Transforming Queensland VET:

Challenges & Opportunities

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Edited by Donna Berthelsen and Lauren Vogel

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Contact
Professor Donna Berthelsen
Faculty of Education
Queensland University of Technology
Kelvin Grove 4059 Queensland
Email: d.berthelsen@qut.edu.au

Foreword

The volume is the third in a series that addresses change and development in the delivery of VET programs in Queensland. The chapters address a breadth of issues that relate to the changing landscape for teaching and learning in VET programs through e-learning.

Organisational change is a key focus of this volume. ***James Waterson*** examines business and pedagogical perspectives for SkillsTech Australia to create teaching and learning environments that will enrich the learning experience for staff and students. ***Kerry Emerson*** explores the ways in which printing teachers might change current practices in order to deliver their training to apprentices and trainees – off-the-job, on-the-job and online, through e-learning. The chapter by ***Erik Dodwell*** takes up issues of user-friendly RPL interviews and the challenges to develop a model that may be applied consistently across all industry areas using conversational interviews.

The chapters by ***Linda Roberston***, ***Nina Woodrow***, and ***Anushka Weerackody*** discuss teaching and learning for specific groups of students. ***Linda Roberston*** proposes a vision for learning support teachers in which the learner is encouraged to be a self-directed and autonomous learner who is capable of utilising e-learning resources and is information literate. ***Nina Woodrow*** presents a case for the diminished sense of occupational identity by adult literacy teachers and the implications of this loss of expertise across the VET sector. Constructive strategies for change are outlined. The chapter by ***Anushka Weerackody*** explores ideas to enhance the practices of ESL teachers in TAFE Queensland through an online community of practice.

The issues of on-the-job training through e-learning for various trades is considered by ***Anne-Louise Johnston*** and the benefits and challenges for SkillsTech Australia in developing training partnerships with industry to deliver these changes.

These papers were completed by the authors as a part of their postgraduate studies at QUT. The views reported are those of the authors and should not be attributed to the Queensland Department of Education and Training.

Donna Berthelsen and Lauren Vogel
Faculty of Education
Queensland University of Technology
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Chapter 1

E-Education for SkillsTech Australia: An Holistic Approach

James Waterson

Teacher, SkillsTech Australia

> Abstract

A trade and technician skills institute operating state-wide has been established to lead product development and delivery in trade areas. This has now evolved into SkillsTech Australia as part of TAFE Queensland. The Queensland Skills Plan indicated that SkillsTech Australia will deliver training in a variety of modes of instruction over fifty weeks of the year to ensure greater flexibility for employers. The desired outcome of this paper is to extend awareness for managers regarding the introduction of e-learning throughout SkillsTech Australia. With new pedagogical and technical challenges, the need to embrace change and create the necessary ICT and e-learning strategies is very important. From a business and pedagogical perspective the desired outcome is to create an environment that will enrich the learning experience for staff and students. This transition to 21st Century education is unchartered for the greater percentage of educators, so for SkillsTech Australia the e-classroom project is an opportunity to integrate the e-learning experience for all learners without any preconceived ideas or prejudice – tabula rasa.

With the current demand for tradespersons brought about by the Australian skills shortage there is an increasing requirement for a flexible delivery service within the Vocational Education and Training (VET) sector. Under the banner of the *Queensland Skills Plan*, flexible delivery for VET aims to give learners a greater choice of how, when, and where they learn. The technology for e-learning within Technical and Further Education (TAFE) utilises an authoring environment and supports an on-line community through the Learning Management System (LMS). SkillsTech Australia as part of TAFE Queensland has introduced the LMS across all training centres giving teaching staff the ability to create and deliver varied subject matter to a wide group of trade-based students. The intention for this paper is to extend awareness of the directions for SkillsTech about e-business; e-technology; e-classroom and; e-assessment.

Stehlik (2003) suggests that the adoption of flexible delivery is affected by the availability of technology and resources; some hesitation towards change by teachers and trainers; time constraints on staff to deliver changes; the availability of funding, and; a recognition that online learning does not necessarily cater to all learning styles. Klein and Knight (2005) suggested that in attempting major technological and administrative change many attempts are unsuccessful or only partly successful. While Surry, Ensminger and Jones (2002) indicated that the complex interactions between local politics, financial resources, social, human, and technological factors all impact on whether innovations will be implemented in educational environments. What then might this mean for SkillsTech Australia with the intended implementation of blended learning and the e-classroom?

Within SkillsTech the field of e-learning has a few isolated early adopters with the majority of delivery staff having had no co-ordinated and subject-specific professional development training for their discipline area. The average age of most delivery staff is quite senior and many of these staff view change as a cause for concern. The Department of Education, Training and the Arts (DETA) (2008) reported that 58.14% of teachers are in the age group 45–60 and 16.29% are more than 60 years of age. The continued reliance on pen and paper for examinations, including re-sits and supplementary examinations, distracts teachers from class preparation and innovation for effective pedagogy. The lack of time due to diminished staff levels creates strong demands on most teaching staff and, therefore, the opportunity to engage in meaningful professional development becomes difficult which, in turn, leads to the lowering of teacher status and burn out that ultimately impacts on the student – our client.

The need to increase the number of workers with appropriate e-learning skills in Queensland; changes in demography of the students; the nature of their learning styles; technology advancements; and how knowledge is imparted has placed a significant demand for change on TAFE. It is this change within TAFE that has to be managed well to ensure the best possible outcome for both the educator and the student. The *Queensland Skills Plan* (Department of Education and Training [DET], 2006) set out twenty four actions that aimed to transform and modernise the VET system including major changes to TAFE. The issues of ICT, change, culture, gender, and the development of students as on-going or life-long learners are major topics currently affecting professional life within TAFE.

In order for teachers to provide students with the best possible environments to acquire knowledge and skills, the 'classroom of old' must become a much more diverse environment. This will incorporate a blended learning scenario and will utilise many delivery options to make allowances for the different learning and life styles of the students. The students will be introduced to a rich learning experience by interacting with their peers in a variety of ways and will have access to a variety of resources. In the *Queensland Skills Plan* (DET, 2006) *QSP Action 3* indicated that TAFE will be restructured across Queensland to include: "face-to-face instruction, workplace-based learning, texts, videoconferencing and e-learning" (p.17). *QSP Action 7* indicated that

more effective use of ICT "… will strengthen every element of the TAFE system – from more flexible student access and accelerated skills acquisition, to greater resource sharing between trainers, and better intellectual property management" (p.21).

From a business perspective, the lynchpin for the management of any project is structured implementation with ongoing evaluation for the designated outcome. With the added requirements for an e-learning project and the complications of utilising embedded technology, the term e-business will now be employed. As suggested by Mitchell (2002, cited in Mitchell, 2003) the mindset required for e-business is challenging because it requires a whole new set of rules with the potential to alter the range and types of customer services provided by a VET organisation. Research supports the argument that innovation in e-learning is becoming the norm for many organisations around the globe. As stated previously, the intention of this paper is to create awareness about ICT change in TAFE and to this end a number of key areas within a SkillsTech project will be discussed: e–business; e–technology; e–classrooms, and; e–assessment.

> E-Business

The need to introduce a new plan or project into a large organisation comes with the requirement for a clear and concise strategy document with a well defined mission statement. The demands of an e-learning project require the involvement of many disciplines throughout all the stages of planning, implementation, and evaluation to arrive at satisfactory outcomes. Rosenberg (2007) stated that:

> *Over the years, when we've thought about "e-learning strategy," the focus was too often on the "e-learning" part and less on the "strategy" part. We bought tons of technology without considering how or if the organisation could use it. We built or bought online courseware without a firm understanding of the needs it might serve or the specific benefits it would bring. We focused on our tools before we focused on our clients. And we wondered why we had so much trouble getting the organisation to embrace what we were doing.* (p.iii)

There is a requirement for SkillsTech Australia to create a department or agency within the institution that can facilitate centralised innovation, co-ordination and control, planning and development, staff development training, content, and budget control measures. This is essential for SkillsTech to manage all e-learning projects across Queensland. A historical reflection to substantiate the successful inclusion of such an agency within a large geographically spread entity is presented in Box 1.1 below:

Demonstration of e-implementation

During the late 1980s the British Army stationed in Germany decided to upgrade all telecommunication resources for both mobile and static units over staged phases in every area of influence. This move to digital technology required the creation of a development team, a large entity with clearly defined objectives, and the remit to train and implement this massive task over one year. The plan was implemented by first training the trainers and then employing a co-ordinated plan with all units. This structured change of equipment with the required training was completed on time. The force was 55,000 personnel spread over all of Northern Germany and Berlin with elements in Holland and Belgium. Equipment was styled from man-packs, tank-based, all other vehicle types, and static locations. This highly successful project only achieved the desired outcome by employing an innovative agency that had control across the organisation.

Box 1.1: Historical reflection on the integration of telecommunication resources

The size and complexity of a central agency for SkillsTech Australia would be a dynamic entity to meet ever-changing market needs, client, and customer demands. Will SkillsTech be doomed to failure if it does not take the time to create a strategy for such an organization? The development framework required for the new paradigm of e-learning within SkillsTech Australia requires the integration of many knowledge disciplines to conceptualise a new learning model as well as to take responsibility for development, rollout, evaluation, on-going maintenance, and upgrades to systems. Coordination is vital at all levels of the VET system to allow for the complexity of the e-learning process to succeed. In keeping with the collaborative nature of e-learning in all areas of the educational process the model of a Community of Practice should be implemented throughout all SkillsTech Australia institutions and in conjunction with national and world-wide educational organisations. Creation and structure of such dynamic e-business environments will depend on the perceived e-learning needs for SkillsTech Australia.

In research papers, many demonstrations of e-business models have been presented (Forzi & Laing, 2003; Khan, 2004; Kvavik, 2001; Osterwalder & Pigneur, 2002). These researchers propose and demonstrate new approaches for customer-oriented e-business solutions. E-business means more than just the process of e-learning employing ICT. It also implies conducting business electronically within the organisation and externally. Research suggests that within the VET sector these two aspects of conducting business electronically are taking parallel but separate paths (Mitchell, 2003).

E-business provides opportunities to increase the range and types of customer services provided by a VET organisation. Students involved with e-learning also want a range of electronic services made available to them. An example of this broadening of e-options

is described by Mitchell (2002, cited in Mitchell 2003) in Box 1.2. He describes the platform made available to students in the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA).

In summary, it is the time to identify whether current processes serve SkillsTech Australia needs for this first step into the dual path of e-business and e-learning. The change suggested in this paper is a whole new strategic approach for the inclusion of technology within education. The challenges of such a management project are many with outcomes that may alter existing practices through a new design that incorporates both e-business and e-learning. Some of these key areas are delineated in the following sections.

Two of UCLA's websites for students are:

The student self-service web application for delivering virtual student services, URSA (www.ursa.ucla.edu), is proving to be so successful for online enrolments that UCLA proposes to close down the previous enrolment system. URSA is based on the principle of self-service and enables the student to use an encrypted Personal Identification Number (PIN) to enrol, change biographical details, request a particular time for a class, and enter a name on a waitlist for a particular class, as well as to access results. Students can make payments online using credit cards for tuition, parking, dining, and housing. In addition, a campus debit card, Bruincard, enables students to make payments to various food venues on campus, the bookstore, the medical centre and to make purchases from local merchants, using an account set up with and maintained by the university.

MyUCLA (www.my.ucla.edu), the student web portal, allows applicants, students and alumni to access University calendars and past examinations and reading lists, view staff contact lists, and hosts web sites for every course, including syllabus, reading lists, discussion boards, and other instructional materials.

Box 1.2: Student online management of learning and access to services

> E-Technology

To arrive at a technological solution that works at optimum levels for any organisation the focus should be on how the LMS can accommodate tailored content requirements. Planning and research into the needs of an organisation from an e-business team, as previously described, is essential. The team will decide which platform is best for the organisation. The outcomes will most likely represent a compromise between how well the features fit the needs of the organisation and the budget available for customisation.

This vital decision must be well researched and it should never be the case of 'if you build it they will come.' There are many commercially available learning management systems at varying price points and with a large list of possible features. Some organisations may choose to develop the system in-house. The advantage of this is that

the system is tailored to the needs of the organisation. However implementation may take much longer to achieve. There are purchasing guides that will allow an e-business team to make the best choice.

Most providers of learning management systems comply with the Sharable Content Object Reference Model (SCORM) which are a set of specifications that, when applied to course content, produces reusable e-learning objects (DigitalThink, n.d.). A result of the United States Department of Defence Advanced Distributed Learning (ADL) initiative, SCORM-compliant courseware elements are easily merged with other compliant elements to produce a highly modular repository of training materials.

If the system does not function as expected at that level, end-users will not want to work with it, posing a threat to organisational change driving e-learning implementation. LMS installations can be challenging projects because they affect multiple areas in the e-business environment, through multiple phases, with each requiring its own project plan. To complicate matters, each area often flows into another area. For successful outcomes, the e-learning organisation has to create a sustainable technical environment that provides a quality content infrastructure. The LMS is the window to e-learning needs and, to be reliable, this vehicle must have fall back procedures to maintain the learning process if outages occur. The technology should be the catalyst not the driver for the educational experience of the future. As noted by Loveless, DeVoogd and Bohlin (2001) constructing knowledge from information is more than using ICT and requires abilities to access, analyse and interpret information.

Co-ordinated support and control would come from elements of the e-business team that provide technical support, content development, and updates. It is vital that as part of the evaluation and testing process for a newly implemented LMS that both delivery and administrative personnel are given induction training with the system. Teachers should be made aware that an infrastructure is available to them to carry out this new style of delivery and should also be supported by an educational development team which is also part of the e-business empire. As Palmieri (2003) suggested from her case study research on the impact of flexible delivery on human resource practices in TAFE, it is important for managers at every level of the organisation to have a good understanding of the nature of the work their staff are doing because it has implications for the way in which their work is understood with regards to the total Institute and also for succession planning.

Audit requirements can be more readily satisfied by the built-in reporting system that a LMS can offer. Allied to this, there are many reports that a teacher can extract from the system particularly for examination and outcome reporting which can greatly reduce time overheads for administrative duties. Communication between the students and staff will be enhanced through chat-rooms within the LMS – email, blogs, and various telephone and fax systems, thus keeping lines open for students if they encounter any problems. Anecdotal reference demonstrating positive outcomes in e-learning when employing LMS technology is highlighted in Box 1.3.

Employing LMS technology

During 2007, the author was involved in the development and teaching of a pilot subject taught in a blended learning environment. The content was created within the LMS platform. Thirty two students were enrolled in Certificate 3–Electro-Technology. They had varying levels of experience and there was a broad age range from 18 to 57 years. Some students expressed initial concern but after a structured induction process and interactions with the system, this apprehension disappeared.

Face-to-face groups, self paced study, labs, text, video and embedded items were employed in the learning environment so that a variety of options were offered to the learner to care for different learning styles. It became apparent that, dependent upon the topic to be studied, students' learning styles actually changed. Flexible hours of operation were employed in the learning environment and this option was well received by both students and delivery staff. Allied to this the students were able to externally log-on to the LMS allowing them to study from home whilst in Brisbane and also have access when deployed all over Australia for their work duties. Communication between students and staff was possible at all times by e-mail, chat via the LMS, and phone/fax thus keeping lines open for students if study problems were encountered.

Box 1.3: Reflection on the use of LMS technology

The new experience of learning in the 21st Century affords students a flexible method of learning with a blend of options. Not only will they arrive in a blended learning environment within a TAFE Institute but they have access to extensive learning resources through Internet access twenty four hours a day, seven days a week. This reflects changes in the fundamental operation of TAFE as described in *Queensland Skills Plan Action 3* which stated, that "… training will be available 50 weeks of the year to allow employers greater flexibility."

As suggested by Cairncross (2001) the e-technology revolution is increasingly more evident and is breaking down barriers and borders. In order to summarise the e-technology area for SkillsTech Australia, questions need to be tabled: How is SkillsTech Australia positioned with the technology? Will ad hoc implementation prevail? Reflecting over the last two years of content creation has been based upon staff and departments operating in isolated environments with no strategic control. The exploitation of new innovative knowledge and technology has been minimal and system enhancements that have been deployed have led to various technical inter-operability problems. Management decisions for ICT and the e-learning process are made in isolation and the 'coal-face' teacher has little or no input in the process. The next section discusses the e-classroom.

> E-Classroom

The main arena for e-learning within SkillsTech Australia will be the blended learning room. The student experience within the new learning environment must commence with a formal induction to the LMS processes and detail about the blended learning model. This will enable educators to analyse their student group for perceived learning styles and create optimum outcomes for a given class and subject. Sadler-Smith (1996) defined learning style as the distinctive manner used habitually to acquire knowledge, skills or attitudes through study or experience. Online learning promotes student-centred, active learning in which the individual becomes largely responsible for his or her own learning experiences. The teacher is responsible for presenting multiple opportunities for processing information and assisting students in the creation of new knowledge. Technology is important but it will be the flexibility of the educator that will enable the complete experience for the learner by utilising many and varied platforms to suit the individuals learning needs. Biggs (1995, cited in Salmon 2004) proposed that constructivism, as a learning theory, calls for participants to explore their own thinking and how they build personal knowledge. Seel (2001, cited in Salmon 2004) suggested that a key principle of constructivism is that the meanings and interpretations that individuals give to incoming information depend on their previous mental models and maps of the knowledge area drawn from personal experience. Learners must be encouraged to use the relevant technological tools to develop a range of skills, concepts, and understandings. Learning will then become a collaborative, shared experience. Consideration needs to be given to content via cyberspace. Leask (2001) proposed that within the structure of the Internet, two opposing ideas or valued knowledge can sit side by side and users have the opportunity to make their own professional decisions and interact in different ways with the most appropriate resources. The cyber-student can study at any time and wherever they choose. Learners have to be guided from irrelevant stimuli by teachers to affect quality and effective learning outcomes and to avoid disorientation within a sea of facts. It is the educator's task to find the right balance between shielding the learners and handing control to them.

Teachers require the necessary ICT training to develop the ability to use the technology and cyber–tools effectively. For example, the area collectively known as "cyber-safety" is important. It covers a wide range of issues about privacy and anonymity, concerns about sexual predators, the online use of cameras, online harassment, scams and fraud, anti-social material, and copyright infringements; to name but a few of the issues that educators must consider.

