

# **The Knowledge Tree: Edition 19 Exposing e-learning skill sets**

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**Australian Government**

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and Workplace Relations**

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## Editorial – The Knowledge Tree Edition 19

You can lead a horse to water, but you can't make it drink. Likewise, you can lead students to computers, but you can't offer them engaging courses – unless VET practitioners have developed and honed the skill sets required to effectively implement e-learning.

In this edition of The Knowledge Tree we expose the skill sets vital for VET practitioners to make lively, interesting, informative and educational e-learning. How do we support and acknowledge those who have these skills – and how do we ensure that otherwise effective classroom educators aren't left behind?

Wikis, tagging, increased use of online social networking – so much has changed, even in the past five years. Through a range of contributions, we get to the heart of what it will take for VET practitioners to meet their students ever-changing needs.

Internationally recognized futurist Elliott Masie was credited with co-inventing the term 'e-learning'. He offers a think-piece, Defining the 'e' in e-learning, in which he takes readers on a journey from e-learning's humble beginnings to current global practices and future possibilities. He explores how both teachers and learners require new skill sets, roles and adaptations.

Annie Fergusson, Benchmarking and Research Business Manager of the Australian Flexible Learning Framework, provides an overview of what must happen on a macro level if VET practitioners are to effectively update their skills to adapt to e-learning environments. She makes her points using recent VET research and the Framework's annual Benchmarking survey, which reports on the uptake and use of e-learning by training organisations, students and VET practitioners.

Results of the 2009 Benchmarking survey will be available from 16 October. As part of the 'e-Gems' series of synchronous online sessions, The Knowledge Tree will on Monday 19 October at 12:30 – 1:30 AEDST present a web-conferencing session analysing the results. Ian Phillips will be the presenter, supported by Annie Fergusson. For more details visit: <http://flexiblelearning.net.au/egems>

Cathy Moore is an international e-learning instructional designer, soon to tour Australia. In an interview in this edition she explains how we can "dump the drone" of e-learning design and instead create engaging, memorable and lively e-learning.

In addition, we offer several interviews with Australian e-learning practitioners as they consider, among other issues, the differences between skills needed for face-to-face teaching and e-learning, the effective use of Web 2.0 tools, and 'the how' in acknowledging new skill sets.

The interviewees are:

- Michelle Potts (TAFE SA);
- Janice Calcei (WestOne Services and WA E-learning Coordinator);
- Terese Morgan (TAFE QLD and Qld E-learning Coordinator);
- Michael Gwyther (RTO Yum Productions, VIC);
- Ben Stokes (MD of SAPOT training organisation, SA); and
- Vivian Evans (TAFE NSW and consultant in synchronous online facilitation).

Edition 19 also sees Sue Lapham, Western Australia representative on the Flexible Learning Advisory Group (FLAG), inviting VET practitioners to the new interactive Australian Flexible Learning Framework (Framework) website. Here providers can develop e-learning skills sets and knowledge by finding resources and collaborating with others.

To help introduce readers to this new learning hub, we offer Flash presentations based on Kim Edgar's recent 'e-Gems' web-conferencing session. Kim, Manager for VET Projects at Education.au and Business Manager for the LORN business activity for the Framework, explores the exciting tools available at the site and explains how to join groups, connect with colleagues and collaborate online.

We hope you enjoy this edition of The Knowledge Tree and, as always, we look forward to your feedback.

## Think piece: Defining the ‘e’ in e-learning

In this think piece, Elliott Masie, who co-invented the term ‘e-learning’, argues the need to change the ‘e’s’ definition from ‘electronic’ to ‘excellent’. Elliott takes us on a journey from e-learning’s humble beginnings to where this now global approach to learning might take us in the future. In doing so, he explores how both teachers and learners require new skill sets, roles and adaptations.

### About the author

Elliott Masie is an internationally recognised futurist, analyst and researcher in the areas of workforce learning, business collaboration and emerging technologies. He is the editor of Learning Trends, an internet newsletter read by more than 52,000 business executives worldwide, and a regular columnist in professional publications. He is the author of a dozen books and leads the Learning Consortium, a coalition of 240 global organisations cooperating on the evolution of learning strategies.

### Putting the ‘e’ in learning

More than 12 years ago, a few of us started to use the term ‘e-learning’. Learning researchers in several countries, as well as business leaders, were getting intrigued about how a ‘connected’ student might learn differently, using their computer and an internet connection. The internet was coming into use and there was interest from educational institutions, investment/venture groups – as well as government agencies – about the ‘e’ aspect of learning.

To put those early moments into perspective, every aspect of business and life was being considered for a shift to ‘e’. There were e-business conversations, e-healthcare conversations, e-commerce conversations, e-travel ventures, and even a few thoughts about e-dating in the future. The e-learning conversations were no different – some thought that it would quickly become a \$100-billion industry – replacing much of the traditional educational infrastructure. Others predicted a dramatic shift in how learners would gain access to knowledge and certification, perhaps resulting in the shut down of classrooms and campuses as we know them. And still others saw e-learning as a powerful way in which employees would be able to learn new jobs more rapidly and effectively. Finally, there were skeptics who believed that learning would be ‘cheaper’ and weakened by a shift away from the powerful face-to-face teaching moment.

### Early e formats

Understandably, in the early days, the implementation of e-learning was quite limited. In the workplace e-learning was focused on:

- Computer-based modules delivered over the network: Learners now had the ability to access a course with structured content and branched testing – over the internet – anytime and any place. Early e-learning was primarily PowerPoint-based, with text and graphics.
- Webinars: Learners now had the ability to attend a live class – with audio, supporting graphics and limited interactivity – from their desktop computer, anywhere in the world.

Needless to say, the functionality of each of these formats expanded and grew over the next dozen years. Content was enhanced with the addition of audio, then animation and finally video. Three-dimensional graphics and virtual worlds were added to some of the environments. And webinars added live video and deeper use of interaction.

Even in the early days of e-learning, the need for new skills on the part of both learners and teachers was understood. The learner would have to adapt to a new set of delivery formats and, in many instances, take additional responsibility for their own learning processes. And teachers would also have to make significant adaptations to the world of e-learning. They would have to become:

- Content developers: Many classroom teachers (in both corporate and educational settings) now had to transform lesson plans and class outlines into structured self-study e-learning modules. Instructional design had to be enhanced, developed and extended.
- Remote mentors: 'I can see if they are understanding by the look in their eyes' now needed to be replaced with 'I can engage them remotely to check for their understanding or confusion'.
- Community facilitators: A component of e-learning involves real time or asynchronous dialogues – which can be deeply aided by good facilitation. Yet the skill of stimulating and steering an on-line discussion was a natural leap from in-classroom moderation.
- E-activity designers: The nature of assignments – that extend the content with projects, discussions, reviews and search-based activities – required an added level of instructional creativity. The teacher needed to be able to visualise and then choose/adapt appropriate activities to engage online learners.
- Blenders: Most learning is blended – it is a combination of self-study, online resources, community/group projects, interaction with a teacher/instructor, assessment and finally transfer. The teacher needed skills in how to get to the 'magic in the mix' of these different components of good blended learning.
- Managers of e-learning: The tools and metrics for managing the learning experience of a distributed set of learners were quite different in the on-line world.
- On-line learners: I would argue that it is impossible to facilitate great on-line learning if you have never experienced the medium yourself as a learner. Yet few teachers have taken their own e-learning activities.

## The e-evolution of e-learning

Teachers who created or facilitated e-learning in the past 12 years developed many of the above skills. And the lay of the land – from learner expectations to tools/systems – has evolved quite a bit. So let's take a look at the 'State of E-Learning in 2009':

- The 'e' has evolved. At first, the 'e' stood for electronic delivery of content. Now 'e' refers to learning can be distributed to everyone, everywhere – with new degrees of engagement and efficiency – which copes with rapidly evolving content. We could add more 'e's', but the point here is that e-learning is about a significant process change in how organisations are linking learners with content and expertise.
- Fingertip knowledge and search is key. Increasingly, learners are using the tools of search, knowledge management and online access to gain access to a wider set of content – beyond what is delivered in a structured module. E-learning is growing its use of search as a core component. For example, posing a question or project that requires the learner to use multiple search tools to find the appropriate content or solution.
- Social learning rocks! The learner is being asked to be part of collaborative and distributed social learning activities – requiring them to locate peers, embedded subject matter experts and others – to provide content and context. Social networking tools are being adapted or copied, so that corporate learners can have the same access to the 'wisdom of the crowds' that they may have at home with Facebook or Linked In.
- Learning in the age of YouTube. The days of all content coming from the recognised subject matter expert are gone. Increasingly, organizations are using short, YouTube like video segments, shot by peers – in a simple story telling format – as some of the most valuable and up-to-date content.
- Blending learning expands. I would argue that almost all e-learning in 2009 is blended. It might be blended by the learner or by the teacher, but we are seeing an on-going mix of online content and live dialogues, with overt or covert resources. For example, when I am doing an e-learning program on my couch from home, my wife Cathy is going to be part of the process as I discuss my newly acquired knowledge or confusion of the moment.
- Global learning. More and more of our learning is also being stretched globally. In the corporate sector, we are seeing powerful designs that reach out to experts from diverse regions and bring multiple perspectives to the content plate.

