TAFE as a pro-active partner in VET in Schools

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INTRODUCTION

This research study originated in the Primary Industries and Natural Resources Educational Service Division of TAFE NSW. The Western Research Institute, Inc. was commissioned by them to carry out most of the research component of the project. It focuses in particular on the relationship between TAFE NSW and schools, and was based on a proposition that mentoring was an appropriate definition for significant parts and numbers of those relationships.

METHODOLOGY

It was determined by the steering committee that a qualitative research methodology should be adopted. The suggested methodology in the project brief was to include:

1. cataloguing of existing VET for Senior Secondary School Students curricula and related TAFE NSW curricula together with identification of existing articulation and credit transfer arrangements for the identified curriculum areas.

2. conducting a literature review on mentoring.

3. interviewing participants in identified mentoring models through a pilot interview phase, pilot assessment phase and completing an extended interview phase.

4. conducting focus groups involving cross representation from Boards of Studies, TAFE NSW Educational Service Divisions (ESDs), Curriculum Managers' group, VET for Senior Secondary School Students Committees, Vocational Programs for Schools Unit, Training and Development Directorate, TAFE NSW Institute representatives, District Superintendents and appropriate schools representatives.

5. collating the above data into a report which includes recommendations for the implementation of mentoring strategies which use identified TAFE NSW resources to support and enhance the development and delivery of VET for Senior Secondary School Students.

With the exception of the first step, which was modified to become a brief investigation of the background to the development of VET programs for secondary school students, this methodology was adopted. However, as the project developed, there were some changes in focus informed by the outcomes of earlier steps.

THE NEED/IMPETUS FOR VET IN SCHOOLS

What has become a major priority in the provision of post compulsory education had its origins in a range of commissioned reports in the late 1980s and early 1990s. (Ashenden, 1989, Finn, 1991, Carmichael, 1992, Mayer, 1992)

A number of factors built towards what was to become known as the National Training Reform Agenda. Each was significant and the challenge was to bring them together and address them in a meaningful and manageable way which would enhance the opportunities available to senior school students and school leavers, and improve Australia's involvement in vocational training radically vis a vis other OECD countries.

In the early 1990s Australia ranked second lowest among the OECD countries in the proportion of post-compulsory students involved in vocational education and training.

Australia had relied heavily on the British tradition of craft apprentices that involved paid jobs linked to a contract of training. Apprenticeships in this form had been the largest component of Australia's limited vocational preparation with traineeships emerging as a recent alternative.

Youth employment patterns were also becoming a driving imperative for Governments of the day with dramatic increases in youth unemployment. In contrast to the healthy level of six out of ten teenagers in full time employment in the 1960s, the 1990s saw this plummet to a disturbing rate of less than one in five. Those with minimal skills suffered badly because of structural changes to the economy, which inevitably impacted on the labour market.

Over a period of 30 years from the 1960s to the 1990s, the number of full-time jobs in the youth labour market had been steadily eroded and by 1993 only 14% of all 15-19 year olds were involved in some form of vocational preparation.

In 1994 Dusseldorp Skills Forum (1999) figures revealed that retention rates had risen from 37% in 1982 to 77% in 1992 and were predicted to reach 95% by 2001.

The same study showed that of those who did leave school 48% did no further study or became unemployed and only 23% of leavers attended TAFE or some other form of vocational training. Destinations of school leavers were: 29% became university students; 28% got a job but did no further study; 20% became unemployed; 15% became full-time students at TAFE or its equivalent; and 8% got a job and became part-time students at TAFE or its equivalent.

VET IN NSW SCHOOLS 1985-1999

In the mid 1980s the declining youth employment market and the subsequent increase in retention rates led school systems in NSW to review the curriculum available for senior secondary school students. The curriculum was primarily geared for students who would proceed to university.

In 1985 Joint Secondary Schools TAFE (JSSTAFE) courses were introduced. These courses, which still operated in 1999, are for students in Years 11 and 12 studying for the NSW Higher School Certificate. The courses are drawn from major award TAFE courses and are packaged to meet the requirements of the NSW Board of Studies so that students would gain credit towards their HSC. The courses are termed "dual accredited".

In 1990, four JSSTAFE courses were accepted for inclusion in the Tertiary Entrance Rank (now University Admission Index), a milestone in the recognition and acceptance of VET by universities. (One course, Small Business, was subsequently withdrawn because its content was not entirely appropriate to students still at school without experience in small business).

