Virtual Team Site – Supporting Teachers

Bronwyn McCallum and Dawn Mullane
TAFE NSW Hunter Institute
bronwyn.mccallum@tafensw.edu.au and dawn.mullane@tafensw.edu.au

Abstract

History

Prior to 2005 Hunter Institute’s newly appointed teachers and their coordinator had been relying on the Outlook calendar, email, face to face meetings and the University Blackboard site to communicate and manage communication relevant to their teacher education program and their new role in TAFE NSW.

In 2005 we established a Virtual Team site for new teachers in an attempt to support our geographically spread new staff in their teaching and learning.

The site has been extremely successful, anecdotal feedback has been positive and all new teachers are using it on a regular basis. As of 19 May, the new teachers had scored an average of 118 hits to the site. This was achieved in approximately 14 weeks and indicates an average of 8 visits to the site in a week. The maximum hits by a teacher were 229 and the minimum was 11. The large differentiation in number of hits indicates differing needs of those undertaking Teacher Education and those already teacher trained.

Features

Some of the features of the Virtual Team site are the ‘Ask an Expert!’ discussion forum and ‘Ask the Coordinator’ chat area where Faculty Directors and the coordinator develop a relationship with the newly appointed staff, respond to any questions they post to this site, refer them on to other Institute experts where appropriate, add interesting web links and facilitate discussion on teaching and learning etc. The site also features useful web links, a calendar of events relating to staff training, university study and teacher training, an announcements section and photos and details of each new staff member.
Benefits

This site provides information access rather than distribution (pull not push). Staff are able to access a time line which will always be visible on a shared calendar. Milestones are celebrated with planned f2f programs/session. Staff find that they can self manage with minimal facilitation, fostering the adoption of an attitude of “if in doubt, communicate”.

The Hunter Institute is able to harness the enthusiasm of newly appointed teachers and provide an opportunity for the further development of their teaching and learning through both formal means and a virtual community of practice. The development and facilitation of the Virtual Team site (share point portal) continues to provide teaching and learning support.
Introduction

Using a SWOT analysis, the New Teacher/Teacher Education Coordinator developed a strategy to further enhance the support of newly appointed teachers and their development opportunities.

The positive implications of adopting Virtual Teaming in general for the Hunter Institute were identified as:

- Ease of information dissemination
- More $ effective
- Underpins organisation’s philosophy
- Breeds the ‘desired’ culture
- Requirement for less external support
- Builds a sense of community/support ‘TEAMS’ program
- Grows leaders of innovation

The positive implications of adopting virtual teaming for individual newly appointed teachers were identified as:

- Support network
- Online experience
- Opportunities to learn
- Helps keep balance
- Less travel time
- Creates a sense of belonging early
- Easy access to information
- Sharing of resources
- Fosters innovation

Key themes

- The thinking and reflective teacher
- Managers supporting teaching and learning
- Tools and strategies for teaching and learning

Sub themes

- Technology assisted learning
- Blended learning
- Assessment
Conclusion

A SOARR analysis has been used to evaluate the project. The project has had many successful outcomes and is exposed to continuous evaluation and improvement.

Virtual teaming is becoming a valuable communication option within the Hunter Institute. With the growth of confidence and skill development (including improved IT skills) virtual teams can become an operational option for future and existing teams. The prospect of future virtual teams having experienced players increases with the introduction of staff to the site during their first experience of learning as new teachers. Existing staff are also exposed to the benefits. As the Hunter Institute’s team program continues to grow, virtual teaming can be integrated into the way teams communicate and add value to their operation.

An organisational learning culture of androgogy therefore moves to one of heutagogy.