

# Different Voices, Different Spaces

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(This paper draws heavily on and is deeply indebted to the report, *Different Voices, Different Spaces*, the result of a 2005 New Practices in Flexible Learning project, funded by the Australian Flexible Learning Framework. This report and related resources can be found at the *Different Voices, Different Spaces* website <http://dvds.flexiblelearning.net.au/index.html>. See Appendix B for more bibliographic details.)

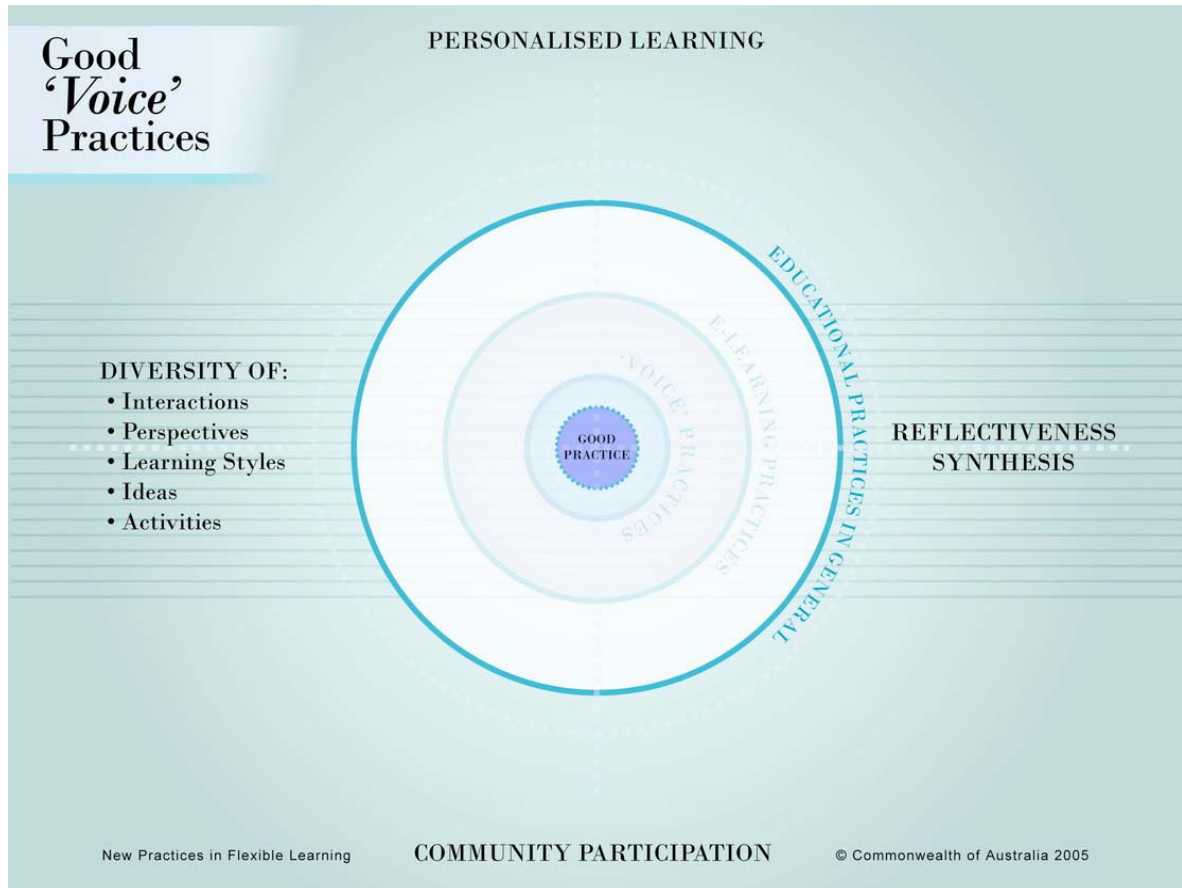
Voice is a vital part of the human story. Oral communication permeates every aspect of our lives, and always has. Speaking and listening (and singing) predate reading and writing by hundreds of thousands of years.

Human voices are powerful. When I asked friends the difference between hearing and reading Martin Luther King's *I have a dream* speech, over and over I was told 'It's hearing his voice that makes all the difference; it's the emotional impact'. Its very physicality makes its presence felt. The spoken word is both immediate and intimate. The subtleties of intonation carry layers of meaning. The spoken voice integrates body, mind and feelings.

Online voice technologies and related educational practices are part of a widespread movement ensuring that spoken voice is given a central place in e-learning. Incorporating the spoken voice is welcome for many reasons. It is welcome as a counter-balance to the pervasiveness of the written word; it is equally welcome as a powerful complement to and extension of the written word. It is not a matter of one mode OR the other but of valuing both in online learning, clear about the virtues and limitations of each.

Voices add value in many ways. Online social interactions involving voice enhance, enrich and expand the lives of learners in quite distinctive ways. Appendix A illustrates some of the pedagogical virtues.

