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**ALIA National Library & Information Technicians Conference
2007**

Classification: Teaching and Learning Environments

Concurrent Session 2:

**The LIS Training Library at Canberra Institute of
Technology**

“Competency is a broader concept than just the ability to perform work place tasks” (ANTA, 2004 cited in Azemikhah, 2005, p.4). The High Level Review of Training packages (2004, cited in Azemikhah, 2005, p.3) notes three essential dimensions of competence; knowledge, skills & performance. These dimensions need to be “conceptually developed in the minds of learners based on the constituents of competence (underpinnings and attributes), and physically developed and perfected by performance (based on performance criteria) resulting in a balanced hands-and-mind’s equilibrium” (Azemikhah, 2005, p.4)

Launched on the 14th September 2006, the CIT Training Library enables LIS students to develop the three essential dimensions of competence, Knowledge, Skills & Performance, with a flexible, student centered and work based focus, delivered within the holistic environment of a simulated working Library.

Pedagogical Background

Until recently CIT hosted the Australian Network of Practice Firms, and the Training Library concept has been loosely based on the Practice Firm experience used successfully to deliver business competencies over many years (3000 practice firms exist worldwide).

“A practice firm is a realistic simulation of a business with all of its administrative functions...as a matter of fact; everything resembles reality except the actual production and exchange of money”
(McNickle, 2000, p.5).

When developing the Training Library LIS teachers borrowed where appropriate from the Practice Firm training concept, but did not join the network given that we did not deal with regular commercial transactions and did not have formal business partners with whom we could trade.

Smith and Blake (2006) in their recent NCVET ‘At a glance’ paper note a strong shift in good teaching and learning research and practice in Vocational Education and training (VET). Key messages in this shift can be identified as:

- Viewing learners as clients and individuals
- Moving to an active and meaningful construction of knowledge
- Actively involving learners in the learning process
- Focusing learning on the ‘whole person’ and learning how to learn
- Integrating formal and informal learning
- Developing learning partnerships and ‘communities of practice’
- Emphasising hands-on, experiential and self-directed learning
- Integrating ‘real’ contexts in learning; workplace learning
- Assessment aimed to enhance learning and empower learners
(Smith and Blake, 2006).

The development of the Training Library very much reflects this shift in best practice VET pedagogy. This shift can be seen as essentially one from a directive, transmission based 'instructivist' teacher centred approach, to a 'constructivist' approach where learners are seen as participants in an ongoing journey, drawing on existing knowledge and constructing individual understandings from context dependent, socio-cultural learning experiences. Many Training Packages indicate that assessment of competency should ideally be undertaken in a work place or a simulated work environment, aimed to reflect both the holistic work place reality and its inherent difficulties and complexities. The ability to work with ambiguity is becoming an important life skill, especially for workers in the knowledge sector. Work place pedagogical simulation can be seen to include; task performance, task management/supervision, dealing with workplace irregularities/contingencies, team work, and the ability to transfer competence from one situation to new contexts (Moy et al., 2000 cited in Azemikhah, 2005).

Given this background, the Training Library can then be seen as a developing simulated work place where learners construct knowledge, and develop skills from the circumstances in which they have experienced that learning, which is then reinforced by their past and ongoing experiences. That is, a simulated work environment based on socio-cultural constructivist educational theory. Learners and teachers work together to jointly construct meaning (knowledge, skills and performance).

Development

The LIS Training Library at CIT commenced as the brain child of the Head of IT, Michael Clough, who was looking for an innovative way to deal with class size/budget issues in the Library Studies area, and control burgeoning small collections of texts in teacher's offices. From this initial concept has grown a Training Library facility which both meets the resource collection needs of the new Center for ICT and the educational requirements of students in Library and Information Services. The Training Library can only be described as a continuous 'work in progress' as is appropriate given its constructivist pedagogical underpinnings. The Development of the facility coincided with the implementation of the revised Training Package for Museum and Library/Information Services (CUL04) and the development of the CIT Advanced Diploma in Library/Information Services. Although useful from an administrative view, this reality resulted in a very heavy workload for LIS teachers who have necessarily taken a staged incremental approach when implementing curriculum within the Training Library. Starting with Certificate II/III and IV offerings, a large component of the delivery of the CIT Library and Information Services suite of programs will progressively be implemented within the Training Library environment.

Sponsors

Early on it was realized that sponsorship would be essential to the development of the Training Library. An initial start up grant from the CIT Faculty of Business and Information Technology was quickly expended on capital works and meetings were held with a number of potential commercial industry sponsors. 3M Library systems has been particularly generous with the donation of a Security System and staff expertise & time, and retain an ongoing relationship with the Training Library. 3M staff have recently been providing demonstrations of RFID technology solutions to CIT LIS students. Raeco Australia also arranged to supply a Reference/Circulation desk and other essentials at a reduced cost to the Training Library. ALIA has been very supportive as has the current ALIA President, Roxanne Missingham. Local ACT libraries have been generous with donations for the print collection. The CIT Library & learning Centre has also been supportive with negotiating access to the Horizon ILMS, ensuring database subscription access and print donations. Ongoing sponsorship, however, remains an issue given that the Training Library does not as yet have a designated recurrent budget line.

