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North Nottinghamshire College, Ann Ord, Advanced Practitioner, June 2014

More than just a workshop? (CPD through modelling good practice).

Research Summary

The project is to explore the impact of modelling as a vehicle for delivering Continuing Professional Development (CPD).

The context for the CPD is the development of staff skills in:

- i. Technology – the use of a range of tools in the VLE
- ii. Flipped learning – the strategies to engage students more in independent learning.

This project is stage one of a longer term plan to use this technique to cascade the learning to all staff through the learning coaches. In this stage the opportunity to develop and practice will be provided to and through the learning coach network and these opportunities will be genuine, work related activity.

This links to the following priorities are taken from the current Quality Improvement Plan:

2.1 Improve inconsistent performance of some areas particularly for adult learners

2.1b Improve learners' outcomes on all underperforming courses. Eliminate less effective lessons by increased learning coach (LC) support for teachers

2.1c Increase the challenge given to all learners in theory lessons. Support all teachers to provide a wide range of activities to meet learners' individual needs.

3.1 Quality and effectiveness of theory teaching learning and assessment

3.3a Improve the consistency of the effective use of the virtual learning environment

3.1b Expand the learning coach programme to include cross college learning coach roles with a remit of peer support for all aspects of teaching and learning

Definitions

The definition of modelling from the Excellence Gateway includes expert demonstration and explanation and opportunities to practice. This project has not been led by experts and learning collaboratively is at the heart of the development.

In *Rethinking continuing professional development in further education* (2009) Villeneuve-Smith et al discuss the expertise in further education and suggest that CPD should replicate the good practice we advocate in teaching learning and assessment. Anecdotally in our college, staff report that they forget the majority of what they have learned once they are back into the demands of the day job. In using similar models to those used in teaching and learning with learners, this project seeks to begin the process of deeper more substantial learning and longer term change in habits. The alternative titles considered for this project were, 'Practice what you preach' and 'Physician heal thyself'. We did not begin the process with any sense that we might achieve many quick wins, and have used metaphors related to the Butterfly Effect to describe our intentions.

The participants on this project acknowledge and are committed to developing learners for the future who have learned to be adaptable and equipped to thrive in their chosen career in an ever changing employment field. It is acknowledged that we cannot predict the technology that will be available in ten years time and should be teaching our learners to learn, adapt and lead in their careers. Again, this same philosophy applies to staff participants in this project. What sector has to reason to change as rapidly as education? Equally important, say Villeneuve-Smith et al, is to make learning and CPD purposeful for the participant; an ethos underpinning all activity in this project.

Flipped learning.

A review of flipped learning (Hamdan, McKnight et al) points out that this methodology started as a grass roots movement long before it became a 'fashion' supported by senior managers. Hamdan, McKnight et al report on increased interaction between learners and teachers and that it is a loss of this interaction often that teachers fear if they start to communicate electronically. There is a perception that learners' attitudes have improved and some hard evidence of improved results. Flipped learning is not a defined model and that this level of preparation and interaction is merely what should be happening in classrooms anyway. Hamdan et al discuss the theories of cognitive overload in their promotion of flipped learning. In this project we believe that this applies equally to staff and not just in formal learning situations but in meetings and networks.

Revising the plan

It was decided early that the timescale of this project would allow for the first of a phased approach to this development. This phase was intended to ensure that coaches were familiar enough with the interactive tools and methodology of flipped learning by July 2014 to be able to roll this out to their coaches in the year 2014/15.

This project was set up to encourage coaches to use the VLE in a flipped learning style and it was important from the beginning to provide authentic reasons to use this rather than to manufacture a purpose. Early in the network formation it became apparent that a monthly, one hour meeting was not adequate to address developments and keep up to date and an additional form of communication needed to be introduced. This opportunity allowed for coaches to develop and experiment with the VLE and other technological devices within the safety that the network provided.

There is complete commitment within the team to improving the effectiveness of face to face interaction.

Self-assessment

Participants undertook a self-assessment: the results of which show a very wide spread of confidence in both the interactive tools in the VLE and in flipped learning. Participants have, at the time of writing, not completed the final self-assessment of their confidence.

The project lead undertook a self-assessment based on action research confidence.

