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Professional Development:

Whose Responsibility Should It Be?

Shelley Kinash

Evidence is amassing to prove that teaching with technology can improve learning. According to research, education technology designed and optimised in keeping with learning principles leads to student advancement in knowledge, skills and attributes. Students who graduate from technology-infused classrooms have increased application, satisfaction and retention.

In education technology, there is acceleration of hardware, software, application and opportunity. Technology affords learning possibilities that were previously inconceivable. Learning analytics embedded into educational software means that modules, challenges and enhancement can be adaptively released only to students who need it when they need it. Through online technology, students can build upon and extend one another's thinking and writing while maintaining version control. Students can manipulate 3D models and experiment with systems. They can build engaging, multimedia portfolios that extend across courses and allow them to make authentic, respected contributions to the knowledge marketplace. Children are rediscovering the creativity and fun in learning through playing, designing and sharing educational games. The opportunities extend as far as the ideas and principled knowledge and application of the teachers.

When technologies were first brought into schools, there were fears that teachers would be made redundant. This proved not to be the case. Instead, it became increasingly obvious that when learning happens, there is always a skilled teacher on the other side or beside the computer. More now than ever, teachers require targeted education technology knowledge, skills and attributes in order to engage students in learning. Teachers need to participate in and apply the outcomes of quality professional development



in order to engage the potentials of education technology for their learners. Herein lies the problem. Teacher participation in available professional development is not what it should be. Recent surveys show that a high percentage of teachers feel unprepared to use emerging technologies.

Why is there an education technology professional development problem? The problem is that the Australian teaching profession does not have a continuing education plan and agreement that clearly articulates requirements and responsibility for education technology training. Certification schemes and agreements to mandate and guarantee continuing education have not been finalised. Finally, there are no standards linking professional development and/or performance with pay increases.

Because education technology training is not seen as integral to teachers' professional progression, it is unclear who should be taking responsibility for overseeing the quality of professional development (PD). In many cases, the training is not hitting the mark. Much of the PD is sales by stealth. The workshops are often delivered by vendors, whose main intent is to sell devices and/or licenses. Training focuses on how to navigate and access the features of the product rather than how to apply the technologies within and beyond the classroom to improve learning. Once teachers have made the effort and dedicated the time to professional development and left disappointed, uninspired and frustrated, they are understandably unlikely to return.

There are three domains in which there must be perceived gain if education technology PD is to attract and sustain engagement: Power, face and money. Successful PD must be perceived to enhance teacher power. Applied power means that the teachers are able to capitalise on the affordances of technology to enhance learning. Further, power means that teachers are able to garner respect and sustain motivation of digital-native learners. The second factor, face, is critical. Teachers must save face within the classroom

and within the actual training. Teachers report feeling safer keeping technology out of the classroom and thereby avoiding the risk of looking foolish when they cannot operate what they have brought in. Further, many a teacher worries that he or she will be the only workshop participant who won't be able to keep up at the training session. The third preventative factor is money. A common lament is that there is not enough money dedicated to quality professional development. Teachers in some school systems report that professional development costs rather than makes them money. Training costs relief days that might have been used for other purposes. Charges for parking, petrol, accommodation and even registration are often covered by the teachers themselves. Electing to take university subjects online or in the evening, on-campus means registration fees and associated costs such as for babysitting. These costs are

most frequently the responsibility of the teacher.

The issue of money segues to presentation of the next challenge in getting teachers to engage in education technology PD. Not only does PD cost teachers money, continuing education is not clearly linked to remuneration, as in many other professional careers. Teachers are expected to participate in continuing education for altruistic or virtuous motivations rather than explicit and concrete career pathways and remuneration grids. The culture of teacher professional development is implicit, optional and under-valued.

The final barrier to teacher PD is lack of clearly articulated responsibility for infrastructure. In order for teachers to close the loop on training, or in other words, bring the training into the classroom to enhance student learning, the technology has to work. Teachers and students need to have appropriate access to the hardware and software.





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There have to be enough funded licenses. WiFi has to work and firewalls cannot block necessary curricular or process-related materials and functions. This is often not the case. Once teachers get excited about bringing their technology learning back to their students, we cannot risk truncating their efforts and engagement by unsupportive infrastructure.

In summary, the four key challenges to teacher PD in pedagogical use of learning technologies all stem from unarticulated responsibility agreements. First, there is no standard for quality of PD. Second, teachers are expected to participate on the basis of altruism, because there are inadequate rewards in terms of power, face and money. Third, the culture and system does not support teacher continuing education. Fourth, there are not infrastructure standards that allow teachers to implement their training.

The solution to the combined problems of PD responsibility is multifaceted. First, there must be a systemic focus on PD quality. Technology training cannot be considered good enough. PD must walk the talk and provide a quality process to inspire teachers and show them how to use the technologies in their classrooms to inspire their students' learning. Second, in a process most commonly known as work integrated learning, teachers must have access to embedded PD in which they are supported to implement their learning in their classrooms. Human supports situated within or circulating between schools ensure that teachers close the loop on PD. One of the key means of supporting ongoing application, and thereby the third recommendation, is to apply a cohort model for continuing engagement. Do not send a single teacher to apply a new technology in

isolation. A small group of teachers will inspire one another, provide a collegial base to pose and answer questions, sustain innovation and champion change across the school. Finally, PD for learning technologies must be conducted in accordance with a strategic plan. This domain should be included in national certification agreements. The strategic plan will not only document which teachers will engage in what PD (while allowing flexibility to suit school contexts), but also how the principal and other school leaders, the technology team, librarians and students will collaborate for teacher PD for enhanced learning. 

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