

## Full Circle Learning Facilitating Community Learning

Study circles enable students to explore issues around learning and the barriers that many people face in beginning study later in life. This support assists many to develop the confidence and skills to become independent and capable e-learners.

Coordinators have an important role as a community enabler - a person to direct people to where they can access further learning.

Staff from Online Access Centres around the state came together for regional workshops designed to enhance the skills of Centre Coordinators in supporting online students.

Coaching and Facilitating Study Circles sessions were held during 2005/6 and led by Bronwyn Cross, a highly regarded motivator, facilitator and consultant in training and education.

Workshops on Coaching, mentoring and facilitation skills were held in Launceston, Hobart and Penguin.

Workshops included activities, theory and practice.

Many commented afterwards that it was one of the best professional development days they had ever attended.

The workshops were part of the TCO E-Learning Creative Communities project which is one of only eight funded nationally through the Australian Flexible Learning Framework in 2005.

These workshops have equipped each coordinator with knowledge and skills to provide increased opportunities for learning in their local communities (especially how to facilitate study circles). The distinctions between the roles of teacher versus learning facilitator were clearly reinforced.

It is commonly known that in regional or rural areas travelling to a training provider to study can be difficult because of physical distance or personal circumstance. In addition to those factors online learning can be inhibited because of limited computer access or Internet connection. This can create a sense of isolation for students, arising from a lack of interaction with other students and not having ready access to support networks.

Question: Is this any different for urban or city students?

In Tasmania, the traditional method of study circles is being given new life to overcome barriers to e-learning and assist students in regional areas to succeed with online study.

Study circles aim to overcome the intimidation and initial fear felt by many new learners from all areas especially those who are beginning study at a mature age, or are returning to study after having children.

Study circles build upon the informal, relaxed and communal spirit of the 66 Online Access Centres, which are located across Tasmania, by enabling students to access e-learning in a supportive and friendly environment.

Intimidation is a real factor for people who are new to computers and technology.

It is very important that we give people the support they need to improve their skills.

Study circles give people the boost of confidence needed to continue learning

The Geeveston Online Centre was one of eight centres participating in study circle trials.

The study circle groups are formed by students who are completing online Certificate II courses in Business or IT (Information Technology) through TAFE Tasmania.

Each study circle is overseen and directed by a leader to facilitate the group and assist students with course problems.

There was a great response from the group involved in the study circle and is reflected in the results they have achieved.

What we are involved in is a process of learning through socialisation.

At Geeveston there was a core group of five people who met four times a week at the Centre, most of which was done informally and organised amongst themselves

While this group is helping themselves undertake their Certificate II course, there is also the added benefit that they are available to help other members of the community who come in to the Centre and need assistance using the computers and the facility.

This is being mirrored at Glenorchy with the first group participating in study circle whilst completing their Elearn certificate.

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