Demonstrating quality:  
Fifteen case studies of good practice in VET

Support document for *Quality is the key: Critical issues in teaching, learning and assessment in vocational education and training*

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1. Introduction

This set of case studies is one of five supporting documents for the final report of the project entitled ‘Critical Issues in Teaching, Learning and Assessment’. The other four supporting documents are cited below.

Purposes

The first purpose of these case studies is to illustrate, test and extend a range of the critical issues in teaching, learning and assessment that emerged from the research for this project.

The second purpose of these case studies is to provide the VET sector with models of effective practice.

Format

The case studies highlight critical issues in teaching, learning and assessment and demonstrate that there are both complexities and opportunities for providers. Each of the case studies identifies a critical issue faced by practitioners, describes the context and challenges, summarises the responses of the practitioners, cites the outcomes of the practitioners’ strategies and discusses aspects of the new practice that may be transferable to other settings.

Theme

The title of the paper, ‘Demonstrating Quality’, continues a theme that emerged from an earlier paper by the researchers for Research Activity 3, ‘Quality a critical issue in teaching, learning and assessment – a three country comparison’. The ‘quality’ paper found that policy makers in Australia, England and Scotland are focused on ensuring the quality of VET. To support quality VET provision, policy makers are using a range of strategies such as fostering innovation and supporting professional development.

The case studies in this document show that policy makers are not the only VET personnel focused on policy. The case studies show VET professionals relentlessly pursuing quality outcomes for their students, and using quality strategies to assist in the achievement of these outcomes.

Selection

The researchers set out to identify five case studies to fit each of the three specific goals of this research:

- identify what individual learners and industry clients want from VET in terms of teaching and learning experiences, services and support, and propose how these can best be met
• identify the skills needed by VET practitioners in the design of learning programs and resources and in the provision of assessment services to meet the needs of different client groups and propose how these skills might be developed most effectively

• summarise the critical success factors – individual, organisational and systemic – in developing and implementing innovative approaches to teaching, learning and assessment in VET providers, and propose how models about good practice might be most effectively transmitted.

The researchers also set out to identify case studies from across Australia, covering the following categories:

• different learner groups such as workplace trainees and VET in Schools students

• equity groups such as Indigenous people and youths at risk

• different categories of VET practitioners, from frontline teachers/trainers and assessors to supervisors – enterprise-based and institution-based – to senior managers

• a range of different industries and different types of enterprises and learning settings

• a range of types of RTOs, including public and private, for-profit and not-for-profit.

Companion documents

The paper is designed to be read in conjunction with other products of research activity three, available from <http://consortiumresearchprogram.net.au>. These products include:

• a literature review ‘Critical Issues’

• a discussion paper ‘Complexities and Opportunities’

• the paper on quality mentioned above, ‘Quality a critical issue in teaching, learning and assessment – a three country comparison’

• a paper on networks: ‘VET Networked for Quality’.
2. Case studies on what clients want from VET

This section of the paper provides five case studies in response to the research goal:

identify what individual learners and industry clients want from VET in terms of teaching and learning experiences, services and support, and propose how these can best be met.

Key points

Five of the fifteen case studies provide insights into the research goal set out above, as follows.

One of the fifteen case studies – ‘Client clarity about training needs’ – provides an example of an industry client developing very specific understanding of its employees’ training needs and developing appropriate training in conjunction with a training provider. The two parties worked in partnership to deliver benefits to both the employer and the employees. The two parties are Kimbriki Recycling and Waste Disposal Centre, a Local Government recycling and waste disposal operation located at Terrey Hills on the Northern Beaches of Sydney, and the Gordon Institute of TAFE whose headquarters are in Geelong, Victoria.

The Kimbriki/Gordon Institute case study extends and enriches the broad finding from the initial research about the increasing demand – and opportunities – for the customisation and personalisation of training services. The case study provides a clear example of the new trend for industry clients to undertake research and to work in partnership with VET providers. This is an example of what Engestrom (2004) calls ‘co-configuration’. Co-configuration means that the customer becomes a real partner with the provider of the product or service. In co-configuration the client and provider actively work together to conceptualise, develop, monitor, change and evaluate the product or service being provided.

Other case studies illustrate and extend the other broad findings from the earlier research into critical issues set out in italics below:

- the need – and opportunities – for the VET practitioner to cater for a range of learning styles and preferences. A case study called ‘Action at the frontline’ of a small private provider in Victoria, William Stubbs & Associates Pty Ltd – a provider that specialises in training and assessment of frontline management in local government, manufacturing and service industries – focuses on the way the training is adjusted to suit the individual’s approaches to learning and the unique features of the workplace.

- the need – and opportunities – to effectively provide services and support for different learner groups. A case study – ‘Assisting remote Indigenous learners’ – based on the Kimberley College of TAFE in the far north of Western Australia provides examples of the College using its extensive experience to use multiple strategies to provide effective training, customised for different learner groups within the Indigenous population. Different learner groups catered for include learners in the traditional art area, Indigenous youth at risk and Indigenous people training in the tourism industry.

- the need – and opportunities – for VET practitioners to understand the many different ways learning can occur in workplaces. A case study on the Australian Institute of Public Safety – “Improving clients’ safety” – shows the provider tailoring training for individual learners, integrating in
each training program the individual’s previous learning experiences, life experiences and work experiences.

- **the need – and opportunities – to develop partnerships between external teachers and enterprise based managers and trainers.** A case study on the Central West Community College – ‘Building partnerships with industry’ – describes the relationships the College has built with enterprises in both the food processing and meat processing industries in regional NSW. The relationships take into account special pressures on industries in regional areas such as skill shortages, high staff turnover and the need to employ casual labour for peak production periods.

The five case studies demonstrate good practice in meeting industry client and individual wants in a variety of contexts.
Client clarity about training needs

Setting

Kimbriki Recycling and Waste Disposal Centre is a Local Government recycling and waste disposal operation located at Terrey Hills on the Northern Beaches of Sydney. Kimbriki employs nineteen operational site staff and five office staff, plus managers, all of whom are employees of Warringah Council. Kimbriki - run in conjunction with Manly and Mosman Councils - provides the community with a range of services for the recycling and disposal of waste. The site is operational 365 days per year and operational staff are rostered to two permanent shifts.

Critical issue

According to the Gordon Institute of TAFE’s Senior Manager, National Training Programs, Colin Frisch, Kimbriki management has always been proactive in the area of staff training, however, they were dissatisfied with some past experiences:

The courses offered have been largely stand alone, such as manual handling, traffic control and armed hold-up situation training. Management was aware that this form of training did not lead to any formal qualification for the staff.

The critical issue for the enterprise was to address the fact that, in the past, many employees in the waste industry in Australia have not been given the opportunity to gain nationally recognised qualifications and with that increased job satisfaction.

Challenges

A desire to deepen staff knowledge and to provide for possible career advancement led the Kimbriki Compliance Officer and Operations Manager to make extensive enquiries about relevant waste management courses.

Frisch explains that little was known within the waste management industry about the availability of suitable courses, but this knowledge gap was addressed:

With assistance from the Property Services ITAB a course was found that took account of existing skills and one which would lead to a nationally recognised qualification in the area of waste management: the Certificate III Assets Maintenance - Waste Management course. The Gordon Institute had been delivering the course in Victoria, NSW and Queensland since 2000.

Strategies

During 2003 Kimbriki Management made enquiries with registered training providers for the delivery of this course to employees on-site. Help was provided by the Chatswood DETNAC and the Property Services ITAB in relation to the establishment of traineeships for existing staff and for all newly employed staff. Consultation was then entered into with Kimbriki staff and the
United Services Union regarding the course and from these meetings it was determined that a majority of staff were willing to undertake training to gain the Certificate III qualification.

In September 2003, Kimbriki engaged the services of Gordon Institute of TAFE – whose headquarters are in Geelong Victoria but has Ultimo, Sydney and Brisbane campuses with permanent staff establishment to deliver the training and to provide assessment. Traineeships were soon established and training commenced. The training competencies chosen were from the Training Package framework selected to meet the following criteria, says Frisch:

- to meet the operational requirements of the Kimbriki site,
- provide staff with knowledge that would be transportable within the waste management industry,
- provide staff with career development opportunities, and
- to complement OH&S practices and competencies required on the site.

In conjunction with Gordon Institute, a flexible training approach was developed to meet the site's needs. As operational staff are rostered to two permanent shifts it was decided that training would be undertaken in the Kimbriki training room, with employees attending formal training sessions on days rostered off. Kimbriki, through an existing Enterprise Agreement, pays staff to attend training sessions and provides resources to assist the staff in their studies. Assessment of competencies for each module was undertaken in the workplace, ensuring that the relevance of the course to the employees work regime could be demonstrated.

The training was delivered by Gordon’s qualified trainers, together with Kimbriki staff. Frisch explains how this collaboration contributed to success:

The Kimbriki Operations Manager and Compliance Officer both hold Certificate IV Workplace Training and Assessment and this enables Kimbriki to complement the knowledge of Gordon staff with site specific and industry specific knowledge. One reason for the staff embracing the training has been the relevance of the course to their positions on the site. This is a model we encourage nationally and one that brings the most productive workplace based training outcomes.

Outcomes

Employees embraced the training, says Frisch.

Of the employees initially enrolled in the course only one ceased the training and Kimbriki signed up a number of new employees who have started since the commencement of the traineeship. A small number of staff have since investigated further education and training options. It is hoped that on completion of the Certificate III course some staff will undertake supervisory training in the form of Frontline Management. In my 23 years in vocational education this rates top three as an exemplary model.

The course has led to improvement in site operations. Since commencing the course staff have completed a number of OH&S competencies and staff now have a greater and critical understanding of the relevance of OH&S in their workplace and are also involved in the preparation of site procedures, OH&S documents and customer information leaflets. This has led to the creation of work documents that are relevant to their needs and to improvements in customer service.

Frisch comments on the changes to staff attitudes:

Staff have a more positive approach to the workplace environment. They are putting in place skills learnt during their participation in the course and are pleased to be participating in a course that will provide them with a formal nationally recognised qualification.
Regular review meetings have been conducted between Kimbriki and the Gordon to evaluate and assess the delivery of the course, the relevance of training to workplace needs and the progress of employees. These meetings are attended not only by Kimbriki Management and representatives of the Gordon but employee representatives as well. This ensures all parties have a contribution to the conduct of the course and take ownership of the educational process. Most staff completed their Certificate III training in September 2005. Now all new staff employed at Kimbriki are asked to undertake the course to ensure they too have the skills and qualification relative to complex waste management operations.

Possible transferable elements

In the resource recovery community, Kimbriki is seen as an industry leader. Frisch expects that the success of the staff training program at Kimbriki Recycling and Waste Disposal Centre will be an inspiration to other organisations within the waste management industry:

Kimbriki management has been proactive in alerting the industry of the value of the Certificate training in Waste Management and traineeships in general, providing articles for trade and union publications. Kimbriki was also instrumental in arranging for Gordon Institute to present a paper at the 6th National Waste Conference 2004, “National Waste Management Training”, publicising the value of traineeships to others within the waste management industry.

Kimbriki Management is rightly proud of the achievements of staff and hope their success and the success of the operation as a whole will stand as an example to the waste industry and wider community. Frisch summarises the value of the modeling provided by Kimbriki:

Waste is an ever present aspect of society and the staff who work in this industry have for too long had their skills and knowledge undervalued. The implementation of traineeships provide one means by which waste management staff can gain qualifications that recognise the skill that is required in this increasingly complex field.

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Reference:

Action at the frontline

Setting
William D Stubbs & Associates Pty Ltd is a small, niche market provider in the area of frontline management, providing training and assessment services to clients in various industries ranging from local government to the manufacturing and service industries. The principal Bill Stubbs has a background in frontline and senior management in multi-national logistics organisations.

Critical issue
The program in Frontline Management is tailored to the client organisation and the client needs. The critical issue is to provide support for the frontline managers but also to relate the workplace issues back to units of competency. Each program takes approximately ten months and remains responsive to the client organisation and the client changing needs throughout this time. Groups are generally between five-fifteen clients.

