FROM DIRTY HARRY TO CLARICE STARLING:
A BLENDED LEARNING APPROACH TO POLICE RECRUIT EDUCATION.

Chris Bushell

cbushell@csu.edu.au

Abstract

Effective teaching in recruit police education, 'Associate Degree Policing Practice' (ADPP) creates challenges when designing curriculum to reflect real life policing situations. The reality of students participating in or being present at 'actual' policing situations presents both ethical and logistical problems. To address this, the ADPP utilises a blended learning approach for both face to face (New South Wales Police College) and distance education subjects incorporating actual policing incidents. This approach is designed to prepare the raw recruit for the unpredictable world of policing. This paper will focus upon the distance education element of the ADPP. It will describe a 'collaborative model' with the School of Policing Studies, Charles Sturt University (CSU) and the New South Wales Police Force (NSWPF), Australia, a 'community of practice' in workplace training. The paper explores the blended learning approach through the use of e-simulations and instructional technologies throughout this element of the course. Combined with the realities of policing their design and delivery creates harmonious learning in a multi-media environment, enhancing teaching and learning outcomes for all theoretical and practicum subjects.

Keywords: communities of practice, blended learning, multi-media, curriculum design & development, pattern recognition.

1.   Introduction

 The primary aim of CSU's ADPP is to enable the students to develop the types of knowledge, skills and application required of a Police Officer in New South Wales (NSW). In order to develop these attributes the students are required to apply their learning and test their acquired skills in '"real life" policing situations. These active learning experiences are undertaken in preparation for the subsequent role as a police officer.

This paper will firstly present an historical overview of the ADPP distance education subjects prior to 2007 whose delivery relied upon a traditional or print based approach through to a present day scenario based learning. Their re-development focuses upon a blended approach to learning using multi-media applications based upon 'real life' policing situations where the focus of delivery reflects the chosen career of those undertaking the learning.   This paper will discuss the use of simulations to assisting student's to develop pattern recognition skills to assist in successfully dealing with real life policing incidents encountered as a police officer in the NSWPF.

2.   Associate Degree Policing Practice – historical overview

Students who wish to pursue a career in policing in NSW can achieve this through the ADPP offered by CSU in partnership with the NSWFP. The course consists of:

Session One:	Student
	13 weeks on campus at the New South Wales Police College and
	2 weeks field experience placement
Session Two:	Student
	14 weeks on campus at the New South Wales Police College
Session Three:	Student/Police officer (probationer)
	14 weeks distance education
Session Four:	Student/Police officer (probationer)
	14 weeks distance education
Session Five:	Student/Police officer (probationer)
	14 weeks distance

Upon completion of Sessions One and Two, the successful students are offered employment by the NSWPF. At this point in the course they are sworn in as Probationary Constables and posted to police commands throughout NSW at the discretion of the Police Force. The probation period is 12 months, requiring the student to complete the final three sessions of the course through distance education. Upon successful completion of Session Five, they graduate from the ADPP and are confirmed as a 'constable' - thus signifying the successful completion of their probation period.

Prior to 2007 students undertaking Session Three, Four and Five, subject materials were provided with a Subject Outline and Study Guide, in print format. This delivery reflected a traditional approach to distance education carried on for well over 100 years (University of Wisconsin, 2007).

Subject delivery in this format did little to support and enhance student learning, instead it placed the responsibility on them to identify what was important or not. The activities in these materials did not encourage higher order thinking skills of analysis and evaluation. Biggs & Tang (2007) recognise that this type of approach provides only surface learning, focusing upon shallow assessment items, rather than deeper learning. This learning environment privileges the quantitative (how many students passed) rather than the qualitative (what was learned). Campbell (2006) suggests there is a distinction between assessment and learning, when operating under the weight of accountability.

The original format of the ADPP included assessment tasks that did not stretch student capabilities, or challenge their understanding of the subject content. This meant that students could complete the assessment items and pass the subject using only lower order thinking skills. Delivering policing subjects solely in print placed the responsibility of learning wholly upon the student, who in turn gravitated to what was relevant to pass the subject. It was decided to redesign the course and the subjects within it to develop the higher order thinking skills required for police work.

What is 'real life' in policing? Dahl (1951) suggests law enforcement (policing) could not function if it were not for observation. Its whole structure is built upon observation, offenders/offences are observed and investigations are conducted solely with the power of observation. Dahl is correct in saying that policing relies heavily on the observations of an individual police officer or the observations of others to carry out their duties. If students are to gain a better understanding of policing there is a need to change from a traditional one-way delivery (lecturer-student) format to reflect the importance Dahl places on observation in its delivery. Observations or the use of observations becomes an important ingredient in the development of the learning resources. Allowing students the opportunity to immerse themselves in a real life policing incidents where they observe what is needed to be done if they were the police officer in charge of the incident. Fowler (2004) agrees that active observation triggers a response to an incident, eventually resolving the incident using a series of actions or a pattern of actions based upon the observations.

