

e-magine Online Campus: VET In Schools implementation.

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Abstract

The e-magine Online Campus is a core project of the newly established e-magine Centre of Excellence in Online Learning in Tasmania.

The Online Campus is designed to empower schools to cross deliver online programs. Rather than the Department investing in centralised delivery, schools are encouraged to form delivery networks.

This is the most effective way of supporting rural and isolated schools in achieving curriculum diversity and providing broad learning pathways for students. Schools in rural and remote areas of Tasmania including the west coast and Bass Strait islands are now able to offer students a broad range of subjects and programs, many of which are delivered online by teachers in other schools.

Additionally the Online Campus was established to support on-campus flexible delivery. Schools are supported in curriculum restructuring by the use of online approaches. The notion of the school or college campus is broadened to that of an online learning community.

The e-magine Online Campus is developing a cohort of teachers in schools and colleges around the state who can teach online – to their own students and to students in other schools.

The e-magine Online Campus is thus much more than a virtual or online school. It is a very powerful project based model of professional learning, which is challenging and supporting a diverse group of teachers to move into a new paradigm. The online teachers in the e-magine Online Campus are the early adopters and change agents (or mentors) who are supporting and leading others online.

The e-magine Online Campus is challenging schools and teachers, system wide, to reflect on the potential of online learning.

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Three Innovations in Online Learning

The **e-magine Online Campus** is in essence an online or virtual school. It was launched by the Minister for Education, the Hon. Paula Wriedt in April 2001 and is a core project of the Tasmanian e-magine Centre of Excellence in Online Learning. It is a highly innovative model of online delivery, unique to Tasmania which is based on the belief that:

“School education provides the foundation for the information economy and the knowledge society... ..children living in an online world must have a school education that enables them to participate in and contribute to that world.” (Forrest, 2000)

The e-magine Online Campus supports, facilitates and coordinates the delivery of online VET in Schools programs through Registered Training Organisations (RTOs) in Tasmanian schools and colleges.

In August 1999, the Minister had launched **Discover, an online learning infrastructure** which complemented dedicated IT funding for schools and a managed networks program. Teachers had access to modern, well-maintained computers and a range of online services. Tasmania became the first state to provide teachers and learners with an infrastructure for online learning.

Since then the challenge has been to encourage teachers to integrate ICT and online learning into their practice.

In 1998 a project had been commissioned by the Department to pilot a new approach to educational computing professional learning. It was recognised that the provision of effective professional learning would be critical in implementing online learning. The report found that

“...technology can be the catalyst for major changes in education...(but)... teachers are often critical of traditional approaches to professional learning.” (Chalmers, Freestone and Murray, 1999)

In Tasmania, with the support of the e-magine Centre of Excellence in Online Learning, schools are looking for ways to provide more relevant programs for a greater number of students in ways that are more flexible, technology rich and appropriate for the contemporary learner. Tasmania is undertaking **a major five year curriculum renewal process** focusing on the new basics or essential learnings. In future this will impact at senior secondary level in VET in Schools programs.

“Schools are educating students from diverse and complex cultures and communities, for new workplaces and technologies, new economies.” (Department of Education Queensland, 1999)

Critical to the process is a desire to align innovations and to reduce rather than add to innovation overload.

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There is a strong belief amongst those leading the changes that online learning has the power to transform learning, the curriculum and the structure of schools.

Purpose

The e-magine Online Campus is a project which seeks to provide a service to schools, colleges and learners which develops and models best practice in the use of online learning, within and between schools and colleges.

The e-magine Online Campus is a catalyst in the process of transforming schools and colleges.

The project is developing skills and understandings about online teaching and learning particularly in those teachers involved in the design and delivery of programs. These teachers are regarded as Online Mentors who will lead cultural transformation in VET in Schools by

- establishing and showcasing online approaches
- supporting other teachers in the adoption of online approaches
- contributing to the Curriculum/Training Package Consultation process at school and college level.

