

**FREELANCE ADULT EDUCATOR PROFESSIONALIZATION IN  
A STATE-LED INSTITUTE - A CASE STUDY OF  
PROFESSIONAL LEARNING AS PRAXIS**

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## **DECLARATION AND WORD COUNT**

I, Koh Tat Suan confirm that the work presented in this thesis is my own. Where information has been derived from other sources, I confirm that this has been indicated in the thesis.

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## **ABSTRACT**

The Singapore Workforce Skills Qualification (WSQ) system, established in 2004 by the Workforce Development Agency (WDA), serves as the blueprint for the Continuing Education and Training (CET) sectors across industries. In the WSQ System, the ubiquitous deployment of freelance adult educators (FAEs) in the CET sectors as a primary resource in national workforce development demands that the professionalization of the FAEs be a priority.

This study is set within the Institute for Adult Learning (IAL), a division of WDA, mandated to actualize this professionalization. The study employs an action research case study methodology and seeks to establish whether professional learning as praxis through action research can support the Continuous Professional Development (CPD) of FAEs. To this end, it addresses three core aspects of the IAL's initiative: (i) to understand the challenges encountered by the FAEs in utilising digital technology as part of their professional development; (ii) to understand the FAEs' working culture within IAL; and (iii) to understand the impact of an educative relationship between the researcher, as a manager, and the FAEs engaged by IAL.

In relation to these three aspects, the study finds that: (i) the FAEs acquired digital competency when it added value to their training competency; (ii) the FAEs did not readily engage in peer professional exchanges as part of a professional development initiative; and (iii) developing an educative relationship lent support that benefitted the IAL's professional development initiative.

Of equal importance, the study demonstrates that adopting an insider-researcher position yields valuable and enlightening insights into the symbiotic relationship between practitioner research and management and the potential of management-led action research to enhance the formulation and implementation of organisational change for corporate improvement. The final chapters reflect on and explore such a potential from the positions of the freelancers and the practitioner researcher.

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## **My Reflective Statement**

### **How I Entered the Foray of Training in the WSQ System**

I started my second career with the Workforce Development Agency (WDA) in March 2005 which was set up in September 2003 as a government statutory board to assist the Ministry of Manpower in the function of workforce development. I was involved in the development and implementation of Employability Skills System (ESS) Framework under the Singapore Workforce Skills Qualification (WSQ) System. The ESS framework identified the workplace literacy, numeracy and generic skills competencies needed by the workforce.

In April 2008, I was tasked to assist in the setting up of the Institute for Adult Learning (IAL). I was appointed as the Director of the Training Services Division responsible in setting a state-led quality benchmark for the training provision in Singapore and overseeing the professionalization of Adult Educators (AEs) who operate in the WSQ system. IAL trains the AEs in pedagogical competence to facilitate, assess and develop WSQ competency-based training and assessment (CBTA) programmes. The AEs IAL trains support all CET sectors under the WSQ system.

### **Developing Useful Skills and Helpful Attitudes During the EdD Programme**

When I enrolled in the degree of Doctor in Education (EdD) International Programme with the Institute of Education, University of London, in October 2009, I began another milestone in my professional learning journey. The readings I had done throughout the programme had contributed immensely to widening my professional knowledge and awareness as a practitioner. They had also helped shaped my 'originality' of thoughts as well as my 'contributions' as Director of the Training Services Division (Whitehead, 1989: 46-47).

The structure of the EdD programme provided me with a methodical scaffolding framework in building up my professional understanding and knowledge in the context of my profession. The undergirding basis of my pursuit throughout this programme had always been: 'How can I improve my practice?' (ibid: 41) The taught modules, the Institution Focused Study (IFS) and the Thesis had enabled me to expand and apply the course materials and my personal professional knowledge beneficially.

I must admit that having to go "back to school" while holding a full-time job had its fair share of challenges for me. Striving to complete the EdD programme within such a context, my 'doctoral experience ... [was indeed at times] filled with tensions and challenges...' (McAlphine & Amundsen, 2009: 109). As Watts (2009) had noted on students pursuing their doctoral studies, '[T]he challenges [of] "becoming a student again"...' were imminent, among them being able to acquire a 'high-level academic writing [skill]' and 'enhanced critical thinking skills' so as to be able to 'question assumptions and established positions' to produce balanced and in-depth viewpoints (Watts, 2009:688).

Going through the experience of learning the taught modules, what stood out vividly for me was the constant polishing of what Caffarella and Barnett (2000) referred to as the three components of scholarly writing: 'content, process and critique' (p.41). I could say I had a laborious but rewarding experience of polishing my scholarly writing throughout the learning journey. I learnt to 'present an argument...that was grounded in literature and/or empirical research'; to struggle with the 'on-going effect of writing and rewriting'; and also to train myself to be 'able to receive and use critical feedback' (ibid). In addition, I constantly strived to remind myself that '[t]here's more to it than simple quotation ... there is always the risk of simply "raiding" literature....' (Green, 2005: 156). In looking back on my experiences of the EdD Programme, I must express my appreciation to my module tutors and my IFS and thesis supervisor for the efforts they exerted in guiding my academic writing.

## **The Professional Relevance of the EdD Programme Structure**

The Taught Modules – To me, each of the taught modules brought their own usefulness to my professional development. The first module on Foundations of Professionalism in Education set me contemplating on my role and functions as the Training Manager overseeing the group of freelance AEs (FAEs) engaged in IAL as well as the full-time staff I supervised. It spurred me to be more conscious of the ways I could make a difference in my workplace. The third taught module on Specialist Course in International Education turned my gaze to understanding in greater depth the Singapore development model in terms of skills development in the nation's efforts to stay competitively viable on the global scene. The second and fourth taught modules, Methods of Enquiry 1 and Methods of Enquiry 2, had prompted me to explore relevant and beneficial research areas that could shape an inclusive and collaborative work culture within IAL. These had culminated in my research question for my Institution Focused Study (IFS): 'Striving for Excellence in Adult Vocational Education in Singapore: Active Learning as a Teaching Approach and Reflective Practice as a Professional Development Pathway'.

The IFS – This study enabled me to gain two valuable insights into the FAEs' state of practice that would assist me, as the training director, to focus on what professional interventions would be beneficial towards raising their delivery competency. The first insight gained was on the use of active learning as a pedagogical approach. The second was on how the FAEs conducted their self-reflections as part of their effort towards self-directed professional development and shared their reflections with a dialogue partner.

The findings had shown that there were challenges faced by some of the FAEs in adopting active learning strategy. This had resulted in the facilitation of appropriate interventions in the form of continuous professional development (CPD) activities to improve their facilitation skills in using active learning pedagogical strategies. With regards to the use of Video Stimulated

Reflective Dialogue (VSRD) as a platform to promote reflective practice, there was a mixed receptivity towards the use of this technique by the individual to provide personal feedback where classroom delivery performance was concerned. Getting the FAEs to rely on video recordings to provide recall rather than from human memory for self-reflection was a worthwhile idea to explore further.

The Thesis – The professional learning I gained from my thesis study has helped me to understand the dynamics of hiring FAEs within the setting of a state-run institution mandated to raise the professionalism of its training fraternity. It has also challenged me to examine my personal assumptions as a practitioner in my field of work. In addition, it has yielded valuable first-hand insights into issues that a training director could encounter in implementing a continuous professional development initiative given the contextual parameters.

The action research methodology I opted to adopt for my thesis study too proved to be of tremendous benefit to me from a professional standpoint. It afforded me opportunities to develop creativity, employ situational analysis and reflect on the efficacy of decisions undertaken. Above all, it enabled me to cultivate even greater rapport and camaraderie with the FAEs through the numerous formal and informal modes of and opportunities for communication and feedback I have had occasion to carry out and receive in the course of conducting my action research.

### **Tensions and Challenges of Insider-Management Research**

Although my operational role as the training manager had afforded me the direct sensing of the ground reality and the flexibility to take any appropriate actions to ensure the organisational goals set were met, conducting the research concurrently as an insider-management researcher did present me with challenges and placed me in situations of tension. A particular tension I faced throughout the research involved the issue of conflict of interest between my roles as manager cum insider-management researcher. I had to

be mindful of the organisational priorities and had to juggle to optimise the opportunities to carry out the research. It is a fine line to balance to ensure the FAEs were not coerced in their participation of the research and yet clear about their obligations to perform and support the research without any sense of bias or prejudice. I believed this is true for the FAEs too.

However, this situation also afforded me ample opportunities to communicate with the FAEs to ensure the FAEs' participation were entirely voluntary and had no bearing on their recruitment. Foremost in my mind whenever I gathered data for my study was that I had to be upfront and impartial on this issue. The experience of seeking their support and participation in my research study had enabled me to develop resourcefulness and had come to a deeper understanding of their predilection and gained a stronger rapport with the FAEs.

### **A Broadened and Deepened Outlook**

In conclusion, the EdD (International) programme has been instrumental in spurring me towards my own continuous journey of professional development. This programme afforded me a holistic gain in that I not only had the opportunities to hone my hard skills, such as academic writing skills and building a steady store of professional knowledge through the literature I read, but also cultivating the soft skills of people relations and situational analysis as well.

This EdD experience had also broadened my outlook in that it has taught me to question my own taken-for-granted assumptions as a person, a practitioner and a management representative. It also taught me to look inward to examine my own values and beliefs so that I can function as an effective leader who truly cares about the people I am supporting.

Conducting this thesis study, I gained deeper insights into understanding the psyche, motivations and aspirations of FAEs as a unique group of workers. I also came to appreciate the challenges of introducing new innovations as

part of corporate advancement and staying relevant. Last but not least, I cherish the experience of building educative relationships within the workplace as an emancipatory and all-embracing approach to management practices.

This programme has indeed enriched my life, both professionally and individually. I am glad I added this milestone to my professional journey. I am more confident than ever of taking on whatever challenges I may have to face as I continue my professional journey beyond this EdD programme.

## Abbreviations and Acronyms

ACTA	Advanced Certificate in Training and Assessment
AE	Adult Educator
AEN	Adult Education Network
AEP	Adult Educators' Professionalization
APB	Association and Professional Bodies Training Arms/Functions
AR	Action Research
ATO	Approved Training Provider
BCTO	Business Consulting Training Organisations
CBT	Competency-Based Training
CBTA	Competency-Based Training and Assessment
CET	Continuing Education and Training
CPD	Continuous Professional Development
CS	Communication Sessions
CTU	Company Training Units
CU1	ACTA Module 1: Interpret the Singapore Workforce Skills
CU2	Qualifications Framework ACTA Module 2: Apply Adult Learning Principles and Code of Ethics Relating to Training
CU3A	ACTA Module 3: Design and Develop a WSQ Facilitated Training Programme
CU4A	ACTA Module 4: Prepare and Facilitate Classroom Training
CU5	ACTA Module 5: Develop a Competency-Based Assessment
CU6	ACTA Module 6: Conduct a Competency-Based Assessment
DACE	Diploma in Adult Continuing Education
DCI	Develop Curriculum and Instruction for Adult Learning Programme
e-Portfolio	Electronic Portfolio
EdD	Doctor in Education
ESS	Employability Skills System
ELC	Episodic Learning Cycle
FAE	Freelance Adult Educator
FGD	Focused Group Discussion
IAL	Institute for Adult Learning
IFS	Institution Focused Study
IPR	Interpersonal Process Review
LMS	Learning Management System
M1	Apply Adult Learning Principles in Training
M2	Design a Learning Experience
M3	Prepare and Facilitate a Learning Experience
M4	Interpret the Singapore Workforce Skills Qualifications System
M5	Assess Competence
M6	Prepare for Continuing Professional Development

NIE	National Institute of Education
OD	Organisational Development
OPO	One-Person-Operation
PEI	Private Education Institute
PSEI	Post-Secondary Education Institute
PSTI	Public Sector Training Institution
RP	Develop Practice Through Reflection
RPP	Reflective Practice Process
SAE	Specialist Adult Educator
TAE	Training and Education
TCW	Technical Certification Workshop
TD	Trainers' Day
TFW	Technology Familiarisation Workshop
TNA	Conduct a Training Needs Analysis
TTP	Technical Training Programme
TTT	Train-the-Trainer
VSRD	Video Stimulated Reflective Dialogue
VT	Video Technology
WDA	Workforce Development Agency
WSQ	Workforce Skills Qualifications
WTP	Workplace Trainer Programme



# Chapter 1: Introduction

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## 1.1 Aim

This introductory chapter provides an overview of the thesis. It explains the origin of the thesis and the operating context of my action research inquiry. It also addresses the methodological approach and the research areas. Lastly, it describes the research questions and the structure of the thesis report.

## 1.2 Origin of Thesis

The origin of this thesis began in October 2009 with my pursuit of the professional doctoral programme to improve my professional practice. Dadds and Harts' (2001) advocacy that '...a central commitment to the study of one's own professional practice by the researcher himself or herself, with a view to improving that practice for the benefit of others' resonated with me as a professional in the adult education field (p.7). As Director of Learning and Professional Development<sup>1</sup> in the Institute for Adult Learning (IAL), a position I held for the seven years since April 2008, I am mindful of the undergirding impact of my leadership style not only on quality provision of training programmes but also the professional development and learning of freelance adult educators<sup>2</sup> (FAEs) engaged in IAL. Therefore, I see a strong relevance of an action research inquiry into my professional role and responsibilities.

Indeed we are operating in a complex and unpredictable world. The military-derived acronym, VUCA, short for volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity used in business school and leadership training, succinctly reflects an increasingly unstable and rapidly changing business world within which

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<sup>1</sup> My appointment was changed from Director, Training Services Division when I needed to absorb another functional role in Professional Development in 2012.

<sup>2</sup> The term "freelance" seems to be most commonly used by people in Singapore operating in non-permanent work arrangements and connotes being paid on an hourly or project basis, for one or multiple employers/clients. Adult educator" is a term coined by Institute for Adult Learning, Singapore referring to people who develop curriculum, train, and/or assess adults in the WSQ system. These workers, however, are often known by many other names depending on personal preference or institutions of employment. These include: trainer, instructor, teacher, lecturer, coach, mentor, training practitioner or facilitator, *in conjunction with*: adjunct, associate, casual, sessional, occasional or portfolio workers (NCVER, 2004; Fenwick, 2004; Guimarães et al., 2006a; Clayton, Meyers, Bateman, & Bluer, 2010; Jütte, Nicoll, & Olsen, 2011).

we need to cope (Bennett and Lemoine, 2014; Lawrence, 2013). I concur with Johansen (2007) that '[l]eaders are always sensing, as well as coaching others, about what's important and what's not ...and stimulate insight, to help make sense out of dilemmas and what [we] might do next' (p.8).

Hence, the dynamics of leadership engagement with the FAEs I envisage is not one that can be rigid and static. Accordingly to Morrison (2002), 'organisational learning requires the [corporate entity] to possess and develop organisational intelligence and an ability to learn from its internal and external environment [that] 'takes the form of problem-solving and action research, maintenance, adaptive and benchmark learning' (p. 91). Thus, an engagement that is produced out of an inelastic and bureaucratic system will not secure the needed support of the FAEs for organisational learning. The general aim of this study is about promoting organisational learning, not just for me but also for the FAEs. This involves observing the dynamics of professional interactions and interdependence that may emerge among the FAEs themselves and with me in my research study.

### **1.3 The Operating Context of my Action Research Inquiry**

It is pertinent to locate this thesis in its historical context for a comprehensive understanding of the issues and concerns that have influenced the design of this research inquiry. It is helpful at this juncture to trace the development of events within the Continuing Education and Training (CET) sector that resulted in milestone changes for the training landscape in Singapore.

#### **1.3.1 Impact of Workforce Skills Qualification (WSQ) System on the Training Landscape in Singapore**

In 2004, the Workforce Development Agency (WDA) introduced the WSQ system and the privatisation of the training provisions. This privatisation made the employment of FAEs to support the training delivery of WSQ programmes a permanent feature of the WSQ system. This altered the local adult education field 'from being a largely private sphere to one which

encompasses a nationally regulated system of workforce development' (Brown, Karmel and Ye, 2012: 1).

In February 2008, Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong launched the first CET Master Plan (WDA, 2009). It stressed the importance of adult education and training in up-skilling the Singapore workforce as the foundation for economic resilience and growth in the 21st century. Closely associated with this endeavour is the agnized need to attract, develop and professionalize CET practitioners. Hence, in April 2008, WDA set up the IAL to help achieve the government's aim to ramp up the annual training capacity to 80,000 by 2010 (Lee, 2008). To date, 'WDA had built up a network of over 40 CET Centres and over 430 Approved Training Organisations, both public and private institutions, at the end of FY 11<sup>3</sup>' (WDA, 2011/2012: 53).

IAL began developing its own brand of programme with a two-fold objective. The first is to complement the training programme offered by private training providers. The second is to establish a benchmark standard for the programme. It introduced two new WSQ programmes, namely the Workplace Trainer Programme (WTP) and Diploma in Adult Continuing Education (DACE) within two years of commencement. WTP caters to line supervisors and frontline managers who need to conduct in-house training for their workers at the workplace. DACE is the next level beyond the Advanced Certificate in Training and Assessment (ACTA) where practitioners can advance their pedagogical skills in training and assessment, including curriculum development.

Around the same period, IAL also embarked on hosting two Master Programmes<sup>4</sup>. One is with the Institute of Education, University of London – Master of Arts in Lifelong Learning. The other is with the Griffith University – Master of Training and Development. This is part of the IAL plan to develop a formal professional development pathway for practitioners. Subsequently, in

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<sup>3</sup> FY 11 – Fiscal Year 2011.

<sup>4</sup> To date, there are now four Master programmes on offer, one with our local university, Nanyang Technological University-National Institute of Education (NTU-NIE) and the other with Cardiff University.

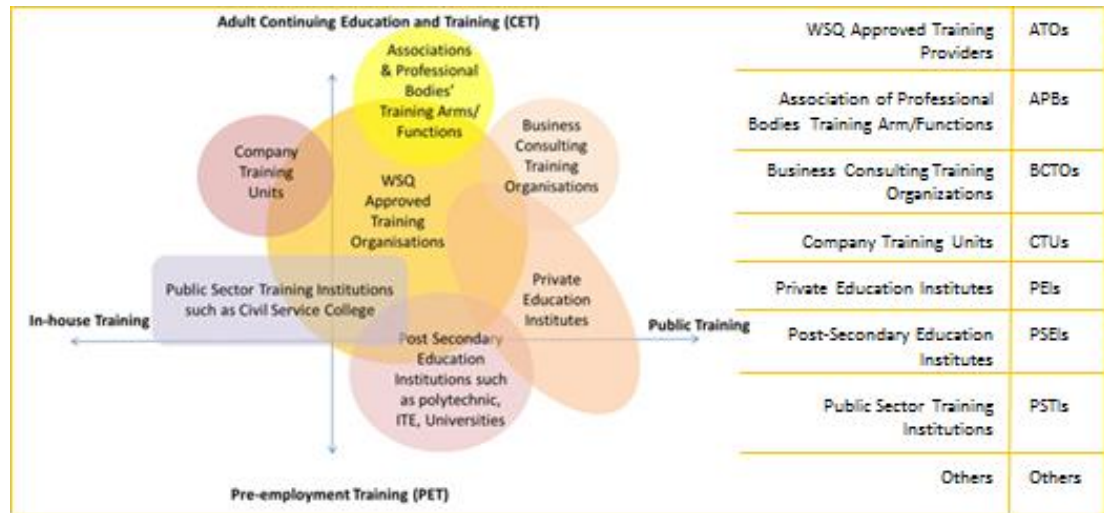
2011, IAL set up the Adult Education Network (AEN) to provide a platform to engage and nurture a dynamic community of CET professionals from a range of disciplines such as the Adult Education, Training Management, Human Resource Development and Workforce Development. To date, with over 6000 members, the AEN provides opportunities for connection, collaboration, learning and continuing professional development through collaboration with industry leaders, setting up special interest groups, and conducting focused seminars, workshops and informal learning (see details at website: <http://www.ial.edu.sg>).

The introduction of the WSQ system created an overnight demand for adult educators qualified in Competency-based Training and Assessment (CBTA). The standard of professionalism that existed within the training industry prior to the launch of the WSQ system was arbitrary and self-imposed. As Willmott & Karmel (2011b) noted, the training fraternity, comprising mostly private trainers, programme facilitators, workshop leaders or conference speakers, was fragmented and ad-hoc in nature. These professionals operate mostly independently and are often self-employed, self-represented or freelance trainers who move around as adjuncts or associate trainers for larger training institutions. Willmott & Karmel (2011a) in their report on the WSQ system also confirmed that 'the existing private training system [in 2003] consisted of several hundred unregulated training providers, most with their own courses which were not externally monitored or subject to quality standards' (p.36).

Hiring freelance trainers in Singapore is a ubiquitous phenomenon for the CET sectors that is observable for both private and public training organisations. This is predominantly driven by economic considerations where the training loads and business opportunities are varied and uncertain. It is usual practice to employ a small core group of full-time trainers supplemented by a pool of freelancers whose number varies according to requirement. The resultant local training community thus encompasses freelance trainers and practitioners with a training component in their work and industry-specific domain expertise (which is sometimes referred to as in-house trainers), each with varying training experiences and educational

backgrounds, all operating within an apparently “free-for-all” CET training market. Karmel, Bound and Rushbrook (2013) identified seven broad areas of activity for adult educators in Singapore as depicted in [Figure 1.1](#) below.

Figure 1.1 Main Categories of Adult Education in Singapore



Source: IAL (2013), The CET landscape and the changing demand (Unpublished. Part 1: Strategic Intelligence of Training and Education (TAE) Sector)

The report noted that a freelance adult educator<sup>5</sup> may offer their services to learners by working as non-permanent staff with any of the categories of organisations. He or she may also have work with one or more of such institutions. As observed by Nuissl & Pehl (2000), NCVET (2004), Robson et al. (2004), Simons, Harris, Pudney, & Clayton (2009) and IAL (2013), many developed economies, including Singapore, have also come to rely on the use of a flexible pool of freelance adult educators to respond to unpredictable market demands. These pools can be individuals who operate full-time as a FAE or have a full-time job but operate as a part-time FAE. For the latter group, they can be in-house trainers from CTUs or PSTIs or even full-time AEs in ATOs, APBs, PEIs, PSEIs, PSTIs and others who are doing training in the WSQ system (refer to [Figure 1.1](#)).

Enhancing and promoting the professionalism of FAEs operating in the WSQ system within the local training landscape is one important function and role of IAL. It is, therefore, crucial to gather, wherever possible, in-depth

<sup>5</sup> At the point of the research study, IAL had 60 FAEs on its list of engagement versus 9 full-time AEs.

knowledge about these FAEs operating in the WSQ CET landscape that will provide a useful foundational insight to efforts aimed at professionalizing this fraternity of practitioners.

### **1.3.2 The ‘Actors’: Freelance Adult Educators Operating in the WSQ System in Singapore**

To begin understanding the operating context of the FAEs in the WSQ system in Singapore, it is necessary to first draw attention to the fact that there is an extant absence of a robust and stringent pre-service certification process. As an initial step towards addressing this issue, WDA, in a ‘government-led’ professionalization effort, implemented through the ‘use of regulation [two] legislative minimum qualifications...’: ACTA (for facilitation and assessment roles) and DACE (for curriculum development role) as the basic entry level within the WDA CBTA framework (Brown, Karmel and Ye, 2012:3). This would ensure there is currently a basic required professional training standard in place that would equip the adult educators with the basic level of competencies from whence they could aspire to improve and develop.

A study by Brown, Karmel & Ye (2012), on the professionalization of AEs in Singapore, made a salient observation when they observed that ‘although adult educators are education workers, they are not the same as primary or secondary school teachers...and it is perhaps unreasonable to expect their professionalization to mimic that of teachers’ (p.39). That being said, given that the FAEs are employed by the WSQ ATOs, it is desirable that some form of in-service CPD programmes are available as a corporate effort on the part of the training providers to compensate the extant absence of pre-service certification. Having the ATOs set aside resources to develop and make available such CPD programmes as part of professionalization efforts is on the wish list of IAL. It would be a step in the right direction if their training managers could accord priority on this.

Where IAL was concerned, a transactional nature of engagement that was deemed expedient in the early days of the WSQ system, such as an

appraisal system with its attending target-setting outcomes and individual output comparison, had tended to aggravate an already existing unhealthy competitive culture among the FAEs. It had been noticeable that the culture of 'performativity' was slowly creeping in whereby FAEs tended to employ means that ensured they maintained high evaluation scores (Ball, 2008: 55). For example, some FAEs occasionally would quibble over the consolidated evaluation scores given by their learners for the programmes that they facilitated. This was because the scores were used to determine the hourly payment rate for their services. Some would even go to the extent to curry favours by offering special services such as buying breakfasts and giving "free consultations" to prepare weaker learners for their assessments.

Given that a performance-driven approach was not entirely without its merit in the earlier days, IAL recognised that it was important to balance this with professional development initiatives that were directed at developing a sense of professionalism and building a professional identity. In pursuit of this desirable balance, IAL hence embarked on identifying initiatives that centred on achieving a transformational culture in classroom practices and in building a professional identity among the FAEs in its employ.

Over the last eight years since its inception, IAL in line with its role of setting a benchmark for quality training provision, it had been active in facilitating CPD for its adult educators. Initiatives undertaken in this direction ranged from improvement in adopting active learning facilitation strategies to updating personal knowledge and networking by attending local and international events so as to materialise the professional development agenda. Such efforts were part of IAL's corporate responsibilities as an agency that sought to engage the FAEs beyond transactional engagements to one of transformational development. These efforts are elaborated in Chapter 2 as part of the Literature Review.

## **1.4 Moving the WSQ Framework Towards Digital Learning**

At the time of the study, more than 90% of the CET learning mode in the WSQ system was classroom-based learning. It is observable that the traditional CET classroom-based learning mode would not meet the efficacy needed to train workers for future work-related challenges. This is due to the global trend of incorporating ever-advancing digital learning technologies, the ever-increasing challenge of workers being able to be released from work for residential training and the increasing emphasis on workplace-based learning. Under the CET Master Plan 2008, IAL reviewed the current training system and explored alternate learning platforms that employed digital learning technologies. Towards this end, in June 2013, IAL launched a Learning Management System (LMS) that included forum discussion and e-Portfolio functions that would support the delivery of a new ACTA V5, to replace the existing ACTA V4.

The second CET Master Plan, known as CET 2020, was launched in September 2014 by our Deputy Prime Minister Tharman Shanmugaratnam. He reiterated that the CET Master Plan by WDA would support the work of a new tripartite committee (WDA, 2014). One of the three CET 2020 initiatives involved providing 'a wider range of high quality learning opportunities' for the workforce (ibid). This would translate into requiring all WSQ CET ATOs to embark on introducing more courses using blended learning which combines classroom training with online e-learning and appropriate workplace learning components, where applicable.

The overall objective of this CET 2020 initiative is to make e-learning more engaging and accessible to working adults. This sets in motion a new mandate and policy for all WSQ ATOs to support the CET 2020 Master Plan to harness the use of learning technologies to deliver WSQ programmes. This move towards digital learning brings with it two crucial implications. It necessitated not only the FAEs to be ready, psychologically and technology-wise, to embrace digital learning but also both IAL and all WSQ ATOs to be similarly prepared. This national move towards the use of learning



technologies to deliver WSQ programmes had an important impact on the design of my research methodology in addressing the scalability concern as my intent was to open the research participation to all FAEs engaged by IAL. Its impact is explained in detail in Chapter 2 under Literature Review.

### **1.5 Consideration of an Appropriate Research Methodology**

Considering the appropriate methodology to adopt for my research study was another area I had to clear. I was aware that I needed to deliberate carefully on the research methodology I chose for my study as it would determine the kind of findings I could obtain, the process involved and the time frame of execution. To arrive at an appropriate methodological approach, I returned to my research objective and context.

Objective - There are currently limited research studies done within the local context to understand this group of adult educator professionals. The research studies conducted by the IAL Research and Innovation Division had centred on adult educators, full-time and freelancing, operating within the CET and WSQ sectors in both private and public sectors. My interest as the training director of IAL was on the professionalization of those FAEs working in the IAL context. The literature on this group of practitioners was non-existent apart from the lone study I conducted as my Institution Focused Study (IFS).

My intent was to investigate the receptivity of the FAEs, engaged by IAL, to an externally initiated professional development effort against the backdrop of their autonomous agency as freelancers. In this respect, I was interested in gaining insights into their psyche and predilection with respect to such an issue through their outward aggregate behaviours.

Context - The element of freelancing was placed as a priority consideration since the adult educators were hired as freelancers and their working arrangements operated around the dictates of freelancing work. Their fluctuating work schedules would have implications on their time availability

and I foresaw it would exert a real impact on the willingness of the FAEs to participate in my research. This issue of participation was compounded when the voluntary nature of their participation was factored in. Under such circumstances, even the scale of participation could not be safely ascertained as I could be receiving lukewarm responses from the FAEs in volunteering as time is a valued commodity for them.

Another contextual area was to consider the “what if” issue. Due to the fluidity on the ground as to how the FAEs would respond to any proposed form of CPD initiative, I had anticipated potential “what if” issues cropping up during the course of my inquiry. In view of this, pragmatism dictated that my research structure should provide for the flexibility of likely timely changes or fine-tuning.

Choice - In order to meet all the criteria listed above, action research, to me, was the most suitable research strategy. In a nutshell, it did not demand that a theory had to be posited as a pre-requisite. This sat well with the context discussed earlier surrounding the nature of my research. Moreover, its inherent design excluded any rigidity whereby changes could be introduced in real-time whenever and wherever deemed appropriate. Chapter 3, under Methodology, discusses, in detail, my considerations for selecting action research as the methodological approach for my research inquiry.

## **1.6 Identifying Pertinent Research Areas**

Then, the next issue to tackle was to decide on what my research study should seek to examine. To answer this, I posed myself these questions – “What is the purpose of my research?” “How can my research study contribute to my role as the Training Director of IAL?” My first thought naturally centred on the professionalization of FAEs as an integral role of IAL, being the public institution tasked with the mandate to benchmark the quality of training services provided in Singapore. My next thought was directed at the industry practice of engaging predominantly FAEs in the WSQ-CET training landscape. This immediately drew attention to the importance of

understanding the factors that would likely lead to quality service on the part of the FAEs engaged by IAL. These factors shaped my areas of interest for the study.

### **1.6.1 Turning to my Institution Focused Study for Suggestions**

In my search for beneficial and relevant areas of research for my thesis study I first turned to my IFS that I conducted in 2013 as part of the EdD programme. There were a few notable findings from this study that had me, as the Training Director, contemplating on taking my work done there to another level.

It would be useful here to first provide some background information on my IFS. The research areas of my IFS (Koh, 2013) identified two spheres of professional development for the FAEs that centred on improving their competencies as trainers. My study attempted firstly, to explore reflective practice as a possible tool for professional improvement and secondly, to elicit the FAEs' perspectives on the benefits and challenges of using active learning as a classroom delivery tool. It was a two-stage empirical study conducted from August 2011 to January 2013 that involved a group of 40 FAEs who were then engaged by IAL.

Stage 1 of the study facilitated a quick poll questionnaire whereby 37 FAEs responded to the poll. This was then followed by 11 small group semi-structured interviews with 22 FAEs who volunteered out of the 37 FAEs who responded to the poll survey. These interviews centred on two themes. The first was the use of active learning as a classroom delivery tool from a practitioner's experience. The second was the practice of self-reflection by the FAEs and the challenges they experienced conducting it.

Stage 2 involved conducting a video-stimulated reflective dialogue (VSRD). The VSRD technique was adapted from the studies by Moyles, Adams and Musgrove (2002) and Powell (2005). A total of 6 participants volunteered for this stage of the study. The participants conducted two rounds of dialogues

with me, the researcher, as their dialogue partner using video excerpts they selected for themselves from the recordings that they taped during their classroom delivery. Each round of dialogue was guided by the use of a scaffolding framework of reflective questions.

There were several findings that interested me immensely. One such finding centred on the issue of reflective practice. There was a perceived sense of professional value on the part of the FAEs from conducting reflective practice. The findings indicated that reflective practice to the FAEs was a worthwhile pursuit as part of professional development. As a result of having to conduct reflective practice as part of their participation in my IFS research, they felt that they were more acutely aware of the implications of the professional choices they adopt for and during their classroom delivery. They then made efforts to improve where they saw they were lacking. Moreover, the findings also indicated that the FAEs could conduct it with no external restrictive impositions whether it be time, nature or form. Focusing on reflective practice appeared to me to be non-invasive and interruptive.

In addition, participating as the passive dialogue partner in the VSRD segment of the research allowed me to see the positive impact the dialogues had on the awareness of the FAEs in regards to their professional practice. Although I did not make any professional contributions during the dialogue but merely guided the FAEs along with the scaffolding questions, I could appreciate the heightened sense of professional awareness from the FAEs during their participation in the second round of dialogues as they warmed up to the idea of dialogue. The findings revealed that the participants saw and felt the benefits of actually reflecting on their classroom delivery techniques and approaches. They were able to better identify for themselves the areas of their performance they could improve.

However, my research also noted that the FAEs expressed hesitation and initial resistance to the idea of dialogue, even as convened in the VSRD form. It was only in the second round of the VSRD did majority of them discarded their inhibitions to feel more at ease to share their reflections on their video

excerpts. Hence, talking to another person about their professional choices and performances was an activity that required accustoming. It would be interesting to investigate what the results would be if the FAEs were given the opportunity to engage in dialogue with a peer of their choice on their professional reflections with a view to raising their professionalism.

Replicating, with modifications, these findings from my IFS on reflective practice and a dialogue partner to encompass a wider population of FAEs could be my next attempt to investigate. As an insider-researcher, I could further investigate the same theme of professional development but initiated at organisation level within the IAL context.

### **1.6.2 Finding a Platform that Allowed for Peer Dialogue**

My research design would require me to find a platform that would allow the participating FAEs to conduct their peer dialogue flexibly in terms of time and space. The lesson drawn from my IFS pointed to the premium the FAEs placed on their time prioritisation. The answer came in the form of the CET Master Plan 2008 that saw the launching of the LMS in June 2013 with its forum discussion and e-Portfolio capabilities at IAL. This LMS platform provided my research with the scalability and flexibility potential I required to conduct my research study.

### **1.6.3 Understanding the FAEs' Working Culture**

That FAEs functioned understandably at primarily a transactional level of engagement, where a "bread and butter" issue was at play, was a fact that should not be ignored. I thus saw that eliciting an understanding of the FAEs' working culture involving work norms and preferences was crucial to ascertain what professional development initiative would be appropriate to them and in what manner it should be presented. This would be a pertinent research area to my study.

#### **1.6.4 The Impact of Management on a Professional Development Initiative**

The unique characteristics of freelancing include the assumption that the individuals were autonomous entities, where work choices of when, where and with whom were entirely in their hands. Apart from their fulfilling their engagement obligations, these individuals were free to decide on their level of commitment to the organisational vision statement. Situating this mind-set within a state-led organisation like IAL with a mandate to produce a national training benchmark could appear to be at odds with one another.

The challenge here then is to create a working environment where the FAEs despite the sense of “temporary presence” within the organisation, could develop a deeper connection to and with it. I saw the answer could very well lie in the kind of working relationship the management had with its FAEs. Hence, it was important for me to gain a close understanding on how fostering an educative relationship could be an added benefit to elicit grounded support from the FAEs. This educative relationship involved building a working relationship that entailed partnership in learning from and supporting one another within the work context. This formed the last part of the puzzle in delineating my research areas for this study.

#### **1.7 Research Question**

Given the considerations discussed earlier, my research question is as follows:

***“Can professional learning as praxis through action research support the Continuous Professional Development (CPD) of freelance adult educators in the Institute for Adult Learning in Singapore?”***

The research sub-questions are:

- a. How will the use of digital technologies in my proposed CPD initiative impact the freelance adult educators' receptivity towards it?
- b. What are the key influences of the freelance adult educators' working culture that may shape their receptivity and willingness to participate in my proposed CPD initiative?
- c. How will an educative relationship between the freelance adult educators and the management impact on the broader professionalization agenda?

## **1.8 Conclusion and Structure of the Thesis**

This Chapter 1 (Introduction) provides an outline of the origin of the research question and the operating context of the proposed action research case study. The context covered the following areas: the WSQ system operating in the local training landscape, the deployment of FAEs by WSQ ATOs, including IAL; and the move towards digital learning. This chapter also presents the rationale for building on the research from my IFS and briefly considers why action research methodology is appropriate for this study (this is covered in more detail in Chapter 3). It also identifies my core research question and the three sub-questions.

Chapter 2 (Literature Review) discusses the literature and recent research studies that are relevant to the core research areas. The literature cited includes the following: two recent research studies by IAL relating to FAEs operating in the adult education sector in Singapore and theories of learning and reflective practice. Lastly, the chapter also discusses the selection of a suitable platform, the electronic portfolio (e-Portfolio), to promote reflective practice among the FAEs.

Chapter 3 (Methodology) elaborates the arguments for employing action research (AR) as the research methodology for the study. It details the assurance measures adopted for a quality knowledge-generating process

that includes conducting personal validation, triangulation and a clear audit trail for data collection.

Following this, Chapter 4 (The Research Investigation Narrative) describes the two episodic learning cycles (ELCs) of the AR study: the ELC 1 - the Reflective Practice Process (RPP) Initiative and the ELC 2 - e-Portfolio Certification Process and Renewal Survey. The chapter also captures the data collected from the Renewal Survey and the semi-structured one-to-one interviews conducted after the survey.

Chapter 5 (Findings and their Potential Applicability) presents the data collected and the findings based on these data with reference to the research question and sub-questions. It concludes with a discussion on how the findings mean for IAL.

Chapter 6 (The Experience of Action Research) revisits the discourse on AR as an empowering and elucidating tool for professional learning as praxis. The chapter describes my personal views and experiences as an insider-researcher employing AR as an investigative tool in an organisational development (OD) intervention.

The concluding chapter (A Practitioner's Reflections and Conclusions) summarises the contribution to knowledge from this AR study through the learning points in terms of the impact of the FAEs' working culture, leadership-cum management approach and cultivating an educative relationship. It also includes stating the limitations of the AR study, future research plans and describes the mode of dissemination of my findings.



## Chapter 2: Literature Review

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### 2.1 Embarking on the CPD Journey within the IAL Context

The elements of fluidity and uniqueness accompanying the professionalization initiative were undeniably real, as observed by researchers such as Crook (2008) and Whitty (2008). When Crook (2008) concluded that 'Disappointingly, perhaps, the application of historical perspectives confirms professionalism to be an artificial construct, with ever-changing and always-contested definitions and traits', it highlighted the reality that each occupational group would indeed have to embark on its unique journey towards attaining its professional status (p. 23). Whitty (2008) suggested that 'Definitions of professionalism vary across time and place' (p.28). Recent literature on professionalism reflected Whitty's observation in which diverse discourses on professionalism did indeed exhibit a contextual fluidity.

Classical professionalism drew on traditional criteria that had evolved out of professions such as medicine and law. These were characterized as having 'specialised knowledge base or shared technical culture; a strong service ethic with commitment to meeting clients' needs; and self-regulated, collegial control' (Hargreaves and Goodson, 1996: 5). However, Hargreaves and Goodson highlighted there were new definitions of teacher professionalism emerging in the post-modern age that encompassed 'flexible professionalism, practical professionalism, extended professionalism and complex professionalism' (p.9).

This new language of professionalism was attributed to new post-modern conditions such as 'globalization in business and professions, where new divisions of labour are being defined and where flexible economies.... are leading to fundamental changes in people's working lives' (p. 9). In the school context, Sachs (2001), however, noted that school reforms involving 'devolution and marketization' had in themselves precipitated 'a set of paradoxes.... about the professional identity and professional development of teachers' (p. 150).

Quite a similar situation happened in WSQ CET landscape when WDA adopted what Ball (2008) termed 'endogenous privatisation' and operating more 'businesses and more business-like' in terms of managing 'budget, devolution, competition, new managerialism, contract and competitive funding, performance management, and enterprise' (p.58). A sense of fluidity could very well be a main stay in the on-going discourses on professionalism given that in this post-modern era, occupations of myriad variety is constantly appearing. What then constituted professionalism and professional identity for the varied occupations would arguably demand embracing what Crook (2008) termed 'a more sophisticated typology, unique to individual professions (p. 18).

I envisaged the journey towards building professionalism among the FAEs would not only be unique but also fraught with naturally-occurring issues of fluidity, paradoxes of reforms and an on-going evolution in the search for professionalism and building of a professional identity. More so, given our embarkation on the professionalism journey is in its infancy. Therefore, it is highly pertinent for IAL to ensure continual engagement with its FAEs to identify what are their professional development needs, how to recognise their already accomplished achievements and how best to fit these in the overall professionalization objectives set by WDA to achieve quality delivery of WSQ CET programmes of skills upgrading nation-wide.

## **2.2 The Uniqueness of FAEs and the Management Role**

Two studies conducted by the IAL Research and Innovation Division had been most relevant in providing a deeper understanding into the issues related to the hiring of FAEs. One of them was a study by Brown, Karmel & Ye (2012) entitled "Professionalising Adult Educators in Singapore: what practitioners make of it". One of its research areas examined how AEs viewed professional development that also involved a state-led imposition of a mandatory basic qualification<sup>6</sup> entry point. The research adopted the use of biographical narrative methodology to understand the work lives of adult

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<sup>6</sup> The impending state-led imposition of the mandatory qualifications referred in the study was the ACTA by 2014 and DACE by 2015.

education practitioners in relation to other aspects of their lives. The study involved 20 adult educators in Singapore. The majority (70%, n=14) were working within the WSQ system, of which slightly more than half (57%, n=8) trained solely in WSQ courses. It focused on people who became adult educators within their working lives, rather than those who enter the field as the initial or “first choice” occupation.

On the issue of professional development, the study noted that an inevitable ‘...challenge...would exist for [any] professionalization endeavour...’ involving AEs in Singapore (p. 40). The study attributed it to ‘largely result from the traditionally diverse background of people who may be considered as working in the adult education profession’ (ibid: 13). The diversity involved a ‘stratification along the lines of function, expertise, and motivation’ upon which they ‘conceptualise their professional identities’ (ibid: 25). This presence of a heterogeneous element needed to be considered as each AE’s working behaviour would naturally be strongly motivated by individual goals and aspirations. In the case of FAEs, an added level of complexity arose given the freelancing nature of their work arrangement. Hence, the awareness of ‘challenge [in a] professionalization endeavour...’ given a ‘... diverse background of people...’ would also be a pertinent point to bear in mind when deciding on the focus of my research areas (ibid: 13).

Where professional development efforts were concerned, the AEs focused on ‘...tasks [that] possess meaning and purpose’ to enable their ‘...professional identities [to] develop and encompass an individual’s sense of “calling” to the field’ (ibid: 40). It would then appear that the issues of what constituted ‘meaning and purpose ... [as well as a] ‘sense of “calling”’ were pertinent to AEs, and this would include the FAEs as well, when it came to professional development. Hence, the choice of what kind of professional development initiative that I introduced as part of my research study would be of great importance.

A later research study by Karmel, Bound and Rushbrook (2013), entitled “Identity and Learning for Freelance Adult Educators in Singapore”

conducted by the Research and Innovation Division of IAL, focused solely on FAEs in Singapore, offered further insights. This research adopted a qualitative methodology involving 30 freelance adult educators who participated in semi-structured in-depth interviews. The participants were practitioners selected from both WSQ and non-WSQ markets, training in a range of subject areas and possessed different work experience and levels of income.

This study centred on three research areas: (1) What do FAEs need to be in order to get work? (2) How do FAEs learn to be these things? (3) How can the learning of FAEs be supported and enhanced? One of the objectives of this study was to assist employing organisations of FAEs, including IAL, to understand 'how to best support them to maximise their impact, as well as offer pedagogic recommendations to improve the current provision on learning and development opportunities for Adult Educators' (Karmel, Bound and Rushbrook, 2013: 3). This had a direct relevance to my intended area of research.

The study found that there were four dispositions and five skills that were valuable for freelance adult educators to negotiate the challenges they faced and make their occupation 'a viable and rewarding profession' (ibid: 1). The four dispositions were passionate, anchored, resilient, and being a permanent learner. The five skills involved planning, continual networking, positioning, shape shifting, and innovation.

The report noted that these 'dispositions and skills ...can help [FAEs] negotiate the challenges of isolation, unpredictability, diversity, and competition that are inherent in their work' (ibid). This report revealed that FAEs displayed certain dispositions and cultivated certain skill-sets in order to enjoy 'a viable and rewarding profession' (ibid: 1). These dispositions and skill-sets could be regarded as components of their working culture.

In the same vein, I found it plausible that certain dispositions and skill-sets could be at work in this group of FAEs should they agree to participate in a professional development initiative launched at an organisational level. It

would be interesting to investigate what were the components of their working culture that would be driving their participation. On the other hand, could there be any dispositions and skill-sets they had cultivated as FAEs that could pose as obstacles to their participation of such an initiative. It followed that including the FAEs' working culture a research area made solid sense.