Facilities

Collections:

The training Library maintains a print collection of around 1000 monograph and 45 serial titles covering the disciplines of Librarianship and Information Technology. Many volumes have been donated by ICT teaching staff and ACT libraries, whilst a number of current ready reference works have been purchased. The Training Library also has access to bibliographic and full-text database subscriptions maintained by the CIT Library & learning Centre. There is currently no ongoing budget line for acquisitions and maintaining publication currency remains a problematic issue. However, funds are made available on an ad hoc basis to top up the collection. Recently, an order was placed for \$1300 worth of reference works. It is anticipated that this topping up will continue without any firm commitment.

ILMS & Bibliographic Tools:

The Training Library currently maintains a training version of the Horizon 7.0 ILMS and has access to Libraries Australia modules via an agreement with the NLA. In addition, Department funds and student materials fees have been used to fund specialist online subscriptions including; LC Cataloguers Desk Top, Classification web including LC Subject Headings, Web Dewey, Global Books in Print, and Ulrich's Web.

Workstations:

The Training Library (created by renovating an existing class room and laboratory) has both a public user services area with 20 workstations for accessing the catalogue, databases and internet and a technical services workroom with 7 workstations which can also double as a theory area for small classes when appropriate.

In addition a purpose built display cabinet, a small discussion conference room table, and a purpose built collection maintenance area make up major Training Library facilities. Scanners, a binder and a laminator are also available as are two book presses.

Digital photos of the Training Library in operation can be viewed at the CIT Training Library wiki at <http://cit-training-library.wikispaces.com/>

Inter Institutional Links

In September 2006 the CIT LIS Teaching Team visited Charles Darwin University in the Northern Territory. The Purpose of this Study Tour included:

- Discussion with CDU Library Studies teaching staff.
- Studying and comparing the operation of the proposed CDU Training Library with the CIT Training Library.
- Comparing the CDU Library Studies Programs to the CIT programs.
- Visiting NT libraries across various sectors

Agreed Outcomes from the study tour included:

- Investigation of the exchange of ILL & Document Delivery between the CIT & CDU Training Libraries when operational.
- Investigation of purchasing ARIEL document delivery hardware & software to facilitate Document delivery between the Training libraries
- Investigation of the exchange of Reference requests between the CIT & CDU Training Libraries
- Discussion off possible student/staff exchanges between the CDU and LIS Library Studies areas
- Return visit of CDU LIS teaching staff to CIT to continue links

The finalisation of these outcomes remains on the table and links between CIT and other developing VET/TAFE training libraries remains desirable, and absolutely essential if the full benefit is to be achieved from using the Practice Firm model.

VET Pedagogy in Action

The Training Library provides a student centred, practical and experiential environment that both complements and prepares students for the two work placements that they undertake in libraries and information agencies around Canberra. Competencies are achieved in a holistic manner as students' multi-skill through technical and client Service areas.

Assessment tasks using the Training Library are mostly formative in nature undertaken as students move from one section of the training Library to another. Based strongly on the Rogers humanist approach to learning and Malcolm Knowles concept of Andragogy (Knowles, Horton & Swanson, 2005), the Training Library works best where teachers act as learning facilitators, whilst students are treated on a somewhat collegial basis.

Carl Rogers the father of humanist thought and theory emphasised realness, acceptance, trust, freedom and empathetic understanding in the learning process. Rogers believed that rather than teaching another individual directly, we can only facilitate learning ie. the direct cognitive transmission of learning from one individual to another is not possible. (Smith, 2005).

Burns (1995) indicates that Andragogy is based on the concept that the deepest learning an adult has is to be treated as a self directing person. Andragogy can be seen as student centred, experience based, problem oriented and collaborative with much in common with the humanistic theory of learning. An adult ability to learn may depend as much on lifestyle, social roles and attitudes as on an innate ability to learn. The adult educator functions best as a resource facilitator, respecting and valuing the experiences of adult students and viewing learning as a co-operative endeavour – ‘the scribe on the side, rather than the sage on the stage’. (1995)

“ Andragogy suggests a teacher role which is much more responsive and less directive. The model encourages high levels of self-directed learning with the adult student having input regarding content, methodology, assessment techniques and even program design”
(Burns, 1995, p.237)

Training Library Subject/Competency Exemplars

Certificate II

- Information Industry (CULLB001A Develop & apply knowledge of the library/information industry & CULLB203B Develop and use information literacy skills)

Certificate III

- CULLB206B Assist with circulation services

● CULLB205B Process and Maintain Information Resources

Certificate IV

- Display, Promotion and Marketing Services (CULMS506B Plan & develop activities, events and programs)
- Customer Information Access (CULLB002A Obtain information from external and networked sources to meet customer needs & CULLB401B Assist customers to access information)

