CASE STUDY 6: A CREDIT TRANSFER GRADUATE DIPLOMA OF TESOL PROGRAMME DELIVERED IN VIETNAM BY AN AUSTRALIAN UNIVERSITY

Part One: Introduction
This case study will focus on a Masters (Coursework) of TESOL programme that is delivered in Vietnam across two sites – Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City three times a year. The programme has been operating for more than a decade and is celebrated by its Australian university partner as being one of the most successful offshore degrees on offer. When the programme was firstly delivered in Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City, there were 32 Vietnamese students enrolled. Currently, the programme has delivered more than 800 graduates. Over the last two years this course has seen 287 graduates. Such success has meant that the two institutions are currently in consultation around the possibility of delivering a Doctor of Education (Ed.D) in Vietnam. This is still to be finalised.

There are no local Vietnamese teachers who teach in the programme however there is a Vietnamese offshore administrator who assists in the co-ordination of the programme. The teaching team is comprised of Australian, Canadian and UK educators who are employed by the Australian institution. All teachers are suitably qualified, having either a Masters Degree or a PhD. The majority of teachers are sessional staff members although the number of ongoing staff teaching is slowly increasing. The team flies in three times a year and teaches intensively for a period of 10 days. During this period three Masters Units are taught concurrently across two sites (Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City). This enables postgraduate students to manage their course completion in different stages allowing for greater flexibility with work/life commitments.

The offshore Australian co-ordinator teaches on each of the three programmes because in his words, ‘it not only helps to maintain quality but helps to ensure that both onshore and offshore staff teaching is adequately supported’. The Vietnamese co-ordinator is responsible for a range of tasks that include marketing the programme, organising classrooms spaces, creating class lists and disseminating reading lists. Both the Australian and the Vietnamese co-ordinators are in constant communication throughout the year relying on skype sessions, emails and phone conversations to maintain a quality programme.

The case study that follows presents reflections on the application of ‘quality transnational principles’ to the Master of TESOL programme. Insights gleamed from both the Australian and Vietnamese co-ordinators are included. The voices of lecturers who applied and embedded particular principles into their teaching are also threaded and documented. It is worth noting that pre and post interviews with the Vietnamese co-ordinator took place via skype while face to face interviews were held with the Australian co-ordinator as well as two teaching staff members on four occasions.

1. Sharing stakeholder experiences and perspectives on transnational delivery

1.1 What is the situation/context of delivery?
The Vietnamese university is well established and has a strong engagement in foreign language education. With more than 30 foreign university partnerships celebrated, the university’s commitment to strengthening its course offerings across national and international borders is evidenced. Countries such as China, Austria, Korea, Australia, Russia, USA and Britain have longstanding partnerships with this university. Such countries deliver a range of academic programmes nested within disciplines such as English, International Studies, Business and Tourism. The Diploma of Business Administration, the Bachelor of Business and the Masters of Business Administration, are examples of programmes that are delivered by this offshore university provider. Overall, the university prides itself on maintaining professional and collegial ties with a variety of international and national stakeholders. Ensuring that undergraduate and postgraduate students experience innovative and quality university programmes is central to its modus operandi.

Postgraduate students who enroll in the Master of Education (TESOL) come from diverse educational and industry backgrounds. They are either English teachers in local or provincial schools, English teachers in business colleges, English teachers employed by private institutions or university lecturers. Geographically, many of the students come from both the Northern and Central region of Vietnam. This means that in addition to planning for studying, there is the added pressure of having to find accommodation during the days they are attending class. For some students, it is not uncommon to travel for three hours a day on their motorbikes in order to attend classes. Release from paid work duties and ensuring that family members are well supported in their absence are also areas of concern for many of students enrolled in this programme.

For lecturers teaching in this programme, their day begins at 8am and finishes at around 11.30 (although there is one unit – the evaluation unit - that ceases at 12). Students attend class from Monday to Saturday in the first week and from Monday until Thursday in the second week. Subsequent communication between lectures and their students is done through email and Skype.

