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THE DEVELOPMENT OF STUDENT WRITING SKILLS

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Editorial

How dependent on subject context is the development of writing skill? This seems to be the critical question when approaches to the improvement of student writing are considered. If one believes that once acquired, the skill can be applied to any writing task, one is happy to turn one's students over to study skills tutors or the English department or some other specialist. If, however, one believes that subject areas make special demands on students' language skills, one must accept at least some of the responsibility for developing those skills to meet those demands. At the 1985 Tertiary Study Skills Conference, much discussion centred not on whether writing skill depends on the context in which students write but on the extent of that dependence. Over and over again the emphasis fell on the thought processes which mediate between subject and language, and on the importance of all who help students working first with their understanding of the matter, rather than the manner of writing. In addition, in many cases the style, the vocabulary, the forms, and the expectations of teachers differ from subject to subject; students need to be made aware of these differences in order that they may succeed in their chosen areas of study. Many specialists in the development of communication skills have observed that a particular pattern of error in a student's writing may be related to the subject matter of that writing and not appear elsewhere: for instance, in dealing with a novel of complex narrative structure in which events are not revealed chronologically, a student may have great difficulty with tenses in her critical essay. All of this seems to suggest that it is nearly impossible to teach writing skills outside of subject contexts.

On the other hand, classroom teachers cannot help thinking that there must be certain basic skills which students should have mastered, or should master before they progress any further. At the least, these take the form of being able to handle the mechanics of punctuation, sentence structure, spelling, agreement of number and so on. On a higher level, many believe that it must be possible for students to learn skills in mounting an argument, in analysing and criticising ideas regardless of subject discipline. Such lines of argument eventually lead to questions about whether the goal is to teach students to "play the game" by satisfying the sometimes limited or even distorted criteria of their teachers, or whether it is to work toward the development and expression of complex and coherent understanding of ideas.

Many such discussions about the importance of context and the possibility of teaching writing (or any other) skills outside of subject contexts have gradually resulted in my centring my own work to develop student writing skills on the following theme. As educators, we hope to develop students' ability to tolerate ambiguity; it is a step in intellectual development to realise that what is right in one context may be inappropriate or even wrong in another, and to be able to make decisions using that realisation. We want students to learn to see the inter-

connections between the subjects and methodologies they study and to be able to integrate or to select as necessary in dealing with professional problems and decisions. Teachers, educational researchers, staff developers, study skills advisers, student counsellors should all be seeking in a variety of ways to help students toward understanding and tolerance of the differences between and within subject disciplines and toward the ability to analyse, synthesise, criticise, and select as necessary. People working in all of these areas are concerned with similar problems and share many perspectives, but all too often we work independently.

We must bridge some of the gaps between persons working with students in different roles, we must bring these individuals together on our campuses and in conferences to share their expertise and experiences.

Perhaps the 1986 HERDSA conference with its theme "The Learner in Tertiary Education: A Forgotten Species?" will contribute to the coordinated efforts which are necessary if we wish to produce not just competent but sophisticated articulate graduates able to communicate at the highest levels of their disciplines. I hope that this issue of HERDSA News will prompt further thought from the Society's membership about what they, as practitioners, researchers, and developers, can do to "advance the cause". Mal Hewitson presents strong arguments in favour of teaching "writing across the curriculum", and the other contributors demonstrate that it is not only desirable but also possible to achieve this goal, John Clanchy draws on his experience with both students and academic staff at ANU to specify the teaching conditions under which student writing is most likely to improve. Specific innovations are described by Skerritt and Knight and by Zubrick: the establishment of a workshop program to assist dissertation writers in a postgraduate course, and the use of reading logs in a first year undergraduate course.

In closing, a few suggestions about areas that seem to need our attention. First and foremost, more research into student learning is needed to inform efforts to develop higher order skills in understanding and communication. Secondly, we need to develop better tools and methods for evaluating programs which seek to assist students in the development of writing skills in particular and study skills in the broadest sense of the term. Finally, we should investigate systematically the possibility that approaches to teaching and learning problem-solving skills may have applications in other areas of skills development, and the inter-relationships between development of language skills and problem-solving skills.

Many thanks to the contributors to this issue who not only met deadlines but also provided thoughtful and informed, pragmatic and concise material that made this fledgling editor's task easy, and to Dave Boud for inviting me to edit this special issue and for his advice and guidance.

Peggy Nightingale

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Improving Student Writing

Practical advice to teachers who wish to help their students write better is offered by John Clanchy of ANU's Communication and Study Skills Unit.

University academics often confess themselves appalled and disheartened by current standards of student literacy. Yet these same academics recoil with horror or disbelief from any suggestion that they should be responsible for the development of their students' writing. 'I'm here to teach science/law/history — not English. That's the secondary school's job.' There are two fundamental difficulties with this position: first, the separation that is implied between content (science/law/history) and the language in which that content is conveyed is not merely misleading, but unreal; second, academics are already involved, willy-nilly, in influencing their students' writing, even if only at the level of prescriptions or injunctions scrawled across the bottom of essays and laboratory prac reports or, more indirectly still, through attention drawn, in passing, to the elegance of a scientific paper or piece of historical analysis being studied. In this short paper I am concerned with ways in which this current incidental academic involvement with students' writing can be made more systematic and effective.

The development of more systematic approaches to the improvement of student writing is inhibited by the vast system of opinion and belief that surrounds the very concept of "literacy". It is necessary to look briefly at two of the most powerful, inhibitory myths of student literacy before proceeding to offer some practical suggestions for assisting students.

1. *There is a persistent belief that literacy is a phenomenon of a single dimension:* that there is one literacy which does service for all contexts and situations and, by extension, that students either possess it (what is often crudely referred to as "having good expression") or they don't. A moment's reflection should be sufficient to dispense with the first of these propositions: we need only bring to mind certain (highly literate) fictional, journalistic and bureaucratic forms and styles of writing that are quite unacceptable in an academic context. The second proposition, that students are either literate or they are not, is equally fallacious. Not only may an individual write very well in one form and context (e.g. creative writing in a school setting) and very badly six months later in another (e.g. analytical report writing in a University) but, even more narrowly, the same student may, in the same month, write well in one *academic* context (e.g. essay writing in English) and very badly in another (e.g. an essay in Sociology, especially if it involves theory).

Literacy has many forms, and literate behaviour, by the same individual, may vary markedly according to context, content and intention.

2. *There is a related and equally persistent belief that students' language development should be complete before they enter the University* — that the function of the University is to develop powers of thought. This belief suggests that new forms and styles of thinking can be adequately expressed in language appropriate for high school and everyday use. In fact, for many students, tertiary study creates an entirely new set of linguistic demands and pressures. The language forms and structures that proved sufficient for high school work (essentially

information processing) are often insufficient for higher level cognitive tasks (analytical and speculative reasoning). A shift in cultural context requires a shift in language use. New items of vocabulary need to be learned (both technical and non-technical jargon), new disciplinary styles or "dialects" acquired. Learning Biology or Sociology, learning to think like a biologist or sociologist, involves learning to read, to speak, to write biological and sociological English. Development in these new "languages" is typical of development in any new language; it is likely to be tentative, uneven in pace, fraught with error and subject to sudden apparently inexplicable retreats into "illiterate" behaviour.

What are the practical implications for teaching of what has been said so far? Based on our experience in the Study Skills Unit at ANU, working with students from all Faculties and at all levels from first year to PhD, the crucial point at which to attempt to influence student writing is early in the first year when the need for adjustment to the new cultural context is most acute.

...academic involvement with students' writing can be made more systematic and effective."

In our view the quality of student writing is most likely to improve:

1. **when expectations are made explicit.** This sounds simple but in practice appears very difficult to achieve. We have been involved in many exercises in which academics, asked to set down their expectations of first-year students' essays and reports, have got themselves inextricably entangled in notions of "excellence", "originality", and so on. In fact, of course, they expect nothing of the sort. What lecturer in chemistry, or for that matter History, actually expects "originality" (in its fundamental sense) from a first-year student? After some years of frustration we ourselves found that the only way in which to establish what Arts and Social Science lecturers expected of their first year students was to ignore what they *claimed* they wanted and, by collecting and classifying what comments they actually made on hundreds of first year essays, gradually distil the key criteria on which they graded. In practice, there proved to be four criteria (apart from quality of content): An essay should be clearly focused on the set topic and deal fully with its central concerns; it should be the result of wide and critical reading; it should offer a reasoned argument; it should be competently presented (Clanchy & Ballard, 1981).

2. **when expectations are made concrete.** Students at ANU claim to have benefited immensely from having the above expectations made explicit for them. Yet a world of distance stretches between abstract and concrete knowledge. One of the most useful ways we have found of bridging this gap has been to establish, over the years, a file of first year essays, at various levels of achievement, marked and commented upon by lecturers and then photocopied by us, which succeeding years of students may consult in order to gain a concrete understanding of what is required of them. We now have a bank of first year essays and assignments for virtually every discipline studied in the University (not one Distinction or Credit essay in a subject, but three or four of each, so that students do not get the idea that there is only one "model" way to answer a question). This is a very simple, practical way of overcoming the classic problem of frustration that results from students being *told* by everyone under the academic sun how they ought to be writing but never having *seen* what a good essay actually looks like.

The bank of essays may be used in a number of ways: in our case, they are read by individual students who visit our Unit; they are used for discussion in small group courses on essay writing; and they sometimes provide the basis for discussion on essay setting and marking with Departmental staff. They may not be copied by students nor taken away from the Unit. With very little change this practice can be (and has been) adopted at the individual department or even course level.

"... The crucial point at which to attempt to influence student writing is early in the first year ..."

3. **when the tasks/topics students are asked to write upon are clear and unambiguous.**

This is not a disguised plea for soft options or the setting of less demanding tasks for students. It is simply a recognition that students write more confidently, better, when they understand what they are being asked to do. Strict application, in marking, of criteria of relevance, adequacy and reasoned argumentation presupposes clear, focused and arguable topics.

Yet even when the task of writing a clear, manageable topic has been achieved, the room for student misconception still seems vast. The reason for this is that the guidelines by which academics are working (even in the use of relatively simple instructions like "analyse" or "discuss") are not yet common ground between them and their students. One way around this gap in understanding is for the person setting the topic to take 10 to 15 minutes of a lecture period or tutorial to discuss what is expected of a forthcoming assignment. We have seen this done very effectively by some lecturers who, far from delivering a formal set-piece of do's and don'ts, manage to create the impression of thinking their way aloud through the topic, with the student audience as incidental eavesdroppers: what questions, the lecturer asks, does this topic raise for me? where does the major weight of it fall? on what terms does it turn? what possible directions might I take? what reading might be necessary? what kind of evidence? what possible conclusions might I reach? what shape might the essay take? This exercise does not provide students with the answer; but it does indicate to them the process by which an acceptable answer can be arrived

"The common theme running through ... these suggestions is the need for explicitness ..."

at. Modelling for students in this way just how an academic begins to think about a topic is not only enlightening for the listeners, it can save time and wasted effort later for both student and lecturer in the actual processes of writing and marking.

4. **when first essays in a discipline are "redeemable".** Almost all Departments in the Faculty of Arts (including Social Sciences) at ANU allow first-year students to rewrite and resubmit their first essay. This strategy enables students who have made a mess of their first assignments to "retrieve" their position; more importantly, to learn from their initial errors without having to wait until late in second term before they are reassured that they are "on target". The main objection to this practice — the worry some staff express that they are potentially doubling their marking loads — proves in practice to be a chimera. In reality, only a very small proportion of students chooses to rewrite (the rest are pinned to the wall by continuous assessment) and they are precisely the group who have most to gain: the "undertaught" country high school student; the nervous mature age entrant whose only writing since leaving school may have been family letters or memoranda at work; the disciplinarily confused — those who write Economics essays full of ethical statements, who confuse sociological with psychological modes of analysis; those who have fallen, too early, in love with the more extravagant patterns of academic discourse...

Permitting the resubmission of a student's first piece of written work in a discipline (it is often only a matter of 10% of the total assessment) appears to be a practical, relatively undemanding and sympathetic way of coping with gross initial misconceptions by students. Those who practise it speak strongly in its favour. The small amount of extra time required, in first term marking, is, they claim, more than counterbalanced by the time and frustration saved in second and third term essay marking.

