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Blogging, podcasting, professional anxiety and change: The use of Web2.0 technologies for supporting Initial Teacher Education in the Post-Compulsory Education and Training (PCET) sector.

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Background

This paper explores the outcomes of two separate but parallel developments in asynchronous support for Initial Teacher Education (ITE) within the Post-Compulsory (PCET) sector. The paper reports on experiments currently undertaken with the adoption of Web2.0 communications technologies (blogging, wikis, Twitter and podcasts) to support reflections about, and learning on, PCET ITE programmes.

As a means to evaluate existing provision, a small cohort of ex-trainees from the PGCE PCET programme have engaged in a regular blogging exercise with a view to articulating and tracking their emerging identities and pedagogic concerns in their NQT year.

Reflections and concerns of the blogging sample are used to frame and inform e-learning provision on the PGCE PCET programme. Semi-regular bespoke 'podcasts' and occasional Twitter micro-blogging, made by the teaching team, are used to support the learning of the current cohort. We seek to draw together both evaluation of provision and new avenues for pedagogy using emergent technologies.

Research Questions

The phrase 'emergent technologies' has come to be associated with rapidly growing and changing technologies arising out of developments in Web2.0: it is interactive and allows for users to participate as manipulators and creators. This enquiry adopts asynchronous Web2.0 tools as a means to both evaluate and enhance ITE PCET provision. Engagement with digital communities and with podcasting teaching/learning tools has allowed for the intensification of support of past and current trainees across both internal and partnership provision. Emergent technology has also provided a platform for emerging teacher educators to solidify their practice, pedagogy and identity by, literary 'speaking-it-out-loud'.

Ongoing concerns emerging through the blogging by the NQT sample have been: feeling 'alone' in the NQT year; missing regular support from the training programme; a sense of concern at pedagogic 'mismatch' between training and mundane 'every-day practice'; and the excitement and overwhelming responsibility of 'knowing ones own learners'.

Methods

It has made sense for the purposes of this enquiry to compare the use of online blogging with more traditional diary-based methods of reflection and data generation. Recently Avis, Bathmaker and Parsons (2001) have used time-log diaries with FE practitioners to record work flow. Jordan (1989) writes of the role to be played by the articulation of 'stories' to help 'apprenticeship' work-based learning. The adoption of blogging has allowed the capture of the stories of PCET sector NQTs - stories firmly rooted in workplace learning. This method has provided an effective means to uncover themes and to see how such stories develop and change over time.

Participation in the enquiry is on the basis of 'something-for-something'. It offers 'value' back to the participants of the research, situating them (Lave and Wenger, 1991) as their own 'virtual community'. The challenge has been to create the right climate and relationships between the members of the

(small) virtual community to encourage them to communicate with each other and to try and understand each other's reflections; to understand the 'situatedness' they each draw upon.

Frame

Souter and Muir (2008) have adopted podcasts as a means to enable pre-service teachers to extend their professional learning through the creation of podcast reports on their own individual action research projects conducted as part of their training programme. For our purposes, the podcasts are generated as a teaching tool by staff involved in teaching on ITE programmes but are congruent with themes and concerns generated from the blogging sample of NQTs.

The posts and blogs are held to be snapshots of wider ongoing identity and pedagogic constructions. Various lessons learned (patterns, trends and concerns) - the articulation of their 'stories' - have been captured from this enquiry as we chart the ex-trainees through their first teaching year. These can help to inform the practice of new trainees and entrants into the FE professional sector at a time when the research literature speaks of concern for the potential of multiple, solid and confused identities at such a "significant conjunctural moment in FE" (Avis and Bathmaker, 2009). Stories help locate our practice within a more tightly defined and yet broader nexus of practice: they help us to imagine and as a result fit in; they help in locating us within the habitus of our professional practice.

It is important for the methodology of this enquiry that participants are afforded the opportunity to reflect upon their classroom practice and in doing so make transparent the choices and decisions which underpin the growth of their professional craft knowledge (Hagger and McIntyre, 2006). Avis and Fisher (2006) have suggested that on-line learning can construct meaningful dialogue.

Research findings

Morrison and Galloway (1996) have highlighted the usefulness of diary accounts in making public the usually private world of classrooms. The experience of this enquiry, to date, indicates that online and digital tools allow for an ease of data generation and gathering. They have allowed rich qualitative data to be produced which at times speaks with a very personal voice; making invisible classrooms slightly less private than before. The regular and at times 'throw-away' nature of the threads, and the openness of many of the blogged posts, suggests that the act of working digitally and communally enables participants to manipulate and mould thoughts and reflections in reflective and reflexive ways.

The paper and presentation will showcase the e-learning blogging and podcasting tool developed, through the use of quotations and audios embedded in the presentation materials.

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