1.2 How does cultural context impact on teaching and learning offshore?

Both the Australian and Vietnamese co-ordinators asserted the importance of having culturally competent lecturers who were aware of the complexities associated with teaching in an offshore programme. Pedagogical approaches that were inclusive of ethnic, political and spiritual beliefs were favored. One of the participants spoke of the cultural and social challenges that he faced when teaching in this programme. Teacher sensitivity around money, notions of family, sharing tales of home life, partners, spirituality and religion needed to be carefully contemplated. He further articulated the importance of maintaining this diligence so as to avoid inappropriate disclosures. For example, he noted that in Vietnam there was a need to be sensitive when discussing money. This is not unlike any circumstance but the students he taught were from fairly poor financial circumstances. It also emerged that sensitivity was needed when discussing personal relationships and personal understandings of family, as the students were not used to variations on nuclear
expressions of family. The researcher was advised that lecturers not living in traditional relationships familiar to the students felt the need to be careful about sharing 'tales of home-life'. It was also apparent that there was no open discussion around spirituality and religion. A lecturer said, “…that once or twice they assumed I was Catholic as I spoke of my early years of schooling in a catholic school in the context of early language learning…. and once or twice they asked me whether I was Buddhist”. Of interest also, it was found difficult to pay for students’ coffee at morning tea time. The students held very firm to the notion that it was not appropriate for ‘the teacher’ to pay. A lecturer remarked that on many occasions over morning tea he was discouraged from paying for himself. The situation was considered awkward and unfortunate as students saw their lecturers as wealthy.

The Australian co-ordinator specified the essentiality of having all lecturers embed localised knowledge and regale into classroom activities and assessment tasks. A consequence of having teaching and learning practices that relied on the ‘lived experience’ was the ability to create learning environments that stimulated independent thinking and meaning making moments. Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) was therefore a dominant approach in this programme that empowered students to make fundamental connections between theory and practice. Students are always encouraged to think about how English language is used in a global and local context.

While both the onshore and offshore co-ordinators spoke of a need to create stimulating learning environments a number of issues were identified. The first issue was a need to provide staff members with an induction process prior to their departure to Vietnam. The induction programme would provide staff members with greater insight into the Vietnamese Culture. The orientation programme would also ensure that all lecturers were aware of information presented in the unit guide, readings and the nature of assessment tasks students were being asked to complete. Other necessary information such as staff dress code and professional standards of conduct could further be discussed. In applying quality principles in the area of practice and teaching, both co-ordinators discussed the benefits of ‘Principles that Apply to Welfare’. In particular the principles ‘that staff development and orientation programmes are relevant, up-to-date, useful and regularly reviewed’ and ‘formal comprehensive training of staff engaged to provide offshore teaching should take place before their deployment commences’ resonated with the co-ordinators. Strong orientation programmes for staff was seen as an essential planning and reflection tool for enhancing the quality of the Masters of TESOL programme and an area that would be explored further for the basis of the ALTC project.

1.3 How do academic stakeholders ensure/safeguard quality of the programme?

The Australian co-ordinator of the MTESOL programme ensures that he teaches on the programme three times a year. While in Vietnam he also has daily communication with team members who are based in another city. Daily briefings ensure that staff members can discuss any issues that arise on the day. Students are also required to complete two evaluations at the conclusion of each unit of study. These evaluations are ‘Student Evaluation of Teaching (SET)’ and ‘Student Evaluation of Subject (SES)’. The results of
these two evaluation tools are sent to the university’s survey management office where the completed response forms are tabulated. In the case of SET forms a confidential report is sent back to the teacher highlighting student feedback on teaching approaches. Unit co-ordinators have access to SEUs which are then used to inform planning for future units.

The Australian co-ordinator regularly attends an international committee chaired by the Associate Dean of International. This committee meets once a month to discuss characteristics of effective off-shore programmes. At this meeting there is also a discussion around evaluation approaches, curriculum tools, assessment and pedagogy. The International committee also provides opportunities for discussion around university policies, procedures and practices that impact on offshore programmes.

In previous years all the lecturers who taught on this programme resided in Melbourne and moderation meetings were therefore easy to attend. As mentioned, lecturers teaching in the current programme are from a range of geographical locations spanning Australia, the UK and Canada. This makes face to face moderation meetings difficult. The Australian co-ordinator is currently investigating the use of electronic meetings to moderate assessment tasks. Additionally the co-ordinator would like to introduce a moderation exercise in the first few days that the lecturers arrive in Vietnam. Assignments from previous years will be provided as a basis for facilitating this.