5. **when feedback is swift, detailed and individual.** Research has clearly shown that the effectiveness of feedback in terms of changed future behaviour is directly related to the speed and extent of explicit detail with which it is achieved. Students who receive essays back six weeks after they were written with broad generalised comments — "badly organised", "not enough analysis", "you quote too much", "evidence not apt", "no argument" — are not being taught, merely graded. The problem with this sort of shorthand commentary, as suggested earlier, is that it presumes, mistakenly, that the terms of criticism are common ground between marker and student. In fact students receiving such feedback are no nearer understanding what constitutes an academic "argument" or "apt" evidence; they only know they have not produced it.

In our experience, the more individual the feedback, the more effective it appears. In a number of first-year courses at ANU, tutors cancel the first week's classes in second term and conduct half-hour interviews with students which allow detailed follow-up discussion of comments made on first term essays. In others, in Science where regular tutorials are less common, small group meetings are arranged in which the tutor and, say, four

(Continued on page 24)

Teaching Writing to Tertiary Students

What should tertiary institutions do to encourage high standards of student writing? Mal Hewitson's P.E.P. leave resulted in a report to the Brisbane C.A.E. advocating the integration of instruction in writing into the curriculum of all subject teaching. Here he argues his case.

Writing is defined by the New York State Education Department as "the process of selecting, combining, arranging and developing ideas in effective sentences, paragraphs and, often, longer units of discourse..." It is often thought of as a series of stages beginning with pre-writing activities which lead to a first draft which, in turn, is revised and then edited to become the final piece. Although this conception of writing is a useful tool for purposes of analysis it is misleading to represent the writing process as a linear sequence (i.e. pre-writing — drafting — revising — editing) because it is, in fact, an integrated process in which the writer moves freely back and forth between all the elements. As Carlson (1982, pp. 1-4) puts it, the stages of the composing process are seen as recursive and integrative, i.e. they overlap, relate to and influence each other. This helps to explain why "writing it down" gives writers a clearer idea of what it was they wanted to say in the first place, i.e. why writing may be equated with thinking and not regarded as simply a product of earlier thought. In Elbow's frequently quoted words, "Meaning is not what you start out with but what you end up with." In this respect, probably all writers know the demands on their thinking which Shirley, a Year 10 student participating in the Language Development Project in Victoria, is experiencing when she writes:

[I] have an idea but can't get it down on to paper. I have this problem a lot, where I have lots of ideas but when I put them on paper they sound different.

Shirley is discovering the fact that "good writing doesn't just happen. It calls for training and practice" (Ebbitt and Ebbitt, 1982, p. 1).

With regard to the teaching of writing, there is a marked consensus of opinion among experts on strategies which are most effective, the result of both theory building and research activity. Although these have frequently been directed towards how pre-school and school-aged children learn to write well, it is clear that many of the emergent principles apply to writers of all ages and at all levels of education. For example, the recent position statement on the teaching of composition published by the National Council of Teachers of English points out that accomplished writers imagine their audience, set goals, develop ideas, produce notes, drafts and revised text, and edit to meet audience expectations. The Commission then comes to the following conclusion:

We can teach students to write more effectively by encouraging them to make full use of the many activities that comprise the act of writing, not by focusing only on the final written product and its strengths and weaknesses.

Similarly, there is general agreement with the following from the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction:

- students learn to write by writing and benefit from both guidance in the writing process and discussion of their written work;

- students should comment on each other's writing, making known their responses to the writing of others and listening to the responses others make to their own writing;
- writing teachers should themselves be writers, willing to write with students to demonstrate the process and able to help students look beyond surface errors to organisation and meaning of their papers.
(For this and the NCTE position statement, see *Basic Education*, 29, 7, March 1985.)

In this regard, Nightingale (1983, p. 287) reports that many Macquarie University staff members also found that poor expression and poor content are almost inseparable.

Many experts also stress the importance of involving the students' ego in the writing task. Ego-involvement may be achieved in part during pre-writing discussion, through "conferencing" sessions for drafting and revising purposes, and by broadening the audience at whom the writing is pitched beyond the person of the teacher.

If, then, the consensus of scholarly opinion is accepted, there are unequivocal implications for teaching institutions in which writing is considered fundamental to the learning process. Such institutions include those in which assigned essay work is a major basis for the assessment of students' academic standing. In the case of higher education institutions, for example, the logical teaching response to current opinion is to include writing instruction as a formal and core class activity, not leave it as something learnt by a process of osmosis out of scheduled class time.

"... writing may be equated with thinking and not regarded as simply a product of earlier thought."

In a 1981 internal report at La Trobe University, Bock identifies some of the conditions under which higher education students are less likely to resent institutional efforts made to improve writing skills where these are weak. Most important is accepting the level of writing which students have reached without apportioning blame to previous educational experience (or lack of it) or to personal factors such as lack of effort or lack of motivation on the students' part. A positive approach replaces the stigma and ego-deflation associated with being labelled deficient ("in need of remedial work") with a non-threatening environment in which development

of writing skills is a means through which students will obtain their own (not the instructor's) goals.

There are two other aspects associated with this approach. The first is the point made by the Senate Standing Committee on Education and the Arts (1984, p. 27) that the language children bring to school should be built on to develop the variety of English most valued in Australia, namely, Standard Australian English. Given that Standard English is the language of education and the professions, the Senate Standing Committee's reasoning is particularly relevant for institutions of higher education. The second aspect is similar. Standard English is the written language of the community of scholars in all fields of study where English is the dominant language. It behoves people with academic qualifications in whatever field to be able to communicate with colleagues in their chosen profession using the conventions of Standard English as the accepted language of discourse.

"... higher education should not view the written assignment exclusively... as a means for making summative assessments about students' academic worth."

The development of educated standards of written English begins with the pre-writing phase. The literature makes it clear not only that the wording of assignment topics requires careful thought but also that clarification is needed with regard to (i) the purpose of the writing (to inform, to narrate, to clarify, to persuade, to report, etc); (ii) the form it should take (reflective, expository, argumentative, etc); and (iii) the intended audience (self, teacher, peers, members of the profession, general public, etc). The appropriate linguistic register and tone of the piece are derived from consideration of all these factors. Pre-writing activities may also include the generation of ideas for content and organisation of material. There is also room for discussion of information sources and such complementary skills as information retrieval and reading strategies during the pre-writing and first draft phases. It is further suggested that some class time be devoted to composing the first draft or part thereof, that students' drafts be discussed in class, and that teachers be willing to offer possible revisions for open discussion.

The revision phase is often considered to be the essence of good writing. A report by Coe College (Iowa) staff confirms the desirability of regarding revision as an integral part of writing for the following reasons:

- it forces writers to think about their topic in greater depth and with greater precision;
- it increases awareness of the demands of writing for the particular audience; and
- it increases the likelihood that students will pay attention to instructors' comments.

Brent, of Calgary's Effective Writing Centre, adds the caution that students need to be disabused of the idea that revision is a punishment for not getting it right the first time. Rather than "correct" the first draft, he notes, the task is to transform it into a reader-oriented piece of work. It follows that adequate allowances of time must be made to encourage students to deliberate over what they have written and carry out what can become quite substantial revisions.

Finally, the editing phase is akin to proof-reading for final copy. It is at this point that any remaining mechanical errors of spelling, punctuation, grammar and syntax are corrected. It is generally agreed that strong emphasis on the editing function in the early stages of composing a piece of work can be counterproductive in the long term development of writing skills. When it comes to the finishing touches, however, correctness of expression is likely to be accepted as appropriate to the extent that it meets audience expectations. The final polish may also become an important element of the writer's sense of pride in achievement.

This necessarily sketchy outline of recent approaches to the teaching of writing clearly implies that institutions of higher education should not view the written assignment exclusively or even primarily as a means for making summative assessments about students' academic worth. The written assignment needs to be seen as an instrument for improving the quality of both the learning experience and the writing output of students. The time constraints under which many tertiary students have to write their assignments add further weight to the proposition that some class time be used to exploit the potential value of writing to intellectual growth, and at the same time promote writing skills which reflect an educated standard of written English.

That direct teaching of writing is needed in institutions of higher education is reinforced by Bock's report which offers an analysis of essential differences between the secondary school essay and the expository essay widely requested by teachers at the university and college level. For example, school students memorise where university students are expected to analyse; school students report "interesting facts" where university students are expected to present reasoned discussion; and school students offer personal feelings where university students are expected to base personal views on competent research findings and informed opinion as found in the relevant literature. Bock notes that, in addition to having to write a new kind of essay, entering students are bombarded with whole sets of new concepts with which they must immediately become familiar to the point where writing about them makes sensible reading to teachers with a high degree of expertise in the specialised area. Hence when the great differences in the sorts of pressures placed on students in school and students in a higher education context are also taken into account, it is logical to conclude that first-year students need to be taught essay writing in class time.

"There is... a strong movement in the U.S. to include the teaching of writing in... each year of study... and to have writing taught within the various faculties."

The experience of the University of Northern Iowa (UNI) is relevant in this regard. In 1970, UNI staff voted to end the requirement of "successful completion of two writing courses" for all undergraduate students. A few years later, the staff voted to establish a different graduation requirement, namely, a "pass" on a Writing Competency Examination, which was implemented for the first time in 1978. However, the proposal put to the

University Senate in March 1985 recommends the establishment of a University Writing Committee and a return to a graduation requirement of a "3-hour lower division writing course" for all undergraduates in place of the Writing Competency Examination. The proposal points out that lack of instruction in written communication is no longer an adequate response for demands made upon graduates. The same could be said of a number of Australian institutions of higher education.

UNI is only one of many institutions to have undergone this experience. According to the Editor of *Focus* (Educational Testing Service, 1978, p. 3):

Yale, Cornell, Brown, Stanford, the University of Colorado, the University of Wisconsin, the University of Illinois, Keene State College in New Hampshire, Simmons College, and countless other institutions have introduced some form of basic writing instruction in the past few years. Many have, in fact, reinstated courses they dropped in recent decades.

In addition to the lower division course in writing, the UNI proposal foreshadows the introduction of "a required upper division writing emphasis course for each academic major". There is, in fact, a strong movement in the U.S., first, to include the teaching of writing in the core curriculum at each year of study (freshman, sophomore, junior and senior years); and second, to have writing taught within the various faculties. According to Kinneavy (1983, p. 15), considerable impetus was given to the first aspect when studies at Harvard and Bradley revealed deterioration in students' writing skills over the four years of college. For example, in 1978 Harvard seniors in the natural sciences were found to write worse prose than their freshman counterparts. Though this did not hold true for the humanities, the findings supported "the common experience of many teachers of advanced courses of composition" that the curriculum for writing should incorporate a "vertical dimension". Given the degree of specialisation that occurs within particular faculties, such an approach complements Bock's thoughts about the need to learn to write appropriately as new levels of conceptualising are reached.

"... it would be foolish to underestimate problems which may arise."

Moves to implement "Writing Across the Curriculum", i.e. to have writing taught within the various faculties, are associated not only with the need for reader-teacher familiarity with the specialised content of essays, but also with the apparent impracticality of having an English department responsible for all writing across the curriculum. The reluctance of departments of English to become involved in the teaching of writing skills is documented in the literature; but in any case, the arguments presented for the direct teaching of writing demand content area expertise. Saul (1984, p. 3) summarises the position succinctly, as follows:

At King's College (Philadelphia) we have recognised that writing skills are required for success in *learning* as well as practicing (sic) any discipline . . . The best place to teach students to write about chemistry is, therefore, in a chemistry course. Writing about chemistry teaches chemistry; we use writing as a teaching tool.

Saul goes on to explain that it was necessary to mount a "Writing Across the Curriculum" program to assist

chemistry faculty to become better teachers of writing, though students with serious writing difficulties are referred to the English department for remedial work. In many institutions across North America, however, such students would be referred to the writing laboratory or writing centre. In 1981, for example, Wiener (1981, p. 2) reported that the recently formed association of Writing Program Administrators (WPA) represented more than 400 institutions in the United States and Canada.

The principle underlying the notion of writing across the curriculum is that students' writing is an institutional responsibility to be shared by all departments. In terms of implementation, however, it would be foolish to underestimate problems which may arise. Fulwiler (1984) reports on six years of experience at Michigan Technological University where he directed the writing program. The first step was to make the faculty sensitive to the role of writing in promoting learning as well as measuring it. Only by influencing faculty, Fulwiler argues, would the University improve students' writing skills; hence some twelve workshops were conducted for a total of 200 participants. Fulwiler then discusses problems which were encountered as change began to have an impact, including sources of resistance among staff, departmental boundary protection, the assignment marking load, lack of trust in the student peer-review process, generation of unrealistic expectations, and the need to maintain motivation and momentum.