Developing an on-going understanding of e-learning and online issues in teaching require commitment to a community of practice. Shulman (1987) noted that the goal of teacher education is not to train teachers to behave in prescribed ways but to educate them to reason soundly about their teaching as well as to perform in skilful ways. Leask (2001) stated that by requiring teachers to lead a revolution in teaching and learning, society is

requiring them to contribute to the demise of the perceived traditional role of the teacher. Some teachers are hostile to new technology because they fear replacement. ICT education for teachers presents more problems than learning for the content of a new curriculum. Breuleux (2001) proposed that "communities of interpretation" are essential to build collaboration between teachers, researchers, developers, and management. In the blended learning environment, teachers have to be imaginative, flexible, committed, and responsible, as well as being expert communicators. Sadly, the VET teacher of today faces a number of challenges. It is no secret that the VET teacher is often a person with many years experience and a number of factors affect their engagement in new learning:

- Retirement age is near or has been passed by many;
- Teaching staff are only required to attain minimum teaching qualification at a Certificate IV level;
- Recruitment of new staff is at minimal levels;
- Class sizes have been increased (Electrical – from 14 to 28 students);
- Professional development is an ad hoc experience, and;
- Administrative time overheads for teachers are ever increasing.

Across SkillsTech Australia, control is required for the co-ordination and implementation of professional development for teachers. At present it is carried out as, and when, the high workload permits or when a new 'silver bullet' equipment or software package is introduced. Add to this resistance to change from many staff who perceive change as a cause for concern, then the piecemeal approach that currently exists will ensure that it will take many more years to just catch up in both pedagogical terms and to deliver quality student learning experiences. Thus, the fundamental status of teachers in VET is undermined and there is a dilution of quality in adherence to the quality principles of teaching and learning. Brennan (2003) indicated that:

> *A large number of teachers are not only struggling with the demands of rapidly changing technologies, but also with an often unfriendly teaching context that is pre-determined by institutional structures and management practices, course content, material presentation and the nature of the platform that their institution is tied to. It is a credit to teacher/trainer professionalism and dogged persistence that online delivery works as well as it does.* (p.5)

Has SkillsTech Australia created a functional e-classroom for operation in the coming years? From a business perspective, the development of the e-classroom requires attention to its effect on teaching satisfaction; ergonomics and environmental conditions; faculty training and staff partnerships; and the seamless fusion of technologies and integration of technology into the curriculum (Coppola & Thomas, 2000). With the

exception of content creation training offered to staff, with non-mandatory attendance, only a few teachers have managed to acquire knowledge in understanding of the e-classroom. ICT training has not been formally scheduled for the delivery staff to facilitate e-environments. Training for teachers or administrative staff needs to address e-classroom processes and understanding of the LMS.

In conclusion to this section, it is clear that the e-business co-ordination and control is needed and, flowing from this, that there is management of how e-technology and e-classroom processes are integrated to deliver new teaching and learning processes. The final section looks at the subject of e-assessment, suggested advantages of adopting the process, and the adoption world-wide.

> E-Assessment

What is e-assessment and why use it? E-assessment or computer-based testing (CBT) offers many benefits as detailed in Table 1.1. CBT and e-assessment in this study essentially refers to assessments delivered to students by computer and marked by computer.

Table 1.1: Benefits in e-assessment approaches

Benefit	Description
Speed	Instantaneous marking.
Insight	Students can see their performance on each question.
Flexibility	Banks of test questions within the LMS delivered at random with varying formats and no requirement for students to sit exams on the same day.
Efficiency	No requirement for distribution, storage, or retrieval of test papers.
Security	Handwritten paper-based tests can get mislaid.
Innovation	Multi-media content can be employed within the assessment.
Data quality management	Information is available on-line.
Ease of use	Minimal computer knowledge required by candidates.

The implementation of a sound e-business team leading to reliable ICT and relevant content to create an ergonomic e-classroom will take time and careful planning. There is much evidence to support the argument that innovation in e-assessment is becoming the norm for many organisations around the globe. Proposals within this paper are drawn from a report from the Joint Information Systems Committee (2007) on e-assessment activity in further and higher education in the United Kingdom and also from the *E-Assessment: Guide to Effective Practice* (Scottish Qualifications Authority, 2007). Additionally, PearsonVUE (2007) provides a comprehensive study of the e-assessment market in the United Kingdom – its size and dynamics with a particular focus on the role of professional bodies and their support for CBT. Many organisations, like PearsonVUE, have created communities of learning and present online resources for any educator who wishes to join the community of practice. PearsonVUE (2007) notes that CBT is delivering in excess of 10 million tests per annum worldwide. While

some professional bodies have been slow to move toward e-assessment because of the high set-up costs that can be incurred and a lack of knowledge of the return on investment, early adopters of CBT typically cite cost benefit to the provider as the number one advantage. E-assessment removes the logistical costs of producing and transporting paper-based assessments and feedback between assessment bodies, test centres, and test markers. Flexibility and convenience are seen as important in the value of e-assessment as well as overcoming geographical barriers. After initial set up costs many organisations are realising a good business outcome and the volume and subject diversity for e-assessment is growing. One area that can be implemented within the LMS very quickly and easily is e-assessment.

For SkillsTech Australia, any desire to remain with pen and paper and not move to e-assessment means that the teacher's existence is one of a tidal wave of marking made worse with re-sits and supplementary examinations; all carried out in a time honoured fashion. The reality is that little CBT has been employed and students still attend fixed schedule re-sit sessions with varying waiting time for results. The administrative reality of this exercise is a major concern for all teaching staff. Introducing CBT and unburdening the teaching staff thereby creates a quality environment that will be a new experience for the teacher and allow time for innovative thinking and development.

> Conclusions

A shared vision from management for the future of e-business within SkillsTech Australia will enhance delivery of effective and efficient learning and teaching programs. A synthesis of activities for the development for blended learning, controlled and co-ordinated within SkillsTech by an e-business office would be of benefit. This would enable the incorporation of flexible educational methodologies and online technologies within an integrated structure that includes a range of delivery methods. It would also support an integrated approach for teacher professional development and workforce management, as well as the implementation of computer-based assessment with real-time marking as an on-going development. Such a structure could provide the basis for liaison activities with national and international agencies. This environment would enrich the learning experience for both staff and students alike as well as increasing quality and accountability. Dublin (2007) noted that:

> *All industries, organisations that are successful with e-learning have in common an understanding that having the right content, the right design, and the right technology is just not enough. Certainly it's necessary for success, but it is not sufficient to ensure success. To ensure their success these organisations pay as much – or even more – attention to engaging learners, motivating managers, and energising their organizations.* (p.49)

A system-wide effort is needed to develop a culture that promotes innovation and to put in place systems and processes that actively encourage the development of ideas. Rosenberg (2007) noted that the underlying message is clear; a coherent and

coordinated strategy is required that permeates all aspects of e-learning planning, implementation, evaluation, and overall organisational initiatives. Kouzes and Posner (1995) propose that the way forward for e-business management are five exemplary practices: challenge the process; inspire a shared vision; enable others to act; model the way; and encourage the heart.

> *Strategy without tactics is the slowest route to victory.*
>
> *Tactics without strategy is the noise before defeat.* (Sun Tzu, Art of War)

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Chapter 2

A Pedagogical Journey for Printing Teachers: Incorporating New Modes of Delivery into Practice

Kerry Emerson

Leading Vocational Teacher, Southbank Institute of Technology

> Abstract

Printing teachers are drawn into a spiralling trajectory in which their systems, practices, and values are challenged in order to meet the changing expectations of their Institutes and the expanding performance expectations of their industry. This paper explores issues for printing teachers in the VET sector to adopt new ways of designing their resources and delivering their training package through blended modes of on-the-job training, online delivery, and face-to-face contact. It investigates ways in which printing teachers can change current practices in order to deliver their training to apprentices and trainees off-the-job; and to enterprise training on-the-job and online. It considers the nature of the professional development needed by teachers for successful online and blended delivery of the training package in order to have flexibility but to also customise their delivery methods to suit the enterprise environment.

Given the scope and urgency of the task to develop and maintain the workplace knowledge and skills that Queenslanders need, it is necessary to consider how the workplaces can contribute to this important imperative. An important consequence of the shift in policies and expectations about workplace learning has been greater pressure on industries to provide more opportunities for training in the workplace and to reclaim the workplace as an authentic site for learning (Billett, 2006). In effect, vocational learning is increasingly being de-institutionalised and VET practitioners are being increasingly encouraged to "get out into industry" (Harris, Moore, & Simons, 2005). The Queensland Government has also acknowledged the requirement for radical change in training through the 2008 *Queensland Skills Plan* (Department of Education, Training and the Arts [DETA], 2008). Current methods of training for the printing industry through block release with apprentices and trainees attending college for up to five weeks at a time will have to change to suit Institutes, enterprises, students, and teachers. As a result of feedback from students, employers and VET practitioners, it is argued that more focused training is needed, for example, by adopting practices such as day release options for firms, especially smaller businesses. Furthermore, more opportunities for workplace assessment that serve to reduce the demands of block release are required which means more flexible training delivery methods and greater use of workplace assessors (Callan, 2007).

This paper will not only assist printing teachers but also VET practitioners in other industries who find themselves in a similar position of change in practices. The term 'printing teacher' is used throughout this chapter as a general title and refers to practitioners and professionals involved in the printing and graphic arts industry. These practitioners engage in a variety of education and training activities which focus on the preparation and delivery of the *Printing and Graphic Arts Training Package* (ICP05). Their work is expanding beyond traditional teaching and training roles. This chapter will explore five key issues related to printing teachers as they move towards a different pedagogical journey. These issues are: on-the-job training and assessment; online training and assessment; printing teachers in the workplace; professional development, and; flexible options.

> On-the-job training and assessment

There has been an increased demand by the management of Southbank Institute of Technology and the Printing Industries Association Australia for the *Printing and Graphic Arts Training Package* (ICP05) to be delivered on-the-job. Teachers in the Queensland School of Printing and Graphic Art (QSPGA) need to consider a number of broad issues so that the quality of on-the-job training does not compromise existing standards. On-the-job training can be defined as an activity undertaken in the workplace designed to improve the student's skills and knowledge.

While QSPGA teachers agree that on-the-job training is important in how students acquire relevant knowledge and skills at work, it is important to make the distinction between training and learning. This is critical to the effective design and delivery of the training package, ICP05. Training is a teacher-led, content-based intervention which leads to desired changes in the student's behaviour, while learning involves a more self-directed, knowledge acquisition process that enhances the student's ongoing capacity for learning and problem-solving. For QSPGA teachers to deliver on-the-job training, new resources need to be developed so that the student can not only be trained on-the-job but is also be able to learn on-the-job. One of the concerns of QSPGA teachers is that on-the-job training does not allow for students to exchange views and share experiences with other students through which they can gain support and realise that some problems are shared. To overcome this, a virtual classroom could be established through the Learning Management System whereby students can communicate and collaborate among themselves and with their teachers.

Wood (2004) argued that students' experiences of learning on-the-job offers little opportunity to communicate with other trainees while, at the same time, they are treated as a novice in the workplace which can be highly stressful and disheartening. Students need opportunities to link theory and practice, to discuss their tasks and learning outcomes, and to gain feedback that will aid in the development of their problem-solving skills. Computer-supported collaborative learning can be accessed at the workplace, from home, or from a designated facility in a registered training organisation. This approach can be used while

students are on-the-job or during module training. A collaborative learning approach could transform individual traineeships into team learning environments that would facilitate mutual support and build greater knowledge for all students.

Printing teachers are concerned about the competing demands of work and training which must be managed by students. Students may be less likely to complete their training under such competing demands. To counter this concern of competing work and study loads, time should be allocated to work and training tasks. This could be addressed through a prepared schedule to accommodate the needs of the student, the enterprise, and the teacher so that the student has time to complete their training without fear of compromising their work commitments. However, it is critical that this schedule is monitored and enforced by all parties involved. It must be structured with identifiable training, instruction, and mentoring components to reinforce the significance of the underpinning knowledge as well as the practical skills required.

Ridoutt, Dutneall, Hummel, and Selby-Smith (2002) proposed that it is important to acknowledge that many enterprises undertake a considerable amount of 'unrecognised' training. Support to enterprises may be very valuable to facilitate a shift from an emphasis on volume (extolling the virtues of more training) to an emphasis on the nature (effectiveness and efficiency) of training activities. Callan (2008a) noted that on-the-job training that attempts to use more flexible approaches and strategies to ensure apprentices are given every opportunity to achieve challenging targets in their training plan will accelerate their learning. However, for this to be successful, there needs to be more intensive assessment practices by printing teachers to ensure that apprentices are given greater recognition for their workplace competence. Any enterprise should be prepared to sign off an apprentice once their assessment of workplace competence has been completed.

Comprehensive on-the-job training for the printing industry in Queensland is a possibility if areas requiring improvement are first considered. Wood (2004) noted that improvements that could be addressed are:

- Level of networking among students, especially from outside the firm;
- Quality of trainees' time management skills;
- Skills to balance work and study loads;
- Level of theory training;
- Breadth of trainees' skill base and work experience;
- Employers' training capacity, and;
- Ways in which trainees are valued in the workplace.

Although dated, Clark (1991) suggested that if on- and off-the-job training is coordinated and complementary, then the trainee will be provided with powerful learning experiences. However in order to achieve this, there needs to be a greater mutual recognition by the in-house and external trainers of their counterparts' contribution.

> Online training and assessment

Rouse (1993) noted that change and innovation can not only bring to fruition new products, services and new organisational functions and roles but also encourage individuals to modify their previous patterns of behaviour, accept change, and endorse new ideas. Callan (2008b) also emphasised the challenges facing trainers with the availability of new communication technologies. Printing teachers today need to recognise the changing environments in which students learn. The possibility of resistance to change by printing teachers is ever present. Reasons for this can include a lack of computer proficiency, mistrust of institutional motives, lack of expertise in using online learning management systems, time constraints, and doubts about the efficiency of online courses to have a positive impact on students' learning.

For successful delivery of training online, printing teachers require professional development opportunities to re-design their instructional approaches and assessment tasks (see Figure 2.1) as well as the support of other VET practitioners already utilising online delivery. If printing teachers are to undertake new ways of working, it would be beneficial if they started in a staged way by redesigning small components of any competency for online delivery. A blended mode (part online, part face-to-face) would allow the printing teacher to ease into the new culture of an online presence.

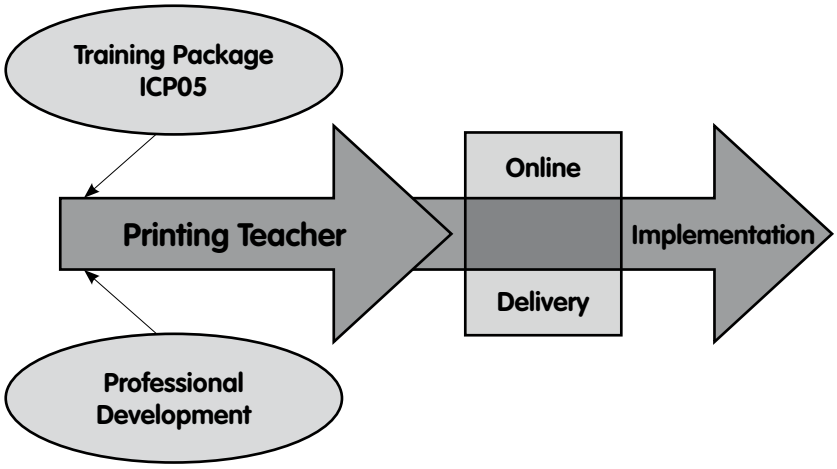

Figure 2.1: Printing teacher requirements for implementation of online delivery

Chappell and Johnston (2003) commented that the new VET practitioner "… will be required to work across organisational boundaries and be able to work productively in the different organisational cultures that characterise the newly diversified VET sector" (p.10). Online delivery for printing teachers need not be a threat. It can assist and, in many circumstances, improve the quality of training (Lawlor, 2000). Callan (2006) noted that in VET Queensland the training of selected key teachers who are prepared and trained to use blended delivery and then introduce their approaches to others will

support changes in practices. Dickie (2008) indicated that "… the adoption of a new idea is the result of human interaction through interpersonal networks. … The process is similar to that of an unchecked infectious epidemic" (p.3). Similarly, Mitchell (2003) stated that many facilitators in VET "… use a wide repertoire of community-building strategies to build relationships and to help members learn" (p.19).

An advantage of online delivery is that it is student-centred and supports self-directed learning. The onus is on the student to take charge of their own learning. This allows the student to develop future-orientated capabilities such as the employability skills that are built into ICP05. Online delivery can also provide strong and increased evidence of students' engagement and skills in the form of an e-portfolio in which opportunities are available for students to personalise and promote their employability skills.

McDonald, Dickie, Fyffe, and Booth (2007) noted that a number of innovators are confronted with the attitude that "if you're not in the classroom, you're not teaching" (p.12); arising from this assumption is the idea that valid teaching must involve substantial amounts of contact time in a classroom setting. Online learning is not as teacher-focused because it is about the learner. Student-centred learning can reflect the real life context of the workplace. Through active involvement in online assessment, students can develop and build their employability and evaluation skills; for problem solving, self management, teamwork, and communication.

Online delivery can cover both asynchronous and synchronous forms of interaction through the design of the assessment tools and the provision of web-based course materials as well as through emails, newsgroups, Wikis, and chat groups. Online delivery has the potential to:

- Increase access for all of the intended audience;
- Maximise flexibility for learning;
- Open opportunities for self-directed learning;
- Provide immediate communication links with a printing teacher and peers, and;
- Record an individual's employability skills portfolio.

> Printing teachers in the workplace

Printing teachers are no strangers to change as they are required to stay up-to-date with technology, legislation and industry changes; as well as changes to the curriculum, and training packages. At the same time, they need to keep their pedagogical skills current. However, the actual role of printing teachers in this new working environment will mean different expectations and emphases that are still evolving. VET practitioners are being asked to work in different ways and to undertake new roles and responsibilities. These are additional to the traditional teaching role and are also substantially different in terms of focus, purpose, and practice. Callan (2005) observed that the successes of the past

provide a strong platform for the future and that there is a need to enhance the capability of VET to meet new challenges. Over the past few years, the training for printing and graphic arts has seen a shift from being a supply system to one that is demand-driven. This shift has resulted in a greater focus on the workplace as the major place of learning (Australian National Training Authority [ANTA], 2002). Printing teachers could possibly be spending more time in enterprise workplaces rather than in their own workplace. They will be the nexus between the learning environment and the working environment. Relationships of trust and respect need to be built while providing a personalised service to individual enterprises.