This 2013 study also pointed out that 'the environments that clients/providers create for freelancers can enhance the freelancer's contribution or limit it, make it easier or more difficult...' (p. 42). This had an important relevance to my study as IAL is indeed a client and its positional impact on 'the freelancer's contribution or limit it' was a causal link that could not be ignored. This finding thus raised a crucial point that the role clients/providers played in motivating or alternatively, discouraging FAEs' contribution to their working environments should not be taken lightly.

The role of management in providing a conducive work environment that would be easier for FAEs to make their contributions where they so choose was another relevant issue to my research objective. The emphasis here was on management as influencer and not as driver. This was most pertinent as the FAEs' working relationship with IAL is entirely on a transactional contractual basis. It would not be wrong to say that the FAEs were in fact their own drivers. Thus, including the management element as an influencing factor in understanding how might my professional development initiative be successfully initiated was another necessary choice.

### **2.3 The Emphasis on Learning as the Backbone of Professional Improvement**

Any endeavour to improve needed first to begin with self-learning. The journey towards practitioner professionalization must also naturally follow suit. Several researchers have discussed ideas on the conception of learning I find relevant and convincing. Illeris (2004) argued that learning should be a process that brings together cognitive, emotional, and environmental influences and experiences for acquiring, enhancing, or making changes in one's knowledge, skills, values, and world-views. I found his definition of

learning encapsulated what I hope our FAEs' learning process would incorporate.

Illeris' (2007) explanation of the three dimensions of learning, 'the content,... the incentive, ... and the social and societal dimension' (p.25) – covered both 'the individual acquisition process ... and....the interaction process between the individual and the environment' (ibid.). This learning concept recognised the duality of individual and environment interaction where knowledge was a two-way flow. This concept highlighted the importance of facilitating a platform to foster a continuous knowledge exchange between our FAEs, not only within their teaching environment but in their personal one as well.

This interactive approach in the learning process was echoed by Gonczi (2004) and his colleagues where they advocated 'a relational approach to competence – one which linked attributes of individuals (knowledge, skills, dispositions, values) to the demands and tasks and activities that individuals were undertaking....' (p. 20). It supported the concept of learning that involved 'the affective, moral, physical as well as the cognitive aspects of individuals...' (p. 19). This argument highlighted the importance of including the individuality of the learner in determining the quality of the learning process. Its insistence that 'real learning takes place only in and through action ... in a social setting such as a workplace or professional association meeting' recognised a strong link between practitioners and their working environment in producing quality learning (ibid).

For Foley (2004), where practitioners were viewed as learners, he was of the view that formal theory led to practice and practice modifies theory where reflection on practice held the key to improvement. He acknowledged that 'professional work is a cycle, or spiral, of action and reflection' emphasized the 'mutual dependence' of theory-practice rather than seeing 'theory as prior to practice' (p.11). In this manner, FAEs could 'think about their practice (i.e. their informal theories)' which they could test and review against formal theory to 'challenge and deepen the common-sense understandings' of their practice (ibid: 10). Boud, Keogh & Walker (1985) cited by Foley (2004) also

argued that '[t]hrough reflection we could become aware of our implicit knowledge, our informal theories' (ibid). Thus, reflection could very well be a tool to unlocking relevant tacit knowledge present in the learners' experiences and memories.

Collins (1991) cited by Fenwick and Tennant (2004) added an enlightening slant to this theory-practice gap by urging practitioners to question the extent to which 'theory helps to illuminate practice, whether it improves our potential as reflective practitioners and helps us to interpret and understand our practice' (p. 69). Collins argued that ideally there should be a discourse between theory and practice where 'theory can inform practice and that practice can inform theory' (p. 69). The literature then suggested constructive learning occurs when individual and environment interact consciously. The question became what learning approach best provides this 'discourse', be it self-reflection (individual) or group reflection (community) where the theory-practice gap could be bridged resulting in progressive professionalism among our FAEs (ibid). Hence, reflective practice and peer dialogue would be good methods of constructive learning where the theory-practice gap could be constantly narrowed through the kind of discourse advocated by Collins (1991).

#### **2.4 Reflective Practice as a Viable Means of In-Service Learning for Adult Educators**

For professional development initiatives to have a concrete impact on the FAEs' performance, a holistic nature, embracing both formal and informal in-service learning platforms, allows for a greater all-rounded learning. A formal academic roadmap for AEs to gain professional progression was first launched in 2010. Informal in-service platforms, however, had yet to be put in place. My study thus aimed to focus on finding a viable informal in-service platform to complement the established formal ones.

The literature cited earlier on professional learning presented a compelling argument for the use of reflective practice that is likely to yield 'deep learning'

when drawn from practitioners' work experiences (Roger, 2007:38). Hence, for my study I decided on this mode of learning as a viable informal platform.

#### **2.4.1 Understanding Reflection and Reflective Practice**

Reflection has a long history as evident in the works of Dewey (1933), Polanyi (1966) and Habermas (1971). Recent interest within the field of professional education covering nursing, social work and education can be seen in works by Mezirow (1981), Mezirow and Associates (1990), Schön (1983, 1987), Kolb (1984) and Moon (2000). Mezirow (1981, 1990) promoted the use of reflection to question one's underlying assumptions in order to develop perspective transformation. Schön (1983, 1987) advocated that learning was contingent upon the integration of experience with reflection. Kolb's (1984) experiential learning model also suggested that all learning is rooted in experience. Moon (2000) argued the importance of reflection in professional education because '[a]ction is what counts' where professions 'rely less on factual detail and more on interpretation and understanding of a complex situation' (p. 55).

Boud, Keogh and Walker (1985) also reiterated that conscious reflection on one's teaching experiences could 'lead to new understandings and appreciations' (p. 19). Bulpitt and Martin (2005) observed that reflection on classroom practices 'presents educators with a method for narrowing the theory-practice gap' (p.207). The reflective practice was 'managed [as] part of the curriculum', thus 'enabling students to understand and value reflection....'(ibid). Tan's (2008) observation that 'reflection and related notions such as reflective teaching and reflective practice are terms often used by teachers, educators and researchers in many countries such as England and Wales, the United States, Singapore and Norway' lends further credence to reflection as a tried and tested tool in in-service learning (p. 225). Existing literature then lent convincing support to the use of reflection on experience as a means for self-learning.



## **2.4.2 Efficacy of Reflection: Identifying Crucial Determinants**

Sieving through the literature on reflection and reflective practice, I found several research studies that yielded valuable insights that eventually shaped the design of my reflective practice model. For example, the project by Allard et al. (2007) sought to understand professional learning processes that facilitated reflective practice and built learning communities through collaborative partnership. Corley and Thorne (2005) in their paper explored how reflective practice could act as a catalyst for change and “add value” to the learning process of the partners involved in professional development programmes.

## **2.5 Selecting an Appropriate Approach to Facilitate Reflection**

Current literature reveals there are gaps in knowledge on the facilitation of reflection. This issue of facilitation was of real concern because ultimately it would likely impact the quality of reflection. This issue when superimposed on the profiles of FAEs employed within the WSQ CET system demands closer scrutiny. What approach should the facilitation assume – a wholly personal initiative, leaving the FAEs to their own devices or a guided and focused one?

Russell’s (2006) view was that to foster ‘reflective practice requires far more than telling people to reflect and then simply hoping for the best’ (p. 204). His research involved a directed and focused approach whereby through engagement with his student-teachers they discussed practicum experiences and to share critical reflective dialogues. Such facilitations provided opportunities where decisions could be made to consider ‘if the new perspective and associated new actions deserved to be included in future professional practice’ (ibid: 200). The research also suggested that reflection between two parties promotes creativity and vibrancy.

An article by Bulpitt and Martin (2005) also highlighted a worthy consideration. They cited Moon (2000) who argued that a crucial aspect of

reflection rested on 'proof of expertise based on outcome' rather than on 'underpinning knowledge' (p. 208). Outcome here refers to performance. Thus the idea that reflection centring on performance and practice provides a reliable indication of 'proof of expertise' is an appealing argument (ibid).

The article by Grushka, McLeod and Reynolds (2005) is particularly useful in bringing me nearer to my search for an appropriate approach to facilitate reflective practice among the FAEs. They approached reflection as an iterative and on-going process rather than a one-off event that involved 'repeated cycles of examining practice, adjusting practice and reflecting upon it, before trying it again' (p. 239). This would involve self-observations and *pensée* along an action-research approach where continuous learning is built into the process.

## **2.6 Deciding on a Suitable Platform to Promote Reflective Practice**

Having resolved the approach issue, my next consideration centred on selecting the most suitable platform for promoting reflective practice among the FAEs. Dawes (1999) raised a salient point when he discussed the 'reliability of human memory...when people were encouraged to learn by reflecting on experience' through relying on only memory recall (p.197). Human memory is often proven to be less than accurate and adjusted to capture "reality" as the brain demanded. The research pointed out that the video replay could also be used in a reflection exercise 'to attend to events they did not notice, only partially noticed or did not fully understand during the original learning session' (ibid: 204). A more reliable platform than that resonated with me was one that employed the use of video recording where the practitioner would be recorded delivering a lesson and the recording is then played back for viewing and comments. The review could be done off-line and definitely more effective in capturing the "moments" rather than trying to recall based on memory. Reality here then would be preserved as it was without any possibility of human error.

### **2.6.1 Rationale for Using Video Stimulated Reflective Dialogue (VSRD)**

One common technique used to minimize memory errors was the Interpersonal Process Recall (IPR). Kagan (1976) cited by Dawes (1999:203) described IPR as 'the basic process of reviewing a videotape with a person trained in recall technique'. Kagan believed that IPR could provide people with a way of seeing themselves in action and of getting to know themselves more deeply and in new ways. However, it had an inherent weakness that was perceived as intrusive by study participants since the comments and feedback were given by an expert authority figure.

There is another technique currently in use called the video-stimulated reflective dialogue (VSRD). This technique is not new as a data collection method for research into teaching practices within the teaching service. Here it is the research participant himself/herself who controls the direction and focus of reflection and evaluation aided by a dialogue partner. An article by Moyles, Adams and Musgrove (2002) examined the benefits of employing VSRD in reflective practice. It pointed out that during the reflective dialogue, 'it is the practitioner who controls the focus and pace of prompts' (p. 465). As these researchers highlighted, it was vital for the participants to 'feel a sense of ownership over the research and not view it as something which was "done" to them' (ibid). It is done with them. This being a 'collaborative research partnership' there was a sense of 'ownership of [the] pedagogical episode' (ibid).

The writers further argued that such a provision would contribute 'to the practitioner's confidence and enthusiasm within the process of reflective dialogue' (ibid). The aim of employing this tool was to facilitate educators to surface their personal knowledge and professional theories, highlight their assumptions made in their thinking about their training strategies and help them to critique their own thinking and practices through selected classroom episodes. The strengths of the VSRD technique made it a highly suitable platform.

## **2.6.2 The Impact of a Collegial Culture on Workplace Learning**

Borko et al. (2008) raised a pertinent point in their study that centred on the nature of the eco-system emerging within a sharing process that involved professional development and improvement between employer and staff and among staff. This study shared the findings of two research projects using video as part of the professional development programmes for teachers teaching mathematics (Sherin, 2001) and science (Rosebery & Puttick, 1998). The projects were successful and 'suggest that teachers can have meaningful discussions with their colleagues around video from their own classrooms' (p. 420).

However, Borko et al. (2008) also shared two other projects studying the formation of a "video club" in schools, documented by Sherin and Han (2004) and Grossman, Wineburg and Woolworth (2001). In the 2004 study, the project did not share the same good outcome as the first two projects mentioned. In that study, it was about teachers' self-consciousness regarding being video-taped. In the 2001 study, it was because the school did not have a 'collegial culture' (ibid). From these findings, Borko et al. (2008) reiterated that '[a] strong [and supportive] community is particularly important when teachers are asked not only to discuss teaching and learning but also to share video clips from their classroom with the colleagues' (ibid).

The observations of Borko et al. (2008) served as a valid reminder of two crucial points. The first involved the instrumental role played by the leadership in implementing this CPD initiative. The second highlighted the importance of advocating a collegial culture. When the competitive occupational context of freelancing was superimposed on these two observations of Borko et al. (2008), some anticipated delicate but realistic issues of this study pertaining to the 'use of video to foster productive conversations' emerged (p. 418). There were the issues, for the leadership, of having to create 'a safe and supportive environment for candid reflections', moving [adult educators] 'towards meta-cognitive independence' (Fernsten

and Fernsten, 2005:303) and ensuring 'through the writing of reflections [that] '[h]onest reflections' must be welcomed (ibid: 304).

To achieve the outcomes of the CPD initiative I intended to implement in IAL, it meant that building a collegial culture among the FAEs and with management would be a step in right direction. It followed then that it would be a given necessity to apply the lessons learnt from the literature cited above when designing my CPD initiative.

## **2.7 Use of e-Portfolio Digital Technology to Support Reflection and Peer Sharing**

The next step was to consider the practicality issue of employing the VSRD technique at the implementation stage. First, there was the issue of capturing the FAEs' training episodes. Technical support was anticipated here as taping requires video recording equipment and technical assistance to be provided in cases where the FAEs had no prior experience in handling video equipment. Secondly, the issue of scalability had to be considered as IAL currently employs 57 FAEs<sup>7</sup> to support the training provision. This meant scouting for the most appropriate media platform that would easily afford scalability of sharing videos and reflection with the critical peer-friend while guaranteeing security, privacy and confidentiality.

The option of leveraging on the LMS became an obvious choice as it was already in use internally in IAL. The concerns of control, accessibility, security, privacy and confidentiality were immediately allayed. The next consideration was the form the reflection sharing and critiques should best assume. Piggybacking on the LMS also allowed for the consideration of using e-Portfolios as a suitable form. Moreover, this e-Portfolio feature was to be included in the revised ACTA V5 curriculum that was scheduled for launch in early 2015.

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<sup>7</sup> As they are freelancers, not all are actively engaged by IAL on a regular basis. Often it also depended on their availability as they may have other assignments by different clients.

Existing literature pointed to a general consensus that e-Portfolios have the potential to support learning but with a caveat that they had differing successes (Duncan-Pitt & Sutherland, 2006; Chetcuti, 2007, Cheng and Chau, 2009, Bolliger and Shepherd, 2010 and Chesney and Marcangelo, 2010).

The study by Duncan-Pitt & Sutherland (2006) noted that ‘the most significant driver for the e-Portfolio use in education came in March 2005 with the publication of the Department for Education and Science’s eStrategy *Harnessing Technology* which promises to “encourage every institution to offer online learning space to store coursework, course resources, results and achievements...to become an electronic portfolio”’(p.70). This study looked at the use of e-Portfolios by healthcare practitioners and students in the context of work and placement in the School of Health at the University of Wolverhampton.

This study also noted that the outcomes of the pilot were promising given that ‘...the e-Portfolio, and learning process ...have been instrumental in developing a more confident and reflexive group of students...’ (p.74). There were several key appreciations of the potential success from the use of the e-Portfolio system. One was the realisation that the e-Portfolio belonged to the learners and not the institution’; another was that it supported ‘learning and not assessment’; a third was ‘it allow[ed] learners to present multiple stories of learning rather than just a simple aggregation of competencies’; and the last was the freedom of the learner ‘to invite feedback from their community of practice [among other learners] to support personal growth and understanding’ (ibid: 74-75).

The Chetcuti (2007) study involved examining ‘student teachers [use of] their professional development portfolio (PDP) as a reflective learning tool’ (p.137). The study applied Schon’s (1991) idea that the use of the PDP was to facilitate ‘assessment for learning’ and to ‘encourage the idea of “reflective practitioner”’ (ibid: 140). The study found that the majority (36 out of 46) of student teachers viewed the PDP as a useful tool in that ‘it had helped them to reflect on their practice and develop into professional teachers’ (ibid: 145).

It was useful to note that in the initial stage, 8 out of 36 of the student teachers expressed that at first they could not appreciate how the use of the portfolio could help them 'grow and develop as teachers' and 'they looked at it as another burden which had to be completed ... but which they would get nothing out of' (ibid: 144). However, at the end of the study, the respondents saw the following benefits of using the PDP as an aid in learning how to develop their reflective practice: (1) to tackle situations better; (2) to critically evaluate strengths and weaknesses in order to improve; (3) to construct a personal identity; and (4) to relate theory to practice (ibid).

While Lin (2008) acknowledged that technology could be a barrier, on the flipside, she also saw the use of e-Portfolios as an opportunity to acquire greater technological competency. Cheng and Chau (2009) of the Hong Kong Polytechnic University extended the e-Portfolio system to incorporate the use of digital video (p.337). They conducted an exploratory study on "How digital video could be utilized to promote self-reflection in an e-Portfolio context". The study noted that '[w]ith increasing prevalence of multimedia technologies in recent years, a growing body of evidence in the areas of teacher education and professional training suggested that digital video could help [learners] foster [quality] self-reflection' (ibid).

Another study by Chesney and Marcangelo (2010) advocated using the e-Portfolio as a 'personal learning system' that 'can facilitate formative and collaborative feedback to assist student learning' (p.701). This reinforced what Duncan-Pitt & Sutherland (2006) highlighted about encouraging the sharing of learning and giving feedback with and among peers within the online environment, what they termed as the 'virtual community' (p. 73).

In a study on the use of e-Portfolios, Bolliger and Shepherd (2010) noted that the '[r]esults indicated e-Portfolios positively impacted some students' perception of communication connectedness, and learning' (p.295). In another two studies, both Lin (2008) and Shepherd & Bolliger (2011) suggested peer feedback was valuable, with students being able to offer each other technical and other support through an online learning network.

Roberts, Maor and Herrington (2016) pointed out that the use of electronic portfolios was 'no longer confined to the role of "evidence repository" (Barrett, 2006)' but that they had progressed to 'provide features that enable the scaffolded development of advanced learning skills' and 'reflective thinking' (p. 22).

On the other hand, there were researchers who highlighted possible areas of concern in employing the use of e-Portfolios to advance self and peer learning in a workplace environment.

Housego & Parker (2009) sounded a word of caution when they pointed out that despite the 'increasing interest in, and use of e-Portfolios', institutions adopting their use, need to be mindful of the challenges as well (p.408). In their study they made references to the observations made by Jafari (2004) that 'the choices about how and where to use e-Portfolio' should not be left to individual teachers in order 'not to fall short of expectations' and by Ayala (2006) that '[e-Portfolios] are not panacea for a wide range of educational ills' (p409).

The studies conducted by Chatham-Carpenter et al. (2010) and Strudler & Wetzel (2012) highlighted the danger of confusion over the purpose of the use of e-Portfolios. A survey participated by 43 higher education institutions in the Chatham-Carpenter et al. (2010) study sought to understand the uses of the e-Portfolios by these education institutions. Their research showed the e-Portfolios served four major purposes: (1) to facilitate reflection on learning; (2) to showcase career skills; (3) to aid in program review and assessment; and (4) to showcase professional standards (p. 438). They cautioned that 'it is essential to determine the purpose(s) for which they will be used' so that all potential stakeholders comprising of the students, the faculties and the education institutions were clear as to their usage and hence be geared towards a purposeful adoption.

For Strudler & Wetzel (2012), they commented that the 'use of EPs for both program accreditation (assessment purposes) and student learning may not be compatible' and such diverse purposes ran the possibility of resulting in a



situation where 'none will be done well' (p. 161) unless 'a productive middle ground can be forged between the multiple purposes for EP use (ibid: 166). The diverse purposes raised by these researchers alluded to the balance between facilitating student engagement and learning where students had a choice as to the artefacts collected with the prescribed artefacts by the education institution for the purpose of evaluation and assessment (ibid: 166-7). Strudler & Wetzel, in citing Imhof and Picard (2009), agreed that such a circumstance 'clarity of purpose was a key to effective use of EPs' (ibid: 164).

A research by Oakley, Pegrum & Johnston (2014) on the introduction of Wi-Fi-based e-Portfolios into a Master of Teaching programme at an Australian university aimed at developing pre-service teachers as reflective practitioners contained insights that were relevant to my research study. This research offered five key pointers that were pertinent to the design of the form the e-Portfolios should assume and the process involved in their implementation. First, the purpose of the e-Portfolios must be made clear to all participants. Secondly, the participation of voluntary workshops or autonomous self-development of ICT skills from the guidebook provided must not be assumed. Thirdly, the participants' must be given the choice of preference whether to have more sharing and collaboration with peers. Lastly, participants must be made aware of the general appreciation of the value of reflection. Lastly, the participants should be provided with a guiding structure in their reflective practice.

From the literature, there was a legitimate argument for the capability of the e-Portfolio as a learning tool and its allowance for collaboration with others in the process. However, the literature also pointed out that it was necessary to address the surrounding issues of adopting the use of e-Portfolios in order to maximise efficacy.

## **2.8 Putting the Pieces of the Puzzle Together: From Conception to Materialisation**

I am acutely aware that with the task entrusted to IAL in setting training benchmarks, it is obvious that CPD and a well-grounded professional identity

are crucial to achieving that objective. Review of existing literature and engagement with other initiatives, at times opportunistic in the course of my professional work, at times purposeful, influenced my decision to focus my research area on a chosen CPD initiative so that it would have tangible professional benefits on the ground.

My CPD initiative involved employing reflective practice as a means of professional development. Literature on professional development pointed to an emphasis on reflection as a means of self-learning and a basis for critique of professional assumptions and practices. From existing literature, I also learnt what constituted quality reflection and factored that into my study. The design of a suitable reflection model based on a customized version of the VSRD technique and the technological platform using an e-Portfolio and computer-mediation completed the 'how' of the initiative. The process of conception to materialisation of an idea had thus been completed. The next chapter addresses the methodological approach this study employed and the principal considerations adopted in the light of the context and the nature of the working norms of the FAEs in IAL.

## Chapter 3: Methodology

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### 3.1 Why an Inductive Approach as the Research Strategy

First, I would like to explain why a deductive approach would be unsuitable given the extant surrounding situation and context of my chosen study. Such an approach would have generally necessitated ‘a pattern that might be logically or theoretically expected’ and then moved ‘to observations that test whether the expected pattern actually occurs’ (Babbie, 2013: 22). However, what I was attempting to research could be regarded as innovative. My research involved a voluntary organisation-led CPD opened to all FAEs hired within a state-run entity (IAL). These elements of the study could be regarded as context-specific. A study such as this had no known predecessor of its kind locally or within IAL itself that would allow for prior knowledge to be drawn for either theory verification or theory generation. Thus, formulating ‘an expected pattern’ would in most probability a “shot in the dark” and this was definitely unacceptable (ibid: 21).

The alternative was to conduct the study based on defined research areas of interest. Thus, an inductive approach was chosen whereby a research question was employed to narrow down the scope of the study. According to Babbie (2013), the function of a research question was to obtain ‘a set of specific observations to [discover] a pattern that represents some degree of order’ of the research areas (p. 21). Hence, based on the rationale explained in the paragraph above, the outcomes of my investigation had to be kept open-ended.

### 3.2 Crafting the Research Design

Qualitative Field Research – There were several overwhelming reasons why my research design assumed the form of ‘qualitative field research’ that ‘more typically yields qualitative data [where the] observations [obtained were] not easily reduced to numbers’ (Babbie, 2013: 324). Firstly, field research

involved 'going directly to the phenomenon under study and observing it as completely as possible' so as to 'develop a deeper and fuller understanding of it' (ibid).

It also provided the researcher opportunities 'to make sense out of an on-going process that cannot be predicted in advance' (ibid). Another strength was it afforded field researchers to 'recognize several nuances of attitude and behaviour that might escape researchers using other methods' (ibid: 325). As Babbie (2013) pointed out, 'Field research is especially appropriate for the study of those attitudes and behaviours best understood within their natural setting' (ibid). Lastly, it 'is well suited to the study of social processes over time' (ibid). This meant that the researcher could 'examine.... events actually occur[ring] rather than afterwards in a reconstruction of the events' (ibid).

Opting for a Case-Study – A case-study was the chosen field research paradigm because it 'focuses attention on a single instance of some social phenomenon' (ibid: 338). This 'limitation of attention to a particular instance of something', that being a voluntary organisation-led CPD opened to all FAEs hired within a state-run entity (IAL), suited my research objective (ibid).

However, my research design also employed quantitative data to complement and support the qualitative findings as a 'mixed and matched' approach where they are most useful (Saunders et al., 2003: 99). The use of quantitative data was most useful when a large number of responses to a myriad set of questions were required. The qualitative data obtained were utilised to compare with the IAL research studies by Brown, Karmel and Ye (2012) and Karmel, Bound and Rushbrook (2013) on areas of interest to my study.

Conducting the Study as an Insider-Research – My research strategy also required the element of flexibility that Robson (2002) advocated where the research objective was to pursue the direction the research took. He noted that 'the design of flexible studies' incorporated 'a process where much less

pre-specification takes place and the design evolves, develops and.... “unfolds”... as the research proceeds’ (p. 5). Such a pathway permitted the researcher to make the appropriate decisions as and when required to advance the research where it so indicated. This pathway fitted in nicely with the context of my research study as explained earlier.

This would necessitate adopting an insider-researcher stance since I was the training manager in IAL overseeing the CPD initiative of my research study. I was in a position to effect whatever timely changes deemed necessary as the research “unfolds” (ibid) during the course of the research in order to meet the research objective. Moreover, as an insider with direct knowledge of the research context, I was in the position to study the issues of my research closely and in depth, which I viewed as an advantage to my research context.

However, conducting the study as an insider-researcher meant the researcher was directly involved and situated within the research setting. There was a real need to ensure the researcher, being myself, preserved the validity element of the findings through a thorough system of checks. Elaboration on these safeguards can be found in 3.3 below.

Adopting the Action Research (AR) Methodology – In addition, the research design needed to provide for opportunities to execute necessary changes during the implementation phase so that reviews could be conducted and workable practices could be adopted to arrive at a workable form of the CPD initiative. Such a process invariably involved on-going investigations over a protracted timeline that tracked the activities undertaken. It followed that the research methodology naturally had to also possess sufficient flexibility and rigour to address all these operational issues.

My research study tracked a CPD initiative as part of the professional development of the FAEs in IAL. As such, my CPD initiative could rightly be regarded as an organisation development (OD) intervention since its objective would contribute to ‘organisation improvement’ (French and Bell, 1980:14). As French and Bell (1980) wisely pointed out, in an OD

intervention, the importance placed on diagnosis of 'the status quo, current problems and opportunities ... as they relate to goal achievement' cannot be understated (p.52). This translated into a need to 'provide an accurate account of things as they really are.... to know the state of things, or "what is"' to ascertain the direction the intervention should progress (ibid). As French and Bell (1980), citing Lewin (1993), pointed out, one needed to 'judge whether an action has led forward or backward ... to prevent us from making the wrong conclusions' (p.95). The features of AR allowed such activities to be conducted as and when required.

*The Strengths of the AR Features* – There is an abundance of literature written on a wide range of fields covering OD interventions from education to medicine, to name a few, supporting AR as the preferred research methodology for 'a professional inquiry' (Waters-Adams, 2006). The book by French and Bell (1980) on "An Introduction to Organisation Development" argued this case quite convincingly by highlighting that the strengths of AR lie in its approach and process.

*Approach: Two Distinguishing Features of AR* – One of the distinguishing features involved 'the application of the scientific method of fact-finding and experimentation to practical problems requiring action solutions' (French and Bell, 1980: 90). This implied an on-going investigation that focuses on fact-finding, assessing the setting and then acting on that assessment. It permitted and facilitated courses of actions to be tailored to match the objectives of the intervention to the receptivity of the target audience.

The second feature involved 'the collaboration and cooperation' (French and Bell, 1980: 90) 'between the individuals inside the system [comprising of the] clients.... and.... change agents or researchers' (p. 93). This feature permitted constant feedback and involvement from individuals who were to be directly impacted by the intervention action. Such an approach was likely to promote a sense of ownership of emergent issues than not. This 'collaborative nature of action research' was seen 'as the primary reason for the model's efficacy' (p. 94). These writers also highlighted an important point

that '[i]t is a widely held belief that people tend to support what they have helped to create' (ibid). A methodology that emphasized and facilitated constant engagement and collaboration with the stakeholders of the study, in my context the FAEs, was therefore more likely to yield encouraging results.

*Process: The AR Singularity* – In a nutshell, the process in AR, as explained by French and Bell, (1980), focused on fact-finding by taking a 'static picture' of the subject under investigation, 'suggest actions' 'on the basis of "what exists," ... and as many necessary subsequent static picture[s]' were again 'taken to examine the effects of the actions taken' (p. 89). It thus functioned as an on-going investigation on two levels. On one level, it was a 'sequence of events and activities *within* each iteration (data collection, feedback and working the data, and taking action based on the data)' (p. 89). On another, 'it is a *cycle* of iterations of these activities sometimes treating the same problem through several cycles and sometimes moving to different problems in each cycle' (ibid).

The process of AR itself naturally yielded strengths that made this methodology a highly appropriate research tool for an OD initiative. Firstly, the focus of AR was 'practice-based' where the practitioners-researchers 'are investigating the situation they are in' (McNiff & Whitehead, 2010: 17). McNiff & Whitehead (2010) also pointed out that 'it is an insider research ... which means the researcher is inside the situation, and will inevitably influence what is happening by their presence' (p.18). I saw myself as an 'insider ... researcher' (ibid) 'investigating the situation [I am] in' (ibid: 17). The strength of this approach here, then, was on creating knowledge, through an iterative investigative process, of 'what' and 'why' certain actions could work and certain could not for my given context.

Secondly, AR also 'interprets "what is going on" from the point of view of those acting and interacting in the problem situation' (Elliott, 1988:17). The actors involved in investigating "what is going on" were me, as the management leader, and the FAEs. The reviews, feedback and fine-tuning

functioned as part of the process of ‘interacting in the problem situation’ (ibid).

In addition, the objective of AR did not concern itself with ‘reach[ing] a successful closure... or behavioural outcomes’ (McNiff & Whitehead, 2010:19). It ‘focuses primarily on improving learning’ (ibid: 19) through an iterative investigative process that involved ‘the diagnosis of a specific situation’ (French and Bell, 1980:96). Figure 3.1 below was adapted from Foley’s (2004) ‘Plan-Action-Reflect’ Cycle model illustrating this iterative investigative process simply but effectively (p.11). The investigation might even branch out in an entirely different direction from its original start point enabling it to explore unplanned developments.

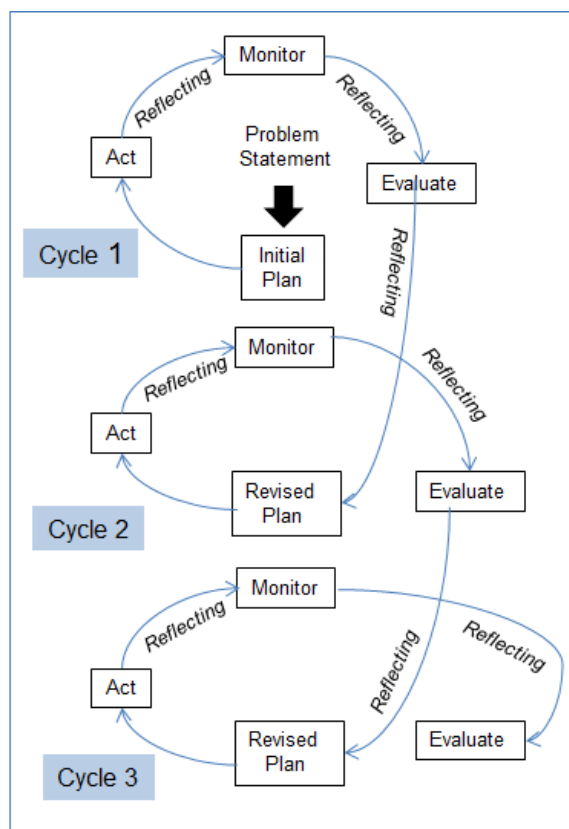


Figure 3.1 Iterative Investigative Process adapted from Foley’s (2004) ‘Plan-Action-Reflect’ Cycle model

Fourthly, it created continuous engagements with stakeholders of the research. Its process provided opportunities for constant feedback and evaluation of actions undertaken. The information obtained amidst and whilst the on-going investigation of ‘the situation’ under study could be utilised to



review and fine-tune the next course of action in order to obtain ‘solutions [that are] relevant and feasible’ (French and Bell, 1980: 95). Most importantly, AR, as McNiff & Whitehead (2010) pointed out, allows one to ‘show your own processes of learning and explain how your learning has helped you develop your work within the situation’ (p. 19).

The arguments for AR as a methodology addressed adequately the criteria my research objectives demand as a professional inquiry. I was of the view that as the training director with first-hand knowledge of the subject matter to be studied, I was in the best position to experiment, with immediacy, actions that could lead to encouraging outcomes for my CPD initiative. Hence, I chose a practitioner-generated approach for this research study. The data collected through such an involved process would in all likelihood provide greater insight into understanding the psyche behind the responses of the FAEs. It would also be immensely useful in helping to identify any motivational and cultural influences as well as technological barriers, perceived or real, which might have impacted the behavioural choices of the FAEs towards my CPD initiative. It would also generate the potential to provide opportunities for fostering an educative relationship between the FAEs and me in the course of exploring workable solutions to the successful implementation of my initiative.

### **3.3 Assuring a Quality Knowledge-Generating Process in my Action Research**

AR encompassed an interpretive paradigm where personal values and choices that inherently possessed a political slant could indelibly influence knowledge claims. The attractiveness of AR was a double-edged sword. Knowledge created out of a contextual practice-based investigation while yielding precious professional relevance and practicality, could also arguably raise the question of ‘validity’ or ‘truthfulness’ (McNiff & Whitehead (2010:190). There were several pertinent issues that had to be addressed to satisfy the criteria of conducting ‘high-quality AR’ and producing ‘a high-quality report’ (McNiff & Whitehead 2010: 205).

### 3.3.1 The Pertinent Criteria for Quality

Firstly, there was the ethical issue of research direction. An AR methodology would naturally result in heuristic questions emerging from each cycle of action initiated in response to the previous one. The choice of what direction to proceed from issues the heuristic questions pose was entirely in my control. In a similar vein, French and Bell's, (1980) observation of a potential pitfall confronting a consultant in an OD intervention was of particular relevance here. In my professional inquiry, a parallel could be drawn between the client-consultant relationship in an OD intervention with that of the FAEs and me as the researcher. As the researcher of this CPD initiative, I could be viewed as a self-appointed proxy-"consultant" and the FAEs as my "clients". The writers cautioned of 'the convenience of [a consultant in] ... applying intervention techniques with which the consultant is familiar or particularly likes, but which may not square with a current diagnosis of' the situation investigated (p. 206). Thus, in order to embark on actions that would likely lead to improving the chances of success for my CPD initiative, I, as the management-researcher, needed to engage in reflective practice myself where I consciously questioned my research direction so as to be constantly vigilant against any conflict of interests and bias.

Secondly, as the management-researcher, the possibility of choosing which pieces of evidence to be 'publicly available knowledge' claims against those treated as 'privileged information' for the researcher's eyes should also remain uppermost in my mind (McNiff & Whitehead 2000:163). After all, as McNiff & Whitehead (2000) rightly pointed out, interpretive knowledge is 'mediated knowledge' (ibid). It is the '[i]nterpretive researchers [who] decide who speaks, whose voice is heard, what is edited out from the discourses and what slant is given to an interpretation' (p. 168). This is where I, as researcher, needed to conduct 'personal validation' by checking my 'ontological ... and political values' against my findings and knowledge claims (McNiff & Whitehead 2010:194).

Thirdly, there should be multi-source data collection, thus, giving depth and breadth to the data gathered. Moreover, the data collected, whatever form it might assume, needed to be triangulated to ensure there was 'truthfulness' and to avoid it being mere 'imagining[s]' (McNiff & Whitehead 2010:179). This was a process that involved the data being interpreted or 'looked at from a range of perspectives – usually at least three' provided by 'different people or different sets of people' (ibid). Once triangulation had been satisfied to ensure affirmation, only then could the data be analysed and interpreted for their meaning in relation to the research questions.

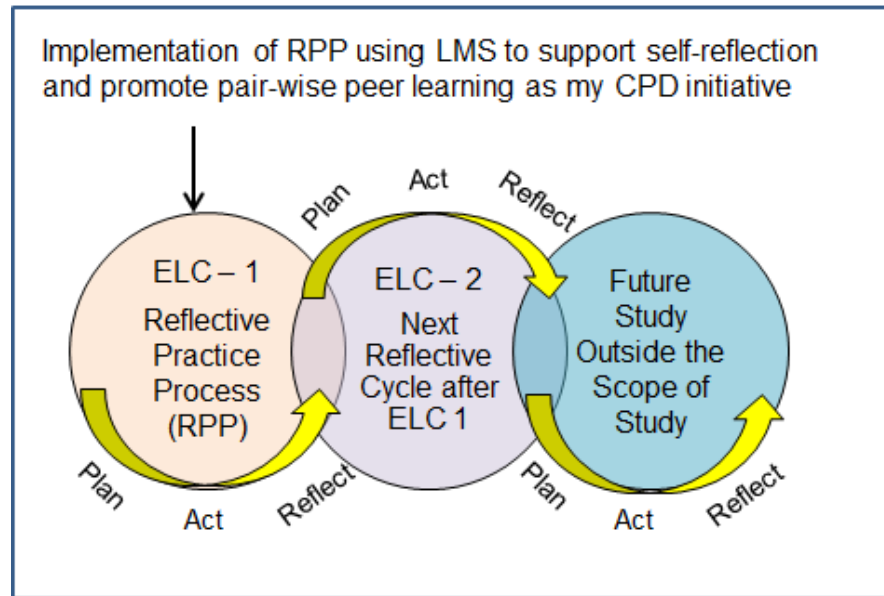
Lastly, another criterion was having a clear audit trail for data collected and archived. A system of documentation for the storage of data, the tracing of data sources and coding steps needed to be drawn up for this purpose. This provided an easy and clear tracing of evidence derived to make knowledge claims.

### **3.4 Customising the AR Tool: Detailing the Relevant Components**

#### **3.4.1 Episodic Learning Cycles (ELCs)**

My AR investigation adopted Foley's (2004) 'Plan-Action-Reflect' Cycle model. The study encompassed two ELCs within the projected duration of this research. The iterative cycles of my research is depicted in [Figure 3.2](#) below. ELC1: the Reflective Practice Process (RPP) was the first AR cycle in this study. The next research direction, ELC 2, would be dependent on how the research progressed based on the outcome of ELC 1. As shown in [Figure 3.2](#), this AR would be covering only up to ELC 2. The next iterative cycle shown in [Figure 3.2](#) (dependent on the outcome of ELC 2) would be outside the scope of this study.

Figure 3.2 Episodic Learning Cycles (ELCs) of the AR Study



### 3.4.2 Timeline of the AR

The period for this AR study commenced in February 2013 and ended in May 2015.

### 3.4.3 Methods of Data Collection

My research study had employed a mixed approach involving both quantitative and qualitative data collection. The types of data collection involved:

- a. survey with thematic questionnaire items
- b. semi-structured one-to-one interviews
- c. audio and video recordings
- d. documentary data collected from research studies
- e. field notes collected from ad-hoc conversations with FAEs
- f. email correspondences with FAEs

These methods of data collection were specifically selected to provide not only variety but also efficacy in obtaining feedback.

An elaboration on the survey method is required here. As part of a periodic ground survey for management planning of FAEs, a non-anonymous survey, called the Renewal Survey, is given to all FAEs hired by IAL. This survey elicits updates on the demographic and types of engagement profiles of the FAEs. The survey also solicits feedback on the work-related topics such as recruitment and induction, performance measurement, remunerations and assignment of work.

I included a section on professional development in one such survey conducted during my research study to gather specific feedback on the CPD initiative I introduced that covered the two ELCs. The quantitative data collected from this section of the Renewal Survey formed the basis for the follow-up semi-structured one-to-one interviews conducted in August and September 2014 with FAEs who volunteered for these interviews. These interviews elicited feedback on the participating FAEs' perspectives of the implementation of the two ELCs and their motivation towards aligning to the institutional implementation of digital technologies to support their professional development.

The audio and video recordings came from the recorded sessions of the one-to-one interviews, engagement events with the FAEs during focus-group discussions and scheduled Trainers' Day events. Documentary data were derived from the two research studies conducted by IAL Research and Innovation Division: (1) Brown, Karmel and Ye (2012); and (2) Karmel, Bound and Rushbrook (2013). Field notes were collected from ad-hoc conversations with FAEs. Email correspondences with the FAEs were also sources of data for the study.

#### **3.4.4 Data Triangulation and Respondent Validation**

Questioning the issue of “anecdotalism” – The use of triangulation to elicit evidence from data collected in qualitative researches carried with it issues of accuracy. As Silverman (2000) rightfully pointed out, it was imperative to 'build into the research design various devices to ensure the accuracy of [the

researcher's] interpretation' (p. 122). Such a need to 'build... various devices', according to Silverman (2000:122), stemmed from the 'complaint of anecdotalism' (ibid: 177). Silverman (2000), citing Bryman (1988), also pointed out that the anecdotal approach involved the use of '[b]rief conversations, snippets from unstructured interviews... to provide evidence of a particular contention' (p. 177). He observed that '[t]here are grounds for disquiet in that the representativeness or generality of these fragments is rarely addressed' (ibid).

Subjecting the evidence to every possible test – To address the “grounds for disquiet”, Silverman (2000) applied the ‘refutability principle’ to answer ‘the problem of anecdotalism’ (p. 178). This principle involved ‘qualitative researchers to seek to refute their initial assumptions about their data in order to achieve objectivity’ (ibid). It was a ‘critical method’ whereby qualitative researchers ‘subject [their] evidence to every possible test’ (ibid). Silverman (2000) viewed that this “critical method” was qualitative researchers’ response to Popper’s (1959) demand for “critical rationalism” in ensuring objectivity whereby they ‘must seek to refute assumed relations between phenomena’ (p. 178).

To satisfy Popper’s (1959) criterion, Silverman (2000) suggested several ‘methods as an interrelated way of critically thinking during data analysis’ (p. 178). Below are two of the methods I found relevant to my research study:

- a. *The constant comparative method* – where ‘the qualitative researcher should always attempt to find another case through which to test out a provisional hypothesis’ (ibid: 179). To satisfy this requirement, different sources of data that pointed to a similar phenomenon or observation during the coding process would be sought. This would lend strength to identify any emerging theme that could demonstrate as a finding.
- b. *Using appropriate tabulations* – where appropriate, qualitative researchers should use ‘[s]imple counting techniques, theoretically derived and ideally based on [their] own categories.... to survey the

whole corpus of data ordinarily lost in intensive, qualitative research' (ibid: 185). I had used data obtained from a periodic ground survey conducted to elicit feedback from the FAEs on various work-related topics. In one such survey, a segment on professional development relating to my CPD initiative for this study was included to gather feedback on this matter. The data obtained from the survey also served as basis for cross-referencing any data collected from other data sources.

The above pertinent checks for accuracy and thoroughness were applied throughout the evidence production process as a matter of principle.

Data Triangulation – Triangulation was one of the methods used in my research study to maximise the reliability of the data collected and the validity of my analysis. Berg (2007), citing Denzin (1978) offered a useful approach to the triangulation of data. According to him, there were three subtypes: (a) time, (b) space, and (c) person. Person analysis, in turn, had three levels: (a) aggregate, (b) interactive, and (c) collectivity (p. 7).

- a. Time: Data could be taken from different times that supported the particular contention.
- b. Space: Data could be taken from the various events and FAEs engagement activities.
- c. Person: The “aggregate” level involved a holistic view of individual FAE’s outlook on a general issue or aspect of matter. The “interactive” levels involved two individuals and more; and the “collectivity” level involved a collective group as a whole.

Respondent validation – Respondent validation was the second method. This involved ‘go[ing] back to the subjects with our tentative results and refin[ing] them in the light of our subjects’ reactions’ (Silverman, 2000:208 citing Reason and Rowan, 1981). In my research study, I shared my update and preliminary research results at different milestones to solicit the FAEs’

feedback and comments to ascertain the extent to which their perspectives were in accord with my initial interpretations of their inputs.

Examples of triangulation of data sources for my research study:

- Feedback or observations from at least three FAEs facing the same challenge(s) (person: aggregate);
- Feedback from semi-structured one-to-one interviews at important milestones (space);
- Observation of FAEs' behaviours, individually and among themselves (person: interactive);
- FAEs' participation of CPD activities at different times (space and time);
- Interactions among the FAEs (person: collectivity); and
- Survey responses (person: collectivity or aggregate).

### **3.4.5 Methods of Analysis**

My data analysis employed a two-layered approach to interpreting the meaning emerging from the raw data collected that eventually formed the evidence for my knowledge claims.