On the other hand, Fulwiler also notes the unexpected benefits which accrued as the high-profile writing program took root. Not only did a consciousness about writing emerge, but also a "community of scholars" developed across disciplinary lines, confidence in personal writing skills and in interactive teaching methods grew, a sense of cohesion spread through the institution, and an impressive number of collaborative research-in-writing projects were undertaken.

When it comes to the teaching of writing, however, the state of the art at many Australian colleges and universities is a far cry from what is happening in numerous institutions in North America. It seems certain that until positive action is undertaken, academic staff will continue to under-exploit writing as a tool for learning and underutilise their actual teaching capacities.

Mal Hewitson,
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- (Note: This article is based on a comprehensive report, *Maintaining Educated Standards of Written English*, presented to the Brisbane CAE on completion of my P.E.P. leave. Anyone requiring information about unpublished reports mentioned above will find complete references in that document.)
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Helping Students Overcome Barriers to Dissertation Writing

Undergraduates are not the only students for whom writing is a problem. Ortrun Zuber-Skerritt and Nick Knight report on a workshop program to help writers of research dissertations.

One of the major problems which the postgraduate student must confront is writing the research dissertation. Writing the dissertation follows several other stages in the total research process: literature review, formulation of research hypothesis and design, and collection and analysis of data. Yet most candidates find writing a daunting, and in some cases an insuperable task, involving as it does a transition from the analysis to synthesis stage of research. Failure to overcome difficulties at this point may leave the student effectively immobilised, suffering a severe loss of self-confidence, which may lead to a failure to submit the dissertation on time or at all.

"... most candidates find writing a daunting... task, involving as it does a transition from the analysis to the synthesis stage of research."

Whilst the late or non-completion rates for full-time PhD candidates reported by various sources (e.g. SSRC, 1980; SERC, 1983; Barrett & Magin, 1983) are relatively high in recent years (40-50%), they are likely to be higher for Master-by-Research candidates and even higher still for postgraduate coursework students because of their greater inexperience in conducting a large-scale research project and because of their tighter schedule (one year full-time or two years part-time).

How can these students be helped to overcome anxieties about writing a dissertation within a specified time limit? How can we help students increase the quality of their final presentation?

This paper presents some solutions generated in the School of Modern Asian Studies (MAS) at Griffith University with Honours and part-time Master-by-Coursework students in the social sciences, but we believe that they can be readily adapted to the specific requirements of other postgraduate programmes (including Masters and PhD) in institutions elsewhere. Our experience and student feedback (in open-ended questionnaires, audio and video recorded evaluative discussions) suggest that an effective way of helping postgraduate students overcome barriers to writing involves a three-dimensional, integrative approach: a combination of (1) a cognitive approach, (2) skill development and (3) an affective approach.

A cognitive approach

This approach aims at the students' cognitive understanding of what to do, how to do it, and to what purpose.

Students may arrive at this knowledge by didactic or generative teaching methods. The latter have the advantage of facilitating gains in the affective domain and will be discussed later. Didactic methods include books, articles, handouts, lectures, audio-visual programmes.

The traditional medium to help postgraduates in thesis writing has been the written text or the supervisor's oral advice. More often than not, it has been assumed that students at postgraduate level should be able to write a thesis and not need any help. That this assumption is a fallacy is evidenced by the many publications on thesis research and writing. There are useful books available to postgraduate students which they may use as guides before planning their first draft and for constant reference during the writing process (e.g. Anderson et al, 1980; Howard and Sharp, 1983). In addition, our students found concise handouts, such as those produced by Pratt (1984) and Stanton (1985), very useful. It is also essential that students be provided with specific institutional and/or departmental regulations and guidelines regarding the format of the dissertation, style sheet and reference system. Failure to do so, adds unnecessarily to student insecurity and frequently leads to unacceptable or inadequate thesis presentation.

We also employed a cognitive approach in a workshop context; the aim of the workshop was to help students realise that there is a difference in purpose and function between the first and final drafts of the dissertation and that there are techniques and skills which can be developed for both. Although students might have read about the functions of a first draft as distinct from the final presentation of a thesis, we tried to reinforce this by stimulating student-generated knowledge as well as using a didactic method. We asked students to generate ideas and solutions to the following questions in small groups of up to six students and supervisors:

1. What is different about writing
 - (a) the first draft, and
 - (b) the final draft?
2. How can psychological barriers to writing be overcome?
3. How can ideas/arguments be presented in such a way that the reader of the dissertation will have no difficulty understanding them?
4. How can plagiarism be avoided?
5. What style of language should be used in a dissertation?

In the subsequent discussion it became clear that many students had intended to write the dissertation in its final form without the intermediate steps of constructing a concept map or flowchart of ideas, writing a first rough draft, revising and editing, and then rewriting. The aim of the workshop was to prevent

students from falling into this trap; for, in attempting to move immediately to writing the final draft, students frequently become preoccupied with fine details, stylistic niceties, and attractive presentation, often at the expense of development of ideas or argumentation; as a result, the writing process is inhibited, and the product often characterised by unevenness of thought and argument.

We believe strongly that the student should write a first draft and be concerned primarily with getting his/her ideas onto paper as rapidly as possible. The important point is to get the student writing. The notion of a rough first draft as a desirable stage in the writing process may be a catalyst which can reduce inhibitions that impede writing.

Once our students had realised the importance of a first draft (rapidly committing ideas and arguments to paper without worrying about detail, precise language, style and presentation) they were receptive to the workshop leader's didactic input. Various techniques of conceptualising, synthesising and structuring research results were presented; these had the aim of improving the cohesion and logic of argumentation; they also aimed to make explicit and coherent the relationships between concepts, methodologies, and substantive interpretations of the student's dissertation. Examples of flowcharts, Gowin's concept mapping and his "Vee" technique were shown to students (Novak and Gowin, 1983); flowcharts and concept maps are techniques which can help students to clarify the structure and flow of argument. The Vee technique is a heuristic device capable of clarifying in one's own mind and making explicit to others the conceptual framework and methodological design to be employed in the research project.

"... many students had intended to write the dissertation in its final form without intermediate steps ..."

If the student has a clear picture in his/her mind of what and how to argue, then it is likely that his/her writing will also be clear. But if the student's ideas are fuzzy, it usually follows that his/her writing is vague and unconvincing. That is why students must understand the importance of planning the thesis and writing a first draft. Although students testified in subsequent interviews that learning about techniques for preparing and writing the first draft were very useful, we are convinced that the didactic approach alone is not the most effective way of helping students apply these techniques.

Skill development

We have found that discussions and interaction with fellow students and supervisors in workshops are effective strategies for helping students to develop practical skills and overcome feelings of inadequacy and isolation through group support. We asked students to come to the workshop on "writing the first draft" with a draft structure of their dissertation in the form of descriptive chapter headings. Each student was then asked to discuss the rationale for his/her thesis structure, and received queries and criticism from the workshop group. Several copies of previous dissertations were tabled as models of structure and of the final product. Students indicated that they appreciated this opportunity to discuss their theses with fellow students and most

reported they subsequently made considerable changes to their own dissertation structure as a result of the feedback received from the workshop.

Apart from the draft structure of their dissertation, students were also asked to prepare for the workshop a personal timetable for the various stages of the research and writing process. This exercise was felt necessary so that students would be aware of the various stages in the writing process and be able to identify what stage they had reached, and how much time to allow for each stage. In both the Honours and Master-by-Coursework programmes, the convenors constructed what they considered an "ideal" timetable; this was shown to students on an overhead transparency and students were asked to compare and discuss their own timetables.

Finally, "nuts and bolts" problems of dissertation writing (such as footnoting systems, bibliography, styles of presentation) were discussed.

Apart from achieving the intended objectives of helping students develop skills in dissertation writing, it was found that the workshops fulfilled other, less tangible, student needs.

"... discussions and interaction with fellow students and supervisors ... are effective strategies for helping students to develop practical skills and overcome feelings of inadequacy and isolation ..."

An affective approach

Students commented on the effect that workshops had in increasing motivation and confidence. Intellectual and social isolation and "loneliness" have been identified in the literature as significant problems which the post-graduate student has to cope with, and these are linked to the failure to complete the research project (Welsh, 1979). Lack of confidence and insecurity about institutional and supervisor standards are factors which lessen the ability of the student to cope with the personal demands which writing a research thesis entails. Bringing students together to discuss common problems in a supportive workshop environment can lessen feelings of inadequacy and loneliness. The workshop can demonstrate to the student that he/she is not alone, and that most research students face similar difficulties and challenges.

Conclusion

We have found that designing, conducting and evaluating workshops on dissertation writing can have very positive effects, both for individual students and their supervisors. Students indicated their appreciation for the concern and support of fellow students and staff, and stated that the workshop had helped to clarify ideas on thesis structure and the writing process. The practical benefits of the workshop were revealed by the fact that a significantly higher number of dissertations were submitted by the due date than previously. Examiners' reports also suggest that the quality of dissertations has improved. Supervisors found their task made easier through the support provided by the collective instruction, discussion and reflection made possible through a workshop approach.

We conclude by reproducing student and staff perspectives on this three dimensional, integrative approach

to helping students overcome barriers to dissertation writing.

The students' perspectives

- It was useful to hear about the expectations of the school/university re the dissertations and suggestions for planning and thinking about what was to be done.
- Prior to the workshop, the dissertation was a vast, amorphous obstacle which lay before me which I was unable to address effectively. The workshops helped me to delineate the tasks involved, and to clarify my methods of approach. It still frightens me but now I know more clearly why.

"... a significantly higher number of dissertations were submitted by the due date. ... the quality... has improved."

- It is often assumed that later year and postgraduate students know how to prepare and write a thesis and of course we didn't know. These sessions helped to clarify procedures for us and allowed us to discover with fellow students and staff some of our problems.
- The opportunity to discuss in open forum the problems we have experienced so far, in our dissertation. The opportunity to carry out practical exercises and then review them in a group. The opportunity to view problems of earlier dissertations. The presence of so many supportive and contributing staff members — their ideas were good to hear, and view, as was the case with the video.

The supervisors' perspectives

- Exchange of ideas amongst attendants — gave all a much wider perspective than would otherwise have been the case. Small group sessions were very useful. Provided excellent framework for students and supervisors to work from.
- The chance for all of the standard problems in dissertation writing and in the supervisor-supervised relationship to come up in an impersonal context.
- Appreciated the opportunity to identify and establish in my own mind, requirements and standards of the masters programme.

Ortrun Zuber-Skerritt,
Nick Knight,
Griffith University.

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HERDSA '86

**THE STUDENT IN HIGHER EDUCATION:
A FORGOTTEN SPECIES?**

The needs and performance of students in tertiary education will be the focus of HERDSA's 1986 Conference, 9-13 May in Canberra. One way organisers hope to emphasise meeting student needs is by including in the program workshops for teachers on teaching methods and assessment skills. Tuesday, 13 May, will be set aside for various special interest groups, including educational developers, study skills counsellors, and TAFE teachers.

Offers of workshops and contributions to special interest sessions would be especially welcomed by the conference committee. Send as soon as possible to:

Mr Allen Miller
Office for Research in Academic Methods
Australian National University
G.P.O. Box 3
Canberra, A.C.T., 2601

Learning Through Writing: The Use of Reading Logs

Ann Zubrick reinforces the message that developing "writing need not be divorced from teaching in 'content' areas" with her description of the use of reading logs in a first year course. Students at any level should benefit from such an assignment.

Writing holds a central place in students' learning experiences at the tertiary level, yet many academic staff express disappointment over the standard of student writing and frustration in trying to improve students' writing skills. While academic staff may help students plan essays, "unpack" topics, select references and readings, and see the importance of revision, often the final written product (whether essay or lab report), is still disappointing.

A student journal, or log, has been used by many teachers to develop creative writing, both at secondary and tertiary level. Here I wish to report on the use of reading logs as one means of facilitating the development of writing in a content area for students writing essays and laboratory and observation reports.

I turned to the use of logs after marking essays by first year students, in which I noted several recurring problems:

- Students submitted essays which were largely constructed from plagiarised paragraphs and direct quotes
- There was little novel or creative thought
- Rarely did one see critical analysis of ideas (unless these were ideas "borrowed" from other authors)
- Generally, the material was poorly integrated, e.g. the student repeated information, included contradictory information or failed to see the relationships among ideas at different points in the essay or report.

