ICT for prisoner education: The story of a trial project

• • • Tasman Bedford, Angela Murphy, Helen Farley
University of Southern Queensland, Toowoomba

Abstract

This paper tells the story of a collaborative trial project between the University of Southern Queensland (USQ) and Queensland Corrective Services, from its inception to the present stage of near-completion. The project involved the use of internet-independent ICT for prisoner education. A major aim was to enable prisoners to greatly enhance their employment and further education prospects by developing their e-literacy/learning skills. The project involved the development of an internet-independent form of a USQ course Moodle site that could be placed on a correctional centre server "intra-netted" to computer labs for educational use by prisoners. Additionally, participating prisoners were individually supplied with internet-independent e-readers containing the course study materials. The trial commenced at the start of semester 2, 2012. Student support in the use of the Moodle site and the e-readers was provided by correctional centre staff and through regular visits by USQ Tertiary Preparation Program (TPP) teachers. The evaluation plan for the trial included gathering weekly feedback from the students via an evaluation instrument in the Moodle site, and from the correctional centre staff. This paper provides an account of the numerous challenges encountered and overcome by the project team, and a summary evaluation of the trial project.

Background information

A University of Southern Queensland (USQ) internet learning environment is created for each USQ course within a Moodle community site, referred to at USQ as the course StudyDesk. In addition to the standard course learning materials that are made available to all students enrolled in the course, the StudyDesk environment provides a variety of online learning resources that cannot effectively be provided to students by means other than by on-campus, face-to-face sessions. Access to the StudyDesk is of particular value to the distance education students who can access it. The resources provided by StudyDesk include, not exhaustively, discussion forums, various ways (such as automatically marked quizzes) by which students can receive instant feedback

on their understanding of course learning material, and additional learning resources such as video recordings of lectures and other types of documents. The discussion forums provide the opportunity for students to raise questions, make comments, and respond to each other, and for course lecturers to respond to students' messages.

Approximately one-third of the students who enrol in the TPP in the distance education mode (amounting to approximately 450 students per annum) do not have sufficient access to the Internet to be able to use the course StudyDesks. Approximately 300 of these students (per annum) reside in correctional centres, and have no access to the Internet.

The trial project, which is narrated in this paper, involved placing an internet-free version of the StudyDesk of a USQ Tertiary Preparation Program course on a server at a correctional centre at which students were enrolled in the course. The internet-free version of the Moodle community site was referred to as SAM (Stand Alone Moodle). The students were provided with supervised access to SAM on a weekly sessional basis. Additionally, each student was supplied with an e-reader that could not access the Internet. All of the course materials were placed on the e-readers. The students were permitted to take the e-readers to their cells, thereby being able to access the electronic copy of the course study materials during the daily lockdown period of the centre. In addition to assistance provided to the students in using SAM and the e-readers by a member of the correctional centre's education staff, the students could access a fortnightly tutorial session on the course provided by a visiting member of the USQ TPP teaching team.

The TPP course of which the modified StudyDesk was uploaded in SAM was TPP7120 Studying to Succeed, one of the compulsory core courses of the program. TPP7120 is a two unit-point course consisting of academic communication skills and study-management skills in equal proportions of content and assessment. The TPP is offered through the Open Access College (OAC) of USQ.

An evaluation plan for the project was included in the implementation plan, involving focus groups with the students and education staff involved in the project prior to the start, and at the end, of the semester in which the trial of the project was scheduled to occur (USQ semester 2, 2012), and collecting feedback information on a weekly basis from the students and the correctional centre staff member responsible for assisting the students.

The story

In 2010

The story of the project begins in 2010 with Gary, the TPP7120 course team leader, deeply concerned that each year approximately 450 of his students, the majority of whom are prisoners, could not benefit from access to their course StudyDesk. He was continually making significant enhancements to the TPP7120 StudyDesk to facilitate student learning from the course. He was particularly concerned that students who did not have access to the StudyDesk lacked any opportunity, at the tertiary preparation stage of their studies, to learn how to use an internet learning environment. He knew that if they enrolled in a higher education program after completing the TPP, their progress with study would depend on their ability to make effective use of the e-learning environment. As a starting point in allaying his concern, Gary sought advice from Bronwyn, an Australian Digital Futures Institute (ADFI) at USQ staff member, as to the possibility of developing an internet-independent version of the StudyDesk that could be made available to students who did not have access to the Internet. Bronwyn advised Gary that development of an internet-free version of the Moodle StudyDesk site was technically possible, and would require a very significant commitment of ICT and OAC teaching staff resources to achieve. Soon after providing this advice, Bronwyn resigned from USQ.

