

Australian *Flexible Learning* Framework

supporting e-learning opportunities

Case Study > PACS Virtual Organisation > SA > 2009

Keepin' it real!

TAFE SA

Background

Linking learning to the real world is important for learners so they can gain the context of the information they are receiving in their course and to assist them to develop appropriate skills and knowledge. Often learners are not able to put their learning into the real world context until they undertake a vocational placement or gain employment. This project set about to introduce our Community Service students to the 'real' world of work in a community service organisation earlier in their course so that they could gain the workplace context and skills before entering the workplace. This project was also developed to engage learners who were normally not used to using e-learning as a learning method and to improve the learners' employability skills.

What was done

The Community Services work team and a student reference group worked together to create a virtual Community Service Organisation intranet called *Panorama Accommodation and Community Services* (PACS). This was developed as an e-learning tool by creating an organisational intranet located on Moodle. The project team developed a mission statement for the organisation that reflected current practice in community services, developed a business logo and an organisational chart. The team made use of the Frameworks' Flexible Learning Toolboxes (Toolboxes) to customise work place policies and procedures for PACS. Job and person descriptions were developed for the many work roles within the organisation and developed relevant workplace forms and documents (eg hazard and incident forms, reporting forms etc). The departments that were developed as part of PACS reflected the courses that were delivered in Community Services at TAFESA and these were: residential aged, community based aged care, lifestyle and leisure programs, advocacy programs and mental health services. The project had developed a range of clients and created service plans to meet these clients' needs. A licence for 'Healthsolve' was also purchased – an electronic client database that is currently used in industry. Using Healthsolve, a computerised database of these clients that simulates a databases currently used in industry was created.

When students enrolled for second semester in 2009, they were asked to complete a skills audit to assess their computer skills and awareness of e-learning. Those students that were identified as having low-level knowledge and/or skills were supported to access some basic computer instruction provided by the library staff at TAFESA and had access to ongoing support with Learning Support staff. During enrolment, it was also determined whether students had access to a computer and the internet at home (if they did not have these at home they were supported to access these through TAFESA library). At induction in semester two, new and existing students were orientated to the PACS intranet on Moodle and were supported to access this by teaching staff. The students then interacted

with the clients and departments that were relevant to their learning or course either through a role play, case study or scenario-based learning activity in response to 'real' life situations.

Benefits experienced by the learners

The project observed a significant increase in learners using e-learning tools and skills as part of their studies that had not been seen previously. There was a steady increase in confidence as the learners accessed the PACS Moodle more frequently, used email for communication and developed good internet searching skills.

Feedback about the benefits the learners saw:

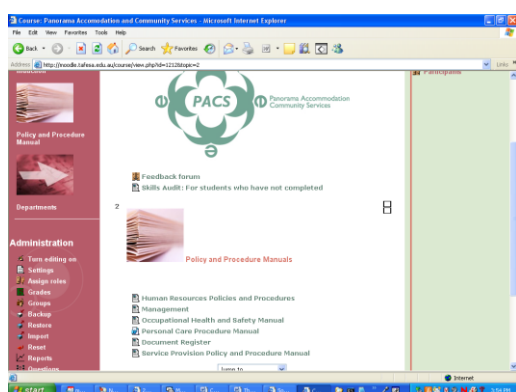
"I am really beginning to enjoy and utilise the computer a lot. I have become less nervous about using the computer and forcing myself to become confident and to take risks when it comes to the computer."

"I find it offers a range of options to supplement the class situation. I especially enjoy being able to access video clips on Moodle, but find PACS good also."

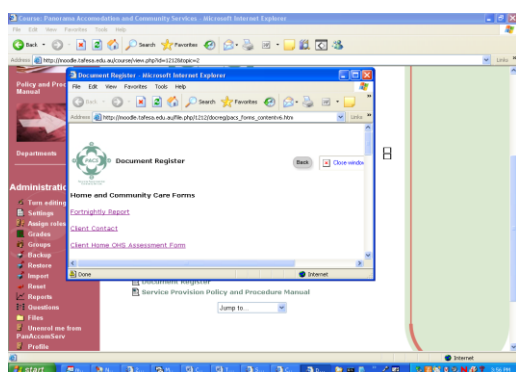
"I think it helps in balancing studying with work and family commitments, as some of the study can be done from home without attending classes. In the course I'm studying the PACS virtual aged care organisation brings together what the course teaches with how it is applied to a work situation, if you do not already work in industry."