The e-magine Online Campus is thus;

- contributing to Training Package diversity and richness particularly in rural and small schools
- supporting the Training Package Consultation Process by fostering the use of online approaches to reshape Training Package delivery and structure
- developing a cohort of teachers with skills and understandings of online teaching and learning. These Online Mentors who will provide just in time support to others seeking to integrate online approaches in their practice
- maintaining and extending student learning pathways into post compulsory VET.

The Model

The e-magine Online Campus is founded on the construct of the *Online Classroom*. Teachers and students are linked by *Online Classrooms* (Figure 1), which create online learning communities. Teachers may deliver programs to students in their own regular classroom and to students in other places.

Delivery is not from a central institution to remote locations. Programs are delivered within and between schools and colleges in a distributed delivery model. This may take the form of cross school delivery, or an on-campus flexible delivery model. Any school may be a delivery school and will be supported in the design and delivery of their online programs. The coordination of programs, however, does take place centrally.

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On-campus flexible delivery programs are programs schools are providing for their own students using flexible and online approaches. The notion of the school or college campus is broadened to that of an online learning community. Within this online learning community there may be access from home, from flexible learning centres within the schools/colleges, or workplaces, for example, when students are on work placement.

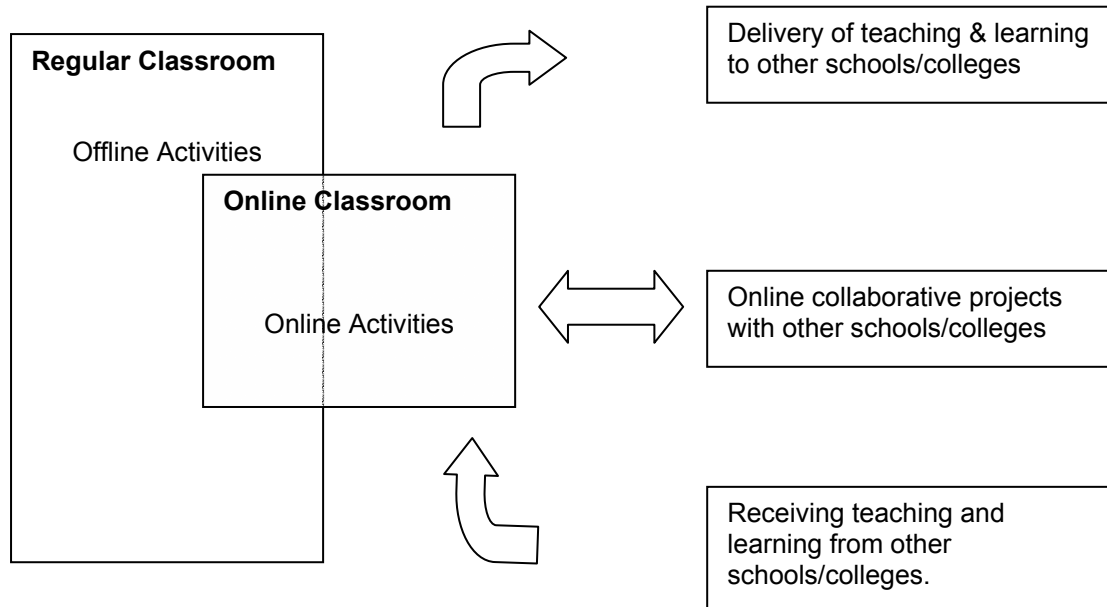


Figure 1: Online classrooms enable students to work in different ways

Resourcing for the e-magine Online Campus is not placed in a central institution. It is distributed to schools/colleges which may become Centres of Excellence in the online delivery of a particular Training Package.

Online Classrooms enable distributed students to receive programs from teachers in other locations. Teachers may deliver programs to students in their own regular classroom and to students in other places. A variety of online programs such as VET Aquaculture, Aged Care, Business Administration are delivered to small groups in schools to make viable class sizes and to support new Training Packages.

