The bold and the beautiful: educators tuning into Millennials

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Abstract

Engaging young 16-22 year old students is a contemporary issue for most large VET providers. This becomes a greater challenge with students that have: short attention spans, an obsession with communications technologies, and require instant gratification with products. Retaining young students and delivering effective training is intrinsically linked to instructional model and training environment. So what model could a large training institute apply to its course structures to produce effective outcomes for its youngest cohort?

This paper firstly acknowledges narrative as a structural model for understanding and defining teaching & learning. It then proposes the narrative structure of Soap Opera as being in tune with the way Millennial learners (under 23 years of age) comprehend time and space. The feminised narrative structure of the Soap Opera provides a framework for considering an alternative mode of delivery and way of organising instruction. Soap Operas provide answers to the question of youth engagement in education by developing shorter and more intensive bursts of training.

Introduction

In my role as a Senior Educator in the field of Vocational Education and Training (VET) in the Australian state of Victoria I am constantly evaluating and modifying the delivery structure and course offerings that I am responsible for. There are two key reasons for this.

1. As a professional educator leading a team of teachers and trainers I want to ensure my team and I design our courses with a focus on creativity and engagement. We hope to ensure students encounter an appealing learning structure engineered to benefit their learning styles and goal achievement.

2. The Australian Quality Training Framework (AQTF) contains key standards that relate to course review through industry contact and student feedback. Most specifically clause 3.1 (DEST, 2007). Review and modification of courses must be ongoing to ensure that these aims are met.

In 2007 I began a PhD programme with the aim of articulating my experience in managing the previous two points. I want to record and define the work my team and I do. I want to articulate a more theoretical model, or more so, a model of jargon, patterns, terms, and structure that allows a deeper (re)consideration of what we do. I want to describe a model that is removed from the dominant discourses of educational thought in

TAFE and instead describe the work of teachers in some other form. I believe that new ideas develop when models or paradigms are sought from one definable structure then mapped onto or combined with another. For me, the theory and practise of education coupled with theories of media studies and narrative structure has proved particularly effective providing alternative ways of considering the work of educators and students. I am not alone in this, see Egan (1992), Ellsworth (1997) and Gallagher (2000).

There is plenty of evidence to show that the concept of narrative is useful in understanding a broad range of educational practice (Connelly & Clandinin, 1988; Egan, 1988; McEwan & Egan, 1995). Generally the narrative structure used to describe either teaching experience or curriculum development has a classic linear form where there is a need for a logical distribution of knowledge over time and a well constructed conclusion where everyone 'gets' the ending.

What I hope to discover in the writing of this paper and, in a wider ranging research project, is how my colleagues and I can construct and manage successful learning programs that are more closely aligned to the learning styles of our students. This is why I like to compare narrative theories and criticism with the structure of teaching and learning, so I can visualise and plan methods that engage staff and students to do the performative work of teaching.

Narrative and Genre

Narrative theory (Barthes, 1982; Chambers, 1984; Egan, 1988), contemporary genre theory (Bhatia, 2004; Devitt, 2004) and creative theories of visual design (Kress & van-Leeuwen, 2006) provide three theoretical areas to pursue the following three assumptions.

1. A belief that teaching structures equate closely to ingrained knowledge of narrative structure and form. Knowledge of stories and storylines help individuals conceive the structure of meaning & learning.

2. The structures of narratives can be applied to the way a group of people organise themselves in time and space to do work.

3. Knowledge of genre and paradigmatic patterns promotes creative thinking especially when, genres and paradigms are mixed.

From a shared comprehension of narrative the teaching team is able to structure and organise the work of teaching and learning in a form that students and other staff members should recognise. In an educational context this should better enable the delivery of skills and knowledge to groups of students through their own active knowledge of narrative and genre. The immediate aim is to use the existing patterns and conventions of narrative genre to define the work the teaching team does in delivering teaching and learning in a variety of courses on multiple campuses.

My broader aim is to develop the assumptions listed above into a research question for my PhD. In its current state the question is: In what ways can narrative and genre be used to define and create new and innovative ways for developing VET teaching and learning structures in TAFE?

The aim of the research will be to contextualise the contemporary VET environment in TAFE and then examine three new and innovative models of course structure and delivery. A narrative genre will be suggested that maps to the delivery structure of each area, the genre constraint then provides a framework with which to theoretically consider the structural patterns of the programme. Once the theoretical framework is defined there will be some consideration of how teachers and students have adapted to a different way of doing things; a way that more fully engages students and meets there learning needs.