Lessons learnt

One of the key lessons learnt was that orientation and induction to the e-learning tool (mainly the PACS Moodle) was important for both learners and staff. If they do not feel confident about how to access or use the product they will not use it. Those that had attended induction and had then been prompted and supported to use the PACS Moodle in their classes were more likely to use it and get real workplace contextualised learning from the PACS Moodle. The use of the PACS Moodle needed to be linked to clear learning outcomes for the students so that they could see a purpose in accessing it.



This was done by including learning tasks that required the student to search for information on the PACS intranet to be able to solve a scenario or problem. For example, the home care students were required to respond to several situations that occurred during their 'shift' (eg this morning when you arrive at Mrs. Beatty's house you discover her lying on floor unconscious, bleeding from her forehead and but unable to get up).



The student then had to search the site to determine from the policies and procedures an appropriate course of action and which forms and documentation would be required to be filled out in the workplace (eg Incident form, fortnight reporting form, client contact sheet, timesheet).

The second lesson learnt was that learners were a great resource of ideas for how they wanted to learn and the information they wanted and/or needed. Their input shaped how information was delivered and structured the PACS Moodle. The use of the forums on Moodle helped gather feedback and facilitated the interaction between the lecturers and the students.

The third lesson was to ensure the staff were confident about using the e-learning tools and were able to link their teaching methods to the tool. Staff who could not see a purpose for using the e-learning tool that linked specifically to their teaching were unlikely to use the PACS Moodle. However, with a bit of support and encouragement they could quickly see the relevance and the benefits to their teaching.

The fourth lesson was that Moodle was a fantastic way to communicate consistent information to large numbers of students very easily and quickly. This also meant the inbox on a email account gets full very quickly so users must ensure the capacity of their inbox could meet this demand otherwise they could not be as responsive to. The project also discovered that in e-learning learners want and expect a quick response!

The results

In all of the courses delivered there was a significant increase in the use of e-learning in teaching and learning practices. After induction and orientation to the PACS Moodle, over 70 students successfully registered during orientation week and at the end of the project more than 100 students had registered. Interestingly, the project found that through the skills audit, most students were highly skilled and had significant knowledge of e-learning – this was a surprise as it was not expected that community service students had this level of skills or knowledge. In the feedback received from students, many of them could see a purpose for the PACS Moodle, engaged in it and really grasped the ‘realness’ of the workplace context the PACS intranet provided them. Many of the teaching resources developed on the PACS Moodle included policies, procedures, workplace documents, client profiles and service plans can be reused for next years delivery with very little adjustment. These will be developed into a product that can be used by other lectures in community services.

Reflections and suggestions

The project would make a great industry partnership with a real community service organisation and would give more validity to the PACS intranet as a workplace contextualised learning tool. The project could also be expanded to other educational programs such as accounting and finance, human resources and management, marketing, office administration, occupational health and safety, nursing, dental and alternative therapies. These could be added to the departments on the PACS intranet and could be real work roles within the organisation.

Framework connection

The national training system’s e-learning strategy, the Australian Flexible Learning Framework (Framework¹) funds and supports E-learning Innovations projects which aim to embed e-learning into the national training system by supporting and enabling innovation in training design and delivery, at the state and territory level.

¹ <http://flexiblelearning.net.au>

This project embedded e-learning into the vocational education and training system by implementing learning outcomes through the PACS Moodle that relate to the qualifications in the Community Services training package. One of the aims of this project was to improve learners' employability skills specifically in the areas of communication and technology. By having learning outcomes that focused on these employability skills within a 'real' workplace context, learners were able to use e-learning tools to improve their communication and technology skills while meeting specific competency-based outcomes.

In engaging in this E-learning Innovations project the following Framework products and resources were used:

- Disability and Mental Health Toolbox 402²
- Policy Research and Advocacy Toolbox 403³
- Grange Care Services Toolbox 602⁴

And the help of Douglas Purcell, South Australia's Framework Toolbox champion⁵ who supported the project by modifying the Toolboxes for specific learners needs.

For more information

For more information on this project:

Melissa Beeston-Nicholls or Julie Goodburn

TAFESA lecturers

PACS Virtual Organisation

Phone: (08) 8207 2893

Email: melissa.beeston-nicholls@tafesa.edu.au or julie.goodburn@tafesa.edu.au

Website: <http://pacs-tafesasouth.blogspot.com>

For more information on the Australian Flexible Learning Framework:

Phone: (07) 3307 4700

Email: enquiries@flexiblelearning.net.au

Website: flexiblelearning.net.au

² http://toolboxes.flexiblelearning.net.au/series11/11_01.htm

³ <http://toolboxes.flexiblelearning.net.au/series4/403.htm>

⁴ <http://toolboxes.flexiblelearning.net.au/series6/602.htm>

⁵ <http://toolboxes.flexiblelearning.net.au/champions/index.htm>