In 2011

After Bronwyn's departure, Gary's idea of an internet-independent TPP7120 StudyDesk remained in abeyance for about 12 months until, at Bronwyn's suggestion, Helen, a new appointee to ADFI, took up the idea as a possible ADFI-OAC joint project targeting TPP7120 students in correctional centres. After consultation with Gary, in July 2011 Helen established a project development team ('the team') consisting of herself, Angela (an ADFI colleague), Tas (the TPP Coordinator), and Lesley (pseudonym) (the senior education staff member at a Queensland correctional centre). Helen named the proposed project *Portable Learning Environments for Incarcerated Adult Distance Education Students* (PLEIADES). As Helen later remarked, "When I first joined this project, I did not realise the true enormity of the battle we were facing" (Helen, personal communication, 3 October 2012).

Initial informal consultations to explore parameters of the proposed project and their possible impact on relevant USQ service units were held between the team, the USQ Information Technology (IT) team, and representatives from USQ Student Services. Helen's recollection of these consultative meetings is expressed in her words: "Most of these meetings felt like gibberish" (Helen,

personal communication, 3 October 2012). Contrary to the advice that Bronwyn had given to Gary, the IT team expressed the view that what the project team wanted simply could not be achieved. Helen's wise response to this viewpoint was to limit the scope of what the project set out to deliver, to the extent that the IT team's constantly emerging objections to the project were neutralised.

The team, led by Helen, developed a project plan for the proposed PLEADES project. At Helen's suggestion, the team decided that the project be expanded from the original idea of providing an internet-independent version of the course StudyDesk to include the provision of e-readers to the students. Initially, Helen made her suggestion to try to ensure that the project aligned with ADFI's research agenda, thus enhancing the probability that ADFI management would support the project.

As a long-standing positive working relationship had been established between TPP staff and Lesley, and the centre at which she was employed was within 80 kilometres of the USQ campus, the team decided to try to arrange for a trial of PLEIADES to be conducted at that centre. The project planning process began with identification of the principal stakeholders in the proposed project as USQ, Queensland Corrective Services (QCS), and PRIVPRO (pseudonym) (the private company that manages the targeted correctional centre). A plan for gaining support for the project from each of them was developed by the team. This plan involved a variety of activities targeting the main stakeholders at various levels during the period July to December 2011.

Obtaining support from USQ seemed at first to be a straightforward prospect, considering USQ's strong policy commitment to social justice and enabling education for educationally disadvantaged people. However, 'The layers of [USQ] support were unbelievably complex' (Helen, personal communication, 3 October 2012). The complexity to which Helen referred stemmed in part from the highly bureaucratic and 'silo-ed' decision-making structures of USQ and in part from the polarisation of attitudes towards prisoner education amongst the representatives of the various USQ silos and decision-making bodies, some of whom were extremely supportive and others very negative. As a result of consultations with USQ internal stakeholders in the propose project, which were carried out in many forums by Helen and Angela, Helen received numerous inquiries from faculties' teaching staff who were interested in using SAM in correctional centres. An irony of this situation was the wide interest in the project from a USQ teaching perspective versus the extreme difficulties experienced by the team in obtaining material support from USQ to progress the project.

In July 2011, the team unsuccessfully applied for a grant from the USQ Social Justice Fund to support development of the project. In response to the team's failure to secure USQ social justice funding to pay for staff work time, during July and August 2011 Helen and Angela successfully lobbied managers of ADFI and of USQ IT to obtain in-kind support for the project by way of allocations of specialist staff time to work on the technical aspects. In August 2011, Tas successfully applied to the Director OAC for a grant of funds and for an in-kind contribution of his and Gary's work time. Lesley successfully lobbied the managers of the targeted correctional centre to obtain in-principle support to conduct the project at the centre. Clearance was obtained from the USQ Human Research Ethics Committee in August 2011 for the proposed project to proceed.