The Campus facilitates classes receiving programs from teachers in other schools/colleges. Teachers may deliver programs to students in their own school/college (on-campus flexible delivery) and to students in other places (cross school/college delivery). Flexible timetabling structures are being developed in response and the concept of "Online Options" is a reality in several schools. Students on one timetable line, in one class may be studying one of up to five training packages delivered online by teachers in other schools/colleges or on another timetable line.

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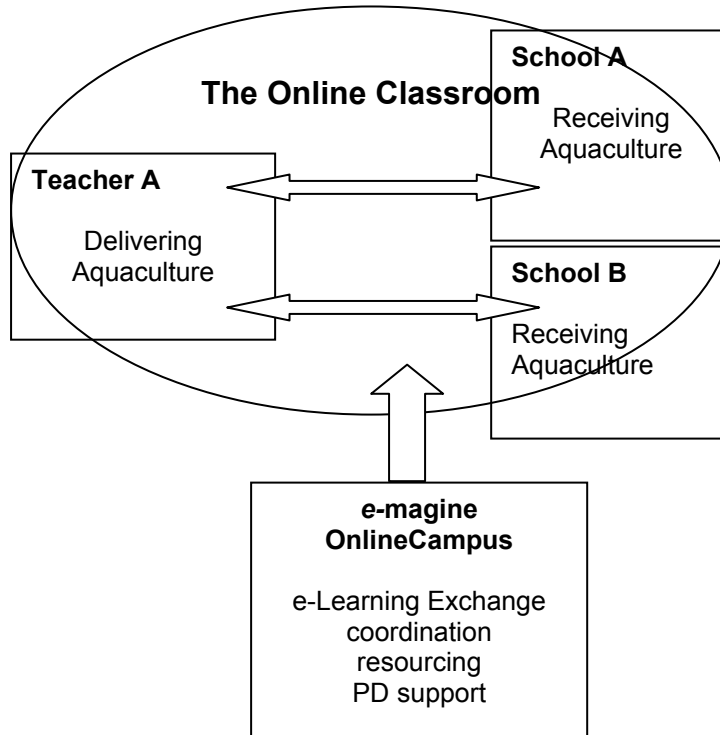


Figure 2 Teachers and students are linked by online classrooms

The e-magine Online Campus is designed to empower schools to cross deliver online programs. Rather than the Department of Education investing in centralised delivery, schools/colleges are encouraged to form delivery networks. One rural cluster of schools has already established their own cross school online program to rationalise small class sizes. The cluster is working largely independently of the Campus, only requiring support in the form of professional development.

A program is defined as a course to a group into one delivery site i.e. VET Aged Care to three students at Sorell and four at St Marys is regarded as two programs. The e-magine Online Campus is currently delivering thirty vocational education and training (VET) programs.

102 students are involved in these programs. The students receiving the programs are enrolled in schools. The majority of these schools are in rural and isolated areas and include:

- King Island District High
- Flinders Island District High
- Mountain Heights
- Dover District High
- Smithton High
- Campbell Town District High

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- Oatlands District High
- Sheffield District High

Several students are enrolled in private schools and receive the programs on a fee paying basis eg. Trinity College at Poatina.

The programs already underway are termed Priority 1 Programs 2002 and are targeted generally at rural and isolated schools. The programs at present receive funding from the Department but a cost neutral model is under development, for implementation once a cohort of online teachers is available in schools.

Priority 2 programs for 2002 will commence next term and will take the form of online collaborative projects. Schools will be able to enhance Training Package opportunities by involving students in programs which include Online Book Shares, Collaborative WebQuests and the utilization of Kahootz, a new multimedia product which enables students to make multimedia stories and share them via the web with students in other schools and countries. Opportunities exist for these strategies to be used with VET in Schools programs.

