

The VeM Voyage: Journey to a Statewide Learning Community

By Simon Brown and Mark Jones, TAFE Queensland



VeMPractitioners: Justafew Vocationale -LearningMentors

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In the beginning...

On 26th October 2006, a meeting was conducted across the TAFE Queensland Video Inq network. The atmosphere was hazy, the means unclear, but the determination existed to build a sustainable statewide support network for practitioners in blended and distributed learning. Thus, the Vocational e-Learning Mentors' network -VeM- began the journey to a statewide learning community.

Introduction

What makes some communities succeed while others fail? What makes a community flourish at all? As travellers on the voyage to VeM, we were focused on building the community but we did not know how. We found very early in the piece, a sustainable community required:

- ◆ A real need for the community, and what it can offer
- ◆ A shared vision of what the community can do
- ◆ A corps of people committed to building and nurturing the community
- ◆ Management support for the venture
- ◆ Technical support for the venture
(Carpenter, 2004 p.4), (Moore & Brooks, 2000 p.6)

However, as we travelled, we found much more.

Prelude to VeM



Dianne Brennan

There were many networks and projects coming together during the previous few years – for instance, the NetLearn Community, the videoconferencing network, the LRM project, the VeLearning Network. All of these added significantly to the culture and machinery of networking and collaboration in Queensland, and all directly influenced and aided the VeM network. However, the nuclear power of the Vocational Learning Network is the eChampions network led by the Brisbane North Head Librarian Dianne Brennan.

Dianne Brennan had, with the aid of previous Learnscope funding, set up a team of blended learning champions (eChampions) at Brisbane North Institute of TAFE. Originally, the team comprised teachers with a few library supporters. However, it was found to be more sustainable to have a blend of teachers, librarians and instructional design staff all working in partnership as eChampions. Dan Hodder, Bernadette Squire, David Roberts and Simon

Brown are teachers that were part of the Champions' network. The eChampions flourished building capability, building partnerships and building product. They even built the Blended Learning Design kit – an extensive website aiding the development of blended courses.

With Carol Webb's prompting and support, in 2006 Dianne successfully tendered for Learnscope funding, as part of the state Ve Learning Network project. Her successful tender was to set up a sustainable, collaborative network to mentor staff in blended and distributed learning practice. Dianne asked the Champions to brainstorm strategies to engage blended learning practitioners (especially teachers) in an ongoing interactive dialogue.

Of the various technologies available, Dianne and her team chose videoconferencing to be the main vehicle because it:

- was reasonably well established and supported
- reached out to practically every Institute
- had a good support network
- was used by blended learning practitioners already

Originally, the focus centred on a few metropolitan TAFE institutes, but because videoconferencing facilitated 'virtual presence' across the state, it was easier to 'think big.' As VideoLink connects TAFE Queensland, then so too could VeM.

Anchorsaw eigh

The early committee relied very strongly on one Champion connections. With the focus on teaching and learning, the ideal skipper was veteran WebCT teacher, Dan Hodder.



Bernadette Squire

VeM's crew included a teacher who had run mentoring programs, Bernadette Squire, and a teacher pushing web technology boundaries in the trade skills classroom, Simon Brown. With Mark Jones the chief petty officer, having Toastmasters' meeting and programming experience, and Dianne Brennan as pilot, VeM weighed anchor.



Dan Hodder

It was recognised by the team, though, that it was not sufficient just to meet via videoconference (or via the web). To build the network, we needed to get people together in the same room, and get base knowledge of mentoring skills. (Carpenter, 2004 p.5) To that end, the team planned an initial face-to-face workshop.

**At the first workshop
(Bracken Ridge)**



The face-to-face workshop at Bracken Ridge provided an opportunity for a score of members to plan how to develop the network, and how members could mentor each other. This meeting engaged remote participants via videoconferencing. Most participants went away with a feeling that they were part of “something big.”

Building a sustainable structure

Several videoconference meetings and discussion postings in EdNAf allowed the initial face-to-face workshop, scaffolding the VeMentoring network. VeM members voluntarily filled committee roles.