When I questioned individual students about how they wrote essays, they revealed that, by and large, they were following those instructions given to them. They read widely; they planned a format and wrote to it; they revised and edited their efforts. Uniformly, they reported that they found it hard to be critical, to know what to be critical of, and to analyse ideas in an essay. They felt safe in tutorials in exploring ideas verbally, but much less safe in writing. If they included more "radical ideas" in writing, might not the assessor mark them down severely? How could they know if their own ideas were "acceptable" or "on the right track"?

So, in 1984, reading logs were introduced as a part of a first year course in Speech and Hearing Science because of the problems I had encountered in getting students to *read*, and interact with what they read. However, I found that the logs had an equally important role in helping students to *write*, and to learn through writing. It is this aspect on which I shall focus.

Reading logs were used for one 15 week semester unit. The 5 assigned hours per week for the unit consisted of a two hour lecture, 1 hour tutorial and 2 hour laboratory. The content covers child language acquisition and development; an area of development which draws on several diverse theoretical orientations, and an enormous and burgeoning literature. The student needs to come to terms with the theoretical constructs and ambiguities, as well as complex inter-relationships between language and

other aspects of the child's development (play, thinking, learning and interacting).

To accommodate the log and to give it appropriate emphasis, the unit was restructured. The assigned extra reading, which I had given each week, was cut out completely.

While all students read the text book, I had found that only few did additional assigned reading. Total class contact time was reduced by 1 hour per week, to encourage students to devote more time to research and reading in the library. Overall, the balance between lecture, tutorial, and laboratory time remained the same.

"... reading logs were introduced... because of problems I had encountered in getting students to read, and to interact with what they read."

What to tell students

Instructions to students pose a problem. If the purpose of the exercise is to encourage individuality and creativity in writing log entries, then the student must not be directed too closely. On the other hand, highly peripheral or irrelevant commentary would need comment. I decided that the important factors to share with the students were as follows:

- 1 Do not summarise. At school, students practise precis and summarising. When they enter tertiary study, their usual technique is to copy quotes from books and to summarise major content. This is non-interactive and not challenging, and is unlikely to push them towards developing new insights and relationships.
- 2 Read (and write) with some purpose in mind. Reading and writing should not occur in a vacuum. Briefly, the students should state why they selected an article and what, overall, they learned from it before they begin to take issue with particular content.
- 3 Focus on things which strike you or are intriguing to you in some way. I wanted students to note things which they found to be keys to new understandings, or which were novel, contentious, ambiguous, implausible, contradictory or unlikely.

How to comment on writing in the logs

What does the teacher focus on in giving the student feedback on their logs? In a sense, the journal is the student's own learning record to which the teacher is a

privileged reader. Nonetheless, the teacher can guide the process by making select comments. I elected to collect the journal 3 times during the semester (each 5 weeks) and to focus on comments which would encourage the student to:

- make analytical comments
- outline reasoned criticisms
- pose questions (and suggest ways of answering them)
- draw associations and relationships among ideas, philosophies and approaches
- draw out further implications
- develop a counter argument

I chose to focus on what each student was doing and to make suggestions from there. I looked for evidence of each of the above behaviours, and identified places where it may have been appropriate for the student to demonstrate that ability. So, I made comments such as: "You have posed some intriguing questions about Chomsky's theory. Try to speculate, where you can, on how a few of these questions could be answered, or observations of language which could be made that would address the question in one way or the other."

In other places I posed questions for the student: "How would the interaction theorists reply to the nativist's position you express here?"

In some instances, I commented on skills in a direct way. "This is a well constructed counter argument to Snow. You have applied and integrated evidence well."

I did not comment on specific aspects of style, and encouraged them to use written language which was more informal than an essay and through which they might explore ideas. I reasoned that more formal written style might inhibit the process of thinking.

I particularly discouraged extensive summarising and pointed out to the students that parroting back language (oral or written) does not help in formulating one's own ideas. The task challenging most students is to develop abstract and independent thinking — processes which could best come through reformulation and self-reflection. Although initially uncomfortable with the instruction not to summarise, the students came to appreciate the difference between summary and reformulation.

The commentary takes time, especially the first time the logs are submitted. However, the students' log entries changed dramatically over the 15 weeks. Both this change and the students' evaluative comments on the experience of log writing at the end of the unit confirmed that the process of direct feedback was important to their learning.

"... the logs had an equally important role in helping students to write, and to learn through writing."

Problems which arose

Most problems were identified from the first submission of the logs and were easily remedied. One was to note the students who read voraciously and widely, but wrote very little. Through quizzing them about earlier readings, they could see how little they had retained for later use. They quickly learned how to taper and select readings more carefully, and to write more.

Another problem was to identify what was summary versus recasting, reformulation and reflection. Once

students recognised the differences, summarising was markedly reduced. A third concern was the students who provided too little written information in their logs. Through posing questions I helped them to see how they could usefully extend their log entries.

Inevitably, there was a small number of students who left the log to the last week, rather than taking time systematically to read and write, who had little motivation to read in the course area, or who did not use the feedback in subsequent entries. Nonetheless, these students were forced to do some extra reading and writing to complete the requirements for this section of the unit. I suspect that without this requirement, they would have done less extra work.

By contrast, several students found the log to be challenging and exciting. Their enthusiasm and hard work placed pressure on students who had less time or application. One student read 85 articles and books (i.e. 6 per week) and submitted a log of nearly 200 written pages.

Outcomes and evaluation

At the end of the course, the students were all interviewed individually to contribute feedback on what they had learned from their logs. Overwhelmingly, the feedback was positive and constructive. There were many comments pertinent to how keeping logs helped writing. Students said that:

- Keeping a log was a disciplined activity. Writing each week meant they kept in practice.
- Making comments helped memory and recall of the material in the unit — they understood this area better than any other studied during the semester.
- They felt "safe" in reporting their views. Once they had written them down, they could often see more objectively where the idea needed development.
- They were able to dissociate the process of thinking through a complex idea from "writing it properly".
- Over the semester, they worked consistently at getting ideas for essays and integrating them in the log. Writing an essay took less time because the ideas were "there".
- Report writing improved quickly and took less time too.

"Successful writing reinforces learning and helps students to sustain thinking over time."

- To be able to use an informal writing style was a relief. Putting hard things into their own words helped clarify if they had really understood them.
- They developed accurate referencing.
- They were able to develop thinking through writing at their own level without the pressure of a grade or group competition.
- They learned how to explore ideas through writing and to play with these ideas on paper just as they learned to explore ideas verbally in tutorials.
- They became increasingly able to grasp concepts that were difficult and to discuss them in tutorials. Writing helped them know what to ask.
- Writing logs helped them to develop their own perspective and not to rely so heavily on book-based or lecture-based ones.

(Continued on page 24)

HERDSA's New Honorary Life Member:

ERNEST ROE



At its last meeting the Executive elected Professor Ernest Roe to Honorary Life Membership of the Society in recognition of his distinguished contribution to the work of HERDSA and to research and development in higher education.

Ernest Roe obtained his first degree from Oxford University and later received a B.Ed. from the University of Queensland and a Ph.D. from Adelaide University. After teaching for several years he worked as a Research Fellow with Sir Fred Schonell at the University of Queensland. In 1960 he took up a lectureship in the Education Department at Adelaide University. He left there in 1967 to become foundation Professor of Education at the University of Papua New Guinea, a post which he relinquished in 1973 to become foundation Director of the Tertiary Education Institute at the University of Queensland. He retired from that position earlier this year after achieving an international reputation for the work of TEDI.

For almost a quarter of a century Ernest Roe has been contributing to the literature of higher education. The

findings of a major study of student performance, undertaken in collaboration with Schonell and Meddleton, were published in 1962 as *Promise and Performance*. His longstanding interest in the educational role of libraries and the materials of learning led to a number of publications, notably *Using and Misusing the Materials of Teaching and Learning*, (1975). More recently he has taken a keen interest in educational evaluation and this led in 1983, in collaboration with McDonald, to *Informed Professional Judgment*. His many contributions to the literature of higher education have been characterised by their lucidity, concern for practical applications, and engagement with real educational issues rather than with technicalities and arid theorising.

Ernest Roe was a foundation member of the Society, he has served on the Executive for several periods, and is immediate past-President. He took the lead in planning and conducting the highly successful series of national workshops on evaluation skills. His enthusiasm, expertise, wise counsel, and seemingly boundless energy have been given freely to enhance the reputation of the Society. We are all greatly in his debt.

Conferences

Fifth Canadian Symposium on Instructional Technology

Place The Westin Hotel, Ottawa

Date 5 — 7 May 1986

Information Mr L. Forget, Conference Services, National Research Council, Canada, Ottawa, Ontario K2A0R6

First International Conference on the First Year Experience

Place Newcastle upon Tyne, England

Date 7 — 11 July 1986

Information Faculty of Humanities, Newcastle upon Tyne Polytechnic, Lipman Building, Sandyford Road, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE18ST, England.

University of Pittsburgh Conference on Computers and Writing

Place University of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, USA

Date 2 — 4 May 1986

Contact Glynda Hull, Learning Research and Development Center, University of Pittsburgh, PA, 15260

Review Article

Academic Staff Development in Colleges of Advanced Education Report of the Working Party, Australian Committee of Directors and Principals in Advanced Education, May 1984, 93 p.

Academic Staff Development is the Report of a working party set up in 1982 by the Australian Conference of Principals of Colleges of Advanced Education to review and report on the professional development of academic staff in colleges of advanced education.

The professional development of academics is a complicated business. There are several reasons for this: institutions of higher education are complex organisations which differ in many important respects from other organisations; academic staff are a heterogeneous group with differing needs, disciplines, and styles of teaching and learning; there is a very weak theoretical and knowledge base from which to develop effective staff development policies and practices, and resources to carry out those policies that are developed are usually strictly limited. For many colleges of advanced education, this situation has not been helped by the unsettling amalgamation, rationalisation and institutional identity issues of the past two decades.

Notwithstanding these problems, there has been an encouraging level of interest in staff development from two important leadership groups in higher education. In 1981, the Australian Vice Chancellor's Committee (AVCC) published the report of its working party on academic staff development in universities, and now we have a comparable report from the advanced education sector which has the general approval of the Australian Committee of Directors and Principals in Advanced Education.

Chapter headings give flavour of the Report: Academic staff development in CAEs; Future trends and needs and staff development; Motivation: Implications for staff development; Roles of academic staff; Aims of staff development; Planning a staff development programme; Staff development and the individual; Groups with special needs (heads, tutors, new staff); Women and minority groups; and Staff review and appraisal. The appendices look at staff development practices and provide references and recommended reading.

It is important to know that the Report, unlike other documents such as the Report of the AVCC Working Party, concerns itself with the full range of professional development matters and does not confine itself to professional development in the teaching role. This is a welcome approach. Teaching is not isolated from other professional activities. Many academics maintain that their teaching and research is inextricably connected, and elsewhere, I have shown how the various aspects of professional academic life are closely integrated (Cannon, 1983).

Integration is something of a theme in the Report: integrating the needs of the individual and the organisation; staff development as an integral element of staff duties; staff development as a shared activity between individuals and their senior colleagues; and meeting the service needs of industry, professional organisations and the community.

The Report is unusual in that it deliberately sets out to be "non-prescriptive". Rather, "it is intended to develop and explain concepts of academic staff development that

can assist colleges in planning their own programmes and thus be responsive to contemporary needs and pressures" (p. 3). By way of contrast, other reports on the subject have very clear, specific recommendations for action. A potential advantage of the approach intended in *Academic Staff Development* is that the reader is obliged to engage with the ideas and not simply read the recommendations they may agree or disagree with.

Notwithstanding the "non-prescriptive" intention, I was able to count at least sixteen instances where the word "should" is used in the summary of the Report between pages 5 and 8: "Colleges *should* allocate sufficient resources..." "colleges *should* establish formal mechanisms ... review of performance *should* be considered by colleges...", and so on. But this prescriptive tone is not always reflected in the body of the Report, to which the summary is keyed.

I found much that I could agree with in the Report. The suggestions, for the most part, are sensible, sensitive to individual concerns, and practical, although I do wonder how many colleges really have the financial flexibility to allocate the suggested 1% of salary costs for staff development, especially if this cost is in addition to the costs of established professional experience programs.