3.   Associate Degree Policing Practice: learning the realities of policing

The driving force for universities to develop relevant, accessible and achievable higher education courses, suggests a requirement to establish authentic learning situations if they are to be competitive on an ever increasing world market where enrolment of the course comes from all geographic locations (Davies & Dalgarno, 2009).

In 2008 all distance education subjects in ADPP (Sessions Three, Four and Five) ceased to be delivered in print. Instead, a multi-media approach was developed. Pivotal to this change was the development of scenarios based upon real life policing incidents, encountered daily by operational police. The development of the scenarios involved operational police within the NSWPF, academics and former police officers employed by CSU, educational support personal within the university, professionals from the Australian film industry all sharing a mutually defined practice (Wenger & Snyder, 2006). All with a common purpose of developing and filming a number of scenarios based on real-life policing incidents designed to reflect best practice in policing.

To achieve this subject content addressed the deficiencies of individual police officers actions or inactions, identified by serving police within the NSWPF, the legal system within New South Wales and government agencies whose charter is to investigate complaints against police. Wenger's & Snyder's (2006) notion of community of practice takes a more corporate approach to include not only who originally identify the deficiencies as well as those whose responsibility is to develop the learning

resources and teaching strategies for example CSU and the NSWPF to address them. Independently or collaboratively all have a mutual practice to promote best practice in the ADPP.

Relying on Dahl's (1951) concept that observation is an essential ingredient in policing, the filmed scenarios are not delivered in isolation, rather they form the link between theory and practice using a blended learning approach. This approach is considered by Graham (2006) as learning that combines traditional teaching and learning approaches with information and communication technologies. Synchronous and asynchronous interactions occur between student-lecturer, student-student, and information/ communication technology (ICT) through on-line forums, where students independently working through the learning initiatives on the CD-ROM post their results on the on-line forum.

The scenarios, as in real life policing incidents, are sequenced commencing with the initial criminal incident (not witnessed by police) and unfold to reflect real life policing, i.e. police are directed to the incident; speak to the victim; interview witnesses; and interview the accused; arrest the accused; and present the matter to court. Biggs & Tang (2007) describes this as 'authentic learning' outlining real life situations. The learning initiatives flow and reinforce this process, delivered by CD-ROM and on-line forum. The learning resources develop the students' understanding of the process or pattern associated with the incident depicted in the scenario and the knowledge of law and police procedure associated when investigating this type of incident. Students post their responses to the resources on the on-line forum whereupon feedback is provided by a university accredited experienced police officer. This observation/response pattern builds their understanding through the sequencing of the scenario and learning resources and links the knowledge learnt as the scenario unfolds. Once completed, case studies of actual policing incidents are used as assessment activities to allow students to demonstrate what they have learnt to the lecturer.

Bryne (1996) considers that although actual methods of constructivist delivery may vary, the central concept remains the same: students should construct their learning rather than just be told the correct answers. Learning based upon reality reflects Bryne's concept: students consider the actions or inactions of individual police specific to that incident contrasting those actions to the 'best practice' identified in the NSWPF's Handbook and Corporate Plan 2008-2012 'Key Performance Area – People', "Deliver professional development of our people" which in turn will "Increase the % of community who are satisfied with the services provided by our police".

The assessment activities like the learning initiatives are based on real life policing incidents. This requires students to display an understanding of law and police procedures reflective of best practice. It requires the students to also apply their understandings to real policing incidents while simultaneously addressing any deficiencies identified.

4.   Simulation

In addition to the filmed scenarios, simulations with a specific goal to simulate a real life policing incident enable students to understand the realities of policing before experiencing it firsthand.

The simulation delivered on-line adds another dimension to blended learning through:

- a practical way to convey a vast amount of information in a short period of time;

- promoting and reinforcing best practice specific to policing incidents;

- affording students the opportunity to make mistakes in a safe environment, avoiding the ramifications of mistakes which in a real situation could be fatal for both the officer and others involved;

- providing all of the information required to undertake and complete the simulations at hand, either reinforcing the student's knowledge or making knowledge gaps visible so they can be addressed

- providing information used, adhered to by the operational police in the NSWPF; and

- providing information and reference material which is current linked through Internet connections to the NSWPF data base, and relevant NSW government web sites.

Reeves, Herrington and Oliver (2002) agree that exposing students to simulations which resemble real life will enhance their learning. Learning content and associated activities should simulate conditions and experiences which allow students to contextualise. Opportunities to apply the knowledge and skills gained reflect authentic learning (Biggs & Tang, 2007).

An essential component of the simulations is giving students the ability to identify best practice when successfully dealing with the incidents portrayed in the simulations. Access Technologies Group, Inc (2009) support this, the real world is the real world, there is no rewind button or restart button. There is a large gap between the safety of an enclosed or sterile learning environment, for example Police college and the diversity of experiences that exist in policing which at times will confront individual's comfort zones. Lombardi (2007) describes this as authentic learning, having students solve 'real world' problems supported by technology. Mims (2003) takes it further as a key concept in constructivist principles, students are presented with realistic problems (real life policing incidents) with realistic purposes (take the appropriate action to resolve the incident) which gives them the opportunity to investigate and converse about these problems and projects in manners that are applicable to them and their lives. The simulations allow them to make mistakes, identify those mistakes, correct them and in doing so establish recognised patterns to deal with similar incidents successfully. The concept of pattern recognition is intimately linked to the design of the simulations.