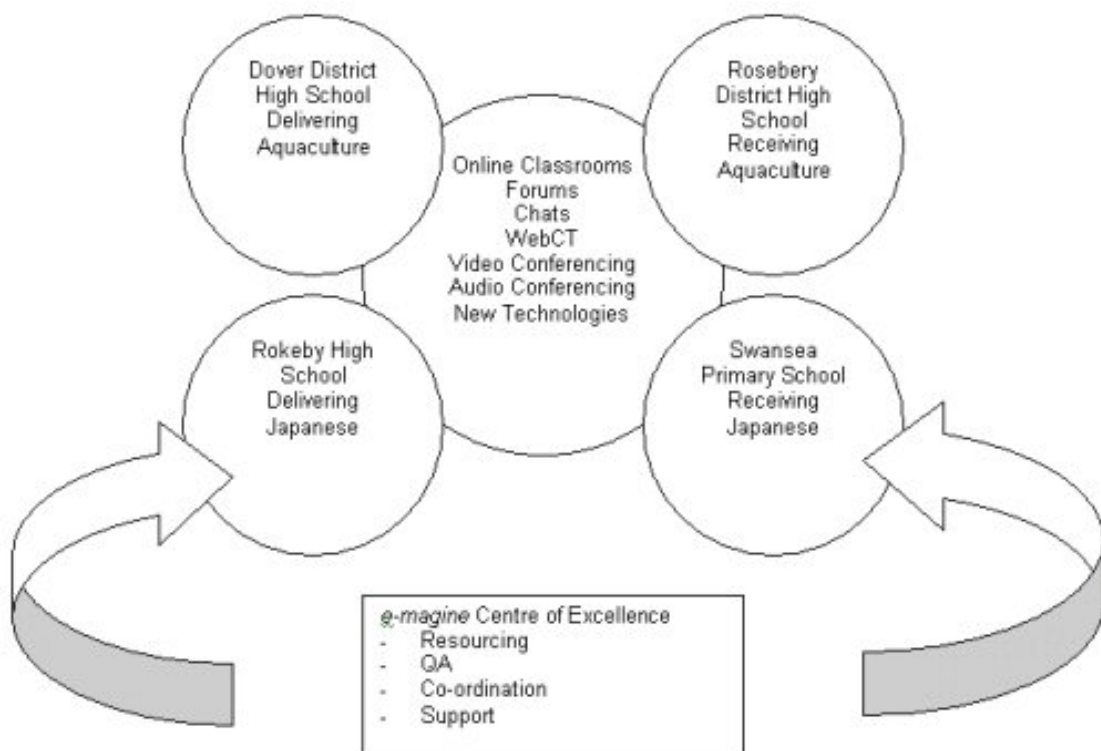


Figure 3 How it works in practice

The e-magine Online Campus is developing a cohort of teachers in schools and colleges around the state who can teach online – to their own students

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and to students in other schools. The reality this creates is that an isolated school which has a small group of students (or 1 student) wishing to study a particular subject may request the online delivery of the program via the e-magine Online Campus.

The e-magine Online Campus 'brokers' the program and arranges for its delivery from another school. By clustering schools, viable class sizes are established. This is an efficient and effective way of supporting rural and isolated schools in achieving curriculum/training package diversity and providing broad learning pathways for students.

Experiences to Date

During 2001 the e-magine Online Campus coordinated the delivery of four training packages and involved almost 150 students. Delivery was very much a hybrid "bricks and clicks" model, based around regular teacher visits and both web based or videoconferencing delivery.

The implementation year was not without its problems. Some teachers moved into the online paradigm with little or no difficulty. The same applied to students. It appears however, that online distributed delivery does not suit all students, particularly those who are not adequately supported by teachers in their own school. The need for provision of close support for students was identified as a major issue in the evaluation process undertaken during third term 2001 and has been central to planning for 2002.

Not unexpectedly another critical factor, which emerged in the evaluation, was support for online teachers in the form of professional development. While the characteristics of effective and rich teaching and learning online may be similar to those applying in the regular classroom, online teaching and learning is a new paradigm and both teachers and students need to develop new skills.

Online PD has been expanded and now includes support teachers. Delivery and support teachers are seen as team teachers. The team approach has pay offs for enhanced student support. Professional learning sessions are now organised and provided on a 'just in time' basis.

