

## 7. T4T4T – Key Recommendations

The recommendations summarized below are intended to help inform any future implementation of an online professional development community of practice for tertiary teachers. These recommendations are drawn from the conclusions reached in the research chapters of this report, and should be read in conjunction with the report findings.

### 1 Online professional development must be a part of an overall professional development strategy.

- a. Links to institutional professional development activities are essential.
- b. Online community should provide a 'smorgasbord' of opportunities to participate, to cater for different patterns of availability and contribution.
- c. Where appropriate, online interactions should be complemented with face-to-face opportunities.
- d. The overall model must allow people to 'connect'
  - i. With each other
  - ii. With PD resource/content
  - iii. With themselves in the form of structured reflection and personal knowledge construction.
- e. It is important to distinguish the purpose of an online community such as T4T4T (i.e. it is a community of inquiry, as opposed to a course or an online resource).

### 2 A conceptual model must cater for different levels of concern among participants. The model should:

- a. Recognize different needs and different learning styles of participants
- b. Provide opportunities for participation at different levels/stages: e.g.:
  - i. Discussions around pedagogy and teaching approaches
  - ii. Specialist sharing within a subject or discipline area
  - iii. Broader, philosophical discussions

- c. Accommodate different groupings of participants, e.g.:
  - i. Institutional
  - ii. Subject/discipline specialisms
  - iii. Areas of common interest
- d. Ensure a range of time-patterns for participation to accommodate those with short-term interests or fixed periods of time within which they can participate
- e. Make use of special events to ignite interest, expose a range of ideas and engage with experts in particular fields. Events also offer an opportunity for managing defined periods of high activity.

### 3 Strong, facilitative coordination is essential.

- a. The role of coordinator emerged through research as a critical factor.
- b. The coordinator had key roles in summarizing, guiding, prompting, modeling etc.
- c. The coordinator acted also as a mentor to the mentors.
- d. The coordinator should be a 'mavin' – making connections, introductions etc., and always providing a 'big picture' overview.

### 4 Effective mentoring is required.

- a. Effective mentors are active in the online and offline environment, and have a clear understanding of the goals and purposes of the project.
- b. Mentors should have strong links to institutional PD models.
- c. Mentors require a combination of skills and knowledge of their particular disciplines, as well as experience in online participation and facilitation.
- d. Mentors must be pro-active in terms of initiating events and facilitating topic areas.
- e. Mentors need to understand knowledge management processes (e.g. managing discussion forums, archiving etc.).
- f. Remuneration is not necessarily a key issue here – mentor roles may be recognized within institutional structures for instance.

- g. Personality is important.
- h. Mentors require training and orientation.

**5 Incentives for participants (including mentors) should be linked with authentic reasons for participation. Suggestions include:**

- a. Recognize participation within internal performance review processes.
- b. Provide time/remuneration incentives for those who emerge as leaders of particular forums and events, or for roles in collating and publishing summaries of events etc.
- c. Make explicit links to institutional PD processes.
- d. Explore links with subject/discipline PD (conferences etc.).
- e. Create ISSN for knowledge base contributions – then these can be included in PBRF listings.
- f. Recognize time/allocate remuneration on the basis of release/effort/contribution.

**6 A flexible and adaptive online environment is essential for success. The core features of the environment should be in place from the beginning of the project. Such an environment:**

- a. Must be user friendly, easy to navigate, flexible enough to cater for a variety of participant needs and concerns
- b. Provides a shared space, with access to everyone
- c. Allows areas to be partitioned off for groups
- d. Acts as a repository for important resources and as a point of access for this material
- e. Provides tools to aid reflection, discussion, knowledge construction, publication etc.
- f. Incorporates tools that are emerging to allow for greater degree of user control – consistent with notions of connectivism and the networked learner
- g. Transcends the time/place restrictions of current PD models

- h. Has features that in the pilot were found to be particularly useful, including
  - i. Notifications of new posting by email
  - ii. Summaries of new postings at login
  - iii. Ability to customize notifications
  - iv. Self-registration within each topic space
  - v. Ability to create personal list of ‘tags’ through the site, and to then incorporate these within written reports etc.
  - vi. Ability to create spaces with different levels of access within the same environment
  - vii. Provision of same toolset within all spaces (including personal spaces)
  - viii. Provision of a personal ‘blog’ within the environment.