5.   Pattern recognition and the realities of policing

Watanabe (1985) in Skrodal et al (2009) considers that one must first perceive and acknowledge that a pattern or a series of actions linked to and capable of resolving specific policing incident exists. Bar-Yam (1997) goes further and suggests a pattern can be conceptualised as sets of relationships that are satisfied by observations of a system, or a collection of systems. This is achieved through the physical senses of sight and/or hearing or through process matching that exists in one's mental schema/model i.e. directed by the police radio to attend an incident. The incident becomes the stimulus in recognising patterns which were successful (Bear, Connor & Paradiso, 2001). At this time the police officer involved acknowledges the existence of a pattern based upon past experiences. Gobert and Simon (1998) agree that patterns associated with pattern recognition are a series of actions repeated across different samples. Gazzaniga et al (2002) agree that this is a highly intelligent process, allowing patterns to be assimilated into and contrasted with the existing pattern to resolve the incident.

Post incident the officer will reflect upon his/her actions/pattern, recognising the consequences of their actions and in doing so refining the pattern for future use when next the officer is called to a similar incident. Ewell (1997) describes this as a cognitive process involving actively created linkages among concepts, skill elements, people, and experiences. For the police officer involved it will be about making meaning or reflecting upon what it takes to successfully resolve the incident; establishing new patterns; re-working established patterns; acknowledging the relationships between the pattern employed and the success or otherwise of the resolving of the incident.

6.   Scenarios/simulations the key to pattern recognition in learning

Lawson (2002) suggests scaffolding where a lecturer provides students with a temporary framework for learning, providing information to enable students to develop his or her own initiative. Enabled by these teaching strategies students gain new knowledge and develop motivation and resourcefulness through which key elements in pattern recognition are developed. The scenarios and simulations offer the students these opportunities. NISO (2004) defines this information as meta-data or structured information that describes, explains, locates, or otherwise makes it easier to retrieve, use, or manage an information resource. The information/knowledge is gathered throughout the ADPP, which learnt in isolation is just information, but when combined it becomes linked knowledge constructed from many sources within the course. For example, learning of officer survival techniques, legislations applicable to specific policing incidents, NSWPF's policies and procedures linked to a specific policing incident becomes blended and applied to the incident depicted. Students take the information learned and apply this to the incident and in doing so recognise the pattern or a series of actions required to successfully resolve the incident.

Paquette (1999) agrees the simulations, like the scenarios, allow students combine what they already know with the new knowledge learnt from the simulations or scenarios, validate new ideas, formulate and develop meta-knowledge or applied knowledge in a particular policing incident. By drawing upon and utilising knowledge that they have acquired in previous ADPP subjects, students are able to link

theory and practice, developing the ability to practice the knowledge learned at their own pace or in 'slow' time in a safe learning environment compared to 'real' time as a police officer in the 'real world'. Once students build the knowledge and develop skills on their own they can then define and redefine patterns, establishing their own pattern recognition specific to the policing incident aligned to the policing depicted in the simulation.

When an officer has completed the distance education portion of the ADPP the scaffolding is removed altogether. Students apply the knowledge gained through the simulation experience, the real policing incidents attended, whereupon they can continue to refine actions based on those experiences. Biggs and Tang (2007) describe this as workplace learning or an active learning experience focusing on student participation. Taking Biggs and Tang (2007) further policing becomes a lifelong learning exercise. Burns & Chisholm (2003) agree most police officers will constantly expanded both their knowledge base and acquired skills to be effective in resolving policing incidents where no two are the same.

Starting out as students then as sworn police officers they will continually acquire the knowledge and skills required to resolve any incidents they attend. Eventually their experience and understanding of what it takes to be successful will lead them to evaluate and refine the patterns first established as students in the ADPP.

7.   Conclusion

"One must learn by doing the thing, for though you think you know it – you have no certainty, until you try."

Sophocles' 400 B.C

Currently a research project is being undertaken in the School of Policing Studies at CSU to evaluate the impact of moving from print based to an online interactive environment for the delivery of Sessions Three, Four and Five of the ADPP. This research will provide valuable insight for the design of the CD-ROM, the capacity of the online environment to support the development of skills for police officers, the role of embedding pattern recognition concepts in police recruit education.

This paper has shown how the history of resource development and teaching practices in the ADPP has progressed from a theory based print format to an authentic experiential learning model. It has argued that the introduction of simulated active learning experiences met a demonstrated need for education in relevant best practice policing. Multimedia elements provided a conduit through which to provide the opportunity for students to apply their knowledge and safely develop pattern recognition skills for the front line of policing.

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