Casing out teaching and learning online: Enhancing fidelity into the mainstream

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Abstract

In this paper we present the rationale and outcome of a University strategically funded project aimed at developing a broad range of cases illuminating good practices in the development and use of digital media and online technologies at Deakin University. The project is aimed at supporting the ongoing implementation of the University's suite of e-learning technologies, Deakin Studies Online (DSO). It was seen as a significant strategic academic professional development initiative by the University in bringing together perspectives on effective teaching and learning in the context of various disciplines and professional fields of practice, with DSO possibilities for enhanced teaching/learning quality, efficiency, accessibility and satisfaction. The 'case' as a useful means of developing practice is outlined, along with the various project processes involving case selection, development, production and promotion. Finally, reflections on the outcomes of the project are considered. A number of positive though largely unintended consequences are identified.

Keywords

professional development, e-learning, mainstreaming technology, cases, learning management systems, organisational learning

Introduction

What strategic academic professional development (APD) initiatives can be taken to further enhance the adoption of e-learning in our universities? In an environment of ever-diminishing resources and ever-increasing demands on academic staff, there are significant constraints on engaging staff in more traditional, off-the-job forms of APD. Attention is relentlessly focused on the next pressing demand for action across teaching, research and administration. Time is scarce to reflect, share and experiment with new approaches. Opportunities to learn from others' good work in local communities of practice are appreciated, but limited, in large, distributed organisations. In response to this constraint, Deakin University supported a project in 2004 to develop a large portfolio of cases of good practice in the development and use of digital media and online technology within the institution. If the organisation could not easily connect teaching staff in-person at various localities and times to exemplary work, then the exemplars needed to be captured and made available to the local communities in engaging and useful ways.

In this paper, we examine the development of various aspects of the case project: its rationale, its strategic significance, its relationship to other major national projects that have been undertaken using and presenting exemplars online, its development, and reflections on project outcomes to date. The paper highlights the strength of the case approach in grounding digital and online developments in the broader context of case participant views on curriculum design. Conceptions of, and approaches to, effective teaching and learning in their disciplines are highlighted. We argue that fidelity, the organisational capacity to enable the reproduction of quality solutions sensitive to various teaching and learning contexts, is enhanced through the use of cases of good practice located within the institution. The organisation's capacity to learn and pass on the best of its practices, fidelity as a key organisational learning characteristic, in turn supports the mainstreaming of effective educational technology solutions through the organisation.

Contemporary e-learning environments in higher education

Like so many other universities, Deakin continues to grapple with designing and teaching in learning environments, increasingly using e-learning technologies. As major new investments in corporate technologies have occurred, initial challenges of implementation have been immense. So we have seen the acquisition and deployment of learning management systems, digital object management systems, synchronous communication tools, streaming technologies and so on. With each new institutional e-learning technology comes specific training needs, exploitation of educational benefit, and larger issues relating to integration with a growing portfolio of systems and applications. The lack of integration of technology possibilities with pedagogical concerns can be reflected in what Corbitt, Holt and Segrave (2004) term 'product centricism', too much emphasis on technology products' features, too little on teaching and learning value. Moreover, newer technologies continue to emerge at the local level around the feet of the bigger, centrally supported systems. It seems a never-ending challenge, further heightened by changing student circumstances, preferences and expectations. This can be seen in their prolific use, for example, of mobile technologies for social and entertainment purposes, all of which have implications for e-learning in higher education institutions (see Anderson & Blackwood, 2004).

Institutions themselves are making major commitments to going and being online. Armatas, Holt and Rice (2004) for example describe Deakin's move to mandating that every undergraduate student must undertake at least one unit wholly online, with no classroom teaching. In order to make sense of the apparent flux and transformation in the system, to borrow an organisational metaphor from Morgan (1997), we see the need to focus on deeper principle or concern for work that really counts in quality teaching and learning environments. This view is all the more compelling in the context of Hayward's (2001) 'Cycle of Technology Hype', which can be equally applied to the adoption of e-learning technologies. After the initial stage of grossly inflated expectations, followed by the disappointments, has come the longer road to gradual enlightenment. This journey takes us back to the more fundamental understandings of what constitutes quality learning and teaching in universities (Ramsden, 2003, pp. 6–7), and the task of designing and working within contemporary online-supported learning environments (Segrave & Holt, 2003). How can these understandings be developed and translated into effective information and communications technology (ICT) enhanced teaching/learning environments?

