Chapter 7
Effective Technologies and Strategies for the Development of Teachers and School Leaders:
Case Studies from the Northern Territory of Australia

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ABSTRACT

Three case studies are presented here to demonstrate some effective professional learning approaches set in remote contexts. Through the use of case studies, this chapter illustrates and discusses how remote workforce training is conducted in the school education sector in remote northern Australia. Workforce training in this chapter is geared towards professional learning required to build the capacity of school leaders located a long way from urban and city locations. Each case study focuses upon the interplay between the quality of professional learning opportunities available to remotely located participants and the use of technologies to support learning in remote locations. Issues emerging from the case studies are discussed, with particular attention paid to the enabling nature of the selected technologies. The chapter concludes by proposing some future directions and potential research activities.

INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents the following three case studies to highlight effective strategies in remote workforce training. The first case study outlines professional learning conducted in a remote context with the support of Facebook. The second case study highlights how handheld devices were used at a state-wide conference to complement the face-to-face program; and the third case study focuses on Indigenous (or First Nations) workforce development of pre-service teachers in remote locations with the use of the Internet.

The case studies presented provide a description of particular workforce development practices used by the Centre for School Leadership, Learning and Development, based at Charles Darwin University in the Northern Territory of Australia. In this chapter, the terms 'workforce training', 'professional learning' and 'professional development' are used interchangeably. The professional learning approaches outlined in these case studies were designed to support the development and capacity building of teachers and school leaders in geographically remote locations. These case studies include the findings from interviews and evaluation reports of the initiatives outlined in the case studies.

Case Studies

Robert Yin (2013) has described 'case studies' as narratives or stories that can be told about individuals, organizations, processes, programs, and institutions. Through writing and/or images, case studies can capture unique, special, or interesting events that can be subsequently analyzed. Case studies are useful in education and organizational research as they can serve to illustrate concepts and the practical application of ideas or principles (Hartley, 2004). The case studies are presented here to function both as a foundation upon which critical analysis and review can be undertaken, and to enable discussion about the effectiveness of the strategies and technologies used in each setting.

Case studies rely on multiple sources of evidence to assist with indepth inquiries (Babbie, 2013). Yin (2013) emphasized both qualitative and quantitative approaches to case study development and analysis. In this chapter, qualitative data has been used, in particular drawing on naturalistic research methods using multiple sets of data including from observations and evaluation reports (Thomas, 2011; Stake, 1995). Quantitative data has been generated from the use of surveys of participants in the programs outlined in the first two case studies. The evaluation reports used in these case studies were developed based upon data collected through online surveys and semi-structured follow-up interviews conducted after participants had completed their programs. The third case study was developed from interviews and document analysis. While qualitative data in case studies does not allow for the construction of generalizable findings, the meanings that can be extracted from these case studies may resonate with others in similar situations.

Effective Workforce Training

The professional learning programs described in the case studies below, were designed on the basis that 'effective' professional learning is best constructed as an on-going learning process (Ingvarson, 2003). Indeed, the concept of 'effective workforce training' or professional learning is interpreted for the purposes of this chapter, as activities that develop the individuals so that they can improve the quality of their work in their respective contexts and locations.

In Australia, the Ministerially-endorsed policy, the *Australian Charter for the Professional Learning of Teachers and School Leaders* (Education Services Australia, 2012) describes effective professional learning as relevant, collaborative and future-focused where technologies can be used to enrich collaboration and learning. This policy states that

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