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Vital - transforming ICT CPD

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Background

Whilst rhetoric surrounding ICT in education suggests that it should play a key role in enhancing education the evidence suggests that the practice does not reflect this. The reality-rhetoric gap still exists. Vital is a £5.6million DCSF funded programme, which aims to address this issue and bring about a step change in the use of ICT in schools in England through the provision of high quality ICT CPD. The programme is being developed and delivered by The Open University and e-skills UK.

Vital is a new approach to ICT CPD. It is an innovative professional development programme which aims to support schools in England to make the most of ICT in their teaching.

Vital, alongside other CPD providers, agencies and employers, will work with specialist technology teachers (of IT, Computing and ICT), as well as all practitioners seeking to use ICT to enhance learning across the curriculum. Vital is open to all staff in schools and sixth form colleges across England, and will support the development of a range of forms of ICT CPD. These include courses, more informal CPD activities (which we call '15 minute CPD'), and peer-peer interaction.

The Vital approach to CPD is based on a view of practitioners as experts in pedagogy. The design of the community is based on a model of practitioner research. Vital is underpinned by a belief in supporting educational professionals to share their expertise and reclaim ownership of teaching as a discipline. We recognise that the only way we can succeed in our mission is to work with the profession, other providers and the wider community.

Research Questions

Research on CPD highlights a number of key features of effective CPD and shortcomings in much existing provision. The Vital Programme has set out to re-conceptualise ICT CPD around teachers as co-developers of the education knowledge-base through engagement in a national online community. In doing so the programme has also reconceptualised the notion of 'course' in university terms, resulting in changes in the way courses and other CPD activities are developed in the institution. This raises a number of aspects of Vital's provision and approach which need to be researched as the programme unfolds. These include (but are not limited to):

- Impact
- Online community development
- Models of CPD (including practitioner research)
- Institutional change

This paper will report on the approach being taken to research into these aspects.

Methods

This paper will explore both research into the application of VITAL 'reconceptualising the notion of "course"' using a concept of reflective practice 'participative' CPD activities AND research into the 'reflexive' experience of belonging to a community - what it means to individuals and the wider group to be part of that community. Thus it will be examining the relationship between reflective practice and reflexive experiences of internet cultures. Whilst all the research adopts an overarching socio-cultural approach a range of different strategies, such as We will use virtual ethnography and

action/practitioner research, will be used to research into the aspects of the programme identified above.

Frame

The Vital model has, at its heart, notions of the reflective practice cycle in which participants in CPD, in this case school teachers and other staff, draw on their own and professional knowledge bases and contribute back to them through iterations of planning, doing and reviewing, sharing with others in the community and a process of individual and collective reflection.

Research findings

The contribution to knowledge will include a richer understanding of models for CPD in education, through an extrapolation from the approach being used in the subject domain of ICT. Additionally it will extend our understanding of research methodologies and ethical issues within online learning communities, and look at how this co-creation of professional development activities, and collaborative knowledge building impacts on the view higher education has of course development.