HERDSA NEWS

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FEATURES

REGULAR ITEMS

SPECIAL INSERT

Editorial

So here I am, on my own with HERDSA News. Dave Boud said in his last editorial that he had come to welcome the paucity of material submitted by members (because he could indulge himself with his commissions). At the moment all those empty pages in issue after issue loom very large and white, and I would be incredibly grateful if someone offered to fill a few — please. HERDSA News will continue to look for relatively short, informal (not heavily referenced scholarly) articles which describe practice or which state opinion on issues in tertiary education.

At the Canberra conference, a small group of members suggested publishing an occasional column in which individuals could briefly and simply tell other members about an interest they were developing, a new insight they were excited about, or a book that stimulated their thinking (no matter how old). I hope to bring you the first of that series before long, and ask you all to consider writing for it.

Speaking of the Canberra conference... I was more aware than ever before what a dynamically mixed group of people HERDSA brings together. Apparently I was not alone in enjoying our ecumenism; the Conference summaries and comments in this issue also emphasise how helpful it is to look into the "black box of student learning" through someone else's window. (Leo West is responsible for that metaphor which threatened to take over HERDSA 86.) As Neil Quintrell suggests, we still have a great deal to do in building bridges between all of the people who are concerned. one way and another, with improving student learning. We identified a few barriers to such exchanges and knocked some holes in them while we were in Canberra. One of my aims in HERDSA News will be to continue that work.

One thing many of us can do to help each other find out who is doing what is to respond to the request from the Commonwealth Department of Education for information for the DERA database, so the Directory of Education Research and Researchers may be revised. If you have not already received a copy of the questionnaire, contact Margaret Johnson (062) 83-7898, Research Statistics and Special Projects Branch, Dept. of Education, P.O. Box 826, Woden, ACT, 2606.

The Centre for Administrative and Higher Education at the University of New England is celebrating the 25th anniversary of the graduation of its first diplomates. Best wishes to all.

Also congratulations to Betty Anderson (Head of the School of Nursing, Macarthur Institute of Higher Education) who has been made a Member of the Order of Australia in recognition of her contributions to nursing education.

Dave Boud has been formally thanked for his contribution to the Society as Editor of HERDSA News, but I would like to repeat that thanks here, and to add my personal thanks to him for giving me a helpful and encouraging initiation into the job. He's a mighty hard act to follow!

Peggy Nightingale

REVIEW OF REVIEWS COMPLETED

A project undertaken by HERDSA and funded by the Commonwealth Tertiary Education Commission's Evaluations and Investigations Program was brought to a successful conclusion in April, when the final report was sent to the CTEC.

The project, conducted by Ernest Roe and Ingrid Moses on behalf of HERDSA, was primarily an appraisal of the methodology used in 13 departmental, school and faculty reviews funded by the Program in recent years. Data was gathered by questionnaire and by interviews with members of both review committees and reviewed departments.

A feature of the report is the guidelines constructed by the authors to assist those embarking on departmental reviews in the future. Other sections deal with a number of key issues concerning reviews and the review process: for example, purposes, term of reference, contact and climate, composition of review committee, time scale, consultation, evidence, reporting, implementation, cost-benefit, performance indicators, self-reviews by departments, and the rights of individuals. The study revealed a widespread conviction of the value of departmental reviews both in the institutions surveyed and among reviewers.

The CTEC has decided to publish the report, entitled *Departmental Reviews in Higher Education Institutions*, and it will be available later this year.

New Journals

Health Education Research: Theory and Practice (quarterly). Free copy and enquiries: IRL Press Ltd, P.O. Box 1, Eynsham, Oxford OX8 1JJ, U.K.

Journal of Educational Computing Research (quarterly) Baywood Publishing Co., 120 Marine Street, Box D, Farmingdale, N.Y., 11735, U.S.A.

Higher Education: Handbook of Theory and Research. Annual collection of critical reviews of current research on higher education, under auspices of AERA (Division J). Agathon Press, Inc., 111 Eighth Ave, New York, N.Y. 10011, U.S.A.

Research Papers in Education. (3 issues/yr). NFER-Nelson. Free inspection copies from Carfax, P.O. Box 25, Abingdon OX14 3UE, U.K.

Curriculum and Teaching. Editor: Dr Joseph Zajda, James Nicholas Publishers, P.O. Box 244, Albert Park 3206, Victoria.