When considering the place of voice, it is important to situate 'good voice practices' within the context of good educational practices overall. 'Voice' practices are one aspect of e-learning practices which, in turn, are one aspect of educational practices in general. 'Voice' practices are not something separate or disconnected from the rest of education. They sit firmly within the bigger picture of education. The model below depicts this close inter-relationship.



There are four educational principles featured in this model of good 'voice' practices. They are: personalised learning, community participation, diversity and reflectiveness. Fused together, they constitute 'good practice'. In other words, when these four active, dynamic principles intersect, 'good practice' is evident. This model emerged from the action research undertaken by the three New Practices 'voice' projects (see Appendix B) complemented with a purposeful literature search, one that encompassed studies both here and overseas. The four educational principles highlighted in this model are accentuated in studies worldwide.

Let me now say a few words about each of the four educational principles.

### **Personalised learning**

This principle highlights the significance of personal, active engagement in successful learning. It refers to learners becoming independent lifelong learners. 'Personal empowerment' is a recurrent motif. A key finding was the contribution of voice in online learning to identity formation.

### **Community participation**

This principle acknowledges that community engagement overcomes alone-ness, creates a sense of belonging, develops confidence, increases motivation and enables collective activity – all critical ingredients in becoming resourceful learners, workers and citizens in today's globalised world. As a complement to the principle above, it spotlights 'social empowerment'. A key finding was the variety of ways in which voice added to creating and sustaining online learning communities.

### **Diversity of approaches and perspectives**

This principle incorporates diversity in all its forms – skills, information, ideas, knowledge, points of view, resources, methods, technologies, programs, media, learning styles, pedagogies, pathways and forms of recognition. Particular value is placed on exploratory activities that are multi-faceted in purpose and outcome. A key finding was the power and potential of voice to extend the diversification of ideas, technologies and perspectives in online learning.

### **Reflectiveness and synthesis**

This principle is a counterbalance to diversity. As Chris Dede puts it in *Planning for Neomillennial Learning Styles*, this principle involves comparing 'multiple sources of information, individually incomplete and collectively inconsistent'; it involves 'seeking, sieving, and synthesising.' A key finding was the special contribution voice makes to incorporating reflectiveness into e-learning activities.

In summary, when these four principles come together, the educational practices are rich and robust. As a result of this powerful confluence, learners' lives are enhanced and extended personally, socially, culturally and vocationally.

A more detailed description and discussion of the four principles, and the relationship between the four educational principles and 'voice' practices, can be found in the report *Different Voices, Different Spaces*. (See Appendix B.)

Introducing learners to voices tools and their related practices is a gift for life. Yes, learners acquire another resource they can add to their repertoire as independent lifelong learners; but, equally importantly, they experience new forms of community participation. They learn new ways to express themselves and new ways to dialogue. They learn the importance of evaluation, new ways to value themselves and others as well as new ways to evaluate the information and ideas that inundate us daily.

Michael Coghlan expands on these ideas most eloquently in his 2004 keynote address at the CLESOL (Community Languages and English for Speakers of Other Languages) conference in New Zealand that he called *Finding Your Voice on the Internet – changing the language, building community, and reducing diversity?* He says:

Another major impact the Internet has had is in the area of public writing (and we could add speaking). Twenty years ago most educational writing (and discussion), except for those few who published books or articles, was a private concern between the teacher and the student. You set an assignment, and the student, ideally, handed it up to you, the teacher. No one else ever saw it. Now, with Internet and mobile (and voice) technologies, we have great tools for public writing (and speaking). And people are using them. The web has given everyman (and everywoman) a stage, and many have taken it. It has enabled everyone to publish. To be given a voice. People send emails out to groups of people, online classes and communities of practice share volumes of public discussion about education, motorbikes, Justin Timberlake music, and travel yarns.

Blogs (including audioblogs) are the latest incarnation of this desire to communicate in public – a wonderfully egalitarian tool where everyone has a voice, where everyone can comment on the opinions of others, and no one person's opinion is worth more than any other. This is not the world of experts or stars. This is ordinary people finding their voice, and having their say. Not as in the traditional media where newspapers and television are full of important people and their opinions. I say turn off the television and blog!

So, rather than bemoan the appalling things these technologies are doing to the language (and drastic things ARE happening – I don't deny it), better celebrate the fact that people are now communicating on a global scale, and often in written text (as well as the spoken voice), more than ever before. There are dreadful websites (and blogs) out there; there is some shocking spelling and plenty of bad grammar – but the common man (person?) has been given a voice and Moscow is talking to Washington, Taipei is talking to Beijing, and some Palestinians are even talking to Israelis.

In summary, thanks to online voice technologies and related educational practices, teachers and learners are (re)discovering the power of voice. They are finding and hearing new voices; they are

discovering new voices of their own. This is a gift that will endure long after formal ties with education have passed.

