

## Bringing theory and practice to life...



### Abstract

A professional development program was developed that targeted staff developing their skills in online delivery. The program was facilitated through "Gordon Online" LMS (Blackboard). A required outcome was that each participant was expected to plan, develop and facilitate online content over a period of 12 weeks with a group of students. Facilitators developed the program and modeled sound educational practice based on Jane Vella's theory that adults learn best through a "dialogue" that takes place in an atmosphere of mutual respect and safety, and with learning designs that were grounded in the reality of their working lives.

### Background

During 2008 the **Gordon TAFE** embarked on an extensive examination of its capacity to be able to compete in the changing world of vocational education and training (VET). A re-organization of the structure of the Institute occurred and there was a realignment of program areas to industry skill areas resulting in the creation of four enterprises with the aim of meeting industry needs in a rapidly changing work and learning environment.

Management at the **Gordon TAFE** then embarked on a large scale staffing restructure of its workforce to ensure that it could be regarded as a major VET provider by the year 2010. (**Gordon TAFE** 2009). Key strategies regarding the knowledge base of its staff were put in place to build the capability of its staff. Programs were established to ensure staff had the opportunity to participate in professional development activities that were targeted to match the identified required skills.

To meet the challenges of Gordon's 1/10 strategy, (to be the employer and training institute of choice by 2010), it was stated that the teachers needed to be skilled in the development and delivery of learning programs that utilized e-learning components.

In 2009 a professional development program was designed in combination with the Innovative Learning team and Organizational Development that was offered to all staff, both ongoing and

casual. This professional development opportunity was aimed at all teachers who wished to develop their skills in blended learning, which acknowledges the benefits of traditional teaching enhanced with e-learning technology.

The program covered the principles of e-learning, the design and development of resources specific to e-learning and the skills required in e-learning delivery and assessment. The participants in the program were enrolled in three units from the current the Diploma of VET (Practice) and on successful completion obtained:

- TAADES503B Research and design an e-learning resource
- TAADES504B Develop and evaluate an e-learning resource
- TAADEL501B Facilitate e-learning

The program, entitled **e-efficient**, included face-to-face and online sessions. Sessions were held weekly and ran for 12 weeks, culminating in a showcase of the developed online courses as the seventeenth session.

A crucial aim of the program was to give the participants time to learn – too often professional development is offered in short snap-shot sessions. The recognition that the learning takes time and the opportunity for real exploratory learning is aligned to Vella (1995) who encourages educators to avoid just “covering” a certain amount of material.

The facilitators delivering the professional development had to be aware that the teacher was not the font of all wisdom, but that all of the participants come with knowledge, skills and attitudes that they are able to share to make the entire learning journey a valuable exercise and experience for all.

### **Part one – Learning Design**

In a retrospect examination of the content delivered and the method of delivery, it is apparent that the model of adult education experience given to the participants, fell naturally into Vella’s (1995) seven step planning approach: Who? Why? When? What? What for? and How?

The program offered the participants the chance to practice what they were learning, with dialogue continually the method of developing knowledge. The participants were designing an online learning experience that they would be delivering to their group of students. The facilitators built in many activities or tasks that involved the participants in dialogue.

The level of questioning was significant as the participants explored best practice in online delivery and learners were encouraged to experiment – by being asked open questions such as “What can we do about that...?”, “If that happens online, what could you do?”, “What do you see as the best tool to use in this situation?”, “What could the group offer as a solution to that?”

For adult learners involved in professional development, Vella’s model provides concrete, practical methodology to enable even the most unmotivated participant become involved. When examining, retrospectively, the learning that was offered to the participants Vella’s words rang true: “Let adult learners see that what is being offered is substantive and will be immediately useful to them.” (p 100, 1995)

**Who:**

The 15 program participants were from many areas of the **Gordon TAFE**. They came from:

- Floristry
- Horticulture
- Nursing
- Business studies
- Information Technology
- Hospitality
- Corrections
- General Education
- Agricultural Studies
- Carpentry
- Bricklaying

**Why:**

The teacher cohort that participated did so because they found themselves either wanting to or having to navigate their way through the 21st century virtual classroom. They wanted to learn the tools available to them to enable learning to be delivered virtually and they also wanted to be able to have time to focus and learn about being a teacher/moderator/communicator within the online learning environment. They recognized the power of dialogue and communication in online teaching and so they were looking to create an online course that was rich and full of impact.