A joint paper about the proposed project was presented by Helen, Tas and Lesley at an Australasian Corrections Education Association (ACEA) conference in November 2011. After extensive consultation with Ralph (pseudonym), who was the Director of the Adult Education, Vocational Education and Training (AEVET) Branch of QCS, and Brian (pseudonym), Senior Advisor, AEVET Offender Rehabilitation and Management Services of QCS, an application for permission to carry out the trial phase of the project as a research project in the targeted correctional centre was submitted to QCS in September 2011. The long-standing positive professional relationship that had been developed between Ralph, Brian and the TPP team over many years enabled consultation to be open, frank and very informative. Ralph and Brian are strong advocates of prisoner education and training in all forms and at all levels, and have always been strong supporters of the provision of the TPP to offenders in custody. They were very supportive of the concept and aims of the proposed project. However, they emphasised the extreme concerns in QCS about the possibility that the proposed SAM and use of e-readers could enable prisoner access to the Internet or prohibited forms of communication between inmates. As a consequence of this concern, application for approval to trial the proposed project in a correctional centre had to be made via several channels, each of which required detailed documentation regarding the security aspects of the project. At a meeting arranged in October 2011 for Helen and Angela to brief the QCS Commissioner and the QCS Board of Management on the proposed project, the Commissioner expressed strong in-principle support for the project. The prospect of obtaining all of the necessary approvals at the QCS and correctional centre levels was greatly enhanced by the support for the project expressed by the Commissioner and by Ralph.

The team was advised by QCS that an opportunity briefing document relating to the proposed project was required by each of the following QCS bodies:

• Unit and Directorate
• the Privacy, Information and Related Technologies Committee
• QCS Board of Management
• QCS Financial Committee Approval
• Communication and Information Committee.

The required documentation was drafted by Helen and Angela, and, after review by the whole team, the final draft was forwarded to the relevant QCS bodies. The process of obtaining the necessary approvals from QCS took several months to complete as there was no precedent for approving this type of project in Queensland correctional centres and, thus, no established procedures for processing the application for approval. Eventually the approval process was expedited by the Commissioner, and approval was obtained. At this stage, Helen commented, "I often thought during this phase that if we'd known what was involved straight up, we would have never started the project" (Helen, personal communication, 3 October 2012).

As part of the project plan to gather relevant information from the stakeholders, a meeting between the team, 13 QCS correctional centre education officers and Ralph was held in November 2011. At this meeting the education officers were briefed on the proposed project and then participated in a structured workshop facilitated by Helen and Angela to gather the officers' responses to the proposal, particularly in terms of their perceptions of potential benefits and barriers/disadvantages at the correctional centre level of implementation. The team, accompanied by USQ IT team members, met with managers, education staff and IT staff of the targeted correctional centre in November 2011 to discuss processes and procedures to be followed for the setting up and implementation of the trial project at the centre, and to secure agreement on support arrangements for the project by USQ and the centre management and staff.

In December 2011, Lesley advised the team that she intended to leave the correctional centre early in 2012, and that Krystal (pseudonym), a member of the centre's education staff, would take over her role on a temporary basis until an on-going appointment was made. Helen concluded that the loss of Lesley's enthusiastic and highly energetic support for the project dealt a significant blow to its development (Helen, personal communication, 3 October 2012). The uncertainty that resulted from this situation was potentially exacerbated by the imminent closure of the existing correctional centre and its relocation of most of

the inmates and staff to a new centre, which was scheduled to occur during the period December 2011 to January 2012.

As ADFI did not have the expertise to develop a SAM, and no funds were available to outsource this work, the team sought assistance from the USQ Moodle project team, who were very supportive of the project to the extent that they offered their work time to carry out the task, an offer that the team gratefully accepted. The generosity of the offer was highlighted by the fact that, at the time and subsequently, the Moodle team were working to tight deadlines to implement a new version of Moodle USQ-wide. Despite the generosity of the Moodle team, the circumstances resulted in delays with the work, which constantly put the planned implementation of the project in jeopardy.

In 2012
During the period November 2011 to March 2012, Gary worked on the redevelopment of the TPP7120 materials for uploading to a SAM. In addition to removing links to external sites, Gary sourced alternative learning materials to the materials on the sites and made arrangements for copyright clearances to be obtained to load relevant materials to the e-readers. In doing this work, Gary had to contend with having to work across the siloed service structures of USQ, which included the Moodle team, Equella (the USQ digital repository for course reading materials in the online library) management, the USQ Learning Resource Development unit, the USQ Information and Communication Technology unit, and the USQ Library. The situation for Gary was exacerbated by the USQ-wide implementation at the time of the change from Moodle 1.9 to Moodle 2.2, which involved changes to the StudyDesk environment and to the location course learning resources. As Helen remarked of Gary's task, "It was really hard to figure out who was supposed to do what and which piece of the puzzle fitted where and when" (Helen, personal communication, 3 October 2012).

