

There would undoubtedly be a return on investment in terms of retention, though this is difficult to measure because it is subject to multiple variables beyond engaged teaching. The problem for sessional staff attending workshops is that our EB requires us to pay them if they're required to attend. [This could not be sustained beyond the project.]

3. Is there value in building a prototype database of effective higher education teaching video exemplars that could be further developed to build professional learning activities around them?

It was proposed that a prototype database of effective higher education teaching video exemplars that could be further developed to and professional learning activities structured around them.

The report states:

A small number of teacher observations that were captured on video. The videos provided evidence about the potential value in building a prototype database of effective higher education teaching video exemplars that could be further developed to create professional learning activities. (Report, p.12)

The ECU Project Leader stated:

This [providing video exemplars] is probably the strongest value that I can see in the project overall because I can't see how the impact itself can be sustained without the funding. As mentioned previously, the development of explicit strategies outside of AVID would be even better – maybe another project!

Dissemination

The following publications and papers produced during the life of the project relate to the project.

Brown, C.,Tangalakis, K. and Hughes, K., (2013). Engaged Teaching for Engaged Students: Explicit, Inclusive AVID. 16th International First Year Higher Education Conference. Wellington, New Zealand.

Hughes, K. and Brown, C. (2014). Strengthening the Intersections Between Secondary and Tertiary Education in Australia: Building Cultural Capital, *Journal of University Teaching & Learning Practice*, 11(2). Available at: <http://ro.uow.edu.au/jutlp/vol11/iss2/6>

Tangalakis, K., Hughes, K., Brown, C. & Dickson, K. (2014). Explicit Teaching Strategies for Science Foundation Subjects. *International Journal of Innovation in Science and Mathematics Education*, 22(3), 42-51. <http://www.ijisme.org/>

Brown, C. (2015). What's the best way to take notes on your tablet or laptop? The Conversation. <http://theconversation.com/whats-the-best-most-effective-way-to-take-notes-41961>. 14th July 2015. (Impact: >60,000 hits, tweets and reprints)

Brown, C. (2015). What's the best, most effective way to take notes? The Conversation. <http://theconversation.com/whats-the-best-most-effective-way-to-take-notes-41961>. 22nd May 2015. (Impact: >200,000 hits, tweets and reprints)

Evaluation against expectations

Evaluation against broad OLT objectives for Innovation and Development Grants

1. Promote and support enhancement of learning and teaching, and the student experience

The proposal appeared to have the potential to promote strategic change that will enhance learning and teaching, and the student experience. The PowerPoint slides, which reflect the structure of the professional development workshops, are based on sound teaching principles and are designed to have participants engage in active, reflective learning. The professional learning process was designed to model teaching strategies it was hoped participants would embed in their own practice.

The ECU Project Leader reflected:

I think that there is an implicit learning theory which is based on metacognition and self-regulated learning.

Asked whether the project activities promoted and supported enhancement of learning and teaching, and the student experience the Project Leader at ECU stated

I'd say yes, it definitely promotes strategic change, though the nature of the project as it ran at ECU was quite grass roots, working with individual academics. The fact that we ran several workshops over a long period of time meant that there was an opportunity for this to be embedded in practice.

Feedback from the project participants was very positive and many have told me that they are now using explicit teaching strategies in their classrooms.

The Project Leader at VU claimed that participants, who were without teacher training, demonstrated improved teaching techniques following the intensive professional development program. Staff engaged in the program reported improvement in their techniques to engage students. In the event improvements were apparent but they were more modest than hoped.

There is some evidence, referred to in 'Findings and outcomes' below, that student engagement improved following the introduction of the program. However the situation was dynamic, there were many variables so it is not possible to demonstrate a causal connection.

2. Encourage recognition of the fundamental importance of teaching in higher education

The professional learning program did have participants who were sessional staff and other staff who were not teacher qualified taking action to improve their approaches to teaching and word of the intervention has spread.

The AVID for higher education program is popular and is still being used in a number of instances in the partner institutions and beyond. The VU Project Leader has been invited to provide professional learning workshops based on the AVID for higher education program at two Melbourne institutions.

3. Develop good individual and institutional practice in learning and teaching

The project did contribute to developing effective mechanisms for the identification, development, dissemination and embedding of good individual and institutional practice in learning and teaching.

The ECU Project Leader reported

We did share our experiences through things like papers at ECulture (ECU's main teaching and learning conference) and with schools and learning consultants who were involved.

Two journal articles related to the project have been published and other forms of dissemination employed. See 'Dissemination' above. The project web site is in final stages of development and is scheduled to be online by the end of March 2016.