## Appendix A

### INTRODUCING VOICE TECHNOLOGIES AND PRACTICES

This table introduces some of the voice technologies featured in the *Different Voices, Different Spaces* report and CD. The information that follows, certainly not a comprehensive account, enables readers to sample of the rich educational fare – both technologies and practices – that is described in more detail in the three ‘New Practices in Flexible learning’ project materials – *Beyond Text*, *Connecting the Dots* and *Social Interaction Packs* – that are the bedrock for the report. (See Appendix B.)

Each technology is introduced in three ways, with reference (in turn) to some of its pedagogical virtues, some of its limitations and other features worthy of comment. Much of the information in these introductory tables has been distilled from the findings of the three projects mentioned above.

<b>Technology</b>	<b>Pedagogical virtues</b>	<b>Limitations</b>	<b>Special mention</b>
<b>PODCASTING</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Being audio, with all its virtues, it is also portable and not time restricted</li> <li>- It gives access to new horizons and a vast array of materials and ideas previously beyond reach</li> <li>- Automatic subscription format enables regular downloads of ‘up to date’ programs of interest</li> <li>- For kinaesthetic learners, it is something they can do while doing something else</li> <li>- Delivery straight into the ear helps easily distracted learners tune in better</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Computer knowledge and resources that are needed can exclude those without the resources or experience</li> <li>- In some circumstances, podcasts (especially if long and monotonous monologues) require images, diagrams and animations to make the ideas being discussed better understood</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Being an alternative to text-based resources, it is one way of overcoming some reading and literacy problems</li> <li>- It is another form of m-learning, allowing people to learn on the move, without requiring telephony support</li> <li>- Short ‘sound bytes’ make good ‘introductions or reinforcement</li> <li>- It democratises publication</li> </ul>
<b>AUDIO/ VOICE BOARD</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Teachers and learners can post voice messages with accompanying printed text messages into voice-based, threaded message boards</li> <li>- Students can listen to a recording as many times as they need and also re-record their response until they are satisfied with the result</li> <li>- They enable individual oral communication skills development - including</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Reviewing learners’ voice postings takes more time for teachers than reviewing text submissions. Voice postings cannot be scanned as can a written text. Teachers need to consider this before setting assignments requiring lengthy answers.</li> <li>- There is the potential for the</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Teachers can provide models of, and pronunciation practice for, learning outcomes that require correct pronunciation of terminology.</li> <li>- Voice board activities allow learners to self evaluate against the models provided, and possibly, also against peer postings. This is of particular benefit</li> </ul>

	pronunciation practice	speaker to feel self-conscious or inhibited about recording a posting in public spaces	for pronunciation and English language learning
<b>VIRTUAL CLASSROOM</b>	- The virtual classroom is communication- rich, providing an opportunity to use a range of interactive and collaborative tools to develop a socially engaging learning environment	- E-learning that includes too much text or too many visual-based learning materials can be a problem for students with sight impairments - Regarding licence costs, smaller training organisations may need to consider educational joint ventures	- It offers shared student workspaces, with breakout rooms for student collaboration and the use of multiple simultaneous communications (for example, audio and text chat and whiteboard text and images)
<b>AUDIO/ VOICE CHAT</b>	- By virtue of the fact that it adds voice to the chat room, voice chat provides new ways of creating a sense of community amongst the learners, of facilitating a course and engaging learners who prefer oral communication	- Managing the voice and text areas at the same time with only one facilitator is challenging. It's best if there are two facilitators (one to facilitate the voice and one to facilitate the text)	- Voice chat may promote deeper level learning than text chat. For example, often learners with slow or poor keyboard skills make very simple postings in a text chat. During a voice chat, these learners are not distracted by the keyboard and can therefore concentrate on the discussion
<b>VOICE E-MAIL</b>	- It is especially good for: * introductions and icebreaker activities * engaging learners with the course, especially at the beginning announcements * reminders about tasks due	- When using text based email, it is simple to 'select reply' to return a message to the sender. This is not the case in most voice email applications	- For important announcements, voice emails can reach learners who are not inclined to read written information
<b>AUDIO BLOGGING</b>	- While voice boards are an effective discussion tool for learners enrolled in courses, audioblogs are:  * more flexible- you can post by phone or	- Students may need to pay for costs incurred using their own phone to post messages - Respondents can only post written text	- Audioblogs may provide an effective, accessible online channel of communication for learners who are shy in class or who prefer

	<p>personal computer</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* more attractive and media rich – you can add graphics and personalised layout (colours, font, banners, etc)</li> <li>* more personalised – they can function as a simple means of creating personal or interactive webpages, and they remain active after the course is finished</li> <li>* more accessible – they can be made available to the public domain for wider participation</li> </ul>	<p>replies in the comments field</p>	<p>an auditory style of learning or an oral mode of communication.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- They can also be an attractive learning option for learners, particularly younger learners, for whom mobile technologies are an integral part of their lives and daily communication.</li> </ul>
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Source: *DIFFERENT VOICES, DIFFERENT SPACES* report (pp. 42-4), <http://www.flexiblelearning.net.au/flx/go/home/projects/2005/pid/126>

## Appendix B

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