This paper is about one specific genre that relates to one specific group of students. The paper outlines the program and the narrative genre that was considered appropriate for that course through a review of selected literature. The paper ends with a brief description of the model that was developed against the narrative structure for use at the beginning of 2008. The structure developed from this paper is in its first 3 months of operation at the time of writing.

Background and Context

The mainstream or adult courses run from my teaching department have to date been unpacked in a linear sequence that reflect the content of our Training Package, AQTF standards, staff management and considerations of time and space. By linear I mean there is a logical and staged continuity to the design and development of our teaching methods that have a clearly defined beginning, middle, and end. This is achieved by distilling multiple sources of information and practice to produce comprehensively planned course structures for sequential delivery. This pattern fits into the time and space generated by a two semester model of 17 or 18 weeks. The actual length of the semester with term breaks can be 20 weeks long, which is almost 5 months. This time span provides significant challenges for both teachers and students in maintaining their enthusiasm and concentration for their subjects.

As a teaching team we assume new students will have an appreciation of how teaching and learning is structured; specifically the delivery and application of concepts articulated over several weeks with a commitment to assessment that proves students have met the training outcomes. This assumption fits a classic classroom scenario with lessons structured around information presented by a teacher then engaged with by the students. To match the previous assumption, as teachers, we adhere to a linear narrative structure that allows for easy sense making of our teaching management and training outcomes, we start at the beginning, give lots of middle, and construct a nice tight ending.

This paper relates specifically to young learners that may reject or not acknowledge a classic linear narrative due to cultural shifts that disengage them from the texts and learning styles of previous generations. It is an opportunity for the team to reflect and modify our teaching methods to the learning styles of the current generation. This is critical in the Victorian Technical and Further Education (TAFE) sector where the Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning (VCAL) is now a prominent and growing area of speciality.

Literature review - VCAL

I am part of a team that from 2003 has set up and delivered multiple VCAL youth programs for 15-19 year olds in the public education sector of TAFE in the northern suburbs of Melbourne, Undertaking the development and delivery of these programs has certainly been demanding. I believe that stating the course is 'sorted' would be premature, as there are still many challenges remaining in organising and running VCAL programmes in TAFE. Most specifically this paper is concerned with considering structural models for developing appropriate delivery strategies to engage students and produce the 'applied' learning that is integral to VCAL.

Retention of teenage students in educational programmes was (and at the time of writing still is) a high Victorian state government priority (DEECD, 2006). To enable this VCAL was developed and widely implemented in 2003 (Kosky, 2002). VCAL was specifically for 15-19 year old students that may have exited, or were considering leaving secondary school, without completing the only senior level secondary qualification, the Victorian Certificate of Education (VCE). The VCE is the Year 11 & 12 award that provides graded and scored assessment for university entrance. VCAL became another choice for students and differs from VCE in that it provides a pathway to work or vocational education and preferences competency based assessment. The VCAL provides an opportunity for early school leavers to stay on at school or enter TAFE and continue studying to a senior secondary level. The introduction of VCAL programmes into TAFE institutes in Victoria in 2003 bought on dramatic professional challenges for staff at all levels. When VCAL became available for TAFE delivery many institutes did not have the necessary procedures in place for managing the large numbers of early school leavers suddenly on campus (McClimont, 2005).

Even though there were many students in TAFE that were part of the 15-19 year old age group, most of these were apprentices and were placed into programmes with long standing and well resourced structures. VCAL offered new challenges. At all levels from teaching, administration, through to senior management there were issues on handling and delivering effective learning to the new cohort. The challenges were varied and many. Not only was there a need to seriously reconsider program structures but also teaching capabilities, resource development, communication, reporting and student management. Many of the students had left secondary colleges dissatisfied or angry, some were described as 'school refusers'. There were large numbers of students that had been bullied mixed in with students that had instigated the bullying. This new mix was to

be taught and coordinated by many staff holding the minimum TAFE teaching qualification, the Certificate IV in Workplace Assessment & Training with no experience of secondary teaching. On top of all the operational issues the structure of VCAL had to be interpreted and enacted on the ground. There was also a need to protect VCAL's difference and genuinely offer an alternative course rather than just a place to hide students that couldn't meet the academic aims of the VCE (Pritchard & Anderson, 2006).