The TAFE practitioner needs to learn about enterprise environments and cultures and that building links takes time and energy, on time lines that are often not determined by the teachers themselves. The TAFE practitioner needs to be flexible and patient, able to change methods and customise materials, and listen to the needs expressed by enterprises. For their part, enterprise staff also need to learn that accredited training is an investment, gaining a certificate of learning is worthwhile, and that patience with TAFE procedures is also important. Strickland et al. (2001) argued that in many instances the goals, methods, ideals, and strategies of business enterprises are very different from those of other learning institutions. The former is concerned with productivity and survival, the latter with learning and professional growth.

The implications for printing teachers in the workplace include the need to be responsive to the practicalities of enterprises in regard to training and the customising of resources. They will also be required to respond to the expectations of the enterprises personnel as well as the workflow. They will have to fit in with regular work patterns and, at the same time, they will also have to match student competencies with enterprise work patterns. Customising the training for the enterprise, in terms of timing and the selection of competencies, may mean a narrower focus but this will be more relevant to the learner and also assists in keeping the learner motivated and engaged. Printing teachers will need to adapt to the workplace environment as quickly as possible for successful delivery of training in the on-the-job. When printing teachers change their practices to suit the environment of enterprises by reducing lecture and classroom activities to incorporate more needs-based interactive training, they will be one step closer to bringing about the culture change required for acceptance in the workplace.

> Professional development of printing teachers

This key issue will address the professional development needs of the printing teacher as they move from an existing comfortable culture to a culture of challenge and future direction. Until recently, printing teachers in Queensland have been delivering their training in the same manner as their teachers before them. They quite often have set beliefs and ideas regarding the way things should be done. However, changing working conditions have impacted on the level of professional preparation opportunities and access to ongoing professional development for VET teachers (Harris, Simons,

& Clayton, 2005). The critical factor for printing teachers is the level of professional development required as they shift from their traditional philosophy based on content knowledge to the role of teacher as facilitator of learning. Because printing teachers will be required to incorporate the appropriate use of information and communication technology (ICT) into their courses, they need support, training, time, and resources to successfully implement alternative modes of delivery. ICT in learning allows for flexibility in delivery. Therefore, teachers need to know not just the subject matter that they teach but also the manner, or mode, in which the subject matter can be most effectively delivered.

With the introduction of alternative delivery modes in TAFE Institutes becoming more common and the demand from industry to reduce the time spent by apprentices and trainees off-the-job, printing teachers will need to successfully mesh the educational and training demands of TAFE Institutes, industry, and the rapidly changing economic environment. The challenge will be to identify teachers who are willing to change their current teaching practices. Making the first steps will hopefully induce others to follow them. The need for printing teachers to up-skill in their area of work as well as to make pedagogical changes is important because the applications of technology and external factors have brought shifts in teaching practices in how and where teachers deliver their programs (Mishra & Koehler 2006). Given the current VET environment, Mitchell, Clayton, Hedberg, and Paine (2003) noted that the pace is quickening and new pressures are now coming increasingly to the fore across, and within, many more areas of VET delivery. Put simply, the quality and frequency of innovative activity in teaching and learning must respond and adjust to the external environment and policy directions. Broadbent (2000) agrees that the process of educational change is complex and often fraught with difficulty, especially for those caught up on a daily basis with changes to their workplace environments.

The role of printing teachers will continue to evolve and several recent reports have identified key factors impacting on the future work of VET practitioners. These factors are: new technology; an increasingly competitive training environment; more flexible delivery; continuing implementation of Training Packages; changes to funding, and; the changing roles and work of practitioners and trainers (Callan, 2006). As teachers develop their skills, there needs to be a stronger focus in their teaching on learning and assessment strategies for blended delivery, development of teaching programs that are flexible and can be integrated with work on-the-job practices, and an understanding of the technology advancements related to industry. However, for change to be successful, it is important that printing teachers have some control over the working environments in which they participate. Through participation and professional development, a heightened awareness of the need for change should encourage higher levels of engagement and satisfaction rather than printing teachers feeling insecure, anxious and burdened with work.

Individual commitment to the change process is essential and this implies the acceptance of the goals and values of change as well as a willingness to participate in the change process. Likewise, for this change to succeed, it is imperative that the

required professional development keeps pace with technological developments. There is a need to identify clear professional development pathways for printing teachers and to link professional development to the larger strategic vision of TAFE. Some of the implications identified for professional development for the introduction of online delivery for printing teachers include:

- Continuous up-skilling to meet future industry and institute needs, including online delivery and related teaching strategies;
- Re-skilling of printing teachers in areas of assessment, and;
- Recognising the skills of the existing workforce and utilising those to assist other printing teachers.

As the ongoing nature of educational and industrial change requires the continual adaptation of new information, the requirements of the printing teacher need to consistently undergo change. Printing teachers need to be proactive and continuously evaluate their individual goals, professional development, and strategies for education if they are to remain up-to-date. This in turn will assist their institute to remain competitive. As the concept of teaching and the work of printing teachers are rapidly changing, printing teachers will also need to be flexible and open-minded in their thinking if they are to continue to deliver training in a new, complex, and interactive way.

Harris, Simons, and Clayton (2005) proposed that VET work roles now embrace a wider range of contexts, where practitioners are required to facilitate learning in increasingly different ways for an increasingly diverse population. Therefore, printing teachers need to engage in constant reflection, evaluation, and experimentation as integral elements of their continually changing pedagogical role.

> Flexible options for printing teachers

The challenge for printing teachers will be to keep abreast of many internal and external factors that affect the way in which they perform their daily jobs. The impact of these challenges on printing teachers coincides with a renewed interest in the capacity and capability of institutes to deliver quality learning products and services. Innovative, responsive and high-quality approaches to teaching, learning, and assessment are crucial to meeting future challenges (Goldman & Skippington, 2007).

Callan (2006) identified role specific capabilities required by Queensland VET teaching staff as:

- Expertise in teaching and learning;
- Flexibility and assessment;
- Learner support;
- Industry currency, and;
- Budgeting and planning.

As QSPGA teachers already posses many of the skills and knowledge suggested by Callan (2006), the key issue will be to address the flexibility and assessment requirements of blended delivery as a combination of teaching methodologies for face-to-face learning, online learning, on-the-job training, self-paced learning, and the use of digital resources. Blended learning environments allow students to take part in both synchronous and asynchronous learning opportunities and to overcome barriers of communication, time and distance. Blended learning and flexible delivery are ways in which printing teachers may regain some balance in the nature of training and may also provide opportunities to engage more strongly with students and, in turn, enhance the delivery of ICP05 to encourage greater learner autonomy and independence.

When developing resources for blended learning, the most important and time consuming aspect is the design phase. It needs to be structured to support the students' independent learning style and be delivered in the most efficient manner with the resources available. Moran (2004) identified a four step process that can assist in keeping the focus on learning while at the same time supporting the selection of the most appropriate delivery strategy. A modified version of this is demonstrated in the Tables presented below as examples on how to identify the best training delivery options. Printing teachers can use such steps to identify the best delivery mode for a particular aspect of training. A series of matrices are presented which look at how an overall training strategy can be developed. It is not concerned with lesson plans or the organisation and structure of content because these can be developed once the overall strategy has been identified.

First, a learning methodology matrix should be developed for each block of training. This is shown by breaking-down Block 1 of Certificate III in Printing and Graphic Arts (ICP30605) into segments that can be identified as procedures, underpinning knowledge and application/techniques. In Table 2.1, the learning required for the underpinning knowledge is knowledge-based rather than skills-based. Therefore, the most appropriate learning methodology option for this block would be a combination of demonstrations, listening/reading, discussions and work book activities. At this stage the focus remains on how best to learn the unit rather than how it could be delivered.

Table 2.1: Learning methodology matrix for ICP30605 Block 1

Block 1	Learning characteristics	Methodology				
		Demonstration	Listen/read	Discussion	Workbook	Simulation
Procedure	Knowledge-based – review, modify and update current knowledge		x	x	x	
Underpinning knowledge	Knowledge-based – OHS, problem solving	x	x	x	x	
Application / techniques	Skills-based	x			x	x

Next, the selected learning methodologies are transferred to the training delivery matrix (Table 2.2). All possible delivery methods are identified regardless of any learning resources. For example, workbooks were identified for the application/technique and so they could be developed as a hard copy resource, an online resource, or on CD/DVD as Portable Document Files.

Table 2.2: Training delivery matrix for ICP30605 Block 1

Procedure	Delivery Options				
Learning methodology	Online	Face-to-face	Print	Video/audio	CD/DVD
Demo	x	x		x	x
Listen/read	x	x	x		x
Discussion	x	x			
Workbook	x		x		x
Simulation	x	x			x

Having identified the learning methodologies and how they could be delivered, organisational boundaries and possible limitations are considered so the delivery options will correspond with the training needs of the student as well as the availability of the Institute's resources (Table 2.3). External factors such as the student's learning ability, the work environment and the resources available for successful delivery and assessment must also be taken into account.

Table 2.3: Organisational boundaries for ICP30605 Block 1

Type of Boundary		Description
Learning	Existing	Fast track student if skills and knowledge exist
	New	Identify skill & knowledge gap
	Updated	Modify current procedural knowledge
	How extensive?	Limited to AQTF framework
	Online	Limited to development of resources
	On-the-job	Limited to resources available
Students	How many?	Numbers limited to off-the-job training
	How often?	Current & ongoing training
	Where and when?	Metropolitan and regional 1 block each year
Timetabling	Blocks of training	Issues for regional attending
	How many hours?	200hrs nominal
	Organisational timeframes	1 block of each group per year
Off-the-job	Staff resources	Teacher limited to 21–25 hours / week contact
	Regional students	Committed to block release

Finally, after going through each process a training strategy using blended methods of delivery can be recommended (Table 2.4). For example, the procedures and the underpinning knowledge for block 1 can be delivered entirely online or they can be supplied on CD ROM, while the application/technique can be delivered both on- and off-the-job.

Table 2.4: Recommended training strategy for ICP30605 Block 1

Block 1	Delivery Strategy
Procedure	Online; CD ROM
Underpinning knowledge	Online; CD ROM
Application / techniques	Work-based (hands on); face-to-face; on–or off-the-job

This four step process assists in keeping the focus on the learning while at the same time supporting the selection of the most appropriate training delivery strategy for the students, the printing teachers, the enterprise, and the Institute. It is a tool that printing teachers can use to identify training delivery options and improve the degree of flexibility in the way they deliver their training as they are faced with significant challenges in reshaping their futures.

> Conclusions

This paper has argued that there is a demand for printing teachers in Queensland to modify their current delivery methods to suit the new environment in which they have found themselves. There are issues related to on-the-job training, and printing teachers agree that it is an important way in which students acquire knowledge and skills. However, new resources will be required so the students' knowledge and skills can be improved and so they can learn on-the-job as well as be trained on-the-job. Other concerns, such as improving the level of networking among students and the balance between work and study loads, are issues that also need to be addressed if training is delivered on-the-job. Printing teachers need professional development to redesign and develop proper instructional design and assessment tasks and also the support of other VET practitioners already utilising online delivery. Online delivery has the potential to support flexible delivery for printing teachers while, at the same time, opening up opportunities for self-directed learning of students. Printing teachers also require professional development for: a stronger focus on teaching, learning, and assessment strategies for blended delivery; development of programs that are flexible and can be integrated with work on-the-job; and for technological advancement relating to the industry.

As printing teachers could be spending more time in the workplace they will have to undertake new roles and become the nexus between the learning environment and the working environment. They will need to customise their delivery to suit the enterprise and change their methodologies to suit the environment.

Finally, this paper discussed the flexible modes required by printing teachers for the successful implementation of blended delivery if they are to serve the needs of the printing industry. It has recommended a methodology printing teachers can use to identify the best training delivery option to meet a particular training need and to further identify which will be the best delivery mode for a particular training program. However, careful management by printing teachers will be required to uphold the quality of their educational outcomes, and training of any description needs to be looked upon as an investment rather than a cost.

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Chapter 3

Conversation or Inquisition? Interviewing as a Method of RPL Assessment in the VET Sector

Erik Dodwell

Educator / Program Coordinator, Sunshine Coast TAFE

> Abstract

Recognition of prior learning (RPL) is a common way for existing workers to gain qualifications. Interviewing as an evidence collection method is strongly encouraged and the interview process is intended to be supportive, user friendly and client-focused. However there are no frameworks, either at state or national level, to ensure a consistent approach to interviewing. Australia appears to be leading the way internationally with their understanding of the benefit of user-friendly RPL interviews; however the challenge is to develop a model that may be applied consistently across all industry skill areas at a national level. Conversational interviews can be a suitable interview mechanism. The advantages and disadvantages of this method are explored. A model for RPL professional conversations that could be implemented at a national level is proposed that could contribute to more reliable and consistent RPL outcomes.

There is a strong move within the Vocational Education and Training (VET) sector to increase the number of skills recognition assessments provided to workers who may be able to demonstrate current competence in their field of work. This strategy, known as Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL)[1], is in line with the goals of government to address the skills shortages and educational levels of the Australian workforce (Australian Qualifications Framework Advisory Board, 2004; Department of Education and Training, 2008). RPL has traditionally been a complex, costly, and time consuming process which has acted as a deterrent to many employees to apply for recognition of current work competencies – "the bastard child of the Vocational Education and Training System" (Spencer, in McKenna & Mitchell, 2006, p. 21–22). In recognition of these difficulties, there has been a concerted effort to redefine RPL as a supportive, user-friendly and client-focused process (Bateman & Knight, 2003). A key innovation has been the introduction of interviews as a part of the process to reduce the amount of documentary evidence that needs to be supplied as well as to create a more client-focused image for RPL. As noted by Bateman and Knight (2003), the interviewing techniques should be supportive, flexible, culturally appropriate, and applied

[1] A glossary of key terms used is presented at the end of this chapter.

consistently across all training organisations. With the advent of interviewing in the RPL process, it is timely to consider the best way for interviews to be conducted in order to elicit quality information from an applicant.

The Australian Qualifications Framework Advisory Board (2004) encourages national consistency and widely accessible models of best practice in RPL assessment, thus creating the rationale for the development of a national best practice interviewing framework. However, while the general principles of an RPL conversation were articulated by the Department of Education, Training and the Arts (2007), no model for RPL interviews appears to exist at either a national or state level. This lack of direction creates a situation where a range of different interview methods have evolved based on the assessor's understanding of interviews and evidence collection, as well as their knowledge of the training package they are assessing. At one end of the spectrum, RPL assessors may conduct the interview as a standardised job interview in which pre-determined questions are asked and candidates are rated on their responses (McDaniel, Whetzel, Schmidt, & Maurer, 1994). At the other end of the spectrum, there may be a casual conversation that is unplanned and unstructured without identification or attention to the specific skill objectives required to be assessed.

The need for a consistent interview process at the practitioner level is summed up by the comments of a TAFE Queensland teacher:

> *The interaction as perceived by the [RPL] interviewee is vital for their psyche. Initial contact for the assessor may well be with a 'new' Australian who has limited English [who is] seeking not only a good RPL outcome but also reassurance that the system of the newly adopted nation is listening. From my personal knowledge the assessors … become very tired and lose objectivity as the process for them has become a huge and loosely defined process.* (Personal communication, 2008)

A model of interviewing used in research is the 'conversational interview' (Kvale, 1996; Lee, 1998; Sewell, 1999). In this process, an RPL assessor can strategically plan and lead a conversation that allows the worker to present examples of their work that meet the criteria set out in the training package. This paper explores conversational interviewing as a process and proposes that it could provide a nationally consistent interview model which could be considered by RPL assessors and policy makers.

> Conversational interviewing

Within qualitative research there is continued reflection and professional discussion about methods for gathering and analysing qualitative data. A conversational interview is a qualitative research method which is designed to gather information from interviewees in a relaxed and non-threatening manner (Kvale, 1996; Lee, 1998; Sewell, 1999).

Conversational interviews are distinct from a more typical and formal interview style which may feel to the interviewee more like an inquisition rather than an opportunity to showcase one's abilities. In contrast to a standardised interview style, Kvale (1996) described qualitative research interviews as efforts to understand the world from an individual's point of view, to explore the meaning of peoples' experiences, and investigate their lived world prior to interpretation and explanation. The hallmark of the conversational interview is that it is relaxed and open-ended. Lee (1998) also noted its informality in that it may appear to be simply two individuals casually chatting about whatever comes to mind when, in reality, it is really much more than that. Sewell (1999) emphasised that the careful planning underlying the apparently casual exchange of the conversational interview and that professional interviews involve more structure and direction of questioning by the interviewer. The value of a conversational interview is that it is a collaborative approach to RPL in which the candidate is guided through the interview in a valuing and empowering way.

Advantages of conversational interviewing

According to Sewell (1999), the benefits of a conversational interview include:

- Allowing participants to describe what is meaningful or important in their own words, rather than being restricted to predetermined response categories so that participants feel more relaxed and more candid in their responses;
- Allowing the assessor to probe for more details as required and to ensure that participants are interpreting questions in the manner in which they were intended, and;
- Providing interviewers with the flexibility to use their knowledge, expertise, and interpersonal skills to explore interesting or unexpected ideas or themes raised by participants.

RPL applicants come from a variety of educational, cultural and social backgrounds, and it is important to acknowledge that the last contact with formal education by many workers may have been unpleasant, or even traumatic, high school experiences. For adult education, in the 21st century, it is important to create a positive and empowering learning environment. Conversational interviews reduce the level of intimidation and power imbalance, thereby building a positive experience of education and encouraging further academic studies. This fits within the 2008 *Queensland Skills Plan* objective to "build the professional skills of our workforce to meet increasingly sophisticated workplace skill requirements" (Department of Education, Training and the Arts [DETA], 2008, p. 2).

The key advantage of the conversational interview model is that a degree of adjustment can be made in order to ensure that the interview is culturally appropriate. Consider the situation in which a young, non-Indigenous female assessor is given the task to assess an older Indigenous male in an RPL interview. If the assessor conducts a formal interview the participant is likely to be wary and uncomfortable and may share learning experiences only in direct response to the questions while striving to give the

seemingly expected answers. Alternatively, the assessor could frame the interview as a conversation where topics are approached in a way that encourages the participant to relate experiences in a culturally relevant narative ('storytelling') style. The participant is likely to leave the interview feeling more empowered, energised, and valued than in the first scenario.