Helen and Angela reviewed a range of e-readers in April and May 2012 to identify possible available candidate machines that met the QCS security requirements for use in the project at the correctional centre. These requirements were so restrictive that "[t]his stage of the project certainly felt like it could not be done" (Helen, personal communication, 3 October 2012). They included no technical possibility of internet connection, no memory slot card facility, and only in-built batteries that could not be removed without completely wrecking the machine. Helen and Angela identified the Sony PRS 350 e-reader as being suitable. However, as this machine was superseded, difficulties in

obtaining supplies at any future time were foreseen. The major difficulty in finding a suitable replacement for the obsolete machines is the no-slot-card-facility restriction as all currently available machines have this facility. Helen and Angela lobbied the senior manager of their USQ division for funding to purchase all of the available machines (a total of 17).

The issue of ownership of the machines when they were placed in the correctional centre was raised by management, and this issue arose as a potential threat to the progress of the project. In addition to the physical property ownership aspect of the issue, the aspect of copyright of the material loaded in the e-readers was raised, as the copyright clearance for the materials applied to USQ rather than the correctional centre. Eventually the issue was resolved by agreement that the correctional centre could use the e-readers on an on-going loan basis from USQ. USQ bureaucracy stepped in again as an obstacle to the purchase of the available suitable machines, as USQ Procurement were opposed to purchasing from the only available supplier. Some representatives of internal USQ stakeholders in the project opposed making the e-readers available for use by incarcerated students, presumably because of bias against the provision of education services to prisoners, thus creating a further obstacle to obtaining approval to use USQ funds for purchasing the e-readers. The issues of procurement and availability to prisoner USQ students were resolved by an agreement that when the correctional centre no longer needed the machines to support TPP studies by inmates, the machines would be donated to the USQ Library. The team was puzzled as to why the Library would want such machines, but at least the issues had been resolved. Helen summed up her impressions of the dreary processes of purchasing the e-readers for the project in these words:

> *Hurdles of inconceivable stupidity were suddenly appearing. It was clear that some of the obstacles arose because of personal prejudice* (Helen, personal communication, 3 October 2012).

Copyright issues presented a further problem with the use of the e-readers in the project. This problem resulted from the need, for technical reasons, to convert all documents for loading in the e-readers to EPUB (Electronic Publishing) file format. Although USQ had obtained copyright permissions to place the relevant documents on the e-readers, it transpired that these permissions did not extend to converting the relevant documents to EPUB format. This situation necessitated negotiating further copyright permissions, which were successfully conducted except for some publications. As a

consequence of this situation, a decision was reached by OAC staff to try to replace all of the externally sourced publications used in the course materials with publications from OERs Commons (Open Educational Resources) in future.

In May 2012 the team learned that Michael (pseudonym) had been appointed as the replacement for Lesley, the former senior education staff member at the target correctional centre for the project who had resigned at the start of 2012. The new appointment resulted in yet another change to the leadership personnel for the implementation of the project at the correctional centre level, there having been several temporary delegations of the leadership function since the resignation of Lesley at the beginning of 2012.

In July 2013, all of the materials to be loaded into the e-readers were converted to EPUB format by staff employed by using the funding grant from OAC, and were subsequently loaded into the machines. A training video on how to use the e-readers was produced for the project by the USQ Digital Media Services production team for inclusion in the SAM version of the course StudyDesk for the benefit of the students. Training in the use of SAM and the e-readers was provided by Helen, Angela and the Moodle team at the USQ Toowoomba campus for the education staff at the target correctional centre who were to be involved in the implementation of the project. A back-up CD of relevant material and a training video were also produced for their use. Simon (pseudonym), who was an IT technician at the correctional centre, and Krystal received training at the USQ campus in using the SAM version of the course StudyDesk and the e-readers, by previous arrangement.