The MTESOL programme adheres to the Australian university’s policy of equivalence. This ensures that potential students meet the benchmark criteria for entry into the Masters Programme as required for students studying this programme onshore. Postgraduate students enter into the offshore Masters of TESOL programme having successfully completed a Graduate Diploma of TESOL. The diploma, made up of 6 units, is completed in one of the leading universities in Vietnam. All potential applicants must complete the Grad Diploma and have an IETLS score of 6.5 in order to be considered for selection into the Masters (TESOL) course. The Vietnamese co-ordinator monitors entry qualification and ensures that prospective students meet the standards required for entry into the Masters of TESOL. A spread sheet is then collated and sent to the Australian co-ordinator detailing individual scores for each of the IETLS components. The Australian co-ordinator is responsible for crosschecking all of the applications to assess the equivalence of Vietnamese diploma units with those offered onshore. Where equivalence is demonstrated, recognition of prior learning is completed for each of the 6 diploma units. This process is a necessary step that ensures that graduates have an opportunity to pathway into an Australian Masters Programme in a supported way. It is worthwhile noting that an information sheet documenting processes and requirements associated with successful credit transfer and RPL are available online allowing students to have access to this body of information at all times.

Part 2: Mapping Principles onto Practice
Various challenges tied to the MTESOL programme were identified by the teaching and administration team. A number of principles were selected as a basis for addressing these issues in an Action learning project. This Action learning plan was established in
collaboration with the team under the co-ordinator of the MTESOL (off shore) programme at the beginning of 2012. The principles identified are summarised below:

**Challenge One:** to ensure that students are provided with up to date resources in each unit of study

**Principles:**

**Curriculum:**
- Cultural sensitivity should always be considered in the preparation of course material, its delivery and the assessment of students’ work.
- Pedagogy:
  - Programme delivery should be responsive to culturally-determined teaching/learning practices.
  - In respect to the assessment of student work, feedback and moderation processes should be monitored for effectiveness.
- Continual use of web-based learning, including for the provision of resources for learning, could enhance ongoing connections between academic staff and students.

**Welfare**
- Programme coordinators should ensure that offshore students have access to appropriate learning resources, including computers, readings and other library services and facilities.

**Challenge Two:** ensuring that curriculum units are culturally inclusive and sensitive to the local context

**Principles**

**Curriculum**
- Cultural sensitivity should always be considered in the preparation of course material, its delivery and the assessment of students’ work.
- Offshore staff should have autonomy in adapting the curriculum to suit the local context and the culturally diverse backgrounds of students. Teaching materials should reflect the cultural context of the course and provide an international dimension to the curriculum.
- Curriculum packages should be comprehensive and should evidence clear quality controls.

**Pedagogy**
- Programme delivery should be responsive to culturally-determined teaching/learning practices.
- Continual use of web-based learning, including for the provision of resources for learning, could enhance ongoing connections between academic staff and students.
**Challenge Three:** to ensure that staff members feel organised when teaching in the offshore programme

**Principles**

**Pedagogy**
- The delivery of curriculum is best facilitated by one key contact point in each country. Directors should take responsibility for student selection, induction of staff, programme review, assessment moderation, and quality of teaching.

**Curriculum**
- Curriculum packages should be comprehensive and should evidence clear quality controls.
- There should be clear guidelines for curriculum implementation, curriculum adaptation and curriculum renewal

**Welfare**
- Programme coordinators should ensure that offshore students have access to appropriate learning resources, including computers, readings and other library services and facilities.
- All staff should be provided with an ‘offshore manual’ which addresses matters as as:
  - accommodation;
  - personal safety and any security issues;
  - vaccinations and health care concerns, including the use of Australian prescription medicines offshore;
  - passport and visa arrangements;
  - appropriate clothing;
  - local currency, including exchange rates and banking facilities.
  - shopping and restaurants
  - transportation and communication including internet and email facilities; and
  - important contact numbers.

**Challenge Four:** to further develop teaching and learning approaches that are multi-modal and technologically enhanced

**Principles**

**Pedagogy**
- Attention should be given to the possibility of ensuring that offshore programmes are delivered through a blended medium, implemented by a small and consistent team of academics from Australia, combined with local tutors who are trained by the host university
Continual use of web-based learning, including for the provision of resources for learning, could enhance ongoing connections between academic staff and students.