In *Recognition of Prior Learning: An Assessment Resource for VET Practitioners* (Department of Education and Training, 2008) an example of a conversational style of interview is provided by Christine Cooper from Challenger TAFE in Western Australia:

> *A rigid question bank is very limiting in eliciting comprehensive responses, so it may be better to use a list of topics that are targeted at aspects of the candidate's work. … Experience has shown that this type of topic based interview has allowed the candidate to tell their story with personal experiences, rather than use 'text book' style answers. The conversational nature of this style helps the client relax and encourages them to illustrate their story with relevant items from their portfolio of evidence – some of which they may not have thought to provide otherwise.* (p.11)

The conversational interview model for RPL can provide a framework that supports students and allows key stakeholders to feel confident that the assessment meets the assessment principles of fairness, flexibility, validity, and reliability that are indentified by the Australian Quality Training Framework (2007).

Disadvantages of conversational interviewing

It is important to acknowledge that the conversational interview model can have certain drawbacks. Disadvantages of such interviewing are discussed by Sewell (1999):

- The interview may be seen as intrusive if participants say more than they intended to say and later regret having done so;
- The interview may be more reactive to personalities, moods, and interpersonal dynamics between the interviewer and the interviewee than more structured methods;
- Training interviewers and conducting conversational interviews can be expensive and time-consuming because it requires considerable skill and experience;
- Analysing and interpreting conversational interviews is much more time-consuming than analysing and interpreting standardised interviews, and;
- Conversational interviews are more subjective than standardised interviews because the evaluator decides which quotes or specific examples to report (and is able to coach the interviewee toward the desired answer).

Conread and Schober (1999) explored data quality issues and the comparative benefits of standardised versus conversational interviewing. They concluded that standardised interviewing was widely practised because it promises to reduce interviewer-related

error in interpretation and is less costly. However, standardised interviews cannot ensure uniform understanding of questions by participants and thus may reduce data comparability. Interviewers therefore have the option of keeping interviews short with the risk of some misunderstanding in the communication or investing more time in the interview to ensure that questions are understood as intended.

The disadvantages of conversational interviews are not significant enough to reject the model. Conversational interviews do not compromise the principles of the Australian Quality Training Framework (2007) of fairness, flexibility, reliability, and validity. Possible strategies to address any deficiencies in using conversational interviews may include the provision of specialised training for RPL assessors, moderation of interview processes and assessor judgments, and designing the interview to ensure that the specific outcomes expected as a result of the conversation are identified in advance.

> A proposed model for RPL interviews

Kvale (1996) described conversational interviewing as an important qualitative research tool. Kvale's key concepts have been used as the basis for this proposed RPL model, although some modifications are made to the terms and the phases proposed in his model. Additional detail has also been included to suit the needs and context of RPL; in particular, Kvale's seven phases have been condensed into five stages for framing RPL professional conversations.

The RPL professional conversation fits within the broader context of RPL assessment. It is one tool from a range of possibilities for collecting evidence to assess learning competencies. It is important to note that the competence decision does not rest on one piece of evidence; rather, competence is determined through the triangulation of evidence. This is a practice whereby multiple forms of evidence are used to check validity and reliability. This will provide a clearer portrait of the RPL applicant and the accuracy of decisions can be cross-checked (Day, 2002). Other forms of evidence relevant to RPL may include, but are not limited to, direct observation, third party reports, and portfolios.

In Figure 3.1, An holistic view of the proposed RPL model is presented. It is important to see professional conversations as one activity within the broader process of RPL. The model shows the place that a professional conversation holds within the broader framework of the RPL National Principles (Australian Qualifications Framework Advisory Board, 2004). According to Lee (1998), there is an inherent power imbalance in any interview situation. The success of a professional conversation may depend on how well this power imbalance is handled. The Australian Qualifications Framework Advisory Board (2004) requires that assessment methods should be able to accommodate different literacy levels and cultural background as well as the different educational backgrounds and experiences of students.

The RPL assessor should give important consideration to each interview to gauge the likely level of power imbalance and to develop power-sharing strategies. Possible strategies might include selection of venue, choice of attire, level of formality of the interview, and the use of empowering terminology. In particular, the terms 'interview', 'interviewee' and 'interviewer' could be replaced with terms such as 'professional conversation', 'participant' and 'assessor', respectively. Throughout the description of this model, this latter terminology is preferred and used.

> Stages of a professional conversation

Professional conversations may be used as an exploratory step before collecting standardised information or after results of more standardised measures are analysed in order to gain further insight (Lee 1998; Sewell, 1999). As shown in Figure 3.1, RPL conversations should fulfil both of these functions – namely, that the participant and assessor would meet for an initial conversation, at which time any relevant and accessible documentary evidence is identified. The documentary evidence should then be provided and analysed, followed by a second professional conversation. This second conversation should be planned and conducted according to the stages outlined in the model. Throughout each stage the rules of evidence and principles of assessment should be closely considered.

Stage 1: Scoping

The aim of the scoping stage is to identify the purpose and nature of the conversation before the interview starts. As a professional conversation may not be required for all criteria in each unit of competency, decisions are made at this stage regarding which themes are best suited to a professional conversation and how they relate back to the training package. Lee (1998) stressed the importance of this stage. Planning of the themes of the professional conversation is important for the assessor and the participant in order for the both to prepare. Particularly, the participant can benefit from making brief notes about the points he/she wishes to raise and can collect any supporting evidence beforehand, making for a more efficient and smoothly flowing conversation.

Tools applicable at this stage include a training plan and a plan for evidence collection, showing what evidence is available to address each unit of competency. This plan should be prepared in consultation with the participant at the initial meeting.

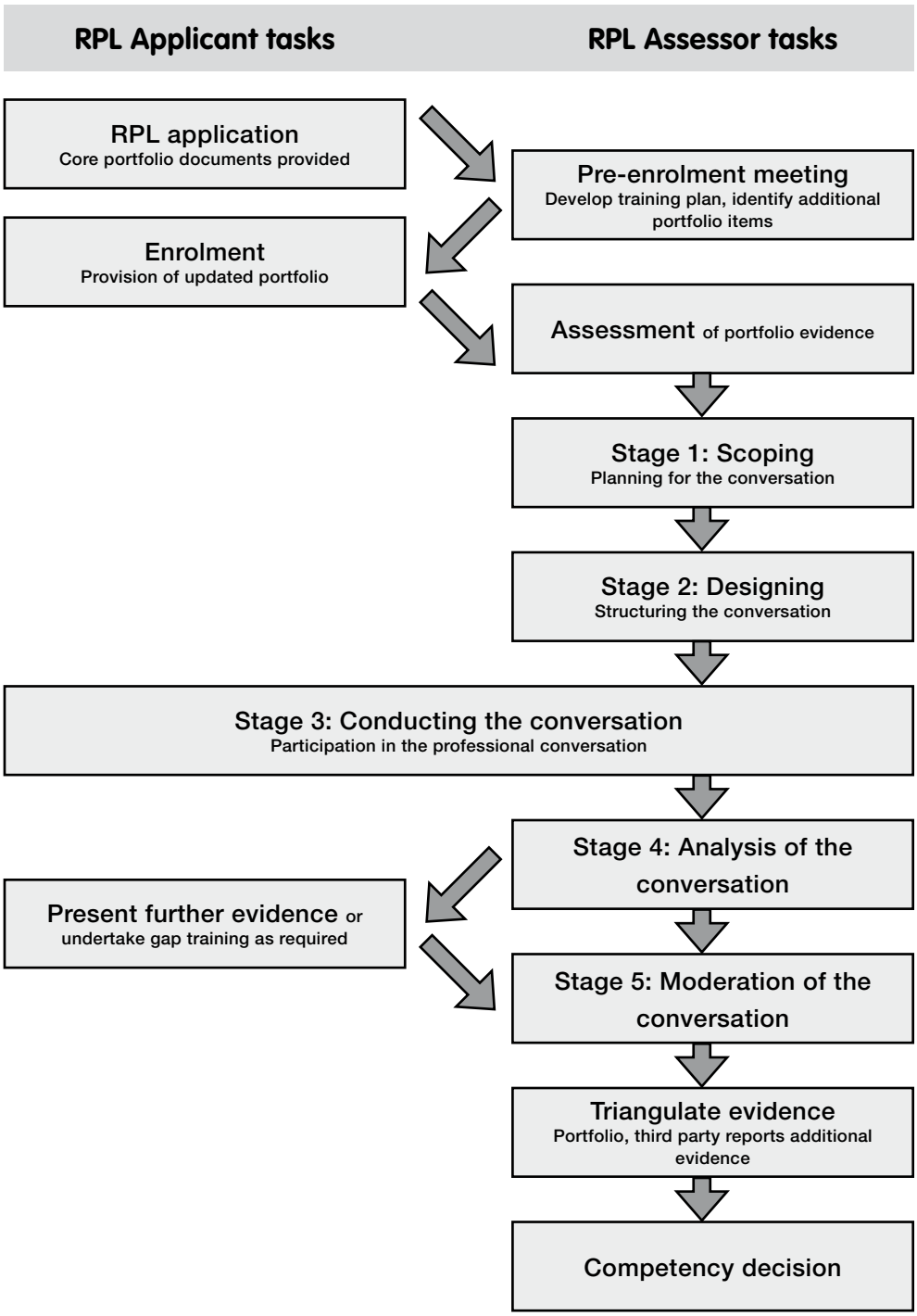

Figure 3.1: An holistic view of the RPL process

Stage 2: Designing

The aim of the design stage is for the assessor to consider how the conversation topics (as identified in the scoping stage) will be structured in order to meet the requirements of the relevant units of competency. Clustering conversations by themes is recommended because it is reflective of the work environment and reduces conversation duplication because the same topics often appear in multiple units of competency. For example, knowledge of workplace legislation, policies, and procedures often appears in many units within a qualification. The RPL conversation may focus on this theme once instead of revisiting it for each unit of competency. A further consideration in the design stage is the method of recording the information elicited in the professional conversation. Common options include electronic recording or manual note-taking.

Tools related to this stage include a copy of the national competency descriptors and a professional conversation guide in which key themes are identified and loosely sequenced. At a minimum, the conversation guide should identify broad themes relating to technical knowledge and skills, administrative requirements of the role, and team participation. A checklist of requisite knowledge, skills, and attitudes is a key document in this model because it informs the design of the professional conversation and becomes a Stage 4 tool for summarising information collected and analysing its relation to the elements of competency. In accordance with Element 1.5 of the Essential Standards for Registration (Australian Qualifications Training Framework, 2007), moderation of all systems, processes, tools, and practices should occur.

Checkpoint

After scoping (Stage 1) and designing the professional conversation (Stage 2), the assessor should have a good understanding of the subject matter, the purpose of the interview, and which techniques will be used. If a professional conversation will not achieve the desired outcomes, an alternative or supplementary data collection method should be considered.

Stage 3: Conducting the conversation

The aim of this stage is to conduct the professional conversation, based on the outlines and guides developed in previous stages. The participant should feel confident to talk freely, with the assessor steering and defining the themes. Drawing on the ideas of Kvale (1996), there are a number of practical strategies to maximise the conversation's effectiveness. The assessor can start with a briefing to the participant and end with a debriefing in which the participant can pose further questions. During the professional conversation, the assessor can follow an interview guide that indicates the topics and their sequence, with or without detailed questions. The more spontaneous the structure of the conversation, the more spontaneous and lively the answers will be. The input from a more structured conversation will be easier to process. If the assessor wants to categorise the answers it is best to continually clarify these categories during the

professional conversation. If the assessor wants to obtain a narrative it is better to let the participant to talk freely and then ask follow-up questions. It is important to keep the flow of the conversation going, to keep the questions brief and simple, and to listen actively.

Patton (1990, cited in Sewell, 1999) highlighted the ethical issues that are present in interviews (or professional conversations), as with any qualitative research activity. First, participants need to be made aware of the risks associated with participating in the professional conversation and give their informed consent, with special conditions applying for those under 18 years of age. Secondly, confidentiality cannot always be offered, such as in document storage and when certain disclosures are made. Thirdly, the assessor can find the conversation very intense and even distressing. Participants may experience psychological stress from disclosing more than intended or being reminded of painful experiences. Some debriefing after the interview may be necessary. Participants should always know who to go to if they need advice or consultation.

Stage 4: Analysis of the conversation

The key outcome from this stage (which combines Kvale's (1996) Phases 4 and 5) is that the checklist of requisite knowledge, skills and attitudes prepared in Stage 2 is completed, summarising information collected and analysing its relation to the elements of competency. Assessors may prefer to transcribe handwritten or electronically recorded conversations into a word-processed format before completing the checklist, or fill it in directly from the hand-written notes or electronic recording. It is essential to also revisit the AQTF (2007) rules of evidence and principles of assessment in order to confirm that the professional conversation has met quality standards.

Stage 5: Moderation of the conversation

Moderation of assessor judgments occurs at this stage. This requires checking that the judgment made by one assessor is consistent with the judgments likely to be made by any other assessors (Australian Qualifications Training Framework, 2007). Moderation of all RPL decisions, including assessor judgment for professional conversations, requires the same process of self-auditing and validation as any other assessment procedures.

After the professional conversation

As discussed earlier, results of the professional conversation contribute to the overall decision regarding whether the RPL applicant has demonstrated competence in the relevant units. Figure 3.1 provided an overview of the entire RPL process, identifying stages that come after the professional conversation.

> Case study of a conversational interview

The proposed model of conversational RPL interviewing has been informed by a combination of academic literature and an action learning model. An actual example of its application is presented. It relates to the assessment of an Indigenous man for a full Certificate IV qualification within the Community Services training package. This case study is presented as a demonstration of conversational interviewing and relates to the initial meeting. The author of the case study is a current TAFE teacher. She and her colleagues developed and refined the principles of professional conversation over the course of hundreds of professional conversations (Personal communication, 2008).

> *George (not his real name) is an Indigenous man in his late twenties who had been employed in a client contact role for about ten years. I was given the task of assessing George. George arrived at the initial RPL meeting with no documentary evidence except that provided by his organisation. This evidence consisted of a position description, statement of service and a performance appraisal. It was immediately apparent that George was nervous about his initial interview with me, a middle aged Anglo-Australian woman. I offered him a seat that I had pre-positioned diagonally across the corner of the desk to me, rather than directly opposite. After a friendly introduction I commenced the interview by acknowledging that George had significant experience in his job and that I could assist him to get a qualification to acknowledge the wonderful work he does. I said that I would love to yarn with him for a while, to hear about his experiences and successes. George's tense posture relaxed, a smile came to his face, and he said he was happy to talk to me. I picked up my pen to take some notes and he again looked nervous, so I put the pen back down.*
>
> *'Yarning with George' involved encouraging him to tell me his workplace experiences while I listened intently to gain an in-depth understanding of how he used his knowledge, skills and personal values to be effective in his job. I was conscious of maintaining an appropriate level of eye contact (not too much, not too little). I tried not to interrupt but steered the conversation as required, almost without George noticing. This first experience took 45 minutes to develop a relationship but in listening to George I was able to identify that all elements of competency were being addressed holistically. I then asked about another experience, and another; and each narrative confirmed my initial judgment that George was a highly skilled, experienced and competent worker*
>
> *At the end of the chat I thanked George warmly for his time and commended him for his obvious dedication to his clients and for the way he encourages and supports his team members at difficult times. I explained that I would now go away and work out what parts of the qualification*

he would get recognition for, based on the documents with which had been provided and the skills he was able to describe in the conversation. I explained that once this was worked out I would know what gaps remained and would like to meet with George again to have another conversation about any remaining topic areas. George was very pleased with this and commented that it was not nearly as hard as he had expected.

I left feeling honoured to have spent the time with George, and I am positive that he left feeling valued and validated as a worker. I believe that a more formal interview style with question banks and model answers would have been very intimidating for George and he may not have been able to demonstrate his competence.

The features of this case study are the relaxed nature of the assessor, the cultural appropriateness of the 'yarn', the awareness of power dynamics, choice of terminology, awareness of non-verbal communication, the subtle guidance of the conversation to meet pre-planned criteria and the focus on the participant's strengths. It is important to note that the assessor must have a very clear understanding of the training package in order to relate a participant's experiences to all areas of the qualification that are being assessed.

> Conclusions and recommendations

Interviews can play a significant role in assisting an assessor to determine the competencies of an RPL candidate. However interviews often feel like an inquisition. The assessor needs to give careful consideration to how the interview is conducted in order to reduce the inherent power imbalance between interviewer and interviewee. Australian policy documents suggest that RPL interviews should be conducted in a flexible, client-focused manner. However, despite the RPL National Principles calling for national consistency in RPL processes (Australian Qualifications Framework Advisory Board, 2004), to-date there is no commonly proposed approach to RPL interviewing. This means that individual assessors may have any number of interpretations of how an interview should be conducted.

Recommendation 1 – Adopt a national model: It is recommended that a national model of RPL interviewing be identified and endorsed by the Australian Qualifications Framework Advisory Board, and that training be made available to all RPL assessors.

Recommendation 2 – Preferred national model: This report describes a five-stage model for professional conversations that is adapted from seven stages of conversational interviewing by Kvale (1996). It is recommended that a professional conversation model be piloted with a view to refining the process and adopting such a model for use at a national level.

Conversational interviewing derived from qualitative research provides a valid alternative to standardised interviewing. It can be developed into a national model for professional

conversations. This chapter has explored the processes for conversational interviewing and provided a viable model for consideration. The recommendations above are therefore presented for the consideration of policy makers and individual RPL assessors.

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> Glossary

Definitions of key terms and constructs used in this chapter are as follows:

- **Recognition of prior learning (RPL):** An assessment process that assesses the individual's non-formal and informal learning to determine the extent to which that individual has achieved the required learning outcomes, competency outcomes, or standards for entry to, and/or partial or total completion of, a qualification (Australian Qualifications Framework Advisory Board, 2004).
- **Standardised (or structured) interviews:** The use of pre-determined questions and scoring guides in order to ensure a systematic and uniform interview process (McDaniel et al., 1994).
- **Conversational (or unstructured) interviews:** The gathering of information in a less systematic manner than a standardised interview. Although the questions may be specified in advance, they usually are not, and there is seldom a formalised scoring guide. All persons being interviewed may not be asked the same questions (McDaniel et al, 1994). While such interviews can be seen as unstructured, the reality is that they only *appear* to be unstructured to those unfamiliar with the methodology (Lee, 1998).
- **Professional judgments:** Judgments by an assessor, based on prior personal experience, publicly available knowledge, and tacit knowledge (McKenna & Mitchell, 2006).

Chapter 4

The Changing Face of Learning Support in VET

Linda J. Robertson

Head of School, Communication & General Education, Southbank Institute of Technology

> Abstract

Today's workplace requires competent use of information and technology to participate effectively. Society has developed new kinds of knowledge and skill sets that are dependent on technical support. There is an assumption that students beginning study at Technical and Further Education (TAFE) already possess adequate literacy and numeracy skills, plus the technical skills and knowledge for e-learning. However, there is a large cohort of students for whom this assumption is false. As TAFE Institutes seek to create autonomous learners, a "sink or swim" situation can develop for many students. The nature of learning support methods are questioned in light of current directions in the Vocational Education Training (VET) learning environment. This chapter presents a vision for learning support as holistic in which the learner is encouraged to be a self-directed and autonomous learner who is capable of utilising e-learning resources and is information literate.