Program strategy
The program strategy – in general, as it may vary – involves:

1. There is an initial induction of the client into the program, informing the clients how the course will run. It is considered by the trainer that it is important for the clients to understand how the course will be delivered and assessed. Critical to the success of the program is gaining the client’s trust, as many of these participants have not had formal training since leaving school.

2. There are two learning sets throughout the program when the units of competency are explained and learning materials are provided. Units of competency and materials are constantly related back to the client’s worksite and work practices, and then to the sorts of evidence to demonstrate competency.

3. One to two sessions are utilised to building the portfolio for initial assessment. Looking at what the client can do and connecting this to the units of competency and then to the evidence required. At this stage the assessor takes a coaching role, assisting in addressing workplace issues and linking advice and strategies to the units of competency and hence the portfolio.

4. The initial assessment of the portfolio occurs within about three months into the program. With the initial assessment, there are essentially four tools: assessment of competence (done between supervisor and candidate) on all units; peer and staff survey pertinent to relevant less tangible units, where it is difficult to demonstrate competence, for example good leadership skills (this is confidential and the participants do not get to see them); portfolio; interview tool (which the contract assessor uses). Initial assessment is conducted by an independent contract assessor against the above suite of evidence. An independent assessor is used to promote validity and ensure distance from the clients. The RTO assessor moderates with the contract assessor their findings, quite often moderating and debating the relative merits of each submission. The final judgement is made cognisant of the relative weighting of the evidence - that is, peer survey is not without its problems.
5. Once a decision is made, the assessor meets with the client and a representative of the client organisation, usually the Human Resource Manager or Learning & Development Manager. The parties go through the client’s results, encouraging debate and questioning. The assessor seeks agreement on the outcome. The outcome could be: Competent; or Further Evidence (which leads into the L&D plan and negotiated at the meeting); or Further development (which leads into the L&D plan and negotiated at the meeting).

6. Further development consists of certain activities: workshops and completing assessment; shadowing a certain person; and completing a workplace based project that enables unit(s) of competency to be demonstrated.

7. Throughout the development of the final submission a coaching role is taken, assisting clients with workplace issues and linking these to the project and final evidence submission. Assessments are on-going, on a needs basis, as requested by the clients. Meetings with clients are monthly, but this often peters off towards the end of the 10 month period with clients completing the assessments, so more time is spent with the “stragglers”.

Challenges

There are a number of challenges that need to be addressed which Stubbs considers critical to the success of the program. One of the key challenges for this delivery methodology is flexibility; flexibility in terms of meeting times as well as frequency. Stubbs considers that the assessor needs to get to know the client, and know what their job entails; and the client needs to trust and respect their assessor. The assessor needs to have “a handle on what the company does and get inside the organisation at a great level”. This is critical and the assessor is the conduit between what the client and client organisation do and the Training Package. Stubbs considers that he also needs to build a strong relationship with the L&D or HR Manager, especially for the latter stages of the program.

Strategies

Stubbs addressed these issues in a number of ways:

• First, by remaining flexible: “I can be flexible to a point.”

• Second, by actively researching the organisation, which is challenging if it is technical or complex in nature.

• Third, by visiting the client:
  …where they work and not in the classroom, to try and understand what they do, how they fit into the organizational structure and strategic plan…I look for opportunities in the organization so to feed the student into the activity.

• Fourth, through extensive communication, especially with the managers:
  I work hard on the business relationship and I need this relationship. I put in a lot of yards in building that relationship. Asking what they want and getting to know them.

• Fifth, by actively building a relationship with the client:
  What I like about Frontline it is pretty broad. You don’t get the same from a classroom and portfolio submission. With the one-to-one strategy I can relate an issue and suggest a strategy and control this. For the client there is no risk in seeking help…they can tell me. But I need to do the spade work early, the more they trust me, the more they tell, the more I can advise them and the better we can build their competencies.
Outcomes

The key outcome as noted by Stubbs was that the clients learnt about their jobs, about what they do and how they do it and about why they do things:

One of my students stated after the initial assessment that his portfolio preparation was a little like an out of body experience where he was watching himself working. He said that it allowed him to take an objective look at what he does, how he does it and why he does it.

Stubbs considers that the process enables the clients to re-examine the way they carry out their duties and provides the opportunity to refine these skills, as well as build their confidence as managers.

Possible transferable elements

Elements of this initiative that may be transferable are the focus on the client, providing support and guidance to work through workplace issues, allowing them the opportunity to reflect on their practice and constantly relating it back to the units of competency.

The strategy also enables the coach/facilitator to constantly adapt and change the provision of information and management strategies, as the need arises. The one-to-one delivery provides the client with a ‘trusted’ mentor, who does not have a workplace relations impact on them, and who can respond to their individual learner’s needs and context.

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Assisting remote Indigenous learners

Setting

Kimberley TAFE in Western Australia services a region of 422,500 square kilometres in the far north. This is one-sixth of Western Australia's total land area but the population is just 1.6% of the state's population but with over 40% of the region's population being 25 years old or under it is one of the youngest regions in Australia. While the region has a relatively small economy the economic outlook is extremely bright with major contributors to the region’s gross domestic product being mining, pastoral, fishing and tourism and hospitality.

Kimberley College campuses are located at Broome, Derby, Halls Creek, Kununurra and Wyndham, with an annexe located at Fitzroy Crossing. A significant percentage of the College’s delivery is undertaken outside of these campuses, at remote communities located throughout the Kimberley. The College offers a broad range of qualifications to over 3,300 students each year and approximately 48% of the College's students are Indigenous.

Critical issue

The population of the local area is 53% Indigenous, but 40% of the Indigenous population live outside the main settlements, often in communities remote from the nearest town. While Indigenous youth make up a considerable proportion of the population, 79.3% are either not employed or are involved in Community Development Employment Projects (CDEP) and are not in mainstream employment. This represents a considerable pool of people not participating in local employment opportunities at a time of increased skill shortages.

A critical issue is how to provide effective training assistance to Indigenous learners, that leads to ongoing employment.

Challenges

The challenges are profound, says College Managing Director Adrian Mitchell, as the disadvantaged position of the Indigenous population includes high mortality rates, high unemployment rates, low numeracy and literacy levels and low education participation and retention rates.

Strategies

Mitchell believes the College’s structure and culture enable it to be client-focused:

The College has a regional-based organisational structure and a culture that has always encouraged staff to focus on meeting meet client needs and this has seen the College able to respond to the needs of the region.
The College has a strong tradition of commitment to the traditional skills of the Indigenous population and has had many successes at providing specialised training to meet unique needs of selected groups in the region over the years. One example is the Mowanjum Arts program, which saw the delivery of training and revitalisation of traditional art and generated some $1,000,000 plus worth of sales for the community. This has led to many employment prospects and numerous other beneficial programs and outcomes for this community. This type of program and style of delivery is now being run at Ringers Soak, with plans to expand to the Loom and Nookenhah Communities.

In 2003, the College received funding to deliver Certificate II in Music to Youth at Risk. This project continues to be successful in gaining the interest of young Indigenous people throughout the local Broome community through word of mouth and successful performances including Port Hedland during NAIDOC week and at a recent Beagle Bay Community performance. There have been several inquiries and interest expressed in the program from both the target group themselves and others working with Youth at Risk within local communities in outer lying areas of the Broome locale. Mitchell notes the recent success of the initiative:

This program proved so successful for Indigenous youth that a band has been formed, CDs recorded and many performances held. This program is ongoing and the College’s new band has just completed a number of ‘gigs’ including Fitzroy Crossing, Derby and the North West Expo.

The Halls Creek campus delivered the Certificate II of Beef Cattle Production several years ago. The unique aspect of this program is that it was delivered to students at a stock camp at Lake Stretch and on Bohemia Downs Station and was delivered in five different Aboriginal languages. Benefits of this initiative are still being felt, says Mitchell:

This proved to be a very successful program which took into account traditional learning styles’ and appropriate delivery using tribal elders as mentors. Given the success of this program the College has recently signed up a number of trainees in the pastoral industry after investing significant resources into developing local Indigenous trainers.

The Barramundi Moon Project, a nationally recognised successful program delivered tourism training to the Dampier Peninsula people. The Doon Doon Station project provided a remote Aboriginal community with its own fully functioning service station and related café, built and staffed entirely by members of the community. Mitchell notes:

All of these tremendous results are testimony for the College on its ability to completely achieve the outcomes from its programs while building on traditional skills and are great indicators of success for any program that the College undertakes.

The College has also undertaken a number of other Youth at Risk programs designed to address literacy and numeracy, self esteem and work readiness. Examples include training in construction which resulted in three Mirror Class yachts being built, a maritime intervention program at Broome supported by the Police Department and music and pastoral skills programs.

**Outcomes**

The College has received national recognition for the development of innovative qualifications for Aboriginal learners. Close relationships have been established with Aboriginal resource agencies and communities to ensure that training undertaken is well supported and relevant to community economic and social aspirations. The College has also developed strong relationships with other providers in the region.

On a broader front, says Mitchell,

there have been employment successes in the tourism industry, pastoral industry, mining industry horticulture and aquaculture area and the very lucrative and empowering visual arts industry and
exciting opportunities exist in natural resource management, where communities are investigating best practice models for the production of native plants such as Gubinge that will contribute to long-term economic development.

Other examples include:

- supporting Argyle Diamonds’ Community Leadership Program that will see 150 young people employed in a wide range of traineeships, apprenticeships or other work placements that will lead into ongoing employment and/or assist in the development of local Aboriginal communities. As part of this program the College is now servicing the 1st year training requirements of Kimberley Group Training’s metal trade apprentices in partnership with Swan TAFE.

- assisting communities to plan and develop economic enterprises including tourism and aquaculture. To date 10 Indigenous tourism businesses have been established including Middle Lagoon, Chile Creek and Barramundi Moon.

Possible transferable elements

Clearly the successes of the College are the result of multiple strategies and experience accumulated over a number of years. So it would be wrong to suggest that these strategies and this experience could be transferred to other settings. However, for those who have similar commitment and patience, the rewards are possible, says Mitchell.

One element of the College’s approach that is transferable is the use of strategies for Partners in a Learning Culture. These strategies seek to identify where effort is needed and by whom, to achieve accountable and equitable delivery of VET for Indigenous Australians.

The acknowledgement that some of the solutions to Indigenous training needs may be found outside the VET sector, “is one that is integral to the way we do business at the College”, according to Mitchell:

The challenges we face and the solutions that are envisaged to meet these challenges require resourcing that is beyond the limits of the College’s core funding and it is only through partnerships with other sectors and groups that we can build the capacity that is required.

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Improving clients’ safety

Setting
Aggression in the workplace and other forms of occupational violence have received widespread attention at all levels of Australian society, says Tony Zalewski, CEO of the Melbourne-based private provider, the Australian Institute of Public Safety:

Research institutions such as the Australian Institute of Criminology, occupational health and safety authorities and various government bodies have documented the impacts of occupational violence in a variety of workplace settings. A common theme of all the research has been the need for organisations and responsible entities to implement pro-active strategies for prevention, response and recovery.

The Institute is progressive in recognising the need to develop relevant training programs that complement government, community and stakeholder initiatives. The Institute is regularly sourced by a variety of public and private sector clients to design, develop and deliver training to up-skill staff to manage occupational violence situations.

Critical issue
Many occupational areas experience high levels of aggression and violence due to the compliance or business nature of the work performed and the client base being serviced, for instance in the health sector. The Institute’s research showed that although many workplaces involved high risk “occupational violence and workplace aggression training was either non-existent or limited”. In the minority of cases where training was provided, it was general in nature, says Zalewski:

Traditionally, programs of this nature are delivered on a continuous basis by the outsourced provider where the specific needs of organisations are not always met. This is due to a lack of understanding of the working environment and a tendency to provide training to specific employee groups in isolation. For example clinical staff, support staff or security personnel.

The critical issue for the Institute was to address industry need for customised training:

The Institute recognised the need to customise this training with a greater organisational focus, to enhance access for different groups and for equity participation.

