

From professional learning to practice for VET teachers

Practice guide

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Purpose

This practice guide outlines effective approaches for both VET teachers and training providers for embedding new teaching skills and sustaining improvements in practice.

A one-page *Quick reference guide* based on this document is also available from the NCVER website.



Strengthening teaching practice in VET

- The role of a VET teacher is becoming increasingly complex, with growing student diversity, rising support needs—including those that are psychosocial in nature—and emerging challenges such as artificial intelligence. Ongoing professional development of teaching skills is one way to bridge the gap between what is learnt through initial teacher training and the evolving demands of the role.
- A greater focus on the continual development of teaching capability benefits teachers, training providers and students. It creates confident teachers with a broader range of teaching strategies, can contribute to positive training provider reputation and higher completion rates, as well as supporting better learning outcomes and satisfaction for students.
- While the importance of professional learning is well established, meaningful improvements in teaching practice depend on new knowledge and skills being applied and embedded in practice.





Activities to support application of new teaching skills

Four key activities can support the transfer of professional learning into teaching practice.

Formal sharing	Ongoing conversations	Incremental changes	Reflective practice
Sharing key ideas from professional development with other teaching staff via presentations, reports, emails or meetings.	Having conversations with others about what was learnt and how it may be used in teaching.	Making small changes to teaching practices one at a time and seeing how they work.	Reflecting at three key stages: • Before/at the start • During/ immediately after • Ongoing after professional learning
Benefits	Benefits	Benefits	Benefits
• Solidifies the teacher's new knowledge • Helps the teacher retain what they learnt • Exposes other team members to the learnings.	• Provides a space to bounce ideas and learn collaboratively • Supports sharing of ideas and pain points.	• Small changes are more manageable than several changes at once • One change at a time allows teachers to see if it is having an impact.	• Allows for the continued application of professional learning to teaching practice.

Activities to support application of new teaching skills (cont)



Formal sharing

What it involves

Sharing key learnings from professional development activities through presentations, emails, reports or meetings.

Why it helps:

- Reinforces learning for the teacher and potentially deepens their understanding of the topic
- Helps the teacher retain what they learnt as explaining concepts to others supports memory and retention
- Encourages collaborative learning by exposing other staff to new ideas and strategies
- Builds a culture of shared practice

Examples:

- Brief team presentations
- Sharing resources or notes
- Discussing practical applications during meetings

I think where it's different for us, is our trainers ... come back and teach us what they did at that PD workshop. (Chief Executive Officer/TAE teacher, Qld)



Activities to support application of new teaching skills (cont)



Ongoing conversations

What they involve

Continued dialogue with colleagues, managers and peers to support the implementation and refinement of learning from professional development activities.

Why they help:

- Allows teachers to exchange ideas and helps generate new perspectives and possibilities
- Encourages collaborative problem solving by sharing challenges and solutions from real experiences
- Supports reflection and refinement of teaching approaches
- Creates opportunities for peer support by building stronger relationships through ongoing dialogue

Examples:

- Peer discussions with other participants after training
- Regular team meetings on teaching strategies
- Informal conversations with other teachers

It's all those conversations you have outside the classroom. 'Well, I did this and it went pear-shaped' or 'this happened and I had no idea what to do. What would you have done?'. All that stuff is really important in terms of the support that people feel, because a classroom can be daunting. (Manager-teacher capability, Vic.)



Activities to support application of new teaching skills (cont)



Incremental changes

What it involves

Introducing incremental and/or small changes to teaching practice over time rather than attempting major changes all at once.

Why it helps:

- Makes change more manageable as small incremental changes are easier to implement
- Enables thoughtful adjustments as teachers can monitor impact
- Builds confidence in trying new strategies
- Leads to sustainable change as teachers can build on what works

Examples:

- Trialling one new strategy at a time
- Adjusting lesson delivery gradually
- Testing different ways of explaining concepts
- Expanding successful changes progressively across different classes, units or programs

Completing this course... I'd go back in and I was trying new things, and I was seeing results and I was, saying it this way, I was saying it that way and, I think that's made a big difference. (Novice teacher, Vic.)



Activities to support application of new teaching skills (cont)



Reflective practice

What it involves

Thinking critically about teaching practices before, during and after professional learning to support the ongoing application of new knowledge and skills.