Current developments in teaching practice in the VET sector encourage a self-directed and autonomous learner. Technical advancements have brought an increase in the use of e-learning methods and an emphasis on techno-literacy for students. In this changing learning environment, teachers cannot assume that students have the core learning and technical skills to effectively participate in a course, especially if they are unfamiliar with current VET teaching practices and the use of digital technology.

Employers can see there is a need for more skilled workers in order to compete globally, yet there is an obvious shortage of skilled personnel. The fastest growing occupations are filled by individuals with postsecondary qualifications (Duke & Strawn, 2008). Workers need higher level skills to gain employment and earn higher incomes. The Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR) (2008) has reported that in Australia there is evidence of a shortfall in "new entrants" (school leavers) to the training agenda. Moreover, larger numbers of people from non-traditional backgrounds are encouraged to participate in training. Many have already entered the workplace and have established commitment, but hold negative memories of past school-based teaching and learning practices. These students are expected to need more support in adapting to the current adult education learning environment.

This report investigates the changing requirements for learning support in the light of a new holistic approach to understanding the learning needs of students. It is argued that teachers cannot assume that students have the core skills to effectively participate in a course, especially if they are unfamiliar with information technologies. Alternative learning support methodologies which utilise a holistic approach are discussed in which the learner is encouraged to be a self-directed learner who is able to effectively use e-learning opportunities and information literacy resources.

> Learning support in the VET sector

In the VET sector, a registered training organisation (RTO), under the guiding principles set out in the Australian Quality Training Framework (AQTF) (2007), delivers training packages to students to obtain relevant qualifications. The AQTF (2007) is "the national set of standards which assures nationally consistent, high-quality training and assessment services for the clients of Australia's vocational education and training system" (p.1). A key feature of the current AQTF (2007) is the emphasis on 'quality service' and the capacity of training organisations to offer flexible and supportive delivery of their courses. The *AQTF Standard 2.4* mandates that all RTOs have systems in place for the identification and support of students and their learning needs. All students, including adult students returning to study from work, migrant students, otherwise capable students from the school system who have trouble writing or reading, and international students beginning formal tertiary study in English, have grounds to expect some form of learning support.

To meet registration requirements RTOs are expected to adopt a systemic approach for the management of services. This includes the management of learning support services to ensure access and equity. In order to do this, RTOs produce policies and procedures based on their particular student cohorts and the nature of the training packages that they deliver. The interpretation of the intent of *Standard 2.4* is therefore placed back with each individual RTO and as a consequence there is great diversity in the ways in which learning support is provided.

The AQTF (2007) Explanatory Notes make special mention of assistance for language, literacy and numeracy (LLN) and request that learners complete a formal assessment of their LLN skills. A review of current Australian literature has found that learning support is strongly linked to the policies on LLN. The federal government and the state and territory governments have put in place a variety of initiatives to address LLN problems (Misko, 2005). The need for support for literacy and numeracy education was also demonstrated by the Adult Literacy and Life Skills Survey (ALLS) (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2006) which provided data regarding the levels of core skills in Australia. The Commonwealth Government also produced *Shaping our Future: Australia's National Strategy for Vocational Education and Training 2004–2010* (Australian National Training Authority, 2004) which provided directions for RTOs in regard to LLN. Government

support is provided through funding for innovative projects and through the Adult Literacy National Project which was designed to improve LLN training through online information for learners and LLN practitioners (Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, 2008).

Since the 1990s, LLN has been incorporated into industry standards and training to meet the needs of workplaces. However the needs of the workplace have changed, as has the needs of the VET student. As demonstrated in an action research project at Queensland University of Technology (Dawson & Brown, 2003), students have inadequate information literacy and critical evaluation skills. Aside from LLN, the AQTF (2007) indicates that learning support can also take the forms of mentoring, disability support, IT support, networking and tutorial support in flexible delivery programs, job search and placement, personal counselling, career guidance, and study skills programs. This suggests a holistic approach to learning support; however this is generally not the case. A typical approach is to isolate student support services to the relevant provider; for example, an LLN teacher for a literacy or numeracy problem and a librarian for an information literacy problem.

Traditionally, TAFE has addressed the need for learning support by providing a specialised teaching area in which one-to-one training takes place. The specialist support teacher would be funded to be available for certain periods of time at this location waiting for students to 'drop-in'. The teacher would then assess the problem and assist the learner in a generic way so as not to influence the assessment tasks set by other teachers (Falk & Millar, 2001). This drop-in method is very costly and can be ineffective depending on the extent of support needed by the student. This approach to learning support through isolated services, with an overriding emphasis on LLN and library information sessions, is no longer adequate for the technical learning environment of to-day. The need for learner support has expanded to include information technology and the development of metacognitive skills for learning. Today's pedagogies encourage the use of e-learning, "a learning experience involving the acquisition or transfer of knowledge delivered or transacted through electronic means" (Bowles, 2004, p. 19). Jaffee (1998) noted that education "… is presently facing an unprecedented range of external pressures that include changing student demographics, fiscal constraints, emerging informational and instructional technologies, new skill demands from private sector employers, and new conceptions of teaching and learning" (p.21).

Effective e-learning methods aim to create learning environments that enable learners to construct their own knowledge and understanding, as proposed by constructivist learning theories (Holmes & Gardner, 2006). The process includes supporting the development of higher-order learning skills in order to become an autonomous learner. Siemens (2004) noted that constructivist theory does not emphasise enough the impact of technology on an individual's learning and proposed the theory of "connectivism" (p.5). Because knowledge is rapidly expanding, an individual needs the assistance of technology to store, access and manipulate knowledge. Hence, learning requires being connected to information sources.

Not all learners will have the skills to become autonomous learners or 'to connect' in the same way or at the same pace. Some students, for example, may relate to the simple, practical and fun digital technologies but not relate to text-intensive learning experiences (e.g., Internet searches). Other students may cope well in a social network context when using blogs but fail to cope when writing skills are required in a more academic context. The 'connection' needs to be suited to the learner in order for that learner to gain the maximum benefit from learning through technology. There needs to be adequate support for learners who are not coping with the new e-learning methods because they lack the required technological skills.

> New learning support methodologies

There are differing interpretations of what learning support involves. There is no cohesive policy to guide VET teachers about this particular training requirement from a holistic stance. Learning support is needed when a student is not performing because they do not have the requisite skills to fully participate in a learning process. There are interrelated skill sets, ranging from LLN, information literacy, use of technology, and metacognitive learning skills. Teachers today have to make changes and adjust to a more varied and flexible teaching role. They not only require content knowledge but also need to utilise methods in order to assist learners to discover the content for themselves. They need to understand students' learning styles, support reflective learning, use complex questioning, and teach students skills such as goal-setting and time management.

Students need to learn metacognitive skills through which they can understand their own thought processes, identify the learning strategies that work best for them, and consciously understand and manage their own learning. Teaching these skills is important at all levels of training in order to foster student self-direction. Learning support is a very specific and designated task for any RTO in order to meet the needs of the individual student. A pedagogy that emphasises a holistic view to the individual learner is a humanistic approach. It is concerned with the learner's self-direction, inner motivation, self-reflection, and personal growth (Leonard, 2002). As Laurillard (2008) noted "… learners at all levels need personalised advice, guidance and support for all the key activities involved in the learning process" (p.153).

> Digital learning support

Laurillard's (2008) "conversational framework" (p.140) for dealing with technology in today's educational environment emphasises the importance of starting with an understanding of educational problems. Such an analysis can be used to target the solutions that we should be demanding from the technology. These ideas can be applied to the problem of providing learning support. The educational problems that create the need for learning support stem from the learner, the learning process, and the

teaching resources and methodologies. The following methods utilise digital technology in an environment that supports learning through effective communication channels, or 'conversations'.

Online learning support

Zhou (2007) argued for pedagogy that supports a humanistic and holistic learning experience through learning with technology. Through curriculum and pedagogical adaptations, she proposed that significant changes can be made in students' learning experiences at both individual and social levels. Applications of computer technology in the classroom supported by humanistic learning theories include using chat rooms to motivate and promote self-directed learning and computer-supported collaborative learning tasks to initiate and sustain learners' social interactions. Zhou (2007) discussed the use of an online discussion board to allow students flexibility of time and pace. Students could log on to the discussion board from computers virtually anywhere. Students' postings demonstrated diverse personal learning styles through their reflections on readings, responses to postings by others, by posting their own questions, and by responding to questions. In their theoretical discussions, students were learning about themselves as learners.

Bowles (2004) viewed e-learning as learning within a wider social context because it offers learners the options of working outside structured educational environments. It cannot be assumed with the rapid evolutions in technology that the Web, as it is today, will remain the primary conduit for Internet-based e-learning. Focusing on communication and how people learn with technology raises the issue that the corporate training market has failed to apply the teaching pedagogies it uses, in favour of simply delivering content on-line. When applied to the problem of learning support, stand-alone content resources in online programs are not enough. Bowles (2004) noted that effective e-learning programs require innovative approaches to design and delivery content that can accommodate individual differences to actively engage the learner and provide support in the development of the learner's abilities to acquire knowledge.

Digital asynchronous learning

Asynchronous learning is the provision of learning opportunities and support that can take place or be accessed at any time. Technological applications can supplement course delivery with information about a course through: notes, links to related Internet sites; multi-media presentations; homework problems and solutions; on-line reference materials, and; on-line quizzes. Applications of technology can support access to information at a student's convenience, as well as supporting communication and collaboration with peers through exchange of information in group discussions. The instructor can monitor and guide the discussions as needed and gauge students' progress. The use of interactive computer-mediated communication technology can significantly enhance learning and student performance.

Information literacy involves an understanding of how information is gathered, analysed, and synthesised to become meaningful knowledge; together with an ability to apply higher-order thinking to these processes. The library of an RTO usually takes ownership of this knowledge base and offers learning support through face-to-face contact and the Internet. These are not sets of skills that can be developed in isolation. The learning of new skills needs to be embedded in other content learning. Stubbings and Franklin (2006) supported the embedding of information literacy education into subject modules. Greater success for learning support programs was found when library and 'faculty staff' collaborated. They referred to the library at the Queensland University of Technology and their integrated teaching approaches which embedded information literacy into the curriculum. The learning opportunities are asynchronous in that they can be accessed when required. An e-learning approach can enhance information literacy training.

Asynchronous Learning Networks (ALNs) can be utilised in the support of learners not coping with learning requirements. ALNs can respond quickly to the changing demands and pressures placed on learners. When RTOs consider learning support, they often think of segregating a student for specialist assistance. An integrated approach whereby a learning support specialist engages with the teacher of the content knowledge can reduce the negative impact of segregation. This theory holds true for the online class as well as for a face-to-face class. Wegerif (1998) discussed the importance of induction into a community of practice and the construction of a sense of community. The social dimensions of participation in an ALN are important in its effectiveness.

E-tutorials

Computer mediated support can be found in the use of electronic tutorials. In a research project involving a third-level computing class, Thomas (2002) discussed the effectiveness of a methodology that provided support by electronic tutorials to clusters of 25 students. Tutors provided direct support to individuals and also group discussions. Students appreciated the variety of support mechanisms that they could access and that personal taste dictated the forms of support that any individual would use. Holmes and Gardner (2006) also noted that "interaction with peers and tutors in a social learning context online will ensure a degree of higher-order skills activity, including the sharing of ideas and formulation of questions" (p.105).

Mobile learning support

The use of personal digital assistants (PDAs) to support classroom instruction and on-the-job training alike has been underway for a number of years, particularly in the fields of medicine and allied health, business, and journalism (Wagner, 2005). A project was described by Ragus (2007) that supported Occupational Health and Safety (OH & S) training on a building site. In the training program a worker could complete an induction to the site even before entering the building site through viewing the information on a PDA and completing the checklists on their mobile phone. Wagner (2005) noted that

mobile learning represents the next step in technology-mediated learning. While students' learning is fostered through the use of familiar technology, it is not unusual for large RTOs to message their students by phone on activities and requests for information. In a project at the University of Wolverhampton, PDAs were used to help students with timetabling, contacting tutors, and accessing course notes (Riordan & Traxler, 2005).

Warschauer (2007) examined the nature of digital learning and the issues of literacy, pedagogies, learning styles and environment and concluded that new technologies do not replace the need for strong human mentorship. Bowles (2004) also viewed blended learning as a more viable approach when it involved the combination of e-learning and other forms of delivery, for example, lectures and tutorials. This is an approach which preserves alternative methods of instruction and encourages a gradual adoption of e-learning. Holmes and Gardner (2006) also recognised "… that there will inevitably be a mix of e-learning pedagogies and traditional/conventional pedagogies" (p.110).

Different leaning styles of students as well as student age also need to be considered. Learning support to students with diverse learning styles is more effective when a variety of learning opportunities are offered. It also cannot be assumed that a young person is automatically comfortable with all forms of technology (Cox, Tapril, Stordy, & Whittaker, 2008). There is a need to support technology and information literacy skills in both younger and older students.

> Embedded learning support

Learning support may be required where the student has limited or no digital technology skills. Embedded digital technology, for example, radio frequency identification technology (RFID) introduces the learners to technology at a level more suited to their need. Embedded technologies allow for information to be accessed on demand with minimal technical knowledge required to operate the system. It is less challenging to operate and the output is fun and rewarding. As technical confidence and skill increases, so too can the complexity of the technology used; the aim being to encourage the learner to 'connect' to information sources (Siemens, 2004).

The RFID method uses smart tags, where the technology is physically embedded into the learning context. A smart tag is attached to a document or article and the document can be simply waved over a box, or reader, which triggers information to be displayed on a computer monitor. The learner is not required to type instructions on a keyboard or to know complex procedures to access the information. LLN support can be given by audio and/or visual output (Ragus, 2007).

> Integrated learning support

Technology can offer new possibilities for learning support. However, there are also changes needed in classroom techniques to support learning. An integrated approach

combines the expert learning support teacher with content experts in a team teaching role. For example, the Course in Applied Vocational Study Skills (CAVSS) (Highland Adult Literacies, 2004) was designed in Western Australia as an integrated learning support program. The learning support teacher conducted lessons focused on study skills to complement and integrate these skills with the content and assessment of the students' principal teacher. Gap training was available for those students requiring extension classes. The advantage of this model was that the learning support teachers developed familiarity and expertise in the particular learning content field and, most importantly, credibility with the students. Bates (2002) noted that this program was effective because individual students were not singled out as lacking particular skills. Instead, all students recognised that the development of their literacy and numeracy skills was a valid and valuable part of their industry training.

Another version of an integrated program was delivered at the University of South Australia where a *Learning Connections* service was formed by teachers, counsellors and learning advisors (Kokkinn, 2001). Collaboration between the learning advisers and faculty staff from the School of Nursing allowed for integrated support to be delivered in a variety of ways that included face-to-face, online, and paper-based support to meet the diverse needs of the students.

> Conclusions

This paper recommends a holistic and integrated model of learning support to meet the growing diversity of student learning needs. A holistic approach brings together the elements of LLN, information literacy, metacognitive skills, and digital technology. The integration of learning support into the regular program where the content teacher and the expert learning support teacher work together has been shown to achieve better outcomes for students.

Improved learning support pedagogies can be developed utilising digital technology. Regardless of the learning styles of the student, some form of technology can aid in learning support programs. A community of practice for learning support that includes teachers, librarians, and counsellors can develop a holistic approach to support within any RTO. Laurillard (2008) notes that "innovation in education is time consuming and … we make faster progress if we can learn from each other … especially through cross-disciplinary collaboration" (p.140). In her discussion on a Learning Activities Management System, she noted that the online community is "one of the few ways currently available to support lecturers and teachers as reflective practitioners" (p.147). Existing communities of practice need to be promoted and benchmarks for best practice established. Encouragement of continuous professional development will occur by greater participation in the community of practice for learning support.

Jaffee (1998) noted that there are institutional, organisational, and cultural challenges to introducing alternative teaching and learning models, in particular ALNs. Advocates of instructional technology have argued that changing social and economic conditions demand new educational delivery modes and the application and incorporation of these technologies into learning programs. As a consequence learning support needs to be addressed in a wider context than that currently stated in the AQTF (2007). In today's world of education, digital pedagogies can be applied effectively for learning support.

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Chapter 5

Making a Mark: Reclaiming a Critically Engaged, Professional Identity for Adult Literacy Teachers in VET

Nina Woodrow

Adult Literacy Volunteer Tutor Coordinator, Metropolitan South Institute of TAFE

> Abstract

The study examines concepts of professionalism and identity for the adult literacy teacher and the conditions that have disturbed the traditional role of practitioners in the field. There is a diminished sense of occupational identity and purpose that undermines capacities for creativity and innovation. The implications of this loss of knowledge and expertise across the VET sector are discussed. A range of constructive strategies for change are considered, including enhanced support for teacher networking, peer mentoring, practitioner research, and partnering. These kinds of responses have the potential to advance the intellectual, social, and cultural capital of the adult literacy teaching community and their ability to partner with other professionals. Given the imperatives of a global 'knowledge economy', there is much to gain from efforts to tap into this expertise to support the development of learners' literacy and lifelong learning skills.

In Australia, government policy for Vocational Education and Training (VET) over recent years has been focused on crafting responses to rapidly changing environmental circumstances including globalisation, skill shortages, and the imperatives of economic competition. This agenda has had profound impacts on the culture of the VET workplace and the ways in which the work of TAFE teachers is managed and perceived by the teachers themselves. The agenda has created a VET workforce represented by the 'industry trainer' (Seddon, 2008). While literacy and numeracy are seen as core skills for students in VET, the adult literacy teachers themselves have no subject area and are positioned somewhat ambiguously within the competitive 'industry-led' system. As a consequence, the expertise accumulated by adult literacy teachers in VET can easily be sidelined. Casualisation of the workforce and a deregulated training environment also continue to disrupt a sense of professionalism within the adult literacy teaching field. Maintaining a professional identity, engaging in meaningful practice and professional learning as an adult literacy practitioner, is therefore beset with tension. We have not managed so far to create a new space for adult literacy teachers to construct new identities and practices that recognise the ambiguities and contradictions inherent in the current VET environment.