By 1992, demand for JSSTAFE courses had risen dramatically to 12,133 participating students. The courses were popular because they were seen as relevant and directly related to employment, were conducted in an adult learning environment and provided students with advanced standing in further TAFE study.

Funding was a major constraint, and school systems began to look towards school delivery of vocational courses to accommodate student demand and to embrace the directions set in the Finn and Carmichael reports.

In 1993 Industry Studies and the first of 7 vocational content endorsed courses were developed by the NSW Board of Studies for school delivery. These courses still operated in 1999.

The demand for school delivered courses was as dramatic as the demand for JSSTAFE courses. 21,890 students were participating in school delivered courses and 24,500 in TAFE delivered (JSSTAFE) courses in 1998.

In 1995 the NSW Government commissioned a review of the NSW Higher School Certificate, the first since its introduction in 1967. The White Paper, "Securing Their Future", recommended the strengthening of VET within the reformed HSC and promoted VET courses as an integral part of the curriculum for ALL students not just those who were not university bound. "The Government strongly supports high quality, industry recognised, vocational education and training in the Higher School Certificate". (Aquilina, 1997: 15)

The paper noted that existing VET programs needed to be reassessed to "assure their coherence and relevance, and extend recognition by employers, the vocational training sector, and universities." (ibid). Industry credibility, work placements and university acceptance were identified as critical areas to be addressed.

In December 1997, the administrative structures of NSW TAFE Commission and the Department of School Education were amalgamated to become the Department of Education and Training (DET).

The changes to VET provision as part of the reformed HSC, the constant changes to the VET agenda nationally and the amalgamation of the administrative structures of TAFE NSW and the Department of School Education provide many challenges and opportunities for schools and TAFE colleges as they move into the year 2000 and beyond. This research study was developed to assess the appropriateness of mentoring as a process for meeting the challenges and opportunities in the relationship between TAFE teachers and school teachers.

MENTORING

Mentoring is widely applauded as an appropriate way of facilitating learning, particularly in the context of adult learning. However, an examination of the literature provides a wide range of perceptions regarding just what is "mentoring". Long, for example, writing about mentoring in the context of the training of neophyte teachers claims that:

> [m]entoring ... is a two way process between the student teacher and the class teacher built on collaborative practices developed over a longer period of time. Mentoring is concerned with the building of mutual relationships where both the class teacher and student teacher are reciprocal learners, where each benefits personally and professionally from the practicum experience. This is achieved through a nurturing and caring paradigm in which reflective practices, centred in mutual problem solving are fostered, which enables the establishment of links between theory and teaching practice. Mentoring is therefore a shared experience between the mentor and student teacher which builds a relationship that empowers the participants towards perceptive and effective practice. (Long, 1995: 4).

The Department of School Education, on the other hand, provides the following fairly simple definitions: A mentor "is a person who is in a position to offer you support, advice, and time in a spirit of acknowledged mutual benefit." (NSW DSE, 1997: 1) Mentoring "is a process whereby someone with more experience or expertise provides support, counselling and advice to a less experienced or less expert colleague" (NSW DSE, 1994).

Carmin, by way of contrast, proposed the following relatively complex definition of mentoring.

> Mentoring is a complex, interactive process occurring between individuals of differing levels of experience and expertise which incorporates interpersonal or psychosocial development, career and/or educational development, and socialisation functions into the relationship. This one-to-one relationship is itself developmental and proceeds through a series of stages which help to determine both the conditions affecting and the outcomes of the process. To the extent that the parameters of ...[mutuality] and compatibility exist in the relationship, the potential outcomes of respect, professionalism, collegiality, and role fulfilment will result. Further, the mentoring process occurs in a dynamic relationship within a given milieu. (Carmin, 1988: 10).
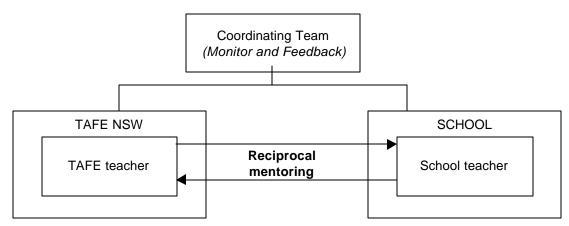
Maclennan provides a similar detailed definition, but one which is more clearly structured. He claims that:

