



Amos Stark: Sharing skills and experience

Slice of real life helps students

THROUGH his program Help a Teacher, Amos Stark is encouraging business people to volunteer to share their skills, knowledge and expertise with school teachers and students.

An educationalist and senior instructional designer with IBM, Mr Stark's Help a Teacher allows people to volunteer to share their expertise with teachers in local schools by posting their interest and specific area of expertise through the program's website.

Not only does Help a Teacher pair school teachers with suitably qualified volunteers from the corporate sector to share their skills and experiences with students, it also allows teachers to post requests for specific types of assistance – be it explaining management practices or skills sharing – to attract an appropriately skilled volunteer.

“The Help a Teacher concept is designed to ease teachers' workloads and enrich children's learning,” says Mr Stark.

After he founded the Australian non-for-profit, community project earlier this year, Mr Stark is delighted that the pilot program has been such a success.

He originally studied to be an industrial designer, and initially had no interest in teaching: “While I did study for my teaching diploma, I never thought I'd use it,” he admits.

But after working as a designer for one of the country's largest office furniture manufacturers, a series of circumstances saw him also training staff in product knowledge, and he was hooked.

Mr Stark holds a Masters of Arts (MA) degree in e-Learning, a Bachelor of Science (BSc) degree in Technological Education, a Design Teacher's Diploma and is undertaking his Education Doctorate. He also lectures the e-Learning Technology subject at the University of Technology, Sydney and is an adjunct senior lecturer at the University of Sydney for his contributions to teaching.

While Mr Stark was convinced he had a winning idea, he resisted running before he could walk. Instead, he looked around for a school that would be responsive to the idea.

He found what he was after at Sydney's Tara Anglican School for Girls. As the first school to engage the Help a Teacher program, Tara has been actively helping reshape the format and content to enable it to evolve into a large scale national education program.

To date, the Tara students have heard from many different people talking about practical examples of managing workplace issues such as women in the workplace, team work, time management, negotiation skills, and conflict resolution.

Melissa Losco, who runs Tara's Business Enterprise Program, says Help a Teacher has brought many benefits to their students: “A recent visit from a young female IBM executive on dealing with gender issues in the work situation gave the girls invaluable advice on being the only female on an all-male team in a male-dominated industry.

“It's life lessons like these that the girls can most benefit from and it's information that you can't get from a textbook.

“By inviting contributions from real-life experts and professionals, the students learn more, are more interested and enthusiastic about the topic and take away critical life skills.”