The committee decided upon a three-part educational platform. The first plank in the platform specified weekly videoconference presentations to build content knowledge, professional dialogue and connectedness. Secondly, the model specified weekly committee meetings held immediately after the presentations so that administrative detail did not disrupt the main videoconference, enabling committee members to segue into their business from the main event. Face-to-face workshops, building practical skills based on examples highlighted in videoconferences, completed VeM’s educational model.

The Success of the Voyage



Bremer TAFE workshop: (L -R) Stella-Maris DeGuara, Bernadette Squire and Mark Jones

This model worked well, and the network continued to gather momentum. Nevertheless, has VeM really succeeded?

Even with these three parts, not all communities flourish. There must also be a larger cohort committed to the risky business of communing, communicating and collaborating.

We think VeMis a successful community because:

- ◆ VeM meets the needs of its members
- ◆ VeMis a working community
- ◆ VeM brings together people in the same domain
- ◆ VeM brings together people across disciplines
- ◆ VeM has inspired people to go further
- ◆ VeMis evolutionary
- ◆ VeMis sustainable
- ◆ VeM grew from a successful model
- ◆ VeMis well led

Meeting the needs of the members

From day one, we discovered a huge demand for personal development in blended and distributed learning. TAFE Queensland practitioners want personalised development opportunities, and VeM enables those that have the expertise to share it. Weekly, presentation content varies, and always contains something for practitioners to take away with them. As examples, some outstanding productions included:

- The interactive video conference of the first face-to-face workshop
- Gold Coast's presentations showing how blended learning could work, and work well, with impressive statistics and pie charts to back it up
- Kerry Russo's presentation on "Blended Learning: Feel the fear and do it anyway" notable for its sheer professionalism
- Annette Winch's video presentation on teaching massage via Blended & Distributed Learning, just to prove that anything is possible



At the Bremer TAFE workshop: (L -R) Sarah Bennett, Megan Vanderzwan, Lexie Keane, Arlene Skene, Jill Heffernan, Mary McVay and Michelle Godfrey

VeM listens to its members. Carolyn Collins suggested video streaming – VeM adopted it. Hands-on skills training featured after VeM members requested it. Members voted to maintain regular presentations, and so it happened.

VeMasa Working Community

The VeM journey targeted a true Community of Practice as a destination, with a *Domain* centred squarely in Blended & Distributed Learning ; a *Community* and a *Practice* (Wenger, 2003).

These second and third face -to-face workshops focused on developing technical skills showcased in the weekly videoconferences, as well as building collaborative skills required to maintain the network.

The face -to-face workshops also provided VeM members with a chance to refresh their tangible presences after periods of ethereal contact via videoconferences.

At the Bremer TAFE workshop, Sandra Lawrence, Susan Todhunter and Greg Harper performed the "The Panel", addressed the lunchtime gathering and affirmed VeMas a leader in innovation, comprised of leaders in innovation.



Christine Ruzic introduces Greg Harper, Susan Todhunter and Sandra Lawrence at Bremer

Bringing together people in the same domain

VeM is a collaborative working in progress reliant on a structure: a core supporting and mentoring team in each TAFE Qld Institute, providing a blend of practitioners support in the TAFE Qld team both locally and globally.

Queensland has a wealth of projects in blended and distributed learning .



Included are :

- Annette Winch and the Gold Coast teachers
- the flexible projects at SQIT
- Kerry Russo, Gary Wood and Julie Woodlock working at Barrier Reef
- Frances and her SCT team
- Denise and her team at Wide Bay

At the Bremer TAFE workshop

- Simon and other innovators at SkillsTech Australia
- the wonderfully innovative team at the Bremer
- of course the eChampion work at Brisbane North
- In addition, the initiatives at a State level through IT&PS.

They are all doing excellent work - now they know they are not alone.

VeM bring together people across disciplines



Abled team

While the focus is on teaching and learning, regular contributors include teachers (e.g. Simon Brown, Julie Woodlock), instructional designers (e.g. Annette Winch, Shirley Turner), library staff (e.g. Dianne Brennan, Robyn Dennis, Megan Vanderzwan), project officers (e.g. Susan Todhunter, Mark Jones), managers (e.g. Wayne Knack, Gary Wood).

VeM has inspired people to go further

Simon communes with people all over the world. Megan now runs the VEM program. Mark is now involved in a project bringing in a new library system to TAFE Queensland.

Would we all have been so brave or so ready if not for VeM's successful collaborative experience?

VeM is evolutionary

VeM's original sponsor was Carol Webb; it is now Wayne Knack. The original convener was Dan Hodder; it is now Simon Brown. Mark Jones was the original program coordinator; now it is Megan Vanderzwan. People will and do leave, but VeM travels on.

VeM is sustainable

So far, the team has kept the VeM community sustainable by:

- Using a simple blended approach
 - Regular weekly presentations and meetings
 - Twice-yearly face-to-face workshops
 - Online interaction
- Including a blend of practitioners in blended and distributed learning
- Growing in accordance with its members' needs
For instance, the first face-to-face workshop focused on mentoring and interactive skills, the second solely on hands-on technical skills, and the latest one a blend of hands-on skills and broader issues such as intellectual property.
- Leading with a cross-Institute coordination team
- Sharing the organisational load
- Using a blend of known, tested technology
 - Video conferencing
 - Email
 - Face-to-face delivery
- Experimenting with new and emerging technologies such as web conferencing and Web 2.0 tools

VeM grew from a successful model

As discussed previously, VeM grew from the eChampions' project. eChampions are still very active at Brisbane North, partnering teaching teams and producing blended learning solutions.

The eChampions' keystones in its success were vision, determination and ongoing, collaborative professional development, the same keystones for the VeM network.

VeM is well led

After each presentation video conference, a small committee with wide representation from across TAFE Queensland regularly meets to review events, and to move the network forward. The members, no more than Dianne, have great pride in the network and are committed to "making it happen".

The Voyage Ahead

The Carpenters had it right – we've only just begun. We still have a lot to learn about the technology's capabilities. Currently, the VeM Mentoring Network uses video conferencing with no great variety in presentation modes.

Debates, role -plays, games etc ., not yet used in the medium , would inject great interest and interactivity .

The VeM community set out to achieve a network of supported practitioners around the state . However, this is not always the case – there exist teachers that have done great work, but find it difficult to continue without management or communal support. With a local support network in place , each Institute could better contribute to the larger team. We think that responsibility for presentations and workshops regularly cycled around institutes would align each location to statewide outcomes.

Technologies and their applications grow and evolve. For instance, many VeM members would like the video conferencing to come to them rather than vice-versa. John wants it on his desktop. Simon wants it in the classroom. While web conferencing shows great potential, at this stage it is a competing rather than a complementary technology.

VeM's online presence currently does not really reflect its innovative philosophy. We have tried EdNA groups , but many people find it confusing to navigate. We are looking at moving content to the eTAFE Queensland Blended and Distributed Learning site.

There are also non -technical issues ahead , for example: how will the move to Statutory Authorities affect the VeMentoring Network? We will need to stand firm in our conviction that collaboration is in our best interests. Enhanced with a virtual presence, the VeM network is a shining example of just that.

Useful References

Brook C & Oliver 2003, 'Online learning communities: investigating a design framework', Australian Journal of Educational Technology

2003, 19(2), pp. 139-160

<<http://www.ascilite.org.au/ajet/ajet19/brook.html>> accessed 1st October 2007.

Chris Brook and Ron Oliver look at a design framework for online learning communities, investigating what:

- is a community
- is a sense of community
- is the role of communities in the learning process
- is the reconstruction of knowledge in communities
- are the factors in developing online learning communities

Carpenter T 2004, Designing for an Online Learning Community: a Guide ANTA

<<http://pre2005.flexiblelearning.net.au/guides/onlinelearningcommunity.pdf>> accessed 1st October 2007.

Tamara Carpenter has produced an excellent primer on designing online learning communities in Australian context. Includes links to some good resources.

Downes, S 2004, 'Learning in Communities', in Best of the Australian Flexible Learning Community 2001 -2004

<http://community.flexiblelearning.net.au/GlobalPerspectives/content/article_5249.htm> accessed 1 October 2007.

Stephen Downes looks at four reasons why online communities should be emphasized, and eight characteristics of successful online communities. Downes emphasizes that communities should be far more than add-ons to online courses.

Moore, A. B. & Brooks, R. 2000. 'Learning communities and community development: Describing the process', Learning Communities: International Journal of Adult and Vocational Learning, Issue No. 1 (Nov), pp. 1-15

<<http://www.crlra.utas.edu.au/Pages/files/journal/articles/iss1/1Moore&B.pdf>> accessed 1 October 2007.

Allen Moore and Rusty Brooks look in some depth at what are learning communities and how they develop. They cite some of the basic characteristics of a learning community as:

- a shared vision (and a broad cross-section sharing in the visioning)
- members have something to share and are willing to do so (with teams and small groups sharing information to contribute to the collective wisdom)
- the community makes something happen

Purcell R, Bellew, MJ & Ross, S. 2000 Turning on Learning Communities Report ANTA

<http://www.training.sa.gov.au/OVETstudents/files/links/tlc_report.pdf> accessed 1st October 2007.

Rosemary Purcell, Mary Jo Bellew and Sue Ross report on their project to set up a learning community in west Adelaide. The report includes a very useful literature review, and a framework for growing a learning community.

Videolinq < <http://videolinq.tafe.net> > accessed 1st October 2007.
TAFE Queensland's videoconferencing network.

TAFE Queensland Video Learning Network
<<http://www.groups.edna.edu.au/course/view.php?id=771>> accessed 1st October 2007.
[Requires log-in]
Network of TAFE Queensland participants involved in Learnscope projects 2006 - 2007.

TAFE Queensland - Blended Distributed Delivery Site
<<http://www.barrierreef.tafe.qld.gov.au/Projects/LeadBDD/>> accessed 1st October 2007.
Collates blended and distributed learning projects and resources across TAFE Queensland. Parts of the site require a log-in.

The Washington Center 2007, Learning communities : [frequently asked questions] The Evergreen State College
<<http://www.evergreen.edu/washcenter/lcfaq.htm>> accessed 1st October 2007.
A structured approach to looking at institutional learning communities. The Center answers questions such as:

- What are learning communities?
- Why have learning communities?
- What do we need to know and how do we get started?
- Each explanation ends with further resources and readings.

Toastmasters International
<<http://www.toastmasters.org/>> accessed 1st October 2007.
World's leading organisation for the improvement of public speaking skills.

Webb, C, Knack, T & Knack, W 2003, 'The Net Learning Community - The Success, the Learning, the Environment and iLearn', Learning Technologies 2003 conference, Mooloolaba, Queensland
<http://www.videolinq.tafe.qld.gov.au/attached_docs/pdf/conf2003_Knack_Webb.pdf> accessed 1st October 2007.
Details the success of Barrier Reef Institute of TAFE's Net Learn Community, which was especially successful in enhancing distributed delivery across North Queensland.

Wenger, E 2003, *Communities of practice*

<<http://www.ewenger.com/theory/>> accessed 1st October 2007.

Etienne Wenger outlines what is a community of practice and how it is applied. Wenger asserts a community of practice has three crucial characteristics: a domain, a community and a shared practice.

Wenger, E, McDermott R & Snyder W 2003, *Cultivating communities of practice: a guide to managing knowledge*, Harvard Business School Press, 2002

Seminal work on communities of practice and their contribution to knowledge management.

Yarnit, M 2000, *Towns, Cities and Regions in the Learning Age: a Survey of Learning Communities* ALA

<<http://www.ala.asn.au/learningcities/LGALearningLayout.pdf>> accessed 1st October 2007.

Martin Yarnit surveys learning communities in the United Kingdom. Included is an extensive analysis with multiple case examples.

Appendix 1: Videoconference presentations, semester 1, 2007

Date	Mode	Title	KeynotePresenter	Chair
22February 2007	Videoconference	Blended&Distributed Learning -TheRoad Ahead	WayneKnack	Daniell Hodder
1March 2007	Videoconference	InnovationatGCIT	CarolynCollins	Daniell Hodder
8March 2007	Videoconference	Usingandsharingvideo	SimonBrown	Daniell Hodder
16March 2007	Face-to-Face	TechnicalSkillsWorkshop	Various	Daniell Hodder
22March 2007	Videoconference	EducationalModelforBDD	WayneKnack	Daniell Hodder
29March 2007	Videoconference	Movingbeyondblendedand distributeddelivery:G4 LearningDesignModel	GaryWood	Daniell Hodder
5April2007		EasterBreak		
12April2007		EasterBreak		
19April2007	Videoconference	BlendingHorticultureat Bundaberg	PeterBrown,Horticulture Teacher,WBIT	Daniell Hodder
26April2007	Videoconference	Copyright[Tobeconfirmed]	RobynAusten,Copyright OfficerDETA -To be confirmed	Daniell Hodder
3May2007	Videoconference	Del.icio.us	BradJones,LibrarianBremer	Daniell Hodder
10May2007	Videoconference	ProjectERECT	GailMacciocca,Senior InstructionalDesignerBNIT	Daniell Hodder
17May2007	Videoconference	ADay inthelifeofa MassagingLearnair	AnnetteWinch, SupplementaryMedicine TeacherGCIT	Daniell Hodder
24May2007	Videoconference	Andsomeoneshouted"Back tobasics"	SueTodhunter,Manager EducationalServicesand Toni-MareePettigrew Consultant,Produ ctServices	Daniell Hodder
31May2007	Videoconference	The DiggEffect	JamesCroft,Multimedia DeveloperBNIT	Daniell Hodder
7June2007	Videoconference	Blended/DistributedDelivery - feelthefearanddoit anyway.	KerryRusso,Community ServicesTeache rBRIT	Daniell Hodder
14June2007	Videoconference	TBA	TBA	Daniell Hodder
21June2007	Videoconference	TBA	TBA	Daniell Hodder
28June2007	Videoconference	TBA	CarolChambers	Daniell Hodder

Appendix 2: Mission and actions for the Ve Mentoring network (part of handout)

Action Learning Program VEM: Vocational Learning Mentors

Join with like-minded professionals in a network of Mentors for Blended & Distributed Learning.

The mission of the VeM Action Learning program is to:

- pilot the establishment of a sustainable mentor network
- provide teachers with experienced mentors support to assist them to incorporate effective blended learning strategies into delivery

Some of the actions for the group are:

- sharing blended and distributed learning models
- establishing guidelines for blended learning practice
- understanding the role of the change agent in fostering innovation in the VET environment
- identifying skills required of blended learning mentors
- providing skills development opportunities for developing mentoring skills in blended and distributed delivery
- practising mentoring activity and share mentoring experiences
- hearing reports from mentees on the effectiveness of mentoring experiences
- establishing a mentor network across the system
- developing a Mentor Management Plan which looks at sustaining and growing the mentor network (including strategies to recognise and retain mentors)

Come and join the weekly videoconferences (Thursday 3.00 - 4.00pm, contact Mark Jones mark.jones@deta.qld.gov.au to be included), or join in the activities online.

Some upcoming events...

- **Blending Horticulture at Bundaberg**
Peter Brown, Horticulture Teacher, WBIT
19th April 2007 Videoconference 3 -4pm
- **The Learning Resource Management system and BDL**
Peter Cooke,
Manager LRM Program
26th April 2007 Videoconference 3 -4pm
- **Del.icio.us**
Brad Jones, Librarian Bremer
3rd May 2007 Videoconference 3 -4pm
- **Educational Resource Evaluation (Project ERECTS)**
Gail Macciocca, Senior Instructional Designer BNIT
10th May 2007 Videoconference 3 -4pm
- **A Day in the life of a Massaging Learner**
Annette Winch, Supplementary Medicine Teacher GCIT 17th May
2007 Videoconference 3 -4pm
- **And someone shouted "Back to basics"**
Sue Todhunter, Manager Educational Services &
Toni-Maree Pettigrew Consultant, Product Services
24th May 2007 Videoconference 3 -4pm
- **Blended/Distributed Delivery - feel the fear and do it anyway**
Kerry Russo, Community Services Teacher BRIT
7th June 2007 Videoconference 3 -4pm
- **Copyright Changes and BDL**
Robyn Austin & Ilona Baronayte,
DETA Legal & Admin Law Unit
14th June 2007 Videoconference 3 -4pm

RSVP Mark Jones mark.jones@deta.qld.gov.au if you wish to attend (or make a presentation)

Appendix3:Agenda,face -to-faceworkshopatBrackenRidge ,BNIT

- 08:30am GatheringandRegistration
Signin,gathermaterials,makeateaorcoffee,logon.
- 09:00am CalltoOrder
DanHodder,VeMConvenor,willcalltheworkshoptoorder ,handlehousekeeping,andoutlineproceedings
- 09:05am Keynotewelcome
WayneKnack,DirectorofInnovations,BrisbaneNorthInstituteofTAFEwillofficiallyopentheworkshop
- 09:15am Communicationstools
RolfRekort&RobertQuimbyfromYellowEdge PerformanceArchitecturewillhelpfacilitateasessionon Elluminate
- 10:15am Refreshments
AvailableintheLearningHub
- 10:30am Mediatools
SimonBrown,StonemasonryTeacher,Trade&TechnicianSkillsInsti tutewillbeleadingthegroupinusingmedia toolsespecially WindowsMovieMaker
- 12:15pm Lunch
ProceedtoMeridianRoom,EBlock,Level2
- 01:15pm Collaborativetools
BradJones,Librarian,TheBremerInstituteofTAFE ,willbefacilitatingparticipantsinmakingBLOGs,WIKIsandother socialtools.
- 02:30pm Refreshments
AvailableintheLearningHub
- 02:45pm Developmenttools
ShirleyTurner,InstructionalDesigner,TAFEOpenLearningwillbehelppingthegroupgetstartedinsomesimple developmenttoolssuchas HotPotatoes , Quandaryand ARED
- 4:00pm Close
Savefiles,shutdownPCs,sayfarewells

Appendix 4: Agenda, face -to-face workshop at The Bremer Institute of TAFE

8:30 -9:00	Registration+Tea&Coffee			Theatrettefoyer
9:00 -9:15	Welcome	GarthO'Mara	TheBremerInstituteofTAFE	Theatrette
9:15 -10:30	ARED2	SimonBrown& JayMair	SkillsTechAustralia &The BremerInstituteofTAFE	Trainingroom
10:30 –11:00	VET Virtual MorningTea	RobynDennis	TheBremerInstituteofTAFE	e-LearningZone Alcoveoutsidethe Theatrette
11:00 –12:30	Audio Tools SurvivingCopyright	PhilWheeler ChristineRuzic& RamilaChandra	WideBayInstitute ofTAFE TheBremerInstituteofTAFE	e-LearningZone Theatrette
12:30 –1:00	&LearningResourceDesign Principles ARED2 Lunch	Simon Brown	SkillsTechAustralia	Trainingroom Theatrette
1:00 –1:30	Paneldiscussion	Specialguests	Various	Theatrette
1:30 –3:00	Games-based learning	MarkJones	BrisbaneNorthInstituteof TAFE	e-LearningZone
3:00	Images ARED2 Close	BradJones Simon Brown	SouthbankInstituteofTAFE SkillsTechAustralia	OfficeTek Trainingroom