Challenge
In addition to the design of customised training, the Institute invented ways of positioning training within holistic organisational approaches to reducing the risk of occupational violence and aggression. Zalewski accepted the challenge to develop an integrated approach to risk reduction and associated training:

Our integrated approach addressed an industry need – the need for improving staff and client safety by reducing risk while developing a culture of safety and strategic thinking in situations where potentially aggressive or hostile situations can arise.
Strategies

Some of the innovative client-focused strategies developed by the Institute include the following:

… empowering local staff to deliver training to facilitate greater ownership of the overall program which in turn results in higher participation and access for broader work groups; and providing opportunities for internal staff to have their existing expertise recognised and skills enhanced along with the achievement of nationally recognised training qualifications.

To further meet the needs of clients, the Institute also developed flexible approaches to training in the safety field:

By empowering the organisation to take responsibility for its training delivery and assessment, sessions could be held at times and places convenient to learners and the enterprise.

Another strategy was tailoring the content to suit individual learning:

The content of the program can be tailored to individual learners and the target group integrating previous learning, life experience and work. Current competencies, knowledge, skills and attitudes are also recognised within the scope of assessments.

To further assist individuals’ learning, the Institute has developed a range of delivery strategies, learning resources and assessment tools.

The Institute helps organisations to develop administrative support through its supply of training and assessment materials, the issuing of certificates and the gathering of trainee data. The Institute also trains the organisation’s staff to conduct monitoring, auditing, reviewing and updating training. In summary, the Institute’s integrated approach to the organisation’s safety needs makes the training more relevant and acceptable to the organisation’s staff.

Outcomes

Outcomes from the Institute’s programs demonstrate that the programs meet the organisation’s needs and positively affect their business. This finding is based on the rigorous collection of client feedback, says Zalewski:

The Institute views client feedback as an integral part of its operation. To ensure maximum feedback is gained, the Institute developed a series of administrative procedures including documented client satisfaction surveys to assess the appropriateness of its training programs.

Institute administrative staff compile data based upon client satisfaction surveys. This data is then circulated within the Institute’s training division including course developers and trainers, Institute management, and the relevant client.

Zalewski finds that common outcomes for organisations include the following:

Enhanced and valued contributions of individual expertise within the workplace;

Development of key persons to deliver and monitor performance within the workplace;

Impacts on the general health and safety of all persons in the workplace, whether staff or others; and

Contributing to the improvement of client operations by raising awareness and developing competence in managing workplace aggression.

Fine-tuning of the Institute’s integrated approach to training has led to the securing of substantial new contracts, for example:
We have just won two Department of Human Services Victoria contracts to conduct training in our enterprise developed nationally accredited occupational violence and aggression management programs. This is an example of industry and client-driven training based upon innovation. The ATO had us deliver to 400 of their investigators nationally earlier this year.

Possible transferable elements

The model developed by the Institute has already been transferred to a range of industries:

The Institute has been heavily sourced to provide training services in the area of occupational violence and workplace aggression across industry sectors.

Personnel from a variety of public and private enterprises have received occupational violence and aggression management training. Clients include a variety of healthcare service providers and major hospitals, statutory law enforcement, compliance management organisations and customer service environments with varying levels of operational risk.

The Institute encourages organisations to identify internal staff to conduct their own training:

Where possible and subject to the identification of internal expertise and staff skill levels, the Institute continues to encourage organisations to be self-directed in their education and training programs regarding occupational violence and aggression within the workplace.

Zalewski believes that individuals exposed to the program learn transferable skills:

The numbers of participants exposed to the program has significant on sell, with participants gaining transferable skills whereby the core content of programs can easily be applied to circumstances outside of their work environments.

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Building partnerships with industry

Setting

Central West Community College (CWCC) in Orange NSW is an independent not-for-profit organisation providing a range of integrated training, recruitment and community support services in the Central West. The College provides services beyond the Central West, extending from Wagga Wagga in the Riverina region to Coffs Harbour on the mid-North Coast. CWCC has 130 regular staff and a further 250 casual trainers and assessors.

This case study focuses on the College’s activities within Simplot Australia at Bathurst, a major company in the food processing industry in the Central West and Cargill Beef at Wagga Wagga, a major company in the meat processing industry in the Riverina.

The Central West region is known as the agricultural heart of NSW. The region has a population of 172,790 and a land area of 63,262 sq km and includes the major towns of Bathurst and Orange, the latter about 250km from Sydney. Simplot Australia, a food processing company for which CWCC provides services, is part of two significant industries within the Central West region, the agricultural and manufacturing industries. Simplot Australia manufactures and sells frozen and canned products. Simplot’s Bathurst site is the largest processor of sweet corn in Australia and all production facilities have recently been upgraded to be world class and globally competitive.

Cargill Beef Australia, a meat processing company which is the other enterprise examined in this case study, is one of the largest businesses at Wagga Wagga in the Riverina region of NSW. Wagga Wagga is 462km from Sydney and has a population of 56,303. Cargill Australia Limited established a presence in Australia in 1967 to service the country’s large grain exports and has since extended its involvement into several other agricultural industries including oilseed and beef processing and flour milling, as well as grain and cotton trading and grain storage. Cargill Beef Australia announced in November 2003 that it would expand its beef processing facility in Wagga Wagga – which will be another key focus of this research project – to better serve key customers, creating 125 additional jobs. CWCC became involved with Cargill soon after this expansion was announced.

Critical issue

To attract new residents to regional and rural communities, these communities ideally need world-competitive industries providing sustainable jobs and long-term security for their populations. It is generally accepted that flexible, customised training in regional industries is one of the keys to realising this vision of vibrant regional development in Australia.

However, the critical issue of developing customised training in regional areas, where enterprises are often small, requires educational providers to understand the enterprise clients’ needs and to adapt the provider organisation to suit the enterprises (Mitchell 2004).
Challenges

To develop customised training, Central West Community College decided to specialise in a small number of industries, particularly food processing and meat processing. However, forming partnerships with appropriate enterprises within these two industries required substantial planning, effort and expertise. To provide training and related services for enterprises in the food and meat processing industries, CWCC needed to contend with a range of critical issues for industries in regional Australia:

- intensive production: the production line needs to keep moving and cannot stop for training, so only small numbers of staff can attend training at any one time
- skills shortages: flexible training strategies are needed to enable unemployed clients to gain the necessary pre-vocational skills necessary to gain employment
- high staff turnover: training needs to address causes of staff turnover such as lack of skill development leading to a reduced career path
- employment of casual labour: training needs to include the provision of a structured approach to induction and initial skills training.

Strategies

Over a number of years, CWCC developed a range of strategies to underpin their partnerships with Simplot and Cargill Beef, says Sandra Gray, Senior Manager, Operations and Business Development, CWCC:

Key strategies included identifying staff who have a deep knowledge of these industries and can develop close partnerships with the enterprises.

Sharon Bradley, CWCC’s Industry Manager, oversees the college’s industry training – which includes meat, food and mining – and supervises CWCC trainers. As part of her role, she leads the CWCC team that provides customised services to Cargill Beef in Wagga Wagga. Part of her role is to liaise directly with senior management of enterprises such as Cargill Beef. While highly competent and entrepreneurial in such business partnership negotiations, Sharon also brings to her work a long background in the meat industry and a passion for the industry.

Two CWCC trainers who provide services at Cargill Beef in Wagga Wagga are Gary Lowe, who spends most of the week at the abattoir, and Murray Izzard, who provides training at Cargill’s abattoir several days each week. Both Gary and Murray have very relevant experience: prior to working for CWCC, Gary was a regional quality manager in a government agency AQIS, which provided services for the meat industry, and Murray has worked in the abattoir field for most of his career and delivers training each week in a range of different abattoirs in the Riverina region.

Sharon Bradley also supervises Bathurst-based food industry trainer Judy Doulman, who works closely with Simplot – a role Doulman finds comfortable given she worked as an employee of Simplot for some years, following her undertaking of a university degree in food science. Additionally, Bradley works with her manager Sandra Gray on long-term planning of industry partnerships and workplace training.

Outcomes

Outcomes of this close collaboration with local enterprises include the development of a model for partnering industry. The model fine-tunes the generic, practical guidelines developed by
Callan and Ashworth (2004), which VET and other professionals can use in setting up and managing successful industry–provider training partnerships:

- Recognise the competitive realities businesses are facing as they try to build training and ongoing skills development into their organisations or industries.

- Build as much flexibility and customisation into the training as is feasible and manageable within the allocated budget.

- Given the time involved in establishing a larger training partnership, support the establishment of longer-term partnerships.

- Accept that a ‘break-even’ outcome initially may be the best financial result that a training provider may achieve, particularly since some outcomes may not be realised in financial terms.

- Find and then develop staff who have special responsibilities for initiating and managing the start-up stages of larger training partnerships.

- Assemble a core of individuals who want to be responsible for the successful management of the partnership and the achievement of its training objectives. (Callan and Ashworth 2004, pp.9-10).

Implementing such strategies is a major undertaking for any provider, but CWCC achieved this goal.

Following Callon and Ashworth (2004), components of the CWCC partnership model that are similar for its partnership with Simplot and its partnership with Cargill Beef are:

- a willingness by CWCC to use training delivery methods, including the timing and structure of training, that suit the enterprise

- a willingness by CWCC to customise training, including the inclusion of enterprise-specific content, to suit the enterprise

- support for the partnership from senior management within both CWCC and the enterprise

- a commitment to a long-term relationship

- a willingness to postpone immediate financial gains in lieu of a longer-term, stable relationship

- the allocation of specific CWCC staff to work with a particular enterprise

- the creation of a learning environment where individuals feel their specific needs are being catered for

- the development of skills by CWCC staff in partnering enterprises. (Mitchell 2004)

Possible transferable elements

Sandra Gray believes that other RTOs can learn from and adapt the CWCC industry partnership model, if the RTOs adapt the model to suit each enterprise, because CWCC varies its multi-dimensional partnership model in response to particular features of each enterprise.

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References:

3. Case studies on what skills and resources are needed by VET practitioners

This section of the paper provides five case studies in response to the research goal:

identify the skills needed by VET practitioners in the design of learning programs and resources and in the provision of assessment services to meet the needs of different client groups and propose how these skills might be developed most effectively.

Key points

Five of the fifteen case studies provide insights into the research goal set out above, as follows:

- One case study – ‘Skills for assisting disengaged youth’ – describes a group of South Australian TAFE teaching staff acquiring the many different skills needed to assist learners who have become disengaged from educational environments. For instance, staff needed to acquire skills in behaviour management and how to cope with ‘compassion fatigue’, including the stress involved in working with learners who may need counselling support for psychological or drug related problems. Staff acquired these skills in a variety of ways, from structured workshops to networking to peer group support on-the-job.

- A case study called ‘Collaborative training in a chocolate factory’ describes TAFE Tasmania staff developing new skills to support learning that occurs in the workplace. In this case the enterprise had a number of workplaces including a chocolate factory, a museum of chocolate for the tourist trade, a retail store and a restaurant. One of the challenges for the TAFE Tasmania staff was to help staff within the enterprise learn on-the-job about each of the different workplaces of this one enterprise. The TAFE Tasmania staff acquired these skills by working collaboratively with the enterprise owner and trainers, so that the training met the needs of the individual worker while assisting business objectives.

- A case study entitled ‘Helping students flower’ focuses on Marjorie Milner College – which operates across Victoria and Tasmania – and the flexible delivery approaches it uses in assisting learners who work within florists. The provider used a team teaching model that allows the trainers to adapt and change the delivery, facilitating discussion, questioning, modelling and reinforcement of learning. The College’s staff have acquired the skill of encouraging the individual learner to manage the progress of their own learning.

- A case study called ‘Support for isolated assessors’ reports on the work of a Lesley Wemyss who manages a private RTO in Queensland, specialising in enterprise-based training and assessment, particularly in mining companies in northern Queensland. As an experienced VET practitioner, Wemyss helps to build the capacity of other practitioners from private, remote RTOs in their assessment practices and in their use of professional judgment. The case study shows the need for workplace assessors to be assisted to develop new skills in aspects of assessment such as validating their assessment decisions and processes.