So what does it mean to be literacy teacher in this environment and what is the role of literacy teachers in generating new understandings to suit current conditions? How can we nurture a professional workforce capable of innovating and influencing future policy directions? This chapter identifies the conditions, particularly in Queensland, that have cut the broader VET teaching community off from a valuable source of expertise provided by adult literacy teachers. The changes in identity for adult literacy teachers and the loss of capacity to develop and share expertise in the VET sector are examined. The intention is to evaluate potentially effective strategies to redress these problems.

The strategies discussed include enhanced support for teacher networking and reflection, peer mentoring, practitioner research, and partnering. These strategies have the potential to increase the intellectual, social, and cultural capital of the adult literacy teaching community and the capacity of these teachers for innovation in teaching and learning practices. This, in turn, may increase the efficacy of knowledge creation and sharing within the wider VET teaching community. The kinds of knowledge and capacities that adult literacy teachers can offer can be (re)generated through these strategies. There are policy implications for a VET system that invests so much in the concept of recognising the demands of the 'digital age' and the 'knowledge economy' to develop a capable, responsive, and innovative VET workforce.

> The VET policy context and adult literacy teaching

In spite of a preoccupation with the question of what VET should mean in the new 'knowledge economy', intense interest in keeping pace with emerging technologies and international trends in e-learning, as well as a focus on 'lifelong learning' and 'employability skills', there has been no national *adult literacy* policy since 1991. In this sense, the problems currently experienced by adult literacy educators may be seen to arise, in part, from this lack of visibility and the absence of a policy framework to support the work of these teachers in the larger VET sector.

The spaces in which adult literacy educators' work at TAFE institutes in Queensland have become more tightly controlled and regulated. A matrix of policies, regulations, and management strategies designed to shape a VET system that is responsive to the needs of industry have strongly impacted on adult literacy programs. The underlying idea of the policy platform informing the directions for VET is that it is a system focused on the needs of employers and that this will ensure prosperity for all (McHugh, 2007; O'Maley, 2007; Sachs & Mochler, 2006; Sanguinetti, 2007; Seddon, 2008; Shore & Searle, 2008; Shore et al., 2002). One of the expected outcomes of the *2008 Queensland Skills Plan* is that the productivity of those who are "under-represented in the Queensland and national workforce" will be improved (Department of Education and Training [DET], 2008, p. 3).

The *2008 Queensland Skills Plan* (DETA, 2008) continues to rework the language used to denote generic or employability skills. However, in this document the term 'literacy' is completely absent. Likewise, adult literacy teachers are not part of the general VET

picture. The Action commitment here is the embedding of employability skills into the structure of training packages and to build the capability of industry trainers to incorporate the delivery of these skills into their technical training. In taking 'literacy' out of the employability skills picture, the policy downgrades the position of adult literacy teachers within the overall VET workforce.

In spite of the absence of any direct reference to literacy or numeracy skills in the *2008 Queensland Skills Plan* (DETA, 2008), a greater emphasis is being placed on the importance of skilling those who are unemployed or underemployed. This is seen as an essential strategy to deal with persistent and emerging skill shortages since additional sources of labour can be activated by re-engaging those who are not currently in the workforce.

> *A stronger focus must remain on skilling those people who are unemployed or not currently in the workforce. (…) It is estimated that some 200,000 people who have the capacity to work remain outside the Queensland labour market. Males aged 25 to 64 years and women aged 25 to 44 years are significantly under-represented in the Queensland and national workforce, as compared to other OECD countries.* (p.3)

The policies have begun to encompass concepts such as 'lifelong learning' and 'social inclusion' that call for entrepreneurial and innovative responses from VET systems and practitioners. At the same time national and state policy is also focusing on shaping a VET system that is capable of responding to the rise of the knowledge-based economy and training workers who can be flexible and self-managing. Rapid technological change and globalised economies mean skills for the future will differ from those currently needed. While it is important that the immediate skills needs are addressed, there must also be a focus on lifelong learning and skilling. To this end, it is important that we start to consider the skilling needs at all stages of an individual's working life, thereby maximising the value and productivity that this can ultimately bring (DETA, 2007). There are tensions, however, for adult literacy practitioners in translating these policies into classroom practices. How can government policies that prioritise employers' needs be reconciled with the traditional practitioner focus on learner empowerment, especially for learners who are disadvantaged or excluded from the workforce?

Historically, the field of adult literacy education in Australia has had a strong connection with student-centred models of instruction. Adult literacy practitioners have generally been concerned with approaches that empower the learner proposing that certain principles should be followed in curriculum development such as concern with social justice, access and equity; and adult learning principles (Sanguinetti, 1994). Importance has also been attached to the ongoing negotiation of topics and activities and the use of authentic resources and materials. Informed by the tradition of critical pedagogy (Freire, 1970), the approach in teaching has been to explore new ways of working towards social justice outcomes using a combination of learner-centred, critical pedagogy, and community cultural development processes (Shore, Trenerry, & Coombe, 2001).

This approach to professional practice in adult literacy teaching in the 1990s was consistent with the prevailing culture of the workplace. Conceptualising teaching in this way meant taking responsibility for creating meaningful and empowering learning experiences through using an eclectic pedagogy that arose from praxis – "the on-going process of critical self-reflection and the dialectical movement between educational theory and classroom practice" (Sanguinetti, 1994, p. 36). The reform agenda in the VET sector in the 1990s had a profound impact on the culture of the workplace. The new industry-led system disturbed the work of engaging with learners, colleagues, and with communities in a professional capacity. It undermined the legitimacy of the commitment that adult literacy teachers held to serving the educational needs of learners as the priority and to using praxis to critically evaluate and inform classroom practice.

In spite of the shift to an entrepreneurial culture in the 1990s, many TAFE teachers struggled to maintain these kinds of personal responsibilities for creating meaningful and empowering learning experiences as part of their professional identities. Historically, TAFE teachers in general have aspired to a service ideal and a professional ethic that gives primacy to the learner. Chappell (1999) emphasised that teachers in TAFE take on the discourse of a liberal education in the manner in which they construct their identity; as teachers concerned as much with humanistic goals of student personal development as they are with the vocational skill development. While professional TAFE teachers kept the demands of multiple stakeholders and the VET system in mind, treating the educational needs of the learner as the primary focus of their work is a characteristic marker of the professional nature of the role. For adult literacy teachers, this kind of professionalism is arguably even more central to their occupational identity than it is for industry trainers.

The prevailing ethos of 'new managerialism' and the preoccupation with 'performative' measures in TAFE have merely overlaid new sets of identities and practices from the world of business. While TAFE systems, such as competency-based training and the employability skills frameworks are engineered to serve business needs and provide customised industry training, there are some silences and contradictions that undermine the professional identities of adult literacy teachers. Seddon (2008) placed these changes in a wider political context:

> *It has also been argued, however, that it is not enough to, 'draw simplistic dichotomies between new and old forms of professionalism.' Here the call is for teachers to "work the boundaries and the possibilities more strategically and energetically"* (Blackmore & Sachs, 2003, p. 15)*. If adult literacy teachers are to play an active part in influencing future policy and practice in the field then, a reconfiguration of leadership roles and professional relationships in the wider VET teaching community is needed.* (p.4)

> The adult literacy expert and 21st century literacies

Why do we need a critically engaged community of adult literacy professionals in VET and why are the notions of ethics, service, and critical pedagogy so critical? Dramatic changes have occurred over the last decade in the wider world of work and community life. 'Reading the world', participating in community life, and performing successfully in any vocation arguably require quite a different set of skills than what was needed ten years ago. Information literacy experts are using terms such as 'information fluency' to describe the combination of basic information technology skills, information literacy skills, and critical thinking skills that are a necessary part of being able to cope with "the swelling flood of online communication/sharing and web-based sources of information" (Lorenzo, 2007). These kinds of conditions call for a fundamental reconsideration of the role of the adult literacy teacher in the digital age. There is a growing realisation that an essential skill for the information age is an ability to continually re-engage with learning. At the same time national and state VET policy is also focused on shaping a system that is capable of responding to the rise of the knowledge-based economy and training workers who can be flexible and self-managing (DETA, 2007).

A collection of 'transferable' skills, variously known as 'core skills', 'key competencies', 'generic skills' or more recently 'employability skills', have rotated on and off governments' policy agenda for more than two decades. The underlying rationale is that the rate of change through economic restructuring and emerging technologies makes it impossible to predict what particular skills will be required. Workers need to adapt and manage their own ongoing skills development through sets of generic skills that can be readily transferred across different settings (Brown, Hesketh, & Williams, 2003). Although there has been a proliferation of reports and schemata attempting to codify these skills and attributes, discussions of teachers' roles, pedagogy, and assessment are sketchy (Clayton, Blom, Meyers, & Bateman, 2004; Williams, 2005). Managing information, organisational skills, teamwork, communication, and using technology are examples of the kinds of skills that consistently reappear in reports and frameworks published by government focus groups and employer associations (Clayton et al., 2004; Cornford, 2006; Kearns, 2001). However, many skills such as cultural competence and critical literacy, while included in early frameworks, have now slipped away.

Ironically it is these critical theories of literacy as cultural and social practice that have been viewed as among the most important conceptual breakthroughs in the educational literature in the last couple of decades. Academics and professional practitioners in Australia have been influential in the development of a new metalanguage describing digital literacy and 'multi-literacies' (Luke, 2001). Lonsdale (2004) in his report reviewing this contemporary literature, *Literacy for the New Millennium*, drew attention to the emergence of new literacies and a recognition that literacies are both multiple and context-specific.

This throws into relief the disjuncture between state and national frameworks in which there is a strong focus on discrete skills and employability outcomes and a view of

literacy as an individual attribute or a cognitive skill. Contemporary understandings of literacy foreground the notion of social practices with an emphasis on how people in groups utilise literacy. In Australia, Commonwealth funded adult literacy programs delivered through TAFE include the Language, Literacy & Numeracy Program (LLNP) and Queensland, like other states, provides additional funding for designated literacy and numeracy programs and community literacy programs. As Shore and Searle (2008) report, the major deliverable requirement for all these programs is greater access to employment or further training. Shore and Searle (2008) argue that since for most of these students these classes are often their first, post-compulsory school learning experiences, they should: "… provide opportunities not only to improve skills in literacy and numeracy, build confidence and acquire a range of social capital previously unable to be accessed or enacted, but also to discover new learning identities" (p.6).

The role of the adult literacy professional in preparing learners, particularly those who are disadvantaged, for lifelong learning and citizenship as well as for work, within this wider, rapidly changing environment needs to be re-examined in light of research in this field. Given the diversity of students that TAFE adult literacy programs target (including the traditional 'second chance' learners; those with learning disabilities; and those from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds), the assumption that literacy training is embedded into all VET delivery, and the increasing presence of the 'net savvy' generation in post-compulsory education, simplistic responses will not suffice. Policy makers for VET and the general VET teaching community need to consider the role of the literacy expert and ask this community to investigate what kinds of literacy skills should be taught and how this could be done.

There is an urgent need to generate new understandings about literacy, technology, and learning and the kinds of technologies and pedagogies that can support this work. What is required is a critically engaged, supported and networked community of teaching professionals who are capable of developing new pedagogies that take account of the new literacies in the context of lifelong learning (Shore & Searle, 2008). The importance of cultivating working environments that support adult literacy teachers to engage in practitioner research, contribute to a body of knowledge, and communicate with other professionals is under-recognised.

> Fostering a learning culture, supporting role transformations, and promoting innovation

What kinds of conditions do we need to create within an organisation to build the capacity of adult literacy educators to generate new knowledge, to innovate, and to influence future policy directions? Any significant transformations in this domain will require a 'top down' and 'bottom up' mix of openness to change (Seddon, 2008). There is an extensive body of literature related to organisational change, educational planning, and teacher professional development. Much of this territory is beyond the scope of this

chapter. The focus here is on three broad pathways that emerge from the research that warrant further investigation. The following interconnected strategies suggest directions for further research and policy development:

- Endorse the expertise of adult literacy teachers and revitalise occupational identity;
- Cultivate critical engagement and reflective practice, and;
- Activate partnering, networking, and peer mentoring.

The centrepiece for each of these dimensions for change is the sense of purpose that they can allow teachers to bring to their role; for it is this that drives innovation. It is in nobody's interests that adult literacy teachers see their role purely in terms of instrumentality, acting as contracted technicians whose function is to meet standards without question or creativity. What is required are adult literacy teachers who are capable of creating a learning environment, learning materials and tasks, and using technology, in ways that can facilitate higher order thinking and learning. The VET teaching community, in general, needs access to adult literacy expertise so that creative synergies can be formed generating new knowledge and new pedagogies that are responsive to the current environment. For this to happen there needs to be a recovery of teacher agency.

Groundwater-Smith and Sachs (2002) contrast two kinds of professionalism in this context: the "entrepreneurial" teaching professional and the "activist" teaching professional. Under managerialist conditions, they argue that teachers can become self-seeking and that 'privacy' is preferred to collegiality and cooperation. In such professional cultures, they claim that there is a tendency towards maintenance of conservative practice and an opposition to generative change. Alternatively, the activist professional has an identity that is rooted in principles of equity and social justice and is transformative.

The mechanisms for facilitating transformative practice can be incorporated into existing and emerging systems, practices, and technologies. Online communities of practice (Hoadley & Kilner, 2005; Wenger, 1998), such as Wikis and web conferencing, are the kinds of platforms that can be deployed in this context. Adult literacy educators would benefit from the power of online social networking to dissolve social and geographical distances and to collect the knowledge of a community. Research has shown how this kind of interaction can lead to a deeper kind of reflection and permit a community of practice to participate in collaborative inquiry (Lock, 2006). Similarly, digital authoring such as creating blogs, digital stories, and e-portfolios are tools for professional development and are the basis for a new pedagogy relevant to the development of 21st Century literacy practices. There are, however, a number of barriers for adult literacy teachers. The inhibitors for this community of practitioners can include a lack of confidence in using IT tools and some scepticism about their value as well as a lack of time to explore and develop new skills (Mackay, Burgoyne, Warwick, & Cipollone, 2006).

Peer mentoring is a constructive strategy for making progress on a number of levels. Mavrinac (2005) attests to the relevancy of this approach to ongoing professional learning since, "… it mirrors the changing nature of work, in which employees must be in a perpetual learning state" (p.400). A formal peer mentoring program can be integrated into an overall system of staff development. One of the advantageous manifestations of peer mentoring in this context is where "mentoring-up" provides opportunities for older employees to gain insights from a younger generation of employees and to have a safe forum in which to address "techno-slippage" (Mavrinac, 2005, p. 399). Peer mentoring can meet many of the needs of this community for: a democratic, empowering process that values existing expertise; the provision of ongoing professional learning support woven into the workplace, and; maintaining the currency of digital literacy skills in a rapidly changing environment. Successful levels of innovation of this nature are evident in VET organisations where they are serious about building and funding learning cultures and promoting innovation (Callan, 2004).

These kinds of collaborative projects are fertile ground for action research. Practitioner research in the field of adult literacy is a well established practice in North America and Europe and much was also achieved in Australia using this methodology in the 1990s and early 2000s (Falk, 2003; Hooley, 2005; Kirkwood & Christie, 2006; Laurillard, 2008; O'Maley, 2007; Quigley, 2000; Shore, 2004). This approach to teacher learning can invigorate a sense of professionalism, help establish new relationships, and leverage the capability of teachers to critically engage with the actual practice of adult literacy teaching and learning. As Laurillard (2008) explains,

> *If we problematise teaching and learning, confront the need for innovation, and turn the teaching community into a profession capable of being experimental innovators and reflective practitioners, then we release a huge resource of energy and imagination for tackling the core educational problems of enabling what it takes to learn.* (p.140)

> Conclusion

This chapter has argued that there is an urgent need to generate new understandings about literacy education and lifelong learning and the kinds of technologies and pedagogies that can support this work. What is required to meet this challenge is a critically engaged, supported and networked community of adult literacy practitioners who are capable of developing new pedagogies and partnerships with other VET professionals. The capacity to craft creative pedagogical responses suited to 21st Century conditions can only emerge from a workplace and organisational culture that supports professionalism and innovation. While adult literacy practitioners generally have a high level of professional commitment to their roles, the omissions and tensions in the current policy frameworks have undermined innovative responses. Potentially useful remedies were indicated, including enhanced infrastructure to support teacher

networking, strategic peer mentoring programs, and adult literacy practitioner research initiatives, as well as a commitment to rewarding and supporting adult literacy practitioners who engage in cross-sector partnerships with community, industry, and universities. The kinds of knowledge and capacities that can be (re)generated through these strategies have critical, long term implications for a VET system that invests so much in recognising the demands of the 'digital age' and the 'knowledge economy' in order to develop a capable, responsive, and innovative VET workforce.

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Chapter 6

Swapping E-Tools at the ESL Shop: A Case for an Online Community of Practice

Anushka Weerackody

ESL Teacher, Metropolitan South Institute of TAFE

> Abstract

The 2006 Queensland Skills Plan emphasised the integration of e-learning into the delivery of courses in the VET sector. E-learning is now being used increasingly in teaching programs for English as a Second Language (ESL). ESL teachers in TAFE Queensland who wish to exchange ideas about e-learning are likely to benefit from collective discussion and exchange of expertise. A community of practice (Wenger, 1998) could be established by individuals or groups who wish to exchange information about a particular subject or theme in ESL programs. An online community of practice would benefit ESL teachers in TAFE because they work in diverse geographic locations. Several steps have been taken to encourage teachers to engage with e-learning, for example, through My.TAFE which is a platform in which teachers can situate online or blended learning activities for students. The same platform could be used for establishing an online community of practice for ESL teachers so that they could exchange ideas about e-learning and also pool traditional ESL resources for joint use.

In an eZone at TAFE, a preliterate refugee student, new to Australia, has just learnt to write two words. She now sits at a computer typing those words – her name and the name of the country from which she has come. The teacher then inserts a picture of the student taken with a digital camera next to her name and also places the flag of the student's country, retrieved from the Internet, next to the name of her country; then gives her a printout. This is a vignette of an ESL teacher at work using e-learning to enhance students' language learning experiences.

The addition of e-learning components to TAFE courses has been taking place in line with the recommendations of the *Queensland Skills Plan* (QSP) (Department of Employment and Training [DET], 2006). Blended learning experiences have been incorporated into training since 2007. There has also been the establishment of My.TAFE, an online platform where both teachers and students can learn online. However, while many teachers are already implementing e-learning experiences, practical support for their teaching is not readily available. The need for an online community of practice for teachers who use blended learning in delivering diverse

courses, specifically for ESL teachers in TAFE, is discussed in this chapter, A community of practice is proposed because of the increasingly successful use of e-learning for second language teaching in different sectors (Warschauer & Kern, 2000). It is possible that the development of an online community of practice for ESL teachers is one that other discipline groups at TAFE could use as a model. While ESL educators belong to a field which has a wealth of resources available, the involvement of ESL teachers in an online community of practice within TAFE would be of benefit.