Diploma

- Acquisitions and Receipt of Materials (CULLB509B Select & acquire information materials)
- Auditing Information management Systems (CUVADM05A Plan & develop information management systems)
- Information Systems Overview (CULLB508B Monitor and enhance information access)
- Reference and Research Strategies (CULLB003A Research & analyse information to meet customer needs)

Advanced Diploma

- Abstracting and Indexing Information Sources (CULLB505B Analyse & describe information materials)
- Cataloguing Processes and Procedures (CULLB701B Analyse & describe specialist/complex material)
- Collection Development & Access (CULLB505B Analyse & describe information materials & CULLB605B Manage collection development)

All of these competencies make extensive use of the Training Library facilities for both student learning and assessment. In addition, the online 'courseware' teaching tool webCT and the social networking strengths of a wiki are used for some content delivery, discussion and communication outside scheduled class times, and some assessment submission.

Many Certificate level competencies are highly practical nature and lend themselves to Training Library delivery in a student centred environment. Students feel a sense of 'ownership' of the facility which also encourages the development of competency. Underpinning theory is provided through readings, webCT courseware and the Training Library wiki; <http://cit-training-library.wikispaces.com/>

At Diploma and Advanced Diploma levels, students use the Training Library in their project work. For example; in Information Audit students conduct a full audit of the training library. Their recommendations are passed on to the Acquisitions and Collection Development classes. Acquisitions students develop lists of titles to be purchased, and a group of Collection Development students are writing a draft Collection Development policy for the Training Library.

Cataloguing students are in the process of cataloguing the reference collection onto the Horizon ILMS for use by reference and information literacy student groups in the Certificate IV and Diploma.

Information Systems Overview students are investigating the acquisition and implementation of a new ILMS to replace Horizon. The outcome of their project will form the basis of a proposal to senior management.

Formative assessment tasks include a written log book and/or checklist, contributions to group assessment, class presentations and participation in class practical activities, exercises and discussions.

ILS Student Voices

“The CIT Training Library has allowed me to gain the practical skills I need in Libraries. While theory is essential, the practical work undertaken in the Training Library has given me a greater understanding and confidence in the subjects I have taken. Having a place where, as a student, I could practice skills such as book repair, circulation services, general library maintenance, to reference work, OH&S assessment and Information Auditing has meant that as I approached a work environment I felt confident that I could handle my job. After 2 years of study I can see that the Training Library will increase as an asset as I have seen it develop and come even closer to a working library with it’s in class usage increasing becoming more practical”.

Rhiannon_Nixon, Advanced_Diploma Student 2007

“Since the start of my studies in 2006 I have watched the Training Library grow. From the very beginning the training library was just another classroom in my eyes, just full of books. But as my studies progressed I became actively involved, as did many other students, in the development of the Training Library. It wasn’t just a classroom anymore; it was an active part of my education. Throughout my studies I was involved in safety information audits for the Training Library, in which I discovered how hard it must be to manage the library. The three teachers involved with the management of the training Library have dedicated a lot of their time and resources to ensuring that it serves its purpose as an educational tool for teachers and future Library Technicians. It will take perseverance, commitment and involvement to fully complete the training Library, but when it is, it wont be a classroom in anyone’s eyes anymore”

Daniel Hulse, Advanced Diploma Student_2007

Issues

Given the ongoing developmental nature of the Training Library a number of issues are still being worked through. These include:

- Former 'specialist' teachers needing to take on a more generalist approach to competency achievement especially at certificate levels at students' multi-skill through the Training Library.
- The ongoing change from a largely transmission driven behaviourist/cognitive teaching approach to a constructivist student centred learner approach.
- An ongoing change from summative to largely formative assessment techniques – or getting the balance 'right'.
- Moving students into a cooperative workplace environment earlier than would have been the case some years ago, creating challenges and tensions as students develop collegial working relationships and essential teamwork skills.
- Ensuring the 'right' mix of competencies (or elements thereof) are delivered through the Training Library.
- Developing and encouraging student 'ownership' of the facility.
- Developing Diploma/Advanced Diploma students as supervisors within the Training Library facility.
- Planning for the continuing development of the Training Library – including an ongoing recurrent budget line.

Conclusion

A best practice picture of VET Pedagogy/Andragogy is gradually emerging for the new information/knowledge economy. Holistic, learner centred teaching provides an environment that encourages students to assume responsibility for their own learning, reflect on that learning, establish achievable goals and assess their own progress towards these goals. (Waters, 2005)

The CIT Training Library (the first of its kind in Australia) can then be seen as a developing simulated work place where learners construct knowledge, and develop skills from the circumstances in which they have experienced that learning; a simulated work environment based on socio-cultural, constructivist educational theory. Within this environment, learners and teachers work jointly to construct meaning and understanding which is then reflected in the achievement of knowledge, skills and performance ie., competence.

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