Teacher CPD, interactive whiteboards and a transfer of innovation initiative. An analysis of challenges encountered in an Irish project.

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SMART_VET was a two year funded pilot project (2011-2013) operating under the EU’s Lifelong Learning Programme. Encompassing seven partners in total, comprising four Irish and three international, its core aim was to support the continuous professional development (CPD) of vocational teachers in the use of interactive technology for teaching and learning in Ireland, with a specific focus on Interactive White Boards (IWB).

To this end the project was primarily designed to facilitate the transfer of good practice in terms of IWB training delivery to Irish Vocational education teachers and trainers (VET). To achieve this a representative sample of VET personnel from five school centres in Wicklow VEC were invited to participate in a project pilot which aimed to provide them with the skills required to create IWB educational resources and integrate them into everyday teaching and learning.

The project included a research and evaluation component conducted by an external academic which commenced as the pilot was nearing completion in 2013. Using a qualitative methodology the research consisted of focus group and individual interviews with VET Teachers, Principals and Project Champions in four of the participating centres (n=32). The aim of the study was to research the project’s impact from the point of view of project participants and to assess the relevance and validity of the training resources and supports developed and made available as part of the project with a view to informing future improvements for technology based training resources and initiatives for VET teachers. Therefore the key research questions were:

How did teachers perceive and rate the value and usefulness of the IWB training seminars and workshops and additional CPD training support materials provided by the project?

To what extent did teachers use the IWB in their teaching and in what way?

How were Learners benefitting from teachers use of the IWB?

The effectiveness of the Project Champion Model?

The role of the online Community of Practice facility for supporting collaboration and sharing of resources and expertise in relation to IWB CPD?

The research revealed that the project encountered a number of challenges and roadblocks that hampered its success. This paper will discuss these findings in the context of adult learning barriers (Cross 1981), technological barriers (Su, 2009) school leadership and organizational culture change (Fullan, 2001).