Part 3: The Action Learning Project

The action learning project team collected data to document the impact of particular transnational principles on teaching and learning practice. These data collection tools included meetings, a focus group session, interviews and student feedback on units of study. The section that follows highlights the results from the data collected.

Action learning activity: to ensure that students are provided with up to date resources in each unit of study.

In an audit conducted by the Australian programme co-ordinator, a number of concerns were raised by students regarding access to library services. Students spoke about having inadequate access to electronic and academic resources and having to rely on printed reading materials (in a reading book) that contained outdated readings. The majority of students also found it difficult to connect to the host university’s library site which limited a range of academic resources they could use in their assessment tasks. Students wanting to locate additional academic resources or reference handouts were unable to do so which compromised their ability to adequately implement theoretical reflections into their pieces of work. One outcome that has emerged from the audit exercise is an acknowledgement that there is a greater need for communication between librarians across both the offshore and onshore campus. In September 2012 an Australian librarian will visit librarians located at the Hanoi campus and conduct training on a range of areas include; online resources, referencing materials and how best to support students to use the Australian institution’s catalogue.

Another aim of this visit is to ensure that the online support provided by the library is working exactly the same in Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh as it is in Australia. Equivalence in the provision of library services will also be re-evaluated and made subject to the same standards of delivery and service as provided onshore. Moving away from paper based resources will also be a key focus in the revamping of course materials and unit guides. In an interview conducted with one of the lecturers he reflected on the reading material for his unit of study in the following way, ‘all this printing for the reading guides is such a waste of paper and the trouble of transporting these guides from one country to the next is not only expensive but very inconvenient. Sometimes it is difficult to read articles that have been photocopied endlessly. This is of course embarrassing when you are teaching. Having online reading materials that are regularly up to date will provide students with more relevant readings in my estimation’. In summary this action learning activity has resulted in a revamping of library services to ensure that there is equivalence across onshore and offshore campuses. Students will now have access to a range of electronic links and databases that will enrich the quality of their teaching and learning experience.

Assessment tasks for units of study in the Masters of TESOL range from written assignments, oral presentations and the use of online interaction forums. Feedback is almost always through written comments. In one of the units, students have been invited to submit their assignments to an international peer-reviewed journal. The journal is edited...
by four of the staff members teaching in this programme. Providing students with an opportunity to publish their assessment pieces has also led to a reframing of writing for a wider audience. In being given a voice to document and share their localised experiences students are able to feel a part of a collective group of scholars. The first ever edition will be published in August 2012. Presently there is a limited body of academic writing on TESOL that is written through a Vietnamese lens. Connecting assessment tasks with writing for publication serves to also raise Vietnam’s profile around matters tied to English language. Students wanting to apply for further study can also use these publications as part of their application process.

**Action learning activity two: ensuring that curriculum units are culturally inclusive and sensitive to the local context**

A review of the three units of study in the MTESOL programme has led to the inclusion of more culturally appropriate pedagogical approaches that embed the lived experience of students. The inclusion of an ‘ethnographic walk’ in one of the units has meant that students are able to contextualise their learning of research methodologies by participating in activities that give voice to and privilege the Vietnamese cultural landscape. One of the lecturers introduced this activity in a bid to encourage students to ‘read the city’ for evidence of English practices being used. During their ethnographic walk students documented the various ways in which English was being located and performed on the streets. Students later presented their findings to the rest of the class and spoke about the benefits of being set such an exercise by their lecturer. We see this in an extract taken from one student’s evaluation of the research unit of study, ‘the way the teacher inspires us to look with our own eyes is important because we are allowed to value our local setting in our learning’. Such a reflection highlights the importance of instilling pedagogical approaches that are imaginative and creative and allow for authentic learning epiphanies in real life situations. Other student considerations on the MTESOL units praised the use of pair work and role plays in classroom activities. ‘I like the relaxing learning atmosphere, the interesting activities and the pair work and the group work activities’ wrote one student and ‘in the research method part I like the part best where I put my autobiography into the research because it reminds me of my desire of my own life and occupation’ wrote another. These contemplations highlight the importance of providing opportunities for students to not only learn in collaborative spaces but to also draw on historical and cultural experiences as a way of making sense of personal and professional lives and thus develop practitioner reflexivity.