Process

- i. The first steps in introducing this style of working was to present agendas and documents in the VLE space in advance of meetings to ensure that members had the opportunity to consider the items and bring their formulated thoughts into the meeting.
- ii. A resource and reading area was also set up containing pertinent material including videos, images and reading.
- iii. Discussion threads were set up relating to the developments and participants were encouraged to use these prior to and after meetings.

- iv. A further group, the Learning and Skills Development Team were then included in the research and their own space in the VLE set up.

Barriers

Flipped learning is a glib term which, whilst descriptive in itself has come to have a whole new meaning which is tightly tied in the literature to learning technology and Higher Education. Most research and discourse is set in the contexts of either HE or in schools. It is difficult to find literature on the use of flipped learning in FE. The strong association with technology can be misleading and the absolute link within this project blurred some debate. All participants do agree that there are methods to prepare learners for the new subject matter in advance of a session but this may not be linked to the common understanding of flipped learning and does not necessarily involve technology.

There is a strong agreement that flipped learning is only one model, and that it should only be adopted where and when appropriate to support learning.

Discussion boards within the VLE are clunky in comparison to commercial applications and require a minimum of three clicks to access. This and the reticence of some participants to take the risk of expressing themselves in such an open forum has slowed this element of the development.

Positive outcomes

- i. Currently there are ten discussion threads in the coaching network and nine in the Learning and Skills Development team area;
- ii. Participants have contributed videos, animations, research and reading material to share with colleagues;
- iii. One colleague has created a Ted Ed Tutorial template to demonstrate to colleagues how to create one themselves;
- iv. All participants routinely ensure that they have checked the VLE space and familiarised themselves with agenda items in advance of meetings;
- v. Participants who cannot attend meetings will send their views in advance.

Incidental gains

- i. The senior leadership team and governing body have adopted this approach to their own meetings, accepting that we should 'practice what we preach';
- ii. Use of TedEd and collaborative Google docs have been added to the repertoire of the participants;
- iii. Senior leadership team are revisiting the ILT policy and strategy to ensure that improved resources are available.

A consideration of the project in relation to:

Kotter's 8 steps to change (www.mindtools.com)		
1	Create a sense of urgency	This stage was limited as the participants were being asked to take on a whole new role at the same time and, whilst they were interested, this was not everyone's priority
2	Form a powerful coalition	All participants are keen to develop learning, teaching and assessment strategies and have an open and collaborative approach to this. However, it is very early days in the development of the group as a team.
3	Create a vision for change	The vision for change, initially, was over optimistic and whilst participants could see the benefits to the group communication, the exact method, associated strongly with the VLE, could not be easily seen as pertinent to their classroom work
4	Communicate the vision	The vision for the change was communicated and expectations were high. However, the next steps of debate about the vision was stilted due to the limitations on communication and frustrations occurred for all.

5	Remove obstacles	The direct obstacles to developing further were time and resources, rather than any lack of cooperation. There are issues associated with the IT resources and more particularly permissions in the college. It was decided that addressing these issues directly would distract from the project and that finding ways to work creatively within the constraints was more likely to move things forward, albeit not ideally.
6	Create short term wins	Creating short term wins was easier. Using the VLE to share agendas and documents for meetings has become the norm and participants who cannot attend meetings often send their thoughts on the agenda items through the discussion boards
7	Build on the change	It is now time to reflect and agree ways of building on the initial changes. Consolidating the method and encouraging the cascading of the method to coaches will be the next steps
8	Anchor the changes in the corporate culture	The outcomes of this project should provide a starting point for the anchoring of the changes in the corporate culture. There are supporting changes taking place that will support this.

Lessons learned

- i. When working with digital immigrants, it is noted that, before joining in discussions on line, they prefer to already have developed a strong personal trust and a relationship.
- ii. Early adopters will lead their colleagues to take risks and experiment.
- iii. Pre-roll out to the project, a greater sense of urgency could have been created.
- iv. A stronger vision is essential to keep the group on track although it is also important to provide a certain degree of wriggle room.

- v. Modelling practice does have the intended impact but slowly. This must be approached without any expectation of any quick wins.

Next steps

Phase 2 of this project is to cascade this learning out to delivery staff who are coachees of the current participants.

Bibliography

Rethinking continuing professional development in further education. LSN Frank Villeneuve-Smith Chris West Balj Bhinder

A Review of Flipped Learning Pearson, Hamdan Noora, McKnight Patrick. 2013