Strategic academic professional development

Segrave, Holt and Farmer (2005) outlined a strategic approach to APD relating to online teaching and learning. While emerging from observations of their institution, it has broader applicability (see, for example, institutional approaches to e-learning outlined by Lee (2003) at the University of New South Wales). Their 'power of the 6^{three} model' identifies six areas of potential value adding through e-learning, six areas of professional capacity development and six strategic APD initiatives which can be taken to develop the required capacities. Their model is grounded in a view of university as learning organisation in relation to being able to critically reflect upon its e-learning activities in order to identify, document and promote better practices. Centrally, the initiatives can be seen to be directed at enhancing fidelity, that is the organisation's capacity to enable the re-creation of effective uses of e-learning contingent on particular teaching and learning contexts. In this sense enhanced fidelity leads to enhanced mainstreaming of e-learning but always in contextually sensitive ways. The six strategic APD initiatives are currently being pursued at Deakin University; they are:

i.   Exemplars through storytelling of cases of innovative online teaching practices.
ii.   Demonstrations of exemplar developments.
iii. Promoting, developing and supporting online teachers.
iv.   Incorporating capacity development in formal courses on higher education.
v.   Developing interactive and evolving supportive environments.
vi.   Integrating APD with course renewal and redevelopment.

Segrave et al. (2005) listed five particular developments at Deakin University in relation to these six initiatives: the Online Teaching and Learning Fellowship program, the Fellowship cases, DSO exemplar presentations to faculties, with accompanying CD-ROM, and the Graduate Certificate of Higher Education (GCHE) offered as a wholly online course for new continuing academic staff. Building on the Fellowship cases, and of relevance to all of the six strategic initiatives, another major project was funded in 2004. This project, 'Contemporary online teaching cases: disseminating cases of innovative practices in the use of Deakin Studies Online (DSO) to enhance teaching and learning at Deakin' is the focus of this paper and described further below, (Deakin University, 2005). The development of the cases has enabled the local, contextual, central, and flexible access and delivery of experiential learning within the Deakin community.

The case as a means to enhanced practice

Providing exemplars, stories, or 'cases', to support professional development in tertiary teaching and learning is not new. Holt, Rice, Segrave and Thompson (1996) reported on a suite of cases developed to support Deakin staff in moving to various forms of flexible teaching and learning, a key strategic focus for the institution then. These cases, presented online, complemented a Flexible Teaching and Learning Guide. Through case meta-analysis, the authors developed a contingency-based framework for guiding decision making in designing flexible teaching and learning programs. This framework set out core values, and internal and external environmental factors that needed to be considered in moving to more flexible educational philosophies and practices. While strategic emphases may have changed from 1996 to 2005, which has seen a de-emphasising of flexibility, and a strong focus on e-learning, the above-mentioned authors have all actively contributed to the development of the current Contemporary Online Teaching Cases project. This case site now becomes in effect the newest manifestation of the effort to support teaching staff by documenting stories of good online practice.

The use of cases online has been prominent in recent times in supporting various aspects of tertiary teaching and learning. James, McInnis and Devlin (2002) presented cases of what they deemed to be good practice in student assessment in higher education as part of their online support and guidance for enhanced assessment thinking and strategies. Rifkin and McLoughlin (2004) reported on a federally funded project, *SkillCity*, a peer-reviewed online environment designed to support staff in higher education teaching generic skills in communication and teamwork. The latter is well grounded in its understanding of the purpose and nature of cases as a pedagogical approach to professional development. Of major relevance to our Case project were two other Commonwealth funded projects: *An Evaluation of Information Technology Projects for University Learning* (Alexander, McKenzie, & Geissinger, 1998) and *Information and Communication Technologies and Their Role in Flexible Learning* (Agostinho, Oliver, Harper, Hedberg & Wills, 2002). The former project documented a small number of major and minor cases, with the major cases presented online in video format. The latter project focussed on generally applicable learning designs, with exemplars categorised by focus (collaborative, concept/procedure development, problem-based learning, project/case study, role play), title, discipline, ICTs used and author. The five Learning Design categories are detailed on the website.