Will the suggestions be put into practice by the colleges? If the experience of the last twenty years is a reliable guide the answer, unfortunately, is "no", unless there is either a change of heart in the colleges or there is some kind of external pressure or encouragement of the kind that led to the creation of teaching units in colleges and universities in the late '60s and early '70s. But perhaps there may be a change of heart. The Report tells us that college directors judged the retraining and redeployment of academic staff as the single change rated most highly in importance for professional development (p. 23). This may not be the best reason for launching a staff development programme but it could provide the needed stimulus.

While there is much lip-service given to staff development for all grades of staff in higher education, what actually occurs is pretty limited. This is apparent when comparisons are drawn with other organisations which employ large numbers of professionally qualified staff. I found the reported comments of two college directors particularly telling on the outcome of this neglect of staff development:

Contact with outside people will call for a *sharpening of the skills of tertiary educators*. Outside professionals often have a *wide appreciation* not only of the discipline, but of economic and social questions. Many academics are content to be *narrowly specialised*.

and

Staff will need to demonstrate relevance, recency and *high levels of competence*.
[The italics are mine.]

All academics need to ponder the implications and implied criticism in these statements; the implications of the level of provision of staff development in colleges and universities beyond professional experience programmes

and study leave; why the word "academic" is used so frequently in the perjorative sense; why it is that several large corporations have set up their own "colleges" to train professional staff in competition with the publicly-funded facilities in the tertiary education sector and why it is that appeals for relief from funding pressures tend to fall on deaf ears (especially when so many of the "ears" in Federal cabinet have tertiary degrees and have actually taught in tertiary institutions).

Perhaps, then, the criticisms of the academic world (some of which are documented in Appendix A of the Report) are well justified. These criticisms are not confined to *what* institutions do but the *way* things are done. This is especially true of teaching. An outsider looking through Chapter 7 of this Report — which lists in detail the kinds of professional development activities one could engage in — might reasonably ask why qualified staff appointed to institutions of higher learning need development *at all* in what seem to be basic professional skills and attitudes.

I enjoyed reading this Report, in spite of a few minor errors and inconsistencies in the summary and index which might have been eliminated by careful editing. The Report has much to commend it, not the least being its avoidance of the fallacy of concentrating upon individuals

without regard to their role in the college (Katz and Kahn, 1966). I fear that we have too often believed there to be an equation between individual change and organisational change. The Report recognises this very clearly:

There is a significant interaction and interdependence between professional development policies and programmes and other aspects of institutional functioning. Professional development programmes will not be effective on their own. They will need to be integrated with, for example, institutional policies, legislative requirements for equal employment opportunity, course structures, planning new course initiatives, teaching approaches and other academic matters, institutional funding mechanisms, and the functions and responsibilities of heads of academic departments. (Para. 3.1).

Robert A. Cannon,
The University of Adelaide.

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- Cannon, R.A. *The Professional Development of University Teachers*, Armidale, The Institute for Higher Education, The University of New England, 1983.
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Women in Tertiary Education

Although no papers or workshops in the scheduled sessions of the HERDSA '85 conference devoted themselves to women's issues, these matters clearly concerned and interested many participants. So much so, that a group of people sought time and space to meet in a workshop setting with Liz Burge acting as the group's facilitator. Barbara Wallis provides a brief summary of this meeting, with the group's hopes that it will encourage someone to organise an appropriate activity at HERDSA '86 in Canberra.

A number of comments on women's issues, made both during paper sessions and by invited speakers at the Auckland conference, led to much tea-break discussion among both male and female participants. A workshop was organised for Monday, 26 August 1985, to formalise these discussions. About twenty-five people attended, although the session coincided with previously scheduled sessions.

Initially problems relating to "women as learners" and "women as educators" were listed, and discussion of specific issues concerning the interaction of age and domestic situation in producing disadvantage for individual women ensued. An attempt was made to group the items listed, but due to the time restraints (only 90 minutes total for the session) we did not finalise a classification.

The items seemed to fall into four broad (and overlapping) categories, viz:

1. traditional roles of women;

2. power structures of institutions, and their effect on women;
3. knowledge mediation (career knowledge, curriculum knowledge, and knowledge creation); and
4. sexism, and related issues.

The participants divided into four groups to draw up strategies for intervention in these four areas. Each group sought to address some of the problems from the original lists. Again lack of time led to some circular discussion, and a genuine regret was expressed that we could not take these issues further.

The group suggested that these issues be addressed in a workshop session of at least three hours at the Canberra Conference next year.

A fuller report of the workshop will appear in the proceedings of 12th HERDSA Conference, August, 1985, edited by John Jones.

Barbara Wallis,
University of Newcastle.

REVIEWS

Problem-Solving Strategies for Writing (2nd edition). Linda Flower, San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1985, 256 pp, ISBN 0-15-571976-9, \$29.10. (Available from HBJ Sydney)

As an applied mathematician I often discuss with students the steps involved in problem-solving, although this is in the context of bringing to bear the power of pure mathematics on to the solution of real world problems. I usually comment that the skills described can be applied to the solution of many problems that have nothing to do with mathematics, e.g. in the area of personal relationships.

Linda Flower suggests that those same techniques are appropriate strategies for writing. As I read her book it slowly dawned on me that I was attacking my writing tasks in just that way. Of course my writing is limited to technical reports and scientific articles and it may be that it is natural to tackle this specialised writing by this means. But Flower recommends such an approach for many other forms.

Problem-Solving Strategies for Writing started out as an attempt to design a program for students of a non-credit course in writing. Its style continues to reflect this genesis. However it is aimed at many others with realistic reasons for writing: students writing essays and academic reports; professionals writing memos and technical reports; and people who wish to communicate effectively through writing.

The book focuses on two different issues. First the question of composition, developing the organisation of a piece of writing. But it goes beyond this, beyond "good advice" about writing, to discussing the thinking process through which writers go. This is an attempt to make our unconscious actions a little more conscious; to give us a greater awareness of our intellectual processes, and therefore the possibility and power of conscious choice.

Flower comments, "It may seem odd to think of writing as a 'problem' with a 'solution' since we apply those terms to situations for which a precise solution procedure is already known as it is in algebra". Here she shows her lack of understanding of mathematics. Once a problem has been reduced to the stage she describes it has, in my view, been solved. In fact it is the search for an appropriate procedure that constitutes the problem; the precise solution procedure finally determined matches the polished essay which effectively communicates ideas from the mind of the writer to that of the reader.

In mathematical problem-solving it is essential that the problem be defined clearly and unambiguously. Complex problems are usually tackled by breaking the problem down into smaller sub-problems which may then be solved. It is also rare that a solution is found by a single flash of inspiration, rather the solution comes by working at the problem, by becoming immersed in it. And the final solution always needs reworking, omitting the false leads and polishing the presentation.

In similar vein Flower attacks the perfect-draft approach to writing and debunks the inspiration myth which implies that a writer's inspiration comes complete and fully assembled, that the act of composition is not a time-consuming task of testing and modifying alternatives. She also recommends "satisficing" when writing a first draft, accepting an adequate, but imperfect, expression or idea in order to get on with more important issues.

For the difficult stage of getting started she urges brainstorming, concentrating on ideas, jotting down thoughts in whatever order they come with no concern for perfect sentences, quite analogous to the approach to problem-solving.

More traditional considerations in writing such as designing for your reader are treated fully although they don't have obvious parallels in problem-solving. It is emphasised that the goal is to create a momentary common ground between the reader and the writer and to achieve this the writer must analyse her audience.

Within the book there is a strong practical emphasis with most points being illustrated by specific examples. Several detailed case studies are provided which bring together several abstract ideas in concrete examples. From my perspective, simple illustrative examples were sufficient and the case studies were unnecessary but it may be that they would be helpful for student readers.

Flower succeeds in presenting a text for student use which is also appropriate for other writers. Its value in the classroom is increased by the inclusion of projects and exercises on each chapter. An Instructor's Manual, which I have not seen, is also available. It contains additional exercises and assignments, a brief introduction to formats for reports, and a discussion of ways to teach the strategies in the classroom. More mature readers may be dissatisfied by the lack of theoretical underpinning of many of the concepts from cognitive psychology. However references to additional reading material are given for each chapter. The strength of this text lies in its attempt to help writers understand more of their own thinking processes and hence to communicate their thoughts to others.

Glenn Johnson,
Macquarie University.

Communication for Professional Engineers. Bill Scott, London: Thomas Telford, 1984, 238 pp, ISBN 0-7277-0187-8, \$25 (+ \$4.50 handling). (Available through EA Books — Institution of Engineers Australia)

To me this is very much "the book of the course". The content and the style make this clear, and it is confirmed by a dust jacket comment that the author "...is retained to run seminars by numerous companies and organisations including the Institution of Civil Engineers...".

I almost felt as though I was in the course as I read the book. As I imagine it, the course would be clearly aimed at professional engineers: it would be carefully thought out, built on a wide range of experience, and focused accurately on engineering. It would be effective in providing a series of inter-related skills and techniques, with plenty for the participants to take away and use immediately — and plenty for them to show to the boss who authorised payment. The tight structure, the "patent" techniques, and perhaps the style, might make the course seem rather bombastic and narrowly aimed; but then I would expect that impression from commercial courses of the kind I have in mind. I would have enjoyed my imaginary course.

These impressions apply equally to the book.

Oral skills, written communication, meetings, and

interviews are the four main headings chosen by the author. His choice of topics reflects my own experience of what is important in engineering, and I found much food for thought among the many practical suggestions in each of these categories.

But to me the strong point of the book is the insight it gives into how communications function within an engineering environment, particularly its emphasis on people, personalities, and impressions. Professional engineering is very much about people, and the book reflects their interaction in a way which, from my experience, rings very true.

The book does not open up topics for broad discussion and it would be sad if it were the only book on communicating which an engineer were to read. On the other hand it is very readable, has a strong and accurate engineering orientation, and provides a very useful handbook (with its own party line) which can be readily dipped into. For example: Are you going for interview? Then try the section on being interviewed. Have you been asked to chair a meeting? Then try the three sections on chairing a meeting. Are you wondering why that regular meeting is still called? Then try the section on repetitive meetings. Do you want to produce a better report this time and with fewer ulcers? Then try the section on writing a major report. You might not find "the answer", or you might disagree with what is said, but there should always be something worth thinking about.

The primary market seen by the author is, I assume, those who already have some engineering background. As a reader who has experience in engineering, and has struggled with communications, I found the comments in the book had an immediacy which they might not otherwise have had. Within a University setting, I would certainly recommend the book to final year engineering undergraduate students (who are already looking towards their professional careers) but I wonder whether students in earlier years would see the relevance of many of the comments or be able to take the "professional" style. On the other hand, the section on writing reports would have an impact on anyone who has ever struggled with writing a technical report, and this would include most first year engineering undergraduate students.

To sum up: I found the book readable, interesting and very useful, although narrowly focused and rather slick. I liked it well enough to buy a copy. I certainly recommend other engineers and engineering students to take a close look at it.

Robin Ford,
University of New South Wales.

The Professional Development of University Teachers, Cannon, R.A. (1983), The Institute of Higher Education, Armidale.

This monograph provides a good overview of the literature on the professional development of University teachers in Australia and suggests that past efforts to improve the quality of university teaching have not been very successful. Four explanations of why success has not been forthcoming are explored:

- 1 a failure to appreciate the distinctive organisational characteristics of universities and the mechanisms of innovation and change in universities;
- 2 the characteristics of academics and their work as teachers;

- 3 the "improvement" approaches within the universities have been inappropriate or poorly executed; and
- 4 the "forces of change" to improve teaching have been weak. (p. 4)

Attempting to clarify the definition of "the concept of teaching", Cannon considers the following elements to be characteristics and indicators of effective teaching:

- 1 relational element (e.g. attentiveness, interest and enthusiasm);
- 2 instructional element (e.g. explanation, interpretation, presentation and stimulating thinking);
- 3 organisational element (e.g. clarity of organisation and preparation);
- 4 disciplinary element (e.g. knowledge, skills, attitudes);
- 5 evaluative element (e.g. skills of evaluating student learning and one's own impact as a teacher).

Following the open-systems and contingency theories (pp. 11-12) Cannon regards "the university as an internally differentiated or heterogeneous organisation" (p. 14) with five distinctive characteristics which have to be taken into consideration by the professional developer:

- 1 Goals (autonomous and service traditions).
- 2 Client-serving (students as members and some staff as part-time students).
- 3 Technology (teaching, research and administration technologies differ depending on disciplines, their beliefs and practices).
- 4 Professional staffing (differentiated by status, interest and academic credibility; therefore bureaucratic "rules" for professional development as implied by the Williams Report are likely to be resented).
- 5 Vulnerability to the environment (cultural, politico-legal, economic, information-technical, and the natural or physical environment).