Two Success Stories

Two online programs, delivered through the e-magine Online Campus, which highlight its success are:

- Online Aged Care
- Online VET Aquaculture (or Fishy Business)

Online Aged Care: Online aged care was developed over two years through support from LearnScope in 1999 and 2000. It was our first successful online VET program. Enrolments grew from 25 in 2001 to 60 in 2002 and demand in 2003 is more than 60. Delivery was originally from Campbell Town (central Tasmania) to many other locations around the

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state including Tasman in south east, to Penguin in northwest. The course has now been cloned and is delivered from Launceston College and Campbell Town to cope with numbers. The original teacher mentored other delivery staff during 2000-2001 so that even though she has now left to work with an Industry Training Board, the course is continuing strongly. The original teacher has been inundated by visitors asking about the innovation.

Online Aquaculture - Dover District High is a small district high school. It is Australia's southern-most school, on the fringe of Tasmania's South West wilderness. The estuaries surrounding Dover are the centre of Tasmania's aquaculture industry. In response to this, the school has its own marine farm and strong links with industry. In 2001 Dover School delivered Online VET Aquaculture Certificate 2 to students in Tasmania in ten different locations. The school received a staffing allocation of 0.2 of a teacher for the delivery. The teacher had one full day per week to devote to online teaching. Twenty students who may not otherwise have an opportunity to study VET Aquaculture, enrolled in *Fishy Business*.

The School Council of Flinders Island District High invited the e-magine Online Campus to host a parent and student evening at the school in August 2001. The island's population is in decline, losing young people interstate. Aquaculture is seen as one way Flinders Island can address regional economic decline. Two new fish farms have opened and the School Council is keen for the e-magine Online Campus to provide Aquaculture Studies to students in cooperation with the local aquaculture industry. It is likely that in the future most grade 9 & 10 students will study a VET preparation program in Online Aquaculture being delivered from Woodbridge District High. Grade 11 students will undertake VET Online Aquaculture Certificate 2 delivered from Dover District High.

Conclusion

The e-magine Online Campus is now firmly established in education in Tasmania. It began a little more than 12 months ago as a pilot online school intended to support students in isolated areas.

It is clear that the e-magine Online Campus is achieving the aims of extending Training Package implementation in small and isolated schools/college.

There are however two very powerful outcomes from the Campus Project which are also impacting at system level.

- It is now recognised in schools that the e-magine Online Campus and online approaches have the potential to facilitate real change in Training Package delivery in schools/colleges – particularly through VET preparation courses in high schools, which have an increasing number of disenchanted students seeking a more flexible approach.

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- The e-magine Online Campus is an effective form of contextualised, project based professional development for all those involved in online programs. The presence of computers in classrooms does not suggest that they are more than ancillary to the pedagogy of traditional instruction (Mann 2002). Effective professional development is critical to the integration of ICT in the curriculum. Teachers in the Online Campus are effectively using ICT within a hybrid teaching model to provide scaffolding and support to online learners, rather than using ICT as an information tool supporting regular teaching.

Online teachers have been provided with customised, needs based professional development to support their online teaching. Wherever possible clusters of online teachers have been created. These clusters have engaged in sharing experiences online and offline. The involvement of these teachers in contextualised project based professional development has established a cohort of Online Mentors. As schools/colleges seek to move into online learning, these Online Mentors are champions of online learning who underpin the professional development strategy. They are acting as agents of change, and in so doing are enabling the e-magine Online Campus to become a catalyst for the change required to move Tasmania's broader teaching community into the online paradigm.

Online teaching is part of a new and still emerging paradigm. Observations of online teaching in Tasmania reveal that successful online teachers appear to have a new staffing profile reflecting their qualifications, motivation and experience, and they utilise different pedagogies and approaches. Many of the teachers are mature and experienced teachers, keen for new challenges and looking for ways to make the Training Packages more relevant and flexible.

The Online Mentors now have established credibility in the eyes of their peers and will foster and support the adoption of online approaches and hence school and VET RTO improvement in Tasmania.

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