

New Zealand Tertiary College: Strategic Management for e-Learning in the Private Sector

The New Zealand Tertiary College's mission is to empower people to become effective early childhood teachers, who respond to the needs of children and communities by providing comprehensive and professional programs.

College Chief Executive, Selena Fox believes that its student teachers will be well served by a blend of distance (correspondence) strategies and e-learning techniques in order to deliver outstanding education to students.

THE COLLEGE was founded in 1982 by Kindercare Learning Centres, a well-known national early care and education provider. In 1997 the name changed to New Zealand Tertiary College (NZTC) and the teacher education provider has since gained professional recognition. Graduates are eligible to apply for provisional NZ Teachers Council registration for the Diploma of Teaching (ECE) and Bachelor of Teaching (ECE).

NZTC is an example of a highly focused organisation dedicated to early childhood education. Over eighty five percent of its students are choosing distance education strategies because they are unable to attend the campus due of geography, personal circumstances, or they have chosen distance learning to suit their life and learning styles.

It is Ms Fox's vision that drives this institution to use a blend of e-learning (web-enhanced) and distance teaching approaches. As Chief Executive she brought together a team comprising the managers of Information Technology, Business Operations, Quality Assurance, the Academic Dean, and senior members of the academic staff, to examine how e-learning strategies might bring benefit to students in the fulfillment of the institution's mission. Important in the CE's thinking was the potential that emerging technologies offer to tertiary education and the possibilities for enhanced teaching and learning opportunities.

The CE fostered a view that decisions about the use of digitally-mediated learning and teaching technologies, and related IT infrastructure choices should be driven by three questions 'What problem does this solve for us?,' 'How has the problem resolved endorsed our mission statement?,' and 'How does this enhance our teaching and learning?'. The disparate character of the student body located throughout New Zealand, the pedagogies needed to empower and support the students, and the IT strategies helping to overcome isolation and create a community of learning, were all key issues in developing the institution's e-learning strategy.

TAKING THE LEAD

Strategic Management for e-Learning

Case Study



In financial terms, NZTC has made significant investment in IT infrastructure to enhance both its efficiency and effectiveness, but the jump from the distance environment to a blended e-learning environment has not been as great as it may be for an institution moving from a face-to-face campus based operation.

For student teachers in the more remote parts of New Zealand, the technical issue of a lack of bandwidth required NZTC to ensure that learning materials are made available in a range of formats, all of which add to development, delivery and operating costs. Ensuring equity of access and opportunity has been foremost in NZTC's focus when considering the opportunities distance learning potentially enables.

NZTC has gone to some lengths to benchmark its IT and e-learning work internationally, particularly in the US market. So, while the approach is internationally accepted, New Zealand accrediting agencies appear to have less familiarity with the blend of web-based, correspondence and e-learning teaching strategies. Perhaps the provision of toolsets such as the *Taking the Lead, e-Learning Guidelines* (eLG) and *e-Learning Maturity Model* (eMM) to accrediting bodies might enhance awareness of the complexity of the blended approaches and best practices in e-learning.

Reflections

New Zealand Tertiary College's experiences highlight the value for private training establishments (PTE's) of having a clearly focused mission, the capacity to create good teams that ensure organisation-wide commitment to address complex issues affecting the operation, and careful selection of the technologies appropriate to solve problems specific to the institutional practices.

It should be borne in mind that applying technology is not a "quick fix" to resolve issues, but a process of selection and adaptation to serve client needs.

Listening to the clients, student teachers, teacher educators, administrators and management is the key to ensuring the creation of an effective e-learning solution.