Although the majority of university teachers are interested in teaching, according to several surveys quoted by Cannon, they have different conceptions of "teaching", and differentiated cognitive and teaching styles. Therefore they perceive the need for, and the relevance and importance of, professional development differently.

Cannon's analysis of statistical information, research studies, reports and official recommendations on professional development (especially those by the AVCC's Working Party 1981) leads him to the conclusion that the paucity of evidence for staff development and for an improvement of university teaching since the 1960s is due to the absence of an adequate general theory of professional development. It is suggested that staff developers should

draw on other theories to inform their practice.

Learning theory because of its focus on the individual, and systems theory because of its capabilities of bringing order to the organisational complexity of the university and its setting. (p. 60)

Cannon ends his monograph with a quotation from Walker (1976):

It is not uncommon for schemes to be devised by educational theoreticians which may be fine in many respects, but in which little account has been taken of their impact on those who will be expected to implement them. (p. 68)

At the end of this monograph we have a better understanding of why past efforts to improve the quality of university teaching have been unsuccessful, but it remains for us to wait and hope for new innovations, research and developments that will have a greater impact on the practice and quality of university teaching. Cannon himself suggests the following topics for further research: "the understanding of the characteristics of Australian academic staff"; "students' and teachers' approaches to learning"; "styles of teaching and learning"; "instructional characteristics and relationships that exist between these

(Continued on page 24)

ABSTRACTS

HERDSA Abstracts are based on a regular survey of relevant literature. They are intended for use by tertiary teachers, research workers, students, administrators and librarians. The abstracts are classified into the same groups used by the Society for Research into Higher Education in their quarterly publication *Research into higher education abstracts*.

The *Abstracts* attempt a coverage of current English language publications in Australia, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea and Indonesia. Publications describing research, teaching, administration, staff and students in higher education are abstracted.

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HERDSA is most grateful to its abstractors and the co-operation of the editors of a number of journals abstracted in this issue. The *Abstracts* are edited by Hugh Guthrie, Educational Research Officer, Curriculum Development Group, Education Unit, The Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology, P.O. Box 2476V, Melbourne, 3001, Victoria, Australia.

Note: Authors or editors who would like abstracts of articles, books or monographs to be included are invited to send a copy of their work, together with an abstract, to the Abstracts editor.

A GENERAL

Anderson, D., **Tertiary fees and the social mix.** *Vestes*, 28, 1, 1985: 20-23.

The paper reviews the issues and weighs the evidence relating to the proposal to reintroduce fees for tertiary tuition. The effects the reintroduction of fees may have on the social mix of students in tertiary institutions are also discussed.

(HG)

Ewan, C., **Objectives for Medical Education: expectations of society.** *Medical Education*, 19, 2, 1985: 101-112.

Since health care and the practice of medicine have become major topics for social and political comment a variety of expectations have emerged which, in a sense, define an idealised image of the medical profession and its work. Different sectors of the community tend to place different emphasis on specific aspects of doctors' roles.

This paper reviews these specific expectations which have been expressed by patients, sociologists, allied health professionals, governments and health administrators and derives from them objectives for medical education.

(Author's summary)

Lechte, J. **PEP in TAFE: What Does It Mean/What Can It Mean?** *Victorian TAFE Papers*, 2, 1985: 9-12.

This article is a background paper which clarifies some of the issues and difficulties relating to understanding the Participation and Equity Program (PEP) in TAFE. In particular, consideration is given to the concepts of "participation" and "equity" and their

relation to the formal government-sponsored activity which bears the title of "PEP". It is argued that without an understanding of PEP in relation to the wider historical context of participation and equity in education and society at large, much of the creative thrust of PEP as a catalyst for inaugurating fundamental institutional changes will be dissipated.

(Journal abstract)

Parkinson, K., **The Articulation of TAFE Middle-Level and Higher Education Courses in Australia.** Adelaide, TAFE National Centre for Research and Development Ltd., 1985, 227 pp.

Universities and Colleges of Advanced Education in Australia were surveyed to determine their policies and practices in admitting and granting status to holders of TAFE Middle-Level Certificates who wish to transfer to relevant higher education courses. Of the 90 higher education institutions which were approached, 35 responded. It was found that the majority of higher education institutes in Australia, including a number of universities, were prepared to admit students on the basis of a successfully completed relevant TAFE Middle-Level course. It was found also that many higher education institutions are prepared to grant status to holders of TAFE Middle-Level Certificates, but that the number of students who are actually granted status is quite small. No conclusions could be drawn from the information obtained in this study on the success of students with TAFE Middle-Level Certificate backgrounds who have been admitted either with or without status to courses in higher education compared with students admitted in the traditional way. The document makes a number of recommendations.

(Modified author abstract)

Sloper, D.W., **A Social Characteristics Profile of Australian Vice-Chancellors.** *Higher Education*, 14, 4, 1985: 355-386.

There is an extensive literature about the presidency in United States universities but very little has been written about the comparable office elsewhere in the English-speaking world. This article analyses, in seventeen dimensions, social characteristics of Australian vice-chancellors incumbent in the years 1983, 1973 and 1963. Interpretation of the data cannot be made in isolation from other information relating both to vice-chancellors and to the contexts in which they are active. The study also places into sharper relief a number of other issues, foremost of which is the extent to which a system of higher education in Australia has developed definitive characteristics.

(Journal abstract)

B SYSTEMS AND INSTITUTIONS

Aitken, I., **Preparatory Programs at a Country College of TAFE — TAFE, Blackburn and all that.** *Victorian TAFE Papers*, 2, 1985: 21-23.

Several factors have combined to stimulate one TAFE college to look closely at its programs. This article explains how that college responded by restructuring course offerings on a semester basis in order to maximise access, especially by a new range of students with a new range of needs. The college has set goals hoping that government and TAFE Board policy will be supportive. In particular, the college relies on the report of the Blackburn Committee to underpin its initiatives.

(Journal abstract)

Birt, M. **Some thoughts on the restructuring of tertiary education in Australia.** *Vestes*, 28, 1, 1985: 2-4.

It is reasonable to have doubts about the effectiveness of the present contribution of tertiary education to meeting the educational needs of our country and its students. Tertiary education should offer four things: a high level training for those who wish to practise immediately after qualification;

a broad, general higher education for those who work in less specialised occupations; an education for the learning professions and vocations; and the conduct of activities which expand, consolidate and extend knowledge in all these fields. A higher education system comprising two sectors is advocated: first a system of "liberal studies" colleges which will provide places for all those entering higher education; second, a group of "universities and institutes" which will enrol students who have completed a college education and who wish to undertake specialised courses for particular vocations and professions, conduct research and offer post-graduate training. It is envisaged that the new system could evolve from the existing one.

(AD)

Birt, M. The Organization of Tertiary Education in Australia: The Need for Re-arrangement. *Journal of Tertiary Educational Administration*, 7, 1, 1985: 21-34.

This paper presents a more detailed exposition of the theme in Birt's article in *Vestes*. (See *Vestes*, 28, 1, 1985: 2-4.) Three possible options are outlined: the first is to do nothing except make marginal adjustments in response to particular pressures from time to time. This option is regarded as simply unrealistic. The second option is to homogenise the system. In its extreme form, this would imply that all universities and colleges would aim at conducting the same kinds of activities. This is rejected as unrealistic on resource grounds. The third option is to re-shape the system. A system of liberal studies colleges would provide a general education including literature and the arts, the developing nature of the natural sciences, the structure of knowledge, the development and structure of Australian society and its economic development and a program of electives. A second sector, universities and institutes, would provide those courses which required preparation for specific vocations and professions. A system of liberal studies colleges could grow out of the present CAE system by careful expansion and development of all but the largest and most diversified institutes of technology. Some 25 or so universities and institutes would probably have somewhat lower enrolments than at present. They would be in a position to devote more effort to post-graduate training. Some 200,000 additional students would be accommodated at an annual cost of \$1,000 million representing a 50% increase over present levels of funding.

(AD)

Cumming, G., The Australian University: A computer-rich environment? *Vestes*, 28, 1, 1985: 27-31.

The paper looks retrospectively at the decade 1985-1995 and the changes to Australian campuses caused by the invasion of the personal computer and its telecommunications links. It is concluded that the universities on the whole moved in the right direction but most of the things they did tended to be "too little too late". They also failed to recognise the extent of conceptual change the computer would bring to academic thinking. The "niggling critics", who insisted that universities should think and act in new ways in order to exploit what computers had to offer, got it right on the whole, but often overstated their case and could not back their visions and exhortations with evidence. The author felt that with more perception then (1985) the universities would now (1995) have been in a much stronger position in contemporary society.

(HG)

Hyman, P., Some Controversies in the Education of Nurses in New Zealand, Great Britain and the United States, with Reference to the Impact of Economic and Social Factors. *Studies in Higher Education*, 10, 2, 1985: 205-222.

This paper aims to show how debates on the appropriate education of nurses are strongly affected by economic, social and interest group considerations in addition to the overt educational arguments. Concentrating on the New Zealand situation, but making some comparisons with the U.S. and U.K., it discusses the following two issues:

- (i) hospital-based training against training based in an educational institution;

- (ii) the case for and against two levels of qualified nurses.

- (i) A phased transfer of responsibility for training of registered nurses from hospital-boards to technical institutes is well under way in New Zealand and a detailed evaluation has been published. The aims of this transfer and reservations relating to the transfer are discussed together with evidence to date of their justification.

- (ii) New Zealand, like the U.S. and U.K., has a second level of qualified nurses with the training period shorter than registration. Arguments for and against the abolition of this second level are presented.

(Modified journal abstract)

Lindsay, A., The Unfulfilled Potential of Institutional Review. *Higher Education Research and Development*, 4, 1, 1985: 81-87.

Institutional review rarely produces benefits commensurate with the effort expended. Major causes of this disappointing result are neglecting the political dimension of evaluation and separating the review process from ongoing decision making. Reviews often engender suspicions of bias and covert motives. These must be allayed by a clear commitment to respect the rights of participants, to recognise the legitimacy of their divergent viewpoints, and to negotiate about the purposes and control of the evaluation. The separation of the complementary processes of evaluation and planning arises from the common practice of forming a special committee to undertake an institutional or departmental review. Furthermore, review reports generally contain fragmented arrays of assessments for individual components of institutional/departmental performance. The information obtained is usually not structured to relate directly to current problems and decision choices. Evaluation and planning can be integrated by expanding the responsibilities of policy and management committees to include the continuing review of institutional/departmental performance. The notions of effectiveness and efficiency, re-cast in a form which accommodates the ambiguity and conflict in higher education, can provide a useful structure for organising review information.

(Journal abstract)

Lourens, R., The Binary System: a University Perspective. *Vestes*, 28, 1, 1985: 8-11.

It is argued that some of the demands being made to abandon the binary system are actually related to concerns about funding of higher education institutions, whereas there is a need for greater inter-institutional cooperation in a period of difficult funding. Such collaboration is a delicate matter and is not encouraged by internecine squabbles between institutions. A view that one group of institutions should be better funded is quite understandable. A view that they should be funded at the expense of other higher education institutions can hardly instil confidence that the cooperation model has much of a future. Improved and jointly supported lobbying and public relations together with such adjustments to circumstances that most preserve the function of the institution concerned are recommended.

(AD)

McKinnon, K.R., Reshaping higher education. *Vestes*, 28, 1, 1985: 12-20.

The paper deals with a range of significant issues in tertiary education — including student access both in terms of numbers and social structure; career structuring for academics; the nature of undergraduate programs; attitudinal changes in the relationship between tertiary education and the community; greater links with industry and, finally, changes to the present binary structure of tertiary institutions. An alternative possibility to the binary system is proposed which allows for greater articulation between the various levels of tertiary offerings. The paper therefore suggests the need for a significant reshaping of tertiary education. The author believes that significant change will inevitably arise from moves by the present Federal Government. These moves will ensure that tertiary education by 1990 is substantially different from that existing now.

(HG)

Nieuwenhuysen, J., **Towards flexibility in academic labour markets?** *Vestes*, 28, 1, 1985: 23-27.

The article examines the ailing labour market for academics within the university system and describes a number of the inherent problems within it at present. Much of the current inflexibility has been created by the financial stringency and cutbacks in Australian tertiary education. While voluntary retirement schemes are being examined by the AVCC and FAUSA, the author suggests that the British experiment in this area was probably not a positive advantage. The inertia of the system is formidable and perhaps the best hope is that a growth in educational funding will again bestow mobility to academic staff and new blood to the academic labour market.