## Appendices – Mentor-Researcher Reports

The reports on the following pages were completed by some of the mentor-researchers on the T4T4T pilot project, and reflect their personal action-research focus through the pilot. Each of these reports provides a unique perspective on T4T4T developed from a participant's point of view. As such, these reports both complement and develop in more depth many of the issues and observations raised in the external researcher's findings.

### **The T4T4T Online Professional Development Pilot for Tertiary Teachers: factors influencing participation**

*Nicki Dabner (Christchurch College of Education)*

Nicki's paper explores what it means to be a participant in an online community of practice, and asks the question; 'what are the factors that have encouraged or discouraged participation within an online professional development community?'. Nicki conducted a survey of a sample of participants from her institution, reporting their feedback in four areas; the technical aspects and site structure; using an electronic environment as a mode for interaction; participation and participants; and content, mentors and T4T4T support. In her conclusion she identifies the level of access to technology, participant attitude and confidence, and the active role of mentoring as key elements identified by the participants as contributing to the success of the programme.

### **Evaluating Online Professional Development at the University of Canterbury: A Report on the T4T4T Pilot Project**

*Amy L. Fletcher, Ph.D. (University of Canterbury)*

Amy's paper provides an analysis of the T4T4T project through the lens of an 'information ecology' approach, using data collected from the University of Canterbury participants. The report explores how the 'information ecology' of the University of Canterbury differs from that of the other institutions, and how these differences

affected the level and nature of participation of the UoC participants. Amy concludes that "we need more empirical work on the way in which a university 'ecology' differs from colleges and polytechnics with respect to the faculty incentive structure for engaging in activities related to teaching practice".

### **'Academic staff development' – a university perspective**

*Jane Robertson (University of Canterbury)*

Jane wrote this paper prior to the completion of the T4T4T project, at a point where she found herself having to withdraw from her role as coordinating mentor-researcher at the University. The paper is not a formal research report, rather, a personal reflection on some key issues that she and her colleagues faced at the University through implementing T4T4T there. Jane's particular concerns are about how initiatives such as T4T4T link to established institutional forms of professional development, and how these might work more harmoniously, rather than being regarded as something separate. She poses a series of questions about the scope and nature of online professional development communities of practice in the University setting that need to be addressed for the future.

### **Toward collective social research: T4T4T Mentor Space as a case study of a complex emerging system**

*H. Elaine Mayo (Christchurch College of Education)*

Elaine's paper provides an insightful personal reflection of her involvement as a mentor within T4T4T. Elaine focuses on the patterns of communication that took place within two areas of T4T4T – the mentor space, and the common space, and analyses these in terms of the nature of the participation and relationships formed within each. She proposes that the mentoring space developed as an example of a 'collective' community, while the Common Space developed as an example of a 'collaborative' community. A useful table is provided that illustrates the various



## APPENDICES

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ways that these two communities differ in terms of structure, organization and purpose. Some very clear areas for consideration regarding the expansion of the T4T4T approach are teased out at the end of this paper.

### Assessment by blog

*Lyn Boddington and Carol D. Cooper (Lincoln University)*

This report has been jointly written by one of the T4T4T mentors (Carol Cooper) and one of the participants from her institution (Lyn Boddington) who worked together to put into practice one of the ideas that had emerged from their participation in T4T4T – namely, the use of blogs as an assessment device. Using a cohort of students from their University who had volunteered for this trial, Lyn and Carol conducted their research through survey and quantitative analysis of student results. This report provides valuable insights for other tertiary teachers interested in using blogs in this way, particularly for those interested in promoting collaborative activity among students.

### Under what conditions is an online discussion environment successful in fostering CPIT staff professional development in teaching and learning?

*Jan Kent, Alan O'Neil, Nicki Page (Christchurch Polytechnic Institute of Technology)*

This report has been jointly written by the three mentor-researchers from CPIT, and focuses on the contribution that the online discussion environment provided by T4T4T made to the existing culture of professional development within their institution. Their study was conducted as an action research project, in which the personal opinions and experiences of all the participants were sampled. The report explains the process of developing the professional learning community of CPIT participants, and draws together an excellent summary of key findings in the conclusion that will be of value to others interested in pursuing the same or similar approach.