## The e-learning future

If I were to make a few predictions about e-learning – and advice for teachers – for the next five years, they would include:

- Video in learning will increase exponentially. While reading will never go away, we will see a significant rise in the use of video, both edited and also live video-conference formats, to shift e-learning to a watching and listening mode, rather than just reading and writing.
- Failing forward will be key. Much of e-learning is way too easy. Our next generation of learners wants to be significantly challenged when playing a video game. They want to fail the first few levels. Learning should increase the challenge, competition and the ability for our learners to 'fail their way to success'.
- Evidence-based research on pedagogy is needed. We desperately need to have more evidence about what teaching and learning styles work most effectively for what types of content – and with which types of learners. This micro level of evidence is needed to be able to hone and target the future of e-learning.
- Collaboration and social learning moves forward. We will invent new models of how learners can learn from and with each other. These will include more use of ratings, peer teaching, project-based learning and structured competition/collaborative learning.

Finally, as the person 'accused' of helping to introduce the term e-learning, I have one hope: that we drop the 'e'. Let's just assume that learning in the future will always make the best use of online resources, digital collaboration and interaction between learners and teachers. The 'e' should evolve to be about 'excellent learning' that naturally uses these traditional and emerging modalities.

## Article: Relevant skills for e-learning

Annie Fergusson provides this overview of what must happen on a macro level if VET practitioners' are to effectively update their skills to adapt to e-learning environments.

### About the author

Annie Fergusson is Australian Flexible Learning Framework's Business Manager, Benchmarking and Research, which conducts national e-learning benchmarking surveys and commissioned research for the Australian VET sector. Annie has more than 15 years experience working in the VET system in South Australia, as both a manager and facilitator in private and public registered training organisations.

### E-learning brings new expectations

There are increasing expectations on VET organisations to provide learners with access to online learning resources and content, and to use technology to undertake and enhance learning activities. The majority of VET students report some use of e-learning in their courses, but according to Australian Flexible Learning Framework's 2008

E-learning Benchmarking Survey there is still a long way to go.

The growth in e-learning aligns with recent predictions from IBIS World Australia that in response to business and consumer demand for increased skills and learning resources 'online education will expand more than twice as quickly as any other industry in Australia over the next 12 months' (Campus Review 2009).

VET practitioners who can effectively enhance the quality of their educational practices by incorporating appropriate information communication technology (ICT) into their teaching have a major role to play in the reform of the education sector.

But the question is how do VET practitioners keep up to date (or even make a start) in e-learning? According to a recent report commissioned by the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR) 'there is concern that only 20% of educators have transformed their teaching practice to incorporate ICTs'.

The Framework's aforementioned annual E-learning Benchmarking Survey reports on the uptake and use of e-learning by training organisations, students and VET practitioners/trainers. Last year, 1,500 students, 1,400 VET practitioners and almost 600 registered training organisations participated. The survey found that 58% of training organisations delivered some units involving e-learning. It also found there was underpinning acceptance and expectation of e-learning, often as part of a blended learning experience.

This year's survey has placed a greater emphasis on how technology is being used by VET teachers and trainers. The results will provide evidence to inform the sector on the level of use and the types of technologies practitioners are engaging with in their teaching practices. (Results of the 2009 survey will be available from 16 October.)

## A place for champions

The Framework, now in its third phase (2008-2011), is focussed on mainstreaming and integrating e-learning across the VET sector. Over the past five years the Framework has developed a strong resource base (including Flexible Learning Leaders) and provided national funding to support innovative initiatives. The Flexible Learning Leaders Project was an initiative of the Framework for VET 2000-2004, which aimed to support the VET system to meet the rapidly increasing demand for flexible learning, including e-learning, from industry, enterprise and clients. The project concluded in 2004.

VET practitioners from all sectors would benefit greatly if they had opportunities to share their teaching practice through a national collaborative approach to ICT, as recommended by the recent Education.au report: Annual report: Emerging Technologies: Planning for Change.

'While there are formal commitments to education workforce development in the school education sector through the Digital Education Revolution there is no coordinated approach to professional learning for VET teachers or academics in relation to ICT in education. The sessional and part-time nature of many of these VET practitioners means that a national strategy is likely to provide them with a non-institution-specific mechanism to maintain their professional ICT in education skills, keep up-to-date with new and emerging technologies, and develop and maintain professional learning networks.'

Recent Framework research explored the effective use of 'champions' as a change strategy for embedding the use of technology in VET teaching and learning practices. It found that 'management buy-in' was a significant factor for success. It was also shown that practitioners required management support at a strategic level, and a responsive IT department to encourage them to explore new technologies as part of their daily operations.

The research found that although 'champions' are having a significant impact on teacher and trainer capability within some VET organisations, coaching and mentoring might not be enough. Many practitioners, once they have decided when and how they will incorporate ICT in their teaching, will often need practical assistance in the development of e-learning resources, uploading of the newly developed content into a learning management system, knowledge of resources, and online facilitation skills.

In addition to formal training programs, practitioners need time to experiment with new technologies and gain hands-on experience, as well as opportunities to share ideas with colleagues. Framework research found that '[a] supportive whole-of-organisation approach is required to sustain the work of e-learning champions and the changes they have influenced'. It also suggested the following recommendations to assist in the integration of e-learning across an organisation:

- VET practitioner support and technical support
- management understanding and use of ICT through the specific inclusion of e-learning in the strategic goals of the organisation
- increased time and/or funds for VET practitioners/trainers to explore e-learning opportunities
- supportive IT systems

## **The critical importance of ICT skills**

Because more students are choosing to undertake all or part of their learning in a variety of settings, there have been clear changes in the role of the VET practitioner. These changes may require practitioners to reassess past teaching methods, and they may need to strengthen facilitation, educational design, guidance and mentoring skills. With the increase in flexible and blended delivery, VET practitioners may also need to develop skills including understanding learning management systems, uploading resources, designing e-learning courses, online facilitation, and varying the contexts in which learning occurs.

If VET practitioners are to keep up-to-date with ICT in teaching and training they may need support through regular and structured professional development. This may include:

- e-learning as a compulsory unit in VET practitioner training;
- opportunities for VET practitioners to access flexible professional development sessions which model good practice in e-learning; and
- understanding how e-learning fits into the broader agendas of VET policy and national economic directions.

The Framework also conducts an employer survey every two years. The 2009 survey of more than 800 employers indicated an increase in the use of e-learning in workplace training and the uptake and impact of e-learning and e-business services.

To remain relevant to the needs and expectations of individuals or organisations in the global environment it is critical for VET practitioners and their organisations to make it a top priority to update the ICT skills required for flexibility and responsiveness to client needs.

## **Interview: Lively e-learning – An interview with Cathy Moore**

International speaker Cathy Moore has written and designed education resources for almost 25 years. Since 1998 she has worked in the online environment, commencing in the K-12 market before moving to corporate e-learning in 2001. Touring Australia this year, Cathy speaks to The Knowledge Tree about what makes lively e-learning lively and the skills practitioners need to create engaging e-learning.

### **Interviewer**

Cathy, could you briefly introduce yourself and your work?

### **Cathy Moore**

I design online materials used by adults, and I help other people design e-learning. I have been in e-learning since 1998 and before that I was a face to face trainer and a technical support person, and I have also spent some time in marketing and have written fiction and published a kid's book.

### **Interviewer**

What will be the key messages about e-learning you'll offer Australian vocational education and training practitioners and business audiences on your up-coming speaking tour?

### **Cathy Moore**

My key message will be that while it is tempting and easy to view e-learning as a way to present information efficiently, I think it is far more effective, and we use far more of its potential, if we view it as a way to design activities. It's a way to make the learner participate in their instruction. It's a way to give people a safe place to practice new knowledge. It's far more than a quick and efficient way to present information.

### **Interviewer**

What principles are pivotal for effective e-learning and instructional design?

### **Cathy Moore**

I think the most important principle for designing lively e-learning is to see e-learning design not as information design but as designing an experience, so we are not designing content, we are designing activities. If we can put the activities first, and then determine what content is needed to support those activities, we will have much more effective e-learning.

## **Interviewer**

Can you offer some key practical ideas to enable people to create lively and powerful e-learning for adult learners?

## **Cathy Moore**

A main recommendation that I make is to focus your material on a goal that is a behaviour in the real world. So if this were, for example, for business, the goal might be 'we want our course to increase the sale of widgets by whatever percent, by whatever date'. If this is for education, we might say 'we want our learners to be able to identify and kill pathogens on imported fruit', or whatever it is that we are trying to get them to do.