(HG)

Ramsey, G., **The Realities of Managing Tertiary Education.** *Journal of Tertiary Educational Administration*, 7, 1, 1985: 35-46.

The paper describes the structure of the state and federal system of tertiary education and addresses, in particular, the role of CTEC in this system. Some of the problems and issues in the administration of tertiary education are discussed. Finally the paper suggests a number of possible changes to the system and speculates on the likely outcomes of the structural review of CTEC.

(HG)

Rogers, J.M. **Evaluation of a Library.** Canberra, A.C.T. Papers in Technical and Further Education, School of Education, Canberra College of Advanced Education, Fourth Edition, 1985: 32-45.

This report presents an evaluation of a library. The assignment was undertaken to develop further understanding of the nature of evaluation procedures through their practical application. The evaluators were particularly interested in the awareness of the full-time teaching staff in a local college of the resources and services their library has to offer. A number of evaluating techniques were considered. The questionnaire method was decided to be the best data gathering instrument given the constraints of time and expertise. To this end, a questionnaire was produced and circulated to just over half the full-time teaching staff in the college. A response rate of 58% was achieved. This report analyses the results and presents conclusions and recommendations.

(Modified journal synopsis)

Ryan, R.J., **The Relevance of Theories of the Policy Process to Educational Decision-Making.** *Journal of Tertiary Educational Administration*, 7, 1, 1985: 47-59.

The excessive claims of the theory movement in educational administration have led to a discounting of the value of theory in explicating the processes of educational practice. In this research two case studies of educational decision-making were undertaken and used as a test of the utility of some extant theories of the policy process. A scheme for the application of this body of theory is developed, and it is argued that there is merit in applying existing theoretical formulations before seeking after new paradigms.

(Journal abstract)

Smith, B.W. and Watts, D.W., **The Co-ordination of higher education in Australia.** *Vestes*, 28, 1, 1985: 4-8.

The paper outlines two contrary views emerging on the restructuring of higher education — one, that the current binary system needs to be maintained while there are existing constraints on funding and the other, that a restructuring of tertiary education is an essential step in matching educational aspirations and funding realities. The paper argues the latter view. It criticises the separation of universities and colleges into two separate sectors with the resulting constraints on colleges, including offering of doctoral programs and funded applied research. It is argued that an arbitrary demarcation of the binary system limits the contribution of major institutes of technology in the area of innovation and professional education. A case is made for a diminution of the State's responsibility in

short-term planning in institutional development in higher education, and that the State's role be focused on longer-term planning with a strong involvement at the TAFE level.

(AD)

Thomson, P., **Idiosyncratic Evaluation.** *Victorian TAFE Papers*, 2, 1985: 50-53.

Based on two recent publications (a report and a handbook) on evaluation of TAFE institutions by Byrne, Houston and Thomson, this article discusses how evaluation can be used to improve our TAFE colleges. Some phases of college evaluation are outlined, together with key factors involved in such evaluation. The article concluded by advocating some key principles which should be remembered when undertaking college evaluations.

(Journal abstract)

C TEACHING AND LEARNING

Anastassiou, M., **Simulators in TAFE: Training for the New Technology.** *Victorian TAFE Papers*, 2, 1985: 40-42.

This article outlines what simulators are and how they are used in training, by referring to the most well known types currently used in practice. It hypothesises that, for the purpose of economic efficiency in training, simulators should be investigated as a viable option for training in some trade areas. The importance of teachers' attitudes towards the use of simulators in training is stressed, believing that for the introduction of such alternative training devices, these attitudes must be taken into account or they will jeopardise attempts to introduce simulators. Finally, it states that simulators are not the "cure all" for training and indicates that certain factors should be borne in mind when evaluating the need for training technologies, stressing that cost effectiveness is not the only reason for the introduction of simulators.

(Journal abstract)

Balson, M., **Future Directions for Educational Technologists.** *Victorian TAFE Papers*, 2, 1985: 32-36.

This article outlines a learning model which aims at maximising student learning without a corresponding increase in resource allocation. Nine variables are detailed which are shown to causally influence student learning. These variables, collectively, are an answer to the question: "What is the least number of factors which control learning?" The proposal is made that educational technologists are employing variables which are not influential in increasing student learning, and a number of suggestions are made which educational technologists might follow to increase the productivity of their effort.

(Journal abstract)

Barham, I. and Prosser, M., **Review and Redesign: Beyond Course Evaluation.** *Higher Education*, 14, 3, 1985: 297-306.

This article discusses small-scale course evaluation as part of a larger, integrated process of course review and redesign. The process is carried out by a team that includes both an "external" evaluator and the teaching staff of the course. This article sets out the aim of the process, describes and analyses a number of characteristics of the activities, the methodology used, and reflects on some particular issues.

(Journal abstract)

Collier, K. Gerald, **Teaching Methods in Higher Education: The Changing Scene, with Special Reference to Small-group Work.** *Higher Education Research and Development*, 4, 1, 1985: 3-27.

The paper opens with a brief statement of the two conceptual frameworks on which the analysis is based. The author then takes up in turn the five classical methods of shaping students'

learning: didactic instruction in the form of lectures; discussion methods; practical work in laboratories, studios etc; provision for the students' private study, including individualised learning techniques and computer-based methods; and the assessment of students' progress. He outlines the main departures from customary practice in each area, with special attention to small-group techniques. Finally, since a critical aspect of development is the dissemination of fresh techniques, there is a section on development strategy.

(Journal abstract)

Duggleby, R.G., **QUTOR: A Computer Program for Presenting Tutorials**. *Biochemical Education*, 13, 2, 1985: 59-61.

Most computer based instructional systems are designed to teach one or a few specific topics but they suffer from the disadvantage that they do not clearly separate process from content. This article describes an extremely simple and completely general program, written in BASIC, for presenting tutorial material. The tutorial material itself and information controlling logic flow is contained in a series of text files. This organisation allows for flow paths of essentially unlimited complexity and the program is capable of presenting tutorials of substantial complexity.

(PB)

Fensham, P.J., **People Products and Raw Materials: Neglected Opportunities for Chemical Education in Higher Education**. *Higher Education Research and Development*, 4, 1, 1985: 71-79.

A number of strengths and weaknesses have been detected in the background knowledge and skill of chemistry teachers. Two weaknesses, knowledge of the persons of chemistry and familiarity with socially useful chemicals and their origins, have been recently identified. The trends in chemical curricula for general education are such that a remedy for these weaknesses is necessary. A number of suggestions that have been used occasionally in teaching chemistry at the universities and CAEs, are made for regular inclusion in undergraduate courses. School teaching is a major outlet for chemistry graduates and this fact should be recognised in designing these curricula in higher education.

(Journal abstract)

Ferguson, B., **Computer Assisted Learning Packages**. Canberra, A.C.T. Papers in Technical and Further Education, School of Education, Canberra College of Advanced Education, Fourth Edition, 1985: 46-58.

The report is primarily a survey of available computer assisted learning packages (CAL) suitable for use in TAFE Chemistry courses with microcomputers. A short history of the origin of scientific CAL packages is presented with discussion of some major issues in the selection and use of current CAL courseware, as well as aspects of CAL authoring with implications for the future. Discussion of an instrument suitable for evaluation of CAL courseware is presented, with a summary of the packages evaluated and a bibliography of major sources of Chemistry CAL. While the report focuses on Chemistry, most of the content is applicable to other fields of education, particularly the sciences.

(Modified journal synopsis)

Guthrie, H. and Storey, G., **The Communication Skills Pilot Evaluation Project**. *Victorian TAFE Papers*, 2, 1985: 54-57.

The article outlines the background to methodology, objectives and general findings of the Communication Skills Pilot Evaluation Project which was completed in 1984. The evaluation was formative and was aimed at determining how well the subject and its individual components ran during their trial. The study did not aim to compare the subject with existing service humanities subjects. Five Victorian TAFE colleges and seventeen teachers were involved in the pilot.

(Journal abstract)

Guthrie, R.D., Jenkins, I.D. and Quinn, R.J., **Organic chemistry by paced self-instruction**. *Education in Chemistry*, 22, 4, 1985: 112-113.

This article describes a course of paced self-instruction in basic organic chemistry offered at Griffith University and based on a similarly taught course at the University of Sussex. The course is organised around seven 2-week cycles and uses a system of key note lectures, problem classes, tutorials, quizzes and a directed reading programme. Failure rates are lower than conventionally taught courses. Student evaluation of the course has been most favourable. The authors believe the paced self-instruction approach is a good one which is suitable for other courses in chemistry or biochemistry.

(HG)

Harris, J., **Self-directed Learning: Why, What and How**. Canberra, A.C.T. Papers in Technical and Further Education, School of Education, Canberra College of Advanced Education, Fourth Edition, 1985: 72-78.

In June of this year the author attended the National A.M.E.P. Conference on self-directed learning and Self-Access Centres. This article discusses that conference and the author's own responses to it. While this was a conference for Adult Migrant Education teachers, the author feels that what was said, and the implications of self-directed learning generally are relevant to all adult learners and their teachers. Interest in individual learning, self-access centres and self-direction as a mode of learning and of developing learning strategies in adult learners, is growing across the syllabus, unbounded by subject matter.

(Modified journal synopsis)

Hurworth, R. and Henry, N., **An Evaluation of the Context Curriculum — Dispelling a Myth**. *Higher Education Research and Development*, 4, 1, 1985: 41-49.

Student surveys were conducted during each of the two semesters of the first year of operation of the Context Curriculum at the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology. The processes of the evaluation used are related to current ideas on evaluation. The evaluation relied heavily on the development and use of student questionnaires. Later in the year teaching staff and departmental heads were surveyed. Teaching staff were consulted about the questions to be included in the student questionnaire and also about the procedures to be used for analysis of the student responses and distribution of the summaries of responses. Special care was taken to ensure that the summaries for particular classes were revealed only to the class teacher. The evaluation showed that most students and their teachers are positively disposed towards the Context Curriculum. However, students were generally unsure of their department's support of the Context Curriculum. The opinions of teachers of the Context Curriculum and heads of department were more polarised than those of students. Both students and their teachers reported that they believed that other students and staff were unimpressed by the Context Curriculum. The evaluation showed this to be a myth.

(Journal abstract)

Ibbotson, P., **Embedding Technology in the Educational Process**. Canberra, A.C.T. Papers in Technical and Further Education, School of Education, Canberra College of Advanced Education, Fourth Edition, 1985: 86-91.

This paper discusses the problem facing educational administrators of making new technology really part of the educational process in their institutions, rather than either an adjunct to it or a passing, expensive interest. The writer, a TAFE College Principal, outlines reasons which motivate administrators to support the introduction of technology into the classroom. He then proceeds to suggest ways by which this might be achieved. Conditions for success of innovations in education as well as conditions for their failure are treated.

(Journal synopsis)

Kenny, D., **Context, Content and Social Responsibility in Professional Education.** Higher Education Research and Development, 4, 1, 1985: 29-40.

The paper describes a curriculum experiment designed to provide a "liberal" complement to the vocational core of an undergraduate programme. After tracing the genesis of the new "context" curriculum its rationale is set out in terms of three key educational assumptions. From these flow implications for both the content of what is to be taught and the ways in which teaching and learning should be conducted.

(Journal abstract)

Mihkelson, A., **Computer assisted instruction in remedial teaching in first year chemistry.** Education in Chemistry, 22, 4, 1985: 117-118.

A system of individualised instruction using the micro-computer was introduced in 1982 for first year chemistry at Sydney University. The teaching is at remedial level and is based on gaining problem-solving skills leading to confidence in attempting assignments and examinations. The author concludes that the CAI program has been a success from the viewpoint of (a) an increase in the number of students successful at the final examination, (b) smaller drop-out rate and continued motivation and (c) the significant gain in final results achieved.

(PB)

Morrison, D.L., **The Effect of Cognitive Style and Training on Fault Diagnosis Performance.** Programmed Learning and Educational Technology, 22, 2, 1985: 132-139.

Recent evidence has suggested that measures of cognitive style may be good predictors of fault diagnosis performance. Experiments 1 and 2 explore the relationship between measures of cognitive style and fault diagnosis performance. A focusing-scanning measure of style was significantly related to testing efficiency and quality of diagnosis in a context-free fault diagnosis task. Focusers showed superior diagnostic performance.

