

Engaging VET Practitioners Forum RPL – Done Well

Professional Judgment - the heart of VET practice

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National Project Director of Reframing the Future, Suzy McKenna reports that the idea that professional judgment lies at the heart of VET practice is strongly supported by VET practitioners.

In August, over 160 VET practitioners attended 'Professional Judgment in VET' Forums' in Townsville, Newcastle, Melbourne and Perth. The forums considered complex issues in teaching, learning and assessment in a Training Package environment.

Forum participants were presented with think pieces by Dr Anne Jones, Andrea Bateman, Dr John Mitchell and Dr Russell Docking and engaged in professional conversations about practice.

Anne Jones described her research on the making of assessment judgments by VET educators working in a variety of training settings and industry areas:

What I found ... was that VET educators were out there wading warily but skilfully through the swamp of professional practice. Assessment judgements are not always simple. It is clear that individual educators and teams make judgements within a personal and an historical context and that a range of problems needs to be solved during the assessment process.

She concluded that the assessment judgments of VET educators are characterised by "preparedness, collegiality, working to rules, seriousness of purpose, dealing with predicaments and obligations and pragmatism".

VET PROFESSIONALS

- Start with a base of vocational and educational knowledge.
- Learn more on the job, especially through specific cases.
- Incorporate publicly available knowledge with their personal practice.
- Use tacit knowledge to read a situation.
- Reflect on practice as a basis for making difficult judgment calls.
- Make sound judgments based on experiences of similar cases.
- Do the best they can.

A. Jones 2005

Andrea Bateman argued that assessment needed to be integrated with teaching and learning:

What we must never forget is that assessment ... is about a judgment of a learners' knowledge and skills and ultimately the extent of their learning. Assessment ... can be diagnostic, formative and summative. Assessment in its broadest sense needs to be part of the teaching and learning program/plan and should be integrated to provide critical information and feedback to the trainers and the learners.

John Mitchell made the case that practitioners need to exercise multiple judgments to function effectively in the complex VET environment. Practitioners need to make continual judgments about how to customise training, how to meet the needs of learners with different learning styles and preferences, how to satisfy individual learners' needs for support, and how to meet the needs of workplace learners as well as industry clients.

Key themes that emerged from the forums included:

- the importance of seeing VET practice as a profession and VET practitioners as professionals;
- the need to achieve a balance between AQTF compliance and creativity in teaching, learning and assessment practices;
- the need to develop new knowledge and practice - about using judgment in VET - by integrating research and experience through professional conversations.

Feedback following each forum indicated that this was a valuable developmental experience. Participants felt their professional practice was validated, some for the first time. Following is a selection of comments from participants in the first forum in Townsville:

What new things will you do when you return to your workplace?

- Review how agile we are as an RTO and review our assessment moderation process.
- Develop more innovative and diverse learning tools.
- Assessment will be integrated into the teaching and learning process.
- Explore the topics in greater detail with my colleagues.

Responses to other feedback questions included:

- Customising my training tools and activities for individual clients is OK.
- All institutes are facing similar challenges and opportunities.
- I am competent to judge and not to fear audits!
- Professional judgment is a necessary part of any educative process.
- The organisation has to be prepared to support our desire to improve practice.

One feature of the forums was the establishment of Special Interest Groups, based around specific topics, including: 'Managing consistency and conflict in professional judgment', 'Professional development strategies for professional judgment' and 'Professional judgment and workplace training'. These Groups are developing their thinking and practice further via online forums. Findings by the Groups will be incorporated into sessions at the national 'New Ways of Working in VET Forum 2' in Adelaide, 3 - 4 November, 2005.

A CD ROM developed from the materials used at the Professional Judgment Forums can be ordered from www.reframingthefuture.net These can be used by RTOs for their own staff development.