Make staff integrate tech into their pedagogy through effective PD

Doug Loader

Well-developed and expertly delivered professional development (PD) for teachers is a fine art in itself. Done well, it will not only have a profound effect on the individual but, collectively, your school and community will flourish as visions are shared and targets achieved.

The single most important thing you can provide to your teaching staff is time – scheduled mornings or afternoons where they know that their lessons are suitably covered and you know that they are immersed in inspiring and engaging PD.

As the weeks hurtle by and terms seem to pass in no time, it is easy for staff to feel under increasing pressure from curriculum demands and to become disconnected from the school's vision. As a principal you will have clear goals from both a performance and pastoral perspective. But without regular engagement with your staff, all may lose sight of either "how could I be teaching better?" or even worse: "why am I doing this?"

This article will discuss the importance of PD in the technology field. The reason is because technology has become the driver for tremendous change in the classroom. Your proposed method of technology integration will change how staff practice teaching in the classroom. It will change the way that staff manage their day and collaborate with colleagues. But most importantly, it will change the way that students and staff learn. So creating an effortless and efficient school environment with modern tools should be very high on your list of PD activities.

Change makers

You may be one of the fortunate schools that have a trusted professional in your community. But often schools need to look externally for assistance with their staff PD, and ICT education consultants come in all shapes and sizes!

Recently I was put onto a professional development framework called EPICT or the European Pedagogy in ICT. This course struck me as being a very different course, because the focus was on the teaching practice (or the pedagogy) applied by the teacher and enhanced through the use of ICT.

I was fortunate to talk with Peter Crosbie, an AISWA employee (Association of Independent Schools of Western Australia), he also project
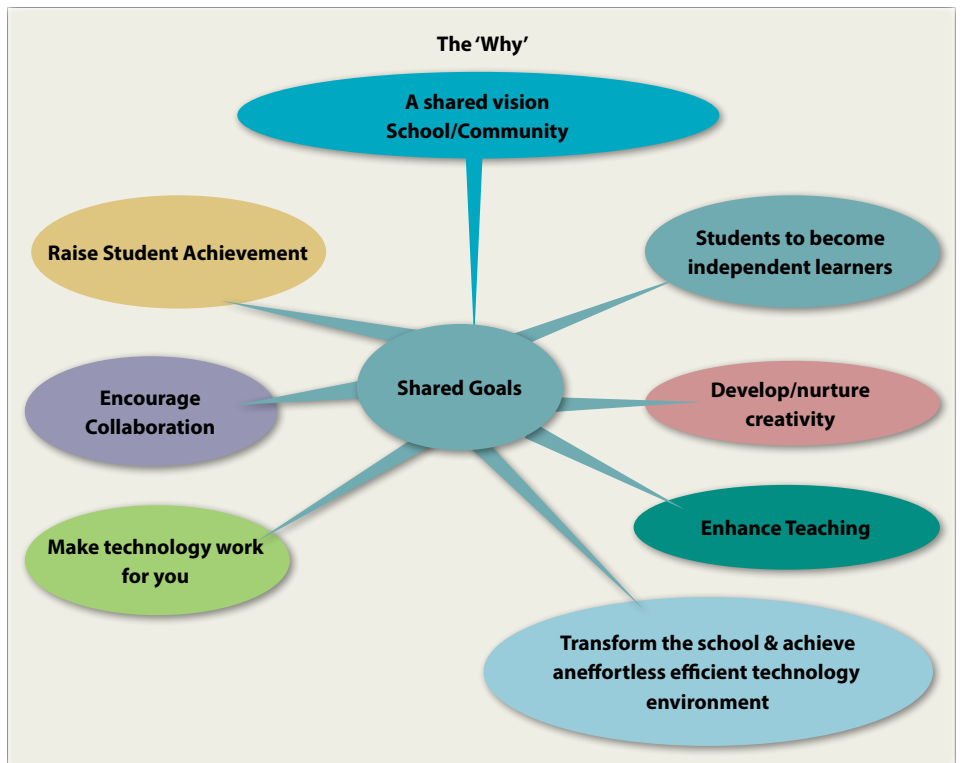
manages EPICT in Australia. He shared with me a little of EPICT's history and future focus. The idea originated in Denmark in 2008 as the presence of ICT in education was expanding. Teachers were paired up with trained facilitators either locally or in their wider community. A combination of four core modules had to be undertaken with four elective modules.

The core modules comprise: Locating and Incorporating Electronic Resources, Word Processing, Electronic Communication and Collaboration and (as a result of your elective modules) Work Methods and where ICT can make a difference. The elective modules range from manipulating spreadsheets to ICT in special needs.

I particularly liked how EPICT encourages competent staff members to become EPICT Facilitators. These facilitators can then assist and train others within the school community. All of the training culminates as an official EPICT qualification, which can assist staff to advance their careers to a senior or exemplary teacher status. In addition, several universities now offer EPICT license holders a credit towards postgraduate qualifications.

The learning framework engaged by EPICT is very impressive and has many similarities to methods I have seen at several leading schools. If you feel that you or one of your colleagues would benefit contact Peter Crosbie at AISWA or visit http://www.epictaustralia.org. But if you feel that you might be able to handle your own internal ICT PD read on.

Moonshot thinking

Moonshot thinking is a term used when people achieve things beyond their own expectations, it is when people have the courage to do things which they initially believe are impossible. Through a combination of inspiration, self-belief and perseverance, the seemingly impossible can become possible.

I expect the students of today to comprehend and accept such challenges, and it should be no different for my teaching colleagues. Students set their minds to magical or seemingly impossible ideas and then (often through technology) bring them to reality.