> mentoring is the process whereby one senior individual is available to a junior to: form a non-specified developmental relationship; seek information from; regard as a role model for the purposes of emulation; pick up what the organisation/department/company expects; show the performer through a phase of operational, professional or vocational qualification; guide the performer through a phase of operational, professional or vocational qualification; provide feedback and appraisal; and teach all the relevant facts that will enable the junior individual to perform effectively in an organisation. (1988: 6-7)

The Department of School Education suggests the following bases for mutually beneficial mentoring: there should be mutual choice; the relationship must be non threatening; the relationship satisfies a mutual need, (eg. for career development); there is friendship; there is trust; and there is a clear understanding of the purpose (DSE, 1997)

MODEL DEVELOPMENT

Given the unusual nature of the relationship between TAFE and schools where there is not a clear mentor and protégé division, none of these models seem appropriate for this particular research study. The nature of the mentoring relationship is one that most accurately would be designated as reciprocal mentoring. That is, the relationship is such that at one time on one set of issues the TAFE participant is the mentor and the schools participant the protégé, at another time on another set of issues, the schools participant is the mentor and the TAFE participant is the protégé.

Figure 1: Proposed model - Reciprocal Mentoring

The proposed model shows a considerable overlap between the TAFE NSW and School institutions with a coordinating team monitoring the situation and providing feedback. The coordinating team consists of members from both the TAFE NSW and school parties (as well as other interested parties).

The coordinating group provides three functions, it:

1. assigns the appropriate participants to the relationships.

2. monitors the relationships for any conflict.

3. acts as a counsellor for both parties. The coordinating group will serve to eliminate the difficult situations that may arise between inappropriate partnership selections and help to reassign both parties.

INTERVIEW PROCESS DEVELOPMENT

It was determined that there would be a pilot interview, to be followed by a review and then the interview program proper would be conducted. It was further decided that while the main focus of the interview program should be on school and TAFE NSW personnel, there would be also a small industry interview program to provide other examples of mentoring.

Following the completion of the literature review, a pilot interview form was designed and tested on a small sample of three interviews, selected for convenience. The outcomes of these three interviews were then reviewed by the Steering Committee. This review identified a number of difficulties with respect to the pilot interview format. These were that the context was not clearly identified in the responses and the relationship between the interview formats and the literature review was not clear.

These difficulties were addressed with a radical redesign of the interview format. This redesign incorporated a question on issues and challenges identified by the respondent; questions related to the nature of the relationship which could be compared with the mentoring model; questions related to the stage of development of the relationship (on the assumption that it was a mentoring type relationship); and a question asking the respondent to classify the relationship.

Because of the significant changes in the interview format between pilot and main survey, the pilot results were discarded.

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SAMPLE SELECTION

The schools/TAFE NSW sample was intentionally biased towards respondents who were identified by colleagues and/or co-ordinators as engaged in successful working relationships between TAFE NSW and schools. For this reason, the results of the interviews are indicative only, and cannot be generalised to the population. Although the initial specification was also that it be a "mentoring-type" relationship, the sample obtained did not clearly reflect this characteristic.

This sample was also selected with the intention of obtaining a spread of results covering city and regional areas, schools and TAFE NSW, and different levels within both schools and TAFE NSW. The majority of the interviews were conducted face to face, with some telephone interviews being used to ensure some coverage of most parts of the state.

ANALYSIS

The NUD*IST computer software package was used to facilitate analysis of the results of the interviews. The results of the analysis follow.

Table 1: Sample Characteristics

Division	No.
TAFE NSW	21.5*
Schools	16.5*
Location	
Sydney	17
Regional	21
Level	
Delivery (i.e. involved in delivery of courses only)	3
Delivery and co-ordination	6
Co-ordination (i.e. not directly involved in course delivery)	25
Management	4

* One respondent from a joint school/TAFE facility.

The schools/TAFE NSW sample contained 38 interviews. A breakdown of the locations and positions of respondents is shown in Table 1.

These results indicate the relative success of the sampling strategy, with a reasonable balance being obtained between TAFE NSW and schools, Sydney and regional areas and the various levels of interface between TAFE NSW and schools.

FOCUS GROUPS

The focus groups were convened in order that the perspective could be broadened; both partners of the relationship could be engaged in a common forum; different levels of the two partnership organisations could be engaged in a common forum; and other interested parties could be engaged in the same forum.