4. Develop and support sharing and benchmarking learning and teaching processes

There has been sharing of the experiences of the project through the avenues listed under 'Dissemination' above. The Project Leader at VU states that benchmarking has not been attempted at the national level as it would involve a longitudinal process going beyond the life of the project.

While the international benchmarking proposed did not occur AVID USA has taken an interest in the project and requested the report. As a consequence of involvement in the project the Project Leader at VU has been invited to contribute to professional development modules with Professor Eric Mazur from Harvard University. See 'Evaluation of unintended outcomes' below.

5. Enhance a deep understanding and knowledge of the learning process

The project was designed to develop and enhance a deep understanding and knowledge of the learning process in the participating staff. The ECU leader reported 'This was one of the key strengths. The explicit teaching strategies are inherently metacognitive in nature and create opportunities to embrace multiple perspectives and negotiate understanding. I think it created a great focus on self-regulated learning that the participants bought into.'

The program was tailored to particular disciplines but there were also opportunities for cross-discipline networking that were appreciated by participants.

In the units of study to which the intervention applied student retention improved.

Evaluation against objectives indicated in the project proposal

Improving the quality of the teaching experience for sessional tutoring staff?

The intent was that sessional staff were also to be provided with ongoing professional learning support from coordinators through the semester to build a collaborative professional learning community across discipline areas within their own university and with colleagues from the other university.

Intensive, ongoing professional learning in AVID's explicit teaching strategies for sessional staff who teach as tutors in large first year units but who have little or no teacher training was successfully provided.

In the event the VU Project Leader reported:

While it was intended that sessional staff would be provided with ongoing professional learning support from coordinators this happened in some cases but not all due to workload issues and redundancy measures. In some cases sessional staff were supported in the second year of the project by First year champions.

It worked in bio-med where First year champions trained in AVID and then worked with first year tutors.

The proposal indicated an intent to build a collaborative professional learning community across discipline areas within their own university and with colleagues from the other university. Reflecting on this intention the VU Project Leader stated:

The teaching teams came together during the workshops and discussions from different contexts and discipline areas were had, but ultimately the professional learning communities relocated back to within disciplines rather than between them.

At ECU the Project Leader reported:

It did happen. By having multiple workshops, we really did engage with staff over a period of time and I think that for those who were involved there was real salience.

A qualification to the success of the initial intervention was also mentioned:

The big problem is sustainability. Sessionals are a highly mobile staff so I don't see the impetus being maintained over the long term unless we can programme it over a longer period.

The ECU Project Leader stated when asked whether explicit learning and teaching pedagogies were embedded in first year units employing a significant number of sessional staff to improve the quality of teaching and learning and therefore improve retention:

This was a real strength. The strategies became embedded in many of our first year units such as the example above as well as our Study Skills unit. It's hard to pin retention causality, though, as there are so many other compounding factors.

Improving student engagement with the learning process

The project title refers to embedding inclusive teaching practices. Participants claimed to be taking a student-centered approach and did for example employ more questioning of students than previously. In some cases, however, the participants' estimation of the extent of improvement exceeded the improvement observed by the project team members. The project team video-recorded teaching sessions conducted by participants in the hope of having video exemplars that could be disseminated through the project web site. The VU Project Leader reported that participants claimed that the program had changed their approach to teaching and that they were now interacting with students.

When I looked at the video that was not exactly what I was seeing. There was certainly improvement but not to the extent that we would now call them highly effective teachers, and I'm sure they wouldn't claim to be, either. They were now asking questions but the person answering the questions was often the one up the front. What people say/think they do and what they really do is not always the same thing.

Improvement was evident but not to the point of being exemplary. Nevertheless examples of effective application of teaching strategies addressed can be found in the video-recordings and will provide a valuable resource to support professional development of higher education academics who currently lack training in teaching.

In relation to this the VU Project Leader claimed:

The AVID program gave teachers some explicit strategies for the planning of their tutorials and lectures. So yes the AVID program could be adapted for an Australian context. But teaching is a craft and an art that cannot be acquired quickly in six workshop sessions even with related application.

At VU Bio-med academics reviewed their course delivery following the AVID professional learning workshops. The Project Leader reported still getting requests from Bio-med academics 'so they do value it'.

The ECU leader reported of student engagement with the learning process that:

This was a major focus and one of the key reported successes. Students appreciated the level of structure that the teaching strategies provided and they kept the classroom moving.

