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**THE COURSE IN APPLIED VOCATIONAL STUDY SKILLS:
PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT ISSUES FOR THE DELIVERY OF
INTEGRATED LITERACY SUPPORT IN VET**

Susan Bates and Cheryl Wiltshire

Western Australian Department of Training

The Course in Applied Vocational Study Skills (CAVSS) is an accredited framework for delivering literacy and numeracy support to Vocational Education and Training (VET) students. It has been delivered in Western Australia since January 2000.

It takes two lecturers to deliver CAVSS. The literacy/numeracy lecturer comes into the VET training environment for up to four hours a week, and for that time, the two lecturers model and teach the application of literacy and numeracy-based processes to the actual VET learning and assessment activities that students are engaged in. Both lecturers teach the whole group. Both lecturers contribute their own range of professional skills and knowledge, and both are involved in teaching at the point of connection between 'theoretical' skills and their practical application.

This paper illustrates some of the implementation and delivery issues faced by lecturers during the pilots of the Course in Applied Vocational Study Skills, and ongoing action research through the first stages of implementation of the course in Western Australia. The paper reflects on some of the tenacious practices and associated beliefs brought to light by the CAVSS pilots and highlights implications for the professional development training of teachers involved in the next stages of implementing and delivering the Course in Applied Vocational Study Skills, and for the adult literacy and basic education field in Western Australia in general.

The structure and purpose of the Course in Applied Vocational Study Skills (CAVSS)

The Course in Applied Vocational Study Skills (CAVSS) is a framework for a wholly collaborative approach to meeting VET students' literacy support needs. The purpose of CAVSS is to improve completion rates among VET students by modelling and teaching the connections between 'theoretical' literacy and numeracy skills and processes and their practical VET application. CAVSS is a process for making literacy, numeracy and study skills support a normal, unremarkable part of VET delivery, and for all students instead of just a few who have been singled out for their lack of skills.

CAVSS is an accredited course, and as a means for accessing public training funds, students are enrolled in from one to eight ten-hour modules which generally translate into up to four hours total teaching time for the literacy specialist per week, per student group. The content of the modules is nominal. Modules have no specific AQF level, and are not assessable. Students may only access CAVSS support on a dual enrolment basis with a VET course or Training Package qualification. The delivery of CAVSS may not impose extra burdens of attendance, or assignments on students, and students may not be charged enrolment fees for CAVSS. The requirement for CAVSS to be delivered by two lecturers (or trainers) means that CAVSS is more suited to delivery in an institutional setting. However, it

is important to spread CAVSS delivery over both theoretical and practical (workshop or live worksite) training sessions.

The following case studies illustrate how the prescribed model can be applied to integrate literacy, numeracy and study skills support at the point of direct application to the industry training and assessment activities.

CAVSS Case Study 1

Sue Clarke is a Business Studies lecturer at the Broome Campus of the Kimberley College of TAFE. As in many smaller centres, students in her course need to study in a range of independent learning modes, including the use of self-paced packages, on-line modules, and with flexible timetable arrangements. Sue has found that many students struggle, and some drop out, because they are unable to access the support they need at the beginning of the course, to understand the requirements they need to meet. The students need to be able to apply a range of reading skills as a basis for accessing and organising information to support their independent learning. Many students are confused by all of the books they receive at once, are not sure when assignments are due, and where to get information, and need assistance in clarifying their own individual responsibilities to complete the course. The students have the pre-requisite skills to develop the industry competencies within the course, but the applied reading/study skills they need, particularly as new students coming into the course, overwhelmed some students.

Sue worked with Jo Camilleri, a literacy lecturer at the college, to deliver CAVSS support. They identified the beginning of the course as the point at which students needed a significant amount of support in finding out what they needed to do, and understand and organise to study in an independent, open learning mode. The lecturers arranged for CAVSS to be delivered each day during the first week and enrolled the students in two modules to provide the teaching hours for this.

During the first week, students had extra support in reading self-paced study manual instructions, table of contents etc, and in organising their individual study time-tables, including scheduling assessments and linking in with on-line delivery. These are applied reading and study skills, absolutely valid for CAVSS support. Students who would have otherwise dropped out due to the confusion they feel when first starting open learning, found their feet and continued with the course.

CAVSS Case Study 2

Gordon Bates is a Course in Applied Vocational Study Skills (CAVSS) lecturer who works in the Building and Construction section of a large metropolitan college. He is currently working with Scott Kay, a VET lecturer, with a group of Pre-Apprenticeship (Plastering) students. Gordon and Scott have found that a collaborative approach, using a tag-teaching strategies, has resulted in dynamic, effective lessons and new insights.

