



Case Study E: The ‘Meitheal’ and Me: Mapping the National Forum Professional Development Framework

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Pilot Group: **Teachers and Researchers**

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In August 2016, the National Forum for the Enhancement of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education published the National Professional Development Framework which aimed to ‘provide guidance for the professional development of individuals ...for planning, developing and engaging in professional development (PD) activities’ (National Forum 2016:1). This was the first time in Ireland that professionals at higher level were being facilitated in considering their own professional development. Key to this new approach was the establishment of a series of pilot study groups with key professional identities in the IOTI, university and private college sectors which were formed to explore the field of PD in higher education.

From February to May 2017, 2 of these pilot study groups combined to establish one group entitled ‘Teachers and Researchers’. Comprising 19 higher education professionals working within DkIT, Trinity College Dublin and University College Dublin, the group determined on a working method of a ‘meitheal’ (a team which traditionally would comprise a group of neighbours working together to complete seasonal work) but which in our case, saw us meet every week to converse and work together to agreed schedules. Located in DkIT, these f2f meetings (which were attended online by our university colleagues and which included a field-trip held in UCD) were led by a mentor and co-ordinator, both of whom are also working professionals in higher education. The aim of each working session was to examine a specific aspect of professional development in a collaborative manner. Key to this was the understanding of the meitheal as a ‘safe space’ where experience could be shared freely and new tools could be trialed by one for the benefit of all. This was an essential aspect of our interactions as the meitheal comprised participants from a wide range of disciplines and digital capacities while the limited time duration of the project made collaboration essential for progress and success.

Focusing on the five domains within the framework, the meitheal examined the Self, Professional Identity, Values and Development, Professional Communication and Dialogue, Professional Knowledge and Skills and Personal and Professional Digital Capacity. During each working session, participants would showcase digital tools which could be of use in the various domains. Over 50 useful websites, research and teaching tools and different kinds of software were trialed during the project with participants sharing their experiences of using these technological tools which included photo, audio and film editing, file sharing, cloud-based document creation and sharing, online courses and teaching resources, podcasts, e-portfolios, screen casting, social networking, programming and time/workflow management tools. Whether during meetings or summarised and shared in our customised shared space on Microsoft OneNote, this array of technological tools were considered by the meitheal for their possible usefulness in capturing, gathering and displaying evidence in our PD portfolios. The success of



our PD meitheal lay in professional collaboration in an inter-disciplinary space with an increased digital capacity for all, making it a strong foundation for our on-going action research collaborations examining PD with a technological focus in higher education.