

Implementing Training Packages: Bringing Learning into Focus

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INTRODUCTION

Since the early 80's vocational education and training in Australia has been evolving from a model defined by inputs [ie, curriculum] to a model defined by outputs [ie, competencies]. The introduction of Training Packages is a quantum leap in this evolution requiring greater reliance on the professional skills of teachers and trainers and on more robust and flexible administration and information management systems than previous forms of competency based training required.

To enable the best use and outcomes of Training Packages for the nation, industry and learners and providers of training need to consider the development of strategies to

- ensure quality learning processes and course design
- support the professional advancement of teachers and trainers
- advance systems to support the learning process including reporting and recording of outcomes.

Judgements on the effectiveness of Training Packages will be made on the basis of the quality of the product as well as the process of implementation. To date the attention of this latest model of vocational education and training has been on the development of the 'product' and as we move onto implementation the focus will move to concentrating on how to make competency happen within the prescribed arrangements of Training Packages. Hence it is critical that we establish a balance between 'product' and 'process' rather than to imply that Training Packages are just more of the same only expressed differently.

CONTEXT OF NEW LEARNING

There will be over 50 endorsed Training Packages covering 80 % of Australian workforce by 2000 with an expectation of full implementation commencing in January, 2000. Training Packages are supported by a framework of qualifications and recognition processes and aim to provide flexible, responsive, quality and consistent delivery. David Kemp, Minister for Education, announced recently that the Federal Government is providing an additional \$8 million to support the implementation of Training Packages and a further additional \$10.5 million to ANTA to support materials production. As from the start of 2000, the majority of the \$8 billion of government funds spent on vocational training in Australia will be in Training Packages and PETE anticipates that RTO will be prepared to enrol in Training Packages at this time. It is now generally acknowledged that the provider is the key to this new system and way of doing business with industry having prescribed the outcomes.

The tenure and skills of teaching staff in public providers will impact on training provision particularly in the participation in professional development activities to support implementation. In the TAFE sector in Victoria

- 53% of teachers are in tenured positions
- 33% of teachers are on fixed term contracts, usually of 9 - 12 months duration
- 14% of teachers are sessional.

In addition the total teaching staff has remained the same from 1993 - 1998 at a time when there has been an increase of about 10% in total provision [SCH]. (Malley 1999)¹

It is this group of committed people who need to understand and be able to interpret and customise Training Packages for a range of audiences; in short, to make the new system work. It is this group of people who have toiled through nearly 10 years of fairly continuous turbulence and change. They have had to deal with the additional factors impacting on the system such as globalisation and

¹ Malley, J., Hill, R., Putland C., McKenzie P., Trends in the TAFE Institute Workforce, PETE/CEET, March, 2000

internationalisation, technological change, outsourcing, user choice and competitive tendering, reduced funding and maintenance of quality, restructuring and re-positioning in the marketplace and finally organisational and cultural change to meet these challenges. This change has led to a sharpening of provider orientation and increased focus on the needs of the client.

In this new and emerging world of Training Package teachers need to be able to

- customise activities necessary to meet the range of needs of industry/unions/employer/learners
- interpret Training Packages into learning programs whilst still being highly accountable to central system
- develop learning pathways and resources for a range of Training Package qualification outcomes
- provide flexible and consultative approaches to clients including
 - delivery of underpinning skills
 - provision of skill development processes that are in multi-mode delivery formats, suit individual learning processes, integrate 'workplace' assessment that is fair, reliable and consistent, ensure articulation and transferability of skill recognition arrangements, have a variety of reporting and recording of outcomes [modules and competencies], ensure quality skill development and maintain equivalence of outcomes cross a range of Training Package qualifications.

