EngagingPedagogies and FacilitatingPedagogues:

Communities of Practice Among Novice Online Tutors and Secondary Vocational Teachers At the Forefront of Systemic Tensions and Change
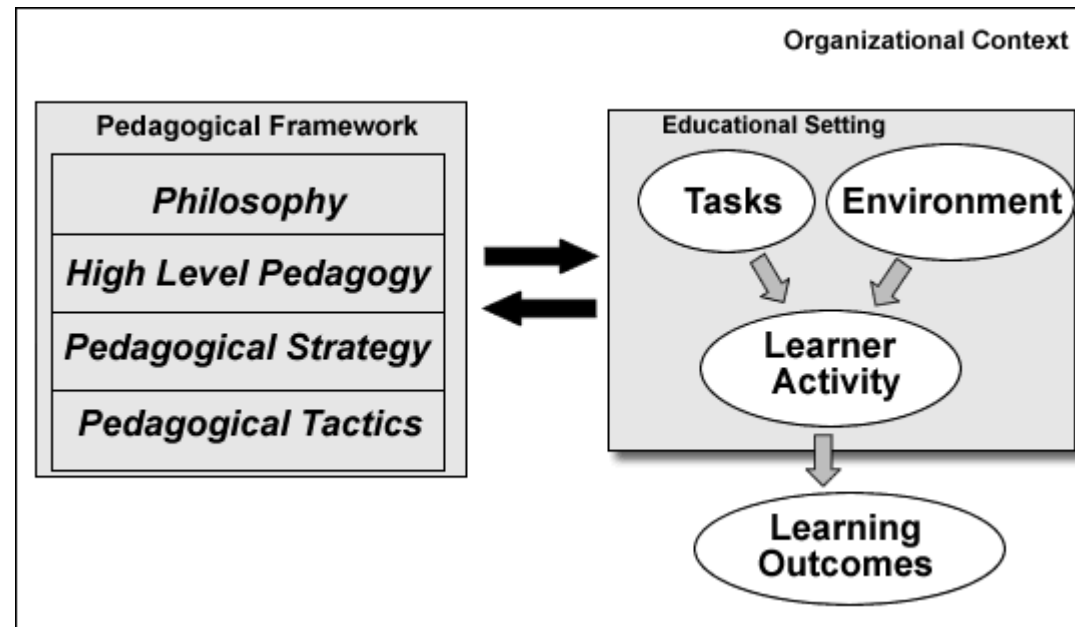
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Outline

○ Pedagogy in context

○ Pedagogical innovators in context

○ Communities of practice

- Characteristics
- Emergence in innovative sites
- Facilitating pedagogues
- Engaging pedagogies in innovative practice

○ Conclusions

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Pedagogyin Context

(adapted from Steeples, Jones, & Goodyear, 2002 by
Kehrwald, Reushle, Redmond, Cleary, Albion, & Maroulis, 2005)

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Pedagogicalinnovators in context: organisationsand communities

- A high level of educators' satisfaction with their teaching appears to be correlated with positive student experiences (Fullan & Hargreaves, 1991; Goodyear et. al, 2001; Hall & Hoard, 2002).

- Much of contemporary educators' work is located at the interface of complex systems of policy and provision.

- As change is enacted, that interface is increasingly the site of broader discursive tensions, with profound implications for individual classes and courses.

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Communitiesof Practice(CoP)

○ Defined by Etienne Wenger (2001), as
- *Communities… focused on a domain of knowledge and over time accumulate expertise in this domain. They develop their shared practice by interacting around problems, solutions, and insights, and building a common store of knowledge.*

○ CoPs are premised on inter-dependence where collaborative engagement stimulates innovative solutions within the Group. They are 'sense making' and 'solution-orientated' entities.

○ 'Domain' is the nexus between the subject matter and the context in which activities are practiced.

○ Members align their practice and develop professional identities within the Group - practice and identity as a practitioner are inexorably linked. [Legitimate peripheral participation.]

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CoPs arenot Simply Inductionsto SanctionedPractice!

- Conceptions of CoPs have matured from earlier romanticised notions of steady state accord where knowledge and practices are perpetuated or refined – a harmony between practitioners and their professional or organisational systems.

- Instead, an environment of reform and innovation invites adaptation and challenge of practices. Within this landscape, CoPs are dynamic, reveal discord, evolve to respond to divergent futures, are focused on practice, and retain substance with a fluid membership. CoPs have a life exceeding the achievement of pre-determined tasks (Barab, McKinster, & Scheckler, 2003).

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Two Cases: Emergenceand Roles of CoP in InnovativePedagogical Practice

○ Novice online pedagogues – *Banksia University*

- First online program where institutional systems established for on-campus study. Administered by a newly formed multi-disciplinary School anticipating 'poor fit'.

○ VET (Vocational Education & Training) pedagogues in schools – regional Queensland

- Massive increase of VET enrollments in schools where formal infrastructures under-developed: partnerships (cross-sectoral collaborations and networks); models of accessing VET educator expertise and the 'hard' infrastructure of plant & equipment.

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CollaborativeEngagement Stimulating InnovativeSolutions: Online Education

- The School, MGS, sought to devise tactical, workable solutions rather than simply understand Banksia's systems and policies).
  - I walk the forms across to the Faculty, back to Student Admin, across to the Library, back to Student Admin…then I do my bit. You know, forms can sit on someone's desk for weeks. After [an applicant's] e-mail, [the Head of *MGS*] went on the warpath following the trail until he found the application. Sent a rocket! We've offered a free semester's study. [The Head] reckons cheap solution, a satisfied and potentially loyal, though wary, customer. They [Banksia] just don't know how to do things – so much red-tape. (Administrator 1)
- Sustaining engagement with students emerged as a major pedagogical challenge and dilemma, compounded by *MGS*' fast-tracking late enrolees into the course.
  - Students are in the course before receiving the introductory course materials and well before they have access to the library. We are the ones that make it work – spend lots of time one-on-one and e-mailing readings. (Tutor G.)