"Recently I was working with one of the Plastering lecturers and some Pre-Apprenticeship students. These Pre-Apprenticeship students need quite a lot of support, including a lot of basic maths. The VET lecturer, Scott, and I had planned to do some work on how to go about setting out and calculating a quote.

We started by taking turns to talk about aspects of organising information for a quote, getting ideas from the students about the factors that needed to be incorporated. Then Scott went into a story. He started telling the students some horror stories about the process of quoting. He was impressing on them how important it was to be careful and accurate in quotes, and

how if you weren't the mistake would cost you money. Scott told them about how he had lost a considerable amount of money quoting from a plan for a plastering job, because although the plan gave him the perimeter of each room, it did not identify that the walls had been built taller than usual. He had given a firm quote for the job, it had been accepted, and he lost money because the job ended up costing him significantly more than he had quoted.

As Scott told the story, in a lot of detail, I got busy on the whiteboard, drawing up a list of factors, setting up the calculations that had to be done in each case. He kept on story telling, and the students were really interested in what was going on. The students are always interested in hearing the real stuff about aspects of the industry. When Scott had finished the story, I went through the processes I had written up on the board, and went over some of the key factors to keep in mind with the class. Then we asked the students to break into groups, and they went outside to work on their quotes while we moved around from one group to the next discussing some of the details, and checking over maths processes.

As the students came back in, Scott suggested, in the 'is it OK with you?' way that we suggest things to each other, that we get the students to present their final quotes first, without any costing information, and see what the reactions were. I agreed, and it was on for young and old. The students took the competitive aspect of the exercise very seriously. They demanded to know how others had come up with very different costings, and queried where other groups had omitted essential equipment, or made incorrect calculations, and even worked out how much money would have been lost because of the errors. Each group had to justify their costings, and there was a lot of discussion about the psychology of quotes, and how the lowest quote was not always the one that got the job. They got experience in 'selling' themselves and their industry skills and knowledge, and some very useful practice in applying their spoken language skills in a very industry-specific way."

The CAVSS Pilots and Research Project

In 2000, the Western Australian Department of Training funded the pilot deliveries of the Course in Applied Vocational Study Skills with a total of 31 VET courses, at twelve metropolitan and regional TAFEs in Western Australia. These courses represented a wide range of industries and AQF levels.

An action research project was undertaken in 2000, to collect specific data from the pilots, with the aims of measuring the effectiveness of the CAVSS model in improving training outcomes and student/lecturer satisfaction on a statewide basis, and to identify the systems and other implementation problems faced by providers in applying the CAVSS model. This research included written surveys of VET and CAVSS lecturers, VET students and Literacy Program Managers, and a series of interviews with providers who had implemented the prescribed team-teaching model. Research by the CAVSS Implementation Team has been ongoing in post-pilot CAVSS delivery across the state, and has involved setting up processes to promote solutions that VET and CAVSS lecturers have found to overcome some of the implementation and delivery problems discussed below.

Overview of research findings

Research findings indicate a high level of lecturer satisfaction with CAVSS, and where delivered according to the prescribed model, VET students accepted and endorsed the support it provided. All groups involved in the CAVSS Pilots agreed that CAVSS was effective, or would be effective, in improving student outcomes.

Evidence from the CAVSS Pilots indicated that a significant number of lecturers appeared to be hesitant in applying all of the structural aspects of the course, in particular, the

requirement for face-to-face delivery using a team-teaching mode. While the VET lecturers involved in integrating literacy support within VET are generally well aware of their students' learning needs, and very motivated to access support for them, many are wary, uncomfortable, and/or completely resistant to having a literacy/numeracy specialist teach in their classroom. Literacy/numeracy specialists delivering CAVSS have generally been highly motivated and enthusiastic about delivering industry-specific literacy and numeracy support. However, a significant number of literacy teachers continue to apply teaching strategies, and use teaching and learning materials, that reflect academic discourses, as if those language practices were generic.

Issues raised by the Course in Applied Vocational Study Skills

The need for an informed culture of literacy awareness

An awareness of the issue of literacy in the context of VET means understanding a range of issues to do with the acquisition and application of literacy skills industry training. Importantly, it also means being aware of the many misconceptions that surround the topic of literacy. Teachers employed to teach literacy are not necessarily immune to those misconceptions. Issues related to a need for greater awareness of literacy issues in VET include