Breaking down the content of a data source - To conduct this, my analysis employed the approach Punch (2005) cited as the Miles and Huberman (1994) framework for qualitative data analysis that comprised three components: data reduction, data display and lastly, drawing and verifying conclusions (p.197). My initial collection of data from any of the sources involved reading into the AEs' 'descri[ption] (of) some external reality (e.g. facts, events) or internal experience (e.g. feelings, meanings)' at face value (p. 122). This reading enabled data reduction and later data display to be obtained through an 'operation of coding and memoing', done with the help of the NVivo software (p. 199). Figure 3.3 below showed the research map used in the coding process from the data collected from the various sources.



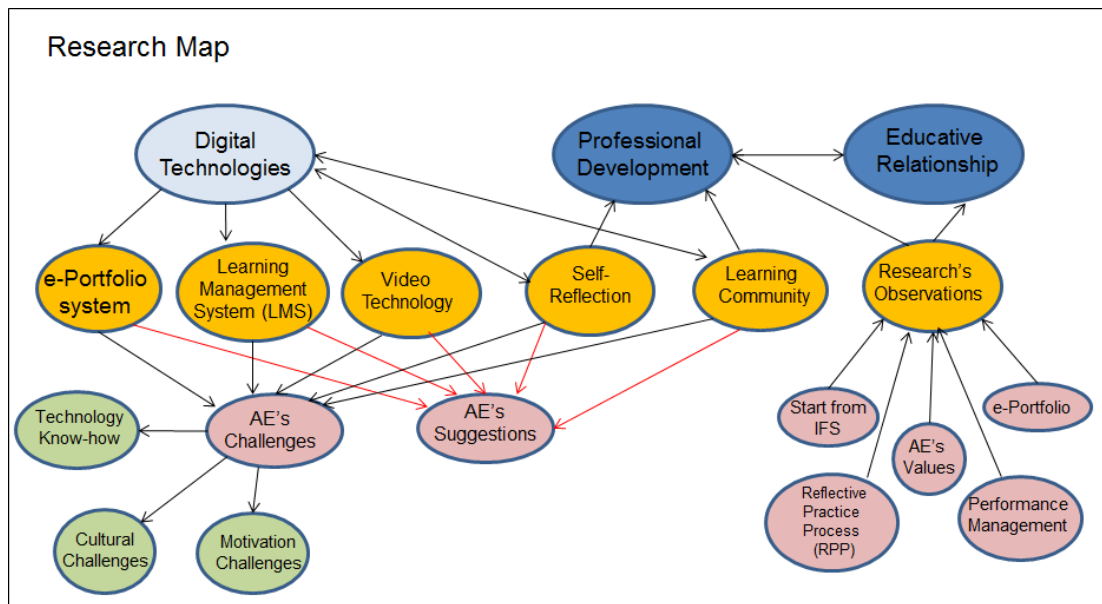


Figure 3.3 Research Map – Coding and Memoing

The process of coding discerned any patterns or themes that could then be categorised as part of the process of applying ‘higher levels of abstraction with the data’ (Punch, 2005: 199). The ‘[m]emoing links coding with the developing of propositions’, and together both operations ‘provide the building blocks...of [the] qualitative analysis (p. 202). The final component of drawing and verifying conclusions ‘involves developing propositions’ or making knowledge claims that have emerged from the AR study (ibid).

Towards this end, NVivo software was employed to create a one-stop portal for data storage and analysis. Figure 3.4 below showed a partial map of the classification of the data analysis and coding of nodes and sub-nodes using the software. The colour coding and the hierarchical formatting [1-1(A...-1(AB...)-1(ABC)... etc.] illustrated the sub-themes that were created from the data sources analysed. This correlates with the research map as shown in Figure 3.3 earlier.

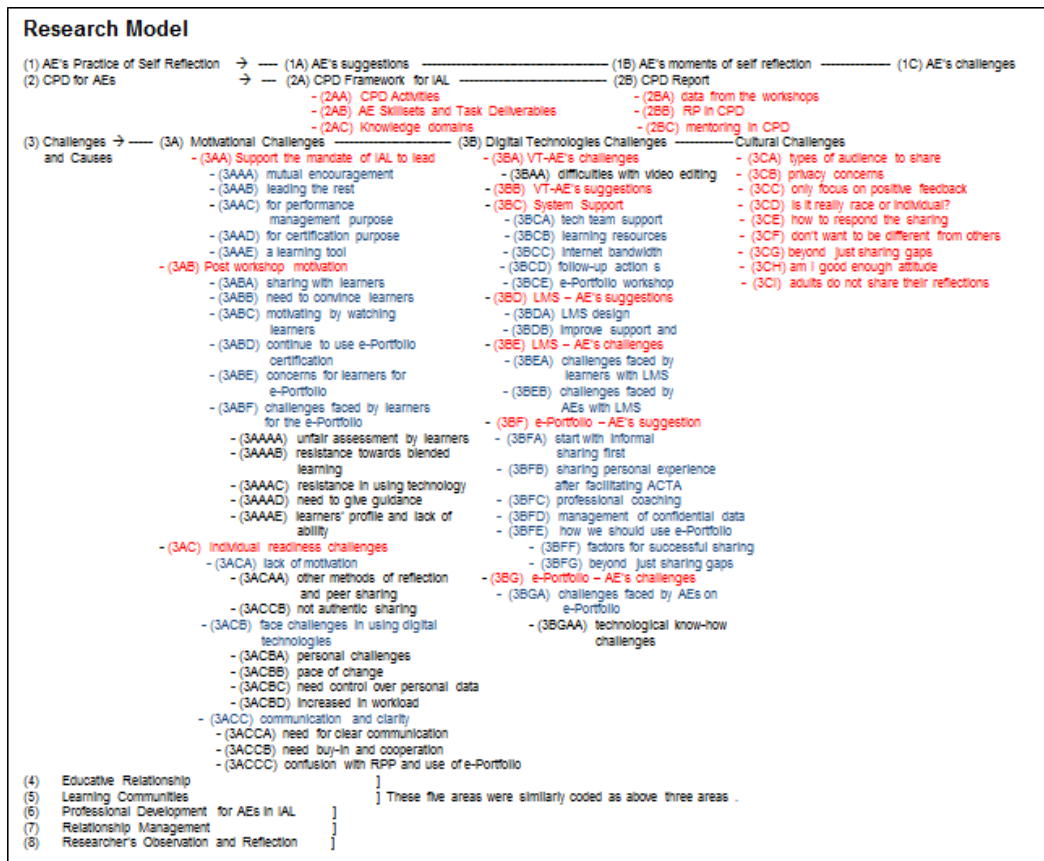


Figure 3.4 A sample of the coding map using Nvivo

Interpreting the data source holistically - Punch (2005) highlighted a valid observation on the above described data analysis approach that was 'based on segmentation, coding and categorization.... to find and conceptualize regularities in the data' (p. 216). By breaking 'the data into small pieces', such an approach naturally created inherent problems of 'fragmentation and de-contextualization' where the "story" of the data was excluded (p. 217).

One means of avoiding such a fall-out was to 'deal ... holistically with the data' by 'thinking about stories in the data [that] can enable us to think creatively about collecting and interpreting data' (Punch, 2005: 217). Punch (2005) pointed out several considerations in the analysis of narratives that included 'thinking about whose voices are telling the stories ... and by the social and cultural context in which the stories are told.' (p. 218). He also rightly observed that 'stories are part of the representation of social reality as text, and narratives are therefore social constructions located within power

structures and social milieu' (ibid). Holistic analysis of the data collected was conducted with these pointers in mind.

The potentially rich sources of such data were the email responses from the FAEs when they responded to periodic updates and preliminary findings. Some of the FAEs would capitalise the opportunity to relay their concerns, shared their views or concerns, especially if they did not participate in the invited semi-structured interviews. The feedback and comments from engagement activities such as Trainers' Day and policy schemes dissemination forum discussions with the FAEs were also excellent sources of data for holistic analysis.

#### **3.4.6 System of Data Documentation for Storage and Retrieval**

As the computer was to be used as a working device for this study, it was important to design a 'well-organized filing and identification' system that facilitated methodical storage, easy retrieval and efficient location of all files and data (McNiff & Whitehead, 2010:167). Such a measure was crucial as the ability to maintain and manage a vibrant data archive provided a clear audit trail of data collected and analysed that would eventually form a strong evidence for the creation of knowledge claims.

### **3.5 Ethical Considerations**

In adopting the AR methodology, the element of 'collaboration and cooperation' (French and Bell, 1980: 90) 'between the individuals inside the system' of the methodology might raise ethical issues (p. 93). With the continuous engagement and involvement of the FAEs as the 'human participants' of this study, there was the possibility of me, as the management-researcher, 'influenc[ing] their thinking', as suggested by McNiff & Whitehead (2010: 69).

To address this ethical criterion, I observed the BERA (2011) ethical guidelines as checks against its possible violation. One issue to be

addressed involved the FAEs' participation in the inquiry. This was strictly to be on a voluntary basis only. This removed the element of unwillingness and perceived coercion on the part of the participants. To secure the participants' voluntary consent throughout the AR process, email invites were used as a means to support freedom of choice in their participation.

As Robson (2002) had highlighted, interview sessions could be an 'uncomfortable business' unless absolute trust was gained from the participants (p.382). To allay any of the participants' fears, offer to extend a copy of the interview transcriptions records was a standard protocol when the FAEs accepted the invite. However, in view of the non-request from the FAEs for the transcriptions, one way to keep them in the loop with the AR findings was to share progressive update on the research through email correspondences. This I believed would also build trust and confidence that they co-owned the study.

Efforts were also made to guarantee confidentiality in the use of data collected. As Bassey (1999) pointed out, it was pertinent to install safeguards that sought to respect the privacy of and encourage as far as possible, unaffected responses from the participants. This was part of 'participants' entitlement to privacy and must accord them their rights to confidentiality and anonymity, unless they specifically and willingly waive that right' (BERA, 2011:7). Hence, to satisfy the confidentiality condition, pseudonyms for participants were to be used unless they preferred to be identified or gave their approval to use their own identities. A waiver in writing would be necessary before the research commenced for those who wished to maintain their own identity (ibid). Any participant who wished to change this decision during the research would be free do so.

As an example of upholding confidentiality and respect for privacy, provision was made to ensure the peer dialogue peers could conduct a private discussion forum, via the LMS. The research design did not require content shared to be analysed. Specific instructions were also given to ensure nobody, including the LMS Technical Admin staff, would access the content

of the FAEs' dialogues for whatever reason(s), unless permission was granted by the FAEs concerned.

Beyond these procedural provisions made, I was mindful of the alarm raised by Malone (2003) when research was conducted in one's 'home institution...or ... "backyard"' (p.797). As discussed earlier in the chapter, under such a situation of assuming a management-researcher role, I needed to be acutely aware of issues of conflict of interest and power-relation throughout the research. Moreover, I had to be mindful at all times of the very real possibility of tension arising for those participating FAEs where they might, in the name of maintaining "good-will" and avoiding "offending" the client (being me, the management/researcher), come in direct conflict with their personal belief and value systems.

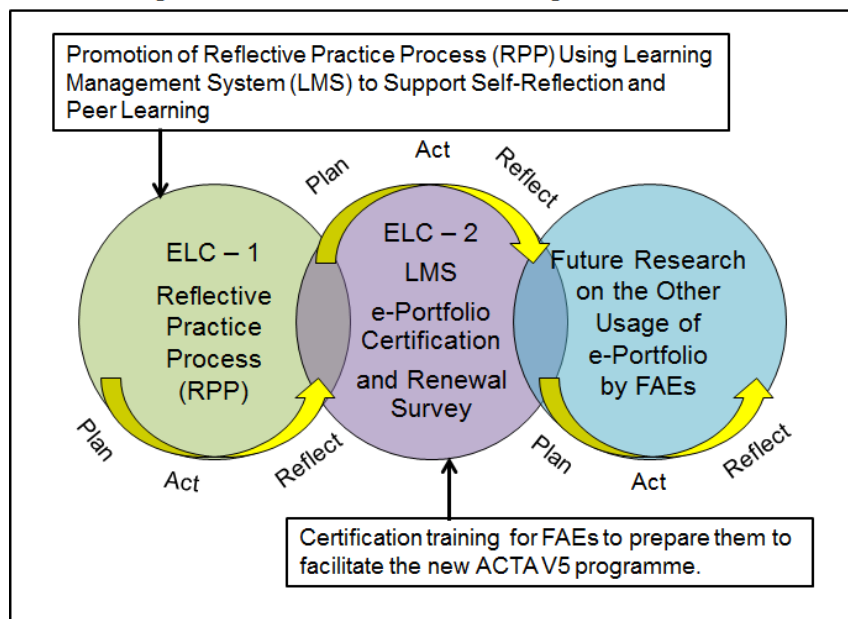
Chapter 5 deals in greater detail these issues of conflict of interest and power-relation. The impact and influence of the FAEs, as participants, and myself, as the insider-researcher, on the integrity of this study cannot be understated. This need to observe, throughout this study, the several checks put in place to preserve its ethical fiber been adhered to the best of my ability as researcher.

## Chapter 4: The Research Investigation Narrative

### 4.1 The Purpose of the Chapter

This chapter provides what McNiff & Whitehead (2010) termed as a 'description of data' in action research reporting that 'constitute[s] an account of the progress of the research at various stages' (p. 239). It traces and describes the episodes of my research investigation as it evolved. It also describes and explains the actions taken, how the progress of the research was monitored and how the data and evidence were gathered. [Figure 4.1](#) below provides a visual description of the successive stages of this research.

Figure 4.1 The Research Investigation Narrative



### 4.2 The Objectives of my Action Research Investigation

As mentioned earlier in Chapter 1 Section 1.6.1, the FAE participants conducted their reflective practice individually on a technical level of reflection. What was lacking was a holistic sharing, between and among peers, which would include also the practical and critical levels of reflection. The latter two levels of reflection necessitated dealing with a context outside the classroom (Schön, 1983, 1987 and McLaughlin, 1999) where

practitioners reflected on and critiqued their practice from a larger perspective such as professional knowledge and skills, attitude and ethics. It was deemed useful then to find a platform to inculcate the practice of quality reflection that goes beyond just focusing on ‘technical application of educational knowledge’ and instead strived to develop practical reflection that ‘[looks] at skills, strategies and rules to question the goals themselves’ as well as critical reflection that would shape the FAEs’ professional identity through peer dialogues and exchanges at institutional level (Tan, 2008: 226-7).

McNiff (2000) also offered a good description of a quality reflection process in pointing out that ‘Self-reflection does not come easily... [it] is complex and involves understanding one’s own process of coming to know, an appreciation of what happens when tacit knowledge becomes explicit, and the transformation that takes place in the individual during the process’ (p. 181). Reflection being ‘a developmental process...improves with practice’ (ibid).

Hence, it was clear that it would be beneficial for practitioners to learn how to carry out quality self-reflection with a mindful intention to improve one’s practice. A natural ensuing question would be how to provide a platform and a conducive and collegial working environment for the FAEs to achieve this outcome. This marked the start-state of the AR study in my interest to see if it was feasible to promote and encourage self-reflection and peer-to-peer learning in IAL.

### **4.3 The Episodic Learning Cycles (ELCs) Timeline of the AR Study**

Figure 4.2 below provides a visual detail timeline of the two ELCs of this AR study. ELC 1 commenced in January 2013 and ended in February 2014. It involved the planning and implementation of the 6-month Reflective Practice Process (RPP) as the initial launch of my AR investigation. The focus was to establish a platform to facilitate the practice of quality reflection.

ELC 2 began in February 2014 and ended in May 2015. The objective of the ELC2 was decided at the end of ELC1. ELC2, termed the e-Portfolio Certification Process and Renewal Survey, involved the implementation of the certification process for the LMS e-Portfolio system, the conduct of the Renewal Survey and the sharing of preliminary learning with the FAEs.

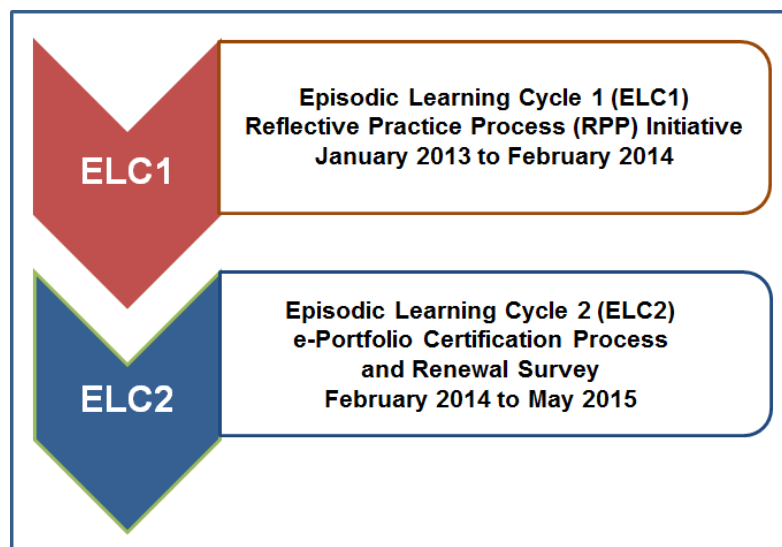


Figure 4.2 The ELCs Timeline of the Action Research Study

#### 4.4 Crucial Organisational Developments Prior to my AR Investigation

It is necessary to provide a background description of crucial organisational developments as part of the continuing improvement of our training offering. In mid-2012, work had commenced on acquiring a LMS to support the CET 2020 Master Plan. One of the key strategic thrusts is e-Learning. This entailed an effort to progressively convert our WSQ programmes to blended learning mode using the LMS. Therefore, eventually all FAEs who wanted to continue to serve IAL would need to know how to use the LMS and its e-Portfolio function to support their facilitation of all programmes in the Institute.

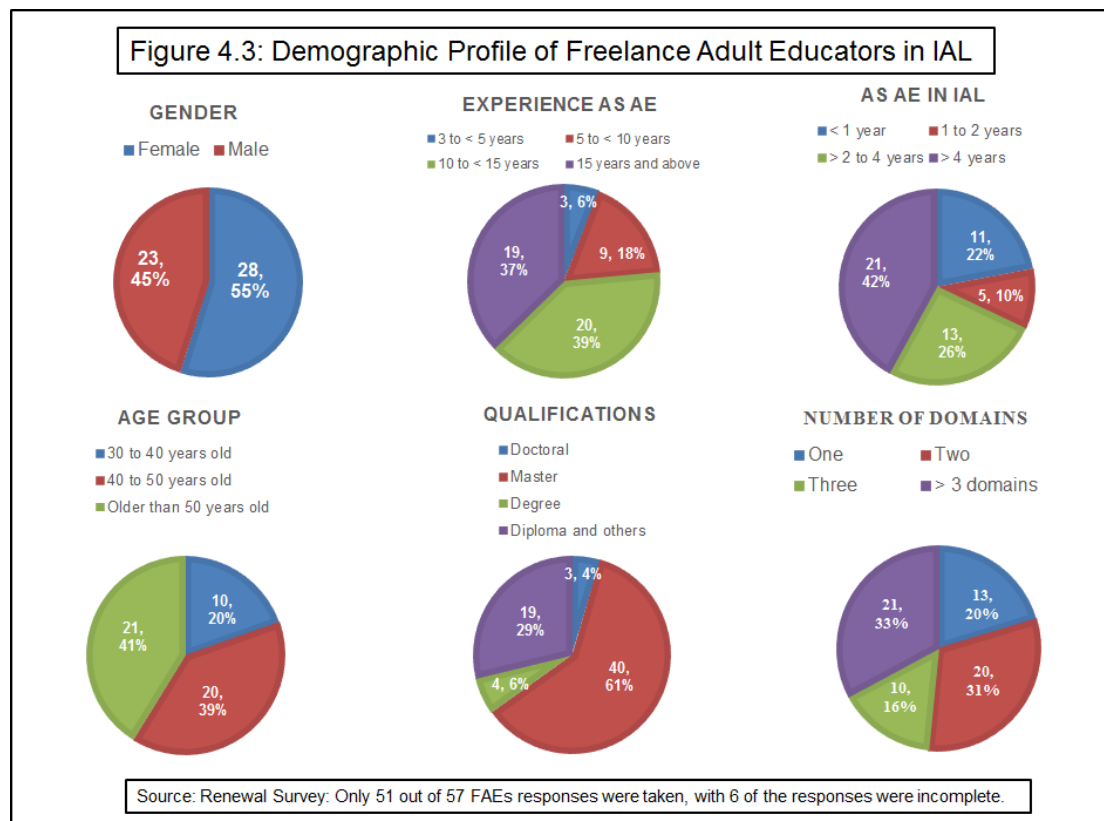
This OD plan would require our FAEs to be “future-ready” to support it. Besides their pedagogical competence, they would need to be conversant with the use of digital technologies such as LMS and its affiliated system features such as discussion forum, drop-box and e-Portfolio to support the



push of e-Learning and the introduction of blended learning in the programmes offered by IAL.

#### 4.5 ELC 1: The Reflective Practice Process (RPP) Initiative

At that point in time, there were a total of 57<sup>8</sup> FAEs on the engagement register serving IAL. My proposed professional development initiative would be open to all these 57 FAEs who wished to participate. The demographic profile of these FAEs is given in [Figure 4.3](#) below (see [Appendix A](#) for details).



From Figure 4.3, there were slightly more female FAEs (55%) compared with their male counterparts (45%). In terms of age profile, majority (80%) of the FAEs were 40 years old and above. Most of them (76%) had at least ten years of working experience as adult educators, with 68% having worked in IAL for more than 2 years. 64.4% of the FAEs have at least Masters and

<sup>8</sup> The data shown only 51 FAEs as 6 of the responses were not complete and excluded.

above. A good majority of the FAEs (61%) could facilitate two or more domains or industry sectors in CET. This demographic profile indicated that the FAEs engaged by IAL were highly qualified, with many years of professional experience and also had the versatility to support other CET clients besides IAL.

#### **4.5.1 The Plan Step of ELC 1**

The Design of the RPP in ECL1 – The “Plan” step started with the design of the RPP in my ELC1 in January 2013. In this RPP activity, the FAEs would first find their own peer dialogue partner to form a dyad arrangement. A dedicated forum discussion folder would be set up to facilitate the pair-wise FAEs to upload and share their self-selected video excerpts of their classroom training delivery. These video excerpts, together with their written self-reflection on these performance videos, would be used as artefacts for the VSRD to be conducted by the pair of FAEs.

The paired dialogue partners would inform their respective partner whenever they had uploaded their artefacts onto the assigned dedicated forum discussion folder. The partners would then access the artefacts uploaded to view the video, read the written self-reflection and then provide their feedback as professional sharing and peer-critiques.

The Strategy of ECL1 – My ELC1 was designed to ride piggyback on the organisational developments that were introduced in IAL around the period of my research. Firstly, ECL1 leveraged on the LMS to provide the platform needed to address the scalability issue as my research design had to be capable of accommodating the loading and flexibility factors. The LMS would enable as many FAEs as possible to participate in the study on a volunteer basis while also allowing them the freedom of time to upload their individual written reflections and engage in peer exchanges and sharing.

The plan was also for ELC1 to leverage on the training workshops conducted to prepare the FAEs who wished to deliver the WSQ programmes using the

blended learning mode on the LMS platform. These were the Train-The-Trainers (TTT) workshops for the new ACTA V5 modules that were to start from March to June 2013 with the Technology Familiarization Workshops (TFWs) for the LMS that were to be conducted in the month July 2013. There were to be 4 runs scheduled for the TFWs.

The planning of the RPP also leveraged on a new engagement approach mooted in June 2013 whereby the FAEs were to be deployed in pairs for work assignments, instead of individually. As participating FAEs had to find a peer dialogue partner, having a working partner double up as the dialogue partner for the RPP could help booster the willingness of the FAEs to pair up to participate in the RPP.

#### **4.5.2 The Act Step of ELC 1**

Preparing the FAEs for the RPP – A briefing on the findings of my IFS research (Koh, 2013) was carried out in March 2013. The objective was to introduce the ideas on the use of the VSRD technique and peer sharing to conduct self-reflection for professional development to the rest of the FAEs who did not participate in my IFS research. Through this, it was hoped that the FAEs would be familiar with these ideas when the ELC1 was launched.

Briefing FAEs on the RPP – The “Act” step began with the briefing of the RPP to the FAEs in August 2013. The FAEs who attended the briefing were told of the 6-month RPP implementation plan that would stretch from September 2013 to March 2014. The rationale of introducing the RPP as an approach to support professional development and encourage peer collaboration among the FAEs was also explained to them. Suggestion was also made to them that they could utilise their chosen working partner for the pair-wise deployment to support the delivery of a new programme, ACTA V5, as their peer dialogue partner for the RPP too.

To ensure all the FAEs were informed of the RPP implementation, a series of emails were sent to all FAEs to explain the RPP launch. The details of

engagement and monitoring of the RPP implementation through the use of emails are given in [Appendix B](#). An outline of the email chronology and timeline is shown in [Table 4.1](#) below.

**Table 4.1 Response Rate for Email Correspondences**

Sequence of email	Date of email sent	Sender	Number of responses	Remarks
First	20 August 2013	Myself	No response	Refer to <a href="#">Appendix B</a> for details of email responses by FAEs  Note: * Email was copied to me.
Second	13 October 2013	Myself	17 responses	
Third	16 October 2013	My staff	1 response (known)*	
Fourth	11 & 16 October 2013	Myself	3 responses	
Fifth	2 January 2014	My staff	(unknown)	

[Monitoring of Participation](#) – The monitoring and feedback channel found that the pairing up process was extremely slow. Four months after the launch of the RPP only twenty pairs were formed. Out of these twenty pairs of accounts, only two pairs of FAEs had managed to upload and share their video artefacts and conducted their two-way dialogues and three pairs only managed a one-way dialogue. Only one of the FAEs in one pair managed a one-way dialogue to share his/her artefacts but there was no reciprocal action on the part of the other FAE.

It was obvious then that there was a necessity to investigate the causes of their challenges. To achieve this, I turned to sources of data that were most likely to throw light on this phenomenon. I was able to gather insight into the issues from the email correspondence responses with the FAEs and also from an informal interview with one of the FAEs, Philip, held on 3 March 2014. The transcription of the interview is given in [Appendix C](#).

### **4.5.3 The Reflect Step of ELC 1**

A couple of issues moved the research from the “Act” stage to the “Reflect” stage. These issues concerned the technical competence in utilising the LMS and the finding of a peer dialogue partner. As a result, my original RPP plan had to be altered to respond to these developments.

Firstly, from the figures on the take-up rate of the TFWs, only 24 of the FAEs had learnt to utilise the LMS. For the TTT workshops, a total of 33 FAEs attended the M1-M3 module cluster and 30 FAEs attended the M4-M5 cluster throughout the months of March to June 2013. For those FAEs who planned to conduct the new ACTA V5, they would be committing a sizeable duration of time to prepare themselves in those few months the TTT workshops were conducted. This could have weighed in on the time they had to again set aside to attend the TFWs that were scheduled for the month following the completion of the TTT workshops. Being freelancers, work time utilisation was a top priority for them.

Moreover, from the general feedback and conversations I had with some of the FAEs and staff, even for the FAEs who attended the TFWs, they were still unfamiliar with the use of the LMS and had technical competence issues. This had impacted the implementation of the RPP as my plan was to leverage on the FAEs’ acquisition of the technical competence to utilise the LMS for the delivery of the new ACTA V5 programme so that they could upload their reflections and video to conduct peer partner sharing and exchanges based on these artefacts.

Secondly, the idea of leveraging on the working partners under the new pair-wise engagement model for the new ACTA V5 could not materialise as the FAEs had difficulty in finding these working partners. This had a resultant impact on the RPP. In cases where the FAEs had intended to utilise their working partners as peer dialogue partners, this would present a difficulty as most of them had been working independently. Hence, most of the FAEs had difficulty finding working partners and this difficulty would be accentuated for

finding a peer dialogue partner for the RPP. The likely reasons for this accentuation could be that the FAEs might have viewed peer partnering as being on a personal level as opposed to that for a work arrangement. Moreover, developing a collegial relationship as co-workers of IAL in the normal course of work was not an easily achievable task as freelancers. Hence, finding a comfort level of professional engagement with peers might present some challenge. The data obtained on the participation rate of FAEs in the RPP indeed supported this postulation. (see [Table 5.2](#) and [Appendix D](#)).

From the observations I gathered, I prioritised the issues into two groups: the first and second hurdles. In the first hurdle I grouped issues that I saw were most likely to form the first barrier in deterring and dampening the FAEs' enthusiasm from even considering participating in the RPP. These issues were also those that could most likely be resolved much easier so that a feasible solution could be sought in a relatively short time as possible given that time was of the essence. The second hurdle included the rest of the issues that would comparatively require a longer time to resolve. Hence, I tackled the issues I saw as those falling within the first hurdle. These were those issues related to the FAEs' technical competence of utilising the LMS for the reflection exchanges and professional sharing.

There were two other reasons that influenced my decision. In my view, enabling the FAEs to acquire this technical competence would be a much easier task compared to getting them to find a peer dialogue partner with whom they were comfortable. Moreover, once they were able to utilise the LMS with ease, this would help remove one of the obstacles to securing a good participation response.

Now I began planning the next ELC that moved my research study in a new direction. My original plan to implement the RPP for a 6-month duration that should have ended in March 2014 instead had to be terminated earlier at the end of January 2014.

## **4.6 ELC 2: e-Portfolio Certification Process and Renewal Survey**

### **4.6.1 The Plan Step of ELC 2**

My plan stage began by addressing the low take-up rate by the FAEs in signing up for the TFWs. This was crucial as the plan was to leverage on the technical competence acquired by those FAEs who would have signed up for the TFWs in preparation for the new ACTA V5 programme. When the expected response to the sign-ups did not materialise, this had a direct impact on the FAEs' readiness to participate in my CPD research study. In addition, in ELC2, more data on the issues relating to the FAEs' concern over peer-sharing and professional learning with fellow FAEs had to be gathered to understand their reluctance. This was extremely important as one of my research objectives was to encourage peer learning and sharing through dialogue.

My insider-researcher position allowed me both to understand the issue at hand and then to initiate the necessary change as the training director. My immediate course of action was to examine how to ensure that the FAEs could acquire both technical competency and familiarity of use. Once the FAEs had acquired the technical competence, they could then be familiar with utilising the LMS to deliver the new ACTA V5 programme if they so choose. This in turn, would mean that with their technical competence, it would be likely they would be less disinterested in participating in my research study if they find the end objective is meaningful to them. Moreover, as the training director, I had to ensure the FAEs were technical-ready to deliver the new ACTA V5 programme by the due date for the launch, which was drawing nearer. Time was of the utmost urgency for both of my targets, as the training director and as the insider-researcher.

### **4.6.2 The Act Step of ELC 2**

Implementation of the TCWs – To address the issues identified in the plan stage, as the training director, I implemented a certification process referred

to as the Technical Certification Workshop (TCWs). The TCWs took place from February to April 2014 to enable the FAEs, who wished to sign up to deliver the new ACTA V5 when it was launched in April 2014 programme, to be technical ready. Four runs of TCW were planned. A total of 35 FAEs signed up and attended the training.

I revised the coverage of the technical training curriculum from that taught how to use the LMS to include the use of the e-Portfolio so that the FAEs would have hands-on practice in creating their own e-Portfolio and uploading their own learning artefacts. This was different from using the forum discussion function of the LMS in the RPP. The TCW also encouraged the FAEs to share their artefacts with their fellow workshop participants as this was part of the certification requirement.

To be certified as technically competent, the FAEs had to attend the technical training workshop and then create and populate their own e-Portfolio with the necessary artefacts according to a set requirement for the certification of competency. The details of the certification requirements were given in Appendix E. For those who had attended the earlier TFWs and were confident with the use of the e-Portfolio without additional training through the TCW, they could choose not to attend the TCW but submit their own e-Portfolio for certification. This provision was to avoid time wastage for the FAEs.

Emails as Line of Communication – Email correspondences were used to reach out to all FAEs to explain the rationale for conducting the TCWs. It was made explicit that for FAEs to qualify for job assignment for the ACTA V5, they would need to meet the stipulated certification requirements. The intent here was to ensure the FAEs understood that their efforts to acquire their technological skills and know-how of the LMS and the use of the e-Portfolio would be professionally beneficial to them on several fronts. With such an understanding, they would, hopefully, be motivated to develop familiarity with the use of the LMS and the e-Portfolio. Details of the email correspondences



are given in [Appendix F](#). [Table 4.2](#) below shows the email correspondences trail to all the FAEs.

**Table 4.2 Email Correspondences Trail for e-Portfolio Certification**

Date of Email of Invite	Agenda for the Email	Remarks
10 February 2014	First email invite to encourage AEs to attend the workshop to learn how to use the LMS e-Portfolio for the new ACTA programme.	Refer to <a href="#">Appendix F</a> for details.
2 March 2014	Email to share the link of a sample e-Portfolio to encourage more AEs to attend the workshops.	
3 March 2014	Second email invite to remind AEs who have not attended the workshop to do so for the next series in Mar 2014.	
17 March 2014	Further reminder to encourage those who missed the previous workshops to do so.	

Monitoring of e-Portfolio Certification Status - By the time the new ACTA V5 programme was launched in April 2014, there were 12 FAEs certified to facilitate the new ACTA V5 programme. By April 2015 the pool of FAEs certified increased to a total 37<sup>9</sup> with 14 still pending approval at that time. [Appendix G](#) shows the certification status of the FAEs as at 1 April 2015 and [Appendix H](#) shows the status of the e-Portfolio utilisation by the FAEs after certification.

Further actions to sense ground sentiments – Getting the FAEs to be able to utilise the LMS and the e-Portfolios was a hurdle that was cleared as evident from the certification status data. However, there was still the issue of finding a suitable peer dialogue partner given to the FAEs’ poor response to finding someone. From the data on the e-Portfolio utilisation pattern, it appeared that the FAEs could be uncomfortable with the idea of sharing their performance for professional development. More than one-third of the FAEs (14 out of 37) subsequently removed their e-Portfolio postings after they cleared their certification.

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<sup>9</sup> I was told by the training manager that to date, as at Apr 2016, some 60 FAEs have been certified competent to use the LMS and e-Portfolio at IAL.

In an attempt to elicit a better understanding of the FAEs' sentiments and concerns towards my CPD initiative, I utilised the regular survey platform conducted periodically to facilitate the management planning of the FAEs' deployment. I incorporated an additional segment into the Renewal Survey to collect more data on the receptivity of the professional development efforts carried out so far. This segment of the survey was to enable the FAEs to give their feedback and comments on the CPD initiative. In addition, participating FAEs in the Renewal Survey were also invited to attend the follow-up semi-structured one-to-one interviews to seek further clarifications on issues they wished to discuss.

Renewal Survey - The Renewal Survey, opened for about two weeks, was conducted in June 2014. The regular survey comprised of the following sections: (1) demographic profile; (2) types of engagement profile; (3) availability of FAEs for IAL; (4) recruitment and induction processes; (5) performance measurement system; (6) remunerations; and (7) engagement of FAEs under the AE Specialist scheme. The segment added was on professional development. The Renewal Survey questionnaire on the Professional development and Institutional Alignment Section is given in Appendix I.

*Survey Response* - There was a 100% response rate to the survey but there were 6 out of the 57 total responses that were incomplete and their partial responses were not included in the data for analysis. Nevertheless, there was still a high response rate of 89% with 51 respondents. The Renewal Survey results on Section C: Availability and Process of Assignment of Work and Projects and Section G: Professional development and Institutional Alignment are given in Appendix J.

*Open-ended comments for the Professional Development Segment* – For the open-ended responses on this dedicated segment of the survey a total of 13 FAEs provided their feedback and their comments. All the FAEs were invited to participate in the follow-up semi-structured one-to-one interviews. The intent behind these interviews was to elicit clarification to the concerns raised

in their responses and to understand the rationale behind their feedback. As some of them were unable to attend the interview, I made arrangements to have ad-hoc conversations with them. These conversations were scheduled after the quantitative data obtained from the Renewal Survey were analysed to better prepare me to understand the FAEs' frame of mind and their position on my CPD initiative.

Semi-structured one-to-one interviews – Another activity I conducted to sense the sentiments on the ground were the semi-structured one-to-one interviews. A total of 15 FAE responded to my invites for these interviews. Table 4.3 below shows the interview schedule. I have included the one-to-one interview with Leesa as a sample transcription recorded in Appendix K.

Table 4.3 Interview Schedule of the Semi-structured One-on-One Interviews

22 August 2014	26 August 2014	28 August 2014	4 September 2014
1. 0800-0840 hr (40 minutes) DUNCAN	3. 1230-1500 hr (30 minutes) SHAWN	8. 0800–0835 hr (35 minutes) KIMBERLY	15. 1800-1830 hr (30 minutes) JULIET
2. 0845–0908 hr (23 minutes) LEESA	4. 1335-1405 hr (30 minutes) VIOLET	9. 0835–0905 hr (30 minutes) NIGEL	
	5. 1700-1735 hr (35 minutes) SANDY	10. 0945-1015 hr (30 minutes) PAMELA	
	6. 1800-1835 hr (35 minutes) SUN	11. 1100-1130 hr (30 minutes) ABBY	
	7. 1835-1905 hr (30 minutes) NATALIE	12. 1635-1705 hr (30 minutes) ROSIE	
		13. 1710-1740 hr (30 minutes) JEREMY	
		14. 1745-1815 hr (30 minutes) HALIM	

Sharing of Preliminary Learning with FAEs – The one-to-one interviews were recorded and transcribed. The transcriptions of all 14<sup>10</sup> interviews were then analysed to better understand the issues raised and sentiments expressed by the FAEs.

One of the takeaways learnt from the interviews was the value of establishing an effective channel of communication between the FAEs and me, as the

<sup>10</sup> One of the FAEs, Rosie had decided to opt out to facilitate the sharing of her interview responses. So instead of 15 transcriptions, only 14 were used for the data analysis.

training manager, in disseminating information with clarity and speed to avoid possible confusion. Hence, I began the practice of providing preliminary reports to update the FAEs on my research with the hope that this would generate interest in and ownership of professional development efforts.

My first email invite to kick off this preliminary learning sharing was sent out to all 57 FAEs on 19 January 2015 explaining the nature and rationale of such a sharing. From January to April 2015, I shared and updated, through emails, the developments of my AR study. [Table 4.4](#) below showed the number of responses I received through the series of updates shared (see [Appendix L](#) for details).

Table 4.4 Response Dynamic of FAEs on Project Update

Sharing	Date of Sharing	Number of responses	Remarks
Email Invite	19 January 2015	10	Refer to <a href="#">Appendix L</a> for details of email responses by FAEs
Sharing 1	26 January 2015	4	
Sharing 2	8 February 2015	0	
Sharing 3	23 February 2015	1	
Sharing 4	18 March 2015	2	
Sharing 5	17 April 2015	2	

#### 4.6.3 The Reflect Step of ELC 2

There were outstanding issues that had emerged from the “Act” stage to the “Reflect” stage of ELC 2 that could foreseeably contribute further to the inquiry of this CPD initiative as an on-going investigation. These issues could form the next iterative cycle of this AR study should this investigation be continued. However, where the writing of this thesis was concerned, the scope of this research report covered only up to ELC 2.

Firstly, although the TCWs had indeed been effective in equipping the FAEs with the technical competence to use the LMS and the e-Portfolio, it remained to be seen if the FAEs would respond favourably to my CPD

initiative. So the next area of focus would need to address how to elicit support for my CPD initiative from the FAEs.

Beyond equipping the FAEs with the technical competence in using the e-Portfolio, the FAEs had also demonstrated difficulty in selecting a peer dialogue partner for professional exchanges and sharing on their chosen video excerpts. Perhaps one way would be to provide greater opportunities for the FAEs to develop familiarity with and trust in their peers in order to cultivate a good professional relationship. This could be achieved through events and activities, covering both in-person attendance and online participation to cater to the different work-life profiles of the FAEs. Knowing their fellow FAEs better might enable them to connect easier with a suitable peer to form a pair of dialogue partners.

In addition, a valuable lesson learnt in ELC2 was the practice of maintaining a line of sharing and updating with the FAEs. Through this, I was able to obtain incidental validations, feedback and comments on the actions undertaken on my CPD initiative from the FAEs. This would go a long way in helping me to understand any emerging issues and to make the necessary changes in response to them.

#### **4.7 Providing a Contextual Backdrop to the Discussion of Knowledge Claims**

This chapter, besides providing 'an account of the progress of the research at various stages', also doubled up as a contextual backdrop to the discussion of my findings from the AR study in the next chapter (McNiff & Whitehead, 2010: 239). This would also enable the readers to be better placed to locate, in their own context, the knowledge claimed in the concluding chapter.

## Chapter 5: Findings and their Potential Applicability

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### 5.1 Adhering to a Quality Interpretive Process

This chapter discusses my 'interpretations, what [I] think was the significance of what happened' (McNiff and Whitehead, 2010: 239), in relation to my research question: *"Can professional learning as praxis through action research support the Continuous Professional Development (CPD) of freelance adult educators in the Institute for Adult Learning in Singapore?"* It also traces how this Action Research (AR) investigation has informed my learning. Multi-sourced data were obtained from one-to-one interviews, the Renewal Survey containing a questionnaire and open-ended questions, ongoing engagements with the FAEs and the participants' feedback on the preliminary results. These sources were utilised to triangulate observations to arrive at what would constitute evidence. In addition, I had kept field notes in my research diary whenever I had ad-hoc conversations or dialogues with the participants. Such evidence was then interpreted to answer my research question.

As pointed out in my Methodology Chapter, interpretive knowledge is 'mediated knowledge' (McNiff and Whitehead, 2000: 163). It is the '[i]nterpretive researchers [who] decide who speaks, whose voice is heard, what is edited out from the discourses and what slant is given to an interpretation' (p168). It is critical to constantly remember that potential bias and slants could appear in an interpretive study to influence the data to be interpreted. Habermas' (1976) communicative criteria of comprehensibility, truthfulness, authenticity and appropriateness as cited by McNiff and Whitehead (2010) were adopted to avoid such potential bias and slants in carrying out the research and the writing of the report (p.15).

In applying the criterion of comprehensibility, I was mindful of ensuring a methodical, clear, relevant and logical layout of the content provided throughout my thesis report. This would allow the reader to follow the

arguments and to relate them easily to my research question. The criterion of truthfulness meant I consistently conducted mental checks to ensure the evidence honestly convey the true meaning of the data interpreted in order to answer my research question. The criterion of authenticity ensured I had to honestly report what data had been gathered and observed from the sources regardless of whether they would support, contradict or differ from earlier studies conducted on similar research areas. The criterion of appropriateness ensured I was always aware of not only the relevance of the evidence put forward in relation to my research areas but also the manner in which they were conveyed.

## **5.2 My Research Question and its Sub-Questions**

This action research study was aimed at creating a learning space for both the FAEs and me, as the insider-researcher, whereby the ‘professional learning or growth that comes out of investigating and changing one’s practice or changing the contexts surrounding one’s practice’ would enrich the knowledge and experience acquired thus far (Stack and Bound, 2012:154). Such an effort would enable us to ‘actively contribute and build systems [together] while engaged in [our] own professional growth’ (ibid). Both the research and sub-questions were designed to realise this objective of raising one’s professionalism.

To support my research question, “***Can professional learning as praxis through action research support the Continuous Professional Development (CPD) of freelance adult educators in the Institute for Adult Learning in Singapore?***”, my research sub-questions are:

- a. How will the use of digital technologies in my proposed CPD initiative impact the freelance adult educators’ receptivity towards it?
- b. What are the key influences of the freelance adult educators’ working culture that may shape their receptivity and willingness to participate in my proposed CPD initiative?

- c. How will an educative relationship between the freelance adult educators and the management impact on the broader professionalization agenda?

### **5.3 How will the Use of Digital Technologies in my Proposed CPD Initiative Impact the Freelance Adult Educators' Receptivity towards it?**

The design of my CPD initiative involved the use of digital technologies that included the use of the LMS, the e-Portfolio and video recordings during the VSRD process. The data collected revealed that the FAEs encountered some issues when they participated in the process designed for my CPD initiative. The findings were extracted from the data collected from several sources: outcomes observed during the RPP implementation, the conducting of the TCWs, the quantitative and qualitative data collected from the relevant segments of the Renewal Survey and the semi-structured one-to-one interviews after the survey. In addition, there were also valuable inputs from email correspondences and responses through the preliminary research sharing series after the one-to-one interviews.

### **5.4 The Findings**

The data collected found that the curriculum and process design of my proposed CPD initiative were the major contributors to a less than encouraging receptivity towards the initiative. There were non-technical factors as well.

#### **5.4.1 Curriculum Design**

The effectiveness of the curriculum design hinged on not only the content but on other equally salient aspects such as the time allocation for the learning of knowledge, the clarity of instruction and hands-on activities for practice, to name a few. The findings in this area revealed valuable insights into what considerations would create a good curriculum design for acquiring digital technology competency where the FAEs of IAL were concerned.