Teaching and Teacher Education (quarterly). Pergamon Press, P.O. Box 544, Potts Point, 2011, N.S.W.

Australian Journal of Educational Technology. Australian Society of Educational Technology. Single complimentary copy: Sue McNamara, ASET (Victorian Chapter), P.O. Box 372, Hawthorn, Vic., 3122.

Higher Education: Canada and Australasia Compared

Chris Knapper compares Higher Education in Australasia with Canada after revisiting us and the HERDSA conference in 1985. He finds HERDSA, at least, to be healthy.

Attending the 1985 HERDSA conference in Auckland, I was struck by the fact that I probably knew more people there than I would at a similar gathering in Canada or the USA. One reason of course is simply size: Australia and New Zealand combined have less than half the population of Canada, proportionally fewer colleges and universities, and fewer students in higher education. But perhaps the existence and special nature of HERDSA suggests there is something unique about staff development in Australasian higher education. I offer the following impressions and comparisons.

The state of higher education

Level of financial support for higher education appears to be a major cause for lament, just as it is in the UK and Canada. It is interesting to note that the governments in both Australia and Ontario campaigned on a promise of increased funds for higher education, but have been unwilling or unable to live up to the expectations of the academic community. Peter Scott, editor of *The Times Higher Education Supplement*, has written about a worldwide retrenchment in higher education, accompanied by a decline in society's expectations of universities and in the self-confidence of both individuals and institutions within the system (Scott, 1985). Some of this malaise appears to be evident in Australasia — especially New Zealand, where budgetary constraints have been severe.

The question of access to higher education — especially for special groups, such as native people and women — was mentioned in the HERDSA conference keynote address. However there appears to be a greater support for an "elitist" notion of university education (only the brightest can fully benefit) among Australasian academics than would be common in Canada, where it is generally believed that all students who successfully complete high school should have the chance to go on to degree studies (though of course not necessarily to the programme of their choice). This probably reflects the much greater extent to which British traditions and roots have been supplanted in Canada by the methods, ideology and organisational systems of education in the USA.

"financial support . . .a major cause for lament"

Developments in teaching and learning

It is easy to be misled by the enthusiastic participation in HERDSA conferences that every antipodean academic places the highest priority on teaching and is constantly looking for ways to enhance its effectiveness. Walking the corridors of universities reveals that commitment to teaching must compete with time spent on research (and with administration now that Australasian universities have been to some extent "democratised"). The prevailing myths about research appear to flourish in much the same way as in North America: that everyone does it; that everyone *should* do it; that everyone does it *well*; that, unlike teaching, it can easily be assessed; that research effectiveness is best measured in terms of size of grants awarded; etc.

The lecture method still remains firmly entrenched, despite convincing evidence of its limitations for teaching the higher order intellectual skills that most academics (in Australasia as in North America) claim as their major objective. However, Australasians do at least lecture *less* than we do, still arrange for interaction with students in (relatively) small groups in tutorials (now largely extinct in Canadian universities), and still seem to believe that students should take some responsibility for their own learning. Nevertheless, Watkins and Hattie's (1983) study of student learning outcomes at a major Australian university makes depressing reading for those who look to higher education as a way of teaching sophisticated problem-solving skills ("deep" learning to use the current jargon). The reason of course involves methods of assessment which, as in North America, too often stress rote learning and regurgitation of the teacher's own prejudices, rather than what Dave Boud (1981) would call "student autonomy in learning".

"commitment to teaching must compete with time spent on research"

If the means of change involves the evaluation of instruction, then the revolution may be slow in coming. Although student appraisal of teaching has made some inroads in Australia (e.g. at W.A.I.T.), it has yet to achieve the widespread usage (albeit reluctant) found in Canadian higher education. And although many criticisms can be made of the validity of students' ratings of instruction, they do at least provide a regular opportunity for the consumers of higher education to voice their opinion about the product's effectiveness, and at best provide a basis for scrutiny of teaching and eventual improvement.

Judging by presentations at the Auckland meeting, instructional innovation in Australasian higher education is by no means dead, but also far from transforming teaching practice. *II News* died for lack of interest, and even computer-based learning does not seem to have evinced the enthusiasm in Australia and New Zealand that it has in North America — though, given the lack of pedagogical (vs technological) sophistication of most CAI, this may be a small loss.

