lived experience, weaving it together with a trainee’s or teacher’s personal context.

Too often, our national conversation on CPD misses this point. We talk a great deal about what content teachers should learn, but not enough about the expertise required to help them learn it. Facilitation, design, and the emotional labour of teaching teachers remain undervalued. If we want professional development that really sticks, we need to acknowledge and invest in those skills.

This is why the idea of *didagogy* excites me. Having a shared language to describe the discipline of teaching teachers feels long overdue. It gives us a way to recognise and value the expertise that already exists in the system, and to develop a set of shared concepts in order to design truly transformative professional learning.

What I would love to see next is more space for open, cross-sector conversation: mentors, teacher educators, leaders, and researchers coming together to co-construct this field. Teaching teachers is messy, emotional, and deeply human — and that is exactly why it matters. If we can better articulate the discipline, we not only strengthen the profession but ultimately create better experiences for the children and young people our teachers serve.



Dr. Lisa-Maria Müller

Head of Research
and Policy, Chartered
College of Teaching

Deconstruct before you reconstruct

Teacher trainees are arguably distinctly different from trainees in other professions in that they have been exposed to the career they are intending to join extensively before even their first day of training.

Take architects, accountants, doctors or lawyers as an example - an 18-year-old will likely only have had minimal contact, if any, with any of these professions prior to starting their training. Even if they come from a family of lawyers or architects, the insights they will have gained about the profession would be relayed by their parents and not stem from first-hand experience.

Students joining the teaching profession, on the other hand, have had years to experience teaching first hand. They have had time to develop views about what works in teaching, what a 'good' teacher is or does and maybe even what sort of teacher they would like to be one day.

In theory, this should help with retention in the profession as it could be argued that students have a much better idea of what they are getting themselves into when they first sign up for their training.

The low teacher retention rate, especially for Early Career Teachers suggests otherwise, however. It seems more likely

that many trainee teachers have developed an inaccurate or at least incomplete understanding of what it means to be a teacher, based solely on the teaching they have experienced themselves and limited to the responsibilities of teachers within classrooms and towards their students but not beyond.

This is why it is important that initial teacher education starts by deconstructing trainees' (mis)conceptions about teaching, maybe even about education more widely, the role of teachers and effective approaches to teaching.

Students need to reflect on their past learning experiences to understand how their experiences may differ from those of others; how what may have worked for them may not necessarily work for all or even the majority of students they may be teaching and that some of the teaching approaches they may have been exposed to may not be based on the best available evidence.

The aim of such reflections should not be to diminish students' experiences or write them off as wrong or incomplete but rather to make it explicit to trainees that they are transcending from the role of student to that of teacher and that they therefore need to develop a more evidence-informed mindset towards teaching that is not solely

based on their own experiences.

Once this process of deconstruction has taken place, reconstruction can start, focusing on acknowledging students' prior lived experience but supporting them to move beyond what works for them.



Professor Phillipa Cordingley

Chief Executive, CUREE

The Unfinished Project of Teacher Learning

When I started to consider teachers' continuing professional development (CPD) and learning (CPDL) in the mid 1990s, many described it as INSET, dismissed its relevance, and saw it as the didactic introduction of new policies by senior leaders during whole school sessions, by exam boards, or one of the national or local agencies. Over the next decade, extensive support emerged from the National Strategies and the Teacher Training Agency, as well as from the emerging General Teaching Council, which sought to challenge assumptions about CPD and model alternative approaches through the Teacher Learning Academy. In the early 2000s, the DFES published its first-ever CPD Strategy. Alongside this, awareness of and expectations about CPD expanded, deepening awareness of its potential to support schools and teachers and, more recently, of the complexity involved in applying insights derived from such support to practice. There have been springboards, backflips, stops, and starts as political attitudes towards teachers ebbed and flowed towards more, and less, positive and deficit assumptions about their willingness and capacity to learn. Similarly, the spotlight moved between what teachers need to learn and onto how they learnt, and those who would support them set about this. Slowly, an appreciation of more personalised and

evidence-rich approaches has emerged with teachers' and leaders' own contributions to their professional learning increasingly being recognised.

So this is contested territory. For decades, research into CPD focused mainly on CPD inputs; partly as a result of a "push system" seeking to influence teachers and partly because of the complexity and cost of researching the many, dynamically interacting variables involved in teacher professional development and pupil learning. The outcomes of CPD which were researched focused on impacts on teachers. Until the advent of systematic and technical research reviews such as the TDT funded, Developing Great Teachers (2025), the omission was obscured. Even now, the role of learners in their teachers' professional learning is still overlooked. However, research that explores teachers' professional learning *in the context of pupil learning* points strongly towards the importance of teachers' aspirations for their pupils throughout the process (Cordingley, Higgins and Greany et al, 2020). It positions professional development and learning as a process for helping everyone in a school take collective responsibility for pupil success.

Given that there are so many moving parts at play, it is important to be able to clearly describe the processes and skills around

which actions should coalesce. So TDT's convening of this debate matters. Teacher learning is distinct from the learning of other professionals who don't face a widespread belief that everyone is an expert, based on the strength of their own years as a pupil. The timescale of children's education means few professions work across such extended, collective chains of accountability. Furthermore, few profession's learning is so impacted; learning about *enabling* learning overlaps with, and so is easily confused with, learning about learning itself.

I am looking forward to the debate and exploration of what to call it. Perhaps we need to create a new word for a newly integrative and synthetic science; possibly something that conveys the sense of the love of learning collectively about helping pupils to love learning and achieving, and to flourish through them?



Professor Caroline Daly

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Reclaiming the Complexity of Teacher Learning

Years of examining a masters programme for medical education professionals left its mark on me. The students were experienced, senior medics, responsible for the professional learning of primary healthcare workers, from GPs, to radiologists, to Accident and Emergency doctors. I inevitably compare teacher development with the professional learning of the experienced medics who teach less experienced practitioners in their field. I was initially intrigued that a medical education programme should seek expertise from the field of school teacher education. I learned that teacher education was highly regarded for its focus on professional learning that is transformational of the person as inextricable from their practice.

For teachers and medics, the development of professional judgement is fundamental. Worthwhile professional learning enables the formation of judgement to be deeply contextualised. It is informed by values and beliefs that are honed by complex life and workplace experience and demands continuous critical reflection. It attends to the inequalities that impact on the decisions that are made and the ways we interpret the needs of both pupils and patients. The knowledge bases that inform practice decisions are developing all the time and have to be navigated with care. This is too

often overlooked in the borrowing of ideas from medicine itself as a revered field, amplifying the scientific dimensions of teaching expertise and relegating the social and emotional dimensions of translating knowledge into practice. Of course, there is key knowledge to engage with in order to teach or treat expertly. However, I learned in my work with medical professional education the serious risks of simplistic views of how that profession learns. Removing the person from the expert is the last place to start.

There is no other name for the teaching of doctors, surgeons or other medical specialists. Medical education is serious enough.

The quest to name the teaching of teachers is symptomatic of a deeper challenge – of the need to address the under-appreciation of the complexity of what it is to learn this expert practice (as opposed to training for curriculum delivery). The real struggle is to accord the respect that the teaching profession deserves for its expertise and for the multiple kinds of knowledge that teachers develop.

It is not surprising that there is a need to find a term that conceptualises teacher learning as specialist, intellectually effortful, requiring respect and addressing inequalities.

Whether we need a 'didagogy' or something equivalent is something for careful deliberation. The question is really about why we have to do this in current contexts and what it takes to reinforce the expert, critical and deeply reflective dimensions of teacher learning. It is about supporting the expert teachers that young people deserve.



Sarah Botchway

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Teaching School Hub

Lifelong Learning for Teachers: Treating CPD as a Core Professional Practice

As a Teaching School, our role is to ensure the effectiveness of the Department for Education's "Golden Thread". This cradle-to-career approach supports lifelong learning for all teachers and school leaders. Continuous professional growth has always been central to effective teaching, but in today's rapidly changing environment it is more crucial than ever.

With research and technology at our fingertips, we know that different methods of teaching can significantly enhance pupil learning and achievement, helping us to create and sustain a high-quality education system. For teachers, learning new skills, knowledge, and strategies is not an optional extra but a core professional responsibility. The expectation of career-long CPD is rightly embedded in national policy as a key lever for improving the quality of teaching. But this raises an important question: how does delivering CPD to teachers, whether focused on subject knowledge, pedagogy, or leadership differ from teaching pupils?

One difference lies in the role of the facilitator. We often use the term "facilitation" rather than "teaching" when working with adults, perhaps because we assume that teachers as learners need greater independence, choice, and agency. Like pupils, however, adults learn in diverse ways and bring different levels of prior knowledge and experience. We cannot

presume that the learning needs of a trainee teacher are the same as those of an executive leader yet both are engaged in learning that must be designed, supported, and sequenced with equal care.

At our Teaching School Hub, our facilitation practices are grounded in evidence-based research. We recognise that teacher learning is shaped by a different set of conditions than pupil learning. Adults value accountability for their own development and benefit from flexible models that acknowledge workload and context. This is why we increasingly combine synchronous and asynchronous approaches, making professional learning more accessible and sustainable. Crucially, we know that the most impactful learning is not one-off, but embedded and sustained over time. Feedback from our programmes consistently highlights that when learning is revisited, contextualised, and rehearsed, it is more likely to translate into real changes in classroom practice.

If we are to treat the teaching of teachers as a discipline in its own right, we must move beyond thinking of CPD as a series of events. Instead, we need to design professional learning with the same intentionality and nuance that we expect in great classroom teaching: structured yet adaptive, evidence-informed yet responsive to context, and above all, sustained. In doing so, we not only invest in the growth of teachers and leaders but also secure the long-term quality and equity of education for all pupils.





Jane Kennedy

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Making Professional Learning Work: Addressing the Barriers to Teacher Growth

Teachers face immense daily pressures. They're shaping the future, guiding the next generation, and doing so under constant public scrutiny. Everyone has been to school, so everyone has an opinion. Add generational tensions and the internal expectations teachers place on themselves - to be role models, experts, and problem-solvers - and it's no wonder burnout is common. Teaching is dynamic, demanding constant adaptation to new ideas and evolving practices, all while working with the ever-changing resource that is young people.

A teacher's identity is forged in the classroom, through triumphs and setbacks. Asking them to change, to step into discomfort through professional learning, is no small ask. And because teachers are experts in learning, they instinctively assess anyone who teaches them. Teaching teachers means being credible, engaging, and skilled in both content and delivery.

Despite advances in education, the fundamentals remain: teaching literacy, communication, and understanding across disciplines. EdTech and new methods may evolve, but the core purpose endures - just teach. Professional learning isn't about reinventing teaching, but deepening our understanding of how to do it well and

ensuring it meets the needs of today's learners.

The last decade has seen a real momentum around evidence-based practices in teaching. Cognitive science, implementation cycles, and research-informed strategies are now part of the professional landscape. Yet participation in professional learning is declining. Online options haven't sparked widespread engagement, perhaps due to overload or the paradox of constant availability. Like a cathedral in your city, always there, rarely visited.

To teach teachers well, you must model excellence, they not only listen to what you say but also learn from how you say it. You're teaching role models, and they'll challenge you - often knowing as much or more. That's not a threat; it's an opportunity. The best learning happens in dialogue, not monologue. So let's shift CPD (Continued Professional Development) to "Continued Professional Dialogue," where trust, curiosity, and shared expertise drive the experience.

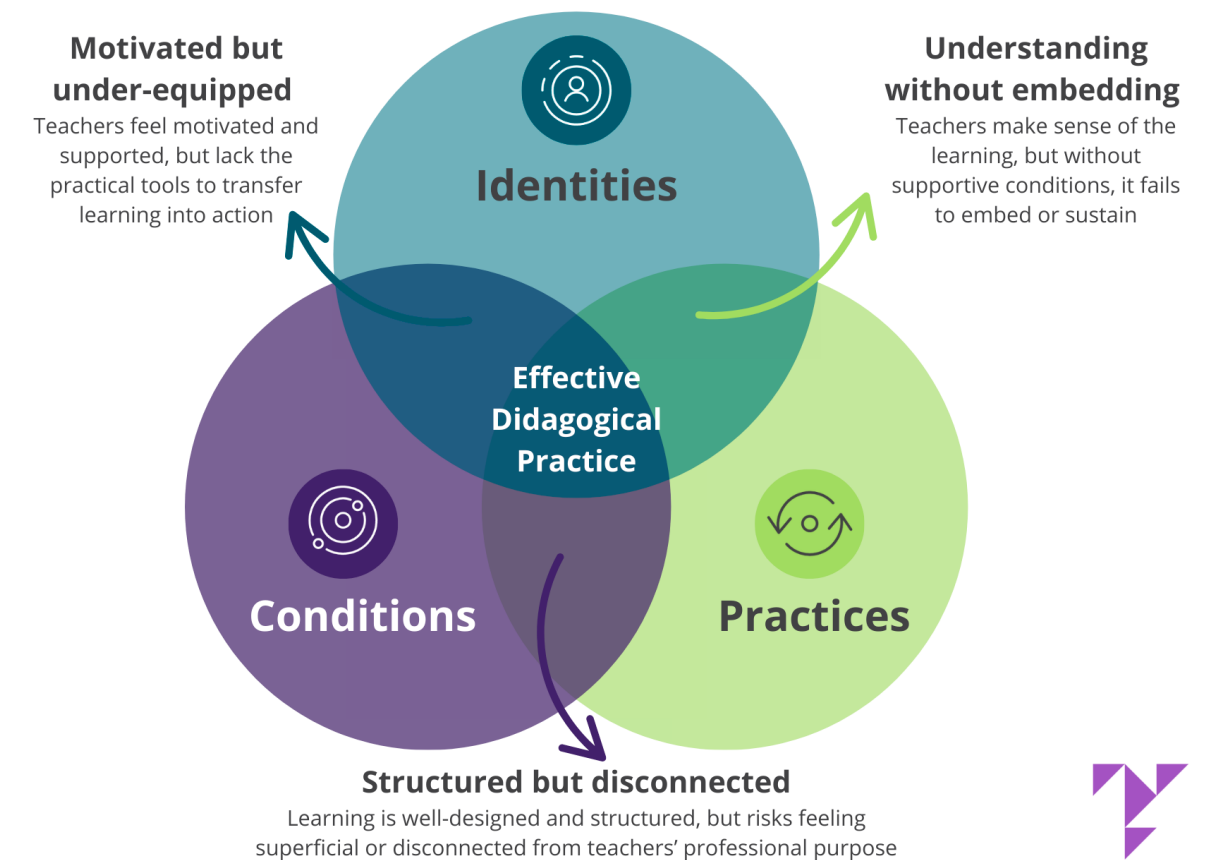
Unlike other professional learning, maybe we need to focus on the 'less is more' approach that we champion so often in classrooms. Instead of cramming sessions with content, invite teachers to think beforehand, come prepared, and engage deeply. Build in time for tangible outcomes