In both the Renewal Survey and the one-to-one interviews, the FAEs shared their candid viewpoints on the issue of acquiring the digital literacy required. It could be said that Leesa, in her Interview on 22 August 2014: “I ... struggled with the process and the scariness of having to go through all the technological things...” echoed an overall sentiment expressed by the FAEs. The FAEs were generally found to have encountered difficulties in actually learning the processes involved in using the LMS and the e-Portfolios.

On the issue of creating learning artefacts, there were these viewpoints:

“... I still struggle and I still don’t know how to edit the video”  
(Juliet, Interview, 4 September 2014)

“Just wondering why when I developed [the video clip] on my notebook when I showed it on the screen ... the picture did not fit and the picture was cut at the two ends.” (Kimberly, Interview on 28, August 2014)

There were also challenges in learning how to upload the artefacts:

“... to teach ... the intricate details of uploading that was not so easy.”  
(Jeremy, Interview, 28 August 2014)

“... the process of uploading the artefacts one by one. I don’t know...”  
(Duncan, Interview, 22 August 2014)

The issue of ease of use of the overall system was also raised:

“... the technical requirements have to be the easiest to use, both for AEs and the learners.” (Mora, Renewal Survey, June 2014)

“It is not just the content. It is the whole process of guiding the person on the technical aspect, [including even] how to begin to write the portfolio and I am showing a model to help others in class.” (Kimberly, Interview, 28 August 2014)

“It is the LMS, the process of uploading artefacts one by one. I don’t know. If this whole thing can be made easier, it will be better. One issue is the uploading of the video, it is very slow. People get frustrated as well. I experienced this myself as well.” (Duncan, Interview, 22 August 2014)

“...I still struggle and I still don’t know how to edit the video.” (Juliet, Interview, 4 September 2014)

Thus, these findings showed that in order to create a pleasant and motivating experience in learning technological content, the curriculum design needed to factor in clarity and ease of learning as priority objectives given that technology acquisition in general was not a topic people gravitated towards as duck would to water.

#### **5.4.2 Provision of Time for Acquiring Familiarity with New Digital Technologies**

The findings also highlighted a valid point in respect to the provision of time for acquiring familiarity of use of new digital technologies.

“Maybe you also need to understand our challenge. You have to allow time for people to get used to the thing.” (Duncan, Interview, 22 August 2014)

“One of my concerns is whether I can really muster this technology to help me to do this. I think I can easily overcome that if I spend some time to explore. Because I know it will take quite a lot of time to explore. I think that one can be overcome.” (Juliet, Interview, 4 September 2014)

“Like I said, it was a very deep [learning curve] for me and I am glad I took it and it sets me thinking about, it gives me a chance to put down in writing what I think about and reflect on the certain things. So, that is a good part of it. The other part is I felt, because it is my own fault, I didn’t have enough time to be familiar with the technology. So once you get over the barrier of technology it is not going to be difficult and it is one way of keep ahead and also a way of ... a point of reference for your learners, a visual reference. It is useful if you ask me but I think you need the proviso, the professionalism on the other part.” (Leesa, Interview, 22 August, 2014)

This feedback called for the necessity of including a feasible duration set aside for the FAEs to be familiar and comfortable with the digital technologies that had to be learnt in order to participate with ease and confidence in whatever the activity that was involved.

### **5.4.3 Usefulness of Acquiring a Digital Language as Part of Professional Development**

The data showed that there were FAEs who questioned the usefulness of having to acquire new digital technology competency that would enhance their core competencies as adult educators.

“...it poses a lot of barriers and walls. Especially for those who are less inclined to use it...like theory, after learn it and that is it. They are not going to use it anymore.” (Shawn, Interview, 26 August 2014)

“... technology ... to promote or enhance learning ... an ineffective trainer will be just as ineffective when using technology.” (Mora, Renewal Survey, Open Comments, June 2014)

“... a number of interventions with AEs ....have they significantly improved other than looking technologically sound?” (Luke, Renewal Survey, Open Comments, June 2014)

“... but the way it is being factored in like ... so ... ePortfolio as a ... so I said this... word document and reflection using video is good but to learn the whole process of another language, in order to do this two may deter. So while I agree it helps me and the AEs to look into our professionalization but if we have to learn too many languages, the technology then becomes a barrier and that is why the agree and disagree responses [for this questionnaire item].” (Jeremy, Interview, 28 August 2014)

This finding needs to be understood for its implications for how FAEs would respond to acquiring new digital literacy as mentioned in Chapter 1, as blended learning involving the use of digital technology is the future direction IAL will be moving in keeping with new delivery methods to reach its learners.

### **5.4.4 FAEs' Motivation Driven by Economic Priority**

The findings also raised an interesting and valuable insight into a likely motivator behind the FAEs' choice of participating in digital technology workshops to learn the digital competencies. This involved the scheduling and sequencing of the workshops that were conducted.

Table 5.1 Scheduling and Sequencing of workshops

TTT Workshops for ACTA V5 module cluster			Technical Workshops for LMS and e-Portfolio		
TTT for M3-M4 cluster	5 runs from March to April 2013	33 FAEs attended	TFWs	4 runs in the month of July 2013	24 FAEs attended
TTT for M5-M6 cluster	4 runs from May to June 2013	30 FAEs attended			
TTT for M3-M4 cluster	3 runs from January to March 2014	17 FAEs attended	TCWs	4 runs from February to April 2014	35 FAEs attended
TTT for M5-M6 cluster	4 runs from January to March 2014	18 FAEs attended			

Table 5.1 above showed there were only 24 FAEs who attended the 4 runs of TFW held directly after the end of the TTT workshops in the month of July 2013. In contrast, for the TTT that stretched for four months beginning in March 2013 to June 2013, a total of 63<sup>11</sup> FAEs attended these workshops. It could likely imply the whole series of preparatory TTT workshops had proved too intensive for the FAEs who would be factoring their work commitment with both IAL and their other clients.

Comparing these figures to the TTT workshops conducted in 2014 over a three-month (January to March) rather than the intensive two-month (March to April and May to June) for 2013, there was a higher take-up rate for the TCWs that ran from February – April, 2014 than that for the TFWs conducted in July 2013 alone. This spread over a longer period might have allowed the FAEs greater allocation of time to their work assignments, a real bread-and-butter issue to those freelancing.

Moreover, as described in Chapter 4, the FAEs were encouraged to learn the new digital technology competencies in the event they wished to deliver the new ACTA 5 module. In addition, there was also a curriculum design revision to include the e-Portfolio feature and peer sharing as part of certification to

<sup>11</sup> Noted that these are not unique headcounts as some of the FAEs had attended both clusters of modules if they wanted to provide the facilitation and assessment services for the programme.

allow for a hands-on experience. These factors could have combined to result in a higher take-up rate for the TCWs

#### 5.4.5 Difficulty in Finding a Dialogue Partner of Choice

Data from the Renewal Survey also revealed that FAEs faced difficulty in finding their dialogue partners during the RPP. There were 25 FAEs (49%) who indicated that finding a dialogue partner was a real issue to them and with about the same number, the remaining 26 FAEs (51%) who indicated otherwise. The almost equally divided feedback on whether there was difficulty encountered in choosing a suitable dialogue partner for the RPP was an important one to note. Table 5.2 below also depicted this point regarding the poor participation rate of the FAEs in the RPP.

**Table 5.2 Participation Rate of FAEs in the RPP**

Number of pairs of FAEs formed	Number of dialogue carried out during the RPP	Remarks	
15	0	No records of sharing	Refer to <a href="#">Appendix C</a> for details.
5	1	2 with two-way dialogues 3 with one-way dialogue	

A quote from one FAE, Abby, bore testimony to this: “But I am still not prepared, given some of the calibre of the people around us to openly use and share my e-Portfolio when I really do not know who are in our community and what they are using it for unless I am very confident that we all hold the same type of values within a small little reflective group, you see. And that reflective group has grown together.” (Interview, 28 August 2014)

#### 5.4.6 The Comfort Level

The issue of comfort level in sharing their video recordings and reflection with their peers was one that a number of FAEs voiced in their feedback.

“Yes, in the class, the workshop [the TCW] for example, if that is the group you are going to share with. But people whom I want to share with may not be in the group as well. So, that is why I feel that there will be people who will [not] authentically share because they are obliged to share or to reflect rather. It is not just me, I think. A lot of people as well...some of them may not share and some may share but share very superficially based on whatever requirements but no substance, no depth to it.” (Shawn, Interview, 26 August 2014)

“You know when we share our e-Portfolio, we meant to share the areas we think we have done well and areas we need to improve on. But we don’t want to make this e-Portfolio something diplomatically correct so that everybody get to see but that is not truly what we want to write. It becomes a motion and worst still, for the reflective practice, the next round people are more resistance to trigger the second reflection after the first one. This is coming from the practitioners when I mixed with the ground.” (Nigel, Interview, 28 August 2014)

In addition, data extracted from the LMS to monitor the certification status and the utilisation pattern of the FAEs after the TCWs conducted, as shown in the [Table 5.3](#) below, revealed interestingly that there were 10 of them who did not activate the “Comment” button during the training workshops and therefore did not receive any comments from other FAEs. One common reason given was they had forgotten to activate the “Comments” feature when they posted their e-Portfolio. It could be possible that these FAEs were uncomfortable with having to share their posts and had therefore refrained from activating the “Comment” button.

Table 5.3 e-Portfolio Certification Status and Utilisation Pattern

Cleared certification as at April 2015			Pending certification	Have not started the certification process yet
Posting still up in LMS after certification		Posting removed after certification		
Without comments from FAEs	With comments from FAEs			
10	13	14	14	8

\* Data extracted as at April 2015

The comfort issue could be inferred further from the system data extracted from the LMS as at April 2015 where 37 FAEs were certified since 22 February 2014. It could be seen from [Table 5.3](#) slightly more than one-third of the FAEs (14 out of 37) removed their postings from the LMS after they

cleared their certification. There were only 13 FAEs who retained their postings in the system and had invited other FAEs to provide feedback and comments on their postings. About only 4 of them were still active in using their e-Portfolio to continue their professional sharing with others even after meeting their certification requirement.

Hence, this issue of comfort among the FAEs in opening up spontaneously to the idea of peer sharing and professional dialogue still needed to be addressed by management in getting them to foster a culture of collegiality and open professional exchanges.

#### **5.4.7 Salient Points to Note**

The findings on the use of digital technologies in my CPD initiative offered valuable insights into the FAEs' sentiments towards the use of digital technologies per se. Concerns were expressed on whether, to promote learning, it was necessary to involve the use of digital technology at all. A reluctant receptivity could be detected towards the idea of the use of digital technology that management should note and address. More efforts could be made in this direction to promote receptivity by the FAEs. As my findings suggested, whatever the approach adopted should enable the FAEs to embrace digital technology with ease, enthusiasm and purpose. This could produce a better buy-in to the use of digital technology as part of their work norms.

Another important finding that surfaced concerned the opportunities afforded to the FAEs to foster trust and collaboration among peers through shared learning and professional exchanges. Given the innate nature of freelancing, it is only natural FAEs would have little opportunity for developing a professional relationship. As my CPD initiative required the FAEs to form a paired team, this necessity amplified the lack of professional bonding among co-workers. Finding ways to foster a strong professional bond among FAEs would definitely contribute to IAL's aspired corporate vision of raising

professionalism as this could likely result in greater professional learning through exchanges and sharing.

There were indeed multi-faceted challenges encountered when digital technologies were employed as part of my proposed CPD initiative. These challenges were consistent with those highlighted in the literature reviewed. As my research design incorporated action research that entailed an iterative process, I was able to initiate timely and appropriate changes to leverage on the lessons learnt as they emerged during the investigative process. My research design allowed for effective situation analysis that made identifying in real time the necessary remedial measures to answer my research objectives a possibility.

My research investigation showed that I did not manage to successfully achieve the aim of using digital technologies in the Reflective Practice Process (RPP) phase of my CPD initiative, particularly with the experimentation of using the video stimulated reflective dialogue (VSRD) process. However, the attempt at acquisition of digital competencies was not a lost cause. As Lin (2008) had observed when she acknowledged that technology could be a barrier, the use of e-Portfolios as she saw it could also provide an opportunity to acquire greater technological competency. At the end of the Episodic Learning Cycle 2 (ELC 2), all the active FAEs had successfully acquired technical competence in using the e-Portfolio and LMS. The FAEs were now ready to use the digital technologies to support their CPD efforts should they be called upon to do so.

### **5.5 What are the Key Influences of the Freelance Adult Educators' Working Culture that may Shape their Receptivity and Willingness to Participate in my Proposed CPD Initiative?**

It is vital to identify the working culture of the FAEs in order to understand their motivation, their adopted norms and their subscribed perspectives. Such an understanding is invaluable in facilitating IAL's efforts to professionalize its training fraternity as part of its corporate vision and mission. Matching FAEs'



goals with that of IAL's could be made possible through insights gained into their working culture.

## **5.6 The Findings**

The discussion here is divided into three layers: FAEs as individual professionals, FAEs operating as peers, and between FAEs and Management (me). This approach is selected because it first sought to understand the FAEs' working culture as individuals. These findings are then superimposed on their relations with their peers and management to help gain deeper insights into the last two layers. The data sources to form evidences came from email correspondences and feedback, the Renewal Survey, semi-structured one-to-one interviews, ad hoc discussions with FAEs and professional events conducted by IAL and my experiences in the capacity of manager responsible for the training division in IAL since October 2008.

### **5.6.1 Working Culture of FAEs as Individual Professionals**

The three main characteristics of FAEs' working culture as individual professionals that emerged from the findings are as follows:

Autonomous Agents - In IAL, the FAEs are engaged via a formal contractual agreement known as "Contract for Service" where the scope and content of the services to be rendered are clearly spelled out. However, the FAEs retained the prerogative to decide what, when, where and how they want to work, to participate and to be involved in organisational activities.

As indicated from their engagement history, the FAEs engaged by IAL also service other clients apart from IAL. From the Renewal Survey results (see Section C of Appendix J), 21 (41%) are serving only IAL. Nearly half of the respondents 25 (49%) indicated that they have other clients to serve while the remaining 11 (10%) did not respond to the item. A quarter of them (13 out of 51) preferred to serve a variety of other training providers.

The survey also solicited the various reasons why FAEs prefer to serve beyond IAL. This gave a good insight into the autonomous nature of the FAEs hired by IAL.

“Don’t put all my eggs in one basket.” (Shawn, Renewal Survey, Section C, June 2014)

“I am a life-long learner and would like to learn from a variety of situations and programs.” (Tracy, Renewal Survey, Section C, June 2014)

“Varieties of engagement, as a hedge.” (George, Renewal Survey, Section C, June 2014)

“... uncertainty of number of runs if time is spent solely with one training organisation.” (Carlene, Renewal Survey, Section C, June 2014)

“I like to do a range of training that is different from ACTA and non-WSQ.” (Jeremy, Renewal Survey, Section C, June 2014)

As freelancing meant flexibility to decide what job engagements the FAEs wished to accept and which organisation they opted to serve, they did not have to adhere to employee status in the strict sense of the word. Operating as an autonomous entity, as the findings revealed, had implications for their working preferences.

A Transactional Inclination - IAL has in place a variety of FAE engagement schemes and activities to encourage them to play a more active role in influencing policy development that will ultimately have a direct impact their work engagements with the organisation. Through such events, feedback and comments on upcoming changes as well as new schemes, programmes and initiatives that are in the pipeline are elicited. For mass outreach, the main engagement platforms for such purposes are the Communication Sessions (CS) series and Trainers’ Day (TD) event. For a smaller group, it is the Focused Group Discussions (FGDs) series. For self-development and CPD activities, there are the AE Workshops, AEN Industry Seminar series and Study Visits.

The breakdown figures on the FAEs' participation rate for these activities were rather revealing. The participation rate was high for the CS series and the TD event. For the CS series, the average attendance was between 20 – 22 participants. It increased to 30 - 32 when the topics involved updates on performance management/ evaluation, new IAL strategic initiatives and FAE contract / engagement rate reviews. For the six-monthly TD event, generally there would be more than 20 FAEs who found the time to attend the event. Compared to the FGDs as well as the self-development and CPD activities, the participation rate was dismally low in a single digit bracket.

Comments by FAEs during the one-to-one interviews demonstrated a similar emphasis on participation in events and initiatives:

“How much does this weigh on the renewal contract?” (Juliet, Interview 4 September 2014)

“They are all AEs and AEs have their livelihood to protect.” (George, Interview, 26 August 2014)

“As associate, time is precious and opportunity cost...nine out of ten, the less to do the better.” (Duncan, Interview, 22 August 2014)

“I thought it was [for] contract renewal and so I better do it right.” (Natalie, interview, 26 August 2014)

Both these findings, autonomous agency and transactional inclination of FAEs, could imply that participation was driven by tangible transactional returns where their time was gainfully employed.

Another finding from the outcomes of the RPP and the TCWs conducted during the implementation of the CPD initiative revealed a similar behavioural pattern. The participation rate for the RPP was also dismally low which out of 20 registered pairs, only 2 pairs managed to complete a one-time two-way dialogue. There were only 3 pairs with a one-way dialogue. However, the response rate took a 180° turn when the TCWs were launched. Its purpose was to enable the FAEs to acquire the necessary digital know-how to facilitate the impending launch of the new ACTA V5 programme. Within a

year, a total of 51 out of 57 FAEs had participated in the certification. This indicated that the FAEs had most likely accorded priority to the TCWs because it affected their eligibility for work assignments for the new programme.

The Internal CPD Review Report, (IAL, 2013b) provided another piece of evidence of the FAEs' transactional inclination. This report had indicated that FAEs were interested in transactional CPD activities organized by IAL but run by external agencies such as AEN industry seminars, study visits and conferences. However, there was a waning of interest in transitional and transformational CPD activities such as coaching and mentoring.

Communication Style - The trend of the FAEs' communication style ran parallel to those discernible under the autonomous agent and the transactional mode of conduct. All mass dissemination of information and updates to the FAEs are communicated via email correspondences by the administrative staff. The findings indicated that where job assignment matters were involved, the FAEs' mode of communication with the relevant administrative staff to indicate their interest and any follow-ups was via their mobile phones, either by calling or texting.

On any other issues such as participation in professional gatherings or initiatives, they preferred to reply through email correspondences if they so chosen. Their choice of speedy and instantaneous communication, via mobile phones, for job assignments over the use of email correspondences for other contexts of professional interactions again suggested they placed a premium priority on bread-and-butter issues over those involving perceived extraneous activities.

### **5.6.2 Salient Points to Note**

These insights afforded IAL an understanding into how the FAEs viewed extraneous activities. The findings suggested that the FAEs were concerned with time allocation and usage, most likely to optimise their earning abilities.

In addition, they valued their autonomy to plan their career path and direction. Hence, to elicit participation on their part in extraneous activities, including CPD initiatives, management, through its actions, would need to convince the FAEs of the benefits of factoring in longer terms returns rather than just immediate ones.

Johansen (2007) raised the idea of the importance of “Sensing and Sensemaking” in planning future organisational strategies (p 122). “Insights [drawn] from foresight” that came from sensing was to him a prerequisite to preparing adequately and successfully for future developments (ibid). This idea served as an appropriate reminder to the longer term objectives set by IAL in raising the professionalism of the FAEs hired by the organisation. “Sensing” accurately how the FAEs viewed extraneous activities would be a necessary step in the right direction towards eliciting their support in any CPD initiatives.

### **5.6.3 Working Culture of FAEs Operating as Peers**

Below were the findings on the working culture of FAEs operating as peers.

Function as a One-Person-Operation (OPO) Unit - As mentioned in the segment under “FAEs as Individual Professionals”, FAEs operating as autonomous agents form a crucial aspect of their working culture. FAEs are, by their very nature, accustomed to working as an individual unit rather than as teams. It is thus safe to form the consequent view that FAEs would function professionally like an OPO unit.

My CPD initiative had brought the issue of collaboration to the forefront of the working relationship between and among peers. Having to pair up with a critical friend as a team would upset the accustomed norm of FAEs functioning as OPO units. Any issues arising from upsetting this norm understandably challenged the FAEs who would need to move out of their comfort zone of working individually as freelancers.

It was interesting to note that the Renewal Survey, conducted in June 2014, showed that 88% of the FAEs (45 out of 51) surveyed agreed that the implementation of the RPP encouraged both self and mutual development among the FAEs (see [Table 5.4](#), Q2 below).

**Table 5.4** Renewal Survey Responses on the Professional Development Section

Survey Question	Strongly Agree	Agree	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	No response
Q1. I believe efforts made by IAL at professional development are important to me as an adjunct AE.	24 (47%)	25 (49%)	0 (0%)	1 (2%)	1 (2%)
Q2. The implementation of the reflective practice process (RPP) encourages both self and mutual development among AEs.	16 (31%)	29 (57%)	1 (2%)	4 (8%)	1 (2%)
Q3. The technical process in creating an e-Portfolio presentation can be viewed as a challenge for those who are not tech-savvy.	14 (27%)	26 (51%)	4 (8%)	6 (12%)	1 (2%)
Q4. I support the use of the e-Portfolio by all AEs as a platform to share their unique contributions and works.	9 (18%)	35 (71%)	2 (4%)	5 (10%)	-
Q5. The choice of a suitable dialogue partner or critical friend is a real issue for me.	5 (10%)	20 (39%)	3 (6%)	23 (45%)	-
Q6. I am not comfortable with sharing my performance video with someone else as part of my reflective practice.	6 (12%)	7 (14%)	7 (14%)	30 (59%)	1 (2%)

Nevertheless, it is useful to analyse the reasons for the very low and slow participation rate for the 4-month period of the RPP implementation. Out of the twenty pairs of FAEs formed, only two pairs were able to carry out the entire RPP process with their chosen critical friend as their dialogue partner. From the findings, it was discernible that the FAEs encountered challenges in securing their critical friends. The findings also suggested that the causes of the underlying issues could likely have stemmed from issues of comfort, trust and self-consciousness when they were required to collaborate with another FAE to form at least a two-person team. From the findings, it was further discernible that these three issues generally surfaced in professional settings involving peer professional learning and exchanges.

One such professional learning and exchange setting involved finding a peer partner for the professional dialogue segment of my CPD initiative. Later when the RPP failed to secure the initial targeted number of dialogue pairs, the TCWs phase was implemented where the FAEs went through the experience of exchanging professional learning within a group for each workshop conducted. The sentiments elicited from one-to-one interviews with the FAEs had the common threads of comfort and trust as well as self-consciousness issues running through them.

*Comfort and Trust Issues* - On the issues of comfort and trust, the FAEs' sentiments were centred on themes that involved the approach to critiquing and sharing and also the critical friend. On the theme of approach, the following FAEs had this to say:

“... when we started to talk among ourselves that it is better that we limit our sharing in the e-Portfolio to the extent that we share what we have done well and we share what we should do well.” (Nigel, Interview, 28 August 2014)

“For those who are not interested, upon receiving the materials, they may feel pressured or whatever.” (Pamela, Interview, 28 August 2014)

“Besides this, maybe in our culture, whether it is about perceived threats or competition or genuinely not comfortable to share, using video captures it all and not everyone is ready.” (Philip, Interview, 30 March 2015)

These comments suggested that the FAEs were concerned with the impact of their sharing and critique on their peers. One suggested approach from Nigel was to safely restrict the comments to what oneself had chosen to do or should do rather than those of the peer's.

On the theme of critical friend, the following FAEs had this to say:

“It is more about chemistry and you don't want to offend people.” (Jeremy, Interview, 28 August 2014)

“I tend to withdraw a little because I do not know who the audience are in IAL.” (Abby, Interview, 28 August 2014)

“But people whom I want to share with may not be in the workshop group as well.” (Shawn, Interview, 26 August 2014)

“I think initially we were suggested to find a critical friend but eventually it was open to all, right?” (Nigel, Interview, 28 August 2014)

“Secondly, we don’t know who are watching the video and it can be evidence of performance or non-performance as well.” (Philip, Interview, 30 March 2015)

“When I read someone’s e-Portfolios and if I go and comment, these are seasoned warriors, old-timers, and if I go and comment, then I also have to be very diplomatic. So, it is like if you ask a newcomer, come and comment and if he picks me so I have to be very careful in what I said. These are very true issues because when I read what other trainers comment, you see a lot of diplomacy there. Then I also need to [do likewise]?” (Natalie, Interview, 26 August 2014)

“For us to share our own feelings and our own weaknesses and how we can improve on with some many people that we are not familiar, especially the new AEs when they come in, it becomes a very sensitive issue.” (Nigel, Interview, 28 August 2014)

These comments raised the issue that the “who” rather than the “how” and “what” of peer dialogue was the focal point. This would have missed the intent of conducting professional sharing and exchanges.

Another professional learning and exchange setting involved the induction process where new FAEs were afforded the opportunity of sitting in classes conducted by experienced FAEs. I could see that some of these experienced FAEs had a comfort issue when I received feedback from them that they were uncomfortable with continuing it. Philip, in a one-to-one interview on 30 March 2015, voiced a similar observation:

“...we need times to cultivate and build trust and understanding... some of the senior AEs are not comfortable to facilitate new AEs like myself to sit in to observe. While they may have reputational capital and in this competitive sector, no one will like to share their trade secrets and maybe they see that if the new AEs are doing better, it will mean lesser opportunities for me...”



Nevertheless, there were also encouraging comments relating to the issues of comfort and trust that came from the FAEs during the one-to-one interviews. Examples of these were:

“... the more you share, the more learn, the more you internalise.”  
(Leesa, Interview, 22 August 2014)

“... the LMS and the Portfolio are very good. This is because you can see, you can read and you can learn something.” (Kimberly, Interview, 28 August 2014)

“Because I do believe that when you open up you will get [to know your blind spots], therefore good that you can get someone to comment on what you are doing, every now and then.” (George, Interview, 26 August 2014)

The findings therefore indicated that there were differing viewpoints and attitude towards supporting professional learning and exchanges between and among the FAEs. Out-reach efforts to elicit receptivity towards peer-to-peer ground support from the FAEs that cut across professional experience and career entry points could yield positive outcomes with such viewpoints acting as ambassadors for moving comfort zones and changing norms.

*Self-consciousness* - Another characteristic accompanying this working culture of an OPO unit appeared to be self-consciousness. Several FAEs in the one-to-one interviews expressed a sense of self-consciousness when they had to share their video artefacts with peers. The following were some of such comments:

“For us to share our own feelings and our own weaknesses and how we can improve on with some many people that we are not familiar, especially the new AEs when they come in, it becomes a very sensitive issue.” (Nigel, Interview, 28 August 2014)

“... it is kind of sudden that we now expose ourselves to everybody.”  
(Tara, Interview, 26 August 2014)

“We are very concerned what we put [up] and what people think of us and we are very concerned about what we say about others.”  
(Natalie, Interview, 26 August 2014)

“I feel I don't have enough to share. Maybe that is why I don't share with others.” (Violet, Interview, 26 August 2014)

“... they may be feeling that I am not good enough to comment.”  
(Shawn, Interview, 26 August 2014)

These comments could suggest the FAEs lack self-assuredness of their competency to participate in professional sharing and exchanges.

However, as in the cases of comfort and trust issues, there was one notable comment from a FAE who shared how he handled the issue of self-consciousness. He said he was prepared to support the CPD initiative for the following reasons:

“Personally, I think this is a good thing .... if this is about professional development rather than performance measurement, we can honestly view for ourselves our strengths and weaknesses, take stock of what action plan we want to execute to improve.... we can then view again the next time we carry out the remedial action plan and see if we have rectified or improved, it is a good tool for self-improvement and if peer are willing to share, it will be a good sounding board. I am prepared to support the initiative.” (Philip, Interview, 30 March 2015).

A Guarded Sense of Privacy - Given the transactional predilection of FAEs as discussed in the segment under “FAEs as Individual Professionals”, the natural development of a guarded sense of privacy could be expected in their interactions with peers. This was another discernible characteristic in the comments elicited during the one-to-one interviews with the FAEs. The following were some of such comments:

“An experienced AE asked me very bluntly, why she should teach me how to conduct the module since it will only make the pie smaller for her.” (Scott, Renewal Survey, June 2014)

“But I find that as adults when we did our reflection, we will not share with other people.” (Pamela, Interview, 28 August 2014)

“...it becomes very resistant for people to just share with any unknown people.” (Nigel, Interview, 28 August 2014)

“I am also concerned about what I put up there is being read by a lot of people.” (Natalie, Interview, 26 August 2014)

Thus, enabling the FAEs to appreciate the benefits of peer sharing and exchanges as means for self-professional development would be a step in

the right direction in assisting them to embrace a new norm of collaboration and collegiality-building.

There was also an inspiring comment from Haley elicited from the Renewal Survey that touched on this issue of collaboration and collegiality-building: “I believe as an AE, [we] must have a sharing mind-set which is one of the professional values. Thus, to be an IAL AE, this must be made mandatory to instil a culture of collaborative learning.” IAL could enlist the help of such FAEs who shared similar professional vision and values in building collegiality and collaboration among the FAE fraternity.

#### **5.6.4 Salient Points to Note**

The findings highlighted a crucial point where peer relationship was concerned. Given the design of my CPD initiative, the FAEs’ had to move out of their comfort zone of functioning as an OPO unit when confronted with the need to collaborate with peers. The issues of comfort level, trust, self-consciousness and a guarded sense of privacy that surfaced to test the peer-to-peer relationship needed to be addressed in order for this CPD initiative, and any other such professional development efforts for that matter, to be a realisable goal.

Towards this end, efforts by management to build self-assuredness and know-how in the FAEs to handle peer professional dialogue and sharing in different contexts and forms would be a move in the right direction. The overall findings indicated there were issues of comfort and trust. To allay these sentiments, management could provide occasions for trust building and developing a sense of comfort between peers that catered for pace and variety.

#### **5.6.5 Working Culture between FAEs and Management (Me)**

Below are the findings of the working relationship adopted by FAEs towards management:

Management as Client Rather Than Employer - It is important to identify the working relationship between FAEs and management. This would facilitate an insight into understanding the behaviour of FAEs towards CPD programmes initiated by IAL as part of its corporate goal of professionalising the FAEs. It is fair to assume that the very nature of operating as freelancing entities would define the working relationship between the FAEs and IAL / management. This is because this status of freelancing carried an implied working relationship.

Under such a circumstance, IAL would be viewed as a client rather than an employer by the FAEs whereby the latter are rendering a professional service rather than being employed by the organisation. They work under the “Contract for Service” scheme in which they have the freedom to accept or reject any job assignments. They are paid based on stipulated engagement fees stated in their contract. Any participation in extraneous activities organized by IAL outside the terms of their engagement would understandably be discretionary on the part of the FAEs.

Hence, as the FAEs are hired as autonomous agents on an assignment basis, it would imply that the usual obligations accompanying full-time employment such as alignment with corporate culture and goals for job security, promotion and bonuses are non-existent. Moreover, their communication and transactional styles of operation, as discussed under the section of “FAEs as Individual Professionals” further lend credence to this autonomous agent entity. As Wallace, a FAE commented:

“...[we choose to be] ... independent professionals ...to be able to pursue as passionately as we can a profession that we enjoy and take pride in. Anything else is often seen as a distraction to that objective” (Renewal Survey, Open Comments, June 2014).

Then, IAL, moving in tandem with such a working relationship with the FAEs, would need to consider how to enlist the FAEs’ participation in extraneous activities launched as part of on-going CPD efforts.

Embracing the “I am my own person” psyche - There was evidence to suggest that FAEs embraced and valued highly the “I am my own person” psyche as part of their work values. This could be seen from the following comments made by the FAEs on this topic:

“Most adults use a set of values and beliefs to guide the macro direction of their lives. When the environment AEs [adult educators] operates in is deemed as ‘in conflict with such values’ or ‘unfavourable’, they would react or manage differently”. (Tracy, Email response, 3 February 2015)

“There are professional differences and I can’t expect IAL to change for my benefit. I therefore have to exit gracefully.” (Luke, Renewal Survey, Open Comments, June 2014)

“...there are those who are strongly against this video-sharing and they are prepared to leave...” (Shawn, Interview, 26 August 2014)

The last two comments, in which there were a couple of FAEs who were even ready to leave the organisation when they felt they could not align with certain directions undertaken by it, accentuated the importance the FAEs attached to this “I am my own person” psyche. As such, management needs to recognise its underlying influence on FAEs’ choices and factor it in their working relationship and CPD strategies involving them.

#### **5.6.6 Salient Points to Note**

The insights gleaned into the working relationship between FAEs and management pointed out that, in matters involving the implementation of CPD initiatives, it is imperative for management to win both the “heads” and “hearts” of FAEs. Appealing to the “heads” of FAEs meant that management needed to link their participation in CPD initiatives to an eventual tangible pay-out in enhancing their professional competency, which in turn strengthens their employability. This is important because the FAEs viewed any corporate activities, apart from those stated in their service contracts, as outside their contractual job-scope. Participation in extraneous activities was weighed in terms of opportunity costs.

As to winning their “hearts”, in management’s decisions on CPD directions and strategies, management needs to respect and bear in mind constantly, the serious regard the FAEs placed on their “I am my own person” psyche as part of their working values. This respect needs to be translated in concrete terms via inclusive actions on the part of management when formulating CPD strategies. This could be done through consultations and invites to sit on CPD committees or task groups.

### **5.7 How will an Educative Relationship between the Freelance Adult Educators and the Management Impact on the Broader Professionalization Agenda?**

The power of leadership in any organisational structure is laden with a very real potential for emancipation or, conversely, subordination. I concur with McNiff and Whitehead (2000) that ‘[a] powerful stimulus for the realisation of deep-level potential is human interaction’ (p. 109). In an organisational setting, such a potentiality occurs whenever there is interaction between the people working there. I also agree with Karmel, Bound and Rushbrook (2013) that it is ‘through such interaction that knowledge is shared and created’ (p. 15).

I am of the view that in any organisational initiative or intervention, whether it results in success or failure depends largely on the relational dynamics of those leading and those led. Hence, I have selected this last topic as part of the sub-research questions to examine the impact of an educative relationship on my CPD initiative. This section explores the topic of “educative relationship” from two angles of interactions: me with the FAEs and the FAEs with me. The findings relating to the FAEs are obtained from field notes that capture the ad-hoc conversations with FAEs, one-to-one interviews, email correspondences, FAEs’ feedback and personal observations at events run by IAL.

## **5.8 Setting the Stage for Discussion**

### **5.8.1 What is an “Educative Relationship” to me?**

The basic element in an educative relationship is the presence of an exchange, be it ideas, skills, attitudes or values. The exchange exists because there is a mutual and compatible interest for the parties involved. While relationships in themselves are created and influenced by surrounding conditions or context, an educative relationship has an added layer of the effect of the individual's overall make up that determines the quality of that relationship. There are two facets to the emergence of an educative relationship. First, when learning about oneself and one's surroundings occur as a result of a relationship. Secondly, when an individual positively influences others to embark on a similar journey of learning in their shared environment through his or her actions.

### **5.8.2 My Values and Beliefs**

It is useful at this point to elaborate how my values and beliefs have guided and directed my actions and thoughts to-date as the training manager in-charge. Writing this segment also enables me to conduct my 'personal validation' by checking my 'ontological ... and political values' against my findings and knowledge claims (McNiff and Whitehead 2010:194).

The values I embrace are respect, helpfulness, care and responsibility. They accrue from my beliefs as a Buddhist. In Buddhism, there is this Buddhist doctrine, 'dependent origination', which 'teaches that all beings and phenomena exist or occur only because of their relationship with other beings or phenomena. Therefore, nothing can exist in absolute independence of other things or arise of its own accord' (NSIC, 1983:62). This doctrine embraces the sanctity of all lives and therefore, according them undifferentiated respect is an important observance. Implied in this doctrine are the values of care and responsibility. When one is conscious that 'nothing can exist in absolute independence of other things or arise of its own accord',

one is made aware that what impacts others will eventually come to impact oneself, either directly or indirectly (ibid: 62).

The values of care and responsibility then become a natural self-expression because others' joys and sufferings become one's own joys and sufferings. McNiff and Whitehead's (2000) observation on the issue of caring echoed a similar realisation: 'When people care about one another they create identities that are committed to autonomy in life-enhancing practices. Discourses *about* care are discourses *of* care. When people do not care about one another they aim to control the creation of other peoples' identities, and turn them into the kind of person they want them to be' (p. 104).

An educative relationship between individuals occurs separate from the emotional outcome of the experience, encounter or interaction. Learning about oneself and one's surroundings can only occur amidst reason and reality. To examine whether, through my interactions with the FAEs in implementing this CPD initiative, an educative relationship had been fostered, my discussion examined a few of the incidences in which such phenomena had occurred.

## **5.9 Me with the FAEs**

I had chosen three pieces of evidence I found that profoundly impacted on my self-learning in the role of management and leader. One concerns an event and two are one-to-one dialogues with two FAEs.

### **5.9.1 "The Pairing Up" Episode**

One of the opportunities for learning presented itself during ELC 1 that involved the implementation of the RPP, which was supposed to stretch from September 2013 to March 2014. The VSRD process required a dyad arrangement in which FAEs, as participants, would need to pair up with a "critical friend" to conduct professional exchanges and sharing. The paired individuals would also double up as "working partners" under an engagement



scheme for the ACTA V5 programme where they would be working in pairs instead of individually.

The objectives of this activity were two-fold. One was to provide the FAEs a platform for peer learning as part of their professional development. As a by-product of the process, the hope was for them to build collegiality and foster collaboration. Another was to prepare the FAEs for the impending changes of using digital technologies in the WSQ training landscape. In addition, I saw that this was my responsibility as manager of the training division within WDA to ensure the FAEs hired by IAL were future-ready to support the direction set by WDA in moving towards e-mobile learning.

As the saying goes, “It looks good on paper.” The ground reality was another issue altogether. There were several challenges encountered in the implementation of the RPP. As shared in preceding sections, the problems were multi-faceted. One structural issue of the RPP that surfaced involved the pairing of FAEs as critical friends. I could see that this “pairing up” requirement produced considerable discomfort for the FAEs. This was evident from the responses of the FAEs in registering their dyad partners.

Two weeks after the announcement briefing, carried out on 16 August 2013, to inform the FAEs of the impending implementation of the RPP, the first 10 pairs were registered within a couple of weeks after the briefing. Subsequently, the momentum of registration trickled. After a period of 4 months, only another 10 pairs were formed. Even then, only 2 pairs conducted a two-way dialogue while another 3 pairs managed a one-way sharing. The rest of the FAEs were inactive.

I respected their decision not to participate in an activity that obviously generated discomfort for them. I sensed they could be uncomfortable with the implications of peer professional exchanges, among them being to share their performance videos for peer comment. It occurred to me that it was realistically difficult to find a critical friend among the pool of FAEs with whom they would not have sufficient working interactions to form collegial ties and

trust. I could see it was impractical and insensitive to expect a ready response to pairing up with peers.

This led me to ponder on a win-win solution that would enable management and the FAEs to meet in the middle. In my earnest search for a viable solution, it dawned on me that the FAEs had to be digital-ready for the eventual launch of the new ACTA V5 programme. This was already one of the problems highlighted by the FAEs during their feedback. Hence, I embarked on ELC 2, the TCWs phase, with a rationalised hope that the FAEs would be willing to experiment with peer sharing as part of their professional skills acquisition that would eventually benefit their work engagements. This move resulted in a large majority of FAEs participating in the certification workshops. The FAEs who completed their certification workshops thus gained an experience in the peer sharing process. Understanding their sensitivity to peer sharing, the FAEs were not asked to continue this activity after their certification unless they so wished.

From this “pairing up” episode, I cherish, even deeper, my values of care, helpfulness, respect and responsibility that had stood me in good stead without which arriving at a win-win solution for both parties would not have materialised. This episode had also allowed me to gain a deeper understanding into the motivations and preoccupations of the FAEs. It made me more conscious of the fact that in a world preoccupied with achieving bottom-lines and tangible outcomes, it is crucial that those in management position, more acute as one advances in seniority, to be continuously conscious of power decisions and their accompanying impacts.

### **5.9.2 “In Conversation With ...”**

Since I took appointment as the training manager, holding conversations with the FAEs through one-to-one interviews, feedback platforms and email correspondence is a practice I initiated as a means of maintaining contact with them in view of their working *modus operandi*. Through such efforts, I hoped to foster a collaborative and inclusive working relationship with the

FAEs. Among the numerous conversations I had with the FAEs on the topic of my CPD initiative, one particular conversation struck a deep chord in me. It was a one-to-one interview held on 28 August 2014 with a FAE, Abby. Below is her side of the conversation:

An Excerpt from the Conversation with Abby

Abby: I am a supporter of RPP which, in all forms, rests on the foundational application of a set of teaching philosophy combined with a unique set of beliefs/values that an AE hold dearly to.

As someone new to IAL and have not done a single set of training within IAL, I find the practice of RPP with the use of critical friend and video a challenge. To me, an appointment of a critical friend means that I can appoint someone who professionally upholds AE values, and whose judgement I can trust, in order for RPP to be practically effective. At this moment, I do not have an in-depth understanding of any AE in IAL whose judgment can be relied on for improvement purposes. At the same time, I do not wish to exercise RPP as a desktop exercise, just for performance evaluation purposes.

May I suggest for IAL novices like myself to first start RPP with an e-portfolio that documents self-reflection based on video recording and critical self-reflection? This may perhaps be more effective as a start, and then the appointment of a critical friend can take place at a later stage. If RPP is now a policy that I have to abide as an AE, I will comply and leave it to IAL to appoint a critical friend on my behalf.

(Abby – Interview, 28 August 2014)

Abby has joined IAL as an FAE for 2 years already. By her own choice, to-date, she has no experience in facilitating any WSQ programmes offered by IAL. Abby represented a cohort of our newer FAEs whom we engaged beyond offering just facilitation and assessment services. She had been engaged for assignments in programme review and development of courseware and curriculum.

Her views and sentiments into the “pairing up” issue afforded me a perspective from a fresh FAE’s angle of sight. This group of FAEs, “novices” as Abby put it, did not enjoy the “privileges” that accompanied seniority of work experience in IAL. Those with seniority of experience would find it comparatively easier to pair up with a critical friend, unlike them. The issues

of trust, comfort and judgement she mentioned in our conversation were real concerns to fresh FAEs too.

Abby's comments made me realise I had inadvertently contradicted my own values of care and respect for others' sensitivities and vulnerabilities. Although the RPP participation was on a voluntary basis, the mode of conducting the activity resulted in an encroachment on a very basic level – the FAEs' comfort level of trust and privacy. As I mentioned earlier, immediately after the TCWs phase ended, I clarified my position to the 15 FAEs who volunteered their time for the one-to-one interviews and at the subsequent Communications Session held on 5 September 2014 that they were not required to continue their video peer sharing activities but could do so if they wished if they were comfortable with their peer dialogue partner. As there were some who were absent for both these events, to ensure that all FAEs were in the know, I emailed all FAEs to update them of this latest clarification. Reflecting on Abby's inputs, I valued her honesty that helped me appreciate the issues she highlighted in the RPP phase of implementation that led to the ensuing change.

Another learning episode came from another FAE, George. His concern was about the clarity of communication which he rightly voiced.

#### An Excerpt from the Conversation with George

Interviewer: Right or not? That was kind of the rationale [for rushing out the certification workshop and get people to be certified]. But I agree with you that perhaps it was the messaging and clarity was not there and so create a bit of hype.

George: So actually now that you have explained, there are two objectives. One is to tell people that if they don't know about the portfolio and when they facilitate V5, it is better that you get yourself trained; that is one objective. I think the objective was clear and was achieved. The other objective is to embrace this as your reflection platform. Longer term, [you need to know] how to use it, that one [objective] did not come out.

Interviewer: Yes, I don't think so but [the second objective], not yet. So far those who want to do V5, they have to accept [it], because it is a requirement, [no choice].

George: Yes, they need to do that.

Interviewer: After that, nobody will continue to use it, the e-Portfolio. Unless there is another way, I think I will have to explain this further on the 5 September.

George: Yes, not many know. I don't know [that] it is your intent or not. When it comes to our performance review, you need to see our portfolio, right? Do all of them know?

(George – Interview, 26 August 2014)

George has been with IAL for almost four years. He is engaged for a range of services that included being i-Team project head as well as training and assessment assignments for WSQ programmes. George frankly highlighted the FAEs' sense of disorientation when there was a switch from the "pairing up" requirement to group sharing of learning artefacts via the e-Portfolios in the transition from the RPP to the TCWs phases.

This was important because the FAEs, who are on a contract service basis, would not be physically present at the same time for a Q & A session to iron out any queries or misunderstandings. It appeared that my mode of communication via email correspondence failed to deliver clarity on this issue. Moreover, clarification done over email correspondence might be rather tedious if there are grey areas still outstanding after the initial reply.