- A lack of recognition of all of the factors that create a 'literacy problem' in VET. Some VET and literacy lecturers continue to focus on the individual student and what that student doesn't know as the 'literacy problem'. Students struggle with literacy in VET because of the content of the course, the way that teaching and learning materials are written, the skills of lecturers and the increasing reliance on text-based independent learning modes. A significant number of teachers continue to regard literacy as an issue for a small number of people, and more associated with individual 'learning problems' or other unspecified 'deficits' than with an issue for a significant percentage of people undertaking industry training in the VET sector.
- A lack of understanding of the way that literacy functions in education as a means of, and process for excluding students whose language and literacy practices are non-standard. A significant number of literacy lecturers remain apparently unaware of the highly complex and political nature of literacy skills acquisition in education systems, the nature and implications for diverse literacy and language practices, and the fact that in the VET sector, they are more likely to be teaching students who have already felt the impact of exclusionary language practices. One CAVSS lecturer described her belief that providing literacy support to VET students was *a bit like cheating*, that achievements needed to be *earned*. Two CAVSS lecturers described their dismay at *VET lecturers' acceptance of poor literacy standards*. It is generally unhelpful for teachers of literacy to adopt perspectives that by definition devalue the language practices of their clients.
- A lack of understanding of the reasons why the stigma associated with needing literacy support needs to be managed in a formal training setting. Strategies such as withdrawing students for remedial support, or holding lunchtime classes for those who need extra help, or assessing students, telling them just what their weaknesses are and leaving *it up to the students to seek further assistance if they so desired*, do little to make support accessible.

Professional and cultural issues in the adult literacy field

The adult literacy field is still relatively new, and over the last few years a significant number of teachers have moved into part-time and casual employment in the VET sector with little or no access to professional development, apart from that associated with the delivery of the Certificates of General Education (CGEA). Teaching adult literacy is not the same as teaching Secondary School English, or Mathematics, or Primary School. A significant number of teachers remain unaware of the need to adjust some aspects of their teaching practice and take into account the experiences, interests and goals of students enrolled in the VET sector. It is not uncommon for the staffroom talk of adult literacy teachers to reflect the 'palliative care' approach to adult basic education, expressed to the author *as You know, these people are never going to learn much. All we can do is be nice to them and let them feel that they are getting somewhere.*

As well as access to program specific professional development training, teachers working in the adult literacy field need

- access to professional development that includes current theoretical developments and teaching practices specific to the adult literacy field
- access to strategies for recognising and adapting practices to clients' specific learning needs
- encouragement and support to change the culture of complacency that has grown in the absence of access to adequate professional development where teachers move into a new field of education without demanding to enhance their professional knowledge and knowledge of the client group and underlying issues
- recognition for professional development

Tensions between VET and 'academic' cultures in VET

All throughout the projects to develop, pilot and implement CAVSS, there has been a recurring theme within the comments made by literacy lecturers, and program managers and others, with teaching backgrounds) associated with the CAVSS pilots and research. This theme is a readiness to be unconvinced by, and sometimes to denigrate, the teaching skills, literacy awareness and student focus of VET staff, or to be surprised when VET staff show themselves to be enlightened and/or skilled trainers. While VET staff do need access to professional development, and there are some VET lecturers who are very resistant to less familiar strategies, VET staff are as skilled, professional, knowledgeable and care about their students' success and welfare as literacy staff.

The attitudinal pattern that has emerged has been a tendency for easy criticism of VET staff's teaching skills by literacy teachers, and a tendency for VET staff to be wary of team-teaching because they do not want their teaching or literacy skills to be judged by literacy teachers. Sometimes VET lecturers are protecting their students, as well as themselves from another round of judgements from a teacher. It seems clear that while both groups have the need for Literacy Awareness training and CAVSS-specific professional development, literacy teachers have everything to gain in terms of valuable skills and better collaboration, from being less willing to automatically assume that the problem is all to do with the VET staff. Literacy teachers may need to be more willing to concede that their own teaching skills are indeed industry specific, and that to be effective teaching in an industry other than the academic industry, they need to be prepared to be learners, and willing to learn from VET students and lecturers.

Establishing the team-teaching model

During the research, a literacy teacher asked how CAVSS could be delivered if none of the VET lecturers was willing to team-teach, and the answer, of course, is that CAVSS can not be delivered unless the VET lecturer is willing to team-teach.

Underlying issues and resistance

Some literacy lecturers and program managers expressed frustration at the resistance demonstrated by some VET lecturers, but there is no point in trying to force one party into a relationship that by definition must be built on mutual, professional trust. Unless these fears are allayed, and proven to be foundless, some VET lecturers will continue to resist team-teaching with literacy teachers.

Despite the clarity with which students have expressed their lack of acceptance of literacy support that involves extra remedial classes or withdrawal from the VET group for remedial support, many lecturers want to try those approaches one more time. A small number of lecturers, including literacy lecturers, talked about the need to *compel* students to accept literacy support. These examples indicate serious lack of responsiveness to the requirements made clear by the client group. Students are not interested in training that is not wholly relevant to industry outcomes, takes up extra time, imposes extra assessment burdens, or is delivered in a manner that stigmatises or penalises individuals. Indeed, CAVSS was developed as a solution to the problem of meeting students' literacy support needs because the traditional approaches were not acceptable to students and therefore ineffective.