On the other hand, Australia remains a world leader in distance education, not just in the amount offered, but also in the quality of its courses in terms of content, delivery mechanisms, and student support services. Other types of continuing education may perhaps be less diverse than in North America, where notions of what constitutes study for a degree are more flexible, and where the idea of dropping in and out of courses, changing study programmes, and transferring academic credits is not the anathema it would still be, for example, in Britain. Given the fact that the "front end loaded" model of higher education is becoming increasingly inadequate in a world of unprecedented change, finding alternatives to traditional degree programmes may be one of the most important challenges facing higher education in the coming decade.

"Australia remains a world leader in distance education"

Staff development and HERDSA

The most remarkable aspect of staff development in Australia and New Zealand is that it has not only survived, but has become an accepted part of virtually all universities and many colleges — whereas the best that could be said for the movement in Canada and the USA is that some small inroads have been made in a few institutions. Although questions such as "does it make a difference?" will continue to demand serious discussion, it was interesting to note that the Auckland conference boasted at least one excellent session (with Bob Cannon and Alan Lonsdale) on the "theory" of instructional development, which is presumably a sign of either maturity or senility!

"HERDSA . . . the most successful organisation in the world concerned with the . . . improvement of teaching and learning in higher education"

As for HERDSA, it may come as a surprise to its members to hear that the society is probably the most successful organisation in the world concerned with the promotion of improvement of teaching and learning in higher education. Certainly there is no equivalent in the USA that has the range of activities and publications, while bodies such as SRHE in Britain have much broader concerns with higher education in general. If imitation is a form of flattery then the recent establishment of a comparable association in Canada (the Society for Teaching and Learning in Higher Education) can be seen as a tribute to the success of a genuine Australasian initiative.

Christopher Knapper,
University of Waterloo,
Ontario.

References

Boud, D. (Ed.) (1981) *Developing student autonomy in learning.* London: Kogan Page.

Scott, P. (1985) Higher education in the next 20 years. *International Journal of Institutional Management in Higher Education*, 9, 195-206.

Watkins, D.A., and Hattie, J. (1983) A longitudinal study of the learning processes of tertiary students. Unpublished manuscript.

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Conferences

Australian Consortium on Experiential Education Mid-Year Conference

Theme	Creating the experience: building experience-based learning
Place	Mount St Mary College, Strathfield, NSW
Date	2 August 1986 (8.30 — 6.00)
Information	Lee Andresen, Tertiary Education Research Centre, University of New South Wales, Kensington, 2033, NSW

Visions of Higher Education — Trans-National Dialogues: Transformations

Theme	How to transform future visions into reality
Place	Gottlieb Duttweiler Institute, Rüschlikon (Zurich)
Date	18 — 22 August 1986
Contacts	Dr Rolf Homann, Project Manager, Gottlieb Duttweiler Institute, CH-8803 Rüschlikon, Switzerland; or Dr John Sinton, Division of Natural Sciences and Mathematics, Stockton State College, Pomona, N.J., 08420, USA.

International Conference on Information Technology in Higher Education

Place	University of Glasgow
Date	2 — 5 September 1986
Contact	Clive Neville, Council for Educational Technology for the U.K., 3 Devonshire Street, London, WIN 2BA

British Educational Research Association Annual Conference

Place	Bristol University
Date	4 — 7 September 1986
Contact	Patricia Broadfoot, School of Education, Bristol University, Bristol, BS8 1JA

Pass-Around Files: A Self-Learning Activity

Students generate original concepts? John Cowan says they can and do when engaged in an innovative activity which poses challenging questions.

During a very wet day on holiday I reflected with some frustration on the inability of many of my students to gather together their thoughts in a logical manner, and to express themselves coherently for the benefit of a third party. It occurred to me that I was not really taking an active initiative to help them to make good their deficiency; and I wondered what I might do about it. The pass-around file activity was one of the measures which I planned as a result, and it has been most successful.

From time to time one of my students has informally aired a query which is beyond the syllabus of my course, yet is both pertinent and worthwhile. I have found it extremely rewarding to explore such topics informally with the questioners; and I have often wished that I could share that experience, in some way, with others in the same class. My attempt to do so is the subject of this paper. I have described it for publication because I believe that this idea can be transferred profitably and effortlessly into many subject areas, even those far removed from engineering.