And I think what happens is that often we're focusing too much on enabling objectives, on objectives that are focused too much on knowledge. So for example, we might have said instead, 'we need our learners to be able to define pathogen' and what we lose track of is what behaviour we are really trying to achieve. And what happens when we lose track of the behaviour, and we start thinking too much about knowledge is then we start thinking about our material in terms of information that we are going to impart and then it becomes pretty much an information dump. And so my main recommendation is to start the design with a goal that is really much more a performance goal. Something that the person is really going to do, that is going to make a change in the real world and not something that they are going to know. To make sure that we aren't giving them information that they don't need.

If we're focusing so much on activities, and in fact even structuring our outline by activity rather than by information topic, putting the activities first, that often makes us think of scenarios or very low-tech simulations where we put the learner in an imaginary situation that is very like the one they are going to face in the real world and we immediately start making them make decisions. So instead of presenting a lot of content and then giving them a test, we're doing what Michael Allen calls the 'test and then tell' approach, where we plunge them into a situation that is compelling to them and ask them to start making decisions and provide them the information as they need it during the scenario.

## **Interviewer**

According to Dr. Karen Becker [‘s] (a lecturer at the Queensland University of Technology) 'PhD in unlearning in the workplace', many people need to unlearn past behaviours before they can accept that e-learning is a powerful teaching and learning tool. Do you agree, and what do you see as the drivers for the adoption of e-learning amongst training organisations and businesses?

## **Cathy Moore**

Often our experience of learning was that a person stood at the front of the class and presented a lot of information and then gave us a test on it. And now that we're doing e-learning, we're taking that same attitude often, or that same belief, and making it even more painful because we have concentrated it into a short, intense burst of information that one person pretty much all alone has to digest and then answer multiple choice questions about. So I think to develop really effective e-learning we have to let go of this traditional mindset about instruction. We have to stop equating information presentation with instruction, and stop equating information with knowledge. Simply exposing people to information doesn't mean that they will actually learn it, and it certainly doesn't mean that they will change their behaviour.

## **Interviewer**

Finally Cathy, what current trends in e-learning, instructional design and technologies are likely to have an impact in tomorrow's e-learning world?

## **Cathy Moore**

One trend that I am seeing a little bit of, and that I hope to see more of, is a movement away from the monolithic course and more towards sort of a suite of online materials to solve a performance problem, or to teach somebody something. It's, I think, partly due to rapid e-learning tools and also to our more traditional mindset of structured information pushed at people. We often seem to assume that any problem or any knowledge gap is going to be solved by a course, and all the information that the person needs should be in that course, and they go through the course once, they learn everything they need to know and we're done. And obviously, that's not really how it works best in the real world.

What I am seeing now is an approach to a course as a collection of activities, and putting only the very core information – the stuff that really needs to be memorised and needs to become second nature to the person – in the course, and reinforce it through the activities. And put the 'maybe this will be helpful' information in job aids or supporting materials; lower tech stuff like a PDF, which makes the course a lot more focused and a lot more active and lean.

Another trend of course I'm seeing, that a lot of people are seeing, is the use of user produced content, knowledge bases, Wikis; social learning in general. Since a lot of people are covering that a lot, I won't be focusing on that in my talk but I do see that as an important trend, and of course it's a challenging trend because it's hard to measure or control. It's hard to make sure that the most useful and valid information really is getting out there.

## E-learning skill sets: Australian experts speak

What are the emerging skill sets VET practitioners need to keep pace with ever evolving education delivery? And how can they obtain them? In this special series of interviews, we ask a select group of Australian e-learning practitioners to consider, among other issues, the differences between the skills needed for face-to-face teaching and those required for e-learning, how Web 2.0 tools can be used most effectively, and how new skill sets can be better shared and acknowledged.

The interviewees are:

- Michelle Potts (TAFE SA);
- Janice Calcei (WestOne Services and WA E-learning Coordinator);
- Terese Morgan (TAFE QLD and Qld E-learning Coordinator);
- Michael Gwyther (RTO Yum Productions, VIC);
- Ben Stokes (MD of SAPOT training organisation, SA); and
- Vivian Evans (TAFE NSW and consultant in synchronous online facilitation).

### **Michelle Potts**

Michelle is the Educational Manager for Vocational Preparation and Equity at TAFE SA. She is currently involved with the Innovations Project 'E-ffective Communication - Virtually Anywhere', which aims to embed e-learning into the Women's Education program.

#### **Interviewer**

What do you see as the most significant skills VET practitioners need to effectively implement e-learning with their learners?

#### **Michelle Potts**

Our VET practitioners really need to be very organised and have done quite a lot of planning in advance. There is so much to consider when you are delivering using e-learning. It's very different from preparing a lot of print based materials and walking into a classroom where you are face-to-face with students. Your communication is face-to-face with students. They may submit their assessments on a piece of paper etc. It's much neater and tidier I think than what we find with e-learning, where you really need to have planned and thought through how each of those processes will occur, given that you may not be in the same room with the students. So I think understanding how you plan to deliver and then thinking through the processes around each aspect, or each phase, of that deliver is very, very important and I think in some ways we forget that's so important and we focus much more on the IT skills that practitioners need.

### **Interviewer**

What are the main differences between the required skills needed for face-to-face teaching and those related to teaching using e-learning pedagogy and technologies?

### **Michelle Potts**

We have really had to tease out these differences as part of our project in working in Second Life. I think that what we have determined is one of the major differences is the way that we communicate. We also have different expectations of the students in terms of them being able to operate far more independently than when they are in our classrooms. We have also discovered that there are advantages in using e-learning, that around that fact that students don't interact. And for some students where there could be some reason why, they might be intimidated by other people, or for some students how they're perceived by other students in terms of stereotyping etc, can also impact on learning. We also want to really identify the sort of student who feels more comfortable with independent learning. There are lots of students who are comfortable with using technology as part of their learning process. For example our project actually encourages our students to undertake quite a lot of self directed learning and research which is a little different to our classroom based students who often have to go off and do independent research. That they actually have a librarian on the campus whose sole focus is their program and that changes things. They also can also work together in groups which changes things and also challenging for us is communicating in an environment where you can't rely on voice. You have to have other skills to be able to communicate. For example, instant chatting or instant messaging in Second Life, requires some coordination with the lecturer and also the students because the students can easily not notice what's being said, not pay attention, could wander off and then they can't see or hear what's happening around them because of the distance in between them and the other students.

### **Interviewer**

What are the most important skills to effectively facilitate learners undertaking e-learning courses especially those delivered entirely online?

### **Michelle Potts**

Most of the skills really required to facilitate learning in an e-learning environment do focus heavily on communication. In particular the lecturer needs to be comfortable using alternate ways of communicating other than voice. In our project we have used Facebook as a way of setting up a group that is private, that allows us to communicate with each other as educators but also will allow us to give the students a chance to express themselves and to communicate with the other learners, again in a private environment.

The use of Moodle is very important in terms of our project and the skills around understanding how to use, not only use Moodle but how to put the resources on Moodle in such a way that they are accessible, that they compliment the approach taken to how we are delivering our course and provide the learner with scope for further exploration that doesn't limit them to just relying on just what is accessible on that Moodle site. For example providing links to other online resources that enable them to continue further research and go off on different pathways.

In terms of our project there is considerable skills in terms of using software that enables us to record, to post PowerPoint presentations with audio. We've used Youtube, so they're skills around using that, recording in Second Life has required specific skills. And again all of these skills come back to how we communicate with the learners.

The other thing that we've chosen to do is use Facebook as a communication tool instead of using email as well. The reason we have chosen to do that is that it makes it much easier to communicate with the students as a group. You don't need to set up, you know email groups. You don't need to have to worry about your email box filling up, things coming in from the students. It's also a way for us to post information that they can then choose to go and look at or be involved with etc. We also plan to use Moodle as a way of also submitting assessments etc so that we can track them and provide feedback to the students.

**Interviewer**

What changes have you seen in the importance, or prominence, of skill sets over the past five years?

**Michelle Potts**

These were things that were shown to us many years ago, but due to our organisational firewalls we haven't actually been able to access them. And so they have required skills to work in them too. To work in those environments, to be able to use Youtube or Teachertube where you can house your own resources, make them accessible to working in Second Life where you actually need to understand about how to create an avatar. How to, you know basically work in that environment to access the resources, which are incredible. They have fantastic educational institutions in there and I think one of the skills around e-learning would have to be, that has developed over the last five years in particular, has been around collaboration and sharing. I think that really one of the key things is that, people need to be willing to share what they know and understand that, that comes back tenfold in doing so.

You know one of the beauties of the Second Life environment is that, if you know, if you go in there with the right approach you actually access a lot of resources that already exist, which means you don't have to invest a lot of time in recreating them yourself. A skillset around how to work with people in an e-learning environment and I think that's one of the advantages of the Flexible E-learning program, the Innovations Projects, is that is it's very much about encouraging collaboration and also sharing the resources and the learning. We've moved on to a point where people are ready to dive in because there's a lot other people around now that they can talk to, that they can ask questions of, who they can gain support from. You know, we've moved away from 'Let's put people through a whole lot of training' to 'Let's maybe mentor some people' as they work through setting up their Moodles, as they work through determining how they will deliver an online course, what components of online delivery will there be etc.