Students are keen to access appropriate support. The CAVSS Survey responses received from students indicate strong support for meaningful, relevant study support. It is not unusual for lecturers, including literacy lecturers, to doubt or denigrate students' motivation, rather than look to their own practices in relation to the training needs of a post-compulsory, fee-paying client group. Providers who have been able to promote a culture of genuine client-awareness may be better placed to foster a culture of literacy awareness that promotes student-centred delivery required by CAVSS and other literacy delivery.

Sharing the role of instruction to normalise literacy

One of the issues where team-teaching was taking place was the degree to which lecturers were actually sharing the instruction role. 'Adaptations' have included

- the CAVSS teacher being left to teach students while the VET lecturer took a break, or undertook other business somewhere else
- the CAVSS teacher being given a desk at the side of the workshop where students are sent for extra help while the rest of the class continues work
- the CAVSS teacher being used in workshops, or on live sites, as a Trades Assistant, or 'gopher' with little opportunity to 'grab' a chance to teach the students
- the VET lecturer delivering the lesson, as usual, while the CAVSS teacher tiptoes around the room, from working with individual students whose literacy skills have been identified as the worst in the group.

Although the CAVSS teacher has been included in some elements of VET delivery in the examples listed above, in two cases, students are still being singled out according to their skills gaps. Students who are "sent to the CAVSS teacher" at the side of the classroom, or continually singled out for the CAVSS teachers' attention in the midst of other students ignored by the CAVSS teacher, are likely to resist the skills support that they need, because

they are singled out for that support. In every case, the skills and the expertise of the CAVSS teachers are not being utilised to their full effect.

Literacy and VET lecturers need access to information about team-teaching. They need to

know what team-teaching looks like. They need to see the tag-teaching approach in action, watch the interaction, become clear about exactly what the CAVSS teacher does in relation to the VET teacher, and vice versa.

Professional development for personnel involved in CAVSS

CAVSS delivery has highlighted a range of professional development issues for lecturing, management and systems administration staff.

Knowing how to diagnose and teach people how to read, write and do maths

CAVSS teachers need to have a strong understanding of how to teach reading, writing and maths, particularly at basic, or foundation skills, levels. They also need to know how to diagnose from students' responses, where particular basic skills have not been clearly consolidated in students' repertoire of problem solving strategies. One CAVSS lecturer said that she finds it very easy to see where students are confused, or uncertain about maths processes. She said it surprised her how she could almost immediately zero in on what the students needed to know about that sometimes it felt more like intuition than anything else. Then she corrected herself and said that it was obviously not intuition, but thirty years of relevant experience that she was drawing on, and able to use as a basis for quickly addressing students' needs as soon as they arose.

Being a responsive teacher and a professional learner

Several CAVSS lecturers described teaching strategies that involved taking notice of how students responded to teaching techniques and styles. These lecturers talked about the way that they learned from listening and observing students, and adapted their teaching strategies according to students' responses. While this might seem an obvious part of learning more about one's craft, some teachers are less willing to question their own practice in the light of students' responses, and instead seek out other strategies for forcing students to comply with what those teachers have decided is appropriate. Examples of this non-responsive approach are apparent in survey responses that called for students to be 'forced' to accept literacy 'support'.

One CAVSS teacher explained that a significant number of VET students (and some VET lecturers) had not been valued, or regarded positively by English and Maths teachers at Secondary School. CAVSS teachers who find themselves facing continual resistance from students should examine their own attitudes and consider whether students are picking up on their negativity and/or prejudices.

Conclusion

At this early stage of implementation of the course, staff involved in CAVSS delivery are, by definition, involved in shifting the culture of literacy awareness in their organisation, even if that is limited to providing information to colleagues. A number of CAVSS and VET lecturers involved in CAVSS have taken on significant promotional and 'informal' professional development activities within their organisation, teaching people about the course.



For the CAVSS Implementation Team, the ongoing action research into the implementation of the course has been a journey of discovery, and the basis of some significant changes to the structure of the course, and collective knowledge about how to teach literacy and numeracy at the point of application.

CAVSS presents practitioners with a number of challenges, in implementing a non-standard course that requires lecturers and administrators to make significant changes to their work practices and expectations. Practitioners who have found solutions to these challenges continue to provide leadership for colleagues in WA, and advice for the CAVSS Implementation Team, in producing professional development products, and support strategies, for further implementation of the course.