Nevertheless there were instances of academics reflecting on curriculum and planned learning and teaching activities:

[An ECU staff member] completely revised his unit outline. Reduced the number of required readings from a large number per week and refocused on the essentials.

The Report provides case studies on the effects of the AVID-based intervention on student engagement. The information provided is selective and no other data is provided in the Report. Nevertheless the information that is made available does provide *prima facie* evidence of substantial improvement in student engagement. Concurrent with the AVID-based intervention there were other changes in the teaching context that may have had some effect on outcomes.

Appendix B of the Project Report provides a case study relating to the application of AHE strategies in one of the foundation units in the College of Arts at VU. In this instance 'the pass rates for this unit have risen significantly from 53% (N=58) in 2012 to 81.01% (N=179) in 2013 after AHE strategies were embedded'.

An observation shared by all tutors in the unit was that the improvement in the pass rates is indicative of more engaged students who are responding well to their new interactive approach to learning and teaching. (Report, p.29)

Appendix C of the Project Report provides a case study relating to the implementation of AVID in a first year core unit. In this case student satisfaction with the unit improved from 54% in 2012 (pre-AVID) to 83% in 2013. Responses to the survey item 'This unit extended my learning' improved from 71% to 88% and responses to the item 'This unit challenged my thinking' improved from 73% to 93%.

The ECU Project Leader reported that improving student engagement with the learning process:

[Was] a major focus and one of the key reported successes. Students appreciated the level of structure that the teaching strategies provided and they kept the classroom moving.

The vast majority of participants valued it and reported that it increased engagement in the classroom

Further evidence of improved student engagement and/or retention at ECU was provided by the Project Leader who reported improvement:

Particularly in the unit [selected]. As I was the coordinator of that unit previously and I had the current coordinator involved I was able to ensure that we embedded this in lesson planning. In the first semester we ran it, student satisfaction doubled in our teaching evaluations.

Investigation of the value of the use of AVID for Higher Education program in Australia

The AVID for Higher Education program was successfully adapted for Australian educators and delivered at two sites over a two-year trial period.

All of the educators who participated in the professional learning program reported that the training was very useful and that they had incorporated explicit teaching strategies in to their teaching. They reported that their teaching was now

more interactive and students appeared to be more engaged in their learning as a result (Report, p.16)

The intent was to target staff in the units of study specified below:

Name of University Faculty and Unit	Enrolments	Number of sessional/other tutors
VU Health, Engineering & Science Frameworks for Nursing/Working with Families Foundations in Biomedical Sciences A and B	565 180	10 5
VU Arts, Education and Human Development Knowing and Knowledge A	360	6
ECU Faculty of Education and the Arts CCA1103 Creativity: Theory, Practice & History	200	5
Student Learning Unit staff for AVID training		4

In the event a series of professional learning sessions were conducted, each involving 1 to 3 training days. At VU the full program provided the opportunity for participation in six sessions. The total workshop days offered amounted to 14 -15. Total of the of individual session attendances (as distinct from total number of participants) was 212 (Report, p.14, Table 2). At ECU workshop days offered were 17-18. Total of the of individual workshop attendances (as distinct from total number of participants) was 118 (Report, p.14, Table 1).

At VU participation, for the units selected, participation was voluntary. Staffing reorganization led to the number of sessional staff employed being reduced so the proportion of sessional staff to contract staff participating in the program was less than anticipated.

Involvement of staff whether sessional or contracted in the full professional learning program was more limited than hoped. The VU Project Leader reported:

Many sessional staff did not attend the full six sessions as they had other commitments or priorities. Some contracted staff did not attend as research rather than teaching was seen as the key to career advancement.

The ECU Project Leader reported:

We paid sessionals to attend the workshops. The plan was to have the same cohort go through. This did work to a large extent with some key teachers, though because of the inherent mobility and difficulty in accessing sessionals as they often have other jobs, there were a few that dropped in and out during the period.

The ECU leader reported that 'Sessional staff were particularly grateful because it allowed us to pay them to attend Professional Development'.

Reflecting on the AVID base for the professional learning program the ECU Project Leader stated:

Ultimately, to my mind, AVID was a good basis but problematic because of IP issues – we would be better in the long run developing our own explicit teaching strategies so not having to be tied to their system and restrictions.

Development of a collaborative, inter-departmental, multi-disciplinary model improving teaching and learning experience for sessional teaching staff and students

With regard to development of a collaborative, inter-departmental, multi-disciplinary model improving teaching and learning experience for sessional teaching staff and students at ECU the Project Leader reported:

That's not going to happen unless you have multiple departments involved. This was very faculty based and didn't involve our Centre for Learning and Development so the advantages were pretty much tied to two schools.