> Communities of practice defined

Wenger (1998) defined communities of practice as bodies of individuals and groups that are formed because they have a common interest and through the community they share knowledge and support each other for mutual benefit. Online communities of practice are becoming common in different educational sectors (Cummings & van Zee, 2005). They are widely used in education as a result of Web 2.0 technology. Research has shown that such communities foster new knowledge and give increased benefits to those who are members (Brook & Oliver, 2005). With the advent of computer-mediated communication, these learning networks are widely used for communication and sharing of knowledge. Wellman and Haythornthwaite (2002) noted that, with the increase of new media forms, communities of practice have become significant to the ways in which members can maintain professional and social connections.

This discussion stems from my own experience as a new teacher at TAFE. Armed with the experience and credentials for the role as an ESL teacher and having worked with the same group of students as a volunteer tutor, I was familiar with the ESL classroom. However, while a few helpful colleagues gave me direction on the learning outcomes that I needed to target, I could find little other prescribed material for teaching and relevant assessment activities and guidelines as a novice teacher. I was also ignorant about the voluminous paperwork that I was required to complete, while struggling to present an engaging learning program to the students.

Bianco, Collis, Cooke and Margaryan (2002) noted that learning professionals should follow best practice models for learning design. However, teachers are often not in a position to do this easily because of the time pressures and the lack of relevant knowledge and skills. Having gone through a 'sink or swim' experience as a novice teacher, I would have benefited from models to follow or a personal mentor. A novice teacher would benefit from a central repository of learning materials; a mentor who could answer questions; a forum in which teaching issues could be debated; and guidelines pertaining to work requirements and administrative tasks. An online community of practice could be a place for sharing new ideas and it could provide a billboard about professional development opportunities.

> ESL programs and ESL teachers' work at TAFE

At present, TAFE institutions in Australia deliver a number of ESL programs including: the Adult Migrant English Programs (AMEP); Language, Literacy, and Numeracy Programs; (LLNP); the English Language Intensive Course for Overseas Students (ELICOS); Workplace English Language and Literacy (WELL); General English; English for Academic Purposes; International English Language Testing Service (IELTS) preparation; the ACCESS program, and English for Vocational Purposes (EVP). These programs are based on second language acquisition theory and, as the learners are usually adults, adult learning theories.

The argument for an online community of practice for ESL teachers is strengthened by the fact that, in comparison with the traditional subject teachers, ESL teachers have unique professional development needs as the clientele whom they serve is culturally diverse. Even though there are teachers on the staff who may be from the same cultural background as their students, the large number of countries from which students come calls for all ESL teachers to have strong intercultural communication and interpersonal skills to enhance all students' engagement in learning. Students also differ considerably according to their needs for English language learning. For example, some need immediate assistance in Basic English for settlement purposes, while others need English for employment and academic purposes.

Students also range in their levels of literacy from their country of origin, with clients including illiterate students as well as highly qualified professionals who are sometimes in the same classes as students with minimal education. Additionally, there may be refugee students in the class who have been through torture and trauma. The teacher needs to have an understanding about how to relate to these students. There is also a large age range in the student population. The overall diversity of this student group calls for a range of teaching styles as well as for relevant intercultural communication skills.

Teaching methodology was defined by Richards and Rodgers (1982; cited in Kumaravadivelu, 2003) as "... the study of practices and procedures used in teaching and the principles and beliefs that underlie them" (p.5). Kumaravadivelu (2003) suggested that methods are conceptualized and created by experts in respective educational fields based on specific pedagogical principles. However, teachers do not always follow the prescribed principles and procedures that make up a particular method. Over time, they establish their own standpoint regarding which tasks are useful and which are not. Kumaravadivelu (2006) cited three types of tasks that are used by language teachers: language-centred tasks, learner-centred tasks, and problem-solving tasks. However, in planning and using tasks, he believed that there is a need to transcend the limitations imposed on teachers and learners by the concept of 'method' to focus instead on the linguistic, social, cultural, and political influences on the practices used in second language learning and teaching. This calls for diversity in the tasks created for use in teaching ESL students.

Stephenson (2001) proposed that people learn better when they have an active role in the learning. He cited the philosophy of Knowles who believed that adults learn best when they can take control of their learning as well citing the philosophy of Freire who believed that people learn better when they play an active role in framing the learning situation. Siemens (2004) discussed the concept of "connectivism" in how knowledge needs to be stored and shared, when using information communication technology, because one person cannot know everything. Siemens also predicted that a new pedagogy for online learning foreshadowed learner-controlled learning. This could be a driving force behind a community of practice through which ESL teachers would control and shape their own learning for mutual benefit while learning and sharing.

Current educational trends give strong consideration to students' learning styles (Drago & Wagner, 2004). To support students' success in their education requires teachers to adapt their teaching methods to the individual differences of students and to create learning environments in which the needs of a variety of learners can be met. Willing (1988) defined adult learning styles as:

> *Any individual learner's natural, habitual and preferred ways of learning. The causative elements behind a person's fundamental pattern of preferences in this area of behaviour are the following: The individual's innate psychological makeup, particular upbringing and socio cultural background, schooling in general, previous educational experiences, in particular, and the subject matter in question, the person's perceptions of her deficits and weak points as well as strengths and talents.* (p.1).

It is evident that, given the variety of methods, tasks and learning styles involved in second language teaching, teachers are faced with the task of finding a vast array of materials to suit different students. This is where a pool of shared resources can become an invaluable asset. While ESL educators belong to a field which contains a wealth of resources, there is, at present, a gap in the involvement of ESL teachers in an online community of practice within TAFE. From an institutional perspective, it is envisaged that successful participation by teachers in a community of practice will enhance the quality of the education offered by the institution. From a teacher's perspective, mutual sharing of experiences and resources would enhance teaching effectiveness. Teachers would also be able to follow the latest research trends in teaching and learning to meet their clients' needs. These are all desirable outcomes under the Code of Conduct of the Department of Employment and Training (2006) which requires that teachers "strive to create and implement high-quality education services that are consistent with government policy" and "advance student learning and the public interest" (p.6).

> A community of practice for ESL teachers in TAFE

Partnerships and interactions among individuals who gather together define a community. An online gathering space for connections and interactions would foster and build interpersonal relationships. In an online community of practice, teachers can learn from each other and provide knowledge and resources to the group. Warschauer and Kern (2000) suggested that there is nothing that can duplicate the human links that are built in a community of practice. TAFE institutes are geographically widespread and, as such, it is not possible for teachers to have regular face to face meetings. Creative initiatives in a particular TAFE that could serve as good models for others are not easily accessible. Specialist knowledge that each teacher builds is not always easily shared. The need to store and exchange the knowledge base of ESL teachers is of increasing urgency due to the aging workforce in TAFE. The expertise of these teachers can be tapped. On the other hand, an ageing workforce could resist change owing to the numerous years they have spent using particular teaching methods. They may find it difficult to change. Involvement in a community of practice may be seen as another chore. However, an online community of practice for ESL educators could be established involving a core group who welcome innovation and opportunities for informal learning. The learning in a community of practice often has a practical rather than a theoretical base. Teachers value practical ideas that they can adapt to their own situation. For example, for new teachers, a Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) page within an online site could provide an orientation and a starting point for learning about teaching and administrative issues.

There are many good models of online communities informing educational practice that are already in existence. The Australian Flexible Delivery Network has 20 different cohorts of educators. However, My.TAFE is designed specifically for TAFE and, as the existing Learning Management System for all institutes, it has the potential to be the platform for communities of practice. My.TAFE is currently being used by TAFE teachers to share files. Moreover, teachers of the Preliminary Course in Spoken and Written English (PreCSWE) have started a community of practice in My.TAFE. A community of practice could be designed for the single ESL teaching group with designated special interest groups within the main forum site.

There are a range of examples that can serve as models for a community practice for ESL teachers in TAFE. One model is *BEST (Beginning and Establishing Successful Teachers for Primary and Early Childhood Teachers)* that was initiated at the University of Wollongong in 2005 (Herrington, Herrington, Kervin, & Ferry, 2006). This has now expanded to include different special cohorts within an overarching structure. Mentors and resource materials including lesson plans and assessment related material are available through this network. Another example is Webheads which is an online community of practice for language teachers, founded by Vance Stevens, that has been operating for more than ten years (Stevens, 2006). Some of the features of this

successful online community of practice include the use of photos for personalisation; use of voice via Voice over Internet Protocols (VoIPs); biographies provided by members to inform each other about common professional interests and skills; asynchronous interactions through blogs, Moodle (an open access course management system); and discussion boards; as well as synchronous interactions via online meetings that are archived for reference.

> Current challenges to participation in a community of practice

Innovation is often fraught with obstacles. Establishing and successfully running a community of practice may be challenging. Lack of knowledge about information communication technology among teachers could be a barrier. However, Lock (2006) noted that an online community can provide essential professional development that can contribute to improving teachers' technology skills. A major benefit of a community of practice is that it facilitates access to resources for educators. Sharrat and Usoro (2003) indicated that knowledge sharing in online communities can provide a sense of community as well as feelings of trust. Ardichvili, Page and Wentling (2003) highlighted that a major perceived value of a community of practice is to help newcomers 'fit in' more quickly and become efficient in their work as well as to assist geographically separate units to work better together.

Mason and Rennie (2006) pointed out that not all educators look favourably upon the use of online networks unless they are extremely well run and the knowledge provided is useful. This indicates the importance of an effective facilitator, as was also noted by Williams and Cothrel (2000). In the example provided by Williams and Cothrel, the online site recruited specialist 'guides' to facilitate discussions on various subjects. The guides ran pages on specific subjects in which they had expertise. The guides were nominated from within the community and supported each other so that the network was highly participatory. Within this online network, there is also the opportunity to facilitate a 'best practices' page to which participants could contribute. An online community of practice raises issues of intellectual property rights for resources that may be uploaded (Lock, 2006). Although not a fool-proof solution, this concern could be overcome to a great extent with competent coordinators, who not only facilitate the community of practice but also review the site and post sources for any published material. At present, the material that goes into the Resource Bank for TAFE is managed through the library.

One of the features of an ESL teachers' community of practice could be orientations to ESL teaching programs such as AMEP and LLNP. The successful community of practice designed by Herrington et al. (2006), which was specifically targeted to helping new teachers, drew its inspiration from two other examples of communities of practice: *Survive and Thrive Virtual Conference for Beginning Teachers* hosted by the Ontario Teachers Federation in Canada and Novice Teacher Support Project hosted by the

University of Illinois in the United States. These communities of practice were successful in removing a sense of professional isolation.

In a study on TAFE teacher professional development needs, Mackay, Burgoyne, Warwick, and Cipollone (2006) highlighted several issues that TAFE teachers felt were barriers to their professional development. These included the lack of information about innovative, relevant, and comprehensive professional development programs that offered examples of good practice; inadequate access to learning materials that catered to specific learner needs; and concerns about accessing knowledge to use emerging technological tools in teaching. Volunteer ESL tutors who play an important role in assisting TAFE students are usually not eligible for paid professional development programs. For these tutors, a community of practice would provide opportunities to interact with other tutors and teachers at an informal level. There are various steps to fill the professional development needs identified that were identified by Mackay et al. (2006). These include links to good teaching websites; e-learning tools; a collection of teaching ideas; lesson plans; videos and podcasts on how teachers are using good practices in their classes; as well as other multimedia resources on learning English; ideas about places of interest to take ESL students on excursions; cultural communication issues; pages for volunteers; and listings of professional development opportunities.

In Figure 6.1, the proposed home page design for an ESL community of practice within which student relations, a resource bank, e-learning tools, teaching ideas, administrative requirements, and FAQs are key areas. The student relations page could be divided into sub-categories around cultural issues. The Resource Bank could include subcategories such as lesson plans, videos, podcasts, and photos. There could also be space for a forum to be used by teachers to brainstorm issues. The online community of practice could also host a chat room as well as discussion forums.

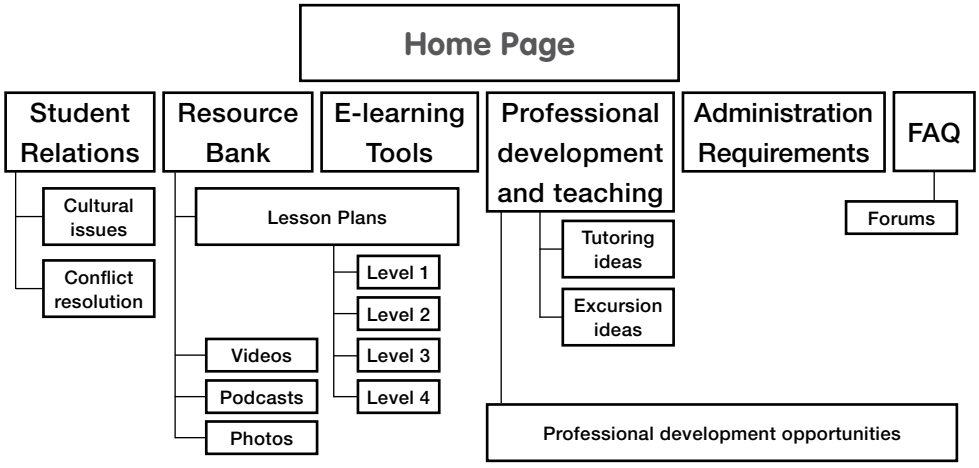

Figure 6.1: A working design for an online community of practice for ESL educators

Sharrat and Usoro (2003) noted that extrinsic rewards can promote knowledge sharing. While Wasko and Faraj (2000) emphasised that when individuals perceive that knowledge sharing is related to their career advancement then they will engage in higher levels of knowledge sharing. The community of practice would also be a legacy for future ESL teachers. However, a recurring idea that has emerged in evaluations of communities of practice is that they are successful only when the power and the directions come from the members of the community themselves. Di Petta (1998) observed that a community of practice cannot be established by a directive from above and imposed on the members. Community building can only be achieved by a personal motivation to participate.

Research has shown that members of an online community of practice often believe that the work in which they invest should be recognised and rewarded. Employees who participated in the Shell Learning Centre Project (Margaryan, 2008), in which models of best practice were collected in a portal, felt that making the knowledge sharing a compulsory part of their personal performance plan would assist in the continuity of the community of practice. They also suggested that rewards would give greater impetus to the online community of practice, for example, by identifying and featuring the best practice exemplars. TAFE teachers have an extensive workload and finding time to contribute would be a major challenge unless they are motivated to do so. Motivation would improve if teachers were oriented to the benefits of an online community of practice and received recognition for their efforts in participation. If a sense of ownership was fostered then the community of practice can be run by the participants for the participants.

> Conclusions

ESL educators who are implementing e-learning programs need ongoing professional development. Establishing an online community of practice is the way forward for ESL teachers delivering courses at TAFE to a diverse range of students. Since e-learning programs are being successfully implemented in many ESL teaching programs throughout the world, a trial for an ESL community of practice for TAFE teachers could be implemented. This would benefit the ESL teachers who have unique professional development needs. The success of a community of practice, however, depends on a range of factors. An online community of practice for ESL teachers would strengthen the quality of the teaching programs and would address ESL teachers' unique professional learning needs. Learning in a community of practice may have a practical, rather than a theoretical base, as teachers share their experiences. Especially for new teachers, a community of practice could be a valuable resource for orientation. However, the members themselves must be the drivers of the community of practice if it is to be a success. An online community of practice for ESL educators would require a core group of ESL teachers who are interested in innovation and increased opportunities for formal and informal learning with their peers.

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Chapter 7

Transitions to E-Learning Training Partnerships

Anne-Louise Johnston

Manager, Product Planning and Strategy, Educational Services, Skills Tech Australia

> Abstract

The 2006 Queensland Skills Plan acknowledges the importance of effective partnerships between TAFE and industry. How does SkillsTech Australia address this? For SkillsTech to work closer with industry a highly flexible and proactive staff is needed to integrate e-learning in their delivery of programs with industry. For this to happen, there are a number of mind shifts and changes needed to help transition to new practices. This chapter explores the transitional shifts and change management processes required to assist staff to incorporate e-learning as a core component in their trade delivery. The chapter considers two case studies as examples of partnerships with industry and discusses the benefits and challenges of partnerships within the trade sector. Partnerships can allow for customised, contextualised, and flexible training delivery.

A key role for SkillsTech Australia is to work more closely with industry to ensure that trade training courses address workforce needs through flexible delivery of training, as highlighted in the 2006 *Queensland Skills Plan* (Department of Employment and Training [DET], 2006). There is limited data about the implementation of e-learning through training partnerships in the trade sector. The reality is that the establishment of training partnerships requires improving the capabilities of teachers and trainers so that partnerships are cost effective for both industry and TAFE (Callan & Ashworth, 2004). It is critical that staff of SkillsTech Australia are equipped with the appropriate pedagogical and technical skills in order to offer a range of different training options to industry.

The embedding of e-learning into training courses has grown from around 3–4% of all VET activity in registered training organisations in 2003–2004 to 36% in 2008 (Australian Flexible Learning Framework, 2008). Surveys undertaken with VET teachers and students indicate that e-learning approaches are now mainstream practice. Eighty-eight percent of VET teachers and 91% of VET students indicated that their training courses included some online access for downloading of learning materials and resources; remote and/or classroom use of multimedia interactive learning resources; electronic submission of work; online assessment; and/or the use of Web 2.0, mobile and voice technologies (Australian Flexible Learning Framework, 2008).

This chapter outlines issues around developing partnerships for SkillsTech Australia. It discusses the RIPPLES model as means for understanding change management and the ADKAR model as a means for managing people and change. The chapter reports briefly on two partnership arrangements that SkillsTech has developed with industry and considers the key issues for successful training partnerships.

> Industry partnerships

Batorski and Hughes (2002) proposed that partnerships involve collaboration which enable the delivery of a service or product. The purpose is to add value for the supplier and the customer. For SkillsTech Australia, the goal for partnership arrangements with industry is to embed digital pedagogies into trade training to increase the flexibility of training delivery. Viable options to increase flexibility include complete on-the-job training supported by quality checks from SkillsTech staff to ensure that the designated learning outcomes are achieved by students. Another option is blended delivery models in which theory and the underpinning concepts informing trade practice are delivered online, supported by synchronous and asynchronous online tutorial support from the teacher, while the practical training components are undertaken in the workplace. Should there be any gaps, where industry cannot fully address the required skills for designated competencies in the workplace, then training can be undertaken in the TAFE environment where the skills required are achieved.