There is no quantified evaluation, nor would I consider it appropriate to formulate or commission one. The evaluation in this instance should be qualitative, answering the question "Does it work?" rather than "How well does it work?".

Description

I selected some of the really thorny questions which have been asked of me by undergraduates in past sessions. I edited them slightly — either to make them more straightforward, or to restrict their scope, or to make the fundamental point at issue easier to explain when the question was being introduced. I then drafted handout sheets which contained a series of short preparatory statements leading into one of my selected questions. The statements were factual and were as complete as I could make them. They provided a terse account of the background against which the question was posed; but in no way did they provide or even hint at the solution to the problem.

I arranged that students would first work on their own for about 45 minutes, studying the allotted question and setting out an answer to it on no more than two A4 pages. They were then given a "pass-around file" which contained further answers to the same question; these had been produced in a similar situation by students at the same stage in their studies. Students read and appraised the contents of the file before discussing the problem with classmates who were engaged in the same exercise, but had not necessarily been given the same files. Finally each was encouraged to commit any further or second thoughts, to paper, as amendments to the original response. The entire activity was generally completed in a period of less than 2 hours.

Throughout the development period the procedure tended to vary slightly, but three key features were always present:

1 The learners had access to no outside expertise whatsoever.
2 The students were able to consider the thoughts of their peers, expressed both on paper and verbally.
3 Students were given an opportunity to reflect before submitting their work, and encouraged to modify their original statement.

Immediate reactions

This exercise was conceived with more able students in mind as the target population. I was prepared to include one such "minority activity" in my programme; and I anticipated and was willing to endure some problems with the less able students, who were clearly likely to find the task too difficult. My apprehension seemed to be justified during the first weeks of the experiment. Most of my students obviously felt unable to complete the task satisfactorily — and at first their written answers did much to confirm that judgement. Then, within a few weeks of launching the uncertain experiment, I found that several students, some of merely average ability, managed to produce answers which were worthy of reasonably high marks. Thus we all perceived that the tasks were by no means impossible or unreasonable; and the standard of the submitted work quickly increased accordingly.

Many students now responded to the activity as to an established part of the curriculum. Feedback, which had previously been restricted almost entirely to rhetorical questions of the form "How on earth do you expect me to...", now came in the form of specific and constructive suggestions for minor improvements. We had apparently passed through a stage of "negative Hawthorne effect".

"I selected some of the really thorny questions..."

Changes

Minor improvements were required in the paperwork, to render the instructions immediately comprehensible and without ambiguity. I also moved towards a structure for the exercise which made it easier for the students to reveal gains in their learning or appreciation of the problem during the later stages of the activity.

Eventually I experimented with a change in format, allowing 15 minutes for informal initial group discussion while they were assimilating the problem. This did *not* lead to similar answers from members of the same group, but *did* result in better conceived answers from a large number of students.

Interim findings

Three features emerged strikingly in the analysis I made of the early results, based both on my initial marking and on a re-marking after six months.

1 There was a sudden and clearly discernible improvement after the experiment had been running for about four weeks.

> *"There was a sudden and clearly discernible improvement . . ."*

2 There was no correlation between performances in this task, and in the regular class tests which are taken at five-week intervals. This was especially noticeable in the case of the more able students, half of whom produced work of no real merit, which compared badly with papers written by students with low examination performances.

3 The most encouraging feature was the number of original concepts which emerged in the answers.

I classified as original any concept which would be new to undergraduates because it had not been covered in their syllabus and was written down by them before they had had any opportunity to consider the written or spoken thoughts of other students. There was relatively slight scope for generating such "original" concepts, so I was encouraged to find that, on average, 20% generated worthwhile and original responses in a logical and convincing form, with a further 20% going part of the way to that position. This was a humbling experience for me. It made me recognise the hidden resources to which my students have access, which I so often disregard when I judge it necessary to take the initiative in teaching them the subtleties of my subject.

Reflections

I sometimes wondered if my efforts as a teacher really deserved to be classified as "higher education". For most of my undergraduate teaching consists of humdrum, bread-and-butter commitments, in which I feel a very pedestrian type of teacher. In contrast, the pass-around file activity is one in which the results have been exciting and encouraging, and have sent me home on many a grey winter's evening with a song in my heart, and a new belief in the ability of my students.

