

## **Generic skills development (in progress)** *“skills under construction”*

Shay Keating and Sue Holden  
Victoria University

### **Abstract**

This paper provides an overview of an OTTE funded New Product Development project looking at generic skill development. This project is still in progress and will be completed in May 2004. This paper therefore provides an overview of the research phase and the model that has been developed as a result of the research to develop teacher's skills in incorporating generic skills in VET programs. The model is currently being piloted with nine teachers at Victoria University and will be further refined at the conclusion of the pilots.

### **Overview of project**

The aim of this project is to develop a model and products for generic skills development and assessment that can be customised for different learner cohorts within the VET sector.

The research phase of this project involved running small group interviews with learners from three different cohorts of learners:

- Certificate of General Education for Adults.
- Third year Carpentry Apprentices.
- Diploma of Operations Management students.

### **Outcomes of the research**

In the three programs listed above, the coverage of generic skills was “patchy” in so far as generic skills may be explicit in a unit of competency, for example, *BCGCM1003B Plan and organise work* or implicit in the delivery or embedded in some aspect of the module or competency standard. This is consistent with the recent NCVET study Clayton et al (2003) that found that there was a great deal of variance in the coverage of generic skills in Training Packages.

Research highlighted that generic skills were effectively developed through the delivery and experiential learning aspects of the course including on-the-job, project-based and community-based learning. For instance, in the module, *Managing People Recruitment Selection and Induction* from the Diploma of Operations Management, the key competencies *using mathematical ideas and techniques* and *using technology* are not covered in the module. However the delivery of the module by the teacher participating in this research clearly covered *using technology*. A major project involved learners developing a policies and procedures manual using technology.

Many of the teachers interviewed were implicitly assisting learners to develop generic skills by imparting their knowledge and experience of the workforce. This was strong in both the Diploma of Business and the Building and Construction areas. For instance, in the case of the Diploma of Operations Management, both the learners and the teacher noted that the teacher's ability to draw on his/her own practical experience in the industry was highly valuable part of the learning experience. The teacher's interpretation of the theory was mediated through experience in the workplace where one had to employ problem solving and communication skills in order to work effectively. The learners valued the teacher's ability to demonstrate this in the classroom delivery.

Where learners were undertaking competencies standards that related directly to one or more of the generic competencies there was not evidence that they were being framed as generic competencies that learners may take to other careers. In other words learners were being taught the skill almost like a technical skill. They were not necessarily being taught to make linkages with other contexts in which these skills are developed. A "language" needed to be developed around generic skills understood by both the teacher and learner.

Learners varied in terms of their ability to identify and discuss generic skills. Learner's familiarity with these terms and ability to discuss the process, varied greatly depending on work and educational experience.

#### ***"skills under construction" model***

While the learners and teachers interviewed placed high value on these skills it was clear that there was no common "language" in the classroom for generic skills development and that generic skills were not being explicitly promoted as important or transferable.

One of main aims of the model is therefore to help teachers become "at ease" with these skills and their own generic skill development in order to incorporate them into their teaching practices through discussion, reflection and assessment.

Significantly too, the teachers involved in this initial research valued the opportunity to talk about their teaching practice. Rather than work with a large group, the project team decided to work with small teams of three teachers to ensure that each participant had the opportunity to focus on his/ her teaching practice and get focused assistance to do this. The model is underpinned by the principle that teachers will then assist other colleagues in their department to develop explicit generic skills delivery.

The model is based on the premise that in the knowledge economy all learners need to be given opportunities:

- To learn in ways and in environments that foster generic skills development.
- To develop an understanding of the importance of generic skills and an ability to identify them in order to continuously improve them.

The “*skills under construction*” model is designed to assist VET practitioners to explicitly incorporate generic skills into their delivery and assessment practices by:

- Highlighting and identifying generic skills in their area of expertise through reflection on their teaching practices.
- Furthering their understanding of generic skills through discussion and reflection.
- Enhancing delivery and assessment strategies to ensure that generic skills are explicit.
- Reflecting on and evaluating the outcomes.

The professional development program acknowledges that many teachers in the VET sector already practice teaching and learning approaches that foster generic skill development and therefore this model aims to capture, build on and enhance existing good practices. It is not an end in itself, but aims to assist teachers to identify an ongoing process for improving their capacity to assist learners to develop generic skills alongside technical skills.

The professional development is based on action learning principles, providing teachers with the opportunity to reflect on their teaching practice and design, modify or adapt their teaching and learning plans to ensure explicit coverage and assessment of generic skills.

The model includes two main components:

#### *Background*

The background section provides important information about what generic skills are, why they are considered important, what the government is saying about them and how they can be understood and facilitated in a VET environment. The information provided is brief and designed to provide a simple overview of the field of generic skills for teachers. Resources to obtain further information on the issues covered are also listed in this section.

#### *Strategy*

The generic skills strategy outlines a process through which teachers examine and enhance their generic skills teaching and learning pedagogy. The strategy is based on a team approach to program planning and development and incorporates the principles outlined in the background section. Includes a number of templates for mapping, self-assessment and developing aims and objectives.

#### *Pilot*

The project team is currently working with teams of three teachers from three departments at Victoria University:

- Building and Construction
- Management and Marketing
- Adult Literacy and Work Education

Case studies will be written up detailing the outcomes of the pilot of the model and the initial research. As a result the model will be refined once feedback has been given.

### **Outcomes of the project**

- A literature review.
- Case studies for each of the three groups detailing the trialling of the model/framework.
- Pilot professional development for staff.
- Recommendations and final report to funding body.

### **Reference**

Clayton, B, Blom, K, Meyers, D, Bateman A 2003, *Assessing and certifying generic skill: What is happening in vocational education and training?* NCVET, Adelaide.