- A case study called ‘Supporting self-paced workplace training’ describes Workplace English Language and Literacy (WELL) trainers from TAFE NSW Hunter Institute on the coast
north of Sydney developing an assessment practice in the local area health system. The TAFE assessors have now developed expertise in working within an area health service. Their process has involved mapping units from the relevant Training Package to the needs of the organisation, and establishing an assessment team of a WELL trainer, a vocational trainer from the relevant TAFE section and an industry based assessor. The approach included winning the trust of the participants so that they felt comfortable with a self-paced, workplace-based training program.

These case studies enrich and deepen the general findings about the skills and resources needed by VET practitioners. They all provide good practice examples of practitioners developing and using new skills to meet client demands.
Skills for assisting disengaged youth

Setting

Not only do disengaged youth have the greatest need for training, and the least support, the cost to Australia of young people leaving school early is estimated at $2.6 billion each year (Business Council of Australia 2003). The Business Council of Australia report reveals disturbing numbers of young people are being left behind, facing insecure employment, and reduced earnings over the long-term, as well as increased likelihood of poorer health and social disadvantage. And the problem is worsening: the number of teenagers not in full-time study or full-time work is the highest than at any other time in the last six years (Long 2004).

In 2004 the South Australian Department of Further Education, Employment, Science and Technology (DFEEST) initiated a program called ‘Learn to Earn’ to provide training for 107 disengaged youth in 2004, in order to identify what support young people required to make the transition to training or employment. The program was conducted again in 2005.

Critical issue

It cannot be assumed that VET staff will automatically have all the skills to assist this cohort of learners. While it is crucial for Australian society that disengaged youth are helped to re-engage with training and employment, this case study focuses on the critical issue of RTOs identifying the skills needed by staff to support these youth and fostering the staff members' development of those skills.

Challenges

Some of the reasons young people become disengaged from educational environments and learning include the following: lack of basic language and literacy; homelessness; mental health and medical conditions affecting students’ ability to concentrate; bullying and harassment leading to school failure; behavioural issues; low self-esteem and lack of motivation; drug and alcohol use; lack of transport; and financial hardship (Fergusson and Young 2005).

Strategies

According to the DFEEST project manager Annie Fergusson, the aim of the Learn to Earn program was to assist young people aged 16-24 years to gain practical experience in their vocational area of interest:

- The program was designed to provide practical work-related experiences so that participants could develop ‘employability’ as well as life skills, while helping them to develop their literacy and numeracy skills.

The Learn to Earn program covered the following topics: working in local businesses and community groups; individual career counselling; industry-specific skills; employability skills;
personal development; and literacy and numeracy skills. The participants who successfully completed the program achieved a nationally accredited qualification, the Certificate II in Vocational Education and Training. A statement of results indicated the areas of study completed.

In the 2004 intake of 107 young people in the program, 74% were early school leavers. All were drawn from disadvantaged groups: 7% were disabled; 7% were from a non-English speaking background; 15% were Indigenous; 22% were long-term unemployed; and 35% were from rural areas. The majority of applicants for Learn to Earn were in the two categories of unemployed and early school leaver. The program was conducted by TAFE SA at Whyalla, Gawler, Elizabeth, Port Adelaide, O’Halloran Hill and Tea Tree Gully campuses.

To help TAFE staff develop the new knowledge and skills required for working with disengaged youth, workshops were held. Some of the topics addressed at the staff workshops included behaviour management, ‘compassion fatigue’, mentoring and case management, organisational support and staff development networks. The staff development networks that flowed on from these workshops facilitated a greater sharing of the resources and skills of staff.

Fergusson notes that as this was a pilot program, staff were encouraged to experiment with new ways of delivery and assessment, and to share findings with staff from other project teams:

- The workshops were found to be a valuable opportunity to share ideas, methodology and resources. Staff agreed that professional development was important for them to de-brief, reflect on what was happening, share strategies and draw on specialist support where necessary.

Staff involved in the Learn to Earn projects subsequently adapted and changed their normal delivery methods:

- They commonly adopted a student-centred, active, hands-on, project-based approach to teaching and learning, together with an individualised case management approach to student support.

A feature of the Learn to Earn program was the use of ‘project-based learning’, where practical projects such as laying pavers around community houses enabled participants to learn as the same time as contributing to projects that benefited the local community. For example, the O’Halloran Hill project pursued an environmental theme and involved the restoration of a trailer for a local wildlife protection organisation.

Another feature of the program was TAFE staff actively forming partnerships with businesses and local and Commonwealth governments in projects such as the $100,000 Rage Cage project for the Elizabeth group. In this project twelve unemployed young people developed hands-on skills by turning six tonnes of raw steel into an ‘extreme sports’ facility for the region. The resultant 25m x 19m facility caters for twelve different sports from basketball to skateboarding and rock climbing.

Outcomes

Results from the Learn to Earn program were encouraging: 56% of participants completed either a VET Certificate I or II. 40% of participants went back to school or enrolled in further training, and another 43% found employment, including through traineeships and apprenticeships. The program had a positive influence on many of the students resulting in them being proud of their achievements and feeling as though they are doing something with their lives.

The research identified factors that supported engagement by young people in this program, including the following:

- ‘it was not like school’; it was very ‘hands-on’ and practical; it had immediate relevance to the young...
people; it was an integrated, project-based approach; there was active encouragement for participants to be involved in decision making and to take on responsibilities; the case management approach provided individual support and encouragement; the groups were small in size; and facilitators had skills in working flexibly and developing positive relationships with youth. (Fergusson & Young 2005)

The Learn to Earn program also challenged TAFE Institutes to develop appropriate methods for delivering programs to disengaged youth. In a paper delivered in late 2005, Fergusson and Young (2005) summarised areas where staff need support to work with disengaged youth. In particular, staff need assistance with behaviour management skills and to be able to refer students to counselling services where students have psychological, emotional or drug related problems. RTOs also need to acknowledge the possibility that their staff may suffer from ‘compassion fatigue’.

Possible transferable elements

The DFEEST experience indicates that multiple strategies are required to address the needs of disengaged youth, such as the facilitation of project-based learning, the creation of ‘youth friendly’ learning environments, the use of individual case management techniques and the construction of durable partnerships.

The Learn to Earn pilot program resulted in the development of significant intellectual capital among the staff, in the area of addressing the needs of disengaged youth:

This is largely the result of the initiatives of the program managers and lecturers who worked together as a team. Together they developed a strong network to continually improve the service provided to their client group. (Fergusson & Young 2005)

Other RTOs that wish to imitate the Learn to Earn model will need to pay special attention to assisting their staff develop the necessary skills to work with disengaged youth.

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References:


Fergusson, A. & Young, S. 2005, ‘Strategies to assist disengaged youth to make the transition to learning and earning’, paper delivered at The thirteenth Annual International Conference on post-compulsory education and training, Crown Plaza Surfers Paradise, Gold Coast, Queensland, Australia, 4–7 December


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Collaborative training in a chocolate factory

Setting

The House of Anvers is a successful, medium-sized business located at Latrobe, Tasmania, and includes a chocolate factory, a museum of chocolate, a retail store and a restaurant. The company has around forty employees.

Critical issues

As a small business, Anvers Confectionery acknowledges the importance of teamwork, multi-skilling and innovation, says Laurie Miller, Learning Manager, TAFE Tasmania:

The business has to draw on a huge variety of skill areas from chocolate manufacturing to retail, restaurant and tourism. By developing a learning culture Anvers has been able to get a strong contribution to innovation and product development from staff. This is strongly reflected in the training program.

Training needs to provide this range of skills and to contribute to the learning culture.

Challenges

Many Anvers staff have to share facilities such as the kitchen and dishwashing area. Hence it is very important that staff not only learn to work in their own field with their immediate team, but understand other skill areas when needed. For example, waiters help to pack chocolates when the restaurant is quiet, and the apprentice pastry chef learns the chocolate skills after his duties are finished. Miller believes that it is imperative that

…they understand the food safety, customer service and OHS procedures from the other areas before being placed in a new temporary work environment.

Other challenges arise from the expansion of services. For instance, several years ago Anvers opened a new tourism attraction the “House of Anvers”. This required a re-focus of the training plan, to ensure Anvers had appropriately trained kitchen staff, restaurant managers and tourism information personnel. Additionally Anvers required staff trained in Asset Maintenance.

Strategies

Formal accredited training is provided to Anvers by a range of delivery teams from TAFE Tasmania, including teams from the Drysdale Institute, Natural Resources, Business and Workplace Learning Services. Training Packages used include the following: Hospitality and Tourism; Food Processing; Retail Operations; Asset Maintenance; and Business Services. The majority of training is conducted on-the-job – a positive approach in the view of Miller:

On-the-job training takes advantage of the specialised equipment and procedures at Anvers, as well as the knowledge and skills that exist within the business. If it is felt an employee will benefit from
learning with others from different businesses, training is provided at TAFE Tasmania premises.

The off-the-job training is usually conducted after hours and during quieter periods, to take into account the needs of the business and personal needs of the staff.

Approximately 50% of Anvers staff are involved in supporting internal training which ranges from acting as a buddy and conducting induction programs for new employees through to specific skills in specialised areas of the business, including production, retail, restaurant and tourism.

The team leaders have a high level of involvement in the induction process, and this has established an ownership and responsibility for the training by the team leaders.

To further strengthen this internal training, Sonia Shearer, Anvers Restaurant Manager, has completed a Certificate IV in Assessment and Workplace Training, and is currently undertaking a Diploma in Training and Assessment Systems. Miller comments on the importance of her role as a workplace trainer and assessor:

Sonia provides assessment support and guidance on training needs for Anvers staff. She works with Anvers staff to develop personal training plans, and liaises with TAFE Tasmania to determine appropriate training and assessment pathways.

Outcomes

Anvers promotes nationally recognised training, and aims to train all operational staff to an AQF Certificate III level in their area of responsibility, with management staff trained to Certificate IV or Diploma level. Miller comments on this valuing of accredited training:

At Anvers Confectionery everyone from the apprentices to the managing director is learning. Anvers staff either hold or are undertaking 43 nationally recognised qualifications between them. This demonstrates a strong commitment to the national training system.

The management training brings together team leaders from different areas of business and promotes better understanding of each other’s operational contexts and creates opportunities for whole of organisation innovation, says Miller.

Anvers has found that through training there is better quality control, and fewer products are discarded. Training has played a significant part in Anvers’ success.

With support from training, Anvers has grown from a cottage industry employing one person in 1989 to a business employing over forty staff, with a turnover of over $1.75 million per annum. Also during this period it has achieved many awards including Finalist, Employer of the Year Category, TASTA Training Awards 2003, and Winner, Small Business of the Year, TASTA Training Awards 1999.

Evidence of training qualifications and awards are integral to marketing the business. Retail customers can view the certificates, awards and accreditations displayed on the walls of the retail shops and tourism attraction.

Anvers’ owner Igor Van Gerwen and staff hosted a community of practice forum for TAFE Tasmania to promote the benefits of workplace learning and the business advantage that it has provided at Anvers Confectionery. At the forum, individual Anvers staff were encouraged to tell their stories about the benefits of training to their personal careers. For the business, the aims of training are to ensure that all staff and management have the competence to contribute to the maintenance and growth of the business. Igor comments:
I believe that the business wouldn’t be the success it is today without training. I would find it difficult to supervise and motivate forty staff without them being trained.

Encouragement to undertake training has increased staff loyalty and support for business development and quality. The achievement of qualifications is linked to staff pay increases, recognising the contribution their training outcomes make to the business bottom line. Igor Van Gerwen explains how the needs of individuals and the business are aligned:

All our employees have meetings with management and training providers to identify the best training pathways for the business and the individual. Apart from the essential core units, Anvers Confectionery selects a range of relevant elective units to match the business needs.

Possible transferable elements

Miller believes that many of the strategies used at Anvers could be transferred to other settings:

The model of collaboration between an enterprise and a provider is entirely applicable to other settings. Ultimately it requires the provider to be flexible and the enterprise to support training.

Miller is supported by a recent study conducted by a University of Tasmania student which confirmed that commitment to training in the areas of customer service, product quality and product knowledge are paying off for Anvers. This translated to over 100,000 visitors to Anvers last year. Written comments from the visitors’ book support the effectiveness of training, such as ‘best coffee’, ‘chocolates are out of this world’, and ‘friendly, efficient service’.