Unfortunately clients may not always be clear or even know what their needs are. So teachers will need to be better at working with a variety of clients and assisting them in this task and developing genuine partnerships with industry that result in mutual benefits and long term strategic value. The elements of best practice in conducting partnerships with industry are

- understanding the business and the relationship between training and profitability of the enterprise
 - being available
 - sharing knowledge and expertise
 - managing the relationship
 - collaborating with competitors with a view to the best outcome for the client.
- (Thorn 1999)²

There is an increasing focus on learning and consequentially teaching. This learning may occur on job and off job and may be government funded, employer funded or self funded. We are also seeing the emergence of a new value of learning - learning for life. Increasingly workers in most sectors will move in and out of training to ensure relevant employability skills and regular skill upgrade for work application.

Barry Hobart, Chief Consultant to UNESCO UNEVOC Centre in Berlin noted that VET teachers and trainers have the most crucial role and responsibility to assist in this development. They

...must undertake programs of initial and recurring professional development and need to be involved in continual upskilling and updating on changes and new requirements of the workplace so that they can continue to adapt to the rapid change and be relevant. (Hobart 1999, p12)³

The challenge for today's educator is

- we can ignore Training Packages as another fad and delude ourselves that things can stay the same
- OR
- we can maximise the tremendous opportunities that Training Packages offer and the subsequent change that they bring.

Dr Qian Tang, Head of the TVE Section of UNESCO is quoted at the recent UNESCO International Congress on Technical and Vocational Education for the 21st Century (1999) held in Seoul as saying 'When the winds of change blow, some build walls, others build windmills'⁴. If we don't embrace the positive opportunities that Training Packages offer to rejuvenate the training system and begin to interpret the fundamental differences of Training Packages to past practices; and if we don't begin to grapple with the new system and support modifications necessary to make Training Packages work,

² Thorn, F., ANTA National Conference - Spotlight on the Provider, December, 1999

³ Grace, B., Going Global, Training Review Oct/Nov/Dec. 99, No. 32 (P. 12 - 13)

⁴ Wiltshire, K., The Ginseng in the Stew, Training Review Oct/Nov/Dec. 99, No. 32 (P.10 - 11)

then we will have more of the same, mediocre outcomes and disinterested, and industry that is disaffected from the value of accredited training. In a recent survey conducted by AC Nielsen Research Services it was noted '...that 76% of employers found graduates who applied for jobs to be unsuitable for either the position applied for or any other position in the company' (AC Nielsen, February 2000)⁵. The challenge is here and the choice inevitable - change is critical if graduates are to get jobs and industry is to be confident in the education and training system. To be judged to be irrelevant in this sphere of industry relevant training, will lead to our ultimate demise.

Moira Scollay, CEO - ANTA, acknowledges the need for further support of the implementation of Training Packages and '...the size of the task cannot be underestimated. Achieving full implementation of all the policy reforms still requires a substantial cultural shift in how training is delivered and valued.' (Scollay 1999)⁶. To support this cultural shift state training bodies need to develop a range of responses including

- professional development activities
- opportunities for cross-provider networking
- funds to pilot responses and innovation in implementing Training Packages
- policy frameworks to inform operational activities and infrastructure design
- online, responsive and flexible communication strategies to inform providers of implementation issues
- publications and manuals promoting best practice in the interpretation and design of courses aligned to Training Packages

So we are at the cross-roads; the train is speeding towards us; the choice is clear; we must embrace Training Packages and embrace the definite advantage that they herald for our work. In conclusion they are the strongest endorsement in recent times for the need, requirement and insistence for quality teaching and learning practices.

The questions that we need to ask are:

- How do we take up the challenge and engage in this exciting way of doing our work ?
- What is involved in implementing Training Packages ?
- What are the issues to explore when bringing Training Packages to ground ?

Firstly Training Packages are flexible. The national system is still evolving and not all the questions have been asked nor all of them answered. Training Packages can be interpreted in a myriad of ways with 'no one size fits all'. However, the training and outcomes must have integrity and be delivered with quality.

Secondly teachers need to be skilled in how to interpret the needs of the clients, how to customise the training to meet these needs, and to how interrogate Training Packages to design programs in 'chunks' of learning that make sense to the learner and that align to the standards and how to develop a delivery plan that allows for dynamic learning experiences that ensure competency outcomes.