In keeping with the project plan to gather project-relevant information from stakeholders, two focus group sessions were conducted at the target correctional centre by Helen, Angela and Tas in early in July 2012. One of these sessions involved the students who were enrolled in TPP7120 in semester 1, 2012. The other session was conducted with students who were enrolled in semester 2, 2012, the semester in which implementation of the trial phase of the project was scheduled to commence in the week beginning Monday 16 July. The focus group activity was preceded by a briefing by Helen and Angela on the proposed trial project. The purpose of the focus groups was to gather information from the students pertaining to their previous experiences with formal education and other learning environments, post-release career aspirations and the skills they would need in order to achieve these aspirations, perceptions of the characteristics of successful learners, perceptions of difficulties of studying within a correctional centre, experience with using ICT,

and concerns with/comments on any other matters related to the project. The date of the briefing and focus groups sessions (5 July) was chosen as being sufficiently close to the commencement date of the implementation of the trial project to engage the interest of the students who had enrolled in TPP7120 in semester 2, 2012 in the sessions.

While the focus group sessions were being conducted, a USQ IT technician and Simon uploaded the SAM version of the course StudyDesk in a PC that was configured to act as a server for the internal network of PCs in two classrooms of the centre's education facility. The PC was used in this way because the centre did not have sufficient capacity in its education facility server to accommodate SAM. The capacity of the regular server was largely taken up with programs and files relating to other education and training activities for centre inmates, much of which was mandatory training material.

Implementation of the trial project was scheduled to begin in the first week of USQ semester 2, 2012, the week beginning Monday 16 July. However, "The best laid schemes of mice and men often go awry" (paraphrased from Robert Burns, *To a Mouse*). In the week prior to the scheduled start of the trial, the team learned that the role of Krystal, the education staff member who had been assigned to support the students with using SAM and the e-readers in their study of the course, had been re-assigned to Jessica (pseudonym), who was a new education staff member at the centre. Several hours on each Friday afternoon of the semester had been allocated by centre management for the students enrolled in the course to have access to the education facility that housed the PCs networked to the server on which SAM had been installed. The team was informed by Michael that Jessica would be available to assist the students to use the StudyDesk and the e-readers. Arrangements were made for Jessica to receive training in the use of the course StudyDesk and the e-readers. Unfortunately, as the team subsequently discovered, by the end of the second week into the trial there had been no formal hand-over of the re-assigned student support role and no briefing provided for Jessica by the centre staff who had been involved in the preparations for the implementation of the project.

Seven students at the correctional centre were enrolled in the course in semester 2, 2012. In addition to these seven new enrolments, there were two students who had extended their study of the courses from semester 1, 2012 into semester 2. Arrangements were made for a TPP lecturer to visit the students each fortnight during the semester for several hours to provide the

students with tutorial assistance in the course. These duties were assigned to Kate, a lecturer in the course. Student attendance at Kate's sessions was on a voluntary basis. Unknown to the team at the time of commencement of the trial, the rate of pay to inmates for attendance at education sessions was considerably less than the rate paid for other work in which they could engage within the centre. A negative effect of this situation for the trial project, as the team was to discover, was that some of the students chose to engage in work that provided the higher rate of pay instead of attending the tutorial sessions.

Kate was not aware that the SAM StudyDesk was loaded onto computers in a computer lab when she attended for her first visit on Wednesday in week 1 of the semester (on 18 July 2012). On her first visit Kate was accompanied by Naomi, the TPP careers counsellor, as the first assignment in the course was on the topic of career planning. The class was not held in the computer lab. Kate did know about the e-readers, which were allocated to students during this visit. As Kate had not seen the e-readers before, she was of limited assistance to the students with their problems in using them. She was able to compile a list of apparent errors the students observed in trying to use the e-readers. Kate and the students did not locate the readings for the course in the e-readers, and the pages were slow to change. During this first visit, Kate and Naomi concentrated upon providing tutorial assistance for the students. Some inmates who were not enrolled in the course visited the classroom in which the USQ staff were working with the enrolled students. Conversations between the students and the non-students were distracting to the tutoring process. At times, the USQ staff were somewhat confused as to which of the inmates present in the classroom were enrolled in the course.