Why it helps:

- Encourages purposeful learning
- Deepens understanding by thinking about what was learnt and how it may be applied
- Helps teachers to recognise what worked well and identify areas for growth
- Supports ongoing improvement through making informed decisions about practice

Examples:

- Identifying goals and areas for improvement at the start of professional learning
- Considering key learnings and potential application during and immediately after professional learning
- Evaluating changes and refining practices on an ongoing basis

Let's have a reflection session on all the PD that you've done this year, or attended this year, and how are you implementing anything, and what could be a barrier if not? (Education Manager-Teacher Development, Vic.)



Activities to support application of new teaching skills (cont)

More information on reflective practice in teaching

Reflective practice is often recognised as important, but many VET teachers receive limited guidance on how to reflect effectively, what to reflect on, and how to translate reflections into improved teaching outcomes.

The research found that VET teachers would value a VET-specific reflective practice guide to help make reflection a more structured and purposeful process, rather than an informal or inconsistent activity. Such a resource could support the ongoing application of learning and continuous improvement in teaching practice.

Although there are few resources specifically designed for reflective practice in the VET sector, a range of school-sector resources and frameworks may provide useful insights and practical approaches that could be adapted for VET contexts.

A selection of resources:

- Atkins L 2014 'Reflective practice for VET teachers', in Brennan Kemmis R and Atkins L (eds), *Teaching in the VET sector in Australia*, David Barlow Publishing, <<https://hdl.voced.edu.au/10707/409694>>. Provides an overview of reflective practice theories and how they can be used in VET.
- Cambridge International Education Teaching and Learning Team 2026 'Getting started with Reflective Practice', Cambridge University Press & Assessment, UK <<https://www.cambridge-community.org.uk/professional-development/gswrp/index.html>>. Contains an overview of reflective practices, activities and a checklist.
- State of New South Wales (Department of Education), 2023 'Reflective practice', NSW Department of Education, NSW, <<https://education.nsw.gov.au/teaching-and-learning/professional-learning/teacher-quality-and-accreditation/strong-start-great-teachers/developing-focus/reflective-practice>>. Provides an overview of reflective practice for school teachers with some guiding questions. Additionally see the 'Beginning Teacher Resource - Reflective Practice' available at <<https://education.nsw.gov.au/teach-nsw/beginning-teacher-information-hub/teacher-resources>>.
- State Government of Victoria 2025 'Reflective practice – Strengthening reflective practice in a Three-Year-Old Kindergarten program', State Government of Victoria, Vic, <<https://www.vic.gov.au/three-year-old-kindergarten-teaching-toolkit/reflective-practice>>. Contains a guide to reflective practice.



Providing a supportive culture

To support VET teachers to engage in professional dialogue, reflective practice, and the gradual implementation of new skills, training providers should foster a supportive culture with a focus on continuous improvement.

Key enabling conditions include allowing time and space, fostering flexibility and trust, and following up and measuring change. The table below outlines common barriers and effective enablers for each of these conditions.

Supportive Conditions	Common Barriers	Effective Enablers
 Allowing time and space	 Heavy workloads and limited time to reflect or implement new ideas	 Time for reflection, collaboration and professional discussions
 Fostering flexibility and trust	 Limited ability to adapt teaching materials or fear of failure	 A culture of experimentation, trust and continuous improvement
 Following up and measuring change	 Limited follow-up after professional development	 Ongoing support, feedback and recognition of growth

Providing a supportive culture (cont)



Allowing time and space

Why it helps:

Time constraints and competing workload demands limit opportunities to integrate new skills into teaching practice.

How to achieve it:

- Provide dedicated time within work hours for teachers to reflect on and apply new learnings.
- Reduce workload pressures or provide administrative support following professional learning to enable time for teachers to apply new skills.

- Create opportunities for teachers to collaborate, seek advice and share insights and learnings following professional learning.
- Align professional development with authentic teaching challenges to support relevance and application.

You go to a conference, think 'that's great, yep, yep, I'll do that'. And you come back and you just get straight back into what you're doing. (RTO Manager, NT)



Providing a supportive culture (cont)



Fostering flexibility and trust

Why it helps:

A fear of failure or uncertainty can discourage teachers from implementing changes to improve their teaching practices. Although standardised course delivery requirements may restrict modifications to learning materials, teachers can be encouraged to improve their own delivery practices.

I can develop anything that I want, that I see fit to, in a way that meets the [RTO's] requirements, but also allows me to be a bit more free flowing in terms of how I deliver the content, and I find that really quite invigorating and enjoyable. (Mid-career teacher, Vic)

How to achieve it:

- Foster a culture of continuous improvement, led and modelled by organisational leaders.
- Encourage experimentation with new approaches to identify effective strategies for different teaching contexts and learner cohorts.
- Promote a supportive environment where teachers can seek guidance, ask questions, and learn through trial and error



Providing a supportive culture (cont)



Following up and measuring change

Why it helps:

Limited follow-up support can reduce motivation to apply new learnings while a failure to monitor changes in practice can diminish the perceived value of professional development.

How to achieve it:

- Provide follow-up after professional development to support the application of learning, reflective practice, and knowledge sharing. This follow-up may be facilitated by line managers, educational leaders, or educator capability staff.
- Measure capability development to demonstrate the impact of professional learning and reinforce the value of continuous improvement. Existing mechanisms such as capability frameworks, teaching observations, and student feedback can be used to assess changes in teaching practice and capability over time.

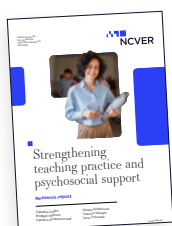
The challenge is seeing where the value for the money is then implemented further down the line... we find with developing our teachers, is yes, you can go and learn something, but how is it changing the practice down the track? How are we measuring that? That's probably a big gap in that space. (Education Manager-Teacher Development, Vic.)



Information and additional resources

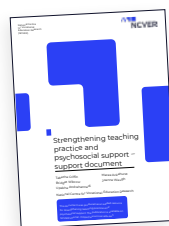
This practice guide is one of several resources developed through the research project *Strengthening Teaching Practice and Psychosocial Support*. The project involved extensive consultation with VET teachers and other VET professionals through a national survey, semi-structured interviews, and workshops conducted across Australia.

These activities informed a suite of practical resources for VET teachers and training providers.



Strengthening teaching practice and psychosocial support: Research report

Research findings on teaching practice and psychosocial challenges in the VET sector.



Strengthening teaching practice and psychosocial support: Support document

Includes some additional supporting evidence related to professional development and the importance of psychosocial support for teachers, as well as the initial literature review.



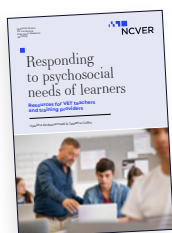
Strengthening teaching practices in VET: Research summary

Summarises the research related to strengthening teaching practices in VET.



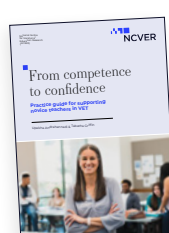
Understanding psychosocial challenges and support in VET: Research summary

Summarises the research related to the teacher experience of psychosocial challenges and how teachers can support psychosocial needs.



Responding to psychosocial needs of learners: Resources for VET teachers and training providers

Resources to support VET teachers in recognising, responding to and referring learners for specialised support.



From competence to confidence: Practice guide for supporting novice teachers in VET + Quick reference guide

Key conditions and strategies for supporting novice teachers as they develop in their teaching roles.



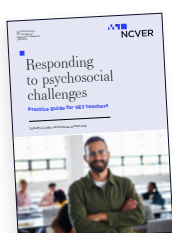
Managing psychosocial challenges in VET: Practice guide for training providers + Quick reference guide

Practical advice for training providers on supporting psychosocial needs in learners and teacher wellbeing.



Developing the educator mindset in VET: Practice guide + Quick reference guide

Explores the importance of developing and sustaining an educator mindset in VET.



Responding to psychosocial challenges: Practice guide for VET teachers + Quick reference guide

A guide for VET teachers on recognising, responding to and supporting learners experiencing psychosocial challenges.



From professional learning to practice for VET teachers: Practice guide + Quick reference guide

Effective approaches for embedding new teaching skills and sustaining improvements in practice.



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