**Interviewer**

What do you think are the emerging skillsets needed for the use of new technological tools to assist learning?

**Michelle Potts**

There is a skill needed around look at what is available and making some assessment of what then is suitable, practical, appropriate for what you want to use and for your students. I think the other aspect of that skillset is about, really thinking about who are your learners. We can't communicate in the normal ways, we don't have the normal cues that help us to gauge how we are travelling with our students. There are various reasons why a student would choose to be involved in a program that has e-learning. It could be that they are remote, it could be that they have personal issues, that prevent them from interacting. It could be that they are in gaol and they simply can't attend.

Underlying all that is that we have to always focus on the pedagogy. It's not just about a means to an end and it's certainly not about trying to replicate face-to-face delivery in an e-learning environment. We have to think about why we're choosing to use technology. We have to think about which technology we choose to use that is also most appropriate and we have to always, always make sure that we have a sound pedagogical stance underlying those choices.

**Interviewer**

What essential aspects of digital literacy and experience do you think VET practitioners need in relation to Web 2.0 tools.

**Michelle Potts**

I think the best way to work as a VET practitioner is to try the different tools that are available until you find the one that seems to fit well in terms of what you are trying to achieve and how effective it will be in terms of the students use as well. Some of the feedback we've gotten from our project from some of our own practitioners who have been involved with trialling different aspects of it has been, don't over complicate it. Most people once they have a certain level of competency and confidence in using technology are pretty happy to just have a play.

**Interviewer**

What position do you take in relation to content development, ie to what extent do VET practitioners need to develop content for online environments or should this be left to teams of instructional designers and multimedia IT experts?

**Michelle Potts**

I think if you're looking at creating interactive environments, that require considerable skill, I think that you know, you may be best to work with instructional designers and multimedia IT experts – together – to come up with that content. A VET practitioner may well have in their mind what they want to achieve and the sorts of content that they might want in there, but they don't have the time and they don't have the expertise to turn that into sort of digital medium that suitable for an online environment.

**Interviewer**

And finally, how can we better acknowledge the new and emerging skillsets of VET practitioners as e-learning becomes more embedded as a teaching/learning practice?

**Michelle Potts**

VET practitioners who are working in e-learning do have different skillsets and different emphasises on their work and I think that we can acknowledge these in terms of their job and person specifications, through their performance management process, in recognising their achievements. We also have the opportunity to enable them to work as mentors with other staff so that they can share and encourage others to also become skilled in e-learning. VET practitioners who clearly have a desire to get involved and an enthusiasm to get involved are able to do with some time release.

A lot of the e-learning to begin with is very time intensive and you know, most VET practitioners are carrying full teaching loads. It makes it very difficult to continue to do what they do whilst moving into a completely new area, that they really have to start from scratch. You can't take, you know, their classroom based delivery and plonk it into an e-learning environment and expect it that to work.

Our students themselves are not necessarily similar or the same as the students who we see in our classrooms. That's not to say that classroom and e-learning has to be exclusive of each other it doesn't but often students who come to a classroom environment don't particularly want to be too involved in a lot of independent e-learning. Independent learners who feel comfortable with not even being on a campus or a classroom who are comfortable with e-learning have a different style and I guess that's one of the skills of being a VET practitioner in e-learning is understanding the differences and the similarities between the students who come to our classrooms and are happy to engage in e-learning either as part of an on campus program or as part of an extended or blended program.

These e-learning champions are really making in-roads that as a manager I can't necessarily do without them. It's one thing for me to say to someone about the exciting aspects of e-learning and being involved but if I have someone who is a VET practitioner who is leading the way and demonstrating to their peers that yes it is exciting, and yes it is interesting, and yes it is time consuming but it's a chance to get into something new. It brings new enthusiasm to their work. So it's really important for me to recognise them and value them and to give them opportunities to continue in their work, because even though it's not something that I will be involved in hands-on in the delivery, I need others to see that I think that it's exciting, that I think it's interesting, that I value it and I think it's important for our students. And I think that's part of acknowledging the work of VET practitioners, and for me as a manager, to support and to get in there and to show enthusiasm as well.

### ***Janice Calcei***

Janice has been the Australian Flexible Learning Framework's E-Learning Co-ordinator (WA) since 2008. She worked in the TAFE sector for 12 years as a lecturer, instructional designer, corporate services manager and education services manager. In 2004, she won a Flexible Learning Leader scholarship.

#### **Interviewer**

What do you see as the most significant skills VET practitioners need to effectively implement e-learning with their learners?

#### **Janice Calcei**

In online, of course, they have to have good teaching skills. A teacher who is a good teacher in front of the class that is they can engage their students, produce good learning resources and direct and support and advice students; those teachers are going to be good teachers in an online environment too, so providing they can address the other skill areas. So good teaching in front of the class can translate to good teaching online. You need to be solving problems on the fly, quite often. You know dealing with technology issues, dealing with access issues, sorting out problems for students, sorting out problems for your teachers, getting content online – there's so many things that need to be addressed. You have to be a good problem solver.

#### **Interviewer**

What are the main differences between the required skills needed for face-to-face teaching and those related to teaching using e-learning pedagogy and technology?

#### **Janice Calcei**

Obvious one is that you need higher levels of technology skills. I think that goes without saying. If you're in an online environment there's no point in being in a online environment unless you are providing interactive content in your course or unless you are providing asynchronous or synchronous activities for the students.

A teacher has to understand how to design for the online environment. Students in an online environment need to be more self directed. Students tend to at higher level qualifications tend to work better because they have the experience, perhaps intellectual capacity. As you work your way up those AQF qualifications levels, once you're getting Cert III, Cert IV, diploma, those are the students who do best.

There is much less content provided on the screen. For example in a learning management system but much more shows the student where to find the material so they can go outside and research, come back, complete an activity. So the students are doing a lot more of the work so they have to be very self directed, hence the design of the content has to cater to that. Probably work harder at being inclusive with their students so in classrooms you can read the cues, you can see what people are doing, what groupings they have in class. When you are in an online environment, that's much harder so you have to design activities that promote inclusiveness and if you're struggling with students who are not contributing then you have to implement some sort of strategy to include students so whether that's communicating with them separately from the learning environment but there have to be strategies to make sure that everyone is brought into the online community, that is your class needs to have some capacity for students to interact at a social level between themselves and with their lecturer.

### **Interviewer**

What are the most important skills to effectively facilitate learners undertaking e-learning courses, especially those delivered entirely online?

### **Janice Calcei**

You can have brilliant content up there but if there's not a person behind the scenes, communicating with the students then it may not work. I know that at university level, sometimes they do only have content and not a lot of teacher interaction. That can work for people who are busy but with VET courses, I think it's probably more important to have a strong teacher presence, someone with good communication skills and that can provide support advice and direction to students who are studying in an online environment.

There needs to be good design and good direction in the way that the course is structured so students are focussed in the correct areas. Whether that mean that students work in a linear way through a course or in a more lateral way through the course. It will mean that through the design of the course they still end up in the place where they want to be in the end.

The lecturer needs to keep control of what's happening in the environment to whatever extent they need to. They need to monitor discussions, they need to monitor chat rooms, they need to monitor what's going on in their online environment to ensure that it's focussed on their content and not on other issues and as a result of that they may also need some skills in bringing in lurkers, so inclusivity but also dealing in conflict situations perhaps where things that are inappropriate may get into an online environment.

There needs to be good planning, time management skills and monitoring the various spaces can be challenging. So if you've got asynchronous, you might have the discussion rooms, access to content, the submission of assignments monitoring emails. And in the synchronous environment, just monitoring chat when it happens and if it happens and running virtual classrooms can be quite challenging. A lecturer or presenter may find that difficult to begin with – the environments are quite busy to work in and it can be quite tiring. The lecturer or presenter will always need to do some practice perhaps with a co-teacher if they are only just starting out.

As time goes on, they get much better at working in those environments but to begin with it's good to practice with another teacher.

More readily available interactive content which is being put into learning management systems, some of the more advanced functions of the learning management systems are being used like RSS feeds for instance, inserting video content from sites like SlideShare, YouTube, TeacherTube, into e-learning management systems. So a lot more multimedia content in the learning management system and then using the great books area, the quiz, developing of quizzes and so on So those skills have definitely improved. Products like Centra and Elluminate – in the last two years, they have moved away from just being used as a meeting tool and they're actually being used quite extensively now in the e-learning area to meet with students. The skill levels have gone up in that area but still mainly among only people who are interested in e-learning. There's still quite a lot of people not aware, not using virtual rooms out in the general VET sector. I think that part of that is being driven by the easy access to professional development using virtual classrooms, things like the online conferences that have being run in the last few years and also things like e-gems and the various things that have being run by the Australian Learning Framework.

