

**The Advanced VET
Practitioner in the new era
of workforce development**

RESOURCES

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1. Identifying the new VET practitioner

Excerpt from *Ideas for Practitioners* (Mitchell 2006)

As VET shifts from being supply-driven to demand-driven, a new practitioner is emerging, to satisfy the increasing expectations of industry clients and individual students. Traditionally, the VET practitioner was supply-driven. This practitioner believed that the best or only learning environment was the classroom – a site for learning far superior to the student’s workplace. In contrast, the new VET practitioner is demand-driven and only provides services that are wanted by enterprises and individuals. This progressive practitioner can customise programs to suit enterprises and personalise learning activities to suit the individual.

The new VET practitioner lets go of the old certainties, like pre-set curriculum and didactic instruction, and develops attributes, attitudes, ideas and techniques that meet the needs of clients. The new practitioner looks outwards at market needs and seeks to meet those needs.

FEATURES OF THE NEW PRACTITIONER

- Views individual students as lifelong learners on career pathways
- Respects the business risks and pressures of enterprise clients
- Appreciates that enterprises need skills to achieve business outcomes
- Understands links between training, HR and workforce development
- Functions effectively within supply chains and skill ecosystems
- Exercises professional judgment in delivery and assessment
- Develops and sustains long-term relationships with clients
- Participates within a team to access colleagues’ specialist skills
- Taps into wider networks for information and resources
- Understands the value of accessing and applying industry research
- Contributes to the development of innovative products and services
- Commits to achieving and maintaining the quality of the profession
- Improves the tools and frameworks of professional practice
- Updates technical skills and industry-specific knowledge
- Copes with complexities and uncertainties about industry skill demands

To address the idiosyncratic demands of each and every student and enterprise client, the VET practitioner needs a raft of new skills: so many, in fact, that many practitioners need to be able to draw on the specialist skills and knowledge of colleagues and partners.

New skills are required by the range of VET practitioners, from those employed by RTOs, either part or full time, to workplace trainers and assessors employed either by an enterprise or by an RTO. New

skills are needed by all VET personnel, from managers to front-line trainers and support staff, in both public and private RTOs.

This profile of the new VET practitioner began to emerge in research published in the last two-three years, and is summarised in *Critical Issues*, which I co-authored with fellow researchers Dr Clive Chappell, Andrea Bateman and Susan Roy. We have built on that emerging portrait of the VET practitioner by conducting further research both in Australia and the UK, as part of a project called ‘Critical issues in teaching, learning and assessment’.

Our project is one of nine activities in a research program managed by NCVET and funded by the Australian, state and territory governments through DEST. The research program, *Supporting vocational education and training providers in building capability for the future*, is being undertaken by a consortium of researchers in 2005-2006.

In the project on critical issues, our first research question was the following: What do clients want from VET? This question drew us into the minds of clients and showed us that more and more enterprises are beginning to understand better their distinctive training needs – for example, for training that is just in time, or just for me, or just enough.

Our second research question flowed on from the first, as follows: What skills do VET practitioners need to service this multitude of client needs? In currently analysing the data, a picture began to form of a new VET practitioner who has a sophisticated understanding of how adults learn in different ways and in different settings, and of how skill development underpins business outcomes for enterprises and career development for individuals.

Questions and topics for discussion

1. Which features of the “new practitioner” do you see in your colleagues?
2. Which features of the “new practitioner” describe you?
3. To what extent are you demand-driven?

2. TAFE lifts industry performance

Excerpt from *Ideas for Practitioners* (Mitchell 2006)

One Australian industry that needs to withstand intense global competition is the food manufacturing industry. However, in attempting to provide world-class products, food manufacturers face challenges such as maintaining a high quality level and overcoming the shortage.

New ways to address the demanding training needs of food manufacturers have been developed by the Innoven Food Industry Centre within the Goulburn Ovens Institute of TAFE in northern Victoria. Innoven's Manager for Manufacturing, Sandy Powell, explains: "If training is not going to get performance benefits for a manufacturer, then they simply won't do it. So Innoven's not interested in delivering training unless we've identified how it's going to help the manufacturer."

Innoven's focus on client performance is part of a broader Victorian Government plan to keep Victorian industries competitive internationally and to build the workforce's knowledge and skills. Innoven is one of eighteen TAFE specialist centres established with seed funding from the Victorian Government that are helping to build Victorian TAFE's capability to meet the skill needs of industry.