**When:**

Twelve sessions were held on Fridays between 9.30 am – 12.30 pm commencing Friday March 20 2009 and concluding on 26 June 2009.

**Where:**

The sessions were conducted in a designated training room within the library complex of the **Gordon TAFE**. The computers lined 3 walls of the training room with tables and chairs in the centre to enable group discussion away from the computers. The room consisted of a teacher console which has a computer, DVD player, video player, internet access, Smart board and audio. The room is very familiar to all staff as it is regularly used to conduct professional development activities.

**What:**

The participants were taken through a series of activities that involved exploration. There was an introduction to the e-learning tools available at the **Gordon TAFE**, and discussion to ensure their understanding of the principles of facilitating on line, of *who* the learners were and *where* they are coming from, with ample time to practice within the online environment in specifically established “sandpits”.

**What: (content)**

- Introduction to e-learning in the context of the **Gordon TAFE**
- Discussion stemming from a PowerPoint on the characteristics of Gen Y learner
- Brainstorming all tools they are aware of that contribute to e-learning
- Completion of group work on comparison between online and face to face teaching
- Observation of short YouTube videos and discussion on the contents in relation to the needs of learners today
- Viewing of samples e-learning courses on offer from the **Gordon TAFE**
- Exploration of their “sandpit” established within Gordon Online (TAFE VC) for their practice and added some communication tools
- Discussion of their anticipated course development and notes made on flip charts to refer to at next meeting.

**What for (achievement based objections)**

When the group had finished the 3 hour learning session they had:

- **Named** and **shared** their experience/s with e-learning and outlined their anticipated learning from this course
- **Compiled** a list of e-learning tools that they are familiar with

- **Contributed** to the discussion on the similarities and differences between online and face to face delivery
- **Viewed** online videos and discussed the content in relation to their student cohort
- **Examined** previously designed online courses and **noted** the features used
- **Indicated** what else they consider they need to know to begin the course design
- **Explored** their “sandpit” and **added** some online tools to it
- **Proposed** a method of gathering resources for online delivery
- **Demonstrated** their ability in adding e- tools to their sandpit
- **Discussed** the design process in regard to lesson planning

## How (The Learning Tasks)

### Learning Task # 1: Pre task needs assessment. (Induct/anchor)

*Pre class task* – the task was designed to establish a commonality of thought among the group. By involving them in a focused task, the facilitator was able to gauge the needs of the group and gain an understanding of the group’s knowledge, skills and abilities. The group, by emailing semi-personal information to each other, also began to establish a “group feel” to the journey on which they were about to embark.

All participants received the following email:

Hi team

Hope you looking forward to this week’s class which will kick off our time together...

Before classes formally start we have some activities for you to complete prior to the workshop, they include

1. sending us a digital photo (please do this by Thursday am to allow us to create the activity for Friday)
2. undertaking an online computer skills assessment  
<http://pre2005.flexiblelearning.net.au/innovations/files/qld011/sacl/index.htm>
3. and answering the following few questions
  - Why use E-learning in teaching and assessment?
  - What tools and technologies could we use?
  - What do you consider the pros of eLearning?
  - What do you consider the cons of eLearning?

- please put your responses in an email and hit **reply to all**, this way we can all gain some insights into the members of our new team and gain some valuable information on e-learning concepts.