So those virtual rooms are providing opportunity for free professional development across the whole nation and that is in turn upskilling RTO training professionals in the use of virtual rooms. There's been increased awareness of tools for example like Facebook, MySpace, Twitter. Lecturers still struggle to produce good learning content because they don't have a good understanding of how web content is put together and also they don't have a good understanding of access issues so the correct use of fonts, colours. They don't understand the editing of images particularly well or the size of various types of media and that can lead to problems with the development of content.

There are some good tools out there now. The WIMBA create product, things like AREC allow some content development and certainly sites like YouTube, SlideShare, allow lecturers to pull down ready-made content. I would say that lecturer are actually using more of the ready made content than creating content themselves. So certainly downloading from LORN, using TeacherTube for instance.

### **Interviewer**

What do you think are the emerging skill sets for the new technological tools to assist learning?

### **Janice Calcei**

I think that virtual worlds are interesting and that has a lot of capacity for setting up simulated learning environment but it's still only on the fringes of e-learning as yet. I think there's still a big focus on the fundamental skills that are required just to get a course and a presence online in an LMS so I think we are still addressing some of the basic.

There are some good frameworks out there now that guide people through content development. I think as those become better and with a bigger profile we'll be able to incorporate those into any PD opportunities as well as on content development.

### **Interviewer**

What essential aspects of digital literacy and experience do you think VET practitioners need in relation to Web 2.0 tools?

### **Janice Calcei**

I think the crucial thing is for any VET practitioner who's anticipating or contemplating using it, anything in Web 2.0 that they really need to go in, set up an account and play around with the tool before they think they are implementing it themselves. They need to understand how it works, what the major components of the tool are, how it might impact on their student group, what the security issues are, perhaps they need to investigate all of those before they use them in a teaching environment. So it may work well for one group but not at all well for another group. For instance, I'm aware of one training organisation that is using a lot of special networking tools in a public relations course and doing it very successfully and that process comprised the teacher learning the tools, allowing the students, once he had understood them, to go in and simply play and then applying the tools to simulate a work environment and that process worked quite well and that the student group matured through that process so that they are able to use the social networking tools in an effective and productive way to achieve their learning outcomes and also so that will translate to effective outcomes in the workplace.

### **Interviewer**

What position you take in relation to content development, ie to what extent do VET practitioners need to develop content for online environment or should this be left to teams of instructional designers and multimedia IT experts?

### **Janice Calcei**

In my experience there are very few lecturers who are good at the development of digital content. They're mostly not too bad at structuring a course into an LMS so grabbing various components, various bits of content and structuring it in a linear way on an LMS and then setting up their assessments and the appropriate spots. But when it comes to web content and web interactions they tend not to have good skills. They find it difficult to understand. There's a huge learning curve required and so if you are talking about actual digital content then I think ideally it's best left to instructional designers and web developers.

### **Interviewer**

Finally, how can we better acknowledge the new and emerging skills set of VET practitioners as e-learning becomes more embedded as a teaching learning practice?

### **Janice Calcei**

A couple of ways, maybe, to acknowledge the new and emerging skills of VET practitioners. One current way of acknowledging those people is to identify them as 'the earlier adopters' and maybe have them involved in championing e-learning, perhaps then also acting as mentors and coaches within their organisation, so perhaps setting aside some funding to allow them time out from teaching to actually assist with the implementation of e-learning in the organisation. Those who are really interested in this area do enjoy that sort of work but it requires a specific set of skills so they need also to be good teachers, have good communication skills, so all of the things I guess which make a good teacher need to be in place for a good e-learning mentor.

The skills may need to be incorporated into job descriptions, as a standard part of job descriptions. I'm not sure whether that happens but I know that sometimes there are some organisations who actually have a base level of ICT skills as part of their JDs in their organisations so as these skills become more common perhaps the e-learning skills also can form part of job description and as time goes on as well perhaps a stronger presence in teaching qualifications like the TAA and other higher level teaching qualifications.

There is already a presence with a couple of units in the certificate, I think they are all electives so I think some of the e-learning units probably need to, or at least one, need to come into the core set of units in the TAA rather than to be electives. That's a time thing, of course. This is all part of workforce development in an organisation so if there is a strong belief in the future of e-learning in the organisation then there needs to be a sort of clarity of vision by the organisation in skilling up their teaching staff and giving them pathways that will encourage them to become more skilled in e-learning technologies and in teaching and facilitating in e-learning.

### **Terese Morgan**

Terese is Queensland e-Learning Coordinator for the Australian Flexible Learning Framework. As Manager of the FlexiLearn Unit at the Southern Queensland Institute of TAFE, she oversaw the operation of the Libraries and Learning Technologies teams with responsibilities that included e-learning product development and the promotion of, and training in, the use of new technologies.

#### **Interviewer**

What do you see as the most significant skills VET practitioners need to effectively implement e-learning with their learners?

#### **Terese Morgan**

There are four significant skills that VET practitioners need to effectively implement e-learning. The first is a preparedness to experiment and use, as well as apply, new technologies. The second is an understanding of the needs of online learners, which would then enable them to develop an approach to e-learning that is founded on a very solid understanding of teaching and learning, particularly for the requirements of clients within the VET sector. The third is the ability to keep up-to-date with their knowledge and skills that support both the training needs of industry, that the VET sector caters to, and which also reflect the online technological development. The fourth and final one is a confidence in their own abilities to guide and lead and manage upwards in order to influence decision making about e-learning and technology.

#### **Interviewer**

What are the main differences between the required skills needed for face-to-face teaching and those related to teaching using e-learning pedagogy and technology?

#### **Terese Morgan**

As opposed to a face-to-face environment, where facilitators can use just basic ICT skills, if at all; they might be the use of a laptop, it might be the use of a PowerPoint presentation, it could be using other digital technologies such as using CD-ROMs within a computer for students to self-pace through but these are simple operating skills.

The online practitioners felt that they needed really to understand the technology, they needed to be able to troubleshoot issues. If they were learning a learning management system, they had to understand how to navigate through and how to explain that navigation, both in an online live synchronous environment, if they were in a chat but also how to describe it in a non synchronous environment so that they could help students who might be experiencing a problem.

In a face-to-face environment there are advantages in that practitioner is able to moderate what he is doing according to the needs of the audience at the time. So if a particular discussion takes off down different pathway then they will move with the flow and they will re-direct the conversation so that the same learning outcomes are met but they will leverage off whatever their discussion is at the time. And yet in a online environment where there are limitations such as literacy levels of students, even if they have provided alternative text or alternative media, they still need to take that into account and it still needs to be fairly structured. They also take into account that learners often might have shorter attention spans, they might be different age groups, they might have different priorities as to whatever their competency is, or whatever the learning opportunities they are working with at that time, or how interested they are in it. So they need to actually provide a different method of learning design, a different type of pedagogy to keep their learners engaged, in order to make sure that they are tracking their learners well in an online environment. Many of the practitioners commented that they established much more complex administration systems. So if they often have larger cohorts, they then need to actually track the progress of those students and if they have got particular issues or concerns, how they are actually managing those or monitoring them. They also felt there was possibly the potential for a broader scope of learners in an online environment and there was also the scope for a larger number of participants to be at varying levels of completion.

The learning opportunities that are created with effective learning design in an e-learning environment are virtually well structured, they lead on from point to point, they might be taking into account a maximum of three clicks, they might be looking at alternative methods of keeping the mind moving, colour, display, etc in the design process, whereas within a face-to-face environment, often the content is first focused more around a structured lesson outline.

### **Interviewer**

What are the most important skills to effectively facilitate learners undertaking e-learning courses especially those delivered entirely online?

### **Terese Morgan**

The first is making sure that the learner focus is maintained at all times, that the learner is the priority in this particular experience. Now the other thing that needs to occur in that learner focused situation is making sure that the support and the feedback that is given to the learner is not only just as good as they would get in a face-to-face environment but in fact in order for it to be as good as, it has to be better than. There has to be established a sense that the participant in that online environment is the only one. He is getting a more dedicated experience than they could get in a face-to-face environment.

Many practitioners do this by giving the perception that they're accessible and available 24 hours a day. Now this might be through just regularly maintaining and checking in bulletins then are broadcasted and sent out through bulletin boards or through channels that they have established. It might be even by a broadcast SMS that goes out to their learners about 'how they are going?', 'have they started their assignment?', etc. It could be a twitter account.

The other area that is important as a skill is the use of e-learning skills, that are appropriate to the client cohort for that particular learning experience. Now if it's a higher level diploma group that might be focused, a training outcome, such as a TAA qualification or it could be a front-line management qualification, then it's quite possible that the experience in the way that it is structured could be and should be quite different to that, what might be targeted at a Cert II or Cert III in child care or children services or something along those lines.

Another areas that is important as a skill for the effective facilitation is to make sure that whatever is delivered in that particular online environment has some very solid instructional design foundations, that it is organised, it is well presented and it is readily accessible for the learner.

### **Interviewer**

What changes have you seen in the importance or prominence of required skill sets over the past five years?

### **Terese Morgan**

First there is the good familiarity with Web 2.0 technologies so that they can then be used for communicating and networking and in so doing creating a good learning community. The second is that practitioners are now required to have an ingrained set of ICT skills that includes some knowledge and understanding about learning design. This is almost an assumed pre-requisite skill, particularly as learners are no longer 'walked or clicked' through their work. The ICT skills of the practitioner need to be there to ensure that they design the learning so that it is self directed in any sense within the online environment. Another one is the digital instructional design skills – they have emerged as a required skills set, though in fact, very few practitioners actually have truly attained or maintained those particular skills, that is something that is now emerging as a deficit in some areas and it's been identified as an area of prominence for up skilling and re-educating many of the practitioners.

The understanding of the e-learning language and the abundant acronyms that comes with an online world. Now some of the obvious one – LMS and LCMS and SCORM etc. There are many out there, the practitioners are the ones are looking to engage in the online experience who really don't understand the key differences in the acronyms that are being used and that can lead to misunderstanding and misdirection.

Teachers still need to know how to modify and upload existing resources and to support their learners through any ICT glitches. Many practitioners have commented that even though there might be an IT helpdesk , some have that and some don't, the first port-of-call for the problems that the learners experience is the facilitator for online learning. It must be extremely innovative, it must be current and it must be solution focussed.

### **Interviewer**

What do you think are the emerging skill sets needed for the use of new technological tools to assist learning?

### **Terese Morgan**

A skill set surrounding the facilitating of learning skills. The second is key learner support skills. The third is proficient use of social networking tools, such as Twitter, Facebook, blogs, Delicious, etc. The fourth is a good solid grasp of instructional design principles and the final emerging skill set is the requirement to be innovative. To become change advocates, to be fluid in their ability to change tact and approach.

### **Interviewer**

What essential aspects of digital literacy and experience do you think VET practitioners need in relation to Web 2.0 tools?

### **Terese Morgan**

The first is an understanding of privacy, copyright and IT principles. The second is the ability to communicate in the abbreviated blink language of texting, the ability to rapidly transfer existing knowledge about the operation of one tool or e-learning strategy to a whole new learning experience, in other words the ability to learn how to learn to use new tools in a variety of environment. And finally the ability to take what may have been developed for other purposes for example gaming, social interaction and so forth and instantly recognise a potential new application to enhance the learning.

### **Interviewer**

What position you take in relation to content development, ie to what extent do VET practitioners need to develop content for online environment or should this be left to teams of instructional designers and multimedia IT experts?

### **Terese Morgan**

In essence, content development is a business decision by the training organisation and there're key questions that need to be asked and considered that relate to that business context and it will depend on the size and essentially the core resources of the organisation. To create an unnatural divide in the roles and responsibilities of the teacher and the designer has inherent advantages and disadvantages. Practitioners in the educational context have always been designers and held some ownership over the presentation of the learning experience. In an online environment though the disparate standards that are then revealed are so much more easily compared. If all design is within the hands of practitioners there is a greater risk of differences in the quality and that is dependant upon all the online and instructional design skills of the practitioner. However, if this process is only left to the designer or the IT expert, then the crafting of a personalised learning experience that is customised for the learner, that is leveraged off the professional knowledge skills and understanding that the practitioner may have. My personal preference I guess is that teachers have a high level of support to help them embed the principles required for effective online learning into their unconscious kit bag of tools for blended delivery. This though assumes that the dedicated team of professionals can assist when they need it.

## **Interviewer**

Finally, how can we better acknowledge the new and emerging skill sets of VET practitioners as e-learning becomes more embedded as a teaching learning practice?

## **Terese Morgan**

I think it is important to actually compare VET practitioner against other professional occupations. Now, there are many other lines of professionals such as pharmacists, engineers, doctors, mechanics, electricians, that significantly impact changes in science and technology. All of these areas need to have re-certification and re-training in order to retain their registration. The question I have is why is this not the case for all practitioners regardless of whether they're face-to-face or online. As e-learning becomes more embedded into core teaching and learning then there will be a less of a distinction between who is e-learning skilled and those who are not. Perhaps it could be that certain percentage of all PD each year should be mandatory as far as updating existing

e-learning skills and maybe this could be done through skills audit and customised training for e-learning skills deficit within organisations. Only once a practitioner can prove competency in a core benchmarked level of relevant delivery skills should professional development options in other areas be considered to be paid for from organisational funding. Now, that's quite a radical thought but if it is such a core skill, if it's something that teachers and practitioners are going to need as an inherent understanding into the future, maybe we have to be stronger about the way that we actually implement it and ensure that it's occurring.

One qualification that should be mandatory for all practitioners is the 'TAA DEL501B Facilitating e-learning' and again this should be checked and measured through performance reviews that occur on an annual basis with all teaching members of organisations.

## **Michael Gwyther**

Michael works with Yum Productions, a private RTO for which he oversees a variety of coaching, mentoring and training programs. These assist practitioners and RTOs to introduce learner-centred approaches to e-learning. He also delivers the TAA e-learning competencies to organisations Australia-wide.

## **Interviewer**

What do you see as the most significant skills VET practitioners need to effectively implement e-learning with their learners?

## **Michael Gwyther**

I think trainers or VET practitioners need three skills. One is they need a sense of their limitations and possibilities of the computer medium. They can create activities and learning opportunities that are interesting and engaging. So I think that leads into the other skills which I think is imagination. I think trainers and VET practitioners need to be able have a sense of being able to write, being able to draft interesting activities, be able to produce characters, situations and scenarios that lend themselves to the learning activities that the learners are going to engage with.

I think the final skill they need is obviously but not necessarily technical skill to be able to use the e-learning strategies that give life to the engaging activities they create but certainly the ability to be able to see how these things can be put together and shaped. So if they are not constructing them, at least someone in their team can follow their particular vision.

I think the main one really is imagination to be honest, to be able to see the possibilities and put them into place.

What are the main differences between the required skills needed for face-to-face teaching and those related to teaching using e-learning, pedagogy and technologies?

**Michael Gwyther**

I think the most obvious difference is an awareness by the VET practitioner of the communication limitations of the e-learning environment and working hard to ensure that people also understand those limitations and to immerse them or model, I suppose, communication behaviours that will ensure people connect with each other during the training. This happens incidentally in face-to-face training just through our own social makeup but in the online environment, whether it be asynchronously or in webinars, etc. They probably need to spend a bit of time thinking about and discussing the limitations of the environment, in terms of the social medium and how to work actively to overcome that and work together. So it's really about providing the skills by which participants can work together [and] share those.

**Interviewer**

What are the most important skills to effectively facilitate learners undertaking e-learning courses, especially those delivered entirely online?

**Michael Gwyther**

The most important skills I think for a facilitator working with trainers in an online thing I think probably there's a few. I think obviously some form of induction into the e-learning tools that are going to be used, the communication tools and to create activities that actually provide an introduction into those tools initially. To provide opportunities for people to be able to share some form of information about one another, particularly job roles, reasons for doing training, so people can make some kind of connection between each other. I think to be able to make some physical contact with your learners, by phone is really important to put a voice to a face. I often get people to send in pictures of themselves so that we can put that in their profile and their LMS or Moodle so we can get a sense of who and what they are, and share a little bit about their quirks or hobbies, a bit about their family maybe, some of the humorous incidents they have seen in stories, just to get people moving/working together.

I think once we get into an online environment we certainly have to have activities that enable people to work together, to share information, to build information together and to be able to reflect back to be able to take advantage of the time people have within the learning activities, to share and build on each others' understanding.

I think one of the great benefits of face-to-face training is that you get a little bit more than the sum of the group, often people come into that training with a fair amount of skill, the opportunity to share it, stories that help other people learn about their particular job role or function, and this goes beyond what the trainer's to offer. In the e-learning environment, we've got to create the opportunities to enable people to share those kinds of stories and learn off one another and identify potential mentors beyond and above the trainer.

**Interviewer**

What changes have you seen in the importance or prominence of required skill sets over the past five years?

**Michael Gwyther**

I think five years ago we were talking about lots of different things. We were talking about HTML. We were talking about the potential for emerging webinars which were just starting to come out I think. We weren't talking much about video except as an augment and we certainly weren't talking about social software. We were really talking about bulletin boards, discussion forums, we were talking about various ways of getting content, we were talking about learner management systems a lot. We were talking about toolboxes as being state-of-the-art. I guess now what we are talking about a myriad of different things. We're not talking about HTML anymore because we've got blogs and wikis. We've got the ability for trainers to get up and running really quickly with creating their own content. We've got a huge range of rapid e-learning tools for better or for worse. I'm probably going to find people are getting sick of drag and drop and quizzes before too long. We've got a whole range of social software tools and methods that people are using to build their own networks and create their own learning as practitioners, but I think that the fundamentals remain important. The thing I think that is consistent is that the hardest thing we've got to develop amongst our trainers is creating good engaging activities, using the tools that are thrown up at us at any particular time.

**Interviewer**

What do you think are the emerging skill sets needed for the use of new technological tools to assist learning?