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Reference:

Miller, L. (2005), ‘Anvers Confectionary Pty Ltd’
Helping students flower

Setting
Marjorie Milner College is a small RTO providing training in floristry, retail and e-security. The focus of this case study is on the College’s largest group of students – floristry. There are approximately four trainees and fifty apprentices in Victoria, and eighteen apprentices in Tasmania. In addition there are approximately forty seven other students in other government funded programs and approximately twenty fee-paying students.

The College provides a mixed mode of delivery with students being either part-time or full-time, block release or day release, or fully workplace based training, even night classes. Flexibility is also built into the employer or student requesting changes in delivery times/dates, although due to logistics the Tasmanian students have a block release. With most delivery there is also team teaching and joint assessment.

Critical issue
The program in floristry is tailored to the client needs, especially workplace demands. The thrust of the delivery methodology is to provide a flexible mode that suits the students’ personal and workplace needs. The RTO provides flexibility in the choice of training days, with apprentices and trainees selecting one day a week to attend training at the organisation.

This case study is a reflection of the concept of personalised training:

…many participants are expressing their needs for customised learning experiences and services – designed just for them, to suit their preferred time frame, work situations and lifestyles, as well as their preferred approaches to learning (Mitchell, Chappell, Bateman & Roy, 2005).

College Principal Greg Milner considers that this flexibility relates not just to ‘what day’ of the week the program is offered, but also the whole program’s flexible methodology, and this approach has given them an business edge, especially in the field of floristry training:

…there is good feedback regarding this flexibility…it is a desired commodity. In my days there was limited flexibility, it was lock step, whereas we very rarely do lock step, however only if we think every student will benefit do we do anything in a group.

The program is based on student interaction and Milner believes that the students like it that way. Students manage their own learning progress and are responsible for the records management of their learning activities.

Challenges
The critical challenge for the College is to provide the level of flexibility in student management but to still enable close monitoring of progress and also to respond to government-funded contractual record-keeping requirements.

In addition, as most students are employed, the College considers that the employer is a critical factor in the learning strategy of the student. Milner believes that keeping employers fully
informed of student progress and developing a productive relationship with the employer is essential to the success of the program.

Strategies
The aim is for the students to be self-directed. To address this, Milner has developed a series of documents to manage the student’s progress and the student takes a major responsibility for the maintenance of the most of these documents.

- The first document is a Training Plan which sets out the proposed dates of delivery and assessment. This is a term by term guide. Elements of competency are ‘mixed and matched’ for each student, to reflect real workplace situations and expectations.

- The second document is the Actual Training Plan in which the individual student makes changes and adjustments as the student progresses.

- A Workroom Chart indicates tasks completions as well as the frequency completed. These tasks are repeated over the three year period even though the student may be competent. These tasks are job requirements, that is, different types of flower arrangements. This Workroom Chart is complemented by a Workplace Chart which logs activity at the workplace.

- For each major task – workroom activity – there are checklists which are specific to the task. Students can assess themselves against the checklist. The checklist also doubles as a learning tool and a questioning prompt. Verbal interaction with the trainer brings to life the checklist. Finally the checklists are used by the trainer/assessor as an assessment sign-off sheet.

- In addition, there is a Progress and Monitoring Chart. Each unit is represented on this chart and students can map their progress through the unit. By this stage of the program, the students have learnt to monitor and record their own progress.

Students can move between units and select ones in response to the needs of the employer and the up-coming work. Students need permission to take on extra units and to ‘mix and match’, mainly so that complementary units can be grouped together to obtain maximum benefit from the learning. As the program is self-paced, students can move between the theory room and the ‘prac’ room, depending on their need: “In the prac room we have the capacity to bring theory to life,” says Milner.

Training materials have been designed especially to align with the checklists and contain extensive diagrams, theory notes and questioning. Group delivery may be provided if it will benefit the group. Milner believes that the notes need to be thorough to enable students to use it as back-up.

In most instances there are two trainers – using a team-teaching approach – for approximately twenty students and the trainers move between the students monitoring and assisting, checking and confirming their knowledge and skills. Team teaching has its benefits as it allows greater flexibility, with teachers ‘floating’, constantly questioning, checking, assisting, and modelling skills: “we move around according to need”. Both teachers de-brief at end of each day regarding student progress. No student is signed off on a competency without one teacher collaborating with the partner teacher.

Milner considers that employers are a critical link in the learning process and aims from the outset to keep them informed of the student’s progress. Each term a ‘report’ is sent to the employer that outlines what ‘pracs’ they have done, and how many times they have practiced it, as well their progress through the theory.

On Fridays – except during block release times – Milner visits students in their workplace to undertake training and meet employers. This provides him with rich examples of changing workplaces and the range of variables, that students may confront. He also believes that it keeps him in touch with ‘workplace foibles’ and provides first hand communication with the employer and the other staff. His demonstrations at the worksites benefit other staff, as they often learn
new techniques. This is an important strategy especially if there is conflict in floral arrangement methodology and the ‘correct method’ needs emphasising. In addition, the employer confirms competence prior to formal sign-off.

Finally, to promote high standards and to reinforce correct methodology and to keep close ties with industry, Milner encourages his students to enter floral arrangement competitions which have been extremely successful and provide independent feedback on their work.

   Competition work makes them realise that they are being assessed by industry…I am learning this and my teacher is telling me, and this is verified at competition.

   Competition is an opportunity to extend yourself as a designer in a way that you wouldn’t always get in a florist business…even though you may not win; it gives you the opportunity to lift your standard…It is an excellent way of reinforcing a very high standard…it is also another way of industry input because the judges are totally independent and the students have the opportunity of the feedback from those judges…industry input is vital.

Outcomes

The College works hard to meet the changing needs of student and employer, and prides itself on a very low attrition rate of students. Students develop a sense of managing their own learning and monitoring their progress and benefit from being in a group of students that are at varying levels of skills, knowledge and experience.

Milner considers that the success of his program is due to four factors:

- flexibility
- high level of product industry knowledge
- teaching methodology and skills
- updated training materials, which are under constant review and development.

Possible transferable elements

Elements of this initiative that may be transferable are the focus on the client, and the provision of support and guidance through workplace activities or theory.

The team teaching methodology allows the trainers to constantly adapt and change the delivery strategy, to allow discussion, questioning, modelling and reinforcement. In addition, the RTO has developed a documented system that meets their record keeping needs and reflects the size of the business.

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Reference

Support for isolated assessors

Setting
Lesley Wemyss manages a private RTO in Queensland, specialising in enterprise-based training and assessment, particularly in mining companies in northern Queensland. As an experienced VET practitioner, in 2005 she provided leadership in a number of projects designed to build the capacity of other practitioners within private, remote RTOs, especially in their assessment practices and their use of professional judgment.

The projects were conducted in the Townsville and Rockhampton areas and involved three RTOs and approximately thirty participants from a large multi-national mining company as well as workplace trainers and assessors from Queensland Health.

Wemyss observed that there is never a shortage of participants in these projects:
- Regional, isolated VET practitioners are often starved of professional development and opportunities for interaction about their work and their assessment practice.

Critical issue
The critical issue in these projects was the need to build the capacity of assessors in remote industry-based RTOs, to help them to improve their understanding of the assessment process, establish benchmarks and develop ways of working together.

Challenges
Wemyss explains the needs of assessors in Townsville:
- It was important to intervene and support the assessors in Townsville because in the mine they had an internal learning management system, linked to their Safe Work Instructions. They had an excellent set of learning resources, all online, however their assessment process was lacking rigour and consistency.

Wemyss explained that the assessors had not kept up to date and now was an ideal time to act:
- The competencies they were using were site-specific. Currently the organisation is undergoing a huge expansion and taking on trainees so therefore it was an ideal opportunity to enhance their assessment system and allow them cater for the Trainees. The organisation’s assessors, typical of many that are industry based and in isolated situations, had only completed a short course in assessing some 4-5 years ago and had not kept up to date with any external professional development since their initial training.

Wemyss explained how the process unfolded:
- So we started from scratch almost, and used real exemplars from their areas and aligned them to the national competencies. They really got into it, once they could see the application to their areas, and also safety was a big selling point. That is someone who is assessed correctly will be a

Demonstrating quality
safe worker and so on. We also had lots of discussion about professional judgment, and content experts.

Assessors in Rockhampton faced other challenges, says Wemyss:

Here the assessors had little or no professional development. They were using sets of commercially available resources and not grouping/clustering the assessments at all.

According to Wemyss, the Rockhampton assessors were over-assessing:

They were really over assessing, too much paper. They were mostly relying on summative assessments where the learner was passive and the RTO and assessors were driving the process. The learner was not really engaged.

There was no workplace application of their assessment process and because they were anxious of the audit process, they “erred on the side of mountains of paper”, and undertook “single assessments without trying to group the assessments logically to relate to their work practices and engage the learners”, says Wemyss.

Strategies

Wemyss encouraged the Townsville and Rockhampton workplace assessors to look at improving the learning and assessment process and addressed how the assessors incorporated their enterprise specific practices into the assessments, at each site. She noted that:

It is not until someone like me gives them time for reflection that change occurs. They just keep doing what they keep doing.

Wemyss had to overcome challenges created by distance. As she regularly works in remote locations and in mining, she used real exemplars from industry. In the case of the mining enterprise in Townsville, Wemyss concentrated on converting their current system into a more rigorous assessment process, with the local assessors covering the content, and her guiding them with the process. The mining organisation was also interested in generic skills and their application in the workplace and incorporating them into the assessment process.

In the case of the other RTOs in Rockhampton, Wemyss again used exemplars to demonstrate the clustering of assessments for a more holistic approach. The group of assessors worked on evidence maps and guides and built portfolios of examples of the range of evidence a candidate may present. Wemyss showed them how to use these examples to create evidence guides for a candidates wishing to undertake the process for recognition of prior learning. The Rockhampton assessors customised the assessment process not only for the needs of the site but also for the needs of the individual candidates. Wemyss noted that:

One of the keys to success was meeting face to face in each area. Some of the best learning occurred after the workshops.

By using the assessors as content experts, Wemyss was able to persuade them to develop assessment tools and complete evidence guides and maps for grouped units. She observed that:

The professional judgment was handled almost like I gave them permission to make a judgment. As they became more confident with the tools and even unpacking a unit of competence, they gained momentum in their practice.
Outcomes

The projects in both Rockhampton and Townsville led to an increase in the confidence of the assessors. The assessors at the mining site in Townsville have now adopted a validation tool that Wemyss had previously developed, as they were not adequately validating their assessment tools, decisions and process.

Some of the comments below from participants indicate their enthusiasm for the professional development experience and their increased knowledge about the assessment process.

Can we have some more please…

…we let audit drive our processes when it should be the business and industry driving us….  

…really didn’t get it at first, thought it meant more work, but actually it is going to produce so much more consistency in our approach….  

…we need to build in reflection time.

There has been a change in culture in both regional areas and the assessors from both groups continue to communicate via email.

Possible transferable elements

Some elements from these two projects could be transferable to other settings. Accordion to Wemyss, some of the messages that may be useful to other RTOs working with their assessors are that “real, practical exemplars are the way to go”; “there is a need to focus the trainers and assessors on business not audit and to look at their practices from a demand-driven perspective”; and “there is a role for content experts for each group”.

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Supporting self-paced workplace training

Setting

The Workplace English Language and Literacy (WELL) Programs run by the Access and General Education Faculty at the TAFE NSW Hunter Institute have rapidly expanded over the last few years across a range of industries in the Hunter and Central Coast regions, on the coast north of Sydney. Administered by Tony Hanna and jointly managed by Sue Hunter and Sue Maloney, the program currently has over 650 workers enrolled in training and is delivered by over 25 workplace based trainers and assessors.

The team has built up a strong reputation for its work in training local area health services workers from areas such as cleaning, food processing and client-patient support. One such program was conducted recently at John Hunter Hospital Newcastle and involved a team of five trainers working on site with over 220 employees. The enterprise-specific approach taken by the team also led to them securing contracts in other NSW Health Services beyond their immediate region.