A similar initiative has been undertaken in the United Kingdom where the Higher Education Funding Council for England's Joint Information Systems Committee E-Learning Programme (2004) has supported effective practices with e-learning. Part of these investigations involved the presentation of 10 cases of effective e-learning practice in response to real-world challenges. These 10 cases are presented online to enhance their accessibility.

Unlike these nationally funded projects drawing upon exemplars across the country, the Deakin Case project only features developments by Deakin staff, though it is open for interested external parties to use. Also, unlike others, the current Deakin Case site does not attempt to theorise about good e-learning design, although relevant tertiary teaching, learning and technology literature, including national projects listed above, has informed the selection and approach taken to cases, and their classification and presentation. However, we believe some type of case meta-analysis could be undertaken on the cases to provide useful theoretical and more broadly applicable practical advice. While limited in some degree by only presenting cases in a particular institutional context, its very limitation we believe may be its fundamental strength in at least providing strong positive messages by Deakin staff for Deakin staff for Deakin online teaching and learning purposes.

The Contemporary Online Teaching Cases project

Institutional context for project

Deakin is a large, multi-campus University teaching both on- and off-campus, nationally and internationally. Its three major teaching campuses, Melbourne, Geelong and Warrnambool are located in three different Victorian cities. Teaching staff are physically dispersed across these campuses and a number travel between campuses/cities to undertake their teaching responsibilities. In addition, like many universities, Deakin employs a significant number of casual/sessional staff to undertake in-person tutorial, online and laboratory teaching activities, and assignment marking. Many of these staff are itinerant workers only visiting their local teaching campus when required or going online for clearly defined purposes. Deakin as an institution then is increasingly dependent on its online environment to conduct many aspects of its work, including work related to APD.

Given the nature of the contemporary academic work environment there are fewer opportunities for teaching staff to engage with their immediate campus disciplinary peers, let alone with colleagues on other campuses/cities and from other faculties. Frequently teaching staff have expressed a desire to learn more from others' experiences and express remorse at the lack of opportunity to meet with other creative practitioners. Annual teaching and learning conferences rotated through major teaching campuses over time cannot fill this void. This sense of desire and disappointment at lack of opportunity has been if anything heightened in our own organisation with the introduction of Deakin Studies Online (DSO) in 2003, a major new online teaching and learning system replacing all former online computer mediated communication and learning management systems. To support the mainstream implementation of DSO a training program was implemented centrally, focusing on the system's features. Significantly, staff evaluation identified a strong demand and preference for skill training contextualized within pedagogically focused APD. One faculty within the University had identified early the need for the availability of electronic case studies to assist in the professional development of staff, to provide flexible opportunities for such delivery and most particularly to bridge the distance experienced by dispersed academic communities.

2004 Strategic Teaching and Learning Grant Scheme (STALGS) project

In 2004, and we believe in response to the abovementioned institutional context, the Case project was funded through the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Academic)'s newly established Strategic Teaching and Learning Grant Scheme (STALGS). The project was completed in June 2005. The project aims were to '… construct and disseminate an institution-wide portfolio of innovative cases of good practice in the development and use of traditional and digital media, and online environments (referred to as DSO) in support of the University's goals relating to internationalising the curriculum, expanding the use of experiential learning and enhancing the implementation of graduate attributes in the Deakin Advantage' (STALGS application 2004, p. 2). In this respect, the project's main purpose was to try to bring together the University's teaching, learning and technology concerns, which until then in various strategic and operational plans from 2000 had been separated in different sections of the documents. This separation of the University teaching, learning and technology goals and objectives had in some senses permeated the thinking in key areas of the University. Teaching and learning directions were to be set on the one hand, while major technology investments were to be made on the other. There was a growing perception that the two hands were not working as well as they could together. Segrave and Holt (2003) highlighted this perceived disjunction between corporate technology acquisition, and teaching and learning direction. They identified six key areas of potential enduring teaching and learning value that could be achieved through the new major investments in corporate technologies to support e-learning. This in turn formed one of the three pillars of the 'Power of the 6^{three} model'. The Project Leader (Holt) secured the support of all Faculty Associate Deans of Teaching and Learning, and the Executive Director, Learning Services and University Librarian for the application.

These commitments to the project application were vital in positioning it as an institutional project of strategic relevance to Deakin, and of broad relevance to academic teaching staff across the organisation. The project was seen as attempting to develop a technology-enhanced knowledge creation and management system accessible by all parties within Deakin and interested external parties. It was to document the best of what we were doing in the University, and reflect strongly the ways in which competent teaching staff were designing and teaching effectively with digital media and online technology, i.e. with DSO. Additionally, the case studies aimed to provide educational/academic development practitioners with a rich resource to assist in the building of understandings of sound pedagogical practices within the context of course and unit development. In capturing the stories, the electronic medium was to facilitate flexible delivery of the resources to staff and enable the construction of opportunities for dialogue with practitioners through online and in context professional development events. In practice, the sharing of successful stories of practice is often an effective method to stimulate engagement and understanding for educational and academic development.

Relationship to the University's six strategic APD initiatives

The Case project is relevant to each of the six strategic APD initiatives:

i.   Each case is a considered story of participant thinking about and use of digital and online technology.

ii.   The cases were in part drawn from DSO exemplar presentations and added to the development of this presentation and accompanying CD-ROM.

iii.   The cases help to promote excellent online teachers within the University.

iv.   The Case site will be used as a key resource in the Teaching in Tertiary Education unit in the University's Graduate Certificate of Higher Education (GCHE).

v.   The Case site, along with other online DSO training resources, is to be used in the ongoing development of an interactive and evolving support environment for teaching and learning online at Deakin University.

vi.   The cases will be drawn upon to help inform ongoing course and unit redevelopments involving extended or wholly online foci.

Selecting cases and case participants

The completed project saw 70 staff involved in preparing 64 cases, with the vast majority of those initially approached participating. From the Faculty of Business and Law, there were 19 cases, from Arts, 14, Education 10, Health and Behavioural Sciences 6, from Science and Technology, 14 cases, and Deakin Prime, 1 case. The cases involved the 8 staff undertaking the 2004 Online Teaching and Learning Fellowship program, and those identified by faculty online teaching and learning support staff involved in the project. The cases included work featured in the DSO presentations CD, and new extended and wholly online units being developed in 2004. The Project Team wanted to ensure a representative sampling of work across the following dimensions: *faculty/school; discipline/professional field; approaches to learning; level of study* (undergraduate and postgraduate); *mode of delivery* (on/cross/off campus); *attention to graduate attributes* (as outlined in Deakin's policy, Attributes of a Deakin Graduate 2002); *use of online features* (e.g. communication, collaboration, assessment, assignment submission, learning resource presentation); *use of other tools* (Excel, PowerPoint, CD alone); and *levels of online-ness* (extended, wholly online). The definitions of extended and wholly online are in the University's operational policy, Online Technologies in Courses and Units, Appendix A (2003).

In relation to graduate attributes, while all cases provide insights into the discipline's knowledge base, modes of enquiry and contexts of practice, certain cases were particularly selected to highlight the development of a number of what we call generic attributes, namely:

*   a capacity for teamwork and collaboration

*   an ability for critical thinking, analysis and problem solving

*   a capacity for lifelong learning and an appreciation of its necessity

*   ethics, social responsibility and cultural sensitivity

*   international perspectives and competence in a global environment

*   the principles and applications of sustainable development (*Attributes of a Deakin graduate: Procedure*, 2002, p. 1).

This was seen as critically important given the project was aimed at highlighting the ways in which such attributes could be developed and assessed using digital media and online environments.

Overall, 36 disciplines and professional fields of study are represented: Accounting, Architecture, Arts Education, Asian Studies, Biological Sciences, Chemical Sciences, Construction Management, General relating to Business and Law, Economics, Engineering and Technology, Environmental Science and Management, Forensic Science, Graduate Certificate in Higher Education, History, Information Systems, Information Technology, Information Technology in Education, Health Promotion, Health Sciences, Journalism, Languages and Cultural Studies, Law, Linguistics and Literary Studies, Management, Marketing, Masters of Education, Masters of Professional Education and Training, Mathematics Education, Media and Communication, Nursing, Nutrition and Dietetics, Continuing Professional Development Partnerships (Deakin Prime), Physical and Health Education, Politics and Policy Studies, Psychology, Public Relations, and Sociology.

Developing the case approach

The project team decided to develop two main components for each case: an audio interview recording with case participant(s); and, where appropriate, screen movie capture recordings of key aspects of their material, CD and/or online environment. It was agreed that while specific questions would be customised for each case, they would fit within a framework of five larger issues common to all cases:

i.   What are the aims and objectives of units you teach, and how do you attempt to achieve them?
ii.   How did you go about designing your digital media and online environment?
iii. How did you go about teaching with these materials and in your online environment?
iv.   What impacts did it have on your teaching and student learning?
v.   What ways would you like to enhance your materials and environment over time?

The project team wanted to locate digital media and online practices within the broader context of curriculum aims and objectives, views on effective teaching and learning, and approaches to assessing student learning and evaluating teaching effectiveness.

Conducting case recordings

Given Deakin's dispersed campuses, the volume of case recordings to be done, and an assessment that participants would not wish to travel any distance for their recordings, we decided to use three major recording options: use of a high quality portable digital recorder to undertake recordings on location; recording in the studio; and remote recordings. Screen movie captures were again done on location and professionally refined in our production area. These were sound decisions, well appreciated by case participants. In making these decisions, we were cognisant of the need to closely liaise with our audio production staff, seeking their ongoing advice on key matters and, most importantly, we needed to plan well our approach to each case through the development of a recording specification for each one. The case specification listed case descriptors, audio interview questions and screen movie capture options. These case specifications were negotiated with case participants and approved by them before recording was undertaken. Detailed planning helped to minimise the need for major editing, something the team wished to avoid at all costs in order to meet project deadlines with the target number of cases.

Designing the Case site

The Case site home page allows users to view the cases by 5 case characteristics. Each case is classified by each of these characteristics/descriptors and features photographs of the case participant; a quotable quotation taken from the case; a series of trigger terms which take users to relevant audio interview questions and answers; a full transcription of the audio interviews; and screen movie captures, where appropriate, of key aspects of CDs and online environments.

Promoting the Case site

The following strategies are being pursued to promote use of the Case site:

- It has been made available in the public domain in the University's Teaching and Learning website, with this site now directly linked from Deakin's home page.
- A selected set of cases is also available on CD-ROM.
- The website is to be used as a key learning resource in the GCHE from 2006.
- The website is to be drawn upon in running various APD activities relating to course and unit development, and DSO training in particular.
- Case participants are able to use their case for any teaching award applications they might make at faculty, University and national levels.

Reflecting on project outcomes

Achieving the key project objective

The project developed 65 cases across a broad range of disciplines, exceeding the target set of 50. In the one-year period of the STALGS funding we were not able to trial the use of the cases; however, implementation pathways will be pursued as planned in 2005 and 2006. A full year was required to plan, develop and produce the cases; certain cases could not be recorded until late in the period given the timing of their completion and teaching. At the beginning of the project we were uncertain as to the best ways of recording interviews and taking screen captures of materials and sites. Approaches ultimately adopted were seen to be satisfactory by all participating parties.

Range of approaches to learning and generic student attributes

In addition to covering a broad range of disciplines and fields of study, we wished to see a diversity of approaches to learning exemplified in the case portfolio. In many interviews one of the questions asked of case participants was how they conceived effective teaching and learning in their discipline or field. Prior to the interviews, we could not be sure what answers to this question might arise. However, the project team were pleased with the actual diversity of approaches articulated by participants, along with the connections made between effective pedagogies and effective development and use of ICT. The *Approaches to learning* articulated in some instances referred generally to the value of experiential learning.

Within this broad field of educational theorising and practice many forms of experiential learning were illuminated, including case-based teaching; project-based teaching; problem-based learning; role play; simulation; Socratic dialogue; activity-based learning; independent self-directed learning; learning journals; blended learning; and critical enquiry. As can be seen from the Case website, 'approaches to learning' is a key navigation device for viewing the cases. Case participants were also chosen on the basis of the extent to which their ICT-enhanced teaching contributed to the development of generic *Graduate attributes,* although this matter was probed further than planned in certain cases. The case team were again satisfied that key generic attributes were featured in a number of the cases, and this provided another important means of viewing the materials. Graduate attributes covered in the cases were communication and collaboration, ethics and social responsibility, problem solving, information literacy, international perspectives, sustainability, and lifelong learning. In these areas, interviewers needed to be alert and responsive during the interviews to any emergent viewpoints of case participants. Not all issues and perspectives could be identified when planning the interviews.

Teaching staff participation

The project team had hoped that staff approached would be amenable to involvement if the commitment was not too time-consuming and recording could be done at a place of convenience to them. The team were, however, unexpectedly surprised and delighted with staff participation in the project. Very few staff declined to be involved. Staff members were on the whole extremely well prepared for the interviews, forthcoming with their thoughts, enthusiastic about sharing their practices before, during and after actual recording, and interested in how we planned to use the cases. The act of contributing a case seemed to make them feel like they were part of a community, with a sense of keenness to share with others in the community. We felt that a deep reservoir of goodwill towards the University and its online learning and teaching directions had been tapped. Moreover, staff members were extremely giving to the project, we believe, because the project represented a positive recognition of their hard work. We believe the very act of undertaking the project has contributed to more positive attitudes towards organisational change in using ICT for enhancing teaching and learning. This was an unintended positive outcome of the project. Such an initiative can be seen as a powerful means of supporting change management in e-learning adoption from an organisational learning perspective.

Presenting the cases

Another unintended consequence was the greater than initially expected use of screen movie capture technology to allow us and case participants to talk to the showing of their material and environments. This commitment led to the skilling up of staff in our production area in the use of this technology, skills that were then used in other work. The project therefore took on a technical R&D focus not initially anticipated. Related to this were the various arrangements for the audio recordings, including the use of a high quality portable digital recorder. Without the use of such a device and the flexibility of recording situations it provided, the team could not have undertaken so many recordings in the time available. We acknowledge some trade-off in the quality of recordings this way compared to those taken in the studio, particularly relating to unavoidable sound interference recording 'on location'. We believe this was acceptable for the purposes of the project in enabling us to achieve its case target. A few interviewees saw value in using the portable digital recorder for their own teaching purposes and acquired one for themselves — another unexpected project outcome. Staff also commented that they felt more relaxed recording in their own environments with the use of such devices rather than being in a formal audio recording studio. This type of recording situation was perceived and experienced by some participants as intimidating and undermining of their performance. We have concluded that what counts with recording for educational purposes is to create a set of conditions most conducive to achieving the best possible performance consistent with recording objectives: some media need to be recorded to a high standard for longer term use; other more 'ephemeral' media need to be recorded for only a particular use at a particular time. However, whatever the recording environment, informality should not be equated with lack of preparation both from the interviewer and case participant.

Devolution of e-learning tool usage

The recording issue highlighted in the project can be seen in the context of broader moves to place in the hands of users — teaching staff and students — a variety of e-teaching and e-learning tools that can enrich the educational experience. No longer in education, or in the personal world, are these tools and devices the sole province of media production experts. While we still argue that certain recordings do need to be taken by trained professionals, other uses can be placed in the hands of teachers and learners with support, guidance and training on tool choice and usage for best effect.

These developments will become an important part of the e-learning technology landscape, increasingly complementing and enriching the use of major corporate technology systems and applications.

Evaluation and future developments

With the Case site launched there will be two foci for evaluation of its impact: its use in supporting participants, (mainly Deakin academic teaching staff), in undertaking units in the University's Graduate Certificate in Higher Education; and its use in our ongoing professional development program for staff involved in teaching and learning online. First, the Case site is seen as highly relevant to each of the four units offered in the Graduate Certificate, namely: *Learners and Learning*, *The Strategic Academic*, *Teaching in Tertiary Education*, and *The Scholarship of Teaching*. The site's effectiveness will be evaluated by participant feedback on each of the units as part of the University's student evaluation system, through special evaluations undertaken on various aspects of the course, the quality of assignment work undertaken in three units, *Learners and Learning, Strategic Academic*, and *Teaching in Tertiary Education*, and the quality of applied research undertaken in the *Scholarship of Teaching* unit. Second, the integration and evaluation of the cases into the University's APD program will occur both at the institution level and faculty/school/program-based level. Both levels are increasingly being directly tied to major course and unit reviews and redevelopments. While the cases are more relevant for continuing, full-time academic staff, we believe they will also be a useful resource for casual/sessional staff now required by the University to undertake some systematic professional development in discharge of their critical teaching duties. The impact of the Case site will be evaluated in the context of its effectiveness in generating value-adding ideas and strategies supportive of major developments.

We would like to continue to add new cases to the site representing new uses of ICT to enhance teaching and learning. New cases may be based on certain new e-learning technologies currently being trialled and mainstreamed in the University, e.g. streaming system and synchronous communication systems. There is a strategic imperative to do this as well, with the University's Australian Universities Quality Agency (AUQA) Audit report (2005) commending Deakin for its Online Teaching and Learning Fellowship Program (and by implication, we believe, the need to codify and share Fellowship work and experiences) and the priority for the University now needing to be the reconsideration of pedagogy in order to make the best use of the technologies in enabling effective learning.

The team continues to look for similar case initiatives being undertaken by Australian and international institutions in order to link to, and learn from, such developments. We would also welcome links to our site from such sites. In both cases, the team looks for reciprocal linking for mutual value adding. Future developments might also include more formal inter-institutional approaches to jointly developing professional development case site(s), particularly where those institutions might be using the same or similar e-learning solutions, such as the same learning management system (LMS). While Deakin's site highlights a particular LMS, it has been conceived in such a way that any LMS could easily be envisaged as playing the same educational technology role in relation to case concerns. The team would also be pleased to provide perspectives on our experiences to other institutions that may wish to move down their own independent track in developing PD approaches, materials and cases for their own online teaching and learning directions.

All of this commitment to share and enhance is premised on the increasing need and opportunity to collaborate more broadly in the context of the mandate and activities of the new Carrick Institute for Learning and Teaching in Higher Education, a significant national entity to enhance the quality of teaching and learning in Australia.

The objectives of this Institute are to: promote and support strategic change in higher education institutions for the enhancement of learning and teaching, including curriculum development and assessment; raise the profile and encourage recognition of the fundamental importance of teaching in higher education institutions and in the general community; foster and acknowledge excellent teaching in higher education; develop effective mechanisms for the identification, development, dissemination and embedding of good individual and institutional practice in learning and teaching in Australian higher education; develop and support reciprocal national and international arrangements for the purpose of sharing and benchmarking learning and teaching processes; and identify learning and teaching issues that impact on the Australian higher education system and facilitate national approaches to address these and other emerging issues (Carrick Institute for Learning and Teaching in Higher Education, 2005).

Conclusion

It can often be the 'case' that opportunities of strategic significance require a rapid and at times not fully articulated response. We needed to respond to the opportunity to develop the Case portfolio through a strategic teaching and learning innovation bid in such a way. The project had a well-defined purpose and an ambitious objective. It made strategic sense in contributing to the integration of the University's teaching, learning and technology directions. However, after the grant was awarded, there was much to work through in terms of the project's implementation. A deal of consideration was given to case selection, ways of conducting recordings, and options for designing and developing the website. As discussed, this task led to a number of positive, and in some areas unanticipated project outcomes, including the high level of staff enthusiasm, the broad range of approaches to learning represented, lessons learned about audio and screen movie capture technologies, and the level of interest that developed in the broader use of these tools for teaching purposes.

Casing out online teaching and learning at our institution has represented a story of many discoveries in relation to process and product. We hope it has shone a light on the institution's many and varied efforts, recognised its many fine actors and reflected a sense of a somewhat grander narrative of an organisation learning about itself and moving forward in the process. This seems to be one of the better ways of working towards fidelity in ICT-based teaching and learning environments. The act of supporting learning and development, and recognising practitioners and the sharing of their stories, contributes to making the world of the large, distributed organisation smaller and more collegial.

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