The key lesson I learned from George is the importance of clarity and speed of communication of especially vital information. Given the *modus operandi* of the FAEs in their work arrangements, whatever the mode of communication I employed needs to factor in these objectives.

### **5.9.3 An External Validation: Through the Eyes of the FAEs**

As an effort at validating my claim that I had lived up to my espoused values in the discharge of my managerial duties, providing unsolicited external validations from the FAEs would be in order (see [Appendix M](#) for details). Their affirmations of me having lived up to my espoused values are indeed

gratifying. I received these three pieces of feedback from Debra, Haley and Duncan, among others, during a sharing of the preliminary results of this research study.

#### External Validation 1

“I applauded [you] for your commitment in building a collegial and collaborative environment for AEs at IAL. Such personal call is hardly observed in both public and private ATOs as profit making is fundamental in sustaining the business. Relationship with freelance AEs tends to be mainly transactional. During my personal encounters with you, you have always been open, encouraging and showing concerns to the area of works that I'm involved in.

I believe this disposition is upheld by your team as well. Despite their busy schedule, they always make time to listen, share and provide help when required. Such relationship forged truly goes beyond transactions. Transformation has occurred on a personal level. Thanks for setting this learning and nurturing culture.”

(Debra – Email feedback for my research sharing,  
22 and 23 February 2015)

#### External Validation 2

“Your path in this action learning of professional development for AEs in the WSQ system is a great initiative. I would like to be part of it and keen to contribute to the well-being of every soul in our society. It's my passion too which is aligned to your vision of making a difference among the freelance educator in the WSQ system.

I being in the WSQ system for 10 years, do support this initiative as I too had gone through both great meaningful developments and challenges to continue to be in this passionate profession in making a difference in peoples' life holistically.

I feel fortunate to have met you and working with you Tat Suan, sincerely it is rare to have leaders like you who engage us compassionately from your heart.”

(Haley – Email response to comment on my research sharing,  
23 January 2015)

#### External Validation 3

“Anyway, it has been really a long ride with you since the early days of IAL and I truly appreciate your support and wise counsel. Your steady hands has steered IAL through the formative years and laid a strong

foundation for its growth to present day. I salute your untiring and undivided attention to the welfare of AEs. Thanks a million!”

(Duncan, Email feedback to my farewell message,  
10 Apr 2015)

## **5.10 The FAEs with Me**

### **5.10.1 The Ripple Effect of Influence**

“To lead by example” – is a motto I adopt as a frequent reminder when discharging my managerial duties. I believe in humanistic leadership where each person, in one’s working environment, be seen as a living being with all their strengths and potentials and not as mere office digits to meet set key performance indicators. I see the managerial role as a unifying medium between the goals of a corporation and that of the individuals working within it.

It is only through educational learning between people working in an organisation that a shared destination and aspirations can be cultivated into fruition. Hence, those in positional power possess the power of influence, through role modelling, to effect mutual holistic growth, both professionally and socially. If I demonstrated an “up-side” instead of a “down-side” mentality towards issues I encountered in my managerial role and functions, then my positive actions in the workplace could similarly influence those around me.

### **5.10.2 Authentications**

Below are two sample testimonies in which the FAEs said my leadership had influenced their outlook and actions.

#### An Excerpt from the Conversation with Debra

“Thank you for sharing your thoughts, observation and support to enhance and enable the development and growth of AEs in the CET environment. Without the visionary approach, balancing between demands from policy standpoint and existing AEs’ capabilities, the works and future of AEs may be mainly transactional, stagnant and

limiting. Thank you IAL for the opportunities of growth and learning. Deeply appreciated that.”

I have the privilege to grow, thrive with WSQ and seek personal aspiration in the CET environment. Your sharing, thoughts, summary of the establishment of WSQ and research findings from Karmel, Bound & Rushbrook (2013), had somewhat reflect my development from an in-house trainer, acquaintance with WSQ, working in the WSQ system, to seeking beyond WSQ. It is heartening to know that at IAL's strategic level, the state of AEs, especially being future-ready, is of concern at the policy level.”

(Debra – Email feedback for my preliminary research sharing,  
22 February 2015)

Debra had training experience both as a full-time in-house trainer and later as a full-time FAE. She was inspired by my efforts at enabling the FAEs to grow professionally to “seek personal aspiration” herself to further her own growth in the “CET environment” (ibid).

Carlene was another example of a FAE who developed an educative relationship in which my personal conduct as the training manager had influenced her own outlook and behaviour as an adult educator. She was among those FAEs who supported the RPP and was active in using the e-Portfolio whenever she could.

#### An Excerpt from the Conversation with Carlene

“One of the many points which resonated with me was that as adult educators, we need to be good models to our learners by practising what we preach in our engagements with them. While we seek to share learning points with our learners, we remember to treat them with respect and make adjustments to their personal needs. This is true of your engagements with us. What I truly value is the fact that you strike a balance between policy and person and provide platforms for continuous conversations and learning. You played a major role in establishing IAL as a premium institute for WSQ Adult Educators by trusting us AEs and creating an AE-centric environment.

As adult educators in the field, we continually ask ourselves how we can be better in what we do so that we can do more for our learners. I personally benefited from your initiative of professionalising freelance AEs and introduction of the e-Portfolio platform for self-reflection.”

(Carlene – Email invite to my preliminary research sharing,  
23 January 2015)



She revealed that she remembers to “treat [our learners] with respect and make adjustments to their personal needs [just as] your engagements with us”. It is indeed rewarding to know of the positive influence I had on her.

### **5.11 From Seeds to Fruits**

Planting the seeds of an educative relationship, through one’s personal actions and words based on one’s values, and nurturing those seeds to bear fruits, through steadfast commitment, is an exhilarating and rewarding experience. I, myself, have been further enriched by my interactions with the FAEs during this action research study. There were a variety of emotions I had the opportunity to experience – epiphany moments, disappointments, inspiring outcomes, to name a few that added to the spice of life in IAL.

An equally important value of this interaction came from the positive influence I had exerted on the FAEs in their professional development, as the findings had demonstrated. This had always been my personal objective, as the training manager, to inspire mutual professional growth within my work environment where its individuals aspired towards achieving personal and corporate growth against a background of diversity. I was glad that my AR study had afforded me an opportunity to achieve this. I am convinced that my firm belief in educative relationship had built bridges of trust between the FAEs and me. Such bridges had facilitated my crossing the obstacles that emerged during the implementation of my CPD initiative. It is also my belief it is this educative relationship that permitted my CPD initiative to achieve its fundamental goal of enabling the FAEs to have their first taste at experiencing peer sharing and learning for their mutual professional development via the digital platform. Where this leads to is anybody’s guess but the seeds have been sown. From seeds to fruits – it was a gratifying sight indeed!

## **5.12 What Do the Findings Mean for IAL?**

Several important implications could be extracted from the findings obtained that would be in the interest of IAL to pay heed as the hiring organisation.

### **5.12.1 The Use of Digital Technologies in IAL: Issues, Solutions and Directions**

The findings on my research also highlighted pertinent issues that would impact the objective of building a collaborative ethos and collegiality among the FAEs in the drive towards raising professionalism within IAL. One way of achieving this would be to harness the use of digital technology.

Introducing a new Technical Training Programme (TTP) – As the findings had shown, it was important to have an effective process of training digital competency. Hence, introducing a new TTP that would facilitate easy learning of the digital technical skills would be a right step. The curriculum of this TTP would consolidate all of the learning materials into an easy to follow online guide and self-help resource. For all practising FAEs, they could also use the TTP as on-going refresher resources. More importantly, the TTP would be part of the induction programme where new entrant FAEs could prepare themselves to learn how to use the various digital technologies in IAL. Once they were conversant and certified competent, they could then be assigned work projects.

The TTP could also be offered as a public-run workshop to all external AEs engaged by other training organisations, focusing particularly on how to design and develop the use of the e-Portfolio tool through our IAL Adult Educators' Network (AEN). Currently, the AEN is already offering its 6,000 members CPD programmes to the practising AEs in the CET community. This would also encourage the AEs working outside IAL to appreciate and adopt the use of reflection and promote professional sharing in the community.

Extending the TPP to all external AEs would also be in line with the impending introduction of the Adult Educators' Professionalization (AEP) scheme where the e-Portfolio tool would be a useful tool to acquire both for the FAEs within IAL as well the external AEs to create their own e-Portfolios for use in the AEP scheme.

The AEP Scheme - The plan was to launch the AEP pilot scheme for the AEs practising within the TAE CET sector in end 2015. This would ultimately be extended to the AEs in other CET sectors such as Nursing, Early Childhood and Social Services. The AEP scheme is a professional charter offering three levels of professional titles to recognise adult educators operating in the various CET sectors. AEs could apply for the professional title by showing evidence of fulfilling the stipulated CPD activities and professional artefacts to substantiate their experience and competence. To produce their artefacts, FAEs could utilise the e-Portfolios to create self-profiles of themselves and provide evidence of professional experience and achievements in their field of expertise.

These efforts would support the professionalization agenda of WDA where AEs are active practitioners taking ownership to adopt the use of learning technology to support their professional practice and build a strong professional core through community sharing and learning.

### **5.12.2 The Fluid Dynamics of the IAL-FAEs Engagement**

To engage the FAEs effectively, IAL needed to respect and value the FAEs' unique differences and harness their respective strengths. As a public institution endowed with its policy objectives and mandates, it was crucial then that any CPD initiatives introduced and implemented to raise the quality of the FAEs needed to assume a longer range perspective given the FAEs' working culture. Hastiness and an expectation of immediate results would only frustrate any good intentions. For the FAEs, it would be to their advantage to adopt a longer term view towards their participation in CPD

initiatives launched by IAL as this would provide them the cutting edge in training competency within the local training fraternity.

The "fluid dynamics" of the IAL-FAEs engagement needed to be highlighted and understood. The FAEs were beginning to warm up to the idea of CPD interventions as a corporate goal. I believe it was important to maintain this momentum of engagement, especially in instances where the CPD initiatives are created internally by IAL. This was because by the very nature of our contractual engagement, not every FAE was active with IAL and they did have other clients. Then there were some of the FAEs who preferred to be less participative and opted instead to be less responsive. There were also those who embraced the CPD initiatives readily. For this group, their inputs of suggestions and ideas for fresh initiatives or feedback on current ones ought to be elicited.

The figures from the Renewal Survey, June 2014 showed that 30 (59%) of the FAEs indicated that if given a choice, they would dedicate more time to serve IAL solely. This was in comparison to the current 21 (41%) of the FAEs serving only IAL. The high percentage of full-time FAEs wanting to serve IAL could be an indication that they liked or were able to adapt and align to the institutional culture of the Institute. For the Institute, this trend could also mean it would have a stable pool of FAEs to support its functions and provide work assignment stability to the Institute. With this sizeable number, it could serve as an advantage for IAL in meeting its objective to raise professionalism of the FAEs it hired through CPD initiatives.

In the drive towards greater CPD participation on the part of the FAEs, IAL could act as a provider and encourager. It could create platforms and avenues for their professional development, individually and as a collective group, and generate opportunities for out-reach efforts to elicit their participation. However, it was highly advisable that every FAE be given the autonomy to chart their own CPD pathway and at the pace they deem fit for themselves. Above all, it was crucial to establish clear communication

channels that were convenient and effective to the working hours of the FAEs to facilitate conversation, feedback and dissemination.

### **5.12.3 Management as Driver and Partner**

The findings from examination of the dynamism of the FAEs' working culture within their work environment in IAL could provide signposts for the future organisational direction in the area of CPD initiatives adopted by IAL. These point to an approach whereby management should play the roles of driver and partner in future CPD initiatives designed for the FAEs in order to secure positive outcomes in working towards creating a community of practitioners among the FAEs.

Management as Driver - The analogy of "driver" succinctly conveyed the role and function of the IAL in any CPD initiative. The IAL, as a public entity, acted as the role of the owner of public buses serving private individuals who were at liberty to board and alight along the scheduled service route. These service routes corresponded to the implemented CPD initiatives. The FAEs played the roles of the private individuals who were at liberty to choose if they wish to board these bus services. Once on it, they were free to alight any time, at any stop and re-board the same service or a different service at a different time. The idea was to eventually arrive at their chosen destination via different times and routes.

This analogy would best satisfy what were acceptable and workable for the FAEs as understood in the sections under "FAEs as Individual Professionals" and "Between FAEs and Management". It fulfilled the three conditions of being autonomous agents, "I am my own person" psyche and viewing management as client rather than employer. The freedom of choice and being their own-person were addressed. Management, in formulating CPD strategies, needed to be mindful of their "driver" role in its attempts to achieve positive outcomes.

Management sitting in the driver seat would also entail making efforts in the following areas:

*Winning over the “Heads” of the FAEs* - Management would need to address the issue of winning over the “heads” of FAEs in its CPD programmes. The overarching significance of the three conditions cited in the above paragraph coupled with the FAEs’ transactional inclination should be addressed with seriousness. This primal set of conditions necessitated that management provided the link between CPD participation and improved professional competency that could potentially translate into better earning potential. FAEs needed to be convinced of the sagacity of not only catering to immediate “bread and butter” issues but also the longer-term returns. CPD participation needed to be viewed by them as bearing worthwhile returns over the longer term in building up life skills. Hence, FAEs needed to see that CPDs, peer dialogue etc., were of benefit to their professional career. It would make them better trainers who would have a greater chance of employment.

Winning over the “heads” of the FAEs would also need to include addressing the peer-to-peer issues of comfort, trust, self-consciousness and a guarded sense of privacy. From these issues, it could be seen that it was important for the FAEs to come to regard peer professional dialogues and sharing as opportunities to build professional competency and identity. In addition, as the findings indicated, the FAEs had demonstrated reticence in writing the professional sharing and exchanges. This could be attributed to not being familiar with the decorum of the language to use, the subject matter to broach and the approach to adopt under such a context. Part of the next Episodic Learning Cycle (ELC) could include the development of a course where its curriculum would address these issues as its objectives. It would be useful to introduce a programme on “Conducting Professional Dialogue Exchanges: Language, Content, Professional Courtesy and Ethics”.

*Getting the FAEs on board* - Management needed to identify the effective platforms that could enable FAEs to gain an appreciation and understanding

of how the role CPD programmes and initiatives could assist them to build competency and a professional identity. It had to assume a proactive role to ensure FAEs actively engage the organisation by securing strong participation and responses from them. Therefore, management must be approachable, friendly and respectful in its dealing with the FAEs, ensuring they knew they were valued partners and their feedbacks were taken seriously. Management could initiate frequent outreach efforts that catered to differing responses and interest expressed by FAEs ranging from silent response to active response. Having target groups would allow for the customisation of FAEs' personal goals and aspirations against organisational ones.

Management as Partner - The idea of partnering implied a sharing of any risks and profits arising in a relationship. This adoption of an equal standing predilection in the IAL-FAEs relationship would likely yield a better return in efforts made towards professional development for the following reasons. Any "top-down" approach would defeat the purpose as the FAEs cherish their autonomous agent entity and uphold their "I am my own person" value seriously. Hence, the "hearts" of the FAEs had to be won over by genuinely giving them a voice and recognising them as an integral stakeholder of the CPD momentum. A FAE, Nigel, had raised a similar need when he said, "... it is rare opportunity not to be seen as contractors and their feedback is taken". Thus, the objective was to reach out to every single FAE to ensure that they knew and felt they were not treated like individual "contractors" but rather as valued partners.

Platforms catering to one-to-one dialogue with management, small groups or mass outreach could be designed to serve as avenues for FAEs to voice their opinions and provide feedbacks. Such a platform, known as the i-Team Project Scheme, had already been made available in IAL. Under this scheme, projects were commissioned specially for specific goals such as the assessment system review, market survey for freelance engagement fees and CPD system review, to name a few. FAEs had to first volunteer to be included in the potential list of candidates. Only one FAE was appointed to

one team as project head. They were paid for their work as project head that included planning and running the given project.

One such project was commissioned in January 2013. The aim of the 2013 project was to collect feedback from the FAEs on what kind of CPD activities would be useful to them. A FAE was appointed project head to solicit inputs from the rest of the FAEs. There were active and enthusiastic feedbacks and most of the inputs were adopted. Such partnering activities in CPD initiatives launched by IAL are opportunities for the management to fulfil the FAEs' aspiration '....where AEs take active responsibility for their own CPD...' (IAL, 2013b - CPD Review Report, unpublished). Going forward, management needed to make available more of such platforms that partnered FAEs in CPD initiatives within IAL.

This concludes my discussion on the findings of my three research sub-questions. The next chapter highlights the importance of a practitioner adopting action research as a tool for self-improvement and accountability for one's professional growth. It provides my perspectives of how the action research methodology has not only facilitated my study but also helped me in my own professional development.



## Chapter 6: The Experience of Action Research

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### 6.1 The Intent of this Chapter

This chapter serves two functions. First, it reviews the efficacy of utilising AR as a research methodology and a strategy for the development of practice. Secondly, I share how using this AR approach has contributed to my own professional development.

I hope this chapter would enable my peers in managerial positions to appreciate the benefits and challenges of such a research approach and hence, evaluate for themselves its usefulness in their own context. It is my wish that practitioners in managerial positions would see the values of adopting AR as a tool to examine one's practice and provide accountability for choices and actions undertaken that would consequently impact those they lead in their respective organisations.

### 6.2 Some Finer Aspects of Employing AR as a Strategy

In the *Introduction* and *Methodology* chapters, I have explained my reasons for choosing an AR approach, as well as discussing potential implementation issues. Here I would like to draw attention to some finer aspects of employing AR as an OD research strategy by engaging with a perspective offered by Reason & McArdle (2008). They describe 'an action research perspective on organisational development [as] one that encourages continual inquiry, development, and curiosity in ourselves and in those we work with...' (p. 1).

The view proposed by Reason & McArdle (2008) points out that there are inherent benefits embedded AR as an OD research strategy where '... continual inquiry, development and curiosity' could be generated '... in ourselves and in those we work with...' in the course of conducting the AR study (ibid). Such a creative and productive process of improving professionalism in the workplace ought to be valued for itself. Applying this potentiality to my research study, achieving the OD goal of raising the professionalism of the FAEs hired by IAL would necessitate envisioning a

direction and movement that had to include fostering collaboration between IAL and the FAEs it hired, to build over time an eco-system that embraced a shared vision and objectives.

### **6.3 Why an Insider Management AR Study: At an Individual Level**

The next question I had to consider was the kind of role I wanted to play in my research study if I were to achieve this OD objective. Eikeland (2015) had pointed out that there were different kinds of action research approaches that were 'categorized ... according to methods used and the relationship between researchers and practitioners' (p. 2). To fulfil my OD objective, I was of the opinion that my research study would be best served by opting for the 'practitioner action research' in which I would personally be able to determine the texture and direction of my AR study when I interfaced with the FAEs in the course of implementing my CPD initiative (ibid). Hence, by conducting the AR myself, my hope was to develop 'a capacity for self-reflective learning' and to utilise the AR study as an 'invitation to relate to others in more open, authentic and equal relationships' (Reason & McArdle, 2008: 2).

Elucidating Moments of Self-Reflection – Conducting an insider management AR study afforded me, the researcher, the opportunity to benefit, up-close and personal, from experiences the study presented. Since AR has no definitive outcomes nor seeks closure, the experiences were always open-ended with a myriad of potential possibilities. Each work situation that cropped up presented a chance for reflection on its meaning and implications.

The important role of reflection in professional education has been rightfully argued by Moon (2000) as he pointed out that '[a]ction is what counts' where professions 'rely less on factual detail and more on interpretation and understanding of a complex situation' (p. 55). Boud, Keogh and Walker (1985) also reiterate that conscious reflection on one's professional experiences could 'lead to new understandings and appreciations' (p. 19).

During the two Episodic Learning Cycles (ELCs) of my AR study, I had occasion to reflect on events where I had to interpret and understand 'complex situation[s]' (Moon, 2000: 55) that led 'to new understandings and appreciations' (Boud, Keogh and Walker, 1985: 19). During my AR investigation, my reflections enabled me to creatively resolve issues I encountered in fulfilling my leadership role. There were several kinds of reflection I had the occasion to employ.

*Reflection-in-action* – This kind of reflection involved what Schön (1983, 1987) and McLaughlin (1999) described as reflection on an existing situation in real-time whereby a practitioner exercises his/her professional judgement, drawn from tacit knowledge and experience. During the period of conducting my research study I had to make several such professional judgement calls in responding to situations that demanded an “on the spur of the moment” attention. I realised that the more I strived to exercise an all-round view of the situation based on my tacit knowledge and experience, the more satisfying the outcome for the FAEs and me.

One such example was the individual conversations during the one-to-one interviews I had with the FAEs on issues of concerns they brought up about the implementation of my CPD initiative. Some of these FAEs were experienced pioneers who had helped me set up the Institute in the early days. Some of the FAEs saw the initiative as an imposition on their time and a disruption to the core service they were contracted to deliver. Among them were FAEs who were contemplating leaving IAL because of their reluctance to align with the institutional goal of using digital technologies for the delivery of programmes.

Under such circumstances, I had to execute what Schön (1983, 1987) and McLaughlin (1999) described as reflection-in-action to assess the criticality of the situation for each individual FAE, as each FAE had their unique circumstances to satisfy, and then to take the appropriate action to resolve their concerns there and then. Given that these FAEs would only be at the Institute when they had job assignments and only at stipulated times, I had

only that moment to come up with a suitable resolution in order to optimise the contact time I had with them. To arrange for another meeting at a later date and time convenient to both parties would not be an easy task as there would be an opportunity cost for them. By drawing on my experience in change management within such reflection-in-action' moments to provide the appropriate encouragement and timely support in this period of transition and apprehension, it had enabled me to convince the FAEs to adopt a longer-term perspective of the benefits of overcoming the technical challenges of learning the new digital language.

*Reflection-on-action* – Essentially, this kind of reflection, as Schön (1983, 1987) noted, occurs outside the real-time situation in which professionals reflect back and critique their practice from a larger perspective of their professional practice as a whole. This larger perspective encompasses not only professional knowledge and skills but more importantly attitude and ethics as well. This type of reflection necessitates going deeper into the practitioners' sense of professional identity. There were instances during my AR investigation where such reflection-on-action moments occurred. In these moments, I reflected on and critiqued my assumptions and presuppositions on the operating policies and their overall implications from a larger perspective that might have a downstream impact on the FAEs. An example was the proposed change of engagement policy to pair up FAEs to deliver the new ACTA V5 instead of individually.

Another example was the need to divert and change the focus of my research study after having understood the reasons for the poor voluntary participation rate of the reflective practice process (RPP) in my first episodic learning cycle (ELC1). The FAEs were reluctant to support the dyad peer dialogue partnership and quite a large number had technical difficulties with the newly introduced Learning Management System (LMS). This situation had larger implications for the operational impact of getting the FAEs ready to facilitate the new ACTA V5 programme that required them to be very familiar with and competent to use the various digital technologies.

This prompted me to consider the operational readiness of the FAEs, in terms of their digital know-how, to utilise the LMS. I then decided the priority was to ensure the FAEs were well prepared to facilitate the new ACTA V5 programme rather than continuing with the push to implement the RPP. Moreover, previously, I had left the attendance of earlier TFWs solely up to the FAEs' convenience. This had resulted in an uneven state of operational readiness among the FAEs. Hence, I saw the importance of emphasising the need for all FAEs to attend the TCWs to ensure their readiness to support the new programme.

I saw the implications of the FAEs not being able to use the digital technologies downstream. As explained in Section 4.5.3 and 4.6, Chapter 4, the investigation at that point needed to branch out in an entirely different direction from its original start point in order to enable it to explore unplanned developments. It was then necessary to focus on the priority of providing a remedy to the organisational requirement facing the FAEs in being operationally ready for facilitating the ACTA V5 programme.

These I did after much consideration of the surrounding issues. To ensure any inconvenience was kept to a minimum for the FAEs to complete their certification, the workshops were scheduled at intervals and timely reminders were sent to secure their sign-ups for the workshops. This experience gave me an opportunity to question my attitude and ethics as the training manager in-charge – was I discharging my role and function that produced a win-win situation for the FAEs as well as the Institute? Did I assign priority to issues without the conflict of interest?

*Immanent critique* – Another form of self-reflection that I had the opportunity to experience was what Eikeland (2015) termed “immanent critique”... [a] kind of radical self-reflection’ (p.4). He saw “immanent critique” as a process of ‘alternation’ by a practitioner ‘between “back stage” reflection and “on stage” performance’ (ibid: 12). According to Eikeland (2015), ‘[t]he work of immanent critique consists in making potentials or latencies emerge or appear ... [where] whatever is to be shown will show *itself* , or emerge, even

from practices apparently denying its significance or even its existence' (ibid: 4).

These 'potentials or latencies' could 'emerge or appear' from a number of sources (ibid: 4). These sources included 'given and established ways of doing things in *any* discipline [or] school of thought' and even "position" or discourse formation' (ibid: 4). These sources could also accrue from 'making tacit practices, patterns and knowledge explicit'; from 'unfolding inner tensions and contradictions'; from 'exposing "secret", "forgotten" or suppressed knowledge'; and from 'showing preconditions and suppositions [that were] taken for granted' (ibid: 4).

In the course of conducting my AR study, I had opportunities to apply this "immanent critique" as I switched back and forth between my roles as the Training Manager overseeing the day-to-day corporate operations and as an insider-management researcher. There were occasions when I had to reflect on my leadership decisions, mindfully considering whether I was living up to my values and beliefs. I consciously self-critiqued my professional decisions when I confronted emotive issues affecting the FAEs.

This was in keeping with my core values of respect, helpfulness, care and responsibility. In my work engaging the FAEs, I valued the importance of respecting each individual FAEs as an unique self, each with their different background and ability; I valued the opportunity to be helpful in facilitating their professional development; I valued the caring of FAEs in terms of providing a collegial and collaborative work environment for them to operate; and lastly, I valued how we could uphold our sense of responsibility in our respective roles in this shared community.

One such example of applying this "immanent critique" was in living up to my work ethic of being a strong advocate for transformational leadership. So it was natural for me when I assumed my appointment in IAL as the Training Director to be a transformational leader in my engagements with the FAEs. I was well aware of the challenges ahead in convincing the FAEs to go beyond

a transactional mind-set to also embrace a transformational working culture. In all my years as the Training Director, I consciously reflected on whether I am living up to my belief of being a transformational leader.

In this manner, I continued to exert my efforts undeterred or discouraged by the FAEs' understandable responses. This practice of constant reflection enabled me to remain committed to moving forward in this direction, firm in my belief that eventually over time, the FAEs would come around to see the relevance of what I am trying to do. Simultaneously, it too had developed in me an ingrained mind-set to question not only the 'what' of my management choices and decisions but also the more pertinent issue of 'how' they were to be executed.

I would like to explore another example of this 'immanent critique' in action, which involved the 'unfolding [of my] inner tensions and contradictions' (Eikeland, 2105: 4). As part of my CPD initiative, I encouraged mutual learning with the FAEs and the FAEs among themselves. Therefore, despite the feeling of vulnerability, I started a series of sharing preliminary learning on my action research study with the FAEs through the use of email correspondences (as described in Section 4.6.2, Chapter 4). However, at that point in time, I had a 'living contradiction' moment (McNiff & Whitehead, 2010: 93). I had hoped that the FAEs were able to overcome their sense of vulnerability to conduct mutual sharing and learning. Yet, here I was hesitant when I had to do so myself. I grappled with this 'living contradiction', reflected and saw what had to be done (ibid).

I had to lead by example. I told myself that if I wanted to be helpful in supporting the FAEs and if I cared enough, I should conquer my sense of vulnerability and not be afraid to reveal any weaknesses in the course of my engagement and sharing. The FAEs were probably experiencing similar sentiments when they were encouraged to share their learning with their peers. That also likely accounted for their lukewarm response to such an activity. I was glad I had learnt to overcome this to lead the way in mutual sharing. To my surprise, the responses I had received from some of the

FAEs on my sharing series were indeed encouraging (see Chapter 5, Section 5.9.3 on 'An External Validation: Through the Eyes of the FAEs). It is evident that these FAEs had been positively influenced by me and had embarked on their own professional development journeys.

Generally, the learning I experienced through conducting this AR study has taught me to continually question, whenever necessary, my 'preconditions and suppositions [that were] taken for granted' as being "correct" (Eikeland, 2015:4). Having gone through this AR experience, I was more aware of how crucial it was to continuously question my assumptions in the formulation and implementation of policies and schemes that would have downstream implications on those in the training community.

#### **6.4 Why an Insider Management AR Study: At a Collective Group Level**

Inculcating a collegial and collaborative learning culture – As French and Bell (1980) noted, a 'distinguishing feature of action research is collaboration between individuals inside the system – clients – and.... change agents or researchers' (p. 93). In my case, the "clients" were the FAEs. It was this very 'collaborative ingredient of action research' that afforded the inculcation of a collegial and collaborative learning culture between the FAEs and me and among the FAEs themselves (p.94). Through using the AR methodology, I had the opportunity to establish 'open, authentic and equal relationships' (Reason & McArdle, 2008: 2) that went beyond fulfilling our respective 'performative roles "on stage"' in our everyday occupational roles to engaging in collective learning through "back stage" reflection occurring during professional exchanges from correspondences, special and regular events conducted at IAL, ad-hoc conversations and one-to-one interviews (Eikeland, 2015: 5).

This AR study created opportunities for realising our innate potential for growth, both as individuals and as professionals. The FAEs and I were able to 'tap into [our] latent potentialities and transform them into real power which



could then be used according to [our] goals' (McNiff & Whitehead, 2000: 109). Below are some of the comments from the FAEs that testified to such a phenomenon actually occurring:

a. As Individuals:

"... it is a research done in the workplace where I now spend most of my time developing myself." (Cindy – Email feedback for my research sharing, 18 April 2015)

"I applauded for your commitment in building a collegial and collaborative environment for AEs at IAL." (Debra – Email feedback for my research sharing, 23 February 2015)

"Thank you for sharing this. Every reading triggers further consideration and reflection at my end. The information here offers new perspectives and learning. Extremely beneficial!" (Carlene – Email feedback for my research sharing, 25 March 2015)

b. As Peers:

"When we put up the RP [self-reflection] there, to be honest most of us do not go in [to the system] to read. However, when we meet up and as we talk, we chat and we share what we have put in and then the rest may ask, 'Heh, can I go in and see? And that really trigger the viewing and you know what, although they may not adopt the RP but when we meet again, they started to ask us 'what do you mean when you wrote this?' And that actually triggers a chain of discussions." (Nigel – Interview, 28 August 2014)

## **6.5 Why an Insider Management AR Study: From an Organisational Point of View**

Conducting an insider management AR study not only equipped the researcher with the necessary instruments to efficaciously conduct the research study since the researcher could respond immediately and purposefully to arising situations and existing circumstances during the course of the investigation. It also created an opportunity to gain up close and personal insights into the issues to be investigated.

First, I was able to personally carry out the field research with far-reaching advantages. This meant I could '[go] directly to the phenomenon under study and [observe] it as completely as possible' so as to 'develop a deeper and fuller understanding of it' and 'to make sense out of an on-going process that cannot be predicted in advance' (Babbie, 2013: 324).

Secondly, I had worked with most of the FAEs for almost seven years since the inception of IAL. This enabled me to 'recognize several nuances of attitude and behaviour' to understand underlying implications of actions adopted in my research study that would not be possible with an external researcher (Babbie, 2013: 325). This also meant I could 'examine ...events actually occur[ring]' as I was also a participant in the process unlike an external researcher who would be collecting data from sources after the occurrence[s] 'in a reconstruction of the events' (ibid).

Thirdly, being the manager, I was in a position to effect whatever timely changes I deemed necessary, based on the ground reality, during the course of the research in order to realise the desired outcome. This was exactly what happened when I had to move from the RPP phase to the TCWs phase. Through the TCWs and with the concerns such as trust, comfort level and self-consciousness being addressed, the CPD initiative of adopting the e-Portfolio for self-reflection and professional peer sharing proved to be a doable thing.

Lastly, it was about '[u]nderstanding organisation, understanding people' as a leadership and management approach (McNiff & Whitehead, 2000: 52) to increase productivity in the workplace. Here I would like to refer to a recent media report where three prominent personnel, Mr Ho Kwon Ping, ex-journalist and founder of the Banyan Tree Hotel Group; Mr Ngiam Tong Dow, retired high-powered civil servant; and Mr Beh Swan Gin, Singapore's Economic Development Board Chairman participated as the opening panel, in the Development Bank of Singapore Asia Insights Conference held on July 10, 2015.

These panellists discussed the topic, “How Can Singapore Future-proof its Relevance for the Next 50 Years”. One of the panellists, Mr Ngiam, shared his view on how to increase productivity in Singapore. He said that ‘[t]he CEO should become the chief productivity officer. You must get out of the comfort zone of your corporate office, get down to the factory floor and lead from the front. You should show your staff how to do things better’ (Tan, 2015).

This was not new in management theory. As the head of our respective organisation or department, we need to lead by example. It seemed like common sense but this was not so commonly practised these days. The message I discerned behind this plea was that there were too many people in leadership positions who neglected their leadership role to focus on their managerial one. They were directing from a distance through proxies and not close to where the actions were. Often they were seen to be too busy to touch base with the ground. In extreme cases, they might not even know who their staff was on the ground.

The concept of hierarchical reporting has pervaded management work norms. Information is commonly gathered from the next in line. This is generally more concerned with key performance indicators and outputs than outcomes. In other words, the focus was on the “what” rather than the “how”. In my opinion, organisational management is not just about the productivity, efficiency and effectiveness of a non-human entity, the organisation.

More importantly, it is also about the people who work in the organisation because they are the ones who actually make productivity, efficiency and effectiveness possible. McNiff & Whitehead (2000) described it succinctly when they reiterated that ‘[d]ominant propositional theories regard organisation as an object “out there”. Organisations are not real; they are virtual ... Understanding organisation is understanding people; theories of organisation are theories of people’ (p. 52).

Therefore, I believe that insider management AR at every level could help those in positional power to get in touch with ground reality and to account for

their actions and decisions in their practice as professionals. They might then learn to 'respect the experience of real people in organisations and their values' too (McNiff and Whitehead, 2000: 52). Speaking from personal experience, through this AR study, I got to know more of the FAEs I am supporting than in the past. I was also more aware of the situation and the pulse on the ground. I would definitely continue my AR journey wherever I would be going.

## **6.6 Executing an Insider Management AR Study: Mind the Rocky Slopes**

However, in all honesty, executing an insider management AR study was not all a bed of roses. Undoubtedly along with the benefits came challenges as well. To begin, in AR, there is no road map for the process to secure answers to the research questions the study set out to understand. It was completely open-ended. I, as the researcher, often had no idea where the investigation would take me. It was often a matter of groping in the dark intelligently as one tried to make one's way towards the door.

Moreover, the process did require me, as the researcher, to respond elastically to actual happenings on the ground. This can make the researcher feel vulnerable if he/she had no idea, at that point, on how to proceed or missed the cue altogether. Likewise, the stakeholders involved in the AR study might also feel discouraged or lose interest in supporting the investigation.

A third challenge was the ability to cater, in terms of time and resource allocation, to both the roles of researcher and manager simultaneously. It was not an easy task to avoid having one role being achieved at the expense of the other. I had to always remind myself the difficulty of tasks assignments and prioritisation for both my roles as an insider-researcher and the training director.

A helpful approach would be to develop a habit of conducting self-reflection. This could include being more conscious of how decisions are made, what

actions are chosen and reflection on the implications of these decisions and actions. Another would be to work towards answering the perennial research question, “How could I improve my practice?” This process would make one more awake and aware of oneself. Through such self-reflection, one could constantly seek to identify areas for improvement in one’s practice so that, as a leader in the workplace, one could make the working environment meaningful and enjoyable.

### **6.7 How the Research Has Contributed to my Own Professional Development**

Through this experience, I gained greater insight into the operating context of FAEs working within a public institution, like IAL, in the CET sector. Working largely with a group of autonomous freelancers was a very different experience from working with full-time staff. This difference became more acute when I had to place raising their professionalism as a priority target to meet one of the corporate goals of IAL.

This group of freelancing staff, to use the term loosely, were primarily driven by a transactional mind-set and understandably too. Moreover, their emphasis on being their own person was a working culture that demanded delicacy, respect and understanding when eliciting support and alignment from them. It could be naturally expected that possible tension could arise if these FAEs were to perceive the efforts to raise professionalism as a corporate goal by their hiring client, in this case IAL, as being disruptive and intervening to their vocation and choices. The challenge was to produce an outcome that could ensure the FAEs were more aware of and active in pursuing their own professional development.

This study had provided proof to me that collaboration and the building of trust through the educative relationships could indeed change prevailing circumstances to a win-win situation for both parties. Although the FAEs did not unanimously support the professionalization agenda right from the beginning but gradually they appreciated the foresight and insights of IAL in

setting the direction that would raise their professional development to a higher level. Ultimately, the decision to make the call of whether to participate in the CPD initiatives organised by IAL would still rest with the FAEs themselves. Whatever their decisions, a bridge of trust and collegiality had been built that could be strengthened over time.

This study has deeply impressed upon me that to cultivate a transformative culture in the workplace, leadership would have to play a pivotal role. I am of the belief that this achievement was made possible through a committed and convinced leadership on my part as the training director. From my standpoint, this was a growth opportunity for me to learn first-hand, among other things, on managing differing perspectives and objectives through a mutual holistic and beneficial engagement. It was also about learning to be accountable as respective practitioners in our profession for the better social good of the working community to which we belong.

## **6.8 Limitations of My AR Study**

A particular limitation of the study involved the data collection phase of the study, where the possibility of harvesting a richer collection of data for inferences and analysis could have been inhibited.

The FAEs as participants - Aspects of the FAEs' working culture coupled with the voluntary nature of participation in this research study limited the possibility of obtaining a greater participation involvement from the FAEs. As mentioned in the earlier segment, FAEs function as autonomous agencies inclined towards transactional engagements where concerns with time allocation and usage to optimise their earning abilities are the norms.

A particular difficulty encountered during the RPP in securing a bigger pool of willing participants for one-to-one interviews, ad hoc conversations and feedback, written or verbal. Ability to involve more participants would have afforded more valuable insights into the psyche and forces motivating the FAEs. This was regrettable as the greater the amount of data that could be

obtained, the richer the inferences and analysis could have been. It followed that the greater the number of responses, the more varied the participant profiles that could be included. Responses from such a varied number would strengthen the findings by way of themes located and the indicated number of participants who supported a common theme.

The high participation rate for the Renewal Survey was possible because the survey was conducted as a management review for the FAEs' re-engagement. It would be safe to say the FAEs would assign priority to participate in this survey as it served to indicate their interest in continuing to serve IAL.

From this experience, it would indicate that should a manager embark on the idea of conducting an AR, it would be pertinent for that individual to prioritise the data collection issue so as to secure a good participant rate from the FAEs. This experience had also demonstrated that researcher-manager would need to firstly understand the motivators that drive the FAEs hired by his/her organisation. Secondly, collection data methods employed by the researcher-manager would need to be practical, innovative and highly diverse that covered as numerous a platform as possible in order to cater to the work routines of FAEs.

The quality of the working relationship between the FAEs and me, the manager, might also have proved to be a limitation in relation to the collection of data. The degree of trust, amiability and mutual respect cultivated and established in the working relationship needed to be extant to elicit support for this research. I could see that had there been not such a good working relationship cultivated between us all along, it would have been difficult, if not impossible at times, to elicit honest feedback and comments as well as ensuring a good turn-out rate by the FAEs in extraneous events and activities organised by IAL that had provided the data for my study.

The insider researcher-manager role - While there were advantages of being involved directly in carrying out my insider research, the downside was the challenge to achieve a maximisation of contact time with the FAEs during our mutual work hours. The FAEs' available time during working hours was an issue that had to be factored in when arranging opportunities where I could collect the necessary data for my study. The FAEs were present at the Institute when they had work assignments. Otherwise they were occupied with training assignments with their other clients. The only other contact time was when they chose to attend the regular events and activities organised by IAL specifically for them.

For myself, I had to utilise the available time I had whenever I was at the Institute to either meet up with the FAEs for one-to-one interviews, or conduct ad-hoc corridor chats. Even these had to be done on the basis that there was a mutual coincidence of availability for both parties. This tight available time for collecting field data meant a natural restriction in the amount of data that could have been obtained, the issue of voluntary participation notwithstanding. This had also resulted in the substantial amount of time expended and the prolonged duration of the AR study.

Another limitation impacting my data collection could be attributed to the issue of prioritisation of focus between my work responsibilities with those of my research investigation. The Renewal Survey was carried out only about 6 months downstream after the Reflective Practice Process (RPP) implementation. In the interim, there was an immediate urgency to prepare the FAEs for the technical certification to ensure their competency in delivering the new ACTA V5 that employs the digital learning technology using the Learning Management System and the e-Portfolio system. My collection of feedback on the poor support for the RPP had to be delayed for six months within which sentiments and viewpoints could have been affected given this period of lag time.



## Chapter 7: A Practitioner's Reflections and Conclusions

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### 7.1 The Intent of this Chapter

This final chapter contains my views on the challenges that would most likely be encountered by management of training organisations, both public and private, in the hiring of freelancing adult educators to deliver WSQ and similar programmes aimed at vocational and professional development. It also covers laying out the recommendations for future research and explains the dissemination plan for my research findings.

As the FAEs serve a pivotal role in the overall mechanism of workforce development geared towards employability, it is in the interest of the State to ensure their quality through professional competency. However, as my discussion will point out, it is also in the interest of privately-owned training organisations to seriously consider their involvement in the professional development of the FAEs they hire. It is desirable that both public and privately-owned training organisations, by means of CPD initiatives, enhance and promote the professionalism of their FAEs who are supporting the WSQ system.

It must be recognised that public and privately-owned training organisations may have different perspectives and approaches towards the issue of professional development for their FAEs. This is a natural ensuing occurrence given that for privately-owned training organisations, a profit-driven business goal is probably the utmost primary consideration for them. On the other hand, the state-run organisations are driven by primarily national economic priorities.

Herein lies the challenge of goal alignment between the private sector and state priority. Perhaps, this is the unavoidable scenario that requires addressing, as highlighted by Ball (2008) whereby 'exogenous privatisation which involves the opening up of public education services to private sector

participation on a for-profit basis and using the private sector to design, manage or deliver aspects of public education' becomes the practice (p.58).

While there is no denying that this approach permitted optimum utilisation of available resources from the private training sector to support the WSQ system, it also gives rise to the need to consider how private training organisations can be convinced of the benefits of raising the professionalism of the FAEs they hire. My discussion of the challenges that would most likely be encountered by management of training organisations would allude to this challenge where applicable.

My discussion addresses four areas. These were selected for the significant role they would likely assume towards the success of any professional development initiatives launched by management for the FAEs as part of its corporate goal to ensure a competent pool of training professionals offering quality service in their delivery assignments. These areas pertain to the following: (1) lack of motivation for peer dyad dialogue using a digital platform; (2) the overarching influence of the working culture of FAEs; (3) the leadership-cum-management approach; and (4) the cultivating of an educative relationship.

## **7.2 Lack of Motivation for Peer Dyad Dialogue Using a Digital Platform**

The LMS, with its supporting e-Portfolio feature, was employed to support the implementation of both the episodic learning cycles of my investigative research. In addition, the Reflective Practice Process (RPP) phase involved having the FAEs find their own peer dialogue partner to pair off in their reflective practice where professional sharing and viewpoints were to be exchanged.

As the findings revealed, there was lukewarm participation in the RPP phase by the FAEs. One reason for this lukewarm participation could be attributed to the lack of the requisite digital competencies. Another was the perceived necessity and/or urgency by the FAEs to acquire these digital competencies.

A third was the difficulty encountered by the FAEs in finding their preferred peer dialogue partner.

The Technical Certification Workshops (TCWs) implemented during the Episodic Learning Cycle 2 (ELC 2) was designed to piggyback on the preparation for the eventual launch of the soon-to-be introduced ACTA V5 programme. The FAEs who eventually signed up for the delivery of the then soon-to-be introduced ACTA V5 programme, had to be adequately prepared to use the LMS and its e-Portfolio feature as these would be utilised in its curriculum. To ensure that the FAEs had the necessary digital competencies to meet the curriculum requirement in time for the launch, a formalised training schedule, in the form of workshops, was implemented.

The ACTA V5 programme utilises the e-Portfolio feature to encourage reflective learning through the learning artefacts collected by the pre-service adult educators. Hence, the FAEs who signed up for the TCW would also have acquired the necessary digital competencies to conduct their peer dialogue professional exchanges and sharing.

Harnessing the Knowledge – One lesson learnt here was that voluntary participation of digital workshops or allowing for an autonomous self-development of technological skills could hinder the FAEs' acquisition of digital competencies. As Oakley, Pegrum & Johnston (2014) pointed out, it should not be assumed that learners' (and in this case FAEs) when given the discretion to choose their own participation mode would yield a positive result.