Thanking you

Sue Mandley and Jan Kealey

### **Learning Task # 2: Poster creation (Induct/anchor)**

1. In groups of 4 each group to have a question and discuss and create mini poster of
  - What is e-learning?
  - What is different about e-learning?
  - What are we planning to deliver online?
  - What do we think we would like to learn over the 16 weeks?
2. Share the poster creations with the group and discuss

### **Learning Task # 3: A vision of students today (input/add)**

1. As a group watch a video - <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dGCJ46vyR9o>
2. In pairs, share your thoughts on the issues raised by the students
3. Share and name something you'd like to focus on when communicating with students electronically - what would be your concerns in making the transition to online learning?  
what do you anticipate being exciting about communicating and teaching online?
4. Build a list for the group to note and keep – as a group

### **Learning Task #4 – Understanding our learners (induct/anchor)**

Guest presenter – new content

Presenter to deliver information on the following –  
VET and E-learning  
Gen y learners  
Digital natives, digital immigrants

- Information to be presented using a PowerPoint show.
- Statements about who our learners are – students to define and discuss
- Students to place themselves on an imaginary timeline to demonstrate their first experiences with computer technology.
- Presenter to pose a series of questions regarding the learning in the blended model.
- “Did you know, 3.0?” <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jpEnFwiqdx8> and participants to comment on the link/s between what they have discussed with the presenter and what they viewed regarding the need to understand over the need to memorise.

### **Learning Task # 5 – “Entering” your e learning sandpit/playground – (induct/anchor)**

1. Students to follow the steps to log on and enter their playground
2. Students to explore their playground

3. Students to complete a web quest of their playground – locating specific tools etc found on and in their playground. Students to also locate and label various areas of their playground on a screen capture of their playground screen.
4. Students to share their results with the person next to them and discuss

**Learning Task # 6: e-tools for our delivery – customizing front page, PowerPoint to flash, digital stories, toolbox object, discussion boards, online journals (Implement/apply)**

1. Demonstrate to students the ease of access of the above e-tools
2. Students to add basic personal work details to their playground front page
3. Show students how to - starting with PowerPoint to flash – allow them to play
4. Show students the others tools, each time allowing them to practice

**Learning Task # 7 (implement/apply)**

1. Students to add communication tools to their playground
2. Students to add a PowerPoint to their playground
3. Show students the others tools, each time allowing them to practice

**Reflection on the session**

Assessing where the learner is in relation to the topic is a way of honoring that they all are coming with different experiences and expectations of the professional development being offered to them.

For this reason, the students were asked to bring a personal experience or opinion that they have of e-learning to the group as a way of integrating the experience with the self. As the facilitators, we were very pleased with this activity as they revealed their apprehensions to the group which helped to cement the notion of a group embarking on an “unknown” journey with questions and concerns but also excitement and problems for which to find solutions.

Their willingness to discuss in both online and face to face forums was heartening to us as the facilitators. It provided information as to how the group felt about the proposed learning and gave an insight into what direction they wanted to travel in their e-learning journey.

As the designers of the learning activities it was important to vary the activities as much as possible to ensure all types of learners were catered for. Hence the design included activities that

required group work and individual work. Use was made of visuals in the form of video, photos and posters; there were discussions for auditory learners; and practical tasks enabled the participants to explore and test out what they had learned.

The skill level of the participants varied enormously – delivery strategies therefore included group work, paired work and using asynchronous activities, such as the pre-class task. This was discussed at the end of the first session as a teaching point that they may need to consider when designing their activities for their own cohort.

The activities from the outset needed to establish a safe but challenging environment. It was an aim to discover what the group really needed to learn and integrate the experience of the class with the “self”.