After her first visit, Kate was asked to monitor the progress of the trial project, to provide assistance to the students (and if necessary, to the education support staff member at the centre) in using the SAM version of the course StudyDesk. During her second visit to the students (in week 3 of the semester (1 August)), Kate observed that the students had not received their passwords to access SAM, and only three students initially attended her session. Simon was called in, and the students were eventually allocated passwords. The process of setting up passwords, and then the process of the students trying to log on using the passwords took approximately an hour of the class time. Kate provided tutorial assistance concurrently with IT assistance, to achieve some outcomes for the students. Once the StudyDesk was available, the students seemed very impressed with the resources available there. However, Kate and the students found that the online quizzes they had expected to be able to start to use to

register activity were not there and so could not be completed; by this time, no usable data had been recorded for the project. After the tutorial session, Jessica made hard copy print-outs of the quizzes for the students to fill out on paper. Several of these were returned to the project team after Kate's next visit.

The lack of use of the StudyDesk by the students was of great concern to the team, particularly because the instrument for recording student feedback about the use of the devices was located in the StudyDesk and was intended to gather feedback on a weekly basis; thus, vital evaluation information about the trial project was not being gathered. Helen contacted Michael about this situation, and found herself in conflict with him about the lack of previously agreed support that the centre was providing to the students. After several telephone conversations between Helen and Michael, during which the conflict escalated, Helen arranged to meet with several members of the centre's management team to discuss the situation. The meeting was constructive in terms of clarifying the student support agreements that had been reached, and confirming the centre management's commitment to the agreements. One of the especially beneficial outcomes of the meeting was a decision by the centre management that the students who attended the scheduled education sessions would be paid at the same rate as inmates who engaged in employment work in the centre. Kate reported the problem of the missing StudyDesk quizzes to Angela, who initially thought an early version of the StudyDesk had been loaded in SAM. The issue was rectified before Kate's next visit.

Kate's third visit was in week 5 of the semester (on 15 August). On this visit Kate was accompanied by Susan, another lecturer in the course. By this time most of the students had been given passwords. However, two of the students who attended the session had forgotten their passwords. Simon was called in again, and the passwords were renewed, which involved yet another lengthy process. Kate and Susan needed passwords too, so they could chat in the forum with the students. The allocation of passwords to the USQ lecturers was not completed before the end of the session. The first quiz entries were made by the students, providing some useful evaluation data. Kate and Susan provided tutorial assistance to the students. Feedback to Kate and Susan from the students indicated that one student had returned the e-reader as he preferred to use the paper materials. Another student complained that access to the computer room to use the StudyDesk was too limited, making it practically impossible for him to use it. As a result of issues with Kate's workload, her duties in the project were re-assigned to Susan. Throughout all these early sessions, the tutorial assistance Kate provided was appreciated by the students, despite the issues

with the technology. The impact of the technical problems was minimised by continued attention to the study program by the lecturers and students.

Just prior to Susan's first scheduled visit, which was in week 9 of the semester (on 12 September), the team was informed that Jessica's support role for the project at the centre had been re-assigned to Ruby (pseudonym), another member of the centre's education staff. From her first visit, Susan reported that Ruby had been helpful in "rounding up" the students and in requesting inmates who were not enrolled in the course to leave the room in which Susan was to work with the students. Initially, only one student was able to log on to SAM, as all of the others needed new passwords. Eventually, with assistance from Simon, all of the students were logged on and they completed the week 1 feedback questionnaire in the StudyDesk. With Susan's assistance, all of the students completed a quiz relating to one of the course study modules, using the StudyDesk. To complete her tutorial session, Susan engaged the students in an open discussion about their learning experiences in the courses to date, of which she made an electronic recording. Comments made by the students included that most of them preferred one-to-one tutoring rather than group discussions. One of the students remarked, 'The quiz helps you remember things the computer is easier' (Susan, personal communication, 13 September 2012).

Susan's next visit was in week 11 of the semester (on 26 September). Ruby accompanied her to the education facility classroom, and stayed with her during her tutorial session. Only one student was present at the scheduled time of the session (1.00pm). Three others had arrived by 1.30pm. Two inmates who were not enrolled in the course also attended the session by 1.30pm. All of the attending students had lost or forgotten their SAM passwords, which resulted in a delay to the work that was planned to be completed during the session while Simon assigned new passwords. Bearing in mind the student feedback from her previous session, Susan encouraged each student individually to engage in some way with the StudyDesk. She concluded that most of the students would not engage in this activity on their own initiative, and needed to be assigned individualised tasks before they would participate. She encouraged them to do this by contributing postings about themselves, such as their career goals, supplementary reading in which they had engaged, and current affairs in which they were interested. Three of the students posted comments or questions in the StudyDesk discussion forum. Susan observed that the students' progress with study of the course was diverse with regard to how far they had progressed and on which aspects they were focussed, and she noted the difficulty that this

diversity created for tutoring the students in a group setting. She noted that the students who attended the tutorial session had completed most of the course's assessment tasks, and were in less need of tutor assistance than those who did not attend. Some of the attendees preferred to talk about their philosophical or sociological ideas or career aspirations than about their study of the course.