VCAL has an open design where multiple permutations of the same award can be structured using a vast array of units or vocational courses. Narratively speaking, the course is capable of supporting multiple storylines or 'plots within plots' so its structure is less linear and more organic in that it can branch, loop, grow and, in most cases, jump to another storyline in the form of well planned pathway opportunities. VCAL has five evenly balanced strands: literacy, numeracy, industry skills, workplace skills, and personal development within its structure. Each segment must be filled with modules or units that match the award rules, but essentially the rules are quite broad. The contextual flexibility allows teachers to construct a full course around an individuals needs if required; operationally a challenge, but practically possible. VCAL also encourages the teacher to concentrate on providing training for and proving the competency of their students through the application of skills. This provides a pedagogic framework that may be more attractive to the type of students that end up in, or choose VCAL programmes. Applied learning may deliver an immediacy of learning that VCAL students prefer.

A course with the structures of VCAL differs greatly from a Training Package based course which is often self-contained and limited in its adaptability. This may be why a linear narrative is the most obvious structure to use for a Training Package course. Yet the linear narrative may not provide an appropriate structure to plan operational delivery of a VCAL course, it may also provide a challenge to young learners that do not always understand or appreciate a complex linear narrative. Sometimes the linear structure is disrupted by students that are unfamiliar with a planned narrative and relate more to the rupture and displacement of non-linear or fractured narrative. Fortunately there are several different types of narrative structures within western-literary styles that may have greater validity in developing teaching and learning structures than a classic linear narrative. This is one of those stories…

Literature review - Soap opera

Brooke is about to marry Ridge now that Ridge is no longer married to Taylor who was his widow but came back to life and is going to marry Ridge's brother Thorne who was married to Brooke after Ridge divorced her to marry Taylor whose marriage to Ridge was annulled because Taylor wasn't dead the first time and was just kidnapped when Ridge's father Eric, who is not really Ridge's father, divorced Brooke to remarry Stephanie who is Ridge's mother that had an affair with Massimo who is really Ridge's dad who then married Jacqueline the mother of Dominic, Ridge's half brother and Brooke's ex-husband who left Brooke because he had got her daughter Bridget pregnant who was almost Ridge's wife once he found out that Eric wasn't his father so there was no blood link

between him and his step daughter, sister, sister in law and niece, Bridget, who is Brooke's daughter that Ridge is going to marry, unless… ("Bold and the Beautiful," 1994-2007)

There is no doubt the interaction between characters within a soap opera is dramatic. There is: conflict, denial, fall from grace, betrayal, love lost, love found, revenge, resurrection, and just about any other plotline that drives the narrative form. Rich in storylines and with multiple characters with complex lives, soap operas are a modern melodrama (Kuhn, 1987). However the soap opera narrative structure has several genre constraints that differentiate it from the classic narrative used in most literature, cinema, or television drama.

The classic or dominant narrative uses a 3 act structure defined by a beginning, middle, and end that generally unfolds in a linear sequence within time and space. Within that naturalised progression of time and space there may be logical references to the past or flashbacks that disrupt the temporal order but these should aid in directing the story forward. Progression from the narratives beginning to its end is essential and is propelled by challenges to the stories central character, the protagonist. It is the protagonist's journey through the 3 act structure of conflict and change towards a resolution that generates the story (Bordwell & Thompson, 1994).

 The first act relies on the protagonist confronting unwanted change in their life. It is where they are mobilised to take action. The second act, or middle, generally engages the reader with the more complex parts of the story. It is where the protagonist confronts change, how they may try to reinstate the conditions of their life before change and conflict were forced upon them. In the third and final act the protagonist will overcome the challenge of change and will create a new life that is similar but different to their life prior to the first act. When all aspects of the story are 'tied up' the narrative ends and unless there is a sequel, the lives of the characters within the story are closed to the reader or viewer. The progression through the 3 acts towards a clear and logical conclusion is a vital element of the classic narrative structure. Without resolution, without a definable and obvious ending the story is lessened in its impact, and ultimately may fail (Barthes, 1982).