Experiment 3 examined the effect of training in fault diagnosis strategies for subjects selected at extremes of the focusing-scanning dimension. Training did not improve the performance of either focusers or scanners although, as suggested by experiments 1 and 2, differences were observed between the fault diagnosis performance of scanners and focusers. Further research is required into the nature of cognitive ability and style and how they interact with fault diagnosis performance.

(Journal abstract)

Muddle, N., **The Development of Computer-Aided Instruction at Bruce College of Technical and Further Education.** Canberra, A.C.T. Papers in Technical and Further Education, School of Education, Canberra College of Advanced Education, Fourth Edition, 1985: 106-119.

This paper outlines the development of computer-aided instruction at Bruce College of Technical and Further Education and describes the present situation. A brief survey of four Author Language CAI systems is included and possible future developments are suggested.

(Journal synopsis)

Mulcahy, D., **Writing to Learn in Teacher Education — The Writing Context.** Victorian TAFE Papers, 2, 1985: 58-62.

Writing to Learn is set out in three parts:

- an account of informing ideas that relate a theory of writing to a theory of learning;
- methodology — how a Journal of Experience is structured;
- analysis of journal entries — how writing in a journal can be a means to learn.

These three parts aim to explain how keeping a "Journal of Experience" specifically, and how expressive writing at large, are instruments to learn.

(Journal abstract)

Powell, J.P., **The Residues of Learning: Autobiographical Accounts by Graduates of the Impact of Higher Education.** Higher Education, 14, 2, 1985: 127-147.

Earlier work on the enduring effects of education is reviewed and then data are presented from 22 autobiographical accounts written by graduates. Content analysis showed that most importance was attached to the learning of high-level intellectual skills and to attitudes and values of personal and professional significance. The implications of these findings for curricula and teaching methods in higher education are then discussed before considering the strengths and weaknesses of life history material as a research tool. It is concluded that written accounts combined with interviews offer a promising method for investigating the long-term impact of higher education.

(Journal abstract)

Steele, J., **Interactive Video — The Robot Teacher.** Canberra, A.C.T. Papers in Technical and Further Education, School of Education, Canberra College of Advanced Education, Fourth Edition, 1985: 79-85.

The technology of interactive video is available now for educators to use. Following a brief introduction to the technology, a schema for interactive video is developed on two axes — locus of control and sophistication of technology. The paper then covers a number of basic issues which must be addressed before the technology is introduced to any degree in schools, colleges and universities in Australia. In particular, reference is made to the role of the teacher in relation to new media technologies, the costs of using interactive video, the source of resources for its implementation and the staff required.

(Journal synopsis)

D INFORMATION NETWORKS

E STUDENTS: GENERAL

Barrett, E.M., **Student Progression in a Faculty of Architecture: Final Report on a Cohort Study.** Research and Development Paper, RD 62, Tertiary Education Research Centre, University of New South Wales, June 1985, 14 pp.

This is the concluding report on a longitudinal study of a cohort of students who first enrolled in 1974 in the Faculty of Architecture at the University of New South Wales. The cohort consisted of 264 students and by mid-1985 76 of these had graduated and 55 were continuing their enrolment. Progression data are presented by School and for the Faculty as a whole, and are related to voluntary discontinuation, exclusion, academic performance, and scores obtained in the Higher School Certificate examination. There is no relationship between the latter and the likelihood of voluntarily withdrawing or graduating. Minimum time graduation rates are low, except in the School of Town Planning, and it is suggested that the large number of optional subjects available to students may be partly responsible for this.

(Paper abstract)

Newble, D.I. and Gordon, M.I., **The Learning Style of Medical Students.** Medical Education, 19, 1, 1985: 3-8.

Recent research indicates that students' learning styles and approaches to study may have a significant bearing on their academic success. A study was undertaken on first, third and final year Medical students to analyse their preferred learning styles and approaches to study, using the Lancaster Approach to Learning Inventory. The results showed that students entering the medical school had preferences which were more similar to science students than arts students. The medical

students had high scores on reproducing orientation (surface approach) in all years tested. The first year students had low scores on meaning orientation (deep approach) but the scores from students in later years showed a progressive rise.

The implications of these results with regard to selection, teaching and assessment are explored. However, the preliminary study does not allow us to differentiate between the effect of student preference and that of the context and environment in which they study.

(Author summary)

Ramsden, P., **Student Learning Research: Retrospect and Prospect**. Higher Education Research and Development, 4, 1, 1985: 51-69.

This article reviews some salient findings of recent research into how higher education students learn. The defining features of the research examined here are its emphasis on idiographic explanation and its concern with realistic learning activities. Examples of investigations into approaches to learning, outcome space, learning styles, orientations to learning, conceptions of learning, and the context of learning in higher education are provided. Against this background, five main areas for future development are outlined: the theory of study process; the conditions for deep approaches to learning; transition, progress and persistence; studies of everyday learning; and action research into the content and context of learning. The paper concludes with a discussion of certain problems in relating the research findings to practice.

(Journal abstract)

Springer, M., **Barriers to Learning**. Canberra, A.C.T. Papers in Technical and Further Education, School of Education, Canberra College of Advanced Education, Fourth Edition, 1985: 132-142.

The author draws upon personal experience as a teacher of adults and some well known literature to identify a range of factors which inhibit learners' attempts to achieve their objectives. The barriers are grouped into those arising from the learner's current life situation, the practices and procedures of institutions and environmental factors.

(Journal synopsis)

Turtle, A.M. and Jack, S.M., **Part-time and evening students: profiles and prospects in the Faculty of Arts, University of Sydney**. Vestes, 28, 1, 1985: 31-34.

Sydney University has a record of providing evening classes for degree purposes dating back to 1884. The article reports the findings of a Committee set up by the Faculty of Arts into the situation of students attending evening classes. A survey of re-enrolling students examined various characteristics of both full and part-time students as well as the characteristics of student groups attending classes during the day only, the evening only or mixed day and evening classes. Finally information about students' major source of income was sought. The committee recommended that a need for evening classes still existed and the Faculty adopted this recommendation.

(HG)

F STUDENTS: SELECTION AND PERFORMANCE

Watkins, D., **How Students Explain Their Academic Performance**. Higher Education Research and Development, 4, 1, 1985: 89-93.

A survey of 563 students at an Australian university found that effort was seen to be the major cause of their first year grades by both successful and unsuccessful students. Younger students were more likely than older students to attribute importance to their study methods. This is particularly encouraging, given the findings of earlier studies that it is indeed the younger students who are most likely to be utilising inappropriate learning strategies and, probably in consequence, performing less ably in their examinations.

(Journal abstract)

G STUDENTS: CAREERS AND EMPLOYMENT

Garton, J., **TAFE and the Recognition of Overseas Qualifications**. Victorian TAFE Papers, 2, 1985: 24-26.

This article briefly discusses the situation of overseas-qualified migrants from the perspective of TAFE. The questions asked are: (1) what problems are faced by migrants seeking recognition of overseas qualifications; (2) what can TAFE do to assist them to overcome problems of non-recognition of overseas qualifications, and unemployment and under-employment related to recency of arrival? Specific solutions are suggested in the context of TAFE policies on access to education, and multicultural education in particular, through the Advanced English Language Project as well as curriculum change in mainstream programs.

(Journal abstract)

Jane, M., **Equal Access to Learning and Employment through TAFE: The Barriers to Teenage Girls**. Victorian TAFE Papers, 2, 1985: 16-18.

This paper outlines the current position of young women in the labour market and some of the barriers which prevent this group from gaining equal access to training and employment. It presents the view that TAFE should take a more leading and challenging role in overcoming the social and economic factors which preclude women from participating equally in all areas of employment and training.

(Journal abstract)

Roberts, A. and Wengermeir, S., **English for Occupational Purposes: Foreign Doctors**. Victorian TAFE Papers, 2, 1985: 27-28.

This article describes a course developed in TAFE colleges to assist doctors qualified in non-English speaking countries, to successfully attempt the English test required for Australian registration. The course has resulted in a marked improvement in student knowledge and greater understanding between TAFE and professional associations in the medical field.

(Journal abstract)

H STAFF

Boud, D.J. and de Rome, E.A., **Academics' Attitudes Towards and Involvement in Staff Development Activities at the University of New South Wales**. Sydney, Research and Development Paper, RD 61, Tertiary Education Research Centre, University of New South Wales, July 1984, 17 pp.

Two hundred and fifty six members of the academic staff at the University of New South Wales were surveyed by questionnaire to obtain information on their activities relating to staff development and their attitudes towards it. Information was sought on the following: areas of concern related to teaching and research, extent of engagement in evaluation activities, sources of assistance which had been used, willingness to allocate time to staff development, and attitudes towards the promotion system. Recently appointed staff were willing to allocate only a very small amount of time to professional development activities. They received much less help from senior colleagues than they had anticipated. Established staff attached far more importance to teaching than they perceived the University to do. One third expressed a need for some assistance with their teaching responsibilities. Lack of time and research assistants were identified as the major obstacles to their development as researchers. Some implications of the findings for institutional policy are briefly discussed.

(Paper abstract)

Moses, I., **The Role of Head of Department in the Pursuit of Excellence**. Higher Education, 14, 4, 1985: 337-354.

This article discusses the role and functions of heads of departments as analysed in the literature with particular

reference to heads in one Australian university. Data on staff's expectations and perceptions of their head's role are examined.

Staff from eight departments of the University of Queensland filled in a questionnaire designed to give feedback to heads. The results show clearly that staff attach great importance to the head's "encouragement" functions. This was supported by data obtained from over one hundred structured interviews conducted with staff. They were asked, *inter alia*, what encouragement was given in their department to excellence in teaching and in research; what they would like to see done to encourage teaching and research more and what barriers to excellence existed in the department. Responses indicate that the majority of staff experienced no encouragement for excelling in teaching, whereas most departments and department heads encouraged active participation in research and publication by overt approval,

funds, assistance with obtaining outside grants and a variety of other ways. Staff made realistic and practical suggestions on how to overcome the barriers to excellence.

(Modified journal abstract)

ABSTRACTORS:

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(From page 4)

or five students at a time, discuss the merits and demerits of a number of Beginnings, Middles and Ends extracted by the tutor from essays recently written by the class, typed-up and photocopied for the occasion.

The common theme running through all five of these suggestions is the need for *explicitness* in dealing with student writing. Writing is not merely a way of testing but it is an important part of the process of learning an academic discipline. Students encountering the intellectual culture of the University for the first time need to have the rules by which that culture is bound made explicit for them. A happy coincidence resides in the fact that most of them are at the very age when the powers of abstract

and analytical reasoning are developing most strongly — and are therefore in a good position to appreciate an objective analysis of the demands of the environment they have just entered.

Books we use most frequently for improving student writing:

(For Humanities and Social Sciences): J. Clanchy & B. Ballard, *Essay Writing for Students*, (1981), Melbourne, Longman.

(For all areas of Science): D. Lindsay, *A Guide to Scientific Writing*, (1984), Melbourne, Longman.

(For Asian students): B. Ballard & J. Clanchy, *Study Abroad*, (1984), Melbourne, Longman.

John Clanchy,
Australian National University.

(From page 12)

- They became excited by what they had discovered through writing. Some shared this excitement quite overtly in their logs as when one student wrote, "I have just realised why understanding of language is so hard. I had always thought of language as something you did in speaking, not something you had as a tool for thinking. This means I must now rethink my whole approach to how children learn and what my role will be as a teacher. We can't teach tools, we can only help children learn to use the tools they have (language). Wow — I'm just blown by this idea. I wonder how many teachers really think about language this way." I wondered indeed!

Conclusion

Successful writing reinforces learning and helps students to sustain thinking over time. I have tried to show how a log can be used for both these purposes by first year students as they acquire the skills and techniques of "academic" writing. Writing need not be divorced from teaching in "content" areas, but can be encouraged and developed as students struggle to grasp concepts, theories and applications. Practice in writing this way has the potential to help students develop better writing proficiency.

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(From page 17)

and their members"; "the nature of the change process in Australian higher education"; "strategies for change and innovation"; and "the evaluation of the design and practice of professional development activities". (p. 65) But I doubt whether the very problem which the book tries to highlight (i.e. the lack of impact of educational research and staff development on the practice of university teachers) can be solved by further research on

the above topics undertaken by specialists in educational theory and research. What we need are: Action research by the university teachers themselves into their own practices and into student learning, and a closer work relationship between Higher Education Unit staff and teaching academics as they design, implement and review their courses.

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