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CollaborativeEngagement Stimulating InnovativeSolutions: VET

- To address the needs of students who would previously have left school at the end of Year 10, staff engaged in active and ongoing liaison with colleagues in school, industry representatives outside the school and curriculum designers for 'local content'… whereas most of their colleagues' work was focused heavily within the school.
  - …we'd have a student and we would try and find a program that suited that student, not have a program and then try and find the students to fit it. You understand what I mean? We go the other way. (Teacher 7)
  - The training packages are all nominated in Brisbane, so the first training package, perhaps, not a word about the Great Barrier Reef, only one word about outback tourism. The latest version does include training for those areas. They had to be bullied and pushed, cajoled, dragged along to do it. They didn't want to do it; they just did not want to be part of it because it's all Brisbane orientated. (Teacher 8)

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Domain Requiring Knowledgeand Practical Competence:Online Ed.

- While the *AMan* tutors anticipated that working in an online environment would be their significant pedagogical hurdle, bringing 'management' alive as a cohesive discipline emerged as an unexpected on-the-fly challenge.
  - I want to re-write much of the course as it is written as if the students want to be an accountant, and have the discipline to work at their own pace. I've had no assignments yet and fear the worst. This makes it very time-consuming as I have to deal with everyone individually. (Tutor I)
  - I agreed to take this class because [the Dean] asked. It is the new thing. For my CV...I thought "a foothold" – something stable....Geoff wrote the course but doesn't want to teach it, so no competition here. However, nobody [in the faculty] knows, nobody is even interested! A dead-end. I'm on my own... (Tutor D)

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Domain Requiring Knowledgeand Practical Competence:VET

○ The domain framing the VET teachers' CoP was the subjects making up the VET offerings in different schools' senior secondary educational provision… set as "an integral part of the mainstream curriculum".

● I've tried to kick that off to try and get an ethos across of a…[local] cluster that kids that have come out of our schools with a voc[actional]. ed[ucation]. mentality will have skills and attitudes that will get them working and keep them working. Trying to have that local flavour, trying to keep kids here, trying to develop the idea that voc. ed. is not just a grubby manual arts subject that kids really do because they can't handle real school. It is a pathway… and there is a definite good quality [inaudible] to take those subjects. So that's why I've tried to drag voc. ed. out of where it used to be. You used to hear some tin bashing [inaudible] whereas it's a lot wider than that. (Teacher 2)

● Although I wonder, if we had 10 kids who were doing a straight traditional science high-flyer type course, and they suddenly came to us and said, "We want to do a traineeship in something"… maybe medical science.., whether teachers would say, "Hang on, I need them for Maths B; they can't go". (Teacher 3)

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Dynamism, Discord and Responsivenessto Divergent Futures

○ And then there were three… the tutor, the students and the *MGS* Marketer.

- [Marketer] makes announcements in the course without consulting. They are lengthy, unrelated to the course….I am careful in my tone, how I present myself through friendly, relaxed, brief, focused announcements… (Tutor A)

○ Tutors felt that the Head of *MGS* displayed a lack of appreciation of their workload

- [Head] thinks we only answer questions about assignments. He keeps adding students which disrupts the teaching – discussions, group work etc (Tutor G)
- [Head] misses the point [that students are ringing the tutor at her home], suggesting that I don't answer the phone…and keep a record of the phone calls I make so I can be reimbursed. (Tutor I)
- Terse e-mail from [Head]. I had told the class that I would not be available when I went to China. He expects me to respond to student enquiries. (Tutor D)

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CoPs

- Online Education: Initially the tutors tentatively 'opened up' by sharing what were seen as unrealistic expectations set by the *MGS*, and at odds with student expectations These conversations changed course to share what tutors had found to be fruitful strategies, and later invitations were sent to other tutors to visit their courses to see how those tactics bore fruit.

- On the one hand, several of the secondary VET teachers spoke about the professional and personal relationships that they had developed over many years in the local community as being the basis for the secondary VET networks to which they contributed. These relationships included associations with other teachers (in the same and different schools), school administrators, other specialist teachers, parents, former students, providers of other community services and employers. These variegated associations constituted a rich tapestry of connections and social capital that the teachers were able to use as the basis for dynamic and fluid membership of this particular CoP.

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Communitiesof Practice – Value to Educators at theForefront of Change

○ A fundamental nexus between the capacity of educators to enact pedagogies that are engaging and the extent to which they are facilitated as pedagogues by the systems at the forefront of whose tensions and change pressures they are positioned.

○ Members gain sustenance from these communities as they struggle to make their pedagogies engaging for their students. Support that is often absent from the systems that employ them.

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Communitiesof Practice – Value to Educators at theForefront of Change

- It is clear from the preceding analysis that, at the interface between systems' policies and the practices of those who are charged with the implementation of these policies, there are particular pedagogical approaches that educators need to (a) know about and (b) be able to apply and enact.

- Given the argument being prosecuted in this paper, this is where and why CoPs become important: they provide a level of support for that application and enactment that is often absent from the systems that initiate much of the change and that depend for their own survival and sustainability on the efficient discharge of the educators' work responsibilities.

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