Critical issues

The critical issues in these programs were the need to deliver on-the-job the underpinning English language and literacy training of identified units from the relevant Training Package and to establish assessment teams to ensure the quality and validity of the assessment process.

Challenges

The large number of workers to be trained and assessed at sites such as John Hunter Hospital as well as the requirement to keep the work teams operating so that the hospital could function normally necessitated the use of an individualised approach that was based on winning the participant’s trust.

Maloney commented on the challenge of gaining the confidence of the workers:

Workers identified for the program were often anxious and threatened as they had never participated in formal vocational training. They realised their need to complete training to enable them to do their job better and also to comply with the organisation’s quality system.

Another significant challenge was establishing an assessment team of workplace supervisors capable of signing off the assessment of both the underpinning language and literacy skills and also the specific vocational competencies for different groups of workers within the hospital or health service.
Strategies

Maloney explained the first step in devising a relevant training program that would cater for individual needs and minimise the disruption to workplace operations:

It wasn’t feasible to set up group training sessions across the board, as the workers had different needs and there was no easy solution to releasing workers for training. We started by shadowing the different groups of workers to really understand the standard operating procedures they follow and the literacy requirements of the work they do.

Based on the research of job roles and functions, the trainers then created self-paced training materials mapped to the different operational areas within the organisation. These materials relied heavily on pictures, photos and diagrams and included a range of different types of exercises and activities to develop the specific literacy skills required by the worker. All the materials were referenced back to the related standard operating procedures.

Maloney outlined the process used to develop individual training plans for each worker:

As well as developing the self-paced packages we also developed an up-front assessment package for the different functional areas. Workers went through the self-assessment which used statements such as *Do you always use signs when cleaning floors...?* to help them identify their ability to follow procedures and related questions to determine their levels of understanding about the processes e.g., *Why do you use the signs?*

In response to the outcome of the self-assessment, trainers worked with each learner and developed an individual plan identifying which self-paced packages the individual will focus on and how they will work with the trainers.

Maloney observed that there was no one way of working with the learners. Often it was a case of “grabbing them on the run” while they went through their normal work processes with the trainer and providing on-the-spot literacy training as needed, and locating the related materials for them to work through to consolidate the learning. Other interactions involved working with small groups and meeting with them in lunch breaks. As the workers’ confidence grew they gravitated more and more to the workplace trainers. According to Maloney, the supervisors valued the on-the-job training as both the supervisors and the workers could talk through any problems as they arose and the training remained specific to their needs.

The assessment process was conducted by an assessment team led by a literacy trainer with a workplace supervisor who held the Certificate IV in Assessment and Workplace Training. Each candidate had an individual interview to work through their portfolio of evidence from the self-paced materials. The assessor also took into account observations of the specific skills required. Another facet of the assessment process was an assessment plan developed between the Access and General Education trainers and the relevant TAFE vocational section, for example cleaning was dealt with through Asset maintenance. This document outlined the roles of all participants in the assessment team. One of the roles of TAFE vocational trainer is to ‘quality assure’ all the training and assessment material to be used.

Outcomes

Comments from a supervisor from Hunter Area Health confirm the relevance of this self-paced approach to workplace literacy training:

We had training tailored to our site within the National Training Framework, not just another training program. It really adds value.
Workers also acknowledged that the training helped them “to gain knowledge and learn proper processes”, particularly in the area of workplace health and safety. For many workers, the literacy training and the gaining of a number of units of competency related to their job was the first step in “picking up a Traineeship”.

**Possible transferable elements**

The individualised approach which includes developing enterprise-specific materials and using self paced training and assessment materials could be adopted by other workplace based trainers.

Other vital steps that could be imitated include spending enough time establishing the assessment process up-front and documenting the roles and responsibilities of members of the assessment team, especially where the assessment involves using workplace supervisors in the evidence gathering process.

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4. Case studies on innovation

This section of the paper provides five case studies in response to the research goal:

identify the skills needed by VET practitioners in the design of learning programs and resources and in the provision of assessment services to meet the needs of different client groups and propose how these skills might be developed most effectively.

Key points

Five of the fifteen case studies demonstrate innovation in many different contexts. The case studies show that the critical success factors for any one innovation vary from case to case and that the barriers to innovation can be surmounted by effective planning and using multiple strategies.

There are elements in each case study that could be transferred to other settings provided the imitators apply similar effort to the originators. These and other models of good practice can be transmitted using some of the techniques described in the case studies, such as engaging fellow VET practitioners in structured, professional conversations; creating systems and processes for innovation within an RTO; and encouraging practitioners to be creative and flexible in their teaching and assessment.

Set out below are some key points from each case study of innovation:

- An example of a boutique-sized supplier to RTOs is Distance Learning Australia Pty Ltd. This Canberra-based company is led by Christine Jarrett and began developing and offering online VET courses in 2000. Jarrett's small company provides 75 units from VET Training Packages in the popular fields of business, information technology and assessment and workplace training. She supplies this service via a range of RTOs around NSW, both in regional areas and in the metropolitan area. Jarrett delivers the programs using a blend of written materials, online activities and email and telephone contact with each student. This boutique provider to RTOs of online training and assessment can be imitated – for instance by teams within RTOs – but it would require the imitator to establish similar technical infrastructure and online systems as well as the skills and attributes of the trainers. The imitator would also need to be willing to spend a number of years fine-tuning the systems and building expertise in online training.

- During 2005 a team of staff within TAFE NSW Western Sydney Institute – who work with students from a variety of backgrounds including youth at risk and people with disabilities – explored and developed new work roles. A critical issue identified by Head Teacher Liz Renshaw and her team was the need to change teaching practice to place learners at the centre of education. The goals of a learner-centred approach for Renshaw included engaging learners in the learning process; developing in learners a strong sense of responsibility for learning; and “assisting learners in vocational and life long learning planning so that employment preparation is seen as a stepping stone and not an end in itself”. To achieve these goals Renshaw set out to challenge and support staff to work in different ways and to explore creative options to meeting student needs. Primarily, Renshaw asked her teachers to see themselves as learners.
• A staff development initiative that commenced in 2004 at TAFE NSW Northern Sydney Institute and is continuing, involves the design, promotion and conducting of professional conversations among teaching staff. The initiative aims to assist staff who are seeking to change their practice, to keep up with increasing expectations of industry clients. The professional conversations were developed, according to Margaret Dix, the Institute’s Manager, Staff Learning and Development, because “a powerful change needed to happen at the interface between learner and trainer/teacher”. The professional conversations were a deliberate strategy to “allow teachers the time and space to talk to each other and to share their stories and practice across the Institute.”

• Box Hill Institute of TAFE is a large VET institution in Melbourne’s eastern suburbs that delivers around 4.5m student contact hours each year. A critical issue for the Institute is to stimulate and sustain innovative approaches by its staff, in order to meet the Institute’s ambitious range of priorities. A key challenge for the Institute in achieving its multiple goals is to maintain quality while continuously improving innovative practice. The Institute’s organisation-wide approach to innovation is supported by elements which could be imitated in other settings, including long-term strategic planning that prioritises innovative goals, the alignment of internal resources with those goals, and the establishment of processes and structures to support innovation.

• Mornington Secondary College is a public secondary school on the Mornington Peninsula in Victoria. The school provides VET training in Certificate II & III in Multimedia. Students obtain credit towards their Year 12 certificate and it also contributes to their ENTER score. There are approximately eighty students within the program and the school services both their own students as well as ten other schools – both government and private – within the region. The critical issue for most schools conducting VET programs is ensuring that the program reflects workplace realities. For this school, the program is dependent on high quality software programs that are accepted at the industry level, and a teaching team that requires constant professional development and exposure to new software programs and version updates. The program also benefits from the teachers’ creation of a ‘VET space’ within the school that is conducive to learning in an adult environment.

These five case studies illustrate the capability of VET practitioners to be innovative, no matter what the context.
Growth pains of boutique innovator

Setting

Registered Training Organisations (RTOs) often can’t meet continually rising demands on their own, so they need to develop innovative strategies to continue to satisfy their customers while constantly refreshing their product line and maintaining quality. One strategy is to partner other suppliers – if the RTO knows the supplier well and has a very clear idea of the supplier’s expertise, quality levels and track record.

An example of a boutique-sized supplier to RTOs is Distance Learning Australia Pty Ltd. This Canberra-based company began developing and offering online VET courses in 2000 and is led by Christine Jarrett who has extensive experience as a trainer, instructional designer and quality adviser. She is supported by an IT Manager and two administrative staff members.

Jarrett’s company provides 75 units from VET Training Packages in the popular fields of business, information technology and assessment and workplace training. She supplies a range of providers around NSW, both in regional areas and in the metropolitan area.

Jarrett delivers the programs using a blend of written materials, online activities and email and telephone contact with each student. Typically, students download their learning materials from the Internet and submit assignments by email, post or fax. Jarrett and her staff then maintain contact with the student, largely by email and phone.

Jarrett describes the tasks she and her small team undertake:

We perform a range of tasks: instructional design, customising toolboxes, developing web pages, maintaining databases and working with RTOs on various projects, but student contact has always played a major role in our success. RTOs (our clients) have their clients (students) well looked after by us, with adequate time allocated to each individual.

Critical issue

Ironically, a critical issue for this boutique supplier to RTOs is to handle the growth pressures on her own business. Jarrett reflects:

My main issue in 2005 was anticipating and responding to rapid growth. As a small business comprising an IT Manager and me, plus occasional admin and proofing assistance, it was certain that something needed to be done to manage increased client numbers of RTOs and an anticipated doubling of students to train, assess and report on.

Challenges

Jarrett’s company commits to a five day turnaround in response to any student marking. The key challenges for Jarrett in 2005 were meeting this commitment and also maintaining service levels:

This year, one important challenge was training/assessing efficiency and keeping to the maximum 5 day turnaround time I set here for marking tasks. How could I maintain a high level of service in the
most efficient way without sacrifice to time spent on student contact?

Strategies

With a tripling of student numbers in 2005, Jarrett needed to make a range of changes to her small operation. Technical changes included the following:

Improvements were made to the learning management system (LMS) and a new recording and tracking system was added. This has reduced recording and reporting – sending results to RTOs, progress reports and so on – by about three quarters. It is easy to use and helps the trainer/assessor stay organised.

An added benefit of this technical upgrade was that it made information about the students’ progress – in addition to other information – available to the RTO, “so progress can be viewed and sorted for all participants at any time”.

In response to increasing demand from RTOs, Jarrett also hired an additional trainer-assessor:

Six months ago, a trainer/assessor dedicated to online learning came on board. Harriet and I share students, in other words, each participant is allocated two trainers, or three where computing is involved as Christine Huddle mentors computing students. This arrangement enabled me to provide the initial and ongoing support and mentoring required for Harriet, and has been very successful in creating a collaborative and supportive environment for us both.

Hiring a new staff member was a lengthy and complicated undertaking:

Quite a search took place over two months to find Harriet who fits my long list of crucial qualities required for the role of trainer/assessor in a small organisation such as mine.

Outcomes

Jarrett set herself some goals in 2005 that she very nearly achieved:

Always the optimist, I set my aim for training/assessing. I set out to decrease training/assessing/reporting hours and increase student contact keeping within the 5 day maximum turnaround time for marking. Twelve months later student enrolments had almost tripled. And the maximum five days turnaround for marking assignments has now become “maximum 5-7 days turnaround”, which is not a bad result.

Following the implementation of the strategies cited above, Distance Learning Australia is now in a stronger position to meet growth pressures and to continue to be innovative while ensuring quality levels are maintained. Jarrett is also much clearer about the knowledge, skills and attitudes needed in a business like hers, to remain both innovative and functional:

In a business this size we all need to be multi-skilled, for example we all must be IT savvy and contribute to instructional design. Technical skills are crucial – enough to be able to interpret questions when they appear to involve a person’s security settings, different browsers, downloading, losing files on their computer, viruses and spyware programs playing up, screen resolutions, or with enough technological savvy to learn.