My research showed that the certification training workshops introduced did in fact enable the FAEs to expand their digital competencies. By April 2015, the pool of FAEs who had signed up for the certification workshops had increased to 37 from just 12 in April 2014 with 14 still pending approval at that time. These figures showed that designing a formalised manner of learning digital competencies could serve as a better means for such an acquisition.

A second lesson learnt was, as Lin (2008) and Oakley, Pegrum & Johnston (2014) had pointed out, the thought of having to learn to use digital technologies could be a barrier but simultaneously, the need to learn could also offer the opportunity to acquire greater technological competencies. This was the case as seen in the ELC2 when the opportunity arose with the impending introduction of the new ACTA V5 and those who wanted to offer this new programme saw the need to acquire greater technological competencies.

A third lesson could be drawn from the turnout of events in ELC2. It showed that all the FAEs eventually acquired the targeted digital competencies when these competencies mattered to their future work assignments in IAL. It could be likely that for the pragmatic reason of securing job assignments for the new ACTA programme, it was in the FAEs' interest to acquire the necessary digital competencies as soon as possible. From this it could be noted that when introducing new digital competencies to the FAEs, it would likely be more productive if management could convince their FAEs that doing so would be in their own best interest in furthering their professional capabilities.

A fourth valuable lesson that could be drawn from the RPP phase was the importance of cultivating a collegial culture among the FAEs in fostering trust and professional camaraderie. As noted in the Borko et al. (2008) study, the sharing of performance videos could be useful to promote peer reviews and meaningful discussions among fellow teachers from their own classroom.

However, the readiness to share would likely depend on the level of comfort and trust the FAEs shared with each other. The results of the RPP revealed that the FAEs encountered real difficulties in choosing and securing a dialogue partner, on top of actualising the professional dialogues. This could likely be attributed to the absence of a comfort level and peer trust where having a collegial culture could very well foster such beneficial traits.

Given the nature of the FAEs' work environment, working culture and work arrangements, the desired workplace collegiality would be difficult to achieve.

However, it could be a reality provided there was a conscious effort on the part of management to continuously and consistently promote and encourage its development through whatever suitable and available means. Having the advantage of workplace collegiality would benefit both the FAEs and the management in promoting professionalism as individuals and as training providers.

Lastly, similar to the study conducted by Chetcuti (2007), it was likely that the FAEs too could not appreciate how the use of the e-Portfolio feature in peer dialogue could help them 'grow and develop' as adult educators looking at the take-up rate and the dialogue process. Four months after the launch of the RPP, out of the twenty pairs of FAEs who had signed up, only two pairs of FAEs had uploaded and shared their video artefacts and conducted their two-way dialogues. Moreover, only three pairs managed a one-way dialogue while their partners did not reciprocate. In addition, after the FAEs had cleared their certification after completing their TCW, which included the use of the e-Portfolio feature in the LMS, more than one-third of the FAEs subsequently removed their e-Portfolio postings.

The FAEs' response to the use of the e-Portfolio as a 'reflective learning tool' (Chetcuti, 2007:137) to facilitate 'assessment for learning' and to 'encourage the idea of "reflective practitioner"' (ibid: 140) contrasted with the findings of the Chetcuti (2007) study. From both the episodic learning cycles, it appeared that the FAEs did not view the use of the e-Portfolio as a reflective tool for professional development with the same kind of reception and enthusiasm as the student teachers in the Chetcuti (2007) study.

The FAEs were more ready to use the e-Portfolio tool for professional sharing when it was a prerequisite for work engagement rather than solely for self/peer development on a private basis. An important lesson that could be drawn from this was the pragmatism the FAEs placed on a transactional motivation for professional development where the precious commodities of time and effort expended mattered.

### **7.3 The Overarching Influence of the Working Culture of FAEs**

Two key characteristics of the working culture of FAEs that exert an overarching influence on the work decisions of FAEs that include participation in corporate generated CPD initiatives warrant mention.

(1) Pragmatic considerations of the FAEs – From the findings obtained, the FAEs' working culture defined them as autonomous agencies inclined towards transactional engagements where concerns with time allocation and usage to optimise their earning abilities are the norm. In addition, they valued their autonomy to plan their career path and own professional development whereby extraneous activities, such as the CPD initiatives institutionalised by their clients, often were measured in terms of opportunity costs.

It could be inferred that the FAEs operated on a pragmatic approach in arriving at any work decisions. Their prioritisation logic, maximisation of time usage and the need to professionally develop themselves could safely be construed as stemming from a “bread-and-butter” issue. The challenge here is to convince the FAEs that is indeed a pragmatic approach to embrace the idea of continuous professional development as a personal goal within the work demands of their profession. Their pragmatism can enable them to visualise the longer term benefits of allocating time and effort towards this end. Participation then in extraneous activities outside their work contract, such as organisational CPD initiatives or self-run community groups will not be a wasted activity from a pragmatic standpoint.

Having said that, there is now evidence to support this idea of building collegiality and community learning from the ground up. Groups such as “Community of Learning (HR)” with 334 members, “Community of Learning (Singapore)” with 981 members and “Games and Activities for Trainers and Facilitators” with 1000 members have sprung up on the social media website, “Facebook”. The awareness to form communities of learning for shared common goals appeared to have taken root among some adult educators, involving both full-time and part-time freelancers.

Harnessing the Knowledge – The achievements of these self-help groups can be augmented by their hiring organisations as the impact of the endeavours made by these different groups will differ greatly. Hiring organisations have access to funding and work resources that individual FAEs do not enjoy.

This pragmatic characteristic of FAEs should be regarded as a strength to be harnessed by their training organisations in wanting to build a cohesive community of FAEs dedicated to improving professional competency. From the organisations' viewpoint, this can lend support to ensuring that a quality brand of training can be synonymous with the name of their organisations. It is up to management to decide if it wishes to regard professional development as a shared responsibility with their FAEs or ignore it completely.

The view that established professional guilds and associations aiming to build a strong sense of professionalism and a professional identity have inculcated a healthy ethos of striving for professional development and excellence is not lost on the state authority. In the local context, efforts were made to form a similar platform with setting up of the Adult Education Network (AEN) in 2011 and in 2015 with the Adult Educators' Professionalization (AEP) scheme (IAL, 2016). These efforts are still in its nascent stage.

More can and perhaps even should be done by training organisations by way of direct involvement or indirectly by funding ground efforts. The manner, nature and extent in which training organisations become involved is, of course, entirely their decision. The overall objective of such efforts should ultimately develop a strong sense of camaraderie among the FAEs where collaboration and peer learning are the norms and peer professional learning and exchanges are the outcomes.

(2) Concerns of Guarded Privacy and Trust – The FAEs have the tendency to operate individually as autonomous agents rather than collaborate as team members. Therefore, they tend to function as what I called, One-Person-Operation unit. They see the necessity to remain differentiated and competitive for survival in this highly fragmented fraternity of freelance operatives. It came as no surprise then that privacy and trust concerns could be potential barriers towards building a more collaborative and collegial culture to promote peer learning. The findings also revealed that the FAEs were not comfortable with the idea of peer sharing and exchanges as evident through their experiences.

There are many reasons that likely contributed to the development of this highly fragmented fraternity. One reason is the need for differentiation and a competitive mind-set to survive given that as a freelancer, the perennial “bread-and-butter” issue becomes a first and foremost priority in work-related considerations. Another reason can be traced to the lack of opportunities to interact as a training community or to work as part of a team. Hence, the idea of collaborative work for a greater sum gain appears rather alien and non-fruitful from a financial standpoint.

The demand-side of the equation might have escalated this state of affairs. The overnight demand of FAEs to fulfil the training positions required to meet the delivery of WSQ programmes meant a sudden upsurge in the demand for adult educators. This in turn resulted in an access route to training cum certification opportunities with the setting up of IAL to ramp up the number of adult educators competent to provide such training services. This route also offered those who opted for a career-switch to embark on training as a career option. This increase in number in a relatively short time could only heighten the guarded privacy and trust issues among the FAEs where “more men, less share” sentiment likely ruled the day.

Harnessing the Knowledge – It would be encouraging to have hiring organisations, particularly the training managers, set the impetus by beginning a discourse with FAEs they hire. The objective here is on



influencing the development of a collaborative and collegial culture rather than a competitive mind-set by creating opportunities for peer learning and sharing with a view towards professional development.

If given a choice, the FAEs would prefer to work alone. This way, they could maintain the competitive edge and reputational capital they had built up over the years. This mode of operation if not discouraged would further reinforce the competitive nature of freelancing and stifle attempts made at peer learning, through collaboration within a collegial spirit, as part of professional development. Therefore, management and leadership in training organisations need to embrace the FAEs' concerns of guarded privacy and trust by devising schemes within their organisations to promote opportunities for team and group work among the FAEs. These schemes can include social interactions and peer support to foster collegiality and a community spirit.

However, where private training organisations are concerned, as they are understandably primarily profit-margin driven, resource allocation is based on pragmatic and rate-of-return considerations. It is, nevertheless, worth the time and effort expended by these organisations on activities that will contribute to the professional development of the FAEs they hire. The reason is that the increase in the professional competency of these FAEs will in a way reflect on the quality of hire fielded in the delivery of programmes offered by these organisations. This surely will portend well for the reputation of the organisation and in turn impact favourably on its bottom-line.

In the longer run, if hiring clients support the national professionalization agenda in such a manner, perhaps we may be able to see a new trend of FAEs who will engage their peers much more readily to pursue personal and peer professional development. This may also build self-confidence and self-assuredness in the FAEs operating in the local training scene.

## 7.4 Leadership-cum-Management Approach

Two key lessons on leadership-cum-management approach when planning professional development initiatives for the FAEs they hire could be extracted from the findings.

(1) Importance of situation appreciation – A critical lesson learnt from this AR study was a lack of understanding of two important issues in the RPP that led to a poor participation rate. One of them was the underlying motivations of the FAEs. The other was the preparedness of the FAEs in adopting digital technologies. These issues had resulted in a lack of situation awareness to ensure a good response from the FAEs.

It was only during the implementation stage of the RPP that these issues became apparent to me, as the training manager. However, this situation offered an opportunity for me to reflect on the possible factors that could have contributed to the poor participation rate. In hindsight, applying situational analysis as a preparatory activity could have secured a better participation rate. Even if this precautionary measure was adopted and still failed, situational analysis could be repeated during the implementation to decide the next appropriate course of action.

When identifying and designing a professional development initiative for the FAEs, it is crucial to obtain prior in-depth understanding of the motivators and preferences of these FAEs. Then securing a higher probability of success for the initiative can be that much improved.

(2) Securing buy-in from the FAEs – The findings suggested that FAEs had the tendency to view corporate activities, apart from those stated in their service contracts, as extraneous activities that were weighed in terms of opportunity costs. This is a significant pointer that indicated appealing to the “heads” of FAEs and winning their “hearts” matters.

Appealing to the “heads” of FAEs meant that management need to convince them that their participation in CPD initiatives have a direct link to both tangible and intangible pay-out in enhancing their professional competency and employability. Winning their “hearts” would require management, in their push for their OD goals, to seriously recognise the importance FAEs place on their “I am my own person” psyche as part of their working values.

Through my experience in the study, a consultative and inclusive approach in getting the FAEs to drive and determine their own CPD activities will facilitate a stronger buy-in and produce a more sustainable result. A top-down and authoritative approach will not work. Such an approach will go a long way towards getting the FAEs on board as a team working both towards a shared vision and goals.

Harnessing the Knowledge – Regardless of whether it is a public or a privately-owned training organisation, the success of promoting and supporting the national agenda of professionalizing the FAEs boils down to securing a shared goal and vision between training organisations and the FAEs they hire. Training organisations and the FAEs alike must be willing to embark on this endeavour for reason or reasons they deem beneficial and meaningful.

To facilitate greater participation from the FAEs, training organisations can plan and design professional initiatives with the FAEs’ work style and goals in mind. In this way, the FAEs will be more likely to embrace corporate-led CPD initiatives readily. This can translate better in a win-win situation all round.

## **7.5 Cultivating an Educative Relationship**

The findings highlighted the value of an educative relationship in which the manager in-charge and the FAEs enjoyed a colleague status relationship as opposed to one of management and contract worker. Such a kind of working relationship enhanced the probability and possibility of achieving an

encouraging outcome for a CPD initiative implemented by the organisation. This approach had the effect of producing a working environment that encompassed openness, trust and mutual respect where ideas, feedback and viewpoints were more readily and easily accepted and discussed.

As the findings demonstrated, such efforts lent support to the building of a conducive and supportive working eco-system where collaboration and collegiality could be fostered in the working environment within the organisation. The findings also revealed that FAEs and management learning from each other with a common intent to excel in their respective professional performance, conveyed a promise of team bonding and mutual understanding as well as respect that would naturally strengthen and benefit the working relationship. Under such a circumstance, professional development initiatives by management to help FAEs hone the quality of their training skills and knowledge was less likely to be viewed as a professionalization mandate or another corporate performance objective to be fulfilled but rather, that they were *about* them and *for* them.

Harnessing the Knowledge – Given the unique work profile of FAEs, a horizontal working relationship rather than a vertical hierarchical one allows for an unfettered two-way exchange of ideas, feedback and viewpoints. Such a working relationship can only be present in an educative relationship where the realisation of set goals, be it individual or corporate, is sought as a two-way communication that is based on mutual respect and trust to find common grounds. It is well worth the invested effort by management to cultivate such a relationship as it will definitely enrich the individual's professional learning and experience on both sides of the same coin.

## **7.6 Future Research Directions and Dissemination Plan**

Future research directions – Where conditions permitted, my future research would pursue two likely directions: (1) to continue with the current action research case-study on a new episodic learning cycle, ELC 3; (2) to expand

the study beyond IAL to include FAEs hired by other local privately-owned WSQ training organisations

*Continuation of this AR case-study in IAL with ELC 3* – This cycle would investigate the FAEs' preferred choices of CPD programmes and activities as well as their push and pull factors. The aim here would be to elicit an understanding on what factors influence the types of CPD programmes and activities the FAEs would support. Such an understanding would greatly assist IAL in its planning strategies to realise its corporate goal of raising the professionalism of FAEs it hired in meeting its mandate of establishing a benchmark for the local training landscape. However, this would be only possible if I were to remain the training director of IAL after this research study was completed. If I should be assigned a new appointment in WDA, then it would be up to my successor to decide if he/she wished to pursue such an investigation.

*Expansion of the study to encompass other FAEs and their hiring organisations within the WSQ system* – This research could also be extended beyond IAL to include a larger group of FAEs operating within the WSQ system but employed by privately-owned training providers. The focus here was to gain insights into this group of FAEs' perceptions and viewpoints towards corporate CPD initiatives in a private sector setting. The findings generated could be compared to those of the FAEs' in IAL as a form of theory verification research.

A comparative study, that used IAL as the comparison model, could also be conducted to understand the level of CPD commitment in privately-owned organisations and to identify the push-pull factors that influence their commitment. Another comparative study could be conducted to investigate the implications of the level of CPD commitment by hiring organisations on FAEs' professional competency in both the privately-run enterprises and state-run institution.

Dissemination of the research study and findings – This research study will be shared at appropriate management forums, in IAL, WDA and to our training partners supporting the WSQ system. This would be useful to apprise the policy makers of the challenges of implementing professional development initiatives in IAL for freelancing individuals. The findings of this research study would also provide an insight into the deployment of FAEs throughout the WSQ system. Such an appreciation is important as the privately-owned training providers would naturally have different viewpoints and, hence, emphasis on the professional development agenda for their own FAEs.

In addition, if there were opportunities, I would work towards sharing what I have learned from my research in appropriate forums and conferences, both local and overseas. The findings of this research study could be useful to fellow practitioners in understanding how a state-run institute has coped with the ubiquitous deployment of FAEs in facilitating national training programmes with the CET-WSQ landscape. Moreover, they could also gain an insight into the various efforts that have been progressively put in place to raise the professional standard of FAEs through CPD initiatives.

## **7.7 Conclusion**

This AR study marks the efforts of IAL in eliciting a better understanding of this highly fragmented fraternity of freelancer in which its findings can also be beneficial to other WSQ training institutions that hire FAEs. The findings of this AR study may be specifically helpful to training organisations looking to invest in the professional development of their FAEs through CPD initiatives. It is hoped that the experience of this study can be a peer-sharing opportunity to shed more light on the issue of corporate professional development for freelancers.

This AR study has demonstrated that planning and designing a CPD initiative for FAEs requires combining a number of factors to ensure a higher probability of success. The recipe for success rests in the hands of

management who decides what ingredients have to be selected and how these are mixed and cooked to perfection. The issue of FAEs' professional development is not just their vested interest but very much a shared responsibility with management as well. After all, it takes two to clap.

As a member of the management, the value of adopting action research as a methodology, in my opinion, cannot be understated. It was only through an investigation in real-time was I able to interact with the ground reality where all the "action" was happening. The process of experiencing an on-going journey of discovery into the work world of the FAEs helped me discover more of mine. It provided me, too, with an opportunity for improvement as a practitioner in my field, through questioning my assumptions held and actions undertaken.

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## Appendix A

### **Demographic Data of FAEs Participating in the Study**

(Note: All names used for the FAEs are not their real name)

#### **1. Demographic Data extracted from Renewal Survey**

(Note that 6 responses out of the total 57 participants were not included due to incomplete entries)

<b>1. Name:</b>	Count	Percentage
Answer	51	100.00%

#### **2. Gender:**

Answer	Count	Percentage
Female (F)	28	54.90%
Male (M)	23	45.10%

#### **3. Age Group:**

Answer	Count	Percentage
Less 30 years old	0	0.00%
30 to 40 years old	10	19.61%
40 to 50 years old	20	39.22%
Older than 50 years old	21	41.18%

#### **4. Years of working experience as an adult educator (performing related works such as training needs analysis, curriculum or courseware development, facilitation and/or assessment):**

Answer	Count	Percentage
Less than 3 years	0	0.00%
3 to less than 5 years	3	5.88%
5 to less than 10 years	9	17.65%
10 to less than 15 years	20	39.22%
15 years and above	19	37.25%

#### **5. Years of working experience as adjunct adult educator in IAL:**

Answer	Count	Percentage
Less than 1 year - with assignments so far	10	19.61%
Less than 1 year - still waiting for assignments	1	1.96%
1 to 2 years	5	9.80%
Longer than 2 to 4 years	13	25.49%
Longer than 4 years	22	43.14%

#### **6. Highest Educational Level Attained:**

Answer	Count	Percentage
Doctoral level	3	5.88%
Master level	40	78.43%
Degree level	4	7.84%
Diploma level	3	5.88%
Others	1	1.96%

### 7. Pedagogical Training Qualifications:

ACTA (specify which version, if possible)	48	94.12%
DACE (version 1)	33	64.71%
Others (provide details of your qualifications)	25	49.02%

### 8. Your domain expertise area(s) - specific industry sector(s):

Answer	Count	Percentage
Accounting, Banking and Finance	4	7.84%
Administrative and Support Services	5	9.80%
Advertising, Sales and Marketing	9	17.65%
Aerospace	3	5.88%
Arts, Entertainment and Attractions	5	9.80%
Audit/Risk Management	3	5.88%
Broadcasting, Publishing and Media	1	1.96%
Building and Construction	1	1.96%
Business and Management	21	41.18%
Community and Social Services	6	11.76%
Consultancy Services	19	37.25%
Design and Creative Arts	1	1.96%
Domestic and Environment Cleaning	1	1.96%
Defence	7	13.73%
Education and Training	49	96.08%
Engineering	6	11.76%
Food and Beverages	6	11.76%
Health Care	4	7.84%
Hotel and Accommodation	2	3.92%
Human Resource Management, Employment and Recruitment	16	31.37%
Insurance	2	3.92%
Landscape	1	1.96%
Language Skills	3	5.88%
Legal	2	3.92%
Logistics and Maintenance	3	5.88%
Manufacturing	9	17.65%
Marine and Port Services	1	1.96%
MICE and Events	4	7.84%
Personal Development	19	37.25%
Pharmaceutical and Biotechnology	2	3.92%
Process and Product Engineering	4	7.84%
Procurement/Purchasing	0	0.00%
Public Administration	5	9.80%
Real Estate	2	3.92%
Retail	5	9.80%
Security and Investigation	4	7.84%
Service Excellence	14	27.45%
Telecommunications	5	9.80%
Tour and Travel Services	2	3.92%
Transportation and Warehousing	2	3.92%
Workplace Safety and Health	2	3.92%
Other	8	15.69%



**9. Number of areas you are training (conducting TNA, facilitating, and/or assessing - select any of the domain area(s) given in Question 8 where possible):**

One - (state the domain area)	13	25.49%
Two - (state the domain areas)	20	39.22%
Three - (state the domain areas)	10	19.61%
More than three areas - (state the domain areas)	21	41.18%

**10. Familiarity with the use of the following features of D2L Learning Management System: Using e-Portfolio (in LMS)**

Answer	Count	Percentage
Proficient	27	52.94%
Need Practise	18	35.29%
Need further coaching	6	11.76%

**10. Familiarity with the use of the following features of D2L Learning Management System: Using Dropbox function (in LMS)**

Answer	Count	Percentage
Proficient	30	58.82%
Need Practise	13	25.49%
Need further coaching	8	15.69%

**10. Familiarity with the use of the following features of D2L Learning Management System: Using Survey function (in LMS)**

Answer	Count	Percentage
Proficient	17	33.33%
Need Practise	22	43.14%
Need further coaching	12	23.53%

**10. Familiarity with the use of the following features of D2L Learning Management System: Using Quiz function (in LMS)**

Answer	Count	Percentage
Proficient	15	29.41%
Need Practise	23	45.10%
Need further coaching	12	23.53%
No answer	1	1.96%

## Appendix B

### **Tracking of Email Correspondences to Initiate the Reflective Practice Process (RPP)**

Date	Remarks
16 Aug 2013 (Fri)	Briefing to FAEs on the implementation of the RPP with effect from 1 September 2013.
20 Aug 2013 (Tue) (see records of email below)	My first email invite to all FAEs reinforced the implementation of RPP from 1 September 2013 and stating that it is for all FAEs facilitating WSQ ACTA training in IAL only.
13 Oct 2013	My second email which I wrote to each of the 10 pairs of FAEs who have found their dialogue partner for the RPP.
16 Oct 2013	My full-time AE staff, Sam (not her true name) had assisted to send an email to all FAEs to provide information and directions. It also acted as a reminder for those who have yet to form their dyad arrangement.
11 and 16 Dec 2013	My third email which I wrote to three FAEs requesting for an opportunity to sit-in their training sessions. The email dated 11 Dec was to Larry (not his real name) and 16 December were to Holland and Juliet (also not their real names).
2 Jan 2014	Second email reminder by Sam to those FAEs who have yet to start their RPP, after 4 months of the pilot had passed. She also reminded all to carry out at least one RPP by March 2014.

### 3. Records of first email sent to FAEs dated 20 Aug 2013

On 20 Aug, 2013, at 12:14 AM, Tat Suan KOH (IAL)

[<KOH\\_Tat\\_Suan@ial.edu.sg>](mailto:KOH_Tat_Suan@ial.edu.sg) wrote:

Message Classification: Restricted

Dear all,

I will like to thank all those of you who had turned up for the briefing last Friday, 16 Aug 2013. This email is to update all that IAL is implementing the Reflective Practice Program with effect from 1 Sep 2013 for all adjunct adult educators doing training. I understand that this message may not be applicable to some of you who are not doing training with IAL now but the intention is to keep you in the loop should you be doing training in the near future.

I have attached the two sets of power-point slides shared that evening. The first set updated the AE CPD performance management emphasis and the second set provided the detailed explanation of the objectives and supporting processes for the launch of the reflective practice program (RPP). As explained, the RPP will be the inaugural professional development program (PDP) we plan to pilot for six months to evaluate your experience in using your training video as a basis for reflection in your own practice. We will also like to take this opportunity to encourage peer learning among you and henceforth the setting up of the dyad (pair-wise) arrangement to facilitate you to share your artefacts (written self-reflection on the selected video excerpt and your video) with your critical friend chosen. This will be done via the LMS folder which will be set up for you. For some, this may be the first time you are seeing yourself in action through your own video to do the self-reflection, for others who have done this before, I hope you can continue to support the process to provide different insights of your experience.

For those who are doing training at IAL now, your first task is to identify your critical friend, a dialogue partner with whom you will share your self-reflection and chosen segment of your training video with. The dialogue partner will in turn provide you his/her feedback to you based on the artefacts shared. Likewise, your dialogue partner will reciprocate in sharing his/her self-reflection and video segment with you. This pair-wise sharing is typical of an action research platform via the video-stimulated reflective dialogue (VSRD) technique. Please see the slides for the explanation of the process and I hope this will provide you an opportunity to diagnose your own practice and have a critical friend to do this with you as well.

Steven and his team will follow up with the information you may need on how you can go about the process of sharing your artefacts once you have identified your critical friend. A dedicated folder using the LMS will be created exclusively for the pair-wise dialogue and forum between the two of you. I will appreciate if those who are actively training in IAL to start the ball rolling by pairing up with your chosen critical friend and let Steven know latest by 27th Aug so that he can create the folder for you. For those who are okay to work

with anyone, please let Steven know as soon as possible so that he can also help to confirm the pairing and create the account for you before 1 Sep 2013.

You are expected to start the RPP on any of your self-chosen training assignments from 1 Sep 2013. Those of you who already have training assignment(s) known, you can proceed to plan your RPP process from 1 Sep 2013. Based on any selected training assignment, you should carry out one RPP cycle with your dialogue partner within a 4-6 week period. At the end of the trial period, generally most of you will have at least 4 rounds of experience on this process. We will then initiate an evaluation process to get your feedback on this trial. Only those who are not training now in IAL will be excused from participating in this pilot trial. However, they will start once they are given training assignment.

I will also get the support from our CCS colleagues to make the necessary announcement or provide the notice to the learners that all IAL adult educators will be expected to carry out reflective practice and their support and understanding will be needed if their adult educators will to request for the video recording of any particular training session or segment needed for the RPP regime.

I sincerely hope to have your cooperation with this pilot project. Please do not hesitate to drop me an email or call me if you have any query on the project or arrangement.

tatsuan

#### 4. Records of second email sent to FAEs dated 13 Oct 2014

**From:** Tat Suan KOH (IAL)  
**Sent:** Sunday, 13 October, 2013 3:43 PM  
**To:**  
**Subject:** Reflective Practice Process (RPP)

**Message Classification: *Restricted***

Dear Holland and Halim (not real names),

Greetings from IAL. Thank you for being among the first few to set up the critical friend partnership to support our reflective practice process (RPP) introduced. I hope you have embarked on the journey and started recording of your training video to share your self-reflection.

I understand this asking to observe the RPP in IAL does demand your commitment and time in the exercise and the benefits will only be as good as your personal experience. If you do have any challenge to fulfil this endeavour please let me know asap so that we can render any assistance.

I have attached the slides which I shared on 16 Aug 2013, explaining the rationale in adopting the RPP and I hope the inculcation of self-reflection is the first step towards encouraging an action research culture in IAL in the longer term. I have also included an adapted matrix of suggested questions you can ponder with reference to different types/level of reflection as additional material for your self-reflection exercise.

For simplicity and if it is helpful to get started, as you reflect, you may consider the following based on the chosen 'critical incident' or 'illustrative moments' in the video shared:

- What does it tell you about your pedagogical beliefs and values about learning and teaching?
- On hindsight after viewing your own video, would you do anything differently? If so, how?

For the critical friend, you may consider the following:

- (i) What are the things you agree or disagree in the self-reflection about the segment shared by your critical friend and why?
- (ii) What have you observed through the video shared that may not be included in the reflection by your critical friend that you deem useful for further discussion or additional issues you will like discuss?

Nevertheless, feel free to do your self-reflection and peer sharing the way you know best. I don't mean to be prescriptive and it is only for those who will like some suggestions.

Lastly, I do wish to catch up with you soon when you are in IAL the next time around. I like to re-connect and update you on our renewal exercise in engagement of adult educators in IAL.

Thank you again for supporting this initiative as part of CPD and I looking forward to seeing you soon for the chat.

tatsuan

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## 5. Responses from the FAEs on the correspondences

20 August 2013	No responses from FAEs. So, after monitoring for about two months, I wrote another email, dated 13 October 2013 to the ten pairs of FAEs that were formed and registered already in the LMS.
13 October 2013 Halim is partnering Holland	Halim's response on 13 October 2013 'Thanks, Tat Suan for sharing.'
13 October 2013 Holland is partnering Halim	Holland's Response on 13 October 2013 Appreciate the advice/insights provided with regards to RPP, trust this will enable the refinement of our approaches in facilitating adult learning. Yes, let's connect sometime at IAL.  Responded on 14 October and he replied 15 October 2013 to propose the date to meet on 18 October (Fri) at 4:30pm or 29 October same time.
13 October 2013 Haley is partnering Juliet	Haley's Response on 13 October 2013 'Training recorded and in the process to do the self-reflection and send to my buddy for her critic. Take care'.
13 Oct 2013 Nancy is partnering Catherine	Nancy's Response on 13 Oct 2013: 'Thanks for taking time on Sunday to write to me and Catherine. I believe we have both just gotten a copy of our recorded CD from the tech team. Yes, we will take some time to review and reflect. Your suggestions are definitely helpful. I can sense your passion in RPP, and grateful of your sharing.  Catherine's Response on 13 October 2013: 'Thank you for your sharing. It will certainly help Nancy and me in our journey of reflective practice process.  I responded on 13 October 2013 to thank their support.  <u>Field Notes:</u> It is interesting to note their appreciation of the support and material and from Nancy's response – she can 'sense my passion for RP'. Despite the enthusiasm from her and others so far, yet the RPP did not take off well. There must be some challenges that the FAEs are facing as I noted they do not have a chance to proceed further. Must look into this further.
14 October 2013 Jeremy is partnering Winnie	Jeremy's Response on 14 October 2013:  He has taken a break of two months to coach his son for his exams (August to September). He was back to IAL to do training and assessment and informed he had no opportunity to do his RPP. Acknowledged that the email attachments have given him a good

	<p>framework and he planned to make arrangement with Tech Team to coordinate the video recording for his module in this October. He would then coordinate with his critical friend, Winnie for the critical reflecting and mutual learning. Planned to meet up on Wed, 16 October 2013.</p> <p>Winnie's Response on 14 Oct 2013:</p> <p>'Appreciated the alert as I was meeting back-to-back programmes + family matters on relative's passing + Mum's hospitalization and nursing. All have been settled now. Will do the recording within these 4 weeks when IAL program is confirmed. Will alert Jeremy on the review and feedback.</p> <p><u>Field Notes:</u> The FAEs have their own personal and family issues to manage besides their work. Glad to have FAEs like them willing to support the initiative despite their own challenges.</p>
<p>14 October 2013 Kimberly is partnering Susanna</p>	<p>Kimberly's Response on 14 October 2013:</p> <p>'Susanna and I will make take to advance and continue this RPP. I will be in this Wed and can meet up during lunch between 12.30 to 1.15pm.'</p> <p>Responded to her on 14 October 2013 and we met on 16 October 2013. The session was recorded.</p>
<p>14 October 2013 Natalie is partnering Carlene</p>	<p>Natalie's Response on 14 October 2013:</p> <p>'Thanks for your email and pointers on reflective questions for us to get started. It will definitely be useful for us to conduct the reflection. Carlene and myself have just conducted a run recently. I have just managed to get the video downloaded to my hard-disk today. Will take some time to look at the video before deciding which portion to trim and conduct the reflection. We will work towards getting it down by early November. Is it ok with you?'</p> <p>Responded to her on 14 October to thank her for supporting the initiative and as long as the intended schedule works for both of them, it should be fine.</p>



<p>15 October 2013 Nath is partnering with Alfred</p>	<p>Nath's Response on 15 October 2013:</p> <p>'Alfred and I had a chat. We will both have training at IAL on November 27 – 29. He and I will review and update you asap.'</p> <p>Responded on 16 October to thank them for supporting and taking the extra miles for the initiative and looking forward to their feedback at some point.</p>
<p>16 October 2013 Carlene is partnering Natalie.</p>	<p>Carlene's Response on 16 October 2013:</p> <p>'Thank you for the email and providing us details for our reflection. If you are in IAL next Friday, 25 October, shall we meet for a chat regarding the engagement of FAEs? I will be in for AE Support Specialist work in the afternoon. See you soon''.</p>
<p>16 Oct 2013 Tony is partnering with January.</p>	<p>Tony's Response on 16 October 2013:</p> <p>'The RPP is definitely a good initiative and it will help us to improve our facilitation skills. Will embark on it when I start my facilitation with IAL. Have not been scheduled for programme yet, still new as an AE. Look forward to work with January as well. Known him for a while, but never had a chance to sit in his classes.</p> <p>Subsequently I have checked with HR his status of understudy. Understood he had completed his understudy and ready for assignment in 2014.</p>
<p>16 October 2013 Tracy is partnering Betsy</p>	<p>Tracy's Response on 16 October 2013:</p> <p>'Betsy and I would like to pair up for RPP.'</p>
<p>16 October 2013 Philip is partnering George</p>	<p>Philip's Response on 16 October 2013:</p> <p>'Many thanks for your invaluable pointers which will be taken into much deliberation'.</p>
<p>16 October 2013 Larry is partnering Jeremy</p>	<p>Larry's Response on 16 October 2013:</p> <p>'I have an understudy (Jeremy) for CU5 in late November which would be an opportune time for video-taping for the RPP. The suggestions in your email will certainly be helpful for the reflective process.</p>
<p>17 October 2013 John is not partnering with Anthony</p>	<p>John's Response on 17 October 2013:</p> <p>He was in overseas on a business trip and informed that he is partnering Anthony as his critical friend.</p>

	<p>However, because he did not have any assignment with IAL, he had not started the RPP. He expressed support for the initiative and will carry out the RPP when he has the opportunity to conduct his maiden run.</p> <p>John's Response on 16 February 2014 to Sam's email on 2 January 2014:</p> <p>He shared that he was cleared only to run WTP for IAL and not ACTA. So he did not have the opportunity to use the IAL classroom with recording facilities. But he had managed to do the recording for one of his module using other training room. He had used Movie Maker to edit a 13-minute presentation with reflections included and embedded inside the video. He gave the link at <a href="https://vimeo.com/86810025">https://vimeo.com/86810025</a>. He also provided access of the video at his dropbox account and shared it with his partner, Anthony.</p> <p><u>Field Notes:</u> I think this is an example of a FAE who is competent with technology and found his own solution to meet our requirements. Indeed admirable.</p> <p>I responded on 16 February 2014 thanking him of his efforts to support the initiative. He replied on the same day.</p> <p><u>Field Notes:</u> His response of appreciation of the effort can be evidence for the educative relationship we have established.</p>
<p>17 October 2013 Abby explaining her inability to participate in the RPP</p>	<p>Abby's Response on 17 October 2013:</p> <p>She wrote a long response explaining her support for RPP but as a new AE who has not done a single set of training, admittedly she found the RPP with the use of critical friend and video a challenge. 'To me, an appointment of a critical friend means that I can appoint someone who professionally upholds AE values, and whose judgement I can trust, in order for RPP to be practically effective. At this moment, I do not have an in-depth understanding of any AE in IAL whose judgment can be relied on for improvement purposes. At the same time, I do not wish to exercise RPP as a desktop exercise, just for performance evaluation purposes'.</p> <p>Nevertheless, she suggested for new FAEs like herself, they should start the self- reflection without using critical friend first. But she is okay if mandatory</p>

	<p>for the process that IAL appoint one for her. She suggested we meet on 1 Nov for further discussion.</p> <p>I responded to her on 17 October and I told her I fully agree with her comments regarding the challenges our new colleagues will encounter for the RPP. We subsequently met after the Renewal Survey in July 2014.</p> <p><u>Field Notes:</u> This comment is valuable and her concerns are pragmatic and true. This also set me thinking about the scheme and the similar challenge that our FAEs may be facing to get the RPP going. I shall take a look and explore this further, because it did not occur to me this can be an issue, regarding privacy and confidentiality.</p>
<p>18 October 2013 Irish is partnering Larry but later Irish left and Larry is partnering Jeremy.</p>	<p>Irish's Response on 18 October 2013:</p> <p>'I'm off-shore presently until later in October. Although conducted a couple of DACE ID sessions earlier but I've nothing firm in the diary yet. So, not sure when I'll be able to shoot and share with my partner and sorry about that.'</p> <p>Responded on 20 October to thank him for his response. He responded on 24 October indicating he would be in IAL end of October at IAL and trying to arrange for a chat if schedule permits.</p> <p>He wrote on 28 October to fix the meeting in early November 2013. I responded that I would be on vacation leave that period and would need to re-schedule.</p> <p>He wrote again on 6 November and by then, he was told that his contract would not be renewed but he accepted the decision. I responded on 7 November to meet him on 13 November, Wednesday. He was okay with the schedule and we met on 13 November 2013.</p>
<p>19 October 2013 January is partnering Tony</p>	<p>January's Response on 19 October 2013:</p> <p>"Thanks for the opportunity in providing the structure and support for the RPP. My intention is to record my CU6 in Nov 2013. Looking forward to work with my critical friend, Tony in our learning and growth together"</p>

	<p>Responded on 20 October 2013 – ‘looking forward to hear his experience’.</p>
<p>11 December 2013</p>	<p>Larry responded on 11 December 2013, positively to the request and offered to explain to the class the purpose of my visit. He also suggested a preferred time-slot where I could come in and provided the rationale for the suggested time-slot. He also informed me that his critical friend had already informed him that he had left IAL. He also informed me that his current understudy, Jeremy (not his real name) had requested to pair up with him. He had planned to record one of his training module in November 2013 and had invited Jeremy to assist for the recording of the session, pending that Jeremy would be his new critical friend. However, he was aware that Jeremy had also agreed to partner with another AE, Winnie.</p> <p>Our subsequent correspondences on 12 and 13 December 2013, confirmed that Larry would be partnering Jeremy for the RPP and the timeslot for my sit-in request on 27 December 2013.</p>
<p>16 December 2013</p>	<p>For Holland, likewise, he is happy to have me to sit-in in his training on 17 December 2013, and also agreed that I can assist in the recording of the video for him. However, he also informed me that he was scheduled to be observed by one of the senior AE, Mora on the same day. In view of this, I told him that I would not disrupt the pre-arrangement of the sit-in observation by Mora and would make a separate time-slot another time. Ultimately, I did not have an opportunity to follow up with the sit-in request.</p> <p>For Juliet, similarly she responded on the same day, readily accepting my request of sitting in on 18 December 2013. She had already made arrangement for the tech-support team to assist in the recording of her training session for the RPP. She planned to record about an hour of her training and then to edit it for sharing with her critical friend.</p> <p>She told me that she had agreed with another AE to support his request to conduct a survey with the learners on the same day as well. In view of this situation, similarly, I told her I would re-schedule the sit-in to another occasion so that it would not be too disruptive for the class.</p>

	<p>Because Juliet does not conduct training frequently as freelancer in IAL, I did not have another opportunity to follow up with the sit-in.</p> <p><u>Field Notes:</u> Juliet is an example of a FAE who does not facilitate frequent and therefore may not have the video artefact to share.</p>
<p>16 February 2014 Anthony responding to John's email</p>	<p>Anthony's Response on 16 February 2014:</p> <p>He wrote to John 19 November 2013, to explain that he would not be conducting any training and therefore would not be his critical friend. Nevertheless, he would take a look at his video to provide him with feedback.</p> <p><u>Field Notes:</u> Anthony has left for his study overseas and one of the challenges faced by FAEs to carry out the RPP is that they do not have video to work on because they don't have assignments at IAL. Although, John has taken the initiative to share his video from another training provider, not many of the FAEs can do this. This is one of the reasons for the lukewarm outcome of the RPP initiative. Even those with assignments at IAL, some of them are in later part of Nov/Dec period as well. This can be a challenge for them.</p>
<p>3 March 2014 Informal chat with Philip on his experience on the RPP.</p>	<p>Philip partnered George on the RPP where they dialogued for 3 threads on November 12, 2013.</p>

**Transcript of RPP Interview with Philip**

**Date of Interview: 3 March 2014, 5 to 6 pm**

**Description of Situation:**

This is an informal chat with Philip who agreed to meet up after I have written to him to thank him for supporting the RPP process. Philip\* and his critical friend, George\* is the first pair of AEs who had done one round of sharing of their training video and exchange their peer critiques inputs.

**1a. Do freelancing adult educators find conducting self-reflection using their own training video in an e-Portfolio context useful in promoting professional learning and in improving their own practice?**

It is not an easy thing to do by writing self-reflection, highlighting my strengths and weaknesses. Inevitably, how truthful, how much should I reveal about my weaknesses and should I highlight my strengths at all? Can I really see my own weaknesses or do I want to see my weaknesses and to what degree I need to balance in sharing these? These are questions that run through my mind and it is about the level of comfort in doing it. It is also about the readiness. When we share our feedback to our critical friend, not everybody is receptive of the inputs as well. It takes time and we need to overcome the psychological barrier of what happens if 'the other party is not happy about it?'

**1b. Do freelancing adult educators find sharing his/her self-reflection and training video with his/her peer as dialogue partner useful in promoting mutual growth and building a learning community?**

Firstly in my context I am new and I don't know anyone well enough to invite my critical friend. So, it was my mentor, George who invited me to pair up and of course I was happy to do so. But this then also posed a challenge for me in terms of level of sharing and professional dialogue we could really engage. The process may affect the relationship. Besides, it can also be subjective in terms of viewing the video and providing the inputs. One example is some learners who are tactile learners would like to take down notes and they could be using their laptops or phones to record down notes, or they could be multi-tasking during training. This is especially so for younger learners where they are used to it but for the facilitator, they might interpret the situation as the learner(s) were rude, and not paying attention etc. So, the interpretation from the video or the perspectives derived could differ. For some facilitators, they understand and accept the situation quite readily but there are also others who cannot. While the intention of this whole effort is good, it will take time to build trust and understanding before the conversations can be developed to be meaningful and useful. There must be buy-in and acceptance by all parties involved.

**2. How motivated are the freelancing adult educators in using their training video to conduct their self-reflection and work with their dialogue partner to build a learning community via the e-Portfolio?**

It will take time and the motivation level is not high now but given time when we understand the intention as explained by you and the use of e-Portfolio as a tool to track and monitor our professional practice through the collection of artefacts as evidences of performance and growth; we can use it as electronic CV to profile ourselves and to seek re-engagement, it is useful to start. We will be motivated if we all understand the purpose and intention and it will ultimately help us to grow as professionals. But we do need to build a strong relationship to see this works.

**3. What are cultural and comparative dimensions of employing the video technology and e-Portfolio platform to facilitate reflective practice and in building a learning community among freelancing adult educators in IAL?**

As mentioned, culturally it can be difficult for us. One is what I mentioned about the 'double-age' culture'. Different generations of learners have different learning styles and how they learn and participate in class may differ. So, there may be different in opinions in our sharing of professional opinions and if we are not careful, it may strain our working relationship instead of helping to strengthen it. Therefore, there may be measured exchanges, perhaps in the beginning, and we need times to cultivate and build trust and understanding. Secondly, we don't know who are watching the video and it can be evidence of performance or non-performance as well. Perhaps that is the reason, why some of the senior AEs are not comfortable to facilitate new AEs like myself to sit in to observe. While they may have reputational capital and in this competitive sector, no one will like to share their trade secrets and maybe they see that if new AEs are doing better, it will mean lesser opportunities for me. Besides this, maybe in our culture, whether it is about perceived threats or competition or genuinely not comfortable to share, using video captures it all and not everyone is ready. Personally, I think this is a good thing and as you mentioned, if this is about professional development rather than performance measurement, we can honestly viewed for ourselves our strengths and weaknesses, take stock of what action plan we want to execute to improve and as you explained, we can then view again the next time we carry out the remedial action plan and see if we have rectified or improved, it is a good tool for self-improvement and if peers are willing to share, it will be a good sounding board. I am prepared to support the initiative.

**Note:**

\* - Philip and George are not the real names of the FAEs

**Summary of RPP Pair-Wise Sharing Records**

A total of 20 pairs of LMS Dyad Forum Discussion Folders were set up to accommodate the respective pair-wise dialogues to carry out the RPP. In view of observing the privacy of the conversation of sharing, data collection on the content was not carried out but just to register the number of conversations carried out and if it is one-way or two-way sharing between the pair.

