Leicestershire Adult Learning Service

An integrated approach to staff development using supported experiments and coaching techniques (October 2016)

Summary

Leicestershire Adult Learning Service invite staff to attend three tutor briefings throughout the year including a one-day conference held on a Saturday. The focus is on providing inspirational, high quality and engaging CPD that is directly relevant to teaching practice. The tutor briefings include external speakers and feature collaborative project work with ongoing support from a team of coaches. Heads of service actively support and monitor progress of the projects known as supported experiments. Moodle is also used to monitor the projects, provide ongoing support and showcase the outcomes.

The challenge

Leicestershire Adult Learning Service (LALS) serves a very wide community covering the whole of Leicestershire and includes many rural communities and some areas of deprivation within their catchment. Enhancing employability is a key focus for the service.

The service employs approximately 180 tutors, many of whom are sessional, some also work elsewhere, are spread throughout the community and work in isolation of find it difficult to visit the main centres. The challenge is to find a cost-effective way of delivering and sustaining continuous professional development (CPD) for tutors, many of whom are aware of technology but are less aware of how to use it effectively to support learning or struggle to maintain the currency of their digital knowledge in a time of fast paced technological change. Ofsted reports showed that technology was not always used in pedagogically sound ways or had the intended beneficial impact on learners and on learning.
LALS has a strong commitment to providing high quality CPD and felt that the most appropriate way forward was to align training in effective use of technology to support learning with other key priorities such as:

» mandatory requirements (for example safeguarding, equality and diversity) matched to service priorities

» curriculum content based on the requirements of accrediting bodies

» the needs of individual tutors identified through observations of teaching and learning, professional development reviews, online feedback and requests from the tutors themselves

Over 30 members of staff have been trained as either Subject Learning Coaches or Teaching and Learning Change Agents available to support tutors with particular issues and they are keen to extend the use of their skills and also practise and update their coaching expertise. Recent changes to move to a non-graded observation process will offer an ideal opportunity for coaching as this is an integral part of our approach towards building a trusting, confident, reflective community of tutors.

With so many other calls on their time it is essential that all CPD is engaging, contextually relevant and demonstrably adds value to the learning and teaching experience.

The solution

LALS have devised a holistic and integrated model of CPD for their tutors, drawing on feedback and other readily available data. They looked at CPD approaches that have had a proven impact and decided to use this as a base to build their own model. Examples of successful CPD initiatives included project work where tutors worked collaboratively with colleagues and use of coaching techniques.

Mindful of the varied needs of the diverse tutor group, LALS designed a framework for their CPD offer that is linked to feedback from Ofsted and self-assessment reviews, quality improvement and curriculum team plans as well as professional standards. It is backed up by active management support and progress monitoring and also incorporates opportunities to share effective practice. Key components include:

» The offer of three tutor training days spread throughout the year. These are called Tutor Briefings. The autumn and spring briefings are split over two days and the final summer event is a full one-day conference held on a Saturday. The events are focused, include keynotes delivered by educational experts, provide opportunities for tutors to work with colleagues on small-scale action research projects and supported experiments that are then continued by curriculum teams beyond the briefing events. Curriculum teams are tasked with looking at their current teaching methods and exploring ways of making the learning more engaging. Technology is available at the events to support the projects and carousel-style training sessions are given on technologies such as Prezi, Task Magic, Triptico, screen casting, Photostory and Swivl. The aim of the technology sessions was that tutors would create something in the sessions that were of practical use in their teaching and then test and refine it as a result of practice in the curriculum.
Technology-focused supported experiments and mini action research projects are spearheaded by lead tutors who have responsibility for setting up the projects linked to quality improvement plans. Lead tutors are also responsible for leading, monitoring and reporting on the progress of the projects.

Deployment of subject learning coaches and change agents for learning and teaching to support project work. Each team is allocated a member of staff trained as a coach or change agent. This helps to embed peer coaching approaches throughout the service and to encourage reflective practice.

Use of the LALS GoLearn Moodle platform to share training materials and media from the tutor briefings and to facilitate collaboration, share effective practice, submit project reports and monitor project progress. Moodle is used to support all e-learning related CPD, modelling the use in a contextually relevant way to reinforce the benefits of e-learning. This builds confidence and encourages tutors to use the tool with their own learners. Common templates are provided to aid tutors and embed basic quality protocols.

Alignment of CPD initiatives to quality improvement processes. For example, supported experiments are embedded in professional development review processes and in non-graded observations of teaching and learning.