Susan concluded that the students who attended her tutorial session did so because they sought the actual presence of a teacher to confirm their identities as students, and that the relatively impersonal electronic environment of the StudyDesk was not attractive to them perhaps because through their incarceration they already experienced a sense of alienation from a student social environment. A major factor influencing students' decisions not to attend the sessions seemed to be their perceptions that the group environment of the classroom lacked privacy and personal space (Susan, personal communication, 27 September 2012). The conclusions reached by Susan from her observations during this visit challenged implicit assumptions that the team had made when planning the trial project, that the students would value highly the opportunity to experience an e-learning environment similar to that available to students who had internet access and that they would appreciate being able to work together on a group basis with a TPP teacher. As a result of Susan's information, the team became aware that these challenges would have to be addressed if the project was to move from the trial phase to wider and on-going implementation in Queensland correctional centres.

Susan's visits continued in each of the remaining two fortnights of the semester. Her next visit was in week 13 (on 10 October). Ruby and Simon were present during this session, which was attended by four students and one inmate who intended to enrol in the course in the next semester. All four students remembered their SAM password, and, after frequent encouragement by Susan, completed at least one of the feedback quizzes in the StudyDesk. For this session, Susan engaged the students in one-to-one consultation on their learning plans and activities, in accordance with her conclusion from previous sessions that generally the students disliked working in a group setting. She noted that the students responded positively to the individual attention she gave them and that they tended to talk about their planned undergraduate studies and career-related goals, which were to obtain employment in a profession. Three of the students spoke to Susan about their perceived need to have use of laptop computers, as exemplified by the following recorded statement of one of the students: 'I don't really use the computer that much. If I had a laptop, I'd use it. I'd use it in me cell…I'm not comfortable sitting around people all the time.

We don't get very much privacy in here' (Susan, personal communication, 11 October 2012).

Only two students attended Susan's final tutorial session, which was in week 15 of the semester (on 24 October). As some students had focussed discussion on their career goals during previous visits, Susan provided the students with individualised information packs that she had obtained from Naomi. These packs contained information on the particular career questions and interests that individual students had expressed.

On 9 November, Helen, with two other ADFI staff members, and Susan and Tas conducted focus group sessions with students at SQCC, one for the students who had studied the course in the semester 2, 2012 trial phase of the project, and the other for students who were to begin their study of the course in semester 3, 2012. Arrangements for conducting the sessions at the correctional centre had been made with Krystal, who had been re-assigned to duties associated with the project in place of Ruby. When the USQ team arrived, these arrangements were in place and the students were assembled ready to start the sessions. A USQ staff member took notes of the discussion during the sessions, and made an audio-recording of the discussion.

Susan and Tas attended the session for the students who had studied the course in semester 2, 2012. Tas facilitated the session, while Susan made written notes of the discussion and also made an audio-recording of the sessional talk. In response to an invitation to talk about their use of the e-readers, two students said that they used theirs every day and three students indicated that they did not use theirs very often if at all. These three students expressed a strong preference for using the course printed study materials rather than the e-reader because of difficulty in using the device or the small size of the print on it. Subsequent discussion revealed that some of the students did not know how to enlarge the screen size of the text, and that very little assistance had been provided to them in the use of the device by the centre education staff. Tas expressed surprise that students had apparently received little help, and pointed out that USQ had provided training in using the e-reader for the education staff involved and a relevant training video had been placed on the SAM course StudyDesk for use by the staff and the students. Some students responded to Tas's information by referring to their perceived lack of support from their assigned centre education staff member. One student remarked that he "wouldn't know the education officer if I saw her". Another student said, "Our liaison person has changed three times (this semester)

already" (words in parentheses added) (Susan, personal communication from her notes taken at the session, 12 November 2012). Much of the subsequent discussion by the students focussed on their perceived lack of correctional centre support for undertaking study, including their limited access to the education computer labs and their inability to have access to laptop computers. In response to a subsequent inquiry by Tas about TPP students' lack of access to use of laptop computers, a centre education staff member told him that QCS policy required that these computers could only be made available to students who had commenced undergraduate studies. He explained that the reason for this policy was that a large number of inmates would enrol in the TPP solely to obtain access to a laptop computer and without any intention of studying in the TPP.

