

IT'S ALL ABOUT YOU

Of course it's making a difference in the lives of students, but technology is ready to play its part in the professional development of secondary teachers, too, says Keith Wright...



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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Nesta recently made some interesting observations about the use of classroom technology in our schools. The body said that ICT was often unsuccessfully applied to 20th century learning methods; you could apply this criticism to the development of trainee, newly qualified and experienced teachers in our secondary schools.

With the ramping up of the School Direct scheme more and more schools will find themselves responsible for the CPD of a new generation of teachers. But the techniques – and technology – that many schools are using to help track and manage the professional growth of these young professionals is seriously out of step with modern demands. With School Direct we have the 21st century reality of large scale in-school teacher training and development, yet the culture and the systems that most schools have for managing and tracking this on a school-wide and individual level is distinctly late 20th century in its approach.

And my worry is that this will disempower teachers, especially trainees.

The vast majority of schools in England and Wales today – around 85 per cent – simply don't have the means to track and manage processes like staff CPD and performance management in ways that fully take on board the needs and feedback of staff.

My experience, gained from working with thousands of leaders and teachers, is that although there is a real understanding of what constitutes good practice in relation to the identification and evaluation of CPD this isn't translated into reality because the tools used to manage this fall short. Many schools still rely on paper based systems or simple spreadsheets for managing CPD and behind closed doors many of those responsible for managing CPD will admit these systems just provide a quantitative record of who requested what, where they went and how much it cost.

In professional development there should be two sides to the contract. If schools are to effectively support the development of their trainees they need to give them the means to build up a detailed, evidence rich picture of their professional development that will help them make informed decisions about their career path. Trainees need to know how their CPD has made them act differently and what the outcome of these changes have been. They need to reflect regularly on their development, evaluate that activity and be appraised by colleagues. In fact it's an approach schools use all the time to track pupil attainment – yet these common classroom approaches have yet to fully transfer into staff professional development.

We all want new and established teachers to take more control of their development, but if they can't

build up a rich picture of their development so far then it becomes more difficult for them to make informed choices about their future development path. As well as putting the career development of new and existing teachers at risk current approaches to CPD and development can also be problematic for the school as a whole. Many CPD activities may not be as effective as they could be because many schools do not have a clear idea of exactly what is effective professional development – and what is not.

This isn't to say that all CPD misses the mark, but I do believe that schools could draw more value out of their CPD investment by ensuring that what they deliver actually helps their colleagues and the school move forward. The identification and analysis of individual professional development should be given far greater importance than it currently is. Quite simply this means asking more questions of ourselves and our peers about what we need to do to make progress.

For teachers, this approach to evaluation gives them a real stake in the process. It makes it easier for them to provide evidence of the impact of their CPD and also means that future CPD will be informed by them because an explicit link is made between CPD and the impact it has on school improvement.

Schools are increasingly in the driving seat in the professional development of new and existing teachers. It's time to let technology help.