Other skills and attitudes needed by staff to handle emails from students are as follows:

A positive attitude towards IT – and not blaming IT – is crucial. An ability to interpret the written word, especially emails. The ability to find three questions in one and determine which is really being asked, then answer it, is also crucial.

Experienced in training/assessing and email communication in the workplace is important. Must
have experience juggling many emails in a business context where confidentiality, privacy and
discretion are concerned.

Patience is a necessary virtue as a trainer in the online environment:

The patience not to get annoyed (or not to show your annoyance in an email reply) when a
participant emails “Here is my assignment. I am sending this from my mother’s email address.
Thank you” (no name) or “Here are all my tasks. Sorry I forgot to number them.”

Other attributes required of the online trainer and assessor include: “Able to work from home
and organize self: crucial”; “An enthusiastic attitude towards helping individuals in online
environments is crucial”; and “Willing to learn how to create web pages and customize
toolboxes”.

Jarrett also believes that experience teaching in the face-to-face environment is a necessary pre-
requisite to teaching online and that the trainer will ideally have the new Training and Assessment
(TAA) qualification or is “willing to get it plus other appropriate VET qualifications”.

Possible transferable elements

This boutique provider to RTOs of online training and assessment can be imitated – for instance
by teams within RTOs – but it would require the imitator to establish similar technical
infrastructure and online systems as well as the skills and attributes of the trainers. The imitator
would also need to be willing to spend a number of years fine-tuning the systems and building
expertise in online training.

The next challenge in transferring this model is to be able to expand the business as demand
increases, while maintaining a quality service. In the case of Distance Learning Australia, the
challenge of managing expansion required substantial changes to operations, systems and staffing.
The case study dispels the myth that it is straightforward to use the online medium for training
and assessment.

On the other hand, adoption of this model will open up opportunities for learners who might not
otherwise be able to access programs of study. The model of accessing a boutique supplier may
appeal to RTOs – particularly smaller RTOs that have limited resources – that wish to extend the
range of options they can offer their client base, without needing to identify or employ a local
expert in the program of study. The model may also appeal to some work teams within RTOs
that do not have the necessary enthusiasm, time, experience or skills to build a similar boutique
operation.

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Reference:

Teachers learning to be learners

Setting

Macquarie Fields Campus of TAFE NSW South Western Institute is located in a section of Sydney's metropolitan area with an above-average unemployment level and a large number of people from non-English speaking backgrounds. At the campus, Head Teacher Liz Renshaw and her staff support two groups of students, the Adult Basic Education group and the English as a Second Language group.

Ranging in age from 15 -70, the students come from a variety of backgrounds including the following: youth at risk; people from non-English speaking backgrounds; women returning to the workforce; unemployed people undertaking training as part of agreements with Centrelink; people with physical and intellectual disabilities, hearing impairments and mental illnesses; retrenched workers; people nearing pension age and needing to study for benefits; people who are beyond ‘traditional working age’ and engaging in life long learning; aged and frail people; early school leavers; and single parents with children aged 12 years who have to undertake training for benefits. Renshaw finds that staff working with this range of students need high order skills.

Critical issue

Early in 2005, a critical issue identified by Renshaw and her team was the need to change teaching practice to better place the learners at the centre of activities. The key is for teachers to become learners, believes Renshaw:

Increasingly VET is focusing on a learner-centred agenda. VET practitioners need to adapt to an agenda that puts learners at the centre of teaching and learning processes. The challenge for practitioners is to see themselves as learners.

The goals of a learner-centred approach for Renshaw include engaging learners in the learning process; developing in learners a strong sense of responsibility for learning and “assisting learners in vocational and life long learning planning so that employment preparation is seen as a stepping stone and not an end in itself”. But to achieve such goals Renshaw commonly sets out “to challenge and support staff to work in different ways that explore creative options to meeting student needs”.

Challenges

The issue about the role of teachers was highlighted in early 2005, when Renshaw and her team commenced a trial project on personalised learning, with funding from the Board of Vocational Education and Training (BVET) and support from the Centre for Learning Innovation (CLI).

Renshaw took the opportunity to challenge her staff, and her staff were ready to be challenged:

We have been together as a staff for a long time. We have been tinkering at the edges, but there was a rising level of dissatisfaction. We are a very experienced staff and we wanted to bring about change.
Other challenges to staff that hindered their innovation included the multiple demands on their time:

- Compliance requirements which are demanding, time-consuming and do not support innovations.
- Having to find creative ways around systems and procedures to support the innovation is time-consuming and diverts teachers’ attention from students needs towards ‘administrivia’.
- Ensuring teams have time for planning next stages of implementation as many are involved in complex and demanding programs with heavy time commitments. There are difficulties in getting staff together.

Initially, the students were resistant to innovation:

- Some students are finding the more personalised service difficult to adjust to because of its flexibility and difference to previous provision.
- Students from disadvantaged backgrounds are finding the changing focus on them accepting responsibility very very challenging. Also the use of different teaching/learning strategies such as a problem solving approach is revealing that students have low tolerance levels, become easily frustrated and have limited strategies for solving issues, and limited strategies for solving issues. These underlying limitations are challenging teachers.

Strategies

Renshaw used a range of strategies to win staff support: regular professional conversations were conducted with staff; specific professional development days were convened; and staff were actively involved in planning more learner-centred strategies. Simultaneously, students were asked for their ideas and suggestions about how teaching practice could be more responsive to their needs. According to Renshaw, there were “high levels of enthusiasm and commitment amongst students which spread like wildfire”.

A number of different factors encouraged the teachers to be innovative:

- The personalised learning project funding gave us the ‘imprimatur’ to work in different ways. Although the amount of funding was not significant, it was possible to be ‘creative’ in how funds were expended.
- The team had a foundation of trust, commitment and maturity in working professionally on innovations. And an established history and culture of trying to do things differently.

Renshaw as project manager noted a number of personal stimuli for innovation:

- Being involved in personalised learning project and being formally evaluated encouraged me to think more deeply about personalised learning in VET context. This involved research, reading and monitoring the in the evolving personalised learning discussions in Britain.
- Working closely with Gregor Mackenzie, an ‘ideas generator’ and professional foil, has encouraged and nudged me to re-engage in some aspects of professional life and push some boundaries. A critical factor is the need for innovators/leaders to be challenged as well as doing the challenging.
- External acknowledgement, recognition and encouragement for project also influenced me.

Outcomes

The outcomes for the teachers of this focus on helping staff become more learner centred were significant:
For teachers there was a shift to understanding that they are learners. The notion of needing to be an expert is being challenged as staff develop the notion of sharing learning experiences.

I have had feedback from teachers indicating their high levels of professional learning, increased use of technology in their personal and professional life, increased levels of collaboration with other staff, and a decrease in the number of student management issues.

The use of teachers and some previous students as mentors was very successful:

The use of student and teacher mentors for differing roles has achieved differentiated kinds of support/guidance and advice for students and staff. Students who have pathwayed to other vocational areas have continued the concept of mentoring. Teachers as mentors has provided a professional development for staff and also increased personalised contact with students.

Other outcomes for students were dramatic:

The increased level of voice and choice for students has resulted in higher levels of engagement in learning. There are increased levels of technology use across the courses as students are feeling more empowered through becoming familiar and using more cutting edge technologies as part of their learning.

Additional benefits for the students included the following:

Feedback from students from online surveys indicating increase in confidence, increase in use of technology, increase accessing of technology, increased participation in learning, high level of satisfaction with teachers performance.

Employability skills have emerged as an important factor in learning across the courses.

Students who have pathwayed to other areas following their personalized learning experience are returning for support and able to articulate learning needs clearly. Their level of empowerment and voice has increased so that they are determined to success in their chosen course despite many barriers.

Possible transferable elements

Renshaw believes that “all aspects of this project are transferable to other VET and School settings”. Further, she believes that:

The gateways that we have used to introduce personalised learning at this college could be adapted, modified or changed to suit a wide range of contexts.

Given that these changes were introduced within the existing structures of the organisation, transferability is certainly possible.

However, what is not transferable “is the experience of the team, group enthusiasm, and risk taking of our team leaders”. These attributes would need to be promoted, fostered and acquired by others seeking to imitate this model.

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Conversation spaces spark practice

Setting
A staff development initiative that commenced in 2004 at TAFE NSW Northern Sydney Institute (NSI) and is continuing, involves the design, promotion and conducting of professional conversations among teaching staff. The initiative aims to assist staff who are seeking to change their practice, to keep up with increasing expectations of industry clients.

Critical issue
The professional conversations were developed, according to Margaret Dix, the Institute’s Manager, Staff Learning and Development, because “a powerful change needed to happen at the interface between learner and trainer/teacher”. She adds:

It became apparent that a creative solution needed to be devised to involve teachers while encouraging them to update their knowledge and develop their skills in line with the recent review of Training Packages and the changes that are constantly happening in the sector.

Dix explains the underlying strategic need which drove the initiation of the conversations:

Our Head Teachers expressed the opinion that there was a need for a greater emphasis on quality teaching and learning. Teachers’ practices needed to change and they particularly needed to embrace student-centred learning.

Challenges
Lack of time was a key challenge in embedding the professional conversations: “teachers were so busy actually doing their jobs there wasn’t time for learning how to do them better”. Dix appreciates that “the national training system relies on practitioners who are learner centred and responsive to industry needs” and was aware that teachers wanted to change, but time was an issue:

Practitioners have continually lamented that the quantity of planning and doing means that there is little time for them to check and act. There is little time to complete Kolb’s experiential learning cycle by being what Schon calls a reflective practitioner.

Another challenge noted by Dix is to devise strategies that enable different practitioners to change at different rates:

My lived experience is that while change models are handy to compare with the real thing, each organisation and its people are much more ‘choardic’ (Hock, 1999). So a readiness for change in one person can be matched by another’s unawareness of the need for change.
Strategies
Having identified the willingness for change, Dix set out to find a strategy that would “allow teachers the time and space to talk to each other and to share their stories and practice across the Institute.”

With support from her Unit, Dix developed and implemented a strategy she called a “conversation space”, where members of the Unit regularly facilitate structured professional conversations at lunch time, around the Institute’s campuses. “The sparks that we use to encourage the conversation focus around topics that are current and sometimes challenging for VET delivery and assessment,” she says.

The conversations range over subjects such as holistic assessment, key competencies, the competitive VET market, funding, new qualifications and adult learning theory.

Responses
Dix and her team find that the conversation spaces are “a safe place to work out how the national training framework can be implemented locally. The conversation spaces also ground our practice so that practitioners can develop resilience and accommodate changes to the system, rather than build resistance.”

There are immediate benefits of such conversations, says Dix:

- Teachers feel energized. A conversation space introduces teachers to their peers and creates a network for sharing. It is reflective. It is based on goodwill. It enables teachers to review their practice about what they are doing and what they might do.

Outcomes
Research and experience at Northern Sydney Institute show that structured, professional conversations enable practitioners to collaborate, reflect and clarify; analyse challenges and identify solutions; share successes and examine lessons learnt; create the conditions for change; and transform practice.

Importantly, Dix finds that conversation spaces suit practitioners who have not kept up with the pace of change:

- Since a professional conversation is non-threatening, it is a more attractive strategy for those practitioners who are not up-to-date regarding the national training framework and its implications.

Dix believes that the professional conversations assist her organisation to become more client-focused:

- The strategies that were developed and implemented through conversation spaces aim to enhance the overall performance of practitioners in their interactions with their learners and the industries that sponsor or will be future employers of those learners. Instead of implementing mandatory training, the strategies have enabled personal and organisational change to evolve within a management framework that is encouraging but strategic. This results in an emphasis on the importance of the client and the need to focus on their current and future needs. The process of involving managers and teachers means that both ends are working towards the middle albeit at different speeds and, sometimes, in different ways.

Dix also believes that the use of professional conversations also helps practitioners to focus on their myriad client groups:

- This approach has emphasised the importance of our myriad client groups in ensuring the
sustainability of our provision and enhanced our capabilities in responding to different needs within and between client groups. Invariably, a conversation among these practitioners includes discussion about responses to learners, about enhancing the learning opportunities and how practice can be underpinned by current thinking about vocational education. The conversation spark sometimes promotes a different way of looking at these aspects of our practice but invariably the conversation turns this way as it proceeds.