Innoven's new approach to training has netted it partnerships with some of Australia's biggest players in the food industry such as Nestle, Kraft, SPC Ardmona and Tatura Milk Industries.

MODELS FOR INDUSTRY TRAINING

Traditional model: provider-centric

- Advertise the attributes of the training organisation
- Promote the availability of accredited training
- Deliver 'one size fits all' training in the classroom
- Produce graduates who may or may not be able to improve their enterprise

Innoven's model: enterprise-centric and learner-centric

- Research the industry and each individual enterprise
- Establish and maintain relationships with enterprise managers
- Determine each enterprise's needs and issues
- Identify individual learner's needs within each enterprise
- Provide teaching and assessment in the workplace
- Assist individual workers to obtain relevant accredited qualifications
- Deliver a business improvement for the enterprise

Innoven's Powell sees the new TAFE approach as a business-to-business relationship: "While business managers recognise TAFE as a provider to the community for training, we also want managers to see TAFE as a provider of services to industry beyond traditional training, by jointly working to deliver measurable performance outcomes," says Powell.

“We find that industry will invest in training and pay fee-for-service if we get the relationship right and value add continuously,” says Powell. “Industry is happy to invest in training that has a measurable return on investment.”

A leading dairy manufacturer in the Goulburn Valley has achieved excellent productivity improvements after implementing Innoven’s customised training model. Tatura Milk’s manufacturing training partnership with Innoven reduced waste in the cream cheese production and provides a best practice model for its staff, for consistency of output and quality.

“Cream cheese sells for several thousand dollars a tonne, so reducing the wastage rate by even a few percent makes a big difference,” says Troy Guest, Tatura Cream Cheese Unit Manager. Innoven helped improve Tatura’s cream cheese manufacturing process and reduced the amount of downgrade product to less than 1%. “It’s the best quality result we have seen in years,” says Guest.

Tatura Milk’s General Manager Operations, Jeff Roberts, adds that TAFE’s Innoven Food Industry Centre enabled the transfer of knowledge between new and existing employees, “to provide real business outcomes”.

Not surprisingly, around 95% of Innoven’s training is on-the-job learning, not traditional full-time training at the TAFE Institute. One of Innoven’s trainers is “embedded” within Nestle, delivering training at Nestle’s premises in Sydney and in Melbourne.

Innoven’s success, according to Executive Officer Paul Culpan, is due to its ability to tie business performance to accredited courses and to design training for the individual task level. “Managers have more confidence in training once they can see how it links to a measurable production improvement,” said Culpan. “Innoven’s services are driven by our interviews with senior managers in the food industry. Everything we do is geared to industry needs.”

Questions and topics for discussion

1. How does a focus by an enterprise on “performance benefits” influence the way training is provided?
2. What types of skills and knowledge are needed by provider teams that work directly with enterprises?
3. Discuss the differences between the traditional model of industry training and the Innoven model (see box on previous page).

3. Gone fishing for skills in the real world

Excerpt from *Innovation and Entrepreneurship in VET* (Mitchell 2007)

To support the fishing industry in Western Australia, Challenger TAFE's fisheries team members in Fremantle contribute long hours of unpaid work in deploying and retrieving the Fish Aggregating Device (FAD).

This device is a buoy which attracts fish, when located at particular sites off the shore of Perth, along a trench where the water depth suddenly drops from 200m to 1000m.

Each year, six FADs are deployed and retrieved by the Challenger team. Retrieving the FADs at the end of summer is particularly challenging, requiring the use of high level skills. The dolphin and samson fish attracted by the FADs are highly prized by local game fishermen, as well as by increasing numbers of recreational fishermen from overseas.

The FADs were initially put in place to cater for local recreation fishermen, but new commercial opportunities are emerging. "There is a burgeoning thing happening for the boat charter industry," explained staff member Chris Fenwick. "The samson fish is a very strong fighting fish, a good sport fish, and what we are finding is that people are coming from overseas, especially Japanese tourists, to fish for samson fish."

"We work hand in hand with the Perth Game Fishing Club. We provide the boats, they pay for the fuel. TAFE is stepping into the community," said Fenwick.

Learning the industry way

A goal for Fenwick and his colleague John Pozzi in deploying the FADs is to integrate students' learning with this community service work: "We involve the students in the retrieval of the FADs, as it is a good way for students to look at the different use of equipment on a trawler, like winches," said Fenwick.

