



## Transforming online curricula, transforming staff

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Developing online teaching skills can occur through involvement in *learn-by-doing* strategies, which incorporate informal, organic or needs-driven strategies. Such processes are sometimes labelled as “bottom-up” staff development processes. In other contexts, teaching staff are formally directed to develop online teaching skills through a series of compulsory staff development workshops or courses. These approaches typically include “top-down” staff development processes. This poster describes how a group of tertiary teaching staff extended their on-campus and distance teaching repertoire of skills to include online teaching skills. In this case, the process of staff development began with collecting data about the concerns and practices of the teaching staff involved. An analysis of the data informed the development of a “middle-out” staff development strategy which comprised a mixture of informal and formal strategies, and acknowledged the ethos of the institution and the specific needs of the staff involved. This professional development program incorporated a group of nine informal and formal strategies. The poster presents an analysis of the data that were gathered during this project alongside the professional development strategies that were developed as a result of this analysis.

Keywords: staff development, online teaching, online curricula

### Background

Avondale College has been in operation since 1897. The College offers undergraduate and postgraduate degrees in various disciplines including Arts, Theology, Education, Nursing, Business and Science. The College has some experience in distance education and selected academic staff at the College are familiar with teaching students from afar and communicating with students through a variety of methods. With the recent adoption of an online Learning Management System (LMS, that is, Moodle), all teaching staff are being encouraged towards offering units in various blended formats including fully online units, on-campus units that are enhanced by use of the online LMS and others that are partly online and partly face-to-face. The move into online learning requires every unit to have a minimum online presence which includes the unit outline. Staff are being encouraged to take this further. The process involves transforming not just the curricula but also the staff.

### Current staff skills

Avondale staff hold an established reputation for quality teaching, facilitated by small classes and a culture of high-level pastoral care related to the college’s philosophy of holistic education. Student evaluations through SEQ and through graduate surveys (for example, *The Good Universities Guide*) consistently rate the face-to-face teaching as outstanding. However, the level of technical competence, and associated degree of comfort, with online learning, has varied widely from sophisticated to rudimentary. In a questionnaire administered to staff in both faculties (Northcote, Beamish, Reynaud,

Martin, & Gosselin, 2010), staff showed higher levels of confidence about pedagogical issues than technical issues related to online teaching.

To acknowledge the work that staff had already completed in transforming curricula to the online environment, the professional development program for academic staff needed to be designed in a way that was essentially constructivist in nature, enabling staff to build upon their skills they had already developed (Matzen & Edmunds). Many of these existing skills could be classified as relating to course design, construction of assessment tasks and resource creation.

## **Implementation of multiple and transformative staff development strategies**

As well as honouring the skills and knowledge that staff already possessed about teaching in general and the online environment specifically, the professional development program for academic staff needed to cater for the emotional element of the paradigm shift experienced by teachers moving from a face-to-face to an online mode of teaching, especially in relation to issues such as role and identity of teachers. A professional development program that was essentially holistic in nature also aligned with the institution's approach to teaching and learning which focused on "the development of the whole person" (Avondale College, 2008, p. 2).

Lastly, previous experience had taught the authors that multiple strategies were required (Northcote & Huon, 2009a, 2009b) to construct the staff development process as a journey in which individual staff members could join at any time, with any level of skill. Rather than being purely top-down or bottom-up in nature, these multiple strategies, outlined below, could be best described as being of a "middle-out" variety; they enabled staff to see examples in action and their skills were applied to their teaching in quite immediate ways. As a result of considering the situation of the staff involved, a professional development program was designed which incorporated multiple informal and formal strategies including:

1. workshops that focused on both pedagogical knowledge and technical skills;
2. one-to-one consultations that were encouraging, acknowledged the difficulties involved and provided a safe and private space in which to discuss fears and other anxieties about online teaching;
3. use of examples (to demonstrate best practice) and non-examples (to demonstrate mistakes or "what not to do" examples) of previously constructed online courses, resources and activities;
4. informal corridor chats that provided academics with "just in time" advice and guidance;
5. support from Faculty Deans and institution's leaders;
6. encouragement and sharing of research into online learning and teaching;
7. identifying a set of units for development;
8. provision of instructional resources via the online learning management system (that is, Moodle) and paper-based (booklets and handouts); and
9. a set of nine pedagogical guidelines for developing online courses at Avondale College, based on expert advice from various higher education educators (Anderson & Krathwohl, 2001; Biggs, 2003; Herrington, Oliver, & Herrington, 2007; Herrington, Oliver, Herrington, & Sparrow, 2000; Herrington, Oliver, & Reeves, 2003; Kerns et al., 2005; Salmon, 2004; Van Duzer, 2002).

## **The future**

Once the nine professional development strategies outlined above continue to be fully implemented and evaluated over the next six months, it is anticipated that some modifications will be required to this program. We also plan to extend this program by: 1) designing and developing a blended professional development unit for staff about online learning and teaching using the current LMS; 2) creating a list of identifiable online teaching skills that staff either possess or can develop; and 3) constructing a rubric with associated examples of baseline, intermediate and advanced units.

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