S/NO	AE Dyads*	Description
1.	Natalie and Carlene	No posting between these two FAEs.
2.	Irish and Larry	No posting between these two FAEs.
3.	Nath and Alfred	No posting between these two FAEs.
4.	Catherine and Nancy	No posting between these two FAEs.
5.	Holland and Halim	No posting between these two FAEs.
6.	Winnie and Jeremy	No posting between these two FAEs.
7.	John and Anthony	No posting between these two FAEs.
8.	Philip and George	3 threads of two-way dialogues on November 12, 2013.
9.	Kimberly and Susanna	No posting between these two FAEs.
10.	Mora and Leesa	No posting between these two FAEs.
11.	Ruby and Dicky	No posting between these two FAEs.
12.	January and Tony	No posting between these two FAEs.
13.	Haley and Juliet	No posting between these two FAEs.
14.	Hillary and Violet	No posting between these two FAEs.
15.	Duncan and Ruby	1 thread of one-way sharing by Duncan on November 30, 2013 – no response from Ruby.
16.	Duncan and Kimberly	1 thread of one-way sharing by Duncan on November 4, 2013 – no response from Kimberly.
17.	Nigel and Charles	5 threads of two-way dialogues from October 11 to March 2, 2014
18.	Andy and Eddie	No posting between these two FAEs.
19.	Shawn and Susanna	No posting between these two FAEs.
20.	Helena and Luke	1 thread of one-way sharing by Duncan on 26 February 2014 – no response from Luke.

\* Not their real names.

**Notes** (highlighted in yellow):

1. There were only 2 two-way dialogues between two pairs of FAEs carried out between the period from October 2013 and March 2014



and 3 one-way dialogue attempts between three pairs in November 2013 period.

2. I only managed to secure one interview with Philip to share his RPP experience and feedback on 3 March 2014. The data collected was useful to provide his perspective which contributed the overall learning collated from the various data sources.

## **E-Portfolio Entries Requirements**

You are required to collect the necessary artefacts – video, pictures, reflections, documents and web-pages, etc., to support your preparation of the e-Portfolio presentation. There are 4 e-Portfolio entries and you can decide how you will design the presentation to showcase your 4 entries.

### **Entry Requirement 1:**

Short videos\* of delivery based on training sessions you have facilitated on any of the modules in the WTP, ACTA or DACE programmes in IAL; or for those who have not yet to start your facilitation assignment, you can use any video from your external training, as a basis for your entry. Your entry should be accompanied with explanation and reflection showing evidence of:

- Promoting active learning
- Engaging learners using verbal and non-verbal communication skills
- Using questioning techniques
- Using media purposefully
- Active listening
- Managing feedback
- Managing group dynamics
- Helping learners to review and retain learning
- Discussing transfer of learning to workplace

### **Entry Requirement 2:**

Short videos\* of conducting assessment based on assessments you have or will be conducting with accompany explanation and reflection showing evidence of:

- Briefing and preparing candidate
- Applying effective verbal and non-verbal interpersonal and communication skills
- Active listening
- Justifying assessment decision
- Providing feedback
- Maintaining a professional demeanour

(\* video should be taken by smart phone/tablet as per required of learners in the programme)

### **Entry Requirement 3:**

Write a self-reflection on the following:

- What is your overall experience in this effort of learning how to use the e-Portfolio?

- What are the challenges you faced in the process?
- What other applications do you think we can use e-Portfolio for besides using it as a learning portfolio? Can you look for one article on application of e-Portfolio and share it with other participants to solicit their comments?

Entry Requirement 4:

- Share your e-Portfolio with at least two participants in the workshop. For individuals on the AOP route, you will be included into the workshop sharing group for sharing your e-Portfolio.
- Respond to participants who have shared their e-Portfolio with you by adding comments.
- Send a completion email notification to [ial\\_techsupport@ial.edu.sg](mailto:ial_techsupport@ial.edu.sg) once you have shared and commented. State which two participants' e-Portfolio you have commented on.

Date of Submission: 21 March 2014

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**Communication with FAEs on the Certification Workshop for e-Portfolio**

**1. Email correspondences**

10 February 2014	My first email-invite to encourage AEs to attend the workshop to learn how to use the LMS e-Portfolio for the new ACTA programme.
2 March 2014	My second email to share the link of a sample e-Portfolio to encourage more AEs to attend the workshops.
3 March 2014	My full-time staff's email-invite to remind AEs who have not attended the workshop to do so for the next series starting in March 2014.
17 March 2014	My full-time staff's second email reminder was sent to encourage those who missed the previous workshop to make the efforts to attend.

**2. Records of first email sent to FAEs dated 10 February 2014**

**From:** Tat Suan KOH (IAL)  
**Sent:** Monday, 10 February, 2014 3:06 PM  
**Subject:** ACTA V5 - Use of D2L e-Portfolio

**Message Classification: *Restricted***

Dear colleagues,

IAL will be offering our ACTA V5 (M-series) from Apr 2014. I understand some of you have attended the various preparatory workshops, including the Tech workshops to prepare you to use the LMS and e-Portfolio. This is important as we want all those facilitating the new programme to be confident to guide the learners to use the LMS and e-Portfolio to meet their course requirements. I know some of you have attended the Tech workshop quite a while ago. Hence, I have requested the Tech Team with the assistance from Edward, our AE Specialist to jointly conduct another two more Tech workshops this month, for participants who have not been trained or those who require a refresher course. The workshops are as scheduled:

- 20<sup>th</sup> Feb 2014, 9.00am – 12.00pm (6 taken; 6 more slots available) [Sign up here](#)
- 21<sup>st</sup> Feb 2014, 9.00am – 12.00pm (12 slots available) [Sign up here](#)

Your registration should come in by 14 February and the team will send you a confirmation email for the workshop.

The objective of the workshop is to ensure AEs are equipped to guide learners to use the e-Portfolio in the context of ACTA V5. To evaluate your readiness after the workshop, there will be a follow-up assignment, typically of what is expected of the ACTA learners in the programme. All participants must maintain your own e-Portfolio and able to produce a Learning e-Portfolio Presentation consisting of at least any three modules of your own learning journey in ACTA and/or DACE. Participants need to meet the requirements stipulated for the follow-up assignment for the workshop before they are listed for assignment.

Please note that for AEs with prior training and are conversant in using the e-Portfolio already, you can decide to take the AOP route. Should this be the case, kindly sign-up [HERE](#) to indicate your interest and the team will contact you separately.

For the rest of the AEs who are not preparing to facilitate ACTA V5, it is our plan to also equip you to be ready with the use of LMS and e-Portfolio for our new programmes downstream. Therefore, it will be useful for you to attend the training in the near future and maintain own e-Portfolio by Jun 2014 as well.

tatsuan

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### **3. Records of second email sent by me dated 2 Mar 2014**

**From:** Tat Suan KOH (IAL)  
**Sent:** Sunday, 2 March, 2014 7:17 PM  
**Cc:**  
**Subject:** ACTA V5 - Use of D2L e-Portfolio

#### ***Message Classification: Restricted***

Dear AEs,

Thank you for those who had attended the workshops on 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> February and those indicated to go on AOP pathway to complete your e-Portfolio assignment. As mentioned in my previous email below, we will conduct more workshops in the next two months for those who have not attended previous Tech Workshops, or those who like to take a refresher can do so once the team has firmed up the dates of the workshop. The workshop will be organised on a 'hands-on' basis, of which you should be able to design and develop your own e-Portfolio after that. This is to enable all AEs to have their own e-Portfolio created and to start collecting their own artefacts.

I have attached the link of a sample e-Portfolio presentation for the workshop requirement for your reference. I have attempted to use the videos contributed by Haley who has graciously allow all workshop participants who do not have their own videos yet to use hers for the exercise.

[https://learningspace.ial.edu.sg/d2l/eP/presentations/presentation\\_preview\\_popup.d2l?presId=2485](https://learningspace.ial.edu.sg/d2l/eP/presentations/presentation_preview_popup.d2l?presId=2485)

I would suggest those who do not have your own video yet to do likewise (using Haley's video) so that you can familiarise yourself in the development of your own e-Portfolio in the context as a facilitator and an assessor in IAL. You can then replace your video reflection segments once you have your own assignments later as part of the effort to maintain your own e-Portfolio. The e-Portfolio requirement for workshop is given in the file attached.

For those who are engaged as AE Specialists and Associate Consultants and currently not playing the role of AEs as facilitators and/or assessors, you have a choice to follow the e-Portfolio requirement using your own external artefacts if you are training outside or to use it to collect your own artefacts and reflections in your areas of engagement such as curriculum/courseware developments and consultancy works.

Moving forward our plan is to adopt the e-Portfolio as a platform to foster community of practice and professional development. It will also be used as a tool for professional profiling and re-engagement as well.

To address some of the potential concerns about the comfort level of sharing your e-Portfolio presentation or artefacts to everyone (after the workshop practice), we can define the sharing groups based on objectives, as follow:

- For community of practice and professional development, we advocate that you shared your e-Portfolio artefacts or presentation with two of your invited critical friends who will respond to your invite as per RPP process. The objective of sharing with your critical friends is to form a small learning circle among you and two of your critical friends. The number of critical friends can be expanded based on choice and comfort level and this can include full-time AEs if you like. This way, the RPP will be replaced by the e-Portfolio process. Potentially, the e-Portfolio can also be used by Module Leads of which the sharing group will be those facilitating the same module(s) as well. They will use the e-Portfolio platform to discuss professional issues and archive their respective artefacts and sharing resources.
- For professional profiling and performance management purpose, once you have own e-Portfolio and engaged in your own learning circles and collecting periodic artefacts and reflections on your practice, you will be able to compile and submit your summative e-Portfolio showcasing relevant artefacts collected, professional exchanges among peers throughout your practice in the year, closer to the time for contract renewal. The e-Portfolio submitted will only be

accessed by relevant E&I staff and management group and confidentiality will be observed.

As mentioned in my New Year message, this is a period of transition and using learning technology as an enabler for professional development and learning is inevitable and also necessary. We are starting to train learners to use learning technology and e-Portfolio as a platform for reflective practice, via our ACTA (Version 5) and other new programmes downstream. As AEs facilitating future-ready practitioners ourselves, we need to embrace the change and I seek your understanding and support moving towards the next lap and be the pioneers of this change.

tatsuan

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#### **4. Records of email sent by my full-time staff to FAEs dated 3 Mar 2014**

**From:** [REDACTED]  
**Sent:** Monday, 3 March, 2014 4:14 PM  
**To:** IAL-AE Adjunct  
**Cc:**  
**Subject:** AE Workshop for ACTA V5 Trainers - Technology Workshop (NEW and REFRESHER!)

Dear AEs

Please read this email carefully and completely to decide if you need to respond on attending the **Technology Workshop**.

In preparation for the launch of ACTA (5th version) in April, we have re-started and fine-tuned the focus of the workshop on technology by concentrating on enabling all trainers to be ready to use, train and inspire ACTA learners on the use of e-portfolio. Please note that this is one of the series of **compulsory** workshops for all AEs intending to train ACTA (5<sup>th</sup> version).

Last month, we started the repeat runs of the tech workshops which were started last year – titled '**Technology on v.5 and More**'. If you had joined us in the workshops last year and would like to have a refresher, you are welcome to sign up for the coming March runs.

**If you've not joined us last year and want to start training ACTA (5<sup>th</sup> version), please sign up for the workshop (the link is at the end of the email).**

## **Workshop Content**

- **Pre workshop** - do a short sample video recording (need not be training / assessment) on your smartphone or tablet and bring to the workshop
  - Learn how to upload your videos onto media space
  - Learn how to create your personal e-portfolio
  - Find out what is required in the reflective writing
  - Learn how to publish or present, and share your e-portfolio with critical friends

## **Creating your personal E-portfolio (Deadline & Alternative)**

- Requirements for the e-portfolio is attached (deadline is in April for March workshops)
- You have one month after the workshop to complete and publish your e-portfolio

**Alternative:** if video-recording your own training and assessment within a month is logistically challenging, you may use an existing video (Haley's FAL and assessment video clips as listed below) to complete the assignment –

FAL video resource:

<http://mediaspace.ial.edu.sg/index.php/embed/index/Sbbxh7r5Lm/3422/glow>

Conduct of assessment video resource:

<http://mediaspace.ial.edu.sg/index.php/embed/index/Sbbxh7r5Lm/3425/glow>

## **Why Reflective Practice and E-portfolio**

The long term effort to have all IAL AEs (not only ACTA trainers) ready and confident users of the e-portfolio will serve the purposes of –

- Firstly, be able to confidently share, demonstrate and support learners in the life-long learning skill of reflective practice. By going through the experience of creating the e-portfolio, we want to be AEs who are able empathise and encourage learners to overcome the barrier or sense of intimidation in their encounter with technology in ACTA and other programmes.
- Secondly, be among the first group of Singapore Adult Educators to be professionally recognised in the areas of incorporating reflective practice and technology-enablers in the TAE sector – more communication on this point coming up soon.



**Sign up for the Workshop or Opt to go AOP**

Please follow this link - <https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/CLHXC8Y> to indicate your interest to either sign up for the workshop or take the AOP pathway.

Do fill in all the required contact details for our follow up with you with more information about the workshops.

If you are not available on these dates, please look out for broadcast on April and July runs.

Thanks and best



## 5. Records of reminder email sent to FAEs on 17 Mar 2014

**From:** [REDACTED]  
**Sent:** Monday, 17 March, 2014 5:18 PM  
**To:**  
**Cc: Subject:** AE Workshop (April) for ACTA V5 Trainers - Technology Workshop (NEW and REFRESHER!)

Dear AEs

We're writing to you as we noted that you've not had time to attend the tech workshop organised for ACTA V.5 trainers over the past months.

In preparation for the launch of ACTA (5th version) in April, we have re-started and fine-tuned the focus of the workshop on technology by concentrating on enabling all trainers to be ready to use, train and inspire ACTA learners on the use of e-portfolio. Please note that this is one of the series of **compulsory** workshops for all AEs intending to train ACTA (5th version).

In February, we started the repeat runs of the tech workshops which were started last year – titled '**Technology on v.5 and More**'. If you had joined us in the workshops last year and would like to have a refresher, you are welcome to sign up for one of the coming April runs.

**If you've not joined us last year and want to start training ACTA (5th version), please sign up for the workshop (the link is at the end of the email).**

### **Workshop Content**

- Do a short sample video recording (need not be training / assessment) on your smartphone or tablet (you are required to bring this and your laptop, as well as cable for connecting the two devices)
  - Learn how to upload video clips onto Mediaspace
  - Learn how to create your personal e-portfolio
  - Find out what is required in the reflective writing
  - Learn how to publish or present, and share your e-portfolio with critical friends

### **Creating your personal E-portfolio (Deadline & Alternative)**

- Requirements for the e-portfolio will be sent to you upon request, if you opt to take the AOP route
- You have one month after the workshop (or your indication for AOP) to complete and publish your e-portfolio

**Alternative:** if video-recording your own training and assessment within a month is logistically challenging, you may use an existing video (Haley's FAL and assessment video clips as listed below) to complete the assignment –

FAL video resource:

<http://mediaspace.ial.edu.sg/index.php/embed/index/Sbbxh7r5Lm/3422/glow>

Conduct of assessment video resource:

<http://mediaspace.ial.edu.sg/index.php/embed/index/Sbbxh7r5Lm/3425/glow>

### **Why Reflective Practice and E-portfolio**

The long term effort to have all IAL AEs (not only ACTA trainers) ready and confident users of the e-portfolio will serve the purposes of:

- Firstly, be able to confidently share, demonstrate and support learners in the life-long learning skill of reflective practice. By going through the experience of creating the e-portfolio, we want to be AEs who are able empathise and encourage learners to overcome the barrier or sense of intimidation in their encounter with technology in ACTA and other programmes.
- Secondly, be among the first group of Singapore Adult Educators to be professionally recognised in the areas of incorporating reflective practice and technology-enablers in the TAE sector – more communication on this point coming up soon.

### **Sign up for the Workshop OR opt to go AOP**

Please follow this link - <https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/DP2NWD6> to indicate your interest to either sign up for the workshop or take the AOP pathway.

Do fill in all the required contact details for our follow up with you with more information about the workshops.

If you are not available on these dates, please look out for broadcast in the coming months.

Thanks and best



**Appendix G****Certification Status as at 1 April 2015**

S/No	Name of AE (Not real names)	Clearance Status	To be assigned to ACTA V5
1.	Andy	Cleared	Yes
2.	Catherine	Cleared	Yes
3.	Charles	Cleared	Yes
4.	Jeremy	Cleared	Yes
5.	Archie	Cleared	Yes
6.	Holland	Cleared	Yes
7.	Leesa	Cleared	Yes
8.	Nelson	Pending	Yes
9.	Debra		
10.	Teresa	Cleared	Yes
11.	Wallace	Cleared	Yes
12.	Connie		
13.	Harrie	Cleared	No
14.	Robert	Pending	No
15.	Juliet	Cleared	Yes
16.	Nancy	Cleared	Yes
17.	Cindy		
18.	Carlene	Pending	Yes
19.	Philip	Cleared	Yes
20.	Lily	Cleared	Yes
21.	Tracy	Cleared	Yes
22.	Haley	Cleared	Yes
23.	Kelvin	Cleared	Yes
24.	Peggy		
25.	Rosie	Cleared	No
26.	Felicia	Cleared	Yes
27.	Kimberly	Pending	No
28.	Susanna	Cleared	Yes
29.	Shawn	Cleared	Yes
30.	Kimberly	Cleared	Yes
31.	Halim	Cleared	Yes
32.	Tony	Cleared	Yes
33.	Mora	Pending	No
34.	Kelly	Pending	No
35.	Ruby	Cleared	Yes
36.	Tara	Cleared	Yes
37.	Helena	Cleared	Yes
38.	Benny		
39.	Dicky	Pending	Yes
40.	Nigel	Cleared	Yes
41.	Duncan	Cleared	Yes
42.	Samson		

43.	Sally		
44.	Carla	Pending	Chinese ACTA
45.	Larry	Cleared	Yes
46.	Frank	Cleared	No
47.	Walter	Pending	No
48.	Violet	Cleared	Yes
49.	George	Cleared	Yes
50.	Natalie	Cleared	Yes
51.	Abby	Pending	No
52.	Alfred	Pending	Yes
53.	Winnie	Cleared	Yes
54.	Willy	Pending	No
55.	Danny	Pending	No
56.	Pamela	Cleared	Chinese ACTA
57.	Washington	Pending	Yes
58.	Peggy		
59.	Hillary	Cleared	Yes

Notes:

1. A total of 37 FAEs were certified and 14 pending and 8 not started;
2. Of the 37 certified, 3 are not facilitating ACTA.
3. Of 14 pending, 8 are not facilitating ACTA but for other programmes

**Status of e-Portfolio Utilisation**

S/No	Name of AE (Not real names)	Dates of Postings	Comments by other AEs
1.	Andy	24 March 2014	Posting taken out after sharing.
2.	Catherine	7 April to 18 April 2014 2 Postings	Posting is still up but did not see any comments
3.	Charles	9 May 2014	Posting is still up and 2 AEs responded – Nigel and myself.
4.	Jeremy	4 August 2014	Posting for private viewing because he had proposed recommendations for improvement which he did not want to share with other AEs yet.
5.	Archie	22 to 29 August 2014 2 Postings	Posting is still up and 2 AEs responded - Ivan and myself.
6.	Holland	Cleared but not in the system	Posting taken out after sharing.
7.	Leesa	8 May 2014	Posting is still up and 11 AEs responded – January, Sam, Charles, Catherine, Felicia, Tracy, Teresa, Charles, Kimberly, Helena, and myself.
8.	Nelson		
9.	Debra		
10.	Teresa	22 February to 15 October 2014 2 Postings	Posting is still up and 7 AEs responded – Howard, Teresa, Pamela, Jone, Kang, Sam and myself.
11.	Wallace	18 June 2014	Posting is still up and 3 AEs responded - Sam, Helena, Howard
12.	Connie		
13.	Harrie	3 November to 5 November 2014 2 Postings	Posting is still up but did not see any comments, except my own.
14.	Robert		
15.	Juliet	21 to 24 March 2014	Posting taken out after sharing.
16.	Nancy	15 June 2014	Posting is still up and 2 AEs responded – Sam and Nigel.
17.	Cindy		
18.	Carlene	4 April 2014	Posting taken out after sharing.
19.	Philip	25 March 2014	Posting taken out after sharing.

20.	Lily	23 November to 16 December 2014 3 Postings	Posting is still up but did not see any comments, except my own.
21.	Tracy	1 August 2014	Posting is still up but did not see any comments.
22.	Haley	11 May 2014	Posting is still up and 4 AEs responded - Andy, Larry, Jeremy and myself.
23.	Kelvin	24 September to 29 December 2014 7 Postings	Posting is still up and 5 AEs responded - Howard, Connie, Harrie, Teresa and myself.
24.	Peggy		
25.	Rosie	22 April 2014	Posting taken out after sharing.
26.	Felicia		Posting taken out after sharing
27.	Kimberly		
28.	Susanna	7 April 2014	Posting taken out after sharing.
29.	Shawn	12 April to 15 April 2014	Posting taken out after sharing.
30.	Kimberly	Cleared but not in system	Posting taken out after sharing.
31.	Halim	19 March 2014	Posting taken out after sharing.
32.	Tony	29 August 2014	Posting is still up and 1 AE responded – myself.
33.	Mora		
34.	Kelly		
35.	Ruby	22 April 2014	Posting is still up 3 AEs responded - Larry, Sam, Emily.
36.	Tara	23 December to 12 January 2015 2 Postings	Posting is still up but did not see any comments, except my own.
37.	Helena	4 April to 24 November 2014 3 Postings	Posting taken out after sharing.
38.	Benny		
39.	Dicky	23 September 2014	Posting still up but no indication he invited others to comment.
40.	Nigel	16 March to 13 November 2014 2 Postings	Posting is still up and 6 AEs responded - Nancy, Charles, Holland, Teresa, Sam and myself.
41.	Duncan	Cleared but not in the system	Posting taken out after sharing.
42.	Samson		
43.	Sally		
44.	Carla		
45.	Larry	20 April 2014	Posting taken out after sharing.

46.	Frank	30 August 2014	Posting is still up and 1 AE responded – myself.
47.	Walter		
48.	Violet	Cleared but not in the system	Posting taken out after sharing.
49.	George	5 March to 13 April 2014	Posting is still up but did not see any comments
50.	Natalie	Cleared but not in the system	Posting taken out after sharing.
51.	Abby		
52.	Alfred	25 September to 30 Oct 2014 2 Postings	Posting is still up but did not see any comments other than my own.
53.	Winnie	13 March to 20 Mar 2014 2 Postings	Posting is still up and 2 AEs commented and provided feedback – George and Jeremy
54.	Willy		
55.	Danny		
56.	Pamela	31 March 2014	Posting is still up but she did not see any comments.
57.	Washington		
58.	Peggy		
59.	Hillary	11 March 2014	Posting taken out after sharing.

### Comments:

Of the 37 certified: 14 had removed their postings for sharing after they met the certification requirements of sharing with specified number of workshop participants; 13 had their postings remained in the system and have at least one comments shared by other FAEs; and 10 did not have or did not invite any comments from others. Of those 37 certified, 3 are not facilitating the new ACTA programme and have been active in using the e-Portfolio for general sharing. For those 10 postings without any comments by other AEs, some of them who are not so conversant with the system in the beginning and therefore they have not activated the sharing button for their postings to invite feedback and comments. We had also left this as it was and did not insist them to share their posting knowing that they were uncomfortable with it.

Of the 14 pending for certification, 8 of them are not facilitating for ACTA as well. But they will need the certification as other new programmes, both WSQ and non-WSQ programme would need them to have this technical competence as well.



**Renewal Survey**

Dear colleagues,

Thank you for taking time to complete the survey. This survey is important to you as it will provide IAL with the necessary data to ascertain our current engagement of adjunct adult educators to assist us in planning our next lap.

In view of this, this survey will address several areas of our engagement with you as our adjunct adult educators. These include:

- a. Section A: Updating of your demographic profile
- b. Section B: Types of Engagement
- c. Section C: Availability and Process of Assignment of Work and Project
- d. Section D: Recruitment and Induction Process
- e. Section E: Performance and Feedback Appraisal System
- f. Section F: Remuneration and Recognition System
- g. Section G: Professional Development and Institutional Alignment
- h. Section H: As a AE Specialist in IAL

It is inevitable there will be sensitive questions where we hope you will respond candidly so we can elicit your sentiments and concerns, if any. We will like to remind you this is not an anonymous survey and will appreciate it if you remember to state your name in the survey.

Please complete the survey by 15 Jun 2014 latest. Once again, thank you very much for your inputs.

tatsuan

Note:

(Only the Renewal Survey items on Section G on Professional Development and Institutional Alignment is given in this Appendix I)

## Section G: Professional Development and Institutional Alignment

*(Click the appropriate option given)*

S/No	Description	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1.	I believe efforts made by IAL at professional development are important to me as an adjunct AE.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
2.	The implementation of the reflective practice process (RPP) encourages both self and mutual development among AEs.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
3.	The technical process in creating an e-Portfolio presentation can be viewed as a challenge for those who are not tech-savvy.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
4.	I support the use of the e-Portfolio by all AEs as a platform to share their unique contributions and works.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
5.	The choice of a suitable dialogue partner or critical friend is a real issue for me.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
6.	I am not comfortable with sharing my performance video with someone else as part of my reflective practice.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
7.	I am not able to align with the institutional requirement on the use of LMS and the e-Portfolio.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
8.	I am in favour of promoting peer-sharing and professional exchanges via the use of e-Portfolio.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
9.	I support the building and maintaining of a personal e-Portfolio but not the peer sharing and feedback using the e-Portfolio.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

10.	I am prepared to take the necessary steps to align with institutional changes that promote CPD and holistic professional development whenever IAL initiates them.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
11.	I am prepared to acquire the necessary technical know-how to use the e-Portfolio for my personal professional improvement and peer-learning.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
12. If you have any other concerns on this section that are not covered in items 1 to 7, please give your comments and views here.					

**Renewal Survey Results**

Number of records in this query: 51  
 Total records in survey: 51  
 Percentage of total: 100.00%

**Section C : Availability and Process of Assignment of Work and Projects**

**1. Indicate the nature of your freelance work:**

Answer	Count	Percentage
I am a full-time freelance trainer	35	68.63%
I am a part-time freelance trainer	16	31.37%

**2. Regardless of whether you are a full-time or a part-time freelance trainer: Are you serving only IAL? Or**

Answer	Count	Percentage
Yes	21	41.18%
No	21	41.18%
No answer	9	17.65%

**2. Regardless of whether you are a full-time or a part-time freelance trainer: Are you also serving other training organisation(s) as well?**

Answer	Count	Percentage
Yes	25	49.02%
No	13	25.49%
No answer	13	25.49%

**2. Regardless of whether you are a full-time or a part-time freelance trainer: If so, 1 more?**

Answer	Count	Percentage
Yes	13	25.49%
No	6	11.76%
No answer	32	62.75%

**2. Regardless of whether you are a full-time or a part-time freelance trainer: If so, 2 more?**

Answer	Count	Percentage
Yes	7	13.73%
No	9	17.65%
No answer	35	68.63%

**2. Regardless of whether you are a full-time or a part-time freelance trainer: If so, more than 2?**

Answer	Count	Percentage
Yes	8	15.69%

No	7	13.73%
No answer	36	70.59%

**3. I need to serve other organisation(s) besides IAL because: There are not enough assignments for me.**

Answer	Count	Percentage
Yes	15	29.41%
No	9	17.65%
No answer	27	52.94%

**3. I need to serve other organisation(s) besides IAL because: I prefer to serve a variety of other training providers.**

Answer	Count	Percentage
Yes	13	25.49%
No	8	15.69%
No answer	30	58.82%

**3. I need to serve other organisation(s) besides IAL because: I was already serving others before I joined IAL.**

Answer	Count	Percentage
Yes	25	49.02%
No	5	9.80%
No answer	21	41.18%

**3. I need to serve other organisation(s) besides IAL because: I have my own sole proprietary/training business.**

Answer	Count	Percentage
Yes	14	27.45%
No	9	17.65%
No answer	28	54.90%

**3. I need to serve other organisation(s) besides IAL because: Others**

Answer	Count	Percentage
Yes	7	13.73%
No	7	13.73%
No answer	37	72.55%

**4. If given a choice, would you consider dedicating more of your time to serve IAL solely? If no, why not?**

Yes, because	30	58.82%
No, because...	20	39.22%

ID	Response
5	I am already spending more than 50% of my working time on IAL training and development matters and I need to create time to do other learning projects for other clients
12	I have become disillusioned with IAL.
14	Don't put all my eggs in one basket
16	I am a life-long learner and would like to learn from a variety of situations and programs.
25	Variety of engagement, as a hedge
39	I have a full time job but if interesting and challenging opportunities arise, I am willing to explore.
41	Prior commitment to other ATO which I have joined prior to being part of IAL and uncertainty of number of runs if time is spent solely with 1 training organisation.
43	I work with a variety of public and private organisations for other programs not offered at IAL
46	Variety of exposure.
48	Insufficient assignments, network.
51	When I'm in Singapore I give all my time to IAL.
52	There is limited demand for Chinese ACTA courses.
54	I like to do a range of training that is different from ACTA & non WSQ.
55	I would like to impact and inspire others who are seeking directions in their careers and lives.
56	More time for IAL is good but I add more value to IAL if I bring expertise garnered from training and consulting outside IAL.
57	Opportunity cost.
61	I have always been with IAL and am at comfort level. Feel that I should challenge myself to work with other organisations.
65	Upkeep other domain expertise areas.
75	Not enough volume of work given. Only one assignment every few months.

**5. I suspect I do not get enough assignments from IAL because my availability does not match the assignments available.**

Answer	Count	Percentage
Yes	18	35.29%
No	12	23.53%
No answer	21	41.18%

**5. I suspect I do not get enough assignments from IAL because the process of booking my time ahead of 3 months or more does not work for me.**

Answer	Count	Percentage
Yes	5	9.80%
No	16	31.37%
No answer	30	58.82%

**5. I suspect I do not get enough assignments from IAL because I am only ring-fenced for specific types of assignment based on my suitability and readiness (such as WTP and/or ACTA and/or DACE and/or AE Specialist or projects only.**

Answer	Count	Percentage
Yes	18	35.29%
No	12	23.53%
No answer	21	41.18%

**5. I suspect I do not get enough assignments from IAL because I am not sure how the assignment process works.**

Answer	Count	Percentage
Yes	13	25.49%
No	10	19.61%
No answer	28	54.90%

**5. I suspect I do not get enough assignments from IAL because I am not aware or inform of the availability of assignments for booking.**

Answer	Count	Percentage
Yes	5	9.80%
No	13	25.49%
No answer	33	64.71%

**5. I suspect I do not get enough assignments from IAL because of reason(s) not stated above.**

Answer	Count	Percentage
Yes	8	15.69%
No	12	23.53%
No answer	31	60.78%

**6. I will like IAL to consider the following to improve my opportunities for more assignments and contributions to IAL:**

Answer	32	62.75%
No answer	19	37.25%

ID	Response
5	So far I think IAL has given me sufficient opportunities to make contributions and to take on assignments.
7	I will be happy to start with just running WTP first for IAL as I am currently booked to continue training ACTA for NTUC Learning Hub right up to 2014Q3. I understand and acknowledge the conflict of interest in running ACTA for two different CETs /ATOs concurrently.
9	Optimize assignments based on my expertise with greater variety and nature of domain areas.
10	I understand from IAL that the demand on Chinese ACTA is very poor. If this is situation, I am willing to help IAL "creating" the demand and helping on marketing and sales for the Chinese ACTA program.
12	There are professional differences and I can't expect IAL to change for my benefit. I therefore have to exit gracefully.
13	I hope to assess/train other modules other than those I am currently doing.
16	Not applicable.
18	I am happy with the present opportunities for my assignments and contributions.
26	No contributions for the moment.
27	I am open to facilitate/assess more modules.
28	I am happy with my current assignments as I have set a self-limit of 4 to 5 days a month for assessments. And these are usually fulfilled.
32	I really don't know what to suggest.
35	Would like to learn more about technologies to equip myself and keep pace with the current trend.
38	I am getting sufficient assignments with IAL. I would like to be able to do more - for example complete all the 6 units of ACTA version 4 to have a holistic view as well as provide cover when needed. I am already scheduled for all three clusters of ACTA M-series. After I complete my MA LLL and top up the DACE requirements, I would like to conduct the TNA / ID / AS modules.
41	Discussions to ascertain requirements for specific assignments (for personal action plan and forward planning).
46	So far so good. Keep up the good work!



48	<p>1. Forgive the reasons that IAL had to ring fence 5 and 6 of ACTA V4 assignments. I had requested to deliver CU3 and CU4.</p> <p>2. My diary in Jun and Jul 2014 were negatively impacted, because of a 'miscommunication' in assignment scheduling. ACTA version 4 schedules cancelled with no reasons given, and version 5 - dates mis-communicated and re-assigned to other AEs.</p> <p>3. I had attended and contributed to WTP feedback sessions 2 years ago - I have yet to be assigned any WTP programmes despite answering more than one LIME surveys.</p> <p>4. I had also indicated interest in conducting DACE programmes in many surveys. I am hopeful to be assigned modules indicated in the above paragraphs.</p>
49	More transparency when assigning assignments, especially for corporate clients.
50	Opportunity for quick learn from experienced trainers and assessors into the other modules. Provide more opportunities for evening/Sat training and assessment.
51	I feel I have been able to choose my assignments to meet my needs and those of IAL, esp given the nature of my work schedule.
54	I am open to dialogue to see how I can serve IAL.
55	I would like to have a go at DACE Practicum and Assessment. Possibility of WTP and ACTA V5 Facilitation also.
56	I am generally pleased and satisfied with the number of assignments I have.
57	N/A
58	My academic achievements (High Distinctions) in Workplace Learning and Instructional Design Strategies obtained in the Masters programme.
59	No comments.
61	I would like to expand the scope of work I do with IAL by moving into DACE modules. For this, I would like to start with assessments first before moving into facilitation.
63	Opportunity to train WTP public run
65	Conversations to explore progressive & potential contributions on a regular basis say quarterly or 6 - monthly.
66	I would like to be able to support IAL in the AE specialist roles in the next phase. I am also keen to explore potential areas which I can contribute to research, take for example, pursuing the areas of my Masters' dissertation to a small scale research and also publishing the work with IAL.

68	Happy to help out with the research component and perhaps e-facilitation.
69	No consideration at this moment.
73	Yes in future.
75	I can work on WTP programmes as well.

**7. I will like to contribute to do a variety of different assignments beyond just training and assessment such as curriculum, courseware and other development projects.**

Answer	Count	Percentage
Yes	24	47.06%
No	9	17.65%
No answer	18	35.29%

**7. I will like to contribute to do a variety of different assignments beyond just training and assessment such as consultancy and outreach to enterprises.**

Answer	Count	Percentage
Yes	36	70.59%
No	7	13.73%
No answer	8	15.69%

**7. I will like to contribute to do a variety of different assignments beyond just training and assessment such as AE Specialist scheme.**

Answer	Count	Percentage
Yes	17	33.33%
No	8	15.69%
No answer	26	50.98%

**7. I will like to contribute to do a variety of different assignments beyond just training and assessment such as i-Team action research projects.**

Answer	Count	Percentage
Yes	13	25.49%
No	9	17.65%
No answer	29	56.86%

**7. I will like to contribute to do a variety of different assignments beyond just training and assessment such as others.**

Answer	Count	Percentage
Yes	7	13.73%
No	7	13.73%
No answer	37	72.55%

### **General Analysis on Section C:**

In view of FAEs' desire to have flexibility in their engagement with different types of work and different clients, the survey aimed to solicit the current profile of the pool of FAEs we are engaging.

Out the 51 respondents, 35 (69%) indicated that they are full-time FAEs with the rest, 16 (31%) as part-time FAEs. The part-timers are people with a full-time job or they may be entrepreneurs with their own training organisations, who would take up ad-hoc training role assignments. In terms of client's engagement, 21 (41%) are serving only IAL, whereas 25 (49%) have other clients, and the rest of the respondents did not respond to this survey item. The survey also solicited the various reasons why FAEs either prefer or not prefer to serve beyond IAL. In addition, 30 (59%) indicated that if given a choice, they would dedicate more time to serve IAL solely and the rest 20 (39%) would not (see Appendix J for details). This also indicated an increased interest of FAEs wanting to work more with the Institute.

The high percentage of full-time FAEs in IAL also correlated to the findings that a good proportion of them would explore serving only IAL instead of multiple clients. This arrangement could be good for the FAEs in terms of work assignment stability and for the Institute this could mean it would have a stable pool of FAEs to support its training provisions. This would also imply that these FAEs either like or able to adapt and align to the institutional culture and demands. While it is desirable to have a core pool of FAEs who would align and support the institutional goals, it is also important for us to ensure their professional development. They would form the "cream of the crop" and set the benchmark for professionalism in this adult education community.

## Section G : Professional Development and Institutional Alignment

**1. I believe efforts made by IAL at professional development are important to me as an adjunct AE.**

Answer	Count	Percentage
Strongly agree	24	47%
Agree	25	49%
Strongly disagree	0	0%
Disagree	1	2%

**2. The implementation of the reflective practice process (RPP) encourages both self and mutual development among AEs.**

Answer	Count	Percentage
Strongly agree	16	31%
Agree	29	57%
Strongly disagree	1	2%
Disagree	4	8%

**3. The technical process in creating an e-Portfolio presentation can be viewed as a challenge for those who are not tech-savvy.**

Answer	Count	Percentage
Strongly agree	14	27%
Agree	26	51%
Strongly disagree	4	8%
Disagree	6	12%

**4. I support the use of the e-Portfolio by all AEs as a platform to share their unique contributions and works.**

Answer	Count	Percentage
Strongly agree	9	18%
Agree	36	71%
Strongly disagree	2	4%
Disagree	5	10%

**5. The choice of a suitable dialogue partner or critical friend is a real issue for me.**

Answer	Count	Percentage
Strongly agree	5	10%
Agree	20	39%
Strongly disagree	3	6%
Disagree	23	45%

**6. I am not comfortable with sharing my performance video with someone else as part of my reflective practice.**

Answer	Count	Percentage
Strongly agree	6	12%
Agree	7	14%
Strongly disagree	7	14%
Disagree	30	59%

**7. I am not able to align with the institutional requirement on the use of LMS and the e-Portfolio.**

Answer	Count	Percentage
Strongly agree	1	2%
Agree	4	8%
Strongly disagree	13	25%
Disagree	30	59%

**8. I am in favour of promoting peer-sharing and professional exchanges via the use of e-Portfolio.**

Answer	Count	Percentage
Strongly agree	8	16%
Agree	33	65%
Strongly disagree	1	2%
Disagree	5	10%

**9. I support the building and maintaining of a personal e-Portfolio but not the peer-sharing and feedback using the e-Portfolio.**

Answer	Count	Percentage
Strongly agree	4	8%
Agree	15	29%
Strongly disagree	5	10%
Disagree	27	53%

**10. I am prepared to take the necessary steps to align with institutional changes that promote CPD and holistic professional development whenever IAL initiates them.**

Answer	Count	Percentage
Strongly agree	15	29%
Agree	32	63%
Strongly disagree	0	0%
Disagree	2	4%

**11. I am prepared to acquire the necessary technical know-how to use the e-Portfolio for my personal professional improvement and peer-learning.**

Answer	Count	Percentage
Strongly agree	19	37%
Agree	31	61%
Strongly disagree	0	0%
Disagree	1	2%

**12. If you have any other concerns on this section that are not covered in items 1 to 11, please give your comments and views here.**

Answer	15	29%
No answer	36	71%

ID	Response
6	D2L technology needs to be improved. Not user friendly.
10	As I have not starting to do any facilitating or training or assessing work in IAL, I do not think that I have the capacity to comments much about CPD or LMS questions.
12	I am not convinced that a significant improvement will be made after the IAL interventions. IAL has initiated a number of interventions with AEs. Have they significantly improved other than looking technologically sound? Your data base can establish that. Data presented at the Trainers day was unconvincing. The data were all from university setting. Is this the same for adults?
26	I am unclear of Q5 & Q6. I take it to mean that I have NO problem in finding a critical friend. Nor do I have an issue sharing videos with a friend of my choice.
35	Need to buck up my use of technologies.
48	<p>Para 9 has two questions. I support the building and maintaining of a personal e-Portfolio - I am open to this as a way to continuing public discourse. To have public discourse is to have peer sharing and feedback.</p> <p>Dear Tat Suan,</p> <p>This is not covered elsewhere in the survey. I am not sure if this is the right thing to request? Could IAL share with adjuncts who took part in the survey a consolidation to get a sense of where we stand, and if possible, actions (or non-actions) taken or not taken, as a result of this survey. If this is not possible, it is ok. Many thanks, and I look forward to a continuing professional relationship with IAL.</p>

49	Question 7: Sorry, I don't understand this question. Question 8 : I'm neutral. There are other ways of doing so. Question 10: phraseology of question too absolute. Question 11: phraseology of question too absolute.
51	Ref. no 2 - it depends on HOW it is implemented - the idea is sound; re no 3 - the technical requirements have to be the EASIEST to use, both for AEs and the learners; if AEs struggle so will adult learners. What obligation do freelance/casual workers have to an organisation to commit extra time?
61	I appreciate the effort IAL puts in wanting us more open to new technology. Though I appreciate it, I wish IAL would take smaller steps, rather than a big push. It is quite depressive when one feels so incapable as an adult. I have started facilitating ACTA V5. I find that IAL is also pushing the learners in a big way. In V5, the learners have to tackle the e-portfolio that is so new to most of them. On top of that, the new methodology used (i.e. no LG but using resources from LMS or other material provided by the AE) is also a challenge for the learners. I wish IAL had progressively made these changes. I like the flexibility that V5 provides us but it is very challenging to manage the learners as well.
65	Need for better logistics support. It takes 3 days to reserve booking of video facilities but 2 weeks in advance for room numbers to be confirmed. Used my own video recording facilities. I am alright with the 3 days advance notice. Perhaps an alignment or booking of video cum room allocation can be better aligned.
66	Q3 needs clarification. Does it refer to our learners or we (AEs). I responded base on my experience. If Q3 is targeted to learner, the answer is strongly agreed. The solution would be to provide the tech guidance to the learners before they enrol into the course. That would be ESS skills to be funded for learners who need this IT enabling skills.

71	As reference, I included some of my perspectives on these issues in my e-Portfolio entries.
75	I am concern about the use of LMS & e-portfolio for short duration learning. That would mean that learners have to spend time learning the technology on top of the content. This is something where we need to strike a fine balance.

### **General Analysis of Induction and Professional Development**

Although most of our FAEs recruited are experienced adult educators, the Institute does provide an induction regime where senior FAEs are deployed as AE Mentors to guide new FAEs recruited in their induction programmes and also on-going professional development through sit-in observations and coaching sessions.

From the survey, 42 (83%) either strongly agree or agree that the current process of induction, including mentoring and class sit-in observation are useful to prepare the new FAEs for their first assignment or their on-going improvement in their practice.

37 (73%) of the respondents also indicated that they support the current practice of sit-in observations by newly appointed FAEs in their class to enable them to learn from the seniors. However, 3 (6%) and the rest 11 (21%) did not respond to this item. On the ground, I know there are FAEs who are against such practices (in view of their strong sense of competitiveness) and there were occasions where some would reject the requests from the new FAEs for the sit-in observations. The AE mentor scheme could be used to mitigate this situation where they would provide the sit-in observation opportunities for the new entrants.



**Transcription Sample of a One-to-one Interview**

**Notes:**

1. Please note that the name of the interviewees is not their real name.
2. I: Interviewer; R: Respondent

**One-to-one Interview with Leesa held on 22 August 2014 – 08:45 to 09:08 am**

**Transcription:**

I: (Q4) Noticed that you indicated that you disagree to support the use of the e-Portfolio by all AEs as a platform to share their unique contributions and works, can you elaborate why you disagree?

R: I see the question expressed as an absolute question and my contention was it was an absolute question therefore I disagree. I think if you explain that it is one of the learning platforms and the proviso is set clearly. My own portfolio, I shared with my second batch of V5 learners, some of them. For my first batch [of V5 learners] surprising most of them are very young and have not done this before, some may have blogged before so they didn't have much problem. However, for the second batch, two in my class absolutely don't know what to do, one is elderly, in his 60s' and is a real estate agent and the other is a young girl whose language is not very good. So I decided to share mine. But I said no one is to take any photograph and they asked, 'what about if they post something on their blog, what I did with them'. I said no and they need to get my permission, although they assured it is closed audience.

So I shared with them what is required in the e-Portfolio and it is not about regurgitation but what you have learnt and your learning internalised and then your comments and your reflections and where you go from there. I said it is meant to be a learning tool, development tool and also to test your articulation of your understanding. Nothing to do with ... because they are not used to this kind of learning assessment. So because, now I am giving them the bit on e-Portfolio, I felt it is a good learning tool because I look at others' I learned too. So I learned about myself. Like the one I put up, I have no time to write although I have things I keep working on them myself mentally. So, although it is a powerful tool but [not the only tool]. I just want to go back to the fundamental and to close this question, it was a very absolute statement or definitive and so I disagree, loh.

I: Yes, agree it should not be just one but..