Four focus groups were convened, one at Bathurst, one at Dubbo, one at Werrington and one at Campbelltown. The number of participants present ranged from 12 to 18, and were drawn from a number of schools and TAFE levels and disciplines including Boards of Studies, ESDs, JSSTAFE co-ordination and delivery from government and non-government schools and TAFE, and other interested groups such as group apprenticeship representatives.

The Institute of Cultural Affairs (ICA) Technology of Participation (ToP) Workshop method was used to derive responses to the focus question:

> What are the critical success factors in a sustainable relationship between schools and TAFE which will facilitate the effective and efficient provision of VET programs for senior secondary school students?

WHAT ARE THE ISSUES AND CHALLENGES IN SUMMARY?

The primary challenge is that of merging two entrenched cultures and the consequent development of a new culture which has as a foundation parity of esteem. This will require getting rid of territories, not only between schools and TAFE NSW, but also within the school system and within the TAFE system. Until the importance of this particular challenge is acknowledged and addressed, successful VET programs for senior secondary school students will remain at the mercy of the goodwill of the participants. Fortunately there are many places where this goodwill is legendary. However goodwill can often deteriorate rapidly as pressure increases.

A second challenge is providing sustainable structures to support VET for senior secondary school students. These structures need to take into account not only the diversity of the student body, but also the scarcity and hence need for equitable distribution of resources.

When these two challenges have been addressed there remains that of working together (via reciprocal mentoring and/or shared staff development) to deal with a number of other issues.

These include coming to terms with the national agenda. The agenda is continually developing and therefore requires on going changes to courses/practices. However, both school and TAFE teachers need to be fully up to date.

They need to deal with the use of training packages. The use of training packages presents challenges to both school and TAFE teachers, though particularly school teachers as the emphasis is on assessment not curriculum. This makes VET courses different from other HSC courses.

They need to address the fact that usually only one teacher in a school is trained to deliver a vocational course. Therefore there is no immediate support structure within the school. There is a need to establish networks between schools and between schools and TAFE and a need to capitalise on the expertise and support structures in TAFE

They need to consider assessment in the workplace. Most training packages require that some assessment must occur in the workplace or at least in a simulated environment. Complexities of arranging this and the availability of qualified assessors make it a continual challenge.

They need to address joint delivery of a course. There is no such thing as a school delivered or TAFE delivered VET course as part of the new HSC. The most practical approach may be for TAFE to deliver some units of competence and the school to deliver the other units of competence to complete the course. This will require a much closer working together on assessment, provision of results to the Board of Studies, and maybe assessment in the workplace

They need to consider effective use of resources. Schools clustering with other schools to offer vocational education courses, schools accessing TAFE facilities (to meet industry requirements), TAFE teachers teaching in schools are all aspects of this challenge.

CONCLUSIONS

The combination of the data gathered from the interview programs and the focus groups allows the identification of some critical success factors for the relationship between schools and TAFE NSW in the context of VET programs for senior secondary school students. Note that the critical success factors referred to here are with respect to the relationship - not the provision of VET programs for senior secondary school students.

The NSW schools system and TAFE NSW each have a long history of doing what they do well. In the living out of that history each has developed its own unique and appropriate culture. The combination of the two systems under one DET director provides inherent challenges to both of those cultures. Neither can expect, nor is it desirable to maintain those disparate cultures. The challenge is for both to transcend their existing cultures to create the new DET culture. This is nowhere more apparent than in the context of providing VET programs for senior secondary school students. This where the realities of cultural (and technical) differences provide the abrasive or the lubricant for the process.

One of the themes which runs through all of the data collected in this project is the need for trust to be developed between the partners, if the relationship is to flourish. This trust needs to be based on a

degree of mutual respect, which may not be present in a traditional mentor/protégé relationship in this context. The difficulty arises in identifying which is to be the mentor, which the protégé.

Against this background, it seems more appropriate to suggest that an effective relationship between schools and TAFE would be a reciprocal mentoring relationship. The two partners come together recognising that they are significantly different in terms of the culture of their organisations and the knowledge and skills that they possess. They commit to a reciprocal mentoring relationship, which allows them to benefit mutually, and hence deliver an enhanced product for the students in their care.

This in fact appears to be the type of relationship that has been developed in the places where the VET for senior secondary students programs are most effective. However, it has developed mostly on the basis of the goodwill of the participants rather than any properly planned and resourced process. As a result the development of highly successful programs is scattered, because the relationships have not been developed to this point in most cases.

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