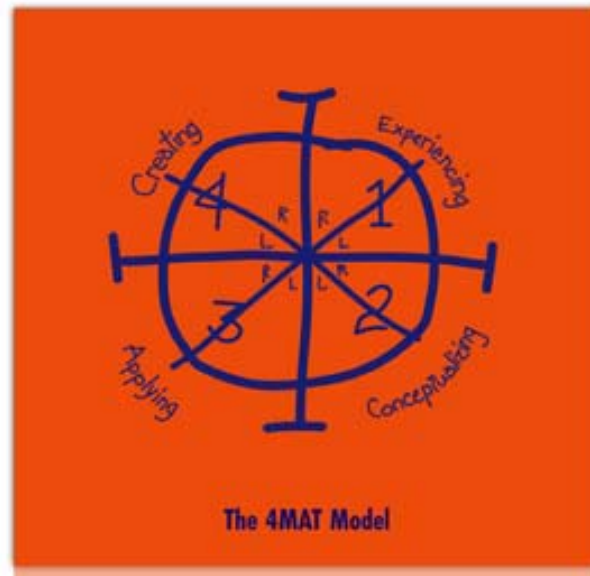
When the guest presenter delivered for a specific time, it was apparent that concept formulation occurs at this stage when the new content is delivered/revealed. Reflection on the content was made by re-visiting the video of learners in an American university and accessing the YouTube clip “Did you know 3.0?”

This provided a perfect lead into actually using the technology – the participants had seen the need to be more technically savvy in their delivery to students in their present and future classes and were therefore very keen to try. The web quest activity generated a lot of talk amongst the participants and a lot of sharing. Terms from within WebCt were used extensively and therefore the language of the environment was learned.

The demonstration and practice activity took most of the time of the first session as it was imperative that they felt comfortable and not threatened in the new environment. Again, discussion and questioning from within the group was encouraged and applauded – the group was on a journey together and by allowing them to share their findings, problems, concerns, laughter, the learning was a shared experience.

The **Gordon TAFE** has adopted Bernice McCarthy's 4MAT with the aim of providing teachers a guide to designing more effective instruction. 4MAT is built around four key types of learning—

- Experiencing
- Conceptualizing
- Applying
- Creating.



This was the basic model for planning the learning experiences of the participants involved in the 2009 *e-efficient professional development program*. The linkages between this model and Vella's are obvious. Active learning is an effective model and active learning is done through "tasks", and the role of the facilitator is to develop the opportunities for active learning.

The following table outlines the similarities:

Vella's Four I/s		4MAT	
Induction tasks	they are tasks to connect us with what we already know and with our unique context.	Experiencing	clarifying the context and the rationale
Input tasks	they are tasks inviting us to examine new input – concepts, skills and attitudes	Conceptualising	identifying the detail of what is to be learnt
Implementation tasks	they are tasks that get us to do something directly with that new context – implementing it	Applying	explore how to use and apply what is learnt
Integration tasks	these tasks integrate this new learning into our lives, applying what we have learned to our life and work	Creating	use what we have learnt to modify, adapt and create in new contexts.

The activities of the first session created the focus and provided the concrete basis from which learning and exploration could continue. The learners also realized that they all have opinions that are valued and that there is no right way to be.

The participants were asked to reflect on the learning they had undertaken and submit their responses via an online survey tool. Their responses to question 1 of the survey can be seen below:

**1. What were the strengths of this session? Please be specific and use examples where possible**

1.	That the class was facilitated like a class we were learning about. it was hands on, practical. We could practice and experiment and play with the new information we were learning about. there was time to ask questions. No question was "dumb". Nothing was prescriptive but all examples of what we could use. We were treated as professionals in our own area, even if we were far from professionals in electronic methods. Instructors were enthusiastic, approachable and so , so , so helpful. it was excellent being able to mix with other teachers from the Gordon from varying areas.	Wed, Jul 3, 2009 2:41 PM
2.	The session was an excellent forum to be able to discuss ideas, access the instructors for assistance and allowing participants to have a lot of 'hands-on' participation	Tue, Jul 2, 2009 12:23 PM
3.	Developing new course materials online	Tue, Jul 2, 2009 7:55 AM
4.	Recognised course where participation in such will I hope provide me with the opportunity and peer group standing to expand and and further develop our course content and presentation to cope with the demands of a rapidly changing training environment.	Mon, Jul 1, 2009 2:14 PM
5.	Being exposed to so many information technology programs and systems so to develop our bricklaying resourses	Mon, Jul 1, 2009 1:37 PM
6.	teachers who helped, the other participants and leanning the tools	Mon, Jul 1, 2009 11:08 AM
7.	Great teacher – she was very encouraging and did not baulk at lack of skills! The classes were interactive, enabling 'hands on'.	Mon, Jul 1, 2009:37 AM
8.	The overall planning (schedule ) was really good and the knowledge and expertise of the instructor was terrific.	Mon, Jul 1, 2009 :35 AM
9.	showing us how to use tafe vc as a assessment tool for online theory and assessment	Mon, Jul 1, 2009 8:28 AM
10.	knowledgeable teacher, flexible delivery,	Mon, Jul 1, 2009 7:58 AM
11.	The outcome of seeing your work actually being used. ie final project on TAFE VC. The networking with other colleagues	Mon, Jul 1, 2009 7:31 AM
12.	the other participants	Fri, Aug 28, 2009 7:11 PM