Monitoring and progress reporting is structured and includes active follow-up by senior managers through existing quality boards, lead tutors and coaches. Heads of service use Moodle to monitor engagement of their tutors in the supported experiments, as does the CPD professional development lead.

Additional training and IT support is offered to those who need or request it beyond the tutor briefings. In addition, LALS have recently worked with colleagues in Derby and Nottingham on a collaborative 'Increasing the blend' initiative to share their digital learning and explore effective use of technologies such as screen casting software to give feedback to learners. The service also monitors new developments in use of digital technologies to ensure effective practice from outside the organisation is shared with staff.

**Supported experiments**

The supported experiments are based on Dr Marzano’s top ten evidence-based teaching methods. The principle behind this choice was that if the service strived for excellence in the top ten teaching methods then it would have established a strong base from which to develop further in the future.

Examples of technology-related supported experiments undertaken by LALS tutors include:

- Improving range, accessibility and availability of resources on GoLearn for ESOL, skills for life and language tutors and learners
- Exploring how coaching can increase the effective use of technology in language classes
- Sharing established effective practice in use of iPads to engage learners in other curriculum areas
- Improving learner engagement online and extending learning beyond taught classroom-based sessions
Using video recordings to model good practice to family learning tutors
Creating engaging video content to better engage apprentices and improve retention and achievement

Impact

“Technology is an integral part of the training – it has to be modelled and seen in context. We have generated interest in what can be done with GoLearn. Managers are encouraging this and tutors are using it within their teaching and seeking feedback from learners online.”

Janet Smith, professional development lead – teaching and learning, Leicestershire Adult Learning Service

LALS integrated CPD model is helping to increase use of digital technologies relevant to curriculum teams aligned to over-arching service priorities. Tutors are becoming more confident in using digital technologies and more reflective about their practice. The briefing sessions are valued by both new and more seasoned practitioners – those new to teaching feel the briefings give them a toolkit to support their practice while more experienced tutors feel the reflection the sessions offer helps them to extend their learning, encouraging them to think about how well they are performing.

The GoLearn site, combined with a robust model of wider support, is enabling tutors who may otherwise be isolated or find it difficult to get together to connect and collaborate in a time-efficient way and to continue their CPD beyond the tutor briefing sessions. Two cascading and showcasing events designed to share effective practice have taken place so far.

“I feel more confident about working with new technology. Working and sharing ideas and resources with my colleagues on this project has been great. It has prompted me to encourage my students to use the Moodle platform. They now take responsibility for accessing the platform each week and download handouts to bring to class.”
This has encouraged them to go back and look at previous topics and to listen to audio clips that are available to support their learning.

This is a positive step towards blended learning. I intend to set up regular interactive question and answer homework sessions using the platform.”

Tutor, LALS

Follow-up work includes identifying common areas of development that can be addressed by specific teaching techniques, uploading reflections on the projects to GoLearn to share with others, creating short video clips to share that demonstrate activities or technologies and using good practice to further develop the support system for tutors. LALS is also moving from graded to non-graded observation of teaching and learning and are exploring the use of Swivl to record practice as part of this transition.

Key points

» The service needed to find a cost-effective and sustainable approach to CPD. Ensuring the CPD offer is relevant, of a high quality and likely to have a positive impact on learners and teaching practice has been instrumental in securing the good will and motivation of tutors and encouraged attendance at tutor briefings.

» Using GoLearn as part of the model has served several purposes. It has modelled a variety of uses and provided opportunities for colleagues to engage, collaborate, share and showcase effective practice. It has been invaluable in monitoring project progress, allowing managers to observe engagement and explore reasons for any non-engagement. It has also highlighted a lack of tutor IT skills which can now be addressed. The experience is helping to shape plans for future use of the platform.

» It is important not to overlook opportunities to showcase and share effective practice.

» Creating a supportive environment while encouraging people to engage in new practice is vital. Tutors need to feel confident that they will not be judged if things don’t work out as intended and managers need to be aware that performance may dip during the experimentation process. Reflective practice can help tutors survive any dips.

» Clear ground rules are helpful in communicating expectations and responsibilities as well as providing guidance on contributing, commenting and feeding back online.
The combination of supportive experiments and coaching support has generated much more professional discussion and reflection which, in turn, is sustaining interest, momentum and CPD.

More information

Website: www.leics-als.ac.uk

Additional case study: LALS Improving students’ experience by increasing independent study

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