> *"The most encouraging feature was the number of original concepts which emerged in the answers."*

If *you* have ever experienced the same kind of frustrations in your teaching as I have, then I would enthusiastically encourage you to experiment with this idea. Take your courage in both hands. Choose a few of the searching questions which you have been asked by your students in the past few years — questions which have forced you back on your heels because you could not offer an immediate and a facile answer. Formulate an expression of each question which will be comprehensible and self-sufficient, and which makes the demand of the question quite clear. Then offer it to your students in a situation akin to the style of format which I have described here. If you have faith in their ability and act accordingly, I am sure you will be very pleasantly surprised by the outcome.

John Cowan,
Heriot-Watt University,
Edinburgh.

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NEWS FROM THE EXECUTIVE

The time of the annual conference is the busiest time of the year for the Executive — much of the business of the Association gets conducted then, new members are welcomed to the executive and areas of action for the next year are identified. This report gives a short summary of our major activities over the conference. If you would like more details, see your local executive member.

PUBLICATIONS

Ingrid Moses has been appointed editor of the Society's journal, HERD, as of Volume 6. She formally takes over from John Powell in January 1986. Ingrid was appointed by the executive after a thorough selection process and we are sure that she will bring further success to the journal with her hard-working approach, her wide contacts and above all her enthusiasm and commitment to HERDSA. Congratulations, Ingrid.

There are changes in responsibilities for the Society's other publications also. Peggy Nightingale is now sole editor of HERDSA News, taking over from the long-serving Dave Boud. Responsibility for the Society's Occasional Publications including the very successful Green Guide Series has moved to Adelaide where a small group under the convenorship of Gerry Mullins will oversee production and publication.

The Executive is pleased to see this spread of responsibility around the country, and with the President and Secretary currently in Melbourne, the next Conference in Perth and two Executive members in New Zealand, feels that HERDSA is better reflecting the geographical spread of its members.

CONFERENCES

The 1987 Conference will be held in Perth from 21st — 26th August with a follow-on in Singapore 26 — 28th August. This is an exciting venture for HERDSA and we expect the move to S.E. Asia to be a useful one. So start planning for time off and travel money now. Advance notice — 1988 Conference in Melbourne and 1989 in Adelaide.

LINKS WITH OTHER ORGANISATIONS

The executive is keen to establish and develop useful links with other organisations. We have appointed Barbara Wallis as liaison person for those organisations with whom we already have reciprocal agreements. Barbara will be reporting through HERDSA News. We are also developing closer links with SCEDSIP (Standing Committee for Educational Development Services in Polytechnics), a very active educational development

group in U.K. Among other things, we hope to make their publications more easily available to HERDSA Members.

We are also keen to work with members in discipline specific areas, including developing joint educational activities at meetings etc. We have pioneered this with the Society for Microbiology and Elizabeth Hazel. We are keen to identify others who might be interested in forging links between HERDSA and their professional association. See your local exec. member or contact Alan Prosser at the University of NSW with names and ideas.

LOCAL ACTIVITIES

We have now established a NSW Branch which is forging ahead with HERDSA activities in that state. We encourage local activities everywhere and individual members who wish to organise a local activity, e.g. in conjunction with a visiting speaker can ask for help and financial assistance from the executive.

HERDSA FELLOW

We are negotiating with Joe Novak from Cornell to be HERDSA Fellow in 1987-88. In the meantime we are looking for suggestions for an Australian HERDSA Fellow and/or for a fellow from the humanities area. If you have any ideas let Alan Prosser from the University of NSW know, or discuss it with your local member.

CONSTITUTIONAL CHANGES

The AGM approved the changes to the constitution which were circulated with the last HERDSA News. Basically the changes mean that we now have provision for postal voting for the executive if members request it and that the term of office for an executive member (other than an office bearer) is two years. Additionally the constitution has been tidied up to remove sexist language and to be consistent, e.g. use of tertiary education throughout.

WELCOME TO NEW EXECUTIVE MEMBERS

A complete list of the executive is included in the report of the AGM. I would especially like to welcome new members to the executive including Vic Beasley from Counselling at Flinders, Dave Boud in his own right rather than ex officio as journal editor, Tim Fishburn from Bruce College of TAFE and Paul Ramsden from Melbourne Uni.

Their wide experience and their keenness to be involved will benefit HERDSA.

Helen Edