Kirklees College: Social media, mobile technology and CPD

Summary

Cathy Clarkson, CELTA course tutor at Kirklees College, wanted to explore the use of technology in relation to developing understanding of Continued Professional Development (CPD) and changing teaching practice, particularly among trainee teachers. A project was set up with six individuals using iPads, iPhones, blogs and Twitter. The result was a useful and efficient way for new teachers to carry out CPD requirements, as well as giving greater confidence in using technology with their learners.

About Kirklees College

Kirklees College came into being in August 2008 through a merger between Dewsbury College and Huddersfield Technical College. It is based at the heart of Yorkshire, with many centres across Kirklees serving the local population, communities and businesses.

The challenge

One of the initial drivers for this project was the idea that teacher training should be at the forefront of using educational technology. The second driver related to the discovery that there was a lack of understanding and confusion around the term CPD within trainee and qualified teachers. This understanding is especially important in relation to the requirement to declare CPD to the Institute for Learning (IfL) in the FE and Skills sector.

The activity

Three iPads and three iPhones (using participants’ own SIM / payment for connection) were purchased in December 2010. Six people were given a ‘loose but guided’ criteria for engagement in the project, including a requirement to feed back on their findings. A group blog was set up to help individuals learn about the potential of using blogs, as

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well as providing a simple way to share thoughts and findings. Cathy explained; “Individuals were encouraged to engage with Twitter, with the aim to “learn about curriculum specialisms and educational technology developments, as well as converse with and learn... from industry experts.”

An initial ‘carousel activity’ was organised where individuals were invited to find a device (either iPhone or iPad) and follow some simple instructions to explore the technology and its potential to support CPD and enhance teaching and learning. This activity raised the key question “What is CPD?” Most participants thought that CPD had to involve formal training and observations.

Throughout the project there were limited structured face-to-face meetings, but individuals met informally as often as they could, while studying together or in the staffroom. Participants also made use of Twitter chats, utilising hash tags to follow a conversation.

The feedback and reflection activity was repeated at the end of the initial project in June 2011 to see any changes in understanding and practice. This resulted in a much wider range of responses about potential CPD activities as well as the use of educational technology.

There are plans to redistribute the technology and repeat the project with new DTLLS trainees.

The outcomes

The change in understanding demonstrated in the final reflection activity is the biggest impact of this short project. Instead of just formal training, the main activities that participants now consider to be valuable and acceptable CPD are:

www.jiscrsc.ac.uk/case-studies
Reading - Including books, journals, blogs and Twitter

Professional Dialogue - via blogs, Twitter, face-to-face meetings, gadgetry groups, conferences

Written Reflections - Including the ESOL Challenges blog, use of gadgets to reflect, using own blogs, utilising text, video & photo contributions

Investigating use of technology in the classroom - Including developing class blogs and exploring Apps with notes, reminders and planning functionality – for the classroom and professional efficiency

The impact

Cathy Clarkson, CELTA course tutor stated; “CPD is still a challenge for teachers to identify and quantify but that collaborative teacher learning led by teachers-as-learners helped develop understanding that it is a chain of events that no single activity dominates.” She adds that “engaging with Twitter had been one of the keys to success, especially in relation to professional dialogue”, and that it helped create “interactivity out of solitude when participants didn’t have the opportunity to meet very often.”

Molly Drake, an ESOL tutor in the second year of her DTELLS course said that; “Last year’s project has nudged me in the direction of exploring web 2.0 tools to not only enhance my classroom teaching but also to develop my own technological expertise. I have become more confident and experienced in using technology and have discovered an online Personal Learning Network (PLN) which I am continually learning and sharing with. I also feel I have gained an understanding of what CPD is in practice. My perception of it has shifted from ‘something which is time consuming and sometimes irrelevant’ to ‘a continual process of development which I take part in not just because I have to but because I want to’.”

Esther Derbyshire graduated from the DTELLS course in July 2010 and found that; “The project definitely helped me to engage with my CPD on a more regular basis - through use of twitter and other online forms. The use of the iPad also meant that I could make notes, plan or reflect when I was on the train to or from work which was really beneficial. In reality not many of us get a chance to complete useful reflections at work and therefore having a device that was so accessible was great. I started using the iPad in classes last year and have continued to find new ways to use it with my students this year. It's great!”
Debbie Flowers, an ESOL tutor who graduated from the DTELLS course in July 2011 pointed out that; “In a career where spare time doesn't really exist, having immediate access to a whole range of resources means that any spare second can be used productively. Being able to chat and share ideas via twitter or email at the click of a button means that I actually get to collaborate and learn, rather than never finding time to sit and chat about something in a nonexistent lunch break. This sharing and time to access almost unlimited ideas and information has no doubtedly improved my resources and teaching ideas, and as it happens a little a day in bitsize chunks, is more consistent as it weaves through my planning and development, rather than an unappealing block of 'training time' lumped at the end of a term. My personal CPD has become effortless, an integral part of my life only available via the use of instant access technology. I would definitely be lost without it!”

The lessons learned

More group learning could have occurred if there had been more structured face-to-face meetings, though with different timetables and availability this may be difficult. Possibly the use of more structured ‘virtual’ meetings could be explored.

Also while most participants were happy to learn how to use the technology they had chosen themselves, it could have been more efficient to plan some structured training sessions at the beginning of the project to ensure all individuals had a secure foundation understanding to work immediately from.
Useful links

Kirklees College
Huddersfield Distributed Centre for Excellence in Teacher Training (HUDDCETT)
Institute for learning (IfL)
ESOL Gadgetry's Space (A group of ESOL teachers and trainee teachers experimenting with social media and mobile technologies for developing teaching and learning)
iPhone (Apple)
Learning with iPad (Apple)

Twitter
Cathy Clarkson on Twitter

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