Possible transferable elements

Elements of this initiative that may be transferable are the beliefs, research findings and goals supporting it. For instance, beliefs about learning, knowledge transfer and change management drive this innovation:

I am committed to the value of peer learning and storytelling as ways of transferring knowledge and improving performance. I believe that colleagues can influence each others’ behaviour and can often diminish the reluctance to change.

The literature on the value of the reflective practitioner also supports the initiative:

One of the neglected aspects of VET practice is this notion of reflective practitioner. While everyone agrees with Kolb, Lewin and Schon that reflection is the necessary element that enables learning, practitioners are often too busy ‘doing’ to stop and reflect.

The strategy is based on goals shared across the VET sector:

As a strategy it enables those who direct and facilitate vocational education to adapt to changing circumstances and the individual needs of learners and to gain confidence that their professional judgement is well formed and appropriately applied.

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References


Quality innovation across the organisation

Setting

Box Hill Institute of TAFE is a large VET institution in Melbourne’s eastern suburbs that delivers around 4.5m student contact hours each year. The Institute actively pursues multiple and demanding priorities: meeting the needs of the local community, especially through taking a client-focused approach; taking an international approach and equipping its clients with skills and knowledge that will equip them for the global job market; improving education and employment outcomes for youth; developing and improving networking and alliances; and focusing on the industries of manufacturing, biotechnology, ICT and performing arts.

Critical issue

A critical issue for the Institute is to stimulate and sustain innovative approaches by its staff, in order to meet the ambitious range of priorities set out above.

Challenge

According to CEO John Maddock, a key challenge for the Institute in achieving its multiple goals is to maintain quality while continuously improving innovative practice:

> We work very hard to sustain innovations, and so do our partners. We look at what we need to do to reinvest. We don’t just look at a new approach and say it will be alright, for all time: the whole philosophy of continuous improvement is something we really believe in and we work hard at trying to do it.

Strategies

The Institute has implemented a raft of strategies to ensure that its products and services are improved and quality is maintained. In particular, Box Hill Institute’s Board of Studies oversees the management and improved quality of educational products. The role of the Board of Studies is quality assurance in the development, recognition, assessment and evaluation of curriculum and other educational programs and services. The Board of Studies also provides leadership to all areas of the Institute in learning delivery and professional development of staff through encouraging innovation and through the development of an organisational learning culture across the Institute.

Another strategy for embedding innovation is the creation of a senior management position with innovation in the person’s title, says Maddock:

> Stimulating innovation is so important that it is embedded also in one of the senior executive’s responsibilities and his job title, that is, General Manager Teaching and Innovation. This person’s role is to stimulate innovation not only in teaching functions but across all activities of the Institute and to lead senior executives, Centre Managers, and staff in fostering innovation. The role also has a responsibility for showcasing the excellence and innovation created by our students.
Maddock stresses that enhancements to educational products and services are in line with teaching and learning service standards and are based on feedback from clients:

The teaching and learning service standards provide minimum benchmarks necessary to ensure that all centres within the Institute have in place up-to-date, industry relevant and quality educational products and programs. Tools including templates for documents and handbooks, checklists and strategies are constantly being developed to assist teachers to implement the standards.

Service standards are in place for the following: pre-enrolment and enrolment procedures; induction and orientation; communication; provision of a safe teaching and learning environment; quality and teaching; assessment; evaluation; graduation and award presentations; and student concerns.

A concrete example of how the Institute simultaneously seeks innovation underpinned by a commitment to quality is demonstrated by its approach to international education. Maddock explains the rationale for being involved in this field:

Our rationale is that there are obviously academic, political, economic and cultural and social reasons as to why you would be involved in international education. It’s about ensuring that students get a global perspective. It’s also about students getting an inter-cultural competence as well as a knowledge of other cultures so that they understand the world. We think that is part of making the world a better place.

The Institute is deliberately putting in place the building blocks to enable its students to be employable across the world, says Maddock:

There are work opportunities now such that students can get labour mobility that enables them to move from one country to another. What we want to do is prepare them for that, so they are employable across the various continents of the world. That’s a huge challenge, but what we’re doing is putting a lot of building blocks in place and we’re focused on areas where we have an exceptional competitive advantage in terms of the IT industry and the work we do with Cisco on a worldwide basis.

Outcomes

The Institute’s partnership with Cisco is just one concrete outcome of its deliberate pursuit of innovative services, about which John Maddock is rightly proud:

Cisco was looking at how they would be addressing the skill shortage worldwide and how they would be reducing the digital divide, so we got involved with them and the approach we use is to work with their curriculum so that we are one of the four Cisco Super CATs in the world. There are two in the US and one in Europe and we look after the whole of Asia-Pacific region. We look after all of their academy programs, whether they are universities or private providers, TAFEs or schools.

John Maddock explains that the ultimate goal of the Cisco partnership is improved student outcomes. For example:

We embed Cisco programs in our advanced diploma and degree programs so that our students have internationally recognised industry-certification within Australian qualifications.

Possible transferable elements

The Institute’s organisation-wide approach to innovation is supported by elements which could be imitated in other settings, including long-term strategic planning that prioritises innovative goals, the alignment of internal resources with those goals, and the establishment of processes and structures to support innovation. Maddock summarises this systematic approach:
Our planned approach to innovation is deliberate. We believe that if we can set the plans in place at the front-end and make sure we have a balance between the management of the operation and the strategic directions we want to take, then what you’ve got is a platform for reacting when you need to react, for being opportunistic when you need to be opportunistic. But if you don’t have a good plan in place at the front end, what happens is that people continue to do the same things all of the time and they’re not constantly challenging what they’re doing.

However, one aspect of the Institute’s approach to innovation that is not easily copied by other institutions, without considerable effort, is its thorough approach to solving problems:

Our focus when we have a problem here is not to blame someone or beat them up for having a problem. We say what is the cause of that problem and what can we do to rectify that problem or to change that or do we need to make an adjustment or do we need to get out of it. We don’t talk about getting out of things until we’ve done some hard analysis and put in some support mechanisms and development strategies to assist people to the level of performance we want.

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Reference:

Creating a VET space in school

Setting
Mornington Secondary College is a government secondary school on the Mornington Peninsula in Victoria. The school provides VET programs in Certificate II & III in Multimedia. Students who undertake the training can gain credit towards their Year 12 certificate and it also contributes to their Equivalent National Tertiary Entrance Rank (ENTER) score. There are approximately eighty students within the program and the school services both their own students as well as ten other schools – both government and private – within the region.

The program covers both Year 11 (Victorian Certificate of Education [VCE] Units 1 & 2) and Year 12 (VCE Units 3 & 4), with the delivery methodology being similar for both years. Year 10 students are sometimes included in the program. At this stage each program is conducted in a computer room of fifty terminals. The program is such a success that it is reaching capacity numbers and the teaching team is debating whether to open up more space for computer terminals.

Critical issue
The critical issue for most schools conducting VET programs is ensuring that the program reflects workplace realities. For this school, the program is dependent on high quality software programs that are accepted at the industry level, and a teaching team that requires constant professional development and exposure to new software programs and version updates.

Challenges
The key challenges for the teaching team are:

- ensuring that students are provided with the relevant and up-to-date learning program that reflects the requirements of scored assessment of VET in the VCE and the latest software programs expected in industry
- ensuring that pathways are forged with university programs and industry
- creating a VET space that is conducive to learning and is more in-line with VET pedagogy
- marketing the program to students, industry and universities and ensuring a level of flexibility in program delivery that will enable other schools to participate in the program.

Responses
All the information pertaining to the learning program is online, with students able to view the coursework, tutorial and project information. Coursework materials include information pertaining to the units (elements and performance criteria). Supplementary information – underpinning knowledge – is also included on-line; for example, information that can’t be demonstrated, such as visual design theory. For Year 12, scored assessments are required and...
students are provided with an extensive Assessment Guide. The Assessment Guide includes the required Assessment Plan which maps the units to the assessment methods as well as the scoring schema. In the VCE the assessment tasks are scored against a five point scale, with the schema provided by the Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority. The teaching team has contextualised the assessment schema for the course so that the generic descriptors are more task orientated. Each task or brief is mapped to units of competency and for each task or brief information includes what the students have to do and what the trainers and assessors are looking for.

The school has timetabled the teaching team flexibly to meet the constraints of delivery in one block, once a week. The program for both years of the VCE is taught in the afternoons until 5.30 pm. In acknowledgement of these additional hours, the teaching team is then timetabled less hours during the traditional school day and is protected during specific times from ‘taking extras’. The greater flexibility in the timetable also allows the teaching team time to practice their skills on software programs.

A team teaching approach to delivery has resulted in the provision of teachers who have a high level of combined expertise in fine arts and the technical side of computer programming. The high level of trust and respect for each of the teacher’s skills, knowledge and teaching methodology is critical to the success of this program.

The delivery program is based around projects that reflect workplace realities, and for some students that have negotiated external jobs these are ‘fitted into’ learning and assessment requirements as much as possible. It may mean that students negotiate their own tasks that reflect these ‘jobs’ or their interests. The teaching team has linked these projects as much as possible with industry, such as printers, to not only develop a professional relationship with the industry but to also encourage students to follow through to publication of their ‘products’.

Students are encouraged to work in small teams to reflect the workplace situation and also to complement the skills and expertise of one another. One teacher explained:

…We encourage them to work with different people and they all develop different areas of expertise. What is really helpful to us is that they learn to help each other. This is important as we can often sit down for maybe 20 minutes with a student…we can both be helping a student…that is a powerful thing for them to learn, to help others and be helped by a peer…we start to think there are 28 teachers in this room and I am only one of them….so don’t ask me until you’ve asked three others…That ability for the kids to be the expert is great…

To further promote ‘real workplace jobs’, one of the teaching team has taken on the school newsletter and another has redesigned the corporate look of the school and developed the stationary and business cards. “The students have confidence in us as they see us do work as well…beyond the teaching.”

The team of teachers discussed the importance of ‘creating a VET space’ for their students. Students are allowed to ‘not wear their uniforms’ in the dedicated VET classroom and are encouraged to assist others in their learning. The teachers try to reflect in their teaching methodology the importance to students of self management and personal responsibility for their own work.

…we try to create a different space that strongly reflects further education and workplace environments…and aim to get the kids to feel confident in that space in preparation for the future…

The teaching team is discussing further strategies to promote the notion of the VET space, such as the possibility of painting the rooms differently and exhibiting a large number of student work on the walls.

The program is promoted as “not just a computer course…it includes design and art theory components”. The school’s VET program is promoted through a number of strategies:
Professionally printed marketing brochures reflect the skills and interests of the teaching team.

Open/Awards night held at the end of this year was very successful and exhibited students’ work, not only promoting the course but also providing an avenue for publication for student work. Quite often the work of students in this field cannot be viewed – for example, if the student’s work involves programming – but the Open/Awards night was an excellent avenue to promote both the visual art work and some of the computer-based work.

Pathways and links with other training and educational institutions are seen as critical to the program as the Certificate is an entry point into the industry, with students often requiring further education and training. The teaching team is currently forging links with at least one university to develop an agreed pathway for their students.

Outcomes

The promotion of the program to other schools is important in providing additional revenue for the program. Funds are used to provide updated versions of software programs, and to purchase new computer hardware and to provide, on an annual basis, vendor training in software programs for the teachers. This is critical if the VCE program is to provide current software and to develop the skills of the students.

One of the key outcomes is the mixing of the students from all schools and the forging of strong friendships. One teacher commented: “we actively mix them up…and after they’ve left Year 12 they still have friends from other schools from their year.”

Possible transferable elements

One element of this case study that may be transferable is the flexibility of learning in a traditional educational setting involving students taking responsibility for their learning which in turn means that the team teaching methodology requires “teachers…to adjust the way they operate and the services they offer” (Stephenson 2001, p.100).

Another element of this case study that may be transferable is the strategy of involving students in their own and others’ learning, which reflects some of the underpinning principles that encourage the development of communities of practice among the learners.

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Reference: