



IN CONVERSATION WITH JOHN RAITI, HEAD OF ICT CURRICULUM SUPPORT, MARIST COLLEGE ASHGROVE

When did you first decide to implement an ICDL program in the school? Why did you decide on ICDL?

Marist College Ashgrove started investigating the ICDL program in 2003. The primary reason was to find a program that would give teachers the foundation skills to apply new technologies in the workplace. Not only is the ICDL a worldwide certificate that staff members can use to enhance their career, the program also allows staff and students to achieve the equivalent of Certificate I in Information Technology.

What benefits is the ICDL offering to both students and teachers?

Initially the College is using the ICDL program with staff, including teachers and school officers. The College is also looking at rolling out the program to students, following a trial conducted in 2004 with Year 10 students.

So far, nine teachers have successfully completed the program, with another 21 having completed a least one module.

The nine teachers that are proud owners of their ICDL have commented that the program gives greater confidence with the use of new technologies in the classroom. They are now prepared to take risks whereas previously they wouldn't. Teachers have also commented that the ICDL program has also forced them to think more about their classroom practices and explore further ways to engage students in the learning process.

Why did you decide to go for a computer based training solution?

A computer based training solution is useful and the most effective way of delivering content in a college like Marist with 112 teachers and 40 school officers. The content is housed on the intranet and can be accessed 24/7.

In that way, the delivery of the content is not labour intensive. In addition, a computer based solution also promotes just-in-time learning which suits busy professionals such as teachers.

Other Benefits include:

Teachers, school officers and students also have the advantage of learning at their own pace. The flexibility of the course allows teachers to spend little time on software applications they know something about & more time on those applications that know very little about. The nature of the content is interactive (promoting a richer learning environment) The content caters for different learning styles.

What were the technology challenges you faced?

Teachers had identified a gap in their understanding and use of computer technology. We have a very low staff turnover rate here and many of our teachers have been working in the organisation for several years, without addressing their ICT skills.

Tell us about the implementation of the ICDL pilot program?

It took us about one week to install the product (course content) on the intranet and to test the software. We implemented a trial of the ICDL program with the primary school teachers during the 4th term of 2003. The response to this trial was very positive and as a result we offered it to all teachers and school officers as well as some Year 10 students at the start of 2004.

How many students and teachers are enrolled in the ICDL?

So far, 30 teachers have completed at least one module, with 9 having completed all seven. However, 33 teachers and 19 school officers have recently expressed an interest in completing this course. Further to this, there are several teachers who do not wish to sit for any tests (at this stage) but are interested in accessing the course material. Having only just rolled out the program to school officers in July 2005, the College is exploring further opportunities to formalise a roll-out of the ICDL to students.

What workplace challenges did you face?

Some teachers found Module 1 Concepts of IT - to be very difficult. Hence I have encouraged some staff members to begin with another module. Another issue we faced was the mindset of some teachers - Why should I do this? How will the ICDL benefit my work? From this perspective, the ICDL presented a cultural change to the school.

This involves educating people about why our work practices need to change to complement the way we should work (as knowledge workers in a knowledge economy) in the 21st century. For example, the vast amount of data and information that we are required to manage and create means that we need to have the skills to use digital technology effectively.

Further to this, our teachers often complain about being time-poor. This is largely due to the perception that any program including the ICDL will add more work to their already busy workload. What administrators in schools should be doing is educating teachers that this program will enable them to replace outdated work practices with more contemporary opportunities for working more efficiently and effectively.

The ICDL program and an e-learning solution like Electric Paper will assist with facilitating some of the cultural changes that are required in the 21st century workplace.

Tell us how you integrated the ICDL in the classroom?

One approach that has proved successful is to highlight certain procedures (e.g. to show people how to cut, copy and paste files using the relevant content from Module 2 Using the Computer & Managing Files).

The ICDL is an effective way for student to access online tutorials. For example, earlier this year, an Ancient History teacher was concerned that many of her students did not know how to create a PowerPoint presentation, given that it was part of their assessment. As a result, I gave the class a short tutorial (about 10 minutes) on the basics of PowerPoint.

Following this, I gave every student in the class a username and password to the ICDL/Electric Paper content on the intranet and told them to go through Module 6 Presentations. The students were able to access this 24/7. More importantly, they now know how to use PowerPoint as a presentation tool in Ancient History and all of their other classes.

What has been the main impact of the ICDL for teachers, students & parents?

Awareness of the growing use of digital technology in the classroom and workplace. Greater confidence in the application of technology skills. Teachers & school officers are taking risks that they didn't take before. THE ICDL has de-mystified technology. The risk taking also extends to classroom pedagogy. Teachers are willing to explore further ways to engage students in their classes. The ICDL program is starting to have an impact in the way the College is delivering the curriculum.

What lessons have you learned?

It is essential to provide time and support to teachers and school officers within working hours, for training and testing. Professional development must be interactive, so that it caters for a variety of different learning styles. It is important to promote the benefits of the program on a regular basis. Celebrate success stories! For example, give all ICDL graduates a bottle of wine at a staff meeting.

What lessons have you achieved?

There has been greater emphasis on the use of technology in the workplace. As the organisation continues to adopt technology as tool that is integrated in our work practices and in the offering of the curriculum, it is essential that a just-in-time learning solution is in place.

There is also greater return on investment (ROI). The College has spent a great deal of money on installing hardware and software, yet staff members are now using this technology more effectively. Let's face it, technology is dysfunctional unless there is a significant investment in human resources.

What are your future plans?

To integrate the program in the curriculum offered to students.

Here's what some of the teachers have said about the ICDL?

Before the ICDL program I knew very little about computers. The students (and my own children) used to laugh. Now my PowerPoint presentations are respectable!

Completing the ICDL program has enabled me to learn other technology concepts quickly (e.g. I recently made a movie with my class using Windows Movie Maker). I would not have attempted this prior to enrolling in the ICDL program.

Before the ICDL program, the simplest of things took a long time. My new technology skills allow me to save time so that I can concentrate on higher-order thinking tasks.²

- Anne Quill Year 7 Teacher

The ICDL program certainly helped me with my teaching practices. While I teach French I am able to teach students more advanced tricks when we have the lessons in a computer room. My tasks for the students can be more varied and interesting.

- Elizabeth Leskiewicz French Teacher