**Michael Gwyther**

I think that the emerging skills are managing social groups as learning entities, as well as audio visual skills in relationship to instructional design. We're now seeing the potential to be able to create audio and video, come into the realm with everybody. We've seen visual high definition video cameras come down enormously in price, so the skills that, not so much the skills, but the tools to enable us to create multimedia, which were the province of specialists and experts, has really been made available to the everyday trainer in the street. I guess what we're not seeing so much is an instructional design underpinning to those skills to support people to be able to make good multimedia activities or demonstrations or case studies or whatever they might be, accompanied by interesting activities that scaffold off that multimedia, which I think is the really critical path.

The other one is obviously trying to perhaps make that link between training and communities of practice, I think is going to increasingly happen. So I think trainers will in the future, probably be looking at managing communities of practice and helping the emerging facilitation of those that might come out of training sessions that they run. So that means there's a whole range of new tools and skills that they have to learn to support their training beyond perhaps what they've been engaged for originally, which is the delivery of competencies.

**Interviewer**

What essential aspects of digital literacy and experience do you think VET practitioners need, in relation to Web 2.0 tools?

**Michael Gwyther**

I think the digital literacy skill that's going to be really important, I think, is brevity, as well as the ability to summarise and make relevant the tide of information that's going to be coming at people to be able to select out what's relevant and what's useful, what could be applicable to various groups under their control or under their influence I suppose. To be able to be a conduit for the range of people, with a variety of abilities, to be able to manage that information and make it sort of wholesome to each particular sub-group that they've got.

I think teaching people information management skills is going to be a really critical literacy skill for people, as well as trainers to learn themselves. I think they're the main ones.

**Interviewer**

What position do you take in relation to content development, ie to what extent do VET practitioners need to develop content for online environments, or should this be left to teams of instructional designers and multimedia IT experts?

**Michael Gwyther**

I think the question for me is that each one of those particular groups should have an understanding of the professional standards of the other, so the trainer should have a basic understanding of instructional design issues faced by multimedia developers who might be developing content on their behalf, and multimedia designers should have some understanding of the competency based training system, as well as the e-learning strategies at their [a trainers] disposal, to enable interesting activities. Whereas, a structural designer might be able to develop the technical steps for a learner to step through a decision making tree or a case study along the way and answer questions and what not, it's really only the trainer that can develop the content that they require to assess and follow the learner with, so I really think it's really about a merging of team understanding of the particular skills. I know in my particular business, we probably will not see a multimedia developer developing content. They would be developing content in response to the needs of the trainer, but we'd be hoping that over time we'd be understanding each other's limitations and each other's needs and requirements to have the best outcome and the best produced content product.

**Interviewer**

Finally, how can we better acknowledge the new and emerging skill sets of VET practitioners as e-learning becomes more embedded as a teaching/learning practice?

**Michael Gwyther**

Look, I think trainers, from my experience, when we go into various organisations delivering e-learning training, after some initial reluctance are often really ripe to take on some of these new skill sets that I've kind of discussed, but the problem that let's them down is bandwidth, computer capacity and blocked sites at their respective institutions. So I think that's the major barrier. And until we get that cleared up, which would enable them to say, do something simple like create a pod cast or embed a YouTube video on a wiki, for example, which is often prohibited at many places.

Until we got the average trainer in the block having that capacity of being able to show their mate who's very reluctant, then I think we're going to really struggle. I think this skill sets can move forward if we have got that sort of door open, so we really need an open access policy. If we had that, we would probably have lots and lots of trainers who could create examples, get enthused, then enthuse those around them, which has probably happened at the kind of enthusiast level we see now.

## **Ben Stokes**

Ben is currently Managing Director of SAPOT Training organization and has a background in 'blue-collar' industries. He has extensive experience in dangerous occupations and is passionate about reducing workplace fatalities and accidents through appropriate training and education.

### **Interviewer**

What do you see as the most significant skills VET practitioners need to effectively implement e-learning with their learners?

### **Ben Stokes**

I believe the skills needed for practitioners need to embed e-learning is to have a sense of reality, and also a sense of understanding who uses the e-learning and have a very open mind on the ways on how you can use e-learning to be engaging to your students and be quite open to accept their feedback because they're the people who are using it.

### **Interviewer**

What are the main differences between the required skills needed for face to face teaching and those related to teaching using e-learning pedagogy and technologies?

### **Ben Stokes**

The one thing you don't want to lose is the flavour and the characteristic of yourself on how you deliver that, so you don't want to try to let the technology and other bits and pieces try and drain out your flavour because your character is what makes the course enjoyable.

### **Interviewer**

What are the most important skills to effectively facilitate learners undertaking e-learning courses, especially those delivered entirely online.

### **Ben Stokes**

Special skills to deliver courses totally online, I think the main thing is to keep your students engaged, get them working with you. Depending on what technologies and what programs you'll be using to deliver the course, you want to try to make the students get their hands on as much as they can with the computer world 'cause the more they use and talk about it, there's obviously going to come with better and desirable results.

### **Interviewer**

What essential aspects of digital literacy and experience do you think that practitioners need in relation to Web 2.0 tools?

### **Ben Stokes**

The literacy needed to use Web 2.0 tools is not a great deal, it's like anything you've just got to sit down, have a good read and play with it before you can get too far with it. I think that you don't need a very great high level of literacy, computer literacy skills to access a lot of the Web 2.0 programs.

### **Interviewer**

What position do you take in relation to content development, ie to what extent do VET practitioners need to develop content for online environments or should this be left to teams of instructional designers and multimedia IT experts?

### **Ben Stokes**

Definitely don't leave it to IT experts and content design people. As a VET practitioner, you know, it's a matter of putting your thinking cap on, relate to the younger generation and see what they like and what they don't like and then you make the decision to put in your content and then you make your instructional designers and IT people build it to what you want. Don't accept nothing else, don't let some IT guru try and tell you they want this and that because you're the practitioner, you should really put your content and your flavour into it so that you get the best out of it.

### **Interviewer**

Finally, how can we better acknowledge the new and emerging skills sets of VET practitioners as e-learning becomes more embedded as a teaching learning practice?

### **Ben Stokes**

I believe the possibility of looking at putting some qualifications towards this and creating qualifications in the long-term would be of great benefit, however at the moment I think with the balance of computer skills that are coming into the world anyway, along with educational practices. Look it is emerging technology for sure, I guess one day there will need to be some sort of training package aligned to delivering e-learning.

### ***Vivian Evans***

Vivian is consultant and synchronous learning expert specialising in facilitating online communities. She also teaches at NSW's New England Institute of TAFE and is currently working on a project to deliver the Indigenous language of Gamilaraay online. She was nominated this year for a NSW Quality Teaching Award.

### **Interviewer**

What do you see as the most significant skills VET practitioners need to effectively implement e-learning with their learners?

### **Vivian Evans**

The teacher needs the skill to be able to plainly explain and give clear instructions for students. They need to have multiple ways to communicate and we tend to teach in our own comfort zones, when need to sort of stretch out of that. You need to be able to communicate in a variety of ways to cater for the different learning styles that students have, particularly when they're distance.

You need to be able to relax and not panic, when things go wrong, to give students the confidence that they can do things too that's not necessarily them that is at fault, you know sometimes it's the technology that can be tricky.

You need to have patience, patience with your students so that to enable them to understand and feel comfortable. Understand what they're thinking, what they're seeing their end when they're learning and have the patience so that you're very calm and it's a really important thing for students that they can feel very stressed when they're learning from a distance, feeling somewhat of isolated. It's more about the connection and the communication that you have with students.

### **Interviewer**

What are the main differences between the required skills needed for face-to-face teaching and those related to teaching using e-learning pedagogy and technologies?

### **Vivian Evans**

In a face-to-face environment, you're seeing each other visually, you're seeing the reaction, so you have to hear the communication through the voice, make connections you know more often and make those connections personable. Be even better prepared, I think, for the online learning. You need to have the resources there at the ready. You can always follow things up when there's questions that you can't answer on the spot, but you need to have that variety and a mix there, so I feel personally, that when I am preparing for the online room or teaching, (I'm talking about virtual conferencing and resources online as well), it's actually, I find, there's more time and you need to be better prepared. They're pretty similar you know really face-to-face, it's still understanding what the students are comprehending, different ways to get that understanding.

### **Interviewer**

What are the most important skills to effectively facilitate learners undertaking e-learning courses, especially those delivered entirely online?

### **Vivian Evans**

The most important skill is strong communication skills. The ability to make students feel at ease, have fun while you're teaching and learning, engage with warm ups and state changes, vary the activity. I strongly believe that you need to have that live connection where possible and as well as the asynchronous, so the synchronous and asynchronous connection, and be able to provide support and connection for those students who can't engage in the synchronous connection.

Have different ways to deliver similar information, I think that's a very important skill to have, so it can be clear written handouts, I use a tool called Voice Threads, where I actually convert screen grabs of my written instructions, put them up into a voice thread where I can actually annotate and display the information. So it's having those different ways, recording the live sessions, posting them in position. So you've got to have multiple skills of embedding things.

