

Ways forward?

For ANU

At ANU the *Promoting Teaching and Learning Communities Project: Institutional Leadership Project* has operated in the main 'under the radar' of formal university structures and management. As 2008 progresses it is now more manifest that project participants are exerting some influence on direction setting, policy development and good practice propagation in regards to teaching and learning at the university.

The project model in part was a response to the increasingly complex organisational and professional contexts staff are required to negotiate. Staff need to understand and make sense of the university context to enable them to integrate their knowledge and skills to perform effectively within it. This can be realised by promoting broader and richer dialogues across disciplinary and business unit divides. Communities of practice can be instrumental in:

- sustaining such dialogues;
- in advancing the scholarship of how staff apply, integrate and convey their knowledge within the university context, and
- generating sophisticated approaches to engaging the university in organisational change.

Through ongoing support for communities of practice CEDAM hopes to strengthen academic practice and the sense of collegiality and engagement among staff.

In the university sector generally and inherently within a research-intensive university the reward and recognition model is individualistic and competitive. The *Promoting Teaching and Learning Communities Project* moved from a focus on individual skill development and personal recognition to a focus on community skill development and the gestalt of concertive endeavour. Passionate staff contributing to excellence in teaching and learning have in the past not always been well supported or rewarded for their endeavour in the higher education sector. This project has been a way for staff and peers to recognise the value of what they are doing and to engage with the university to value their contributions. Emergent indicators are that staff who have participated in CEDAM communities of practice or who been supported in the process of applying for teaching awards, have been successful in achieving promotions over the last two years. Academic promotion encompassing teaching performance was an initial project driver, and it is an interesting point of reflection at this juncture. In the next Carrick Project—the Promoting Excellence Initiative, evaluation mechanisms are being developed to trace the relation between community of practice capacity building and teaching promotion outcomes.

For CEDAM

CEDAM intends to honour its ongoing support and resourcing obligations to existing communities of practice established during the course of the project. However there is also another generation of communities of practice now being seeded by members of existing communities of practice. There

is a new demand to support and resource emerging communities of practice. It is this ongoing propagative trajectory that is requiring CEDAM to strategise laterally about our core work.

To maintain its integrity with university stakeholders in these communities CEDAM needs to incorporate this developmental approach into the mainstream of its work. The Director of CEDAM and project staff can see the benefits and imperatives for this incorporation, among other ADU staff there are resistances. In this transition period the community of practice model is conceptualised as a bridge between formal accredited programs of professional development and the requirements of workplace practice. The opportunity to build on communities of practice to offer an informal learning context for integrating and transforming knowledge and skills is an area the unit seeks to pilot further and more rigorously evaluate. CEDAM through the Promoting Excellence Initiative Grant intends to transform its service from a historical on-demand-staff to academic developer model, to one based on sets of overlapping communities and capacity development processes.

For existing communities of practice

The existing communities of practice generated by the *Promoting Teaching and Learning Communities Project* have developed a momentum and a life of their own. In various ways they are all in expansionary mode through seeking to diversify their activities, build their membership and offer resourcing to other areas within the university. Although they have developed their own visions and are pursuing their self-identified enterprise trajectories, the resourcing provided by CEDAM, is seen as critical to their sustainability. A planning session involving project stakeholders is being held with CEDAM to consider ways of sustaining the developmental work CEDAM has managed over the last two years. Further community members are more actively involved in this next round of project planning and in setting the direction and undertaking the resourcing of their own community of practice activities.

For the sector

The *Practice in Leadership Workshop* created a series of eddies and ripples across several participating institutions in the sector. There have been a number of unsolicited comments at other Carrick and sector events that have indicated that it continues to impact on participants and their universities. There have also been further conversations with several universities such as Queensland and Southern Queensland and discussions with Griffith concerning further collaboration, information or running specific capacity-building sessions.

The distillation required to realise this final Carrick Report has also generated a cogent report to distribute to *Practice in Leadership Workshop* participants. It is hoped that this will further stimulate conversation in the sector around distributed leadership and communities of practice. CEDAM is also considering the possibility of redeveloping some of the material from this report into a sector wide resource.

A strong interest has been expressed within the Super Community of Practice and by *Practice in Leadership Workshop* participants to build on this project by planning, resourcing and holding a follow-up *workshop* for 2008. In the post workshop survey respondees suggested re-running the

Practice in Leadership Workshop in various manifestations—for the same cohort, a mixed cohort combining previous and new attendees, and a completely new cohort. People saw value in repeating the workshop experience and also extending it through:

- designing specific collaborative projects to focus on strategies for instigating CoPs;
- planning more active follow-up opportunities for groups ... to get together again to share, discuss and develop research agendas; and
- bringing actual projects to the table at the workshop to have further discussion regarding progress and to receive input from others.

Within the Australian National University CEDAM has also seen value in running the *Practice in Leadership Workshop* model within the university across its colleges and disciplines. There is some scoping activity occurring through project members and associates to consider the feasibility of this proceeding.