- resources, plans, actions they can take back to school. That way, momentum isn't lost.

Teacher teachers is challenging and getting teachers to engage is the first hurdle to be overcome. Making the learning meaningful, manageable and motivating is the first step. Identifying those common areas where all teachers would appreciate the opportunity to consider best practices and reflect on their own and offering less in terms of choice and far more in terms of in-depth quality is perhaps a way forward.



Section 5: A Conceptual Model and Future Thinking



To support thinking about Didagogy we have developed a conceptual model. This is a visual prompt designed to spark dialogue and guide further inquiry.

At its centre is the recognition that teaching teachers is a discipline in its own right, requiring approaches that differ from both pedagogy and andragogy. The model is intended to help teachers, leaders, and researchers reflect on the multiple, interacting elements that ensure teacher learning is most effective.

It is best viewed as a thinking tool - a way to map what is currently understood, identify gaps, and prompt new questions.

This work represents an exploration of effective didagogical practice rather than a prescriptive framework. The visual representation highlights the overarching emerging themes from discussions with sector professionals and members of the EWP, as well as from their thinkpieces. A detailed framework has been intentionally avoided to encourage those involved in teaching teachers to engage in deeper dialogue around these three areas and determine for themselves what constitutes effective didagogical practice.



Summary

Returning back to our guiding questions we can determine the following from the work to date:

Is this work important and why?

Yes, without naming or exploring the discipline of teaching teachers, we continue to risk inconsistency and missed opportunities for impact. Teacher learning is distinct from pupil pedagogy or adult andragogy; it is shaped by professional identity, culture, and context. Didagogy offers a shared language to develop understanding and ensure that professional development is designed with these realities in mind.

What does it look like?

Effective didagogical practice aligns with the emotional, social, and contextual elements of a teacher. It is non-linear, iterative, pupil learning orientated, and grounded in dialogue. Discussion surrounding didagogy considers the need for both design and facilitation, not simply subject expertise, and it works carefully with school cultures that prioritise trust and collaboration.

How do we define and develop it as a discipline?

At this stage, we define didagogy as an emerging discipline concerned with

the principles and practices of teaching teachers. Developing it further requires sustained dialogue, research, and collaborative inquiry - across schools, organisations, and research communities. The themes identified here provide a starting point, not an endpoint.

TDT is committed to this next phase. We are keen to work directly with sector colleagues to deepen this understanding, while also welcoming other organisations and settings to undertake this work independently, share their findings, and foster conversations about effective practice. This shared effort is essential to ensuring that discussions around didagogy are embedded across schools and professional learning environments, just as they are around pedagogy.

There is clear scope for further research to strengthen this work, particularly in examining:

- the influence of teacher identity on engagement with and responsiveness to professional learning.
- strategies for integrating teachers' prior experiences, emotions, and professional vulnerabilities into CPD design, enabling a more personalised approach to learning.
- how to develop psychologically safe

school environments that promote risk-taking, reflection, and sustained improvement.

- what can be learned from other professional fields regarding effective models of development and knowledge transfer.

We welcome collaboration to advance understanding in these areas, ensuring that both those leading teacher learning and those delivering CPD are better equipped to support meaningful and lasting change to practice. This work should ultimately help create a more satisfied and confident workforce and improve outcomes for pupils.

Internally, TDT is already using these findings to reflect on, and refine our learning design and our partnerships with schools. Our goal is to ensure we have a clear and coherent approach to didagogy ourselves, while helping schools develop their own shared understanding and structures to sustain these vital conversations.

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The Teacher Development Trust is a UK charity which works to raise awareness of the importance of professional development for teachers and other education professionals. Founded by teachers in London in March 2012, the Trust promotes access to evidence-based, high quality training through its nationwide programmes.

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