



Tips for Teachers

The following is a collection of 'Tips for Teachers' contributed by teachers and managers from ten Victorian Adult & Community Education (ACE) organisations who participated in the 2007 AccessACE project. Their highly individual projects involved the trial of a locally developed blended learning approach designed for a particular ACE learner group, in either accredited or pre-accredited training. The projects incorporated many uses of information and communication technology (ICT) including online learning environments and social software. The organisations were very diverse, both in size and capacity to deliver.

The learner groups and the technologies were also very varied. Project outcomes in terms of reach, results and potential to improve learner retention were impressive.

The learner groups included a range of young VCAL students, students with disabilities, mature aged learners in a range of settings including women studying in return to work programs, young men studying to pass the Police entrance exam, rural and remote learners, as well as students from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities across Victoria.

The technologies ranged from virtual classrooms and online delivery platforms such as Moodle and the TAFE VC to the effective use of data shows in the VCAL classroom. Many trials incorporated a variety of free and easily accessible Web 2.0¹ technologies such as wikis, podcasts, slideshows, pictures from Flickr, and much more.

Each project team was asked to share three tips for teachers - lessons they had learned during the course of their project that would help other teachers interested in including more ICT into their teaching.

They have been categorised under three headings:

- 1** Planning and preparation
- 2** Working with ACE learners and teachers
- 3** Using technology

To find out more about the project, visit the website at
www.acfe.vic.edu.au

Planning and preparation

All teams reported that planning and preparation are vital to an enjoyable and productive online learning experience, be it in the classroom or in the form of a fully distance model, especially if it is a new experience.

Here is what they found in relation to the following three technologies:

1. online virtual classrooms
2. online learning management systems, and
3. the new Web 2.0 environment.

Working with online virtual classrooms such as Live Classroom and Elluminate:

- While existing materials such PowerPoint presentations and quizzes can be used in a virtual classroom session, they may need modification to take full advantage of the features of that environment, for example, the whiteboard or the polling tool.
- The polling tool allows you to ask the group to respond to pre-prepared questions - great for getting immediate feedback or to check understanding of a topic. It can also be saved and printed for recordkeeping purposes.
- Allow plenty of planning / preparation / familiarisation time, especially in the early stages.
- If at all possible, program staff time to cover the whole educational cycle of design, implementation and evaluation, that is, not only class teaching hours.
- Virtual classrooms are a highly successful way to organise meetings with people who find it difficult to travel to face-to-face meetings.

Working with online learning management systems such as Moodle or TAFE VC:

- Estimate the time required to undertake the project and double it.
- Find a source of face-to-face and on-site assistance and mentoring. Make sure your mentor is very familiar with your chosen platform and available while developing your course.
- Teaching materials need special attention - modify them if necessary to be used for independent study or for students who can fast track through the course using the online component.

- There is a need to keep the group (teachers and learners) together - a sense of community is important.

Introducing the new web 2.0 environment

- Allow time for students to become used to the technology.
- Plan for plenty of lead time for teachers to become familiar with the e-learning product: its tools and practices.
- Make sure the teachers understand and feel comfortable with the new web 2.0 tools as a teaching environment before trying them with the class.
- Timetable wiki training into the course timetable in the planning stages.
- Respond rapidly to any student contributions on the wiki or blog.
- When using photos from a site like Flickr, check copyright conditions ('Royalty Free' does not necessarily mean 'free').
- Be creative! There are lots of new Web 2.0 tools that are free and easy to use.

Working with ACE learners and teachers

Everyone agreed that understanding the needs of your learners, and working within the capabilities of the teachers, is essential. They agreed that the single most important aspect to a successful and enjoyable technology based course is induction.

Here are some more insights:

- Know and understand the student demographic and their relationship with ICT.
- Anticipate that some participants will be reluctant to accept e-learning.
- Make the learning outcomes and activities that incorporate ICT relevant to the students, for example, by learning how the internet works through topics relevant to a workplace or the life interests of students.

- Allow time/resources to train students in effective use of your chosen technology.
- If you can, get a data projector into every room and learn how to use it well. The potential for bringing multiple kinds of media and literacies into the classroom this way is significant. Young learners in ACE are very receptive to information that is screen and network-based.
- Explore the connections between screen-based and portable media, for example, Google Earth and the Melways. Learners can compare the way similar information is presented with differing kinds of text related to different contexts.
- Find alternative ways to present the same material, for example, on-screen and on-paper; written and spoken; using a range of images to introduce a theme; use video to record explanations for later playback if possible.
- Before a student enrolls, explain to them what the online component of the course will entail. Make sure all students are aware of any pre-requisites or technical requirements.
- When delivering online, plan carefully for those students who want extra work or work ahead of the rest of the class.
- Encourage a sense of community if you are delivering fully online. You can do this very effectively by maintaining contact with students before / during / after your online course and by responding rapidly to emails.
- If possible, provide out of class access to computers for participants for the duration of the course. Consider lending laptops to the students. It can significantly speed up the learning process.

Using technology

Not everything was (or usually is) plain sailing. However, for those who had the smoothest journeys, it was because they spent considerable time planning and communicating with the staff members and students involved.

Some strategies that have worked:

- A successful computer & IT project requires coffee, more coffee and sometimes tears.
- It is crucial to do as much planning as possible in the early stages. Give particular consideration to timelines, resource allocation and the time to be devoted to issues like software testing, training of staff and learning new systems.
- Research should happen early and this needs to be included in the timelines and resource allocation. Changing hardware or software is very difficult and costly once a project is in progress.
- Check out your computer room setup for up-to-date computer resources.
- Check out the speed of the internet connection and make sure that it works.
- Good reliable hardware and software are important.
- Check and purchase the necessary equipment early.
- Firewalls can be an issue with some Web 2.0 applications as well as virtual classrooms. Test everything before you decide to utilise it as part of a class.

If you would like more information about any one of the project trials, you can visit their websites by accessing <http://www.acfe.vic.edu.au/actionplans>

Each project has developed a complete profile and action plan that are intended to provide a starting point for you to plan your own ICT-enabled blended learning program.

1) The phrase Web 2.0 can refer to a perceived second generation of web-based communities and hosted services – such as social-networking sites, wikis, and folksonomies – which aim to facilitate creativity, collaboration, and sharing between users. From Wikipedia, accessed 01.01.08