Governments are encouraging training partnerships with industry to allow students to learn in workplace environments. Evidence indicates that this promotes an optimum form of skill acquisition (Callan & Ashworth, 2004). A workplace environment in which students can practise their skills in relation to the designated training competencies gives students the context in which to gain meaningful feedback on their skill development. Through partnering with industry, more responsibility can be given to students to address and enhance their practical skills for work. A combination of practical and theoretical knowledge provides a solid foundation for students to achieve the desired learning goals.

The partnership arrangements need to be successful for both industry and training organisations. The challenge for the VET sector is to develop relationships with industry partners that are sustainable over time. Pawlowski (2007) identified that the lack of ownership by any partner in an agreement is the major barrier to sustainability. While a key issue for senior management is to increase profitability which could be generated from a partnership, Callan and Ashworth (2004) noted that often a 'break even' approach may be the best outcome initially when the partnership is formed. Over time, the culture of the partnership develops and the sense of ownership increases, leading to improved profitability.

There is little research on the nature and extent of existing partnerships in the VET sector. However, the table below represents the opinions of 102 VET providers on the main drivers operating for entering training partnerships (Callan & Ashworth, 2004, p. 37). The data highlights that an increase in the bottom line is rated as the most important

aspect followed by the stronger links that staff can form with industry. In the VET sector, partnership arrangements formed with industry have been catalysts for change in training approaches. VET staff are challenged to rethink how they use can use new technologies in their delivery of programs in the workplace.

Table 7.1: Drivers for developing industry/employer partnerships (Callan & Ashworth, 2004)

Drivers for training partnerships	% agreement
To bring in additional revenue	88.2 %
To give staff stronger links with industry	82.3%
To build extra capability within our staff	82.3%
If we did not get involved in the partnering, another institution would have taken the opportunity	67.1%
To find future employers for our students	57.6%
Industries/employers have demanded we assist them	45.9%
To copy what other institutions are going	34.1%
Our motivations are not really clear	32.9%

> Embedding e-learning into training partnerships

Training partnerships can incorporate the needs of industry as well as being customised and contextualised to a specific business environment (Callan & Ashworth, 2004). Organisations believe that it is difficult to remove trainees from business sites because site managers and employers are trying to meet the basic operational needs of the business. VET partnerships can provide 'just-in-time' training delivered by on-site industry trainers so that knowledge can be accessed from any site using the right technology. Such an approach reduces the need to release employees to TAFE institutes to attend block or day release during their apprenticeship. In remote and regional areas, the support for development of in-house trainers is a common aspect of partnerships due to several critical issues including costs of travel, lack of services, and the inability of employers to release staff. In a partnership arrangement, guidelines are required to ensure audit requirements are met by all stakeholders to achieve quality standards.

An e-learning approach is becoming a central component for trade training. It is the preferred choice for many students undertaking studies (Australian Flexible Learning Framework, 2007). The major benefit of e-learning to industry is that it can be delivered anytime, anywhere and at any place. This is advantageous to the industry partners of SkillsTech Australia who are keen to address the challenges for skilling their workers in remote and regional areas and also to fast-track workers through their training. Through embedding e-learning approaches, workers may be able to access learning resources online in the workplace or at home across the 24 hours in any day. This gives students the opportunity to access, review and revisit content knowledge at times convenient to them. This benefits industry through major cost savings, such as travel time, while productivity is not reduced. E-learning can be delivered in a 'just-in-time' mode, reducing the period between the theoretical learning and the application of skills on the job.

The nature of e-learning and its capacities for visual and auditory reinforcement of information as well as the opportunities that it affords for individualised feedback can be built into a Learning Management System. The time taken for any individual to learn new information is significantly reduced, often up to 30%–50%, by allowing learners to 'see, hear and do' thereby providing significant reinforcement for new learning (Australian Flexible Learning Framework, 2007). Industry-education partnership arrangements provide an opportunity for learning to be contextualised within a workplace environment, as well as for flexibility and consistency in training when all participants have access to the same information.

> Building a culture that supports partnerships

Capability and capacity building of staff in TAFE is critical to change the culture and improve the uptake of online delivery methodologies in trade training. Heckman and Annabi (2006) proposed that teachers who have experienced extensive traditional face-to-face teaching are often challenged in the move towards e-learning. A vision for the change and an appropriate organisational culture that supports change is vital. There are a number of models that have been applied for managing the change process that can inform the manner in which e-learning is embedded into training partnerships. For example, RIPPLES is one model that is viable and practical for the implementation of e-learning into a partnership arrangement between VET and industry (See Figure 8.1). The RIPPLES model was developed to assist organisations to implement innovative e-learning practices (Surry, Ensminger, & Haab, 2005). RIPPLES is an acronym for Resources, Infrastructure, People, Policies, Learning, Evaluation, and Support.

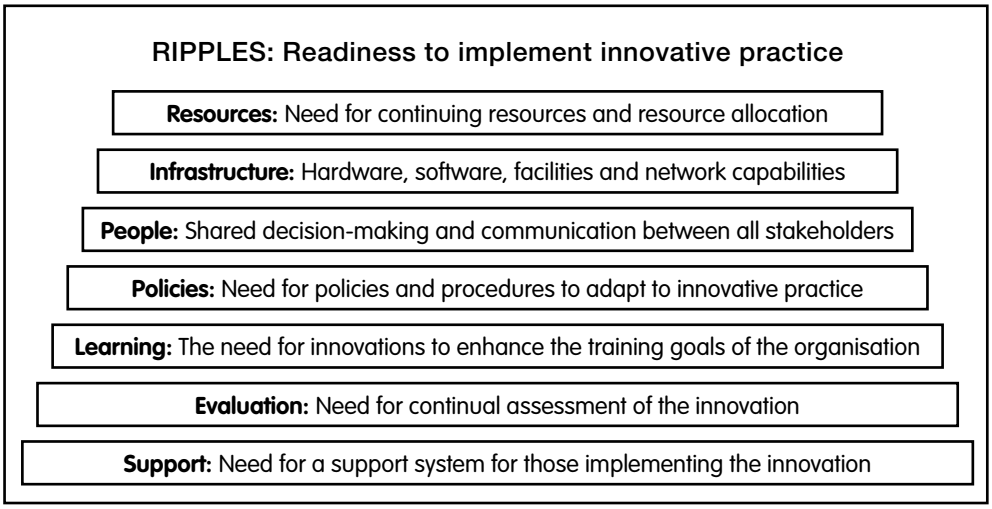

Figure 7.1: RIPPLES innovative practice model (Surry, Ensminger, & Haab, 2005)

Jasinski (2007) indicated that the seven component RIPPLES model can help to indentify the possible barriers and enablers for implementation and embedding of e-learning into VET sector training. Jasinski (2007) noted that a key enabler for implementation of e-learning approaches is to focus on learning outcomes while one of the key barriers to embedding innovative practices is technology infrastructure. While all seven components of the model are considered important for embedding an e-learning process into an organisation in their own right, it is important that all the key components be aligned for a move forward to occur. When developing e-learning training partnerships, the RIPPLES model could be applied. If both parties are hesitant in analysing the processes or do not have established resources in place, then the success of implementation is jeopardised.

Complementary to the RIPPLES model, but with a greater focus on the 'people' component of change, is the ADKAR model (Hiatt, 2006) as presented in Figure 8.2. It analyses participants' engagement in change processes. The lifecycle for ADKAR begins when the need for change is identified, for example at SkillsTech the need was for staff to start embracing new technology by embedding e-learning into their current delivery. The ADKAR model can take account of readiness for change, assessment, sponsorship, communications, coaching, training, recognition, and resistance to management.

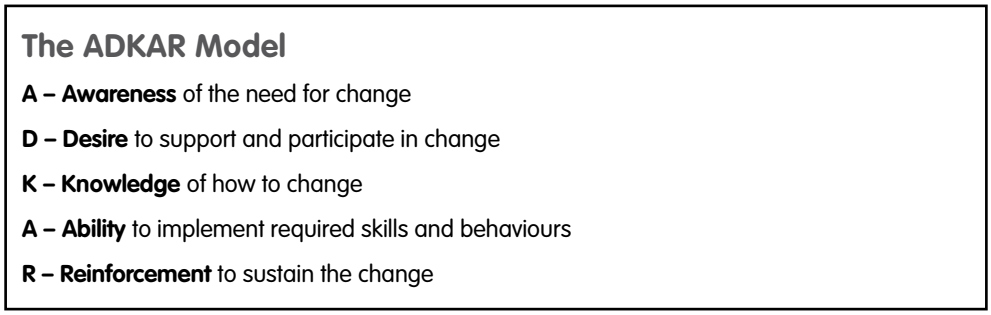

Figure 7.2: The ADKAR Model (adapted from Hiatt, 2006)

Hiatt (2006) provides an analysis of the ADKAR model. The *awareness* stage represents a person's understanding of the nature of the change. It highlights why the change is being made and the risk to an individual or organisation if the change is not adopted. The *desire to embrace change* is primarily a personal choice and, for a change manager, it is important to recognise this challenge and to ensure processes are in place to manage this risk. There is most likely the 'desire' from management for their staff to be engaged in the change, however for the staff this is often dependent on the impact that change will have on them as an individual and the potential for any personal benefits. Providing support for teachers to gain the *knowledge* on how to change and the *abilities* to implement changes that require new behavioural skills is critical for a successful outcome. The *ability phase*, in the context of the ADKAR model, is achieved when a person or organisation is well positioned to change their practices and the likelihood for successful outcomes as a result of the changes are very high. The final stage in the ADKAR model is the *reinforcement*

phase through which sustainability of change is achieved. The reinforcement stage helps to build momentum during any transitions. Recognising employees for their individual contributions helps reinforce change in an organisation.

> Case studies of partnerships

In this section, two brief case studies on how training partnerships between SkillsTech Australia and an industry organisation may work and the issues that may arise are presented. The first case presented is the partnership with a building organisation in which the issues of effective communication and engagement are identified. The second case study emphasised the importance of ownership by all stakeholders for an effective partnership.

SkillsTech Australia and Hutchinson Builders

A training partnership was formed between SkillsTech Australia and Hutchinson Builders. It was envisaged that all Hutchinson apprentices could undertake their training completely on the job with quality checks by teachers from SkillsTech Australia. Such a partnership was developed to meet the government strategy for TAFE to be more agile and responsive to industry through building closer training relationships with the trade sector. Carpentry, formwork, and falsework apprentices were the trades in which training was developed to be completely on-the-job. This model could be rolled out to other trades over time including plumbing, roof plumbing, roof tiling, painting, and decorating. Currently, this was not possible as the workplace could not provide the entire on-the-job skills training required for the apprentices to gain their trade qualification. For example, in the plumbing area, the industry partner could not provide training in the gas handling area at the time because of the specific and specialised training equipment required. As gradual roll-out occurs, the full range of skills to be delivered on-the-job for a range of trades would be developed.

One of the key incentives for developing the partnership was to reduce time being spent at TAFE by apprentices for block training. SkillsTech Australia worked closely with Hutchinson Builders to customise a training program that could be delivered at the work site. To ensure the client's needs were met, a full time SkillsTech trade teacher was dedicated to this partnership as a project manager and co-ordinator of trade-specific teachers to undertake workplace training, as well as coaching and assessment at different work sites in the Brisbane metropolitan area. As Hutchinson is a large building contractor operating across the state, similar arrangements were set up in regional areas (Townsville and Cairns) to meet training needs. This proved very cost effective for Hutchinson Builders because apprentices did not have to be released from work to undertake training at TAFE sites. Because apprentices are employed on an 'as needs' basis, Hutchinson Builders could also recruit apprentices at different times of the year to meet the peaks and troughs in the industry rather than employing at specific times to meet set training schedules at TAFE sites.

This change in delivery required SkillsTech Australia to develop on-line resources in carpentry, formwork and falsework so that students could learn the under-pinning theory components for their trade skills, via the Internet, and access these resources at a time that was suitable for them. This was a positive outcome for the apprentices as they could complete their training and earn a tradesperson's salary sooner than expected. Industry recognised that having an apprentice who must be monitored and supervised continuously by a tradesperson throughout their apprenticeship could be a costly exercise, however the benefit was that the apprentice could complete training as a faster rate. If apprentices can be fast-tracked through their training, in the end it is more cost effective and efficient both for the industry partner and the students.

One of the challenges for SkillsTech is embedding e-learning as a complete system into the training arrangements. If learning is being undertaken completely on the job, e-learning needs to provide the means for students' engagement in learning tasks to be at a time that meets student and work demands. As Hutchinson Builders is a whole-of-state employer, apprentices often move around the state depending on high and low demands in the industry. For example, if a commercial complex is being undertaken in Townsville, apprentices move to that area to fill the gap and help to meet the deadlines of the project. On-line resources can allow students to learn wherever they are located, through the Learning Management System. SkillsTech can create a one-stop shop for their industry partner by providing an online learning platform that supports on-the-job training. As this is a relatively new delivery methodology in the trades' area, continual evaluation and monitoring is required to ensure quality outcomes are achieved for all stakeholders.

SkillsTech Australia and the Gas Industry

SkillsTech Australia was successful in obtaining funding from the Australian Flexile Learning Network to work in partnership with Liquid Petroleum Gas (LPG) Queensland, for the development of e-learning resources to support three competencies from the national plumbing training package. The three competencies form part of the Certificate III in Plumbing (Gas Fitter) qualification that is the first step towards gaining a gas fitting license in Queensland. Because of the skills shortage in the gas industry, the development of an online product would service the gap being experienced with a lack of online resources to support delivery of this qualification, especially in regional areas.

The challenge in establishing new partnerships is to obtain buy-in from senior and middle management both at SkillsTech and within the gas industry. Support was initially gained from senior management but it was more difficult to obtain support from middle management when changes were not seen to be aligned with operational objectives and/or that changes may negatively impact on the current day-to-day operations. The middle managers are gatekeepers for the employees that they manage. It was essential that additional resources, such as instructional designers and content experts were put in place to undertake the project and achieve the deadlines in developing the resources for online delivery. The future growth of the SkillsTech and LPG Queensland partnership

can occur when additional funding is obtained to build on the initial arrangements. The critical aspect in the development of this project was the involvement of all stakeholders including students, industry representatives, content experts, and licensing authorities in the development the on-line product.

The benefits of partnering and creating true learning relationships include higher levels of mutual trust, greater levels of co-operation and understanding between partners, and improved communication and sharing (Gulati, Nohria, & Zaheer, 2000). Through knowledge sharing and collaboration in problem-solving, networks of relationships are established and communities of practice evolve. Surry and Ely (2001) emphasise that organisations need to invest a significant amount of time and energy into developing strong levels of trust within partnerships, whether this involves partners internal or external to the organisation.

> Challenges in developing partnerships

Balance and *equality* in a training partnership must be assured for all stakeholders. This can be achieved through a well documented agreement that clearly states the roles, responsibilities, and deliverables of both parties in the implementation of the e-learning project, which must also be endorsed by senior management (Watson 2001). If there is not balance or equity in the partnership, stakeholders can become disillusioned with the level of input that they have.

Successful partnerships are characterised by high levels of *co-operation* and *trust* between the partners. In the SkillsTech partnerships, both parties were interested in supporting each other and meeting their existing and emergent business objectives. Open communication is seen as central to the success of the relationship to ensure that there is no misunderstanding in goals and objectives for the e-learning project. In the SkillsTech Australia case studies, one of the keys to the ongoing success of these relationships was the high level of trust that was established. Mohr and Spekman (1994) noted that in order to achieve the benefits of collaboration, effective communication and trust between partners is essential

Continued s*trategic ownership* by senior management is important to support projects. Decisions can be made at the top management level initially and then over time the lines of communication become blurred. The roles of each of the stakeholders need to be clearly documented and key players must take an active role in ensuring the success of a partnership. For success to occur there should be strong engagement of senior leaders as the change sponsors from within the VET sector and industry (Watson, 2001).

As noted in the RIPPLES change management model it is critical that all areas are addressed when entering a partnership arrangement. Lack of resources such as hardware, people, training, professional development, and support systems which are not dedicated to the partnership can bring failure. Without sufficient resources and infrastructure in place the partnership cannot grow and become viable. Solid processes and procedures are needed to ensure the success of any partnership agreement.

A key reason why training partnerships are formed is the ability to customise, contextualise and be flexible to the needs of industry. Lack of flexibility is often cited as one of the key barriers in partnering with government organizations. At SkillsTech, a conscious effort was made to ensure that flexibility was built into the partnership arrangement so that when changes in policies and mandates occur, the partnerships can sustain this change. Lendrum (2000) stated that to allow partnerships to work, it is important to develop simple, quality processes that are flexible enough to foster creativity and imagination, yet provide structure for measurement and productivity. With SkillsTech Australia and our partners, it is important for all participants to be collaborative and not be constrained by narrow performance and accountability procedures and rigid bureaucratic processes which can be the case with public providers.

> Conclusions

This chapter has identified the importance for SkillsTech Australia to actively work with industry in embedding e-learning into partnerships in the trade sector, which in turn will help address trade skills shortage. For SkillsTech to become highly agile, flexible, adaptive and proactive in embracing and trialling new delivery strategies, it needs to empower staff to integrate e-learning into their practices. The change management models of RIPPLES and ADKAR can be used to understand the issues in partnership arrangements. The ADKAR model is complementary to RIPPLES and deals specifically with the people side of change management. In the RIPPLES and ADKAR models, the importance of people and their support is critical to successful innovation. Research indicates that a structured change management model, such as ADKAR, is a key contributor to the success and implementation of changes within people in an organisation (Prosci Benchmarking Report, 2007).

Professional development to support staff in their transition to embedding e-learning into their delivery is important. Professional development would follow a skills audit of the trade teaching staff at SkillsTech. This will identify the skills gap and the training required to ensure staff are to engage with digital pedagogy which is the future of teaching. A community of practice could be established to foster innovative and collaborative practices within the teaching staff of SkillsTech and its current business partners. A community of practice can create an environment where innovation, collaboration, problem solving, and cultivation of change can occur. Training partnerships must be supported, resourced and sponsored by senior management in industry and the VET sector. E-learning is now a pivotal part of vocational learning in Australia. As the business plan for the Australian Flexible Learning Framework (2006) states: ... “E-learning is a critical means for transforming the central VTE business of teaching, learning and assessment. By integrating information and communications technologies (ICT) into the way VTE is done, it is more flexible, more responsive to industry and learner needs, has improved quality and access and fosters innovation” (p.4).

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