

Teachers as learners

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Rob Clarke draws on some of the wisdom circulating at the recent Learning with ICT Conference (www.infovision.co.nz/conference) and on his 3.5 year involvement in teacher professional development in Information and Communication Technology (ICT) to look at...

Teachers seeing themselves as learners...

Software will never replace the creative potential of a skilled teacher and their children working together! But teachers face a formidable task in keeping up with technological change and upskilling themselves.

Building the need...

I strongly believe that teachers MUST be learners with their children. I have learnt more from peering over children's shoulders over the last 5 years than from any workshop, seminar, conference or course! So often in the past has an expert, come along to a school and had no long-lasting influence on teacher attitude, skill or integration of skills into learning. We need to break down the thinking of the computer expert. It is not beneficial to the sharing of expertise within a staff.

The challenge is for school leaders to set up systems that encourage the open sharing of successes, challenges and discoveries. Why not ask teachers what they really enjoy in their teaching and look for opportunities where ICT can be used in this area? Another important aspect is the notion of taking teachers from the known to the unknown - important in creating an environment of high challenge - low threat. Using easy strategies that encourage teachers to want to explore and try new things helps. An example is to get teachers to share photographs of themselves and then to learn to scan them into the computer so they can share them with friends or with the children in their class.

A key strategy we employ in our project is to visit classrooms where ICT is being used in purposeful ways. This puts ICT into a context. Teachers can see ICT being used in practice.

Multilayered support strategies - variety is the spice of life...

The Apple Classrooms of Tomorrow (ACOT) model for PD is a model that I believe has some really useful implications for those involved in teacher PD in ICT. ACOT is a research project started by Apple Computer in the 80's. Two key ACOT research findings have helped me in my ICT support role:

1. Teachers evolve through a series of developmental stages in their journey to integrate technology into the classroom and the learning process.
2. Teachers focus on different things at each stage in this progression and therefore need different types of support at each stage in this progression.

Multilayered support strategies are needed in schools because staff are usually at vastly

different levels in terms of skills, attitudes, and also in how they are integrating ICT into learning. Having a diverse range of skills and attitudes is a wonderful thing in a school- why have PD programmes not always given teachers this? Staff need a variety of supports, here are some examples of some:

- 🍏 techie brekkies- where groups get together in the mornings, share breakfast and learn skills
- 🍏 conference attendance- conferences that focus on teaching and learning, as well as ICT skill development
- 🍏 skills-based courses run after school
- 🍏 the use of consultants to challenge and guide our thinking
- 🍏 impromptu sessions run by staff for staff (sometimes called 'Just in Time, sessions')

Multilayered also means providing different PD for different groups within schools. Here is a summary of how we build up our expertise:

- 🍏 skills based sessions available to all staff
- 🍏 Principal PD programme
- 🍏 Lead Teacher PD programme
- 🍏 an intensive practicum approach run over a longer period of time for a small group of staff
- 🍏 providing ways to communicate and dialogue between schools, as well as within schools
- 🍏 Providing a variety of ways to learn new things, challenge ideas and thinking- as well as providing for different groups of staff is a great way to build a diverse, skillful and hungry group of staff within a school or between a group of schools.

There are a number of great examples here in NZ...

For example, the recent Learning with ICT Conference (www.infovision.co.nz/conference) was an excellent example of a multi-layered approach to PD. This conference used a strand approach - where you opt into one area for the entire conference. The choice included: teaching and learning, policy development, technical issues, pot pourri (for those who wanted a variety of things), Absolute Beginners, FileMaker Pro for school administration- who wouldn't be well catered for!!!

Combine this with keynote presenters such as Professor Stephen Heppell (www.ultiralab.edu.uk), Dr Julia Atkin, local expertise, teachers sharing their successes and challenges, and great social events and you've got a really powerful formula for success.

The critical issue that a conference like this addresses is the reality that we need to spend quality time learning things really well rather than just brushing over the surface. Effective learning with ICT is not a destination but a journey. In the words of Henry Ford: "Whether you believe you can or you can't - you ARE absolutely right!"

Have you got all the pieces to the pie???

Teacher PD is only one piece of this pie, however. We cannot expect teachers and schools to use ICT effectively if they do not have key elements in place:

- 🍏 infrastructure that allows transfer of information and sharing
- 🍏 technical support that is ongoing and well thought through
- 🍏 adequate equipment and software
- 🍏 time to learn, practice, explore and challenge
- 🍏 mentors to help them in this process

Without a holistic approach progress will be limited. I encourage people to select their ICT supplier according to a number of criteria:

- 🍏 Do they provide people who can act as mentors to give advice, guidance and support?
- 🍏 Do they provide other opportunities for teachers to learn to use and manage ICT effectively in the classroom?
- 🍏 Have they got a support network as a resource for teachers in ICT?
- 🍏 Do they have a research base and a proven track record in terms of helping teachers and students learn with ICT?

Check out the offerings that Apple NZ provides in this area:

- 🍏 resellers throughout the country who have to focus on their educational services as well as selling top quality software and hardware
- 🍏 a range of PD opportunities that cater for a wide variety of educators (such as North Island Bus Trips, education advocates, education solutions seminars)
- 🍏 facilitation of visits to other conferences overseas and a series of visits to schools using ICT well in North America.

More information about the Christchurch ICT Cluster, the ACOT model for PD, useful classroom strategies and our thoughts on PD in ICT can be found at the Christchurch ICT Cluster website:

www.christchurchict.org.nz