The objective of the learning design was to create a stimulating, challenging and rewarding learning experience. As an introductory session to a professional development program the aim was to focus on demonstrating and modeling to the participants the aspects of teaching that may be able to be transferred to enhance the experience of online delivery once the tools of the product have been mastered.

### **Part 3**

#### ***Development and maintenance of skills and knowledge via teacher professional development in the ever changing VET environment***

##### ***Issue***

The Victorian TAFE system must continue to provide quality education and training to meet the demands of an increasing global economy, the diverse training needs of its clients and a rapidly changing TAFE workforce. The system must also consider the TAFE teacher workforce which is made up of a large proportion of casual workers and an aging population of teachers working in TAFE.

At the same time that TAFE is being confronted by increased expectations in relation to teaching and learning practice (Guthrie, Perkins, & Nguyen 2006; Darwin 2004) the increasingly casual TAFE teacher workforce are less likely than permanent staff to access professional development related to VET pedagogy.

Anecdotal evidence abounds as to why casual TAFE teachers are less likely to undertake professional development in relation to their teaching role, and by focusing on one specific TAFE, the facilitators of the ***e-efficient professional development program*** sought to gain an insight into the issue from the perspective of teachers, both ongoing and casual.

##### ***Rationale for tackling this issue***

There are increasing requirements for TAFE to provide quality education. Combine this with an increasingly task oriented clientele with clear expectations related to quality and flexibility (Guthrie et al, 2006), then there are specific implications for the pedagogical skills of VET educators. The **Gordon TAFE** has given voice to the need for strategies that build capability and focus on the needs of both the individual and the organization. Vision statements have been made that outline a re-focusing and a re-emphasizing of the importance of teaching, learning and assessment as the core business.

The development and maintenance of contemporary pedagogical skills definitely requires a commitment to professional development by all TAFE teachers, both permanent and casual. The **Gordon TAFE**, as the employing body, must also have a commitment to ensuring all staff members are able to access specific and targeted professional development activities that can guarantee an

increase in the capability of their staff to deliver programs that meet the many needs of the learners in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. Being proficient, confident and capable to deliver in an online environment is necessary for all **Gordon TAFE** teachers.

With regard to staff, both ongoing and casual, and their involvement in professional development activities, the planning and design for professional development activities for teachers is often driven by Human Resources. Little consultation occurs between the decision of what type and when to offer professional development with teaching staff. Consequently, teaching staff have workloads planned in advance and feel they cannot jeopardize student learning to attend to their own learning and development. They also see many programs on offer as not being as relevant as they could be to their immediate job role. Casual staff involvement in professional development is generally limited because of

- casual teachers being not as likely to be involved in formal training provided by their employer
- the possibility that casual staff might leave the organization;
- the limited time that casual staff could make available to attend PD;
- not paying casual staff to attend professional development activities

Teachers generally require professional development that can give them immediate strategies for managing or enlivening their delivery. The motivation to try something new, such as integrating the use of **e-technology** into lessons, is a valid reason for participating in professional development that is targeted to specific skills, knowledge and attitudes that has the potential to enrich the experiences for the students.