Thirdly the academic and information management systems that underpin the implementation of Training Packages need to be equally flexible and allow for quality responses to the various provider clients and stakeholders such as government funding bodies, employers and students. No longer will a single management system of information management and reporting be sufficient in satisfying all of these groups and this means a more significant dialogue between the teaching and student administration/management sections of providers. For it is through these conversations that the intricacies of the new system can be managed such as the accommodation of

- reporting competency completions to the funding body whilst also reporting regularly to students and employers on progress and achievement within a competency
- allowing for multiple enrolments in a single competency in order for a variety of specialist skills to be achieved by the student
- providing evidence and record of achievement in the instance of partial completion of competencies

⁵ AC Nielsen Research Services, Employer Satisfaction with Graduates, AVCC Report, February 2000

⁶ Scollay, M., CEO's Message, Australian Training Volume 6 Issue 4 December 1999, (P. 3)

- providing a record of achievement that will facilitate articulation/credit exemptions into higher education courses and transferability of skill recognition between providers
- ensuring ethical and transparent reporting to funding bodies.

Fourthly the role of those involved in general education has become less clear and discernible. There are few units of competency and elements of competency that explicitly deal with the assessment of general skill competencies such as communication skills. However, there is always mention of such competencies in the underpinning skills and range of variables. Teachers need to begin to work collaboratively across discipline areas to 'unpack and re-pack' Training Packages and to design learning programs and pathways that build towards holistic delivery and assessment of industry skills and enterprise [generic] skills. Richard Hall notes in his research of the impacts of globalisation on the industry training market that

...future reform needs to build on previous initiatives to establish new mediating structures that enhance co-ordination between all the elements of (these) industries skill formation systems'⁷. Strategies that will assist and encourage collaboration are

- mentoring of teachers of industry skills by teachers of general skill areas
 - team teaching
 - development of integrated approaches to learning and delivery
 - collaborative and co-operative support to Course Teams
 - development of integrated learning materials
 - provision of student support materials and sessions in enterprise/generalist skill areas
 - encouragement of accelerated learning in core industry skill areas where appropriate which then allows for time and attention for achievement of enterprise/general skills
 - development of assessment tools and approaches that integrate industry skill and enterprise/general skill assessment.
- (Hall 1999, p5)

Fifthly and most importantly professionalism of teaching is being redefined as the shift inherent in achieving the competencies detailed Training Packages means an increased focus on the process of learning. It is no longer simply what is presented in the classroom or the resource materials but is also the understanding that teachers have on how learning happens, is promoted and encouraged. It is the quality of the program design and how the competencies have been grouped and integrated to make sense to the learner as well as strategies to ensure industry and skill formation generally. The learning experiences and relationships between experiences; and the quality and nature of the holistic assessment leading to the achievement of competencies that teachers will be judged by and accounted for. Teachers need to heighten their passion for learning and to shift the focus from traditional approaches centred on the classroom to more flexible problem solving approaches in which the learner is central to the process of learning and competency achievement.

CONCLUSION

Quality teaching practices, learning environments and student centred approaches are essential especially if the positive outcomes of Training Packages are to be truly realised and embedded at a very fundamental level into the operations. Dr Roland Williams, President of Business Higher Education Round Table notes that

Each sector must recognise the criticality of preparing people for the world as it is and it is likely to be, as opposed to that which is rapidly vanishing. Institutions which fail to grasp this reality have what is surely a brief life expectancy'.⁸ (Williams 1999, p1)

In summary Training Packages have the potential to revitalise learning and to bring learning back into the equation of training but only if

- students are the centre point for learning process design

⁷ Hall, Richard (July, 1999), Globalisation and the Industry Training Market: Recent Policy and Practice in the Information Technology, Metal and Engineering Industries, Paper presented at the 8th National Vocational Education and Training

⁸ Research Conference, Australian Centre for Industrial Relations, Research and Training, University of Sydney (P. 5) Ibid.

- teachers are confident and skilled in the process of learning and program design
- providers have flexible and robust information management and administration systems to support innovative program design
- State Training Systems have extensive professional development programs that maximise developments and understanding across organisations and disciplines.