### **Interviewer**

What changes have you seen in the importance or prominence of required skill sets over the past five years?

### **Vivian Evans**

I see an increased myriad of resources to tap into over the past five years, for both the teacher and the student to engage in and utilise for learning and assessment. There's a variety of voice tools, a huge array of image tools, animation tools, RSS feeds and aggregators. Seen recently, we've been trying things with a pen that writes and records what's being said while the pen's writing. Point-of-view cameras. There's a host of ways of tools to actually grab the information and put it on to these other resources that are online with Web 2.0. It's an ever expanding kit bag of tools to teach, in a variety of ways to meet the variety of learning styles of their students. What does this increased kit bag mean for practitioners? It means fun and frustration. It puts the practitioner firmly in the learners' seat, exploring and trying out new skills, constantly learning and coping with change, these tools change themselves even when you've learnt them.

### **Interviewer**

What do you think of the emerging skill sets needed for the use of new technological tools to assist learning?

### **Vivian Evans**

One of them is tagging, to be able to collect and build the tags effectively. Tagging's a pretty good tool that's becoming more and more available in lots of different mediums. I think bookmarking or social bookmarking is another key tool for research and finding information. To be able to edit a wiki, to try that out, to embed codes and links, from one site to another so you start to build and make those connections. Weave a web online with the networks, key information and resources. Know how to utilise an aggregator using RSS feeds, what that means, how that works. Be able to record your voice and put that voice somewhere to utilise again. To engage in live synchronous communication and that can be in a variety of ways, certainly you know, begin slowly, and I've said that to build your confidence and skills gradually, so engage in those things as a participant, before you step into practicing and exploring and trialling doing it where you're the facilitator. We don't need bells and whistles just for the sake of them. This can really only add to confusion, so you need the confidence to reflect with students what worked with them and what didn't. There's got to be times when you can work with students to give them a little taste of something and see/find out from them what they think, and you've got to remember that different students will connect with different resources, so it may mean that you've got to include a variety, in fact I strongly think it does need variety. I think practitioners need to build their own blog or wiki (I personally prefer wikis), to explore and reflect on their own learning. A great way to build an e-portfolio and trial different pieces, and do it gradually all the time, exploring new things and new ideas. It doesn't have to be a huge amount of time, but it needs to be you know, fairly regularly that you trial and explore things.

## **Interviewer**

What essential aspects of digital literacy and experience do you think that practitioners need in relation to Web 2.0 tools?

## **Vivian Evans**

Social bookmarking. That's a fantastic tool that you can try. It allows you to save your favourite websites, share them with others, and be able to access them anywhere. I think it's a fantastic tool we should all be doing, and so it's exploring that and trying to see how you can share those in different ways that you can utilise those tools. Photos online. How can you adapt them to the classroom, collections of photos with activities. Tagging – really the key thing that's happening now, is that connection with tagging to find things. Animations. Animations such as Toon Doom. I'm working with a group of indigenous students at the moment, who and I'm supporting a teacher who's teaching Kamilaroi, and we're having a fantastic time doing Toon Doom, writing language in Kamilaroi, the language that's locally. We're being able to write those, have a ball with the pictures and then be able to share those stories and then look at embedding them into our wiki, which is a Wetpaint, and I think the biggest challenge is which ones to go for. So, that experience comes from connecting in online training, all the opportunities that the Australian Flexible Learning framework offer, trying those out, finding out what other people are doing, networking, and just dabbling. I personally find that I need to dabble at home in my own time. I find it pretty tricky to do it when I'm at work, sometimes you can have a quiet study space, you might like to allocate that and do it at work. I find I need to be able to relax and engage and have that time to explore, so that can be a challenge, but it's certainly a lot of fun and you'll find so many benefits that you get out of it.

I think another point to consider is that sometimes when you use a tool, you may not see the connection straight away, for example, social bookmarking tool Delicious, where I used it but I didn't quite get it, and it wasn't until I actually lost my laptop and all my favourites with it, that I started to see a real benefit for it and just exploring and so although I looked at it and was aware of it, then there's more than just Delicious a tool it could be a year or two years later that I actually end up engaging with it.

A lovely tool I'm really delighted with at the moment is Voice Threads and it allows you to put up PowerPoints or pictures or images and then different people add their story and reflections to it. It's a glorious tool, so I'm working with a number of communities on history projects, but we are also using it with the Kamilaroi language and indigenous language where the teacher's able to say the word we've got pictures from a PowerPoint that we've used in the live chat and then we've been able to use that same PowerPoint for revision, and then students have been able to practice, listened again and again to the words they wanted to pronounce and then have a go themselves, so in a way, it's a form of assessment.

### **Interviewer**

What position do you take in relation to content development, ie to what extent do VET practitioners need to develop content for online environments, or should this be left to teams of instructional designers and multimedia IT experts?

### **Vivian Evans**

I believe teachers should be totally involved in the content development and the ongoing development. I feel strongly that when you're in a classroom, working with students, you adapt how you teach to the students involved. Likewise, you need to adapt what you do deliver online. I'm very much against static websites with lock step activities. Sure you can have a core of key information and you should when you're planning and preparing for a course. It's the change in the adaptability in the connection that you have when you're teaching that's really important. I work with adult literacy and numeracy students, I teach emerging technology skills, I'm even at the moment supporting Kamilaroi language delivery. Whoever I'm working with, you know with partners, with teachers and myself, we gauge when students are ready for what, we change and adapt the activities as we go. You know the teachers need to grow, need to develop skills in IT and the confidence in using IT, to be able to do [teach] effectively, and have a great course for students to engage in.

### **Interviewer**

Finally, how can we better acknowledge the new and emerging skill sets of VET practitioners as e-learning becomes more embedded as a teaching/learning practice?

### **Vivian Evans**

There are a number of ways we can better acknowledge the new and emerging skill sets of VET practitioners as e-learning becomes more embedded as a teaching/learning practice. One way as a qualification in the form of a unit or a series of units which is heavily based on RPL, I believe, of the emerging technologies and the developing skills and resources for teaching via emerging technologies so I think some thought could be put in. Short, sharp professional development events for practitioners to be introduced and engaged with tools and this can be nationally through the framework, at state level within RTOs themselves, within faculties and these can be online and face-to-face.

Opportunities to work in partnerships with colleagues to build and reflect on tools for e-learning, so partnering, mentoring, working as a team to build these tools, create them, share them, reflect them. Longer term professional development with mentoring aspects, support to try out new tools and embedding effective facilitation schools, a clear communication between IT and teachers regarding firewalls and blocking of effective teaching tools. I can't tell you the number of times I've been teaching for weeks and weeks using an excellent tool, only to find walking into the classroom to find it's no longer available and then it takes time to get that back up and running and I find the links to unblock the firewalls. Often we buy new tools within the institute, but don't have the mechanisms to support, or you know, through an organisation, to support teachers taking up the tools, so here's a tool, but no one really knows how to use it effectively, I might say, maybe I'll use it technically, it's facilitation skills that go with it that are really key.

## Presentation: A hub for e-learning

Launched in August by the Australian Flexible Learning Framework (Framework), the [flexiblelearning.net.au](http://flexiblelearning.net.au) e-learning hub allows practitioners and providers to connect with colleagues around Australia and internationally.

Interactive and user-driven, it features Web 2.0 technologies which encourage the sharing of knowledge, experience and learning resources. One of its standout features for users is the ability to join interest groups and engage with like-minded people. More than 25 specific groups have already been established, generating relevant and focussed discussion.

[flexiblelearning.net.au](http://flexiblelearning.net.au) provides a range of services, including:

- quality-assured tools, resources and learning content, through search and browsing;
- the ability to save and bookmark site resources to your personal Your Space area;
- information about new learning technologies;
- opportunities to comment on and exchange ideas about the relevance and usefulness of particular training delivery modes, resources and strategies;
- the ability to create and/or join interest groups and share knowledge; and
- information about the Australian Flexible Learning Framework, its activities and resources.

**Sue Lapham** invites you to take the time to browse through the site, join some of the many interest groups and connect with people who have similar interests in vocational education and training.

### About Sue Lapham

Sue is General Manager, WestOne Services at DET. WestOne provides support to education and training practitioners through the development of, and access to, K-12 curriculum resources and VET learning materials. She is the WA representative on the Flexible Learning Advisory Group and is committed to equitable access to information and lifelong learning opportunities.

### Flash Section: Introducing [flexiblelearning.net.au](http://flexiblelearning.net.au)

In this section Kim Edgar explores the exciting tools available at [flexiblelearning.net.au](http://flexiblelearning.net.au) e-learning hub and explains how to join groups, connect with colleagues and collaborate online. To view Kim's presentation visit '[A hub for e-learning](#)'.

### About the presenter

**Kim Edgar** is the Manager for VET Projects at Education.au and Business Manager for the LORN business activity for the Australian Flexible Learning Framework (Framework). She has a VET background with more than 15 years experience in Adult Education, including managing a private registered training organisation.

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