"The certificate 11 is directed at deck hands and some of our students will go into charter boats. So we teach them to catch the fish on rods and lines, so they know what tourist game fishermen experience. We show them the equipment needed by game fishermen, which is different to that used by recreational fishermen. We show the students so that when they get a job on a charter boat they have a good background."

To replicate the experience of game fishing, the Challenger staff target particular fish: "Mainly we're after dolphin fish because the kids can catch one, get it on to the boat, get the hooks out, get it into the slurry: it is a good fish to catch," said Pozzi

Fenwick added that students continue to learn after they catch the fish: "Challenger TAFE also has a seafood processing operation: we've invested money in a local factory and we have a classroom there, and our seafood processing lecturer based there sometimes takes product from us and on-processes it, and the students can follow the process. Students learn not only how to catch fish but about how to

present fish for sale. We're always looking for things to use in the training. We're doing things with the industry and the pay-off comes later."

Fenwick and Pozzi place a strong emphasis on a sustainable industry and valuing stewardship. "We are very much industry driven in what we do," said Fenwick. Their involvement with the FADs is based on their shared philosophy that in "doing things with the industry ... the pay-off comes later". The selfless "pay-off" they seek is a sustainable industry offering viable and safe careers for their trainees.

Kingsley Waterhouse, Challenger's director of the WA Maritime Training Centre and manager of Pozzi and Fenwick, is committed to maintaining this interface between TAFE, industry and community: "FAD is an ongoing commitment."

SERIOUS FISHING OUT WEST

The fishing industry is very significant for WA's domestic and export market:

- "Western rock lobsters contribute over \$500m or 25% of the \$2b annual income from the fishing industry, nationally," said Fenwick.
- Besides dolphin and samson fish, game fish like tuna and marlin that are caught around the FADs are the basis of a large commercial industry in WA.
- "One blue tuna, 80kg and in prime condition, could get \$80,000: one fish could pay for your whole trip," said Pozzi.

Learning from the real world

Classroom training provided the basics, said Pozzi, "tying knots, splicing a rope, net work, craypot work, those sorts of things", but taking the students out in the boat is the key to new learning. "Once we get out there they know what's going on, they start to see these things in action. You can talk about a craypot in the classroom, but if one of these comes flying across the deck they learn in a hurry. If something went wrong out there, they'd learn in a hurry."

Pozzi believes that students learn best from the real world: "Basically the classroom learning is very theoretical, but if you jump on a boat you have a real good look in the real world. It's hands on. We find most of our students perform best under those situations. Put a bit of rope in their hands and they get going, but ask them to write an essay and they're lost."

Learning on the boat is appropriate because the daily work of a fisherman is very practical, said Pozzi: "The job itself is very hands-on. You need to be that outdoor type to survive in the industry. If you were in the cray-fishing industry, right now you'd probably be getting up at 3am and pulling pots to lunchtime every day."

Pozzi finds an effective strategy with students is to create a friendly competition on board: "I always run a competition onboard for the 'champion fisherman of the day', and we measure the fish and weigh them, and whichever kid does the best becomes 'The Man' for that day."

Memorable learning

Capturing the local samson fish is a particular achievement: "Just getting the bloody things to the surface is hard work: your arms are falling off," joked Pozzi. "The reason they are called samson fish is because they are so strong. They put up a fight. Each one can be a fifteen minute battle. You know where your arms are by the end of the day," said Fenwick.

"It is the same with the FADs," said Pozzi: "Whether we're dropping them in or pulling them up, once you've done the job the whole boat seems to lift. You've done a good day's work and this has been a good thing. It's an intrinsic thing."

Students find it memorable to catch a dolphin fish near the FADs, said Pozzi: “If a kid goes out there and hooks on to a dolphin fish, he’s going to remember that experience for a long, long time. These things tail dance and jump and dive: you’ve got everything happening, plus us yelling at them to do this and that. At the end of that day, when the kid’s walking off the boat with a big fish in their bag, he’s pretty happy.”

“He’s got a bit of a tale to go and tell mum about too,” added Fenwick. “And the next time we’re talking to them about rods and reels and looking after them, he’s now starting to listen. There’s a reason behind it,” noted Pozzi.