After discussion of the use of the e-readers had been exhausted, Tas invited the students to talk about their use of the course StudyDesk in SAM. Much of what the students said about this aspect of the trial project focussed on their perceived lack of adequate access to the education computer labs to use the StudyDesk. One student said, "The problem you have in jail is getting across to the room. We're only allowed to use the computer room four hours a week." He added, "And you have to type your assignment in that time too" (Susan, personal communication from her notes taken at the session, 12 November 2012). A centre education staff member who was present at the session questioned the student's account, and an exchange of views occurred between the staff member and some of the students regarding their access to the computer labs. The different perceptions seemed to have arisen from apparent differences between the centre's policy regarding access by TPP students, and what actually occurred in practice when the students attempted to obtain access.

Tas attempted to re-focus the discussion on the students' experiences of actually using the StudyDesk when they did have access to it, by inviting them to comment on their use of the discussion forum. One of the students said, in explaining why he did not use the forum, "It takes too long to get a response" (Susan, personal communication from her notes taken at the session, 12 November 2012). Another student suggested that automatic responses to questions frequently asked by "outside" students of the course be incorporated into the discussion forum, so that when a student posted a question, an answer would be automatically displayed. Tas agreed that this was a useful suggestion, and that it would be followed up by the project team.

As a concluding phase to the session, Tas invited the students to make any further comments or suggestions, or ask any questions, relating to their experience of studying the course. One of the students remarked, "It's a fantastic course." Another student asked if the TPP mathematics courses would be made available on e-reader in the future. Tas replied that this idea would be considered. A third student suggested that an electronic archive of all TPP study materials be made available in SAM, to which Tas responded that being able to make this constructive suggestion a reality depended on the capacity of the correctional centre's available server as the current capacity was not adequate for this purpose.

The focus group session on 12 November 2012 was the final direct contact between the students enrolled in the course in semester 2, 2012 and the USQ staff.

This story of a partnership trial project between USQ and QCS draws to a close with some ambivalent reflections by the project team members, which included:

- No communications security risk issues arose
- A minority of the students used the course StudyDesk in SAM
- The majority of students were reluctant to make any use of the StudyDesk
- A majority of the students preferred to work alone rather than in the group setting originally planned for the project implementation
- Student access to the StudyDesk was generally perceived by the students to be much too restricted
- A majority of the students used the e-readers for studying the course learning materials
- A majority of the students regarded the dictionary in the e-readers as the most valuable aspect of having access to the devices, and access to the study material on the device as being of lesser value
- Agreed arrangements by the correctional centre personnel for education support of the students for using the devices were often not realised in practice, partly because there were three changes of education support staff during the implementation of the project
- The educational value of the project to the students could not be definitely determined because:

  » the anticipated amount and quality correctional centre education support for implementing the project (as had been agreed by SQCC management) was not provided (in particular assisting the students with using the devices and encouraging them to do so)

» the size of the sample of students was too small from which to generalise (the responses of this group may have been peculiar to the group rather than generalisable)

- The effectiveness of the arrangements made in the project for the use of ICT for prisoner education is heavily dependent on the amount and quality of the education and technical support provided by the correctional centre with which the arrangements are made.

Despite the seemingly endless tribulations encountered in the trial project, and the ambivalence of the evaluation data obtained so far, the team looks forward with incurable optimism to the continuation of the project with a new group of students at the trial target centre in semester 3, 2012, and the implementation and expansion of the project in several other Queensland correctional centres in the 2013–14 period and beyond.

The following comment made by Helen when she read a draft of this paper seems most apt, considering the tortuous pathway she had to steer the trail project through to its conclusion: "It's a heart wrenching chronicle" (Helen, personal communication, 15 November 2012).

Postscript 19 November 2012:
Of the seven students at the correctional centre who enrolled in the course in semester 2, 2012, one obtained a high distinction, one obtained a grade of 'A', two are awaiting finalisation of their grade (assessments in progress but incomplete at this time), two did not submit any assessment items and thus obtained a fail grade, and one withdrew his enrolment and re-enrolled in semester 3, 2012. Both of the students who continued their study of the course from semester 1, 2012 obtained a grade of 'B'.