



Building organisational capability through mentoring

How one TAFE supported new educators and re-engaged experienced staff

Focus

Using mentoring as a practical workforce development strategy to support new educators, re-engage experienced staff, and strengthen organisational capability across teaching teams.

Scenario

A large vocational education provider, Excellence TAFE in Western Australia, identified a recurring challenge: many new educators entering the organisation were highly skilled in their industry areas but had limited experience in teaching and assessment.

While an induction program existed, leaders noticed that new educators often felt overwhelmed by the complexity of program design, assessments and the diverse expectations of the training environment. Retention of new staff in the first two years was considerably lower than desired.

Leaders also identified that a cohort of skilled and experienced educators lacked some of their initial enthusiasm and energy: they had been in their roles for a considerable time and, in their own words, "needed something of interest to regain their sense of pride and satisfaction in their work."

The mentoring program

In response and in consultation with an education consultant, Excellence TAFE introduced a structured mentoring initiative to support new educators while strengthening the teaching capability of more experienced educators. Experienced educators were invited to serve as mentors in the program. These mentors were selected based on their strong teaching practice, industry knowledge and their willingness to be part of the program.

A 2-day professional learning program was designed and implemented to help mentors explore key mentoring skills and establish clear guidance and boundaries for their practice with the mentees. The program included opportunities to practice mentoring skills within the team of mentors before meeting with their mentees.

The mentors had a time allocation for each new educator they mentored. This professional learning also formed part of their annual vocational competency requirement, a requirement around VET Teaching capability.

The mentees also began the program with a day of professional learning to explain the program, introduce their mentors, answer questions, and explore the parameters of the shared experience. This day also afforded the opportunity to meet other new educators, which was welcomed with enthusiasm.



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Each new educator or mentee was thoughtfully paired with an experienced mentor for 6 months. The mentoring process included regular fortnightly meetings focused on professional dialogue, classroom observation, and collaborative problem-solving. The mentoring conversations encouraged reflective practice and the sharing of strategies and practical approaches to teaching diverse learners. The program encouraged both the mentor and the mentee to observe the other teaching twice, with an additional option to team-teach a session.

Feedback from members of the mentoring program

Jason, a new auto educator, stated, "Shelly was a great support as my mentor. Our weekly conversations made me really think about being inclusive in the class and about designing and implementing interesting learning activities that sparked enthusiasm among my learners. Shelly also helped me with some ideas around creating a community of my students who were really diverse. It was really useful to have time set aside to think and share ideas. I also really enjoyed meeting the other new educators at the start of the program – a number of us have kept in contact and share ideas when we get together".

Shelly told us, "The mentoring sessions with Jason were fabulous: I looked forward to them. He inspired me to improve my teaching, based on the conversations we shared. We observed each other teaching a few times, and that gave us a lot to discuss in our weekly sessions. We also team taught a few sessions which was great: we each brought strengths to the sessions and the students thought it was fabulous! It was great to have time to think about what we were doing instead of being in autopilot and doing the same thing repeatedly. I would like to repeat this program with another mentee and improve my skills. I also have some ideas about improving the program in general".

The outcomes of the Excellence TAFE mentoring program

Mentors supported mentees in areas such as planning engaging learning activities, designing valid and reliable assessments, managing learner engagement and interpreting training package requirements. Importantly, mentors also helped new educators understand the organisation's culture and expectations, which contributed to a stronger sense of belonging to both their teams and the organisation as a whole.

Over time, the mentoring program produced several positive outcomes. New educators reported increased confidence in both their teaching and assessment practices. They also valued having a trusted colleague with whom they could discuss challenges and test ideas. The new educators also benefited from the connection with other new educators at Excellence TAFE. Leaders observed improvements in the consistency and quality of teaching across departments.



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The mentoring process also benefited the mentors themselves. Experienced educators reported that mentoring prompted them to reflect more deeply on their own teaching practice and encouraged the sharing of innovative strategies across teams. Importantly, the mentors also reported feeling more valued and recognised by Excellence TAFE.

At an organisational level, the mentoring program strengthened collaboration, professional learning, and knowledge sharing. Staff retention among new educators improved, and leaders observed greater alignment in teaching approaches across programs. Excellence TAFE invited Jason and Shelly to share their experience at its annual conference and asked both to serve as leaders in the design of future mentoring programs.

Questions for reflection – Excellence TAFE mentoring program

1. What aspects of the mentoring program at Excellence TAFE appear to have contributed most to the confidence and development of new educators?
2. How were the mentors supported in their roles?
3. How was the introductory session for both mentors and mentees structured for success?
4. What challenges could you see affecting the program?
5. What aspects of this case study could be relevant and important in your organisation?

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