FEATURES OF THE NEW VET PRACTITIONER

- networks with both the community and industry
- develops long-term partnerships with industry
- aligns training with industry’s employment needs
- commits to the sustainability of the industry
- delivers and assesses learning in industry settings
- introduces students to the industry’s supply chain
- encourages students’ lifelong learning within an industry
- prepares students to obtain a job, not just a qualification
- collaborates within a team to access colleagues’ expertise
- ensures training is conducted in a safe environment
- pursues high quality learning resources and activities

Quality standards

Fenwick has a life-long passion for quality: “Having grown up in the industry, I know the industry demands quality. For the whole thing to work the training has to be good, the equipment has to be good, so you try and keep things in good condition. It all has to work. If it breaks down through lack of maintenance you are not going to catch much.”

Safety requires high standards, said Fenwick: “Due to the nature of the game, which is dangerous – the fishing industry has the highest number of deaths compared to other industries – your work standard has to be high. It is a very competitive world, so your standards have to be high.”

Questions and topics for discussion

1. In what ways are John Pozzi and Chris Fenwick innovative?
2. What do you think motivates Pozzi and Fenwick?
3. Which of the features of the new VET practitioner, in the box above, could describe practitioners in your organisation?

4. The emergence of superior practitioners

John Mitchell's Inside VET column in *Campus Review*, 28 Aug 2007

What is special about VET's leading practitioners?

Over the last few years this column has promoted the concept of the new VET practitioner who is driven by the demands of industry and the community and is capable of customising training programs in response to client needs. Several times this year the column has placed the spotlight on an exceptional version of this practitioner, who could be described as the advanced VET practitioner.

The new VET practitioner is demand-driven, while the advanced VET practitioner has extraordinary capabilities for building client relationships, ensuring customer responsiveness and supporting flexible delivery.

This superior strand of the VET practitioner deserves public attention because its representatives are challenging previous concepts of the limits of capability of the VET practitioner.

One of the practitioners profiled this year who fits this advanced category is Churchill Fellow recipient and current PhD candidate Terri Simpkin, the Hobart-based CEO of a micro training provider called Catalystdevelopment and a consultancy company Mischief Business Engineering.

Another exceptional VET practitioner profiled this year is Barbara McPherson, the managing director of a boutique training provider, River Murray Training, which came to public notice when awarded the national small training provider of the year in 2004.

Simpkin and McPherson share the characteristics of an advanced practitioner with Lesley Wemyss, director of Crestfern Pty Ltd, a small provider in Queensland and previously a finalist in the national training awards. Wemyss has managed Crestfern since 1992, but over the last five years has shifted her focus from the booming Gold Coast region to servicing remote mining companies and indigenous communities in far north Queensland.

Like Simpkin and McPherson, Wemyss offers her clients a suite of inter-related services, including training, assessment, research, consulting, resource development and project management. And like her two colleagues, Wemyss has a highly successful business despite operating in thin markets in regional areas. All three focus on opportunities in the market and skilfully avoid obstacles. All three effectively blend innovative approaches to education with business acumen.

Totally demand-driven

A typical week for Wemyss is to take two-three flights from Townsville to remote mining sites in far north Queensland. In one week recently, to deliver training programs within enterprises, she took six flights and drove 1,000km, but she has no complaints: "I love what I do and I mix with some of the most genuine people who work in these areas. People in industry are keen to train."

Over the last two years Wemyss has worked closely with BHP Billiton to develop a health and safety management system for their staff in the Bowen Basin, a business unit involving nine coal mines, to manage the health and safety of their contractors. Additionally, she has developed a short course on auditing skills to be run in conjunction with this health and safety process, to be delivered to the workers who manage contractors.

She is also working with the mining company Zinifex to enhance the skills of their onsite trainers and assessors. She began with this company over ten years ago, at a remote mine called Century Mine.

With an honours degree in biogeography and a five other postgraduate qualifications, plus accreditation as an assessor and auditor, to work effectively in challenging locations Wemyss also draws on her personal experiences: “I have a country background, being born in Mudgee NSW, and that still influences many of values and attitudes to life and work.”

Wemyss is committed to making a contribution to the wider VET sector. For instance, her collaboration with BHP Billiton resulted in being awarded funding by the Australian Flexible Learning Framework in 2006 for the development of an e-learning tool for use in industry. The project produced blended e-learning packages in a number of competencies including working at heights and working in confined spaces. The e-learning package enables workers who engage in these work practices to access a consistent process for recognition of their knowledge and skills.

In 2007 she was granted funding by Reframing the Future to facilitate professional development for trainers and assessors working in the complex industries in regional Queensland. Wemyss believes that “industry trainers and assessors from the complex industries are already drowning in training and assessment demands, and the pressures of skills shortages”.

This industry network project is giving the participants “a lifeline to rise above their current situation and have time to reflect on the need to think smarter, value the skills that are in existence in their workplace and commence an evolution into a higher level of training and assessing methodologies and innovative strategies in partnership with other practitioners in the same situation.”

Being industry focused and demand driven is not new for Wemyss: “We only work with industry, we are totally demand driven, and have been for the last 10 years. We do not advertise at all, all our business is via referral.”

“I do a lot of listening to the client, I deliver what they need. We value-add to the businesses we work with, we give 150%. We believe in what we do, but we never take for granted who puts the food in our mouths.”

ADVANCED CHARACTERISTICS

Characteristics of advanced VET practitioners, such as Lesley Wemyss, Terri Simpkin and Barbara McPherson, include:

- A breadth of experience in industry, refreshed by ongoing research and networking
- A deep knowledge of niche areas within their industry
- The ability to offer services both as a consultant and as a training provider
- The capacity to design, deliver and improve the use of flexible learning strategies
- A focus on linking training to an enterprise’s strategic planning and innovation
- The ability to design training that benefits both the individual and their employer
- A skill for positioning enterprise training so that it supports workforce development
- A track record of personalising training for each and every client
- A personal commitment to extensive and ongoing professional development
- An active involvement in professional associations such as ACPET
- A commitment to continuous improvement of their provider organisation
- An ability to develop a sustainable training business despite thin markets
- A positive focus on the bountiful opportunities in the VET market
- A determination to positively influence the VET sector

5. Characteristics of change agents

John Mitchell's Inside VET column in *Campus Review*, 17 June 2008

Some capabilities required of change agents are below the surface.

In possibly most training providers in Australia, there is a supervisor, head teacher or similar person who is highly valued by the executives in the organisation, because of that person's ability to enhance the professional practices of others.

At the moment in VET, that person is most likely focused on changing the practices of colleagues in relation to employability skills, flexible learning, workforce development or the recognition of prior learning.

These change agents are vital to the continual improvement of training providers and we need to know more about their capabilities and whether these capabilities can be learnt by others.

An example of one such advanced practitioner is Michael Callahan, program co-ordinator, recognition, training and assessments, at Northern Melbourne Institute of TAFE.

A year ago his responsibilities were focused mostly on assisting his colleagues with their teaching in the carpentry section. However, during 2008 Michael has quickly become prominent across his state, delivering presentations around Victoria about recognition issues. Also, he is the newly elected chair for the Victorian recognition network.

"I now have a lot of exchange of information and sharing of resources to help out colleagues, both within the college and from other TAFEs," says Callahan.

There are multiple reasons for Michael's sudden rise to prominence, including his active participation in various professional networks. Another reason, he believes, is the confidence he developed as a participant last year in the change agency program conducted by Reframing the Future. As that program's mentor, I observed Michael's development in 2007.

Callahan believes his new capabilities include his understanding of why he wants to initiate change, his ability "to gather support for the change from both senior management and subordinates", his appreciation of his organisation's culture, and his willingness to consider the impact of change on all the players involved.

Five characteristics

From my observations, Callahan has humbly understated his capabilities. We can better appreciate Callahan's capabilities using insights provided by theorists from the transitional change school who emphasise the psychological factors affecting change, such as people's beliefs, values, hopes and defence mechanisms.

First, Callahan displays considerable emotional stamina. "You need to be there for the long haul," he

says, in contrast to those who hope that change might be a quick fix and a rational process.

Second, he is able to contend with negative feelings both in himself and in his colleagues, as normal reactions to change. Callahan says that he has become “more mindful of his own and others’ prejudices and experiences and the possible hindrances these might cause you”.

He is surprisingly candid about his own tendency to negativity. “Having spent some fifteen years at TAFE, I have collected a lot of baggage and constantly find myself opening the bags to spend time with the ghosts of bad experiences. My attitudes and relationships with management are founded unfortunately on a history of mistrust.”

Third, a transitional change agent like Callahan deliberately creates in the workplace a learning environment that is not perfect, but it is sufficiently well thought through to encourage people to interact about real problems. For example, Callahan became aware of a difference of view between management and teaching staff and accepted it was part of his job to work through it, not ignore it.

“There was an expectation that the recognition assessments would simply be absorbed by teaching staff, but clearly management’s view was not supported by staff. Negotiating this path was and still is a difficult one.”

Fourth, the transitional change agent courageously positions her or himself in the thick of the action. “I needed the courage to tackle areas that previously I would have shied away from.

“It’s a bit like the real estate agent’s chant – position, position, position. You need to be in a position to inform about prospective change, why the change is occurring, the anticipated effects of that change and the people involved in the change process.”

Fifth, the transitional change agent believes in human development, through public and proactive strategies. “Only through widespread, direct and transparent communication can you expect to succeed, or at least give yourself the best chance of success with the change required,” says Callahan.

Change agents like Callahan perform critical roles in training organisations, by creating a space for working through tensions and giving their colleagues sufficient time to develop new skills. Such capable change agents deserve acknowledgement and emulation.

CHANGE AGENT CAPABILITIES

- Draws on emotional stamina
- Contends with negative reactions
- Creates space for staff learning
- Positions self in the thick of action
- Believes in human development

6. The making of the VET practitioner

Excerpt from *Innovation and Entrepreneurship in VET* (Mitchell 2007)

An uncommon question in VET is how long does it take for a VET practitioner to be well prepared for the job.

The more common questions are what skills and knowledge does a VET practitioner need and how can these be packaged into a formal program such as the certificate IV in training and assessment (TAA) or various programs for VET managers.

Recent search I have undertaken confirms that no one learning program will help the VET practitioner develop all the skills and knowledge required in the job. In fact, a structured program such as the TAA certificate may end up being a useful but secondary contributor to the development of the VET practitioner.

Research shows that the new ways of working for the VET practitioner are becoming increasingly complex. In this dynamic environment, progressive RTOs are providing the practitioner with multiple opportunities over an extended period of time to acquire the vast range of skills and knowledge needed to function effectively. However, it is curious that very few RTOs specifically acknowledge the many years it takes for a practitioner to become well prepared for the role.

My interest in this issue of the time required was sparked several years ago by a point made by the Sydney author Neville Symington that it takes eight years for a psychotherapist to be trained. Eight years of full time training, growth and practice. A VET practitioner is not a psychotherapist, but if it takes eight years to become a psychotherapist, I asked myself how long does it take to become a VET practitioner?

A VET practitioner is not a psychotherapist, but if it takes eight years to become a psychotherapist, I asked myself how long does it take to become a VET practitioner?

It is clear that VET practitioner learns from a raft of activities, for some considerable time after being hired as a teacher or promoted as a manager. This is understood by leading RTOs such as Challenger TAFE in Perth which not only conducts a program called ‘supporting the new VET practitioner’ but has also introduced campus-based mentors to help more experienced staff to enhance their teaching and learning strategies.

The Photography Studies College in Melbourne actively encourages its staff to stay connected to and learn from their industry, such as fashion or sport photography, and TAFE Tasmania offers its many work teams the opportunity to self-evaluate their development over an extended period, sometimes up to twelve months.

Managers can also keep learning. The Australasian College of Natural Therapies in Sydney encourages the managers it recruits from outside the VET sector to undertake some teaching, “to see life from the learner’s perspective”, says General Manager Danny Bielik.

TAFE NSW Northern Sydney Institute is establishing a network of coaches for its managers and head teachers, through a community of practice funded by Reframing the Future. Margaret Dix, manager staff learning and development, explains the benefits: “Coaching helps practitioners identify their own strengths but also informs their professional practice in areas like assessment, RPL, targeted learning strategies and building professional judgement.”

Accepting that the making of the VET practitioner takes some years will encourage new practices. For example, those responsible for staff development within RTOs might look to negotiate five year learning plans for each newly appointed or promoted staff member, including a strong component of informal learning. Dix is modelling this at Northern Sydney Institute: “We recommend a number of informal avenues for developing skill when teachers and managers are preparing their individual PD plans. These informal strategies include shadowing, observations and professional conversations.”

For the making of the VET practitioner, five-eight years might turn out to be the minimum time required.

YEARS OF INFORMAL LEARNING

Over a period of years, the newly appointed VET teacher or newly promoted manager can develop skills and knowledge from a range of activities outside of structured courses:

- learning from experience as a teacher or manager
- solving problems with colleagues, customers and clients
- reflecting during professional conversations
- collaborating in work teams
- participating in networks and communities of practice
- benefiting from the advice of mentors and coaches
- shadowing more experienced colleagues
- observing good practice in industry
- developing innovative educational services.

Questions and topics for discussion

1. After you joined VET, how did you develop your professional skills and knowledge?
2. How many years did it take you to develop those skills and knowledge to the point where you considered yourself fully trained for the work you were undertaking?
3. What learning strategies do you use to remain innovative?