### ***Research to support the issue***

As facilitators within the Education Development area of the **Gordon TAFE**, the writers have the potential to influence the type of professional development being offered, hence, the design, development and delivery of an e-learning professional development program that was aimed specifically at an area identified as needing immediate up-skilling of the capabilities of the workforce. In the promotion of the program, assistance was sought from Human Resources to emphasise a change in HR practices from administration and people processing, to a more capability-driven function.

Harris, Clayton and Chappell (2007) suggest that generally training and development is not seen as a high priority for human resource management within TAFE organizations. They discuss the changing of terminology from 'professional development' to 'workforce development'; but the change of label has not yet seen a significant increase in the type or frequency of training offered to staff. Professional development is generally focused on national initiatives from other peak bodies and higher education.

Harris et al go on to discuss that, in the VET sector, human resource management is very much focused on the operational level and less on training and development. There needs to be a more positive organizational climate, they argue, with a strong desire to provide all staff with opportunities and environments that promotes ongoing learning and development.

In a more recent study of professional development within the TAFE sector, Simons, Harris, Pudney and Clayton (2009) reported that teaching staff who undertook formal professional development stated it had been helpful in assisting them to obtain and maintain positions, but they were generally dissatisfied with the access they had to professional development and had a surprisingly low level of satisfaction with the quality of professional development they attended.

A significant proportion of teachers at the **Gordon TAFE** have stated during many formal and informal discussions, that they do not have a current professional development plan established with their program manager, despite a minimum of 30 hours being mandated as compulsory in their workplans under the work conditions agreement. This can suggest that management expects greater self-directed behaviour on the part of teachers to develop their own skills.

**Gordon TAFE** teachers view professional development as a way of 'trying to stay at the forefront of what is happening' but seem to receive less than their desired level of access to professional development or encouragement to take up opportunities

### ***Implications***

The emphasis on adding "e" to the learning of students has been stressed at **Gordon TAFE** and is a driver for building the capability of the teaching staff in this area. With this in mind, the **e-efficient professional development program** was devised. By recognizing that long term learning and change occurs in a supported environment, the program aimed to integrate practice and on-the-

job learning in the teacher's classroom with theory. The result was that the group became a mini "community of practice" of staff from across the different teams, disciplines and enterprises.

In having the participants involved in researching and designing e-learning resources for their cohort the learning that ensued was able to generate specific options for e-learning and then research and interpret e-learning resources that exist or need to be developed. The facilitators' role was of assisting in the finalizing of the e-learning design concept – and dialogue provided the perfect backdrop to enable the learner to explore all aspects for themselves.

The implementing task stage enabled the facilitator to stand back and observe the development and evaluation of e-learning resources. The participants trialed and evaluated an e-learning resource, and collaborated within the group in developing the full e-learning resource. Their knowledge of instructional design was challenged and ultimately enhanced as they modified their teaching and learning modules according to feedback from the group. Implications for the facilitators at this stage was to use extensive open ended questioning to force an examination of why the participant chose the specific resources for their cohort.

At the integration stage the participants established their e-learning environment, introduced their student cohort to it and monitored and reviewed the outcomes. Their experiences with discussing learning styles in the class settings enabled them to be aware of the characteristics of their own learner group and assess the suitability of both the content and the learner for the online environment.

As a professional development program, e-efficient had features different from many programs aimed at up-skilling the teaching workforce. It was recognised that pedagogic knowledge requires experience and reflection. Usually programs that aim to skill up, do not go beyond a specific skill, whereas e-efficient gave participants the opportunity to develop knowledge and beliefs about teaching online.

Whether the program is substantial enough to develop more than a foundation for pedagogic content knowledge that can impact on substantial change in the professional practice is undecided. However teachers seem to be asking for specific and targeted professional development that can enhance their teaching. In providing the **Gordon TAFE** teachers with a

professional development program that informs, teaches, challenges and supports and also focuses on dialogue, it's stimulating. At the end of the program the facilitators saw specific evidence that answered the question "How do I know they know?" Because the participants told us!!

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