Evaluation of unintended outcomes

Engagement in the project led to a discussion between the VU Project Leader, Ms Claire Brown and Professor Eric Mazur, Prof Physics and Applied Physics at Harvard University and Member of the Faculty of Education at the Harvard Graduate School of Education. Professor Mazur has expressed interest in working with Claire Brown to design professional learning modules for an e-learning platform he is developing.

There were no other unintended outcomes of the project but a number of the findings differed from expectations.

An unexpected point of contention in the higher education application of AVID was participant questioning of the US origin of the material and suggestions Australia should develop their own materials rather than negotiating around the American intellectual property issues. When this issue has surfaced in the Australian schools' implementation of the AVID program, the availability and ease of access to more than 36 years high quality learning and teaching materials and resources already available is offered as a counter argument. .

Another issue raised was how the AVID program related to other professional development in teaching and learning offered by the universities involved, including the award programs relating to learning and teaching in higher education.

Participants stated that they wanted discipline-specific professional development but in the event valued interaction across disciplines.

The ECU Project Leader stated that he:

Found that by attending workshops with sessional staff I was able to get a better insight into some of their experiences, particularly in terms of the lack of information they receive from their unit coordinators. They're typically not very aware of assessment policies, addressing English Language proficiency etc. It gave me an opportunity to discuss these things with them.

Conclusion

The project title indicates the intent of the project was to embed inclusive and explicit teaching practices in higher education first year units. The focus was on teachers of first year units who lacked teacher training, including teachers employed on a sessional basis. The means to achieving the broad intent was intended to be engagement of higher education first year teachers without teacher training in a professional learning program based on the US professional learning and student support system AVID (Advancement via Individual Determination) for Higher Education. The project included investigation of the effectiveness of the implemented professional learning program in improving student engagement in first year units.

The project has delivered in provision over two years of a professional learning program informed by the AVID for Higher Education program. Both sessional and contracted academics teaching first year units undertook the program at the participating institutions, Victoria University and Edith Cowan University. Evidence is provided of both improvement in the teaching practices of the participants and in the retention and satisfaction of students in the units involved in the study.

The investigative element of the project indicated that:

- Providing professional learning informed by the AVID for Higher Education (AHE) explicit teaching framework stimulates more engaged teaching. The extent to which this is so difficult to determine but it appears that this six session program did result in improvement in the teaching practices of participants but that the extent of improvement was modest. This aligns with findings in the final report (pp.7 &18). There is the potential to maintain this level of improvement but it is too early to claim inclusive and explicit teaching practices have been embedded.
- There may be value in building a prototype database of effective higher education teaching video exemplars that could be further developed to build professional learning activities around them. At the time of this evaluation the website of video exemplars is in the final stages of construction so the value is yet to be determined.

There is evidence that the project has made a contribution to each of the broad objectives of the OLT Innovation and Development Grant Scheme and has, at least to an extent, met the each of the specified and the implicit objectives of the project.

The evaluator

The evaluation was undertaken by Peter Ling, B.Comm., M.Ed., Ph.D., Adjunct Associate Professor, Learning Transformations Unit, Swinburne University of technology.

Peter Ling has acted as evaluator for several national projects including: *Developing multi-level leadership in the use of student feedback to enhance student learning and teaching practice*, Carrick Leadership Grant Project, 2007, RMIT University; *Peer Review of Teaching*

in Higher Education, The Australian Learning and Teaching Council project, 2009, Centre for the Study of Higher education, The University of Melbourne; and *Evaluation of Learning Spaces*, Australian Learning and Teaching Council project, 2010, Swinburne University of Technology, The University of Queensland, and Victoria University.

Peter Ling has been principal researcher in several national projects including: *The development of academics and higher education futures*, Australian Learning and Teaching Council, 2009-2012; *The effectiveness of models of flexible provision of Higher Education in Australia*, Department of Education Training and Youth Affairs, 2001. Peter was co-researcher for *Multiple modes of delivery*, A Higher Education Innovation Program project of the Australian Universities Teaching Committee, 2004. Peter was engaged as Project Officer for *Learning Without Borders, Enhancing Leadership in Transnational and International Education*, Australian Office for Learning and Teaching, 2010-2013.

For the purposes of the evaluation Peter Ling was engaged as a consultant by Victoria University.

Dr Peter Ling
913/58 Jeffcott St
West Melbourne
Vic., 3003
P: +61(0) 418 313 755
peterling28@gmail.com

ABN: Peter Newson Ling 26 224 408 956