While the 3 act drama is engineered to propel the protagonist and story towards a conclusion, the soap opera narrative delays or postpones conclusion. Viewer satisfaction comes from engagement with the characters and a focus on the 'narrative moment' rather than the expectation of engineered solutions that force finality and leave little room for negotiation or interaction. Constant avoidance of narrative conclusion disrupts the logic of the classic narrative and changes the focus from the mechanics of storytelling to the relationship between characters. The soap opera keeps its multiple characters engaged in exploration and discussion. With the storyline perpetuated around dialogue and emotion rather than action multiple points of view are aired; points of difference acknowledged. Focus on the moment, the relationship between characters, what they are trying to solve with discussion and the gaze between them is a key genre constraint of the soap opera. Finality, conclusion, even death can easily be overcome; the story is perpetual but

focused on the instant. Time and space within the soap opera narrative remain open, and the narrative seldom progresses beyond act 2 (Brown, 1987).

The five times a week airing of many soap operas allows time within the story to mimic real time, viewers can feel the pace of the soap opera move with the pace of their own lives (Brown, 1987). The almost one-to-one relationship between the temporal moment of the storyline and the life of the viewer traps the soap opera text in the space of the middle. By being all middle, the soap opera story is both static and perpetual. By this I mean that the lack of conclusion develops a narrative that appears not to progress, yet the story continues in the next episode, day after day, week after week. So the soap opera narrative is more a state of stasis than static, in that the story lives but appears locked. Yet within the stasis: negotiation, discussion, and realisation can still occur even though the issues that generate the story do not resolve. However while conclusion and resolution may be delayed in a soap opera, the text is not rigid, scenes change quickly, new scenarios develop, the view is moved quickly from one scene to another. This creates storylines that are able to be drawn out over a large amount of time and are told within the small 'bites' of the jump cut scene. So while soap opera time can mimic real time, soap opera space is fragmented. Yet despite the fragmentation of space as a result of jump cuts, and drawn out discussion and conversation, sense making and continuity of story happens. This almost unique privilege of soap opera viewers, where time moves but is also delayed allows them to miss several episodes and still pick the story up when they return to viewing, this is because the narrative is cyclic and as such remains open.

Gendered Narratives

Many feminist (Kuhn, 1987; Modleski, 1982) or media theorists (Allen, 1985; Fiske, 1987) have defined the linear and conclusion driven focus of a classic narrative as a masculine or dominant narrative. With a masculine narrative there is often only one issue to solve, a central protagonist on which the dynamic of the story turns and a strong and determined push towards finality. The masculine narrative is about reaching the end and closing off any doubt about the outcome of the story.

Modleski (1982) defines the lack of conclusion or closure in soap operas as an open feminine narrative. This is based on a structure that focuses more on processes and negotiation rather than the outcomes and judgments that are an essential part the dominant or masculine narrative (Fiske, 1987). Other key characteristics of the feminine narrative found in soap opera is the emphasis on emotions, focus on the family, delay in judgement and engagement of the present. The feminine narrative is about the moment, what can be achieved now.

Both the linear masculine narrative and open feminine narrative are useful when considering planning structures for use in teaching. The linear masculine narrative has been used to define a variety of techniques for developing, delivering and evaluating teaching methods. The logical drive towards revelation of knowledge, application of knowledge and assessment of new skills overlays the 3 act structure nicely. The 3 act structure is adaptable in mainstream teaching, deliverable in just about any classroom and

easily mapped logically onto curriculum or competency documents (Egan, 1988, 1992; McEwan & Egan, 1995).

Outside the mainstream, where alternative teaching methods and structures are used, there needs to be something else, another model for students that have resisted or not recognised the dominant linear narrative. The feminine narrative provides one such model. The television soap opera genre provides the space and textual structures for modelling an alternative teaching program. Establishing the parameters of a feminine narrative provides a framework for establishing an alternative pedagogy to that used in most secondary schools or adult VET programmes in TAFE. If running an alternative program for young learners then considering the open/cyclic model, which uses the feminine narrative of the soap opera, should be an option. This relates specifically to learners that need a sense of immediacy in their learning, that need more attention paid to who they are and what their life struggle is. There needs to be acknowledgment of their life's complexity with a learning program structured around their interest, expression and how they work with others. The key dynamic of the soap opera narrative is the 'moment'. The storyline not concerned with the 'end' but the 'now'. This means the student occupies the core of the narrative and learning branches outwards from them; learning is constructed around what concerns them. There may be dead ends, there may be crossovers. There may not even be measurable outcomes for completion, but there should be engagement and there should be application of skills between student and teacher defined as the teaching moment.

By using soap opera narrative structure to define delivery methodology I am not suggesting that teaching or lesson content be dumbed down for students in youth programs. I am suggesting that teachers delivering TAFE youth programs must firstly consider the learning styles of 15-19 year olds and then apply a different teaching and learning model to their delivery strategy. This would be particularly useful for students struggling in a course developed with a complex linear format driven by standardised results. So to further progress this paper and the ideas generated from the feminine narrative, it is necessary to review assumptions and research about the learning characteristics and social outlook of students currently in youth programs. These students will have been born between 1980 and 2000. This generational slice goes by many names, the one I am preferencing is The Millennials (it has a soapy feel to it!).

Literature review - The Millennials.

Titles for progressive generations tend to be a mix of marketing profile and behavioural categorisation: baby boomers, Generation X and now The Millennials. Defining the general characteristics of generations book ended by dates is problematic. Geographical location, wealth, ethnicity, and religion are just some of the factors that will contribute to huge diversity in an individual's outlook, experience, and opinion. However there are often key historical moments that can affect almost all people within the spread of generational dates. The Great Depression of the 1920s, World War II (1939-1945) and the Cold War (1947 – 1991) shaped the attitudes and experience of children growing up

and being educated during those significant historical moments (Taylor, 2003). In contemporary Australia it could be argued that the most prominent historical change that has affected current secondary students is the information & communication technologies (ICT) revolution (Lumby & Fine, 2006).

ICT spans a variety of media and modes of communication. Mobile phones, broadband internet, media players, global connectivity computer games, file sharing, and digital music files have changed the way teen's access, read and share information and knowledge. The emphasis is on constant communication and being in touch with what is new. Teenage users of these technologies capture, share, and create texts for one another (Long, 2006; Oblinger, 2003). Internet sites such as youTube offer instantaneous search results for popular music video and excerpts from television shows amongst a mixed variety of original content. Computer storage and hand-held communication devices allow for the sophisticated collation and sharing of digital files. The Millennial culture is communicative, collectivist and immediate.

I will argue that the division and compression of large texts into smaller bites has had an impact on how some teenage students learn. The digitisation and compression of music and video has constructed a variety of texts removed from their original context and means of distribution. Users of these files are able to search, locate, and download the pieces of a text they desire and view it separated from any establishment or resolution of plot that may be integral to the text's comprehension. The ability to search and locate is immediate, the gratification of the text is also immediate. With a decontextualised immediacy, larger complex narratives may be resisted or ignored in the search for instantaneous delivery of information.

Technology constructs Millennials to look for immediacy. Contemporary communications technologies allow this. Information, results, conversation, and sharing can all happen from a central position multitasked in real time (Rushkoff, 1996). Educators need to acknowledge this and make use of the Millennials way of managing experiential information and apply this capability to developing contemporary learning experiences. This does not mean that learning should solely be delivered using the technological platforms that Millennials have available to them, it means that the training structure, the design and engagement of learning and the anecdotal filler that make a lesson have to have the immediacy, interactivity and multiple levels that a Millennial juggles.

The technique for delivering learning to students with the textual reference points of The Millennials means teachers and course planners must engage with the abbreviated structures that The Millennials are familiar with. Unlike a more traditional approach where foundations are laid and the learning can be built in incremental steps over many weeks, the preferred model for the Millennials is hands-on and instant. To use this attribute effectively the direct benefits of the learning or training activity must be self evident within the activity. The activity undertaken by the student then becomes the teaching and learning moment. The moment is where the structure of soap opera narrative intersects with the learning styles and narratives of the Millennials and gives some clue to

how the student might be engaged. All that is needed is an appropriate course structure that is open ended, flexible, nurturing and allows for applied learning; VCAL is such a course.

Like any institutional construct VCAL still comes with a complex and rigorous reporting structure that requires compliance within fairly strict rules. It is also complex to manage as the award straddles both the TAFE and secondary system meaning two sets of enrolment details and two sets of results need to be coordinated. Yet the 'feminised' structure that is VCAL allows for development and continuity of education for students that otherwise may have rejected the VCE narrative. The values and attributes of VCAL have great similarity with the feminised attributes of the soap opera narrative and the immediacy and application preferred by the Millennials.

Discussion and findings

This paper grapples with three areas of 'difference'. The soap opera narrative is different from the linear narrative, the learning styles of the Millennials are different from that of their teachers, and VCAL is different from the VCE. It is here that the structure within soap opera can be considered in conjunction with The Millennials and the VCAL program. While there are limits to descriptive matrix of Table 1, it is not designed to be a literal interpretation of characteristics or attributes, instead it is designed to look for similarity in difference and provoke thought on how teachers can develop different learning styles and environments for some students to succeed in. The first column of Table 1 lists eight characteristics of the a soap opera genre from Brown (1987). In the second column the characteristics of Millennials are drawn from a variety of sources including: Oblinger (2003), Peters (2005), Raines (2002), and Rushkoff (1996). In the third column the Characteristics of VCAL come from Dymke (2005) and are a distillation of my own experience and the aims of the course as set down in the VCAL Handbook.

Table 1: Comparative characteristics of soap operas, Millennials & VCAL

Characteristics of Soaps (Brown, 1987)	Characteristics of Millennials	Characteristics of VCAL programme
Serial form which resists narrative	Almost instant access to digital files that are often truncated and removed from context. Information received in compact forms.	Multiple students that have resisted the linear narrative and structure of schools, but are able to study in classes where applied learning allows achievable activities.
Multiple characters and plots.	Variety of identities defined by fashion and communication technologies where individuals go by many names.	A wide range of students doing the same VCAL award but with manifest structural differences in course design and skill outcomes.
Use of time which parallels actual time and implies that the action continues to take place whether we watch it or not.	Instantaneous capability to contact others and receive information in real time. Messages left and retrieved at will.	Adherence to the teaching moment where skills can be developed in a single session. A need to adapt to student's mixed attendance patterns and life complexities.
Abrupt segmentation between parts.	Movement between communication technologies, capability to multitask and read and understand SMS text.	VCAL applied learning can quickly move from one training focus to another as teaching instances are self contained and can be adjusted to keep students engaged.
Emphasis on dialogue, problem solving, and intimate conversation.	Open and honest conversations based on emotion and identity.	Applied learning where there is a high level of communication and activity based teaching to engage the student.
Many of the male characters portrayed as 'sensitive men'	Easy non-threatening friendships between boys and girls.	Male teachers need to be good role models that show strength and compassion with their students.
Female characters often professional or otherwise powerful in the world outside the home.	Children of working mothers, see more successful woman in business or leadership roles than ever before.	Female teachers need to show that women can be professionally successful and aspire to leadership positions.
The home, or some other place which functions as a home, is the setting for the show.	Average age of Millennial home leaver expected to be in the early 30's.	A safe and secure classroom must be created where students can study in a supported and non-judgemental environment

Table 1 displays common attributes in soap operas, Millennials, and the VCAL program. The horizontal matrix sorts similar characteristics against each other. The table then becomes a tool to consider how a course may be designed that would better suit the integration of learners into a course structure with specific aims and outcomes. The table allows for a deep consideration in constructing a different model of delivery than that which is currently being used; using a cyclic feminine narrative rather than a linear masculine narrative.

Hex

The literature review and the theoretical concepts associated with this research have actually led to a pilot programme being enacted to test a new model of delivery. The actual place of work where this consideration has been applied has seen masculine narrative dominate for some time as a two semester, usually 1 x18 week and 1 x 17 week, delivery mode with between 5 and 7 subjects delivered and studied per week. The semesters are usually split into four terms that are influenced by public holidays and the secondary school structures. This is a common but by no means a standard for many Victorian TAFES where an annual 35 to 38 week delivery structure has been influenced by traditional institutional/teaching structures and the teaching award, currently the Multi-Employer Certified Agreement (MECA) (AEU, 2003). As explored in this paper, there is doubt that the linear\masculine model is sustainable with contemporary learners. To address the challenges of engaging students that have different learning styles to that of their teachers a new model has been developed by a team of teachers to supplant the previous linear model. This new model has been dubbed the Hex model and was directly influenced by the feminine narrative structure as discussed in this paper. The Hex model is so named because the teaching and learning year is composed of 6 terms of 6 weeks where 6 classes are delivered per week. The word 'hexagon' describes a six sided object.

The Hex model preferences space over time, minimises long drawn out instruction to engage students, cycles teachers among groups so students get new faces and approaches to their learning, achieves as much assessment within class as possible, allows teachers a six week timeout to work in a support role before returning to the classroom, enables students to complete missed units in a shorter time, and builds in the capability to do more one-on-one training in workshops. All these aims meet many of the strategic aims of the institute where it is being trialled and also does not impinge on any conditions in the current teaching award. These operational changes were all found in the feminine narrative structure and have been implemented not just in a VCAL youth program but in Certificate IV and Diploma groups. Students that were pitched the model were keen to try it out.

To describe the full operational structure here would be difficult and a more complete description of the application will appear in another paper. However, using a table as earlier some principals of the soap structure can be viewed alongside the old linear and new cyclic models.

Table 2: Comparative characteristics of soap operas, masculine delivery model, and feminine delivery model

Characteristics of Soaps (Brown, 1987)	Characteristics of a Linear/Masculine Narrative delivery structure	Characteristics of a Cyclic/Feminine Narrative delivery structure
Serial form which resists narrative	2 x 17 or 18 week semesters	6 x 6 week Hexmesters
	Multiple (5+) subjects delivered once per week.	Minimal subjects (3) delivered twice a week.
Multiple characters and plots.	Teachers locked into delivery path for 18 weeks	Teachers rotating through Hexmesters, will change classes or subjects every 6 weeks
	Teachers have singular role that has a teaching and admin mix.	Teachers have varied roles including 1 Hex out of classroom in support role.
	Teachers work in isolation with few opportunities to meet and discuss teaching.	Emphasis on team work where time and space are set aside for minimal of 2 x 2 hour meetings per-week
Use of time which parallels actual time and implies that the action continues to take place whether we watch it or not.	Term breaks where delivery stops	Workshops run between Hex's to give students opportunities to complete assessment or start on next Hex.
Abrupt segmentation between parts.	If student fails a subject may be required to study again for 18 weeks	If student fails a subject will only be required to study again for 6 weeks
Emphasis on dialogue, problem solving, and intimate conversation.	Assessment or exams at end of term	Assessment current within each class
The home, or some other place which functions as a home, is the setting for the show.	Accent on time (start here finish there).	Accent on space (we study here)
	Timetables adjusted between semesters, sometimes between terms. Emphasis is on time and not space	Timetables are set for the whole year and remain fixed. Accent is on space not time

Currently the Hex model is into an early stage of its operation. Evaluation of the model remains a larger project and it is hoped the place of research for a PhD program. While the research design provides some challenges there are measures in place to record outcomes of the Hex model using course completion rates and staff and student satisfaction surveys. These are more for institutional measures but may also provide some basic data for the larger research project.

Conclusion

The review and discussion of literature helped compare and contrast two narrative models, the liner or masculine narrative and the cyclic or non-linear feminine narrative, against the characteristics of contemporary learners. The aim of the textual research was to gain insights that will inspire an alternative pedagogic practice and operational structure to that run in a teaching department for some years.

It is the nature of genre that allows a reconsideration of the relationship between two or more narrative structures. This happens because genre requires conventions and frameworks, identifiable as patterns, to set its boundaries. Policy and compliance driven texts set those boundaries, but it is from within that framework that experimentation and difference can occur. This is because those active within a genre can make choices on what aspects of the genre framework they choose to use, modify or resist. It is from those choices that genres are affected. "For creativity to be generated, then, the creative mind must both discover patterns and follow patterns; both diverge from the already existing and converge into the now existing…genres, as patternings, become necessary to creativity (Devitt, 2004, p.152)."

Therefore the difference between the two narrative structures does not set them apart in permanence; instead a dialogue can be constructed between the two where difference and creativity can spring from the parameters of need. This consideration acknowledges the creative potentialities in institutionalised texts via contemporary genre theory: "Because genre encompasses both standards and variation, constraint and choice, genre encourages and even makes possible creativity…Like variation, creativity inheres in genre (Devitt, 2004, p.151)."

This relates to the work of teaches as a conceptual model for the work that they do. To date, the team that is the focus of this research has applied a liner narrative structure to the articulation of the planning and delivery of VET within a large TAFE institute. This was a generic choice itself, a framework other than that provided from Training Packages was needed to provide visual representation of work and planning. Narrative provided the pattern to lay across the grain of compliance driven training frameworks "…the uniqueness of each utterance and each text means that genre patterns must be conceived from dissimilar texts, the divergent must be seen to converge (Devitt, 2004, p.154)."

The creative potential in a comprehending genre as a concept defining structure, rules, and conventions stems from an ability to say something new with what has been said

before. That is to unpack the necessary elements that make up a genre and rework what is inside into a new way of doing something. It is also the ability to recognise specific utterances within one genre and transfer it to another to create difference, enhancement, or modification.

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