**Action learning activity three: to ensure that staff members feel organised and safe when teaching in the offshore programme**

One of the challenges expressed by the co-ordinator and the teaching team was the need to ensure that all lecturers felt confident and well equipped to teach their units of study when they arrived in Vietnam. Prior to their departure, all lecturers were provided with a USB complete with information needed to make the teaching successful. Content on the USB contained the following information:

- Unit Guides
- Reading Materials
- Assessment Tools
• Contact details of staff, students and administrative staff
• Geographical information tied to Ho Chi Minh and Hanoi
• Accommodation details
• Student class lists - including gender and date of birth for each student
• Student Evaluation Proformas

In addition to the inclusion of a USB is a strengthening of the induction programme for students. In previous years lecturers provided an induction to the programme on a range of themes in their individual classes. For new lecturers unfamiliar with the course, providing consistent information was at times challenging. A new system is now in place where there is a day-long induction programme for all students in the MTESOL programme. During this session students receive an overview of the programme as well as information tied to units of study, library resources, graduation, university requirements for taking a leave of absence alongside assessment submission requirements. The incorporation of an induction day has meant that in the words of one lecturer, ‘students are encouraged to be more autonomous and proactive in their own learning. Through attending this day students also have greater insight into resources they can access throughout the duration of their studies’.

In previous years the Australian co-ordinator was responsible for a range of administrative duties that included tasks such as managing travel authorities, booking accommodation, organising airport transfers and ensuring that visas were granted prior to the team departing. An important addition to the MTESOL programme has been the appointment of an onshore administrative staff member who will be in charge of these activities alongside other administrative tasks associated with the programme. The appointment has been well received by all the team and especially the co-ordinator who can now spend more time on fine tuning academic resources and approaches that needed to deliver a quality programme.

International classroom climates that are inspiring and motivating are reflective of teaching staff who feel safe in foreign settings. Having comfortable accommodation was identified by the lecturers as being central to generating feelings of wellness and comfort. One lecturer reported this sentiment in a focus group session,

‘if you are staying in substandard hotels and you are exhausted for teaching all day the stress is likely to impact on the quality of your teaching engagement. You need facilities to rest and recover everyday in Vietnam. It is also important that the hotel has Western style food as this contributes to familiarity and work-life balance for international teaching’.

This year the Australian programme co-coordinator upgraded the teaching team’s accommodation from a two star local Vietnamese hotel to a five star local Vietnamese hotel. In conversations with the hotel’s manager the co-ordinator has established an ongoing relationship with him which has enabled all lecturers to receive free internet and laundry facilities.
'One of the reasons why accommodation was moved was to meet the dietary requirements of staff and also to provide a more international cuisine. This change has been positively commented on by all lecturing staff. In their view their visit here is based on ‘work’ and they need to be able to be in a work environment where the standard of hygiene and food is of the highest quality’.

In this instance accommodation is essential to providing a safe and supportive environment for lecturers to adequately plan for their teaching and learning commitments.

**Challenge Four: to further develop teaching and learning approaches that are multi-modal and technologically enhanced**

The use of ICT was another issue discussed by both the onshore and offshore co-ordinators. In previous years the team relied on a wiki to upload resources for each of the three Masters Units. Both the Australian and Vietnamese co-ordinators commented that the majority of post graduate students did little to communicate with lecturers and peers once their studies had ceased. Introducing and trialing an online platform such as a ‘Ning’ would not only give students 24 hour access to unit material, but also allow them to participate in a discussion forum in a synchronous way. The Australian co-ordinator discussed the benefits of using Ning to upload video clips of each of the lecturers prior to their departure. For the majority of students enrolled in the Masters Unit, exposure to Western teachers is minimal. This can undoubtedly lead to tension around student perceptions of their English language competency and academic writing skills. Creating opportunities for students to learn more about their lecturers could assist in alleviating any fears they might have concerning their future studies. Hence the video clips would not only allow lecturers to introduce themselves and their areas of expertise but would also enable lecturers to welcome students into the programme in a supportive and non-threatening way.