When approaching modern learning environments, I think it is vital that expectations are set high. Technology progresses at such a fast

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rate and if you don't truly stretch the imagination about what is possible, then we may always be one step behind our students.

The vision which is shared at my school is at times very forward thinking, but for it to be realised it is important that all staff, students and parents share this vision. Making your goals clear is the first step of your PD program.

From vision to practice

I have included two diagrams *(p. 30 and right)* illustrating a brain storming session I had with my colleagues earlier this year. I wanted to find out exactly what they wanted to achieve with the new digital tools available to them. Some of the points raised in the Shared Vision image were very honest responses; probably the most pertinent was simply "To raise student achievement". This I thought was a good starting point.

Next on my road to a transformative classroom practice was to assess the tools that support my teaching colleagues. This includes the main device they are using and also the supporting networks and classrooms in which they are teaching. How will you fund and supply your assets? As discussed in last term's *Education Today* Vol 13 (2) 'Bring Your Own Device' might be the best way forward.

It's one thing to supply the latest tablet or laptop to teachers but without classrooms containing good AV systems and stable networks providing fast internet, the device will become nothing more than a point of frustration. Collaboration and simplicity were key elements in the Vision Plan. Don't ever lose sight of these key ingredients.

Learning spaces (sometimes referred to as classrooms!) can be tricky to get right. There is no doubt that with the introduction of personal computers, classrooms and teacher/student interaction has dramatically changed. John Muskovits looked closely at this in his two-part ET article *An investigation of the effect of learning environments* (I encourage you to take look *www.educationtoday.com.au* 2013 Vol 13 (1 & 2).

Finally, you have a duty to provide time to your staff. Time for you to consult with them, time to fine-tune and share your strategy and goals, but most importantly; time to establish a positive and trusting working relationship. When I commenced work at my school the first thing the deputy principal said to me was "It's all about relationships Doug. If you can earn the trust of your colleagues they will follow." I have never forgotten this and it's something I recall almost every day.

Professional development delivery methods

With the foundations in place, all that's left is to develop and deliver your PD sessions. The aim is to help teachers make curriculum outcomes happen in their classrooms (using digital tools) by supporting all students with different learning styles. These sessions must

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The "How"
Strategic Planning – To action
- Ascertaining the timeframes, securing the funds and actioning the acquisitions
- Apple Technologies – To inspire
- The technology itself is irrelevant, yet ubiquitous, and holds tremendous potential
- Only if this potential is realised, by all concerned can a school begin to transform
- Enabling, device, platforms and spaces – To empower
- To fully grasp the device at hand, to traverse apps and effortlessly collaborate with cloud computing. Learning spaces which support wireless technology, physical and virtual spaces
- Continuous PD – To educate
- PD models which suit all. Supporting EVERY member of your staff any which way you can. Address the "third carriage" staff as a priority. Earn their trust.

My favourite Twitter hash tags to follow are: #adedu, #curriculum, #edtech, #ipadchat #elearning, #k12

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be constructed for different types of learners. I categorise my sessions in the following way.
- Personalised/self directed
- Scheduled group sessions and 'on-demand'
- Classroom focused with students, teacher-to-teacher
- Targeted, prepared for the individual

Self directed PD

Personalised or self-directed PD is suited to those already competent in ICT. These staff members need nothing more then a fertile environment to sow their ideas, discuss and seek solutions. They will already been familiar with communities like Twitter. They will reach out to thought leaders in the national and international community. They will be members of Google Circles and follow other inspirational teachers on Facebook. You will need to introduce these teachers to Apps such as Zite, and Twitter hash tags to fuel their inquisitive personalities. Nurturing these staff members is very important.

Scheduled group sessions

Try to constantly schedule PD sessions. Before school, lunchtime and after school are obvious choices, but reinforce that these sessions are not compulsory, and if you miss one it is OK. The sessions are re-run throughout the term.

You must also advertise these sessions to be available 'on-demand' i.e. when the teacher has a spare period in the day they can request a one-on-one session at their own convenience. I find that these are popular with staff and create a just in time learning model, and this is a good thing, especially when technology is concerned.

In the class PD

For time poor teachers this is probably the best form of PD. Because here your PD facilitator can actually address students in the classroom on the art of movie making, podcasting, stop animation etc., with the classroom teacher present as well. The questions raised during

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these sessions and the actual outcomes in work produced are a learning process for all involved.

Targeted or prepared for the individual

This method can be used to reach those members of staff you see little of; these teachers might be the most disinterested, so this is where the importance of establishing a trusting relationship is key. In order to tailor and adapt PD programs for individuals, I ask the teacher to complete an online survey that I have set up. Questions include:
- Do you consider your school to be a digital 'light house' school?
- Are we doing a good job assisting you?
- Which technology PD topics interest you the most?
- When would you prefer to attend PD?

Of course, once you engage the teacher, listen to their opinions and go to the time of constructing a learning pathway for them, you are beginning to earn their trust.

Conclusion

If you have invested a small fortune on computers, make sure that you realise that investment by up-skilling your staff. Provide an inspirational and fertile environment, be open to new ideas, and support staff with the time to access and action the school's clearly prepared vision. Because with new technologies available, cloud storage, unrestricted collaboration options and touch screen mobile tablets, teaching is not the same as it was five years ago.

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Doug Loader is a technology enthusiast with a track record of delivering effective and working solutions in education and business. He is an Apple Distinguished Educator and has worked in education for over five years. He manages the IT Department at Kolbe Catholic College in Rockingham, 45 minutes south of Perth Visit his website for more articles, guides and opinions: www.iSupport.com.au