R: ...maybe if you say why, then I will not totally disagree.

I: No worries, then we just move on..

R: (laughter) so we moved on...as I said, it is a powerful tool and it should be stated that it is one of the learning platforms and should re-phrase it.

I: I think at the end of the day, if we can inculcate the habit of doing reflection, doing self-reflection, then ultimately it can be one of the many possible tools and individuals can then pick something they want. Remember when we first started, we

were hoping that, the idea is to inculcate their awareness of those who have not done this (reflection) before and those who have already been doing it, maybe they could be using journaling or other means, it is fine. At some point, it is about your preference but the intent is also ...huh..in preparing our facilitators to guide our V5 learners, they themselves ought to know the process and the challenges and once they do it themselves, the e-Portfolio, then they can guide students. So, that was the premise of which we started to ensure that those who are interested to do the V5 ACTA because as the facilitators, they themselves need to experience it. Better still if you are conversant with it then you can help the students and at the same time empathise their challenges. And also at the same time, prepare them to use technology and new learning processes so that they can actually be a bit more guided towards what we called reflective practice.

R: I think that is the way to go. (Hmm). Two things, in face-to-face facilitation, it is the way to go. I told them in the National Day Rally, when they interviewed Denise Phua, she said the teachers are also facilitators, which I think it is not true lah. I mean...ideally lah. (they are hoping to work towards it) they are hoping to work towards. Then I said, your audience coming in, their expectations are very different. (Hmm). If you don't move [forward] and then the e-Portfolio is... there is no choice. I said I struggled, I told them how I struggled ...I really struggled...not with the writing but struggled with the technology, the process and the scariness of having to go through all the technological things and I said I am not really that conversant (I truly respect your determination and your ...) ..I had to lah (your willingness and perseverance to...) I had to lah. Life is like that what, ...what is in front of you, faced it (that's right). Then face, then you stumbled ...huh (and which is fine, you know) I stumbled loh (as long as you are willing to ..kind of learn new things, we are always there for you), thank you, [laughter] ..(to ensure ..) they helped me [the tech team] lah. I called Rai I called Danny. Danny not around, I called Rai and he will ask me if I have clicked this or that, so I said, ok, ha ha [laughter].

I: (Q6) You are saying you are not comfortable with sharing, we talked about this before that you are not comfortable to share your video with someone else.

R: Ya, I am not very comfortable, sometimes lah. Because you...can come across as...overbearing [ in the video ]. Like even in ..when you attend workshop, we are so afraid that our strong views can be misinterpreted and but then in person, at least I can qualify but not when you write huh...it is quite difficult lah in the e-Portfolio. (Sure). Sometimes I hold very strong views I am quite afraid that being misinterpreted that may offend people.

I: It is fine actually individual has the right to have their own voice lah. Whether right or wrong. (R: Yes, it is how it is presented. Sometimes it comes out very strong).Yes I agree. So I think ... (then I played with words and people may misunderstand me then I feel bad lah.) OK, I understand.

I: Let's move on. For question 7, you missed indicating your response and you said you don't understand the question. Let me explain. With IAL institutionalising the use of e-Portfolio as a tool to encourage self-reflection... partly, it is the alignment needed to facilitate our training programmes because the learners are already using it but there may be people who absolutely feel that the new learning [the use of LMS and e-Portfolio] is beyond them or that this does not align to their own belief system in using technology and henceforth they are not going to...or they might want to leave and say, maybe this is not the place for them. So, I am just asking for a definitive answer from individual so that we can also see individual's stand on this matter. In fact, if you said you really can't ...fine, we can part amicably but if you said

I am willing to learn, I am prepared to align but it is just about teaching me how to do it, fine, then we will also know what we need to do, the necessary preparations in order to get someone onboard lah. So, that is the idea.

R: So this one I would have answered right? I did the e-Portfolio, hee, hee [laughter].

I: You did not answer this one but I think you are absolutely aligned to the requirement or at least making efforts for sure. (R: I am trying) because the fact that you have done your portfolio despite the challenges ... hours and hours of learning and overcoming the challenges. I fully appreciate that and I think this is not an issue.

I: For Q8, you have also missed answering it and I guess it is again the difficulty...(peer sharing huh?). You are saying you are neutral and there are other ways ...(typo error ...peer sharing and professional exchanges via the use of e-Portfolio.)

R: Again, it is very absolute loh.

I: But what is your opinion...like we always discussed, you are quite concerned about the sensitivity of your personal views and so on. ( Ya, ya) Sharing it openly, it is a challenge, sharing it with a critical friend also potentially who do you feel is your comfortable critical friend, maybe, I am not sure. Then, it is also the question I asked lah. Is a challenge to find a critical friend in this kind of environment.

R: Not really has a challenge to find a critical friend in this kind of environment

I: Not really huh? Because generally people said that we are all freelancers and we all have a bag of tricks and you know, if I openly share I may be concerned.

R: I think there may be one main contention that nobody will dare to say with you and openly. A lot of people would not like to share their own tricks...huh.

I: Concerning the willingness to share [as a freelancer], in my opinion, ..of course it is very individual, some are more generous and willing to share and with abundance mentality and no worries. If I can teach someone, like in your spirit of trying to develop professional facilitators then obviously you are prepared to guide them, train them and so on. But there are also others, if I train more people, capable or even better than me at some point I may lose my job lah, in that sense lah. So....

R: I think it is very difficult to answer this one in favour. But on a personal level, I feel the more what I promote with my learners and really share generously in class, showing them this and that. Not all trainers do that, you know. There is standard clause where they said they don't. I said the more you share, the more you learn, the more you internalise and ...no one, even if they share a particular method...in other words.. I am not totally in disfavour lah. It is just that sometimes again to have proviso that the other parties who get the sharing huh..at personal level. I think it is important to share and I share with my learners and my tenet to them when they asked me, 'you are not afraid ah?' and so generous to share. I said, 'no'. Nobody will do the same thing exactly the same way, right? When you attend courses, you will see a technique you would modify to suit your purposes. But I think, one thing they need to learn, I told them to give credit. If I use something that I learned from my colleagues or from somewhere, at least state it. Don't claim it as yours lah. Because there were some incidents where some people use what you have done and then erase the name and I am pretty upset lah. And I feel that as professionals, we need

to be very upfront and that is why I ...the question is very hard for me to answer. Again when it is on an absolute statement it is difficult for me. I value this face-to-face elaboration and opportunity to elaborate why I find some of these questions I did not feel comfortable to answer. We need the face-to-face and when we do something like this I know it is, to me, when I saw the questions not just to get feedback as research on the use of technologies, e-Portfolio and LMS and the justifications of LMS. I also know why we need to use [the new technology although], we can easily do an upload like a word document, it is easier. The learners always asked, Leesa, there is a shorter cut, I said ya I know but we have reasons for it, for self-directing and all that. But my point ...huh, we need to have proviso always. We cannot expect they want to be equally professional, you know. So, I think if we want to do things like that, we always set very clear guidelines for the staff. If we do this, [for example] you are, like using the Document of Understanding (DOU), "You are not supposed to train and go and prime your learners anymore once they finished your class, especially you are not the assessor". I always tell them, don't send to me. They asked, "Can we send to you for further comments?" I said, "Within the deadline, yes, but after that, no". Because I don't want to interfere with the assessor. Because I am given this document of understanding and it is written there, I do not want to violate the rule. So, I think we need certain proviso when we want to fully implement this. 'You are to do this, this'. You are required to accept these terms. Because I feel ...one thing to share. The professional in us to acknowledge where the source comes from. Then you can say I also play about with it. (Agree that if there are people not doing that, we need to rectify). I think we need to set the parameters. I think we do have the scrupulousness.

I: Just one more question – overall after going through the challenges in creating your portfolio, do you feel it is useful. What kind of experience and feedback received or the critique you would give?

R: Like I said, it was a very deep [learning] curve [for me] and I am glad I took it and it set me thinking about, it gives me a chance to put down in writing what I think about and reflect on the certain things. So, that is a good part of it. The other part is I felt, because it is my own fault, I didn't have enough time to be familiar with the technology. So once you get over the barrier of technology it is not going to be difficult and it is one way of keeping ahead and also a way of ... a point of reference for your learners, a visual reference. It is useful if you asked me but I think you need the proviso, the professionalism on other parts.

I valued all the comments made [ by other AEs on my e-Portfolio sharing]. In fact, June recently make one and I just saw it because I used it to show my students. 'Oh Leesa, I saw yours' and I said, 'so sorry I have not responded to yours and few other people's comments they made and the ideas I can learn'. So, she responded, 'never mind' and I said 'I have not done it. like yours', ha [laughter], I did. It is always on my mind. Overall, I see, in terms of being pragmatic is the way to go. You can't run away from technology and you all have made the best efforts in using the LMS. The LMS has its minuses and pluses, so you have to accept it. (I: Now after accepting, do you get anything out of it?) Yes, I think I have. And have I used it for a purpose after doing it? I did. So, on this basis, I think it is useful.

I: Okay, just one more point, motivation level, what drives your efforts. Of course, because of the institutionalisation and you have no choice situation [laughter] and now that you have used it, would you consider continue to do it?

R: I will [continue to use the e-Portfolio] because I always reflect on what I just told my learners of the V5 series. I said, 'You noticed that this kind of work is even harder for you to come and sit for the test?' They nodded their heads. I said, 'It is very hard on you'. I don't have to promise to write to them and it is hard on me in terms of my time, in terms of the technologies but I encourage them to do it. By doing that you will really be learning. For me, it is looking from within and without. You are looking at yourself in the technical term when you do a portfolio and the idea is right. Then in the intellectual way, you somehow is at a stretch, stretch with the theory. Are you really applying the theory? Because when we train, we do that when we train. I said, 'Do you realise you are doing this theory?' They looked at it and said, 'Oh ya, huh'. I said, 'Otherwise theory and concept doesn't make sense to you, right?' You will forget and now do you see. So, one of them said, 'Ya, hor'. 'When you jump, jump here and there', one of them remarked, 'Leesa, it is pretty confusing for me, I have no background'. I said, 'I know, and that is why, when you go back and [you need to] reflect on it, slowly'. I chatted with this elderly guy, never trains but somehow, he called himself a consultant, he has his own business, but he reads and all that. I said, 'Mr Chan, you read, right? Now you see [what you read] in action.' But he responded that it takes him time to reflect. I asked him, 'Do you know why?' To align the actual practice I have to now and then refer to it [theories and concepts] but he said, 'I can't do it because you are so complex and all over'. I said, 'I am not expecting you to'. I am sharing [this] with you, how you learn and all the pieces will come together. So, I feel it is useful lah. I will never say die, one. I am grateful and you all are very patient.

I: You have done well and I got the feedback that you are a star in V5.

R: No lah, I see them for ten days [for the ACTA V5]. We can build relationship and I told them we are building a learning community (it is the intent). Yes a whole intent.

**Response Dynamic of FAEs on Project Update**

Sharing	Date of Email Invite	Number of responses	Remarks
Email Invite	19 January 2015	10	The names of FAEs used are not their real names and their responses are extracted out for this report.
Sharing 1	26 January 2015	4	
Sharing 2	8 February 2015	0	
Sharing 3	23 February 2015	1	
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1. Email Invite sent on 19 Jan 2015  
**From:** Tat Suan KOH (IAL)  
**Sent:** Monday, 19 January, 2015 2:41 AM  
**Subject:** Validation of Research Findings

**Message Classification:** *Restricted*

Dear Colleagues,

I am writing to you with two objectives. The first objective is to inform you [if you have not been informed already] that there is a re-organisation at IAL and the functions of Implementation and Evaluation unit under **xxxxxx** have now been transferred to the newly formed Learning Services and Support Division (LSSD), under **xxxxxx**. This will also mean that the recruitment, deployment and service management of our freelancer Adult Educators (AEs) will now come under the new division. Hence, the second objective is for me to take this opportunity to thank you all in supporting me in my role as Training Manager all these years since the inception of IAL in 2008. You have been conscientious and committed in your respective role to ensure the quality provision of our training programmes. This has greatly contributed to the reputation of IAL as a premium Institute for WSQ Adult Educators. You have journeyed with me to offer both formal and informal professional pathways to the practitioners and I appreciate the trials and tribulations you have been put through in coping with the professionalization efforts and engagements all these years. It has been a great experience for me working with you and I hope it is a pleasant learning journey for you too.

We started off with a humble beginning in offering just the Advanced Certificate in Training and Assessment (ACTA) programme in Oct 2008 and to date we have a whole range of formal professional development programmes ranging from Workplace Trainer Programme (WTP), Diploma of Adult Education (DACE) both of which are in their second versioning; other non-WSQ programmes such as Managing Training Business (MTB), Learning Professional Consultancy (LPC); new WSQ programmes such as

Specialist Diploma in Advanced Facilitation (SDAF), Specialist Diploma in Education Quality Management (SDEQM) in the offering; and a whole spread of different Masters programmes to further the professional development of our CET Professionals. As an institute, we have made progress and this is not possible without your help and contributions.

In the area of informal professional development, I am curious what we can do to make a difference as far as individual practice is concerned, particularly how we can facilitate freelancer adult educators operating in the WSQ system. I started my own action research to understand how in my position I can make a difference. I hope my on-going inquiry will facilitate my own learning to inform my actions and in the process influence your learning and your actions. My inquiry premise is on the question, 'How can I improve what I am doing?' This accounts for my fixation on 'experimenting' how we can offer continuous professional development through the informal pathway in IAL. Efforts of pushing for reflective practice, using of digital technologies such as learning management system, e-Portfolio for reflective learning are on-going means to prepare 'future ready' adult educators. To date, we are pushing for the formalisation of an Adult Educator Professional Scheme to give credence to their professional achievements and contributions to the CET sectors they are operating in. This is one of a kind intervention in Singapore concerning the State's initiative to professionalize the (freelancer) Adult Educators. There are many lessons learnt and some of these personal learning have informed my practice and actions, including policy formulation. But I must admit that I have also made mistakes along the way and have caused a lot of angsts and inconvenience too. I know I need to question my taken-for-granted assumptions. I suppose this is what action research is all about. It is an on-going continuing improvement process and any outcome achieve in one reflection cycle will generate new questions and concerns as the landscape and needs change. As practitioners, we are committed to learn to improve our practice and we are accountable for what we do and why we do what we do. My long-term wish is we can all come together to improve this 'social situation' we all shared and enable each one of us to contribute to the greater good of the community.

Therefore, I hope to validate my learning and invite you as my critical friends to share your feedback and to build a learning community. However, I fully agree with McNiff and Whitehead (2010) when they share that 'all people are born with the capacity for the originality of mind, i.e. the capacity to think for themselves, and will therefore exercise this capacity in deciding whether or not they wish to be influenced...' (p.36). I want to reiterate that you are not obliged to respond to my invite but if the issues shared do resonate with you, please give your comments. I have decided to use the email system rather than the LMS discussion forum because I can reach out to more people and it is convenient for those who choose not to respond, can remain so. I do wish to use your inputs as my validation evidence and I want to be open enough to modify my actions if my learning is not useful based on your feedback. For those of you who want to respond, you can reply directly to me or you can choose to reply to all where all our colleagues can have a chance

to hear your views as well. Where relevant, I will use your data for my report but I will still seek your permission before I do that.

My plan is to narrate my action research explanation stories from the start until to-date in the form of my reflection cycles. Each learning episode is likely to be shared on a weekly or fortnightly basis for the next couple of months. I want to share my learning and close the loop by this social validation process with you as participants and key stakeholders. I hope you will give your critical feedback on my learning. I believe this will mark a key milestone for our respective professional learning and the co-creation of a collegial culture of peer learning. I will like to thank you in advance and looking forward to our engagement in the next couple of months.

tatsuan

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**2. Extracts of Email responses from FAEs for the email invite above – 10 responses**

**A. From “Debra” dated 19 Jan 2015**

Hi Tat Suan,

Thanks for the invite to participate in the action research. The question, 'How can I improve what I am doing' has been one that I asked while designing and developing curriculum. However, after making an intentional move to go beyond just doing WQS training, development and assessment, the question I ask is 'As an AE, what other areas can I explore to expand this profession and grow as an individual in the process'. Not sure if this make any sense to you...

Anyway, May I know what is the role of this critical friend? What is the mode and frequency of engagement? What is the duration of this validation exercise. I am interested to participate in the validation process if time permits...

Cheers,

“Debra”

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**B. From “Tracy” dated 19 Jan 2015**

Hi Tat Suan,

Count me in if I fit the bill.

Rgds

“Tracy”

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**C. From “Helena” dated 19 Jan 2015**

Good morning Tat Suan,

I would like to be a voice that provides you feedback. I would be happy to be part of a larger reflective community, uncovering and exploring assumptions, learning together.

Let me know what I can do. “Helena”

**D. From “Nigel” dated 19 Jan 2015**

Good Morning Tat Suan

Thanks for your email. I would like to express my appreciation and gratitude

to all the support and guidance you have given to me as your staff and AE of IAL.

I am keen to continue to partner and work with you hence, look forward to participate in your research project.

Regards  
"Nigel"

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**E. From "Winnie" dated 19 Jan 2015**

Dear Tat Suan, thank you for sharing and leading IAL's evolving learning landscape.

Look forward to hear more and be part of the reflective and feedback rounds, allowing us to sharpen our saws continuously.

Thanks n regards, "Winnie"

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**F. From "Willy" dated 20 Jan 2015**

Hi Tat Suan

Thank you for the update on the re-organisation within IAL.

As for the reflection, I shall consider my own journey with IAL carefully and see if there is anything worth mentioning.

Thanks much!

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**G. From "Walter" dated 20 Jan 2015**

Tat Suan,

You have my support as well.

All the best!

"Walter"

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**H. From “Tara” dated 23 Jan 2015**

Hi Tat Suan

I am happy and at the same time sad to know that you will not be taking care of us. Thank you for being so patient and caring to us.

Certainly, would like to walk the journey with you. I hope I am a good contributor though.

Do let me know when I can be of help

Regards  
“Tara”

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**I. From “Haley” dated 23 Jan 2015**

Dear Tat Suan

Thanks for updating us with this latest information.

It's been a joy working with you and the journey is indeed a pleasant one. I look forward to be part of your project in this meaningful action learning research.

Tat Suan, I too believe the lines quoted by you in this email. McNiff and Whitehead (2010) when they share that ‘all people are born with the capacity for the originality of mind, i.e. the capacity to think for themselves, and will therefore exercise this capacity in deciding whether or not they wish to be influenced...’ (p.36).

The above lines too a validation for my own professional practices. This enlightenment came to me through my research studies in MALLL where I applied it in the classroom facilitation in managing learners. MALLL too had nurtured and enriched me on the aspects that there is no such thing as disruptive learners too. It's all voice down to how me as an Adult Educator develop my skills to transform within oneself to manage various situations and circumstances to manage people.

Thus it opened my mind to explore ways to tackle situations in a meaningful platform where everyone is a winner. Though it's challenging but doing the best instils in me the greatest satisfaction to make a difference in myself and others.

Your path in this action learning of professional development for AEs in the WSQ system is a great initiative. I would like to be part of it and keen to contribute to the wellbeing of every soul in our society. It's my passion too which is aligned to your vision of making a difference among the freelance educator in the WSQ system.

I being in the WSQ system for 10 years, do support this initiative as I too had gone through both great meaningful developments and challenges to continue to be in this passionate profession in making a difference in peoples' life holistically.

I feel fortunate to have met you and working with you Tat Suan, sincerely its rare to have leaders like you who engage us compassionately from your heart.

Please count on me as this initiative is close to my heart.

Take care

“Haley”

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**J. From “Carlene” dated 23 Jan 2015**

Good morning Tat Suan!

I attended the 'Special Call to Educate' workshop conducted by Vadidu recently. One of the many points which resonated with me was that as adult educators, we need to be good models to our learners by practising what we preach in our engagements with them. While we seek to share learning points with our learners, we remember to treat them with respect and make adjustments to their personal needs. This is true of your engagements with us. What I truly value is the fact that you strike a balance between policy and person and provide platforms for continuous conversations and learning. You played a major role in establishing IAL as a premium institute for WSQ Adult Educators by trusting us AEs and creating an AE-centric environment.

As adult educators in the field, we continually ask ourselves how we can be better in what we do so that we can do more for our learners. I personally benefited from your initiative of professionalising freelance AEs and introduction of the e-Portfolio platform for self-reflection. Here are my takeaways:

### **1. Greater awareness of my practice**

Prior to the introduction of e-Portfolio platform for self-reflection, I was taking pictures of work done by learners (product) in class. Having to record the facilitation process created a greater sense awareness in terms of specific action in class and its impact on the learners and their learning process. This insight proved useful for my learners in ACTA and WTP as they were asked to consider their own actions at a deeper level when they facilitate in class or conduct on-the-job training.

### **2. Future planning**

The greater awareness of my practice got me to consider and think about what actions I can take to improve my own practice, particularly now that I have spent 5 years as a freelance AE. I have since sought advice from my

seniors and peers in the field and am deliberating on the next course of action. And here are some suggestions as to what I would appreciate as a freelance / new AE:

**a. Different options in reflection process**

The e-Portfolio platform is a good way to reflect, present artefacts and invite comments from peers. Having an easier system to use and navigate as well as control over the specified peers who have access to the reflection entries can aid motivation and trust. Flexibility in terms of artefact presentation can be useful in catering to the different needs and preferences of individuals.

The current system requires much effort and time to use; can be sources of pain in the process of reflection. I believe every individual supports reflective practice, but when the time and efforts are spent on administrative and systematic issues take a bigger portion than the actual reflection and input, it can be demotivating to the individual to carry on over prolonged periods of time.

**b. Contact time with a pool of mentors**

One of the issues which I face (and perhaps some of my peers too) is the lack of direction and targeted, holistic advice. While I desire to improve my skills and expertise, there are blind spots and uncertainty regarding specific ways / actions which I can take to improve and progress further. The opportunity to seek counsel from a pool of experienced mentors can certainly help in determining clear areas of improvement and actions to take (such as courses to attend; both WSQ and non-WSQ). This should ideally be provided for all levels of AEs in order for everyone to have a clear idea of where and how to progress.

Thank you for taking the time to read this, Tat Suan. I hope the points which I have raised are good for your consideration. Please share more with me about the findings of your action research; I certainly want to learn from you!

Cheers, "Carlene"

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**3. Extracts of Email responses from FAEs – Sharing 1 – 4 responses**

**A. From “Ruby” dated 26 Jan 2015**

Thank you, Tat Suan, as my boss and also a leader of change in the several years,  
and at all times, walking your talk and encouraging our hearts.

You are remarkable, even in this research. I observed that while you are researching, the landscape changes.

I have not responded, as I wanted to meet you first, as my boss. I have read and understood. I am sad, but also happy that your work is alive.

Yours sincerely,  
“Ruby”

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**B. From “Carlene” dated 26 Jan 2015**

Hi Tat Suan,

Thank you for sharing this.

The points which you have brought up here resonate strongly with me in my 5-year journey as a freelance AE. WSQ landscape has evolved from my initial entry into the field and this evolution is very much needed. As the pool of ACTA-certified AEs continues its growth, there is a need to ensure that the quality of delivery and engagement are upheld and not diluted. The evolution brings with it challenges and complexities for those who are keen to enter the WSQ / Adult Training landscape.

I love the Career GCETP initiative which you have shared in the section on 'Professionalising of Freelance AEs'. ACTA learners who are keen to enter the industry often ask questions on how they ought to enter and grow in the adult learning field. Career GCETP is a great resource in kick-starting their journey by providing practical advice and helping them to manage their expectations. I wonder if this career counselling be developed and extended to AEs who have been in the industry for a while. (This relates to the suggestion I have on presenting a pool of experienced mentors and providing holistic guidance for individual AEs to manage their own careers.)

I am looking forward to second sharing from you. Thank you, Tat Suan.

Cheers,  
“Carlene”

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**C. From “Tracy” dated 3 Feb 2015**

Hi Tat Suan,

My response is as follows. If meeting face-to-face for an 'interview' is deemed necessary and can be of further help, just let me know.

Most adults use a set of values and beliefs to guide the macro direction of their lives. When the environment AEs operate in are deemed as "in conflict with such values" or "unfavourable", they would react or manage differently. The forces which affect how one reacts include the stage of life cycle one is in and the choices one has in life. As a result, one may choose to influence or not to influence the environment to make it more favourable.

With regards to the AE's scheme starting in April 2015, I would take a wait and see attitude till more details are made available.

Re the question of "Whether mandatory requirement of baseline qualification is adequate to ensure training standards and sustain professionalism of practitioners?" my answer is "No". We need to keep ourselves current by (1) having conversations with those who are current (2) staying focused in what we do best in (3) having opportunities to practise.

Rgds  
“Tracy”

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**D. From “Debra” dated 22 Feb 2015**

Dear Tat Suan,

Thank you for sharing your thoughts, observation and support to enhance and enable the development and growth of AEs in the CET environment. Without the visionary approach, balancing between demands from policy standpoint and existing AEs' capabilities, the works and future of AEs may be mainly transactional, stagnant and limiting. Thank you IAL for the opportunities of growth and learning. Deeply appreciate that :o)

I have the privilege to growth, thrive with WSQ and seek personal aspiration in the CET environment. Your sharing, thoughts, summary of the establishment of WSQ and research findings from Karmel, Bound & Rushbrook (2013), had somewhat reflect my development from an in-house trainer, acquaintance with WSQ, working in the WSQ system, to seeking beyond WSQ. It is heartening to know that at IAL's strategic level, the state of AEs, especially being future-ready, is of concern at the policy level. During my personal encounters with you, you have always been open, encouraging and showing concerns to the area of works that I'm involve in. I believe this disposition is upheld by your team as well. AAAA, BBBB, CCCC & DDDD were really inspirational and positive. Despite their busy schedule, they always make time to listen, share and provide help when required. Such relationship forged truly goes beyond transactions. Transformation has

occurred on a personal level. Thanks for setting this learning and nurturing culture.

As a new kid on the block in the freelance AE journey, I'm on an exploration journey to learn about workplace based learning explore and areas beyond developing and training WSQ programme. My values and beliefs are definitely drivers that propel this shift beyond a corporate career but pursuant of influencing and building individuals to work related in capabilities building. However, this aspiration may only remain idealistic if not for opportunities offered by IAL to participate and contribute to workplace learning and technology driven learning. Unfortunately, for the latter, the opportunity to develop e-learning module was not utilised as no suitable programme was available to work on that can meet the requirement. Also, having a co-ownership of the end product may not be desirable by the organisation that wished to own the e-module. The environmental factors and policies are definitely determinants to what AEs may explore if we are sensitive enough to the shift in demand and hungry to grow and develop other areas in the CET arena.

Pertaining to influencing the policies that impact the AEs, it has been a top down approach from observation. I believe it has been well thought of and intended to support strategies to prepare AEs to be future ready. Rather than influencing the environment to be more favourable to an AE, perhaps it is easier to change personal perspective to adapt to the environment and provide feedback subsequently. Again, from observation, once a policy has been established, it will only be progressive and responding to future needs. AEs either go with the flow or seek happiness elsewhere.

Pertaining to the AE professionalization instituted by IAL, I believe it is pushing the envelope. Then again, I observed that the criteria are mainly targeted at IAL facilitators conducting classroom training. However, the works of an AE is beyond training and facilitation. I'm not sure would having separate specialisations be desirable or perhaps a holistic perspective to ascertain the competencies of AE from the various types of work that an AE can perform may be more reflective of their capabilities.

Sorry for the late response. Hoped this five cents worth of thought is helpful. Have a huat huat Chinese New Year)

Cheers,

**Second response from "Debra" after my response to her on 23 Feb 2015**

Hi Tat Suan,

Being able to contribute to the works of IAL, the pleasure is mine. It is an honour working alongside with some of the experts in CET. The opportunities and learning have been tremendous :o)



Going on sabbatical leave, FANTASTIC!!! Have a good break and if possible, stay away from work, both doing and thinking.

Pertaining to using my inputs for your area of work, permission is granted. Please use them as deemed fit.

Thanks for taking time to read and respond to my comments. I wasn't expecting that though... It is enlightening and I suspect I might be missing some information... Oops...

1) Pertaining to the 123 project, I'm not sure if that's the one that AAAA has opened for AEs to participate in December 2014. If we are talking about the same project, it is the timeline, fulfilment of requirements (e.g. application of the e-learning or blended learning at the workplace) and issue of ownership that deterred the participation at that point in time... If 123 is a different initiative, perhaps I can check with Michael as you will be on sabbatical leave soon?

2) I applauded for your commitment in building a collegial and collaborative environment for AEs at IAL. Such personal call is hardly observed in both public and private ATOs as profit making is fundamental in sustaining the business. Relationship with freelance AEs tends to be mainly transactional... In any case, I'm thankful that your work continues with IAL.

3) Thank you for the clarification on IAL's AE professionalization efforts. It gives confidence to know of the intentional effort to focus on AEs' delivering classroom training since they are a major pillar in the services provided by IAL. I suspect the national AEP scheme would be the level playing platform for all the AEs to profile their capabilities. Perhaps the currency of practice may be one of criteria when evaluating the works of the AE before conferment. Then again, this might be in place...Just my ignorance.

4) Exploring beyond training delivery. Indeed, it was rather intentional to explore areas beyond training, especially on workplace learning. This seed was planted during the Workplace Learning module, MTD. Having conducted standup training during my early years as a trainer, developed WSQ curriculum, audit WSQ curriculum to select, recruiting and coaching new developers, is classroom training still desirable and affordable for the learners and employers? In reality, how effective is classroom learning when compared to workplace learning in building competencies that are applicable at the workplace? With research from Prof Billet and team, workplace is still a desired mode of learning by the workers. How is workplace learning being played out in Singapore? How is workplace learning be advocated or executed in local context? These were some of the questions that set me off on an exploration trip. Having said that, it is also critical to remain current in training delivery to try out the knowledge and skills assimilated and accommodated in other areas of work in the CET. I hoped IAL's SOP does not categorise AEs to specific track, making it exclusive... :o)

Yes, let's stay connect in person or via electronics means.

Enjoy your break!

Cheers,

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#### **4. Extracts of Email responses from FAEs – Sharing 2 – No responses**

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#### **5. Extracts of Email responses from FAEs – Sharing 3 – 1 response**

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##### **A. From “Carlene” dated 27 Feb 2015**

Hi Tat Suan,

Thank you for the third instalment of your findings. Would you please view the attached for my input? I hope they are useful for your consideration.

Thank you.

Cheers,

“Carlene”

Carlene: As one who is constructivist in nature, I am a firm believer in active learning. There are learners who prefer to go through activities for increased understanding and retention. Like me, they believe that in order to learn something, they have to get their hands dirty and active interaction with the content provides authentic learning. However, there are some learners who fall on the other side of the continuum and generally prefer to be taught passively by the facilitator.

From observation and dialogue with learners, some reasons for non-participation in active learning are:

- No prior / related experience in the training field (novice level); content perceived to be overwhelming or complex
- Fatigue (especially for night classes)
- Limited exposure to active learning (due to the type of pedagogical approach they have experienced in school or other training WSQ / non-WSQ programmes)
- Focus is on certification, hence easiest path to clearing assessment is ideal

Setting expectations for the type of learning activities at the start, engaging learners in active learning right from the beginning and explaining the rationale for activities typically set the stage successfully for learners to understand the approach taken. An ACTA v5 learner who is new to the adult education field shared during her assessment that she felt uncomfortable when she had to participate in learning activities in the first module. However, she gained appreciation for these activities because it helped her to learn concepts and kept her engaged in the learning after a long day at work. This learner also thought the activities served as good models which she can adopt for her own practice. On hindsight, this change in perspective came about as the new version of ACTA provides more contact time than v4.

I have not had the chance to facilitate CU3A and 5 and hence, lack the perspective whether the product-based modules see learners seeking more passive instructional methods such as lecturing. However, I suspect active learning can be achieved in the facilitation process through the design of the lesson even as time constraint is very real. Having had the privilege of observing other AEs in IAL facilitate, two salient points in facilitation were observed. One, active learning does not need to involve complex, time-consuming activities. It can be as simple as getting learners to match concepts to their definitions on a pre-designed form. Two, multiple concepts can be designed into one anchor activity (e.g. teaching learners how to conduct case studies can be integrated with communication skills – learnt this from Haley).

The ideas of having coaching and master classes by the senior AEs are wonderful. We tend to have our own approaches and activities in facilitating content; the additional perspectives and suggestions will be very helpful in identifying our blind spots and inject some creativity into the designing of active learning. Can I propose that master-classes be divided into module-specific and general facilitation classes? Module-specific master-classes will be useful in modules (such as CU3a and 5) which may appear to be more difficult to design active learning in the sharing of content. As they are module-specific, there is immediate relevancy and application to the participants of the classes. General facilitation master-classes can aid the gaining of skills for facilitation of any module.

Carlene: I am for the idea of having IAL AEs play the role of the dialogue partner for their counterparts. There is shared context; an understanding of IAL's learning environment, modules and general types of learners. Having clarity in the engagement will be helpful (e.g. specific areas to focus on, commitment in time, understanding the background of the dialogue partner) in building trust in this process. Volition in terms of partner can also create greater buy-in and comfort in the process.

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## **6. Extracts of Email responses from FAEs – Sharing 4 – 2 responses**

### **A. From “Carlene” dated 25 Mar 2015**

Hi Tat Suan,

Thank you for sharing this. Every reading triggers further consideration and reflection at my end. The information here offers new perspectives and learning. Extremely beneficial!

Cheers,  
“Carlene”

### **B. From “Nigel” dated 30 Mar 2015**

Hi Tat Suan,

***What are the challenges faced and the motivation of the AEs in embracing the use of digital technologies in the changing training landscape?***

I have tried leveraging the technologies in a few of my ACTA V5 classes recently. I thought of sharing this part on the challenges encountered and benefits from using the technologies. I tried the following:

#### ***IAL Learning space's chart forum***

1. Good start in class as learners had a pleasant surprise. They were to use the forum without talking to one another. A topic was discussed and shortly triggered a chain of communications. Forum page however dampened the excitement as each question posed will see the participant brought back to the index page before they can read and place a comment. Believe it is a system design issue.

#### ***Poll everywhere***

2. Participants were seen actively using it when they reached M2&3. It's free after all and above all, it helps to draw out learners' responses anonymously, using any devices such as smartphone, tablet, laptop.

#### ***Wireless router***

3. Mirroring allows participants to showcase their work right from their laptop saving them the hassle of doing it manually using the VGA cable. Productivity and active discussion were evident.

#### ***Skype***

4. Hard to get everyone hop on at the same time even after they have all committed to it. Adult learners' challenges.

### ***What's app chat group***

5. Initially it was good to kickstart the discussions, maintain some can take a toll for trainers.

### ***Blended***

6. Useful when they get to watch the youtube links before the lessons. Those who didnt watch it can find time during breaks.

Am also keen to explore on animated video learning and interactive e-learning using platforms like powtoon, camstasia and youtube

regards  
"Nigel"

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**7. Extracts of Email responses from FAEs – Sharing 5 – 2 responses**

**A. From “Teresa” dated 18 Apr 2015**

Dear Tat Suan

Thank you for the email. I wish I have more time to read this email in greater detail because it is a research done in the workplace where I now spend most of my time developing myself.

Let me know if you are still collecting responses from those you email to.

“Teresa”

**B. From “Kimberly” dated 20 Apr 2015**

Thank you, tatsuan. All the very best in what you do next.

“Kimberly”

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**Validation Comments from FAEs**

There were 17 validation comments given when the FAEs when they were told that I am leaving IAL and expressed my gratitude for their support and collaboration all these years.

**1. My Email to FAEs to say good-bye – dated 10 Apr 2015**

**From:** Tat Suan KOH (IAL) [[mailto:KOH\\_Tat\\_Suan@ial.edu.sg](mailto:KOH_Tat_Suan@ial.edu.sg)]

**Sent:** Friday, 10 April, 2015 6:47 PM

**To:** Undisclosed recipients:

**Subject:** Good-bye and thank you

***Message Classification: Restricted***

Dear Colleagues and Friends,

It is with a heavy heart that I am writing to inform you that I will be posted out of IAL after clearing some annual leaves and starting my sabbatical leaves from 16 Apr 2015 for 3 months. For those pioneers who joined me in the early years when IAL was since established in 2008, thank you for being the pillars I can lean on. For those who are still with us, thank you for being supportive and dependable colleagues all these years.

We started with just one ACTA programme in our pioneering years, but today, after several years, IAL is offering many more WSQ and non-WSQ programmes including hosting the current two and more new Masters programmes to facilitate the formal professional development pathway for our adult education practitioners. The Adult Education Network, (AEN) has also grown in membership and it is supporting the community of practice and learning agenda. This platform will form the basis for our next milestone through the AEP scheme. We cannot be where we are without you.

On a personal note, you have also been very helpful in supporting my personal learning journey all these years. It has been very educational and fulfilling. I truly appreciate your participations and contributions to my study and thanks to those who had provided your feedback and comments throughout the period. I hope we have developed an educative relationship to facilitate our mutual growth.

With the transfer of Implementation and Evaluation (I&E) unit from my Division over to Learning Services and Support Division (LSSD) since Jan 2015, under [redacted] idership of [redacted], I look forward to [redacted] on [redacted] support to [redacted], [redacted], and her team members and to bring IAL to new heights.

The operating landscape will change and it will require your professional adaptation to the new changes coming your way and I do want to wish you the very best in your future endeavours. I have certainly enjoyed my working with you and my sincere thanks again for all your support and friendship. My successor, [REDACTED] will be posted to IAL from 1 May 2015.

So farewell my friends and all and take care till we meet again. Please keep in touch through my personal email [ktatsuan@gmail.com](mailto:ktatsuan@gmail.com) or HP: 96723078.

With warmest regards.

tatsuan

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## 2. Email responses from FAEs

(a) From "Holland" dated 10 Apr 2015

Dear Tat Suan,

Thanks for your guidance and support all these years, and may I wish you every success in your new endeavours. Let's keep in touch!

Best regards,  
"Holland"

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(b) From "Teresa" dated 10 Apr 2015

Dear Tat Suan

Thank you for your support, leadership and direction of IAL in the last 2 years. I was working with them. Your friendly and encouraging presence will be missed. All the best for your D Ed. journey.

Please keep in touch.

"Teresa"

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(c) From "Nancy" dated 10 Apr 2015

Dear Tat Suan,

The effort you have put in to bring IAL to where it is now is certainly a great achievement, in no small part due to your brilliant mind, dedication and determination.

I want to appreciate you for making a difference to adult learning and lifelong learning. I am also deeply grateful to you, too for bringing me on board as an Adjunct AE to fuel my passion in education, and being in a position to influence and make a little difference to learners and their learning. The satisfaction is immense.

I want to wish you all the very best in your endeavour. If there is any way that I could help you, I will be happy to do that.

Last but not least, I will be curious to know your next move, which I guess will be in WDA?

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(d) From "Kelvin" dated 10 Apr 2015

Hi Tat Suan,

It is a pity that I didn't get to work much with you. Would have benefitted learning from you. Hope we can collaborate in future.

Best Regards

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(e) From "Duncan" dated 10 Apr 2015

Hi Tat Suan

I am shocked to learn of your posting out of IAL. Which division are you heading to in WDA?

Anyway, it's been really a long ride with you since the early days of IAL and I truly appreciate your support and wise counsel. Your steady hands has steered IAL through the formative years and laid a strong foundation for its growth to present day. I salute your untiring and undivided attention to the welfare of AEs. Thanks a million!

I'm sure old-timers like me would like to catch up with you for get-together makan. When are you available to catch up? You can't turn me and the rest down ok.

Meanwhile, have a well-deserved rest and looking forward to your successful completion of your PhD.

Regards  
"Duncan"

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(f) From "Valeri" dated 10 Apr 2015

Hi Tat Suan!

Thank you for keeping me in the loop.

I think of you from time to time, with the intention to catch up, eh but been a bit tardy about it...sorry!

I remain grateful for your patience, understanding and encouragement when I was there.

It was a privilege for me to have gotten to know you, and to work with you. Respect, Sir!

Do connect when things are more settled. All the best

Valerie

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(g) From "Halim" dated 11 Apr 2015

Hi, Tat Suan,

Yes, it is a heavy heart indeed to hear of your move. You have been both a superior and a friend all these years! Even though I do not spend a lot of time at IAL because of my commitment at SMU & NUS, your efforts and dedication is certainly felt. Other colleagues too have positive comments about your leadership.

But move on we must at least for learning purpose. Here's wishing you a fulfilling time at your new appointment. You will certainly bring change to the new place.

Best wishes,  
"Halim"

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(h) From "Andy" dated 11 Apr 2015

Hi Tat Suan,

It is sadness to know that you will be posted out of IAL.

I had enjoyed your strong support and kind guidance throughout my journey and contribution in IAL. And I am especially grateful of the opportunity you had given in opening the door for me to join IAL as an AE. I do enjoy training and you allow me to live this passion, giving impact to more lives. Thank you for that opportunity in a lifetime, Tat Suan!

As you will continue to the next adventure, please keep in touch. I wish you more successes and blessings in years to come.

With gratitude,  
"Andy"

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(i) From "Larry" dated 11 Apr 2015

Hi Tat Suan

Just a note to thank you for the opportunity to be part of this fraternity.

No wonder you seemed distracted the last time we met at IAL. I had wanted to tell you then that I am joining XXX Training Hub to help them expand their capabilities in the CET sector.

Best wishes in your new journey.

Larry

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(j) From "Kim" dated 11 Apr 2015

Dear Tat Suan,

I have very fond memories of IAL and my time spent with you and the first team that founded IAL. Your commitment and strong support have made IAL and AEN what they are today and I am very proud of your achievements.

I wish you the best, success in your study and any future undertakings. If you are travelling soon, safe journey to you. We will catch up again when you can find time to do so.

Thank you.

Best regards,

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(k) From "Kimberly" dated 11 Apr 2015

Good morning Tat Suan,

It was certainly a good thing to have worked under your watch. I will keep in touch.

I wish you ever happiness in your next adventure.

Regards,  
"Kimberly"

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(l) From "Nigel" dated 12 Apr 2015

Hi Tat Suan,

All the best in your new role and your PHD pursuit. Thank you for all that you have done for us, especially for me - the time you coached us playing badminton, impromptu chats about life philosophy, your being understanding and caring boss, and supporting us as AEs, being open and consultative.

Hope to have opportunity to serve you again in your new role, one way or another, it will be one that is enriching, enjoyable and enlightening to the heart.

Warmest  
"Nigel"

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(m) From "Haley" dated 12 Apr 2015

Dear Tat Suan

Thank you for your hospitality of accommodating me with great support and trust.

I always uphold my gratitude to you for giving me the opportunity to be part of IAL FAMILY. You are an important personality in my milestone journey of being an Adult Educator. This profession is a calling to me and with your leadership I was able fulfil my dream.

I believe wherever you are the people around you will benefit the most as happened to me. Your approachability and being a listener had been a great comfort to me. I am sad that you are leaving IAL, as it will be to everyone one day. But the fond memories of you will always be in my thoughts and heart.

I would like to take this opportunity to sincerely thank you and also seek your forgiveness for any hurt that I have brought to you.

My apology as I could not contribute in your recent research in responding to your mails. But sincerely, I had so much thought to share about it. But to put into words was a challenge as it needs to be communicated with clarity without misunderstanding. I held back at this point but always ready to share with you face to face any time.

I would love to keep in touch with you wherever you are. I would like to continue to support you in any of your endeavours for professional development for our society.

I pray that you continue to have blessed learning journey in both your personal and professional life.

With love and gratitude

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(n) From "Tara" dated 12 Apr 2015

Hi Tat Suan

It was with heavy hearts that we read through your email. You have always been very supportive and encouraging during our times in IAL.

We are certainly going to miss your presence in IAL. Catherine, Duncan and myself would like to take this opportunity to say our BIG 'Thank-you' personally. Would you be free for lunch or dinner with us? Please let us know your available date and time

Regards  
"Tara"

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(o) From "Walter" dated 12 Apr 2015

Tat Suan,

Much had been accomplished at IAL under your leadership.

All the best for your new endeavours.

"Walter"

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(p) From "Pamela" dated 13 Apr 2015

Dear Tat Suan,

I am really touched by your farewell letter. All of our AEs have witnessed the development of IAL from scratch. We have always seen you at AE meetings and workshops and you have made tremendous contribution to the professional development to AEs at IAL and AEs at the TAE sector. It is my pleasure to have worked with you in the past years and I hope we can have opportunities to work together again in future. Wish you all the best in your future endeavours!

Best regards,

"Pamela"

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(q) From "Felicia" dated 24 Apr 2015

Hi Tat Suan

Sorry for delayed response. I was away in China

It has been such a privilege knowing you. I will miss your sharing and leadership. Thank you for shaping the learning culture we now enjoy at IAL and spearheading many projects including reflective practice!

Here's wishing you all the best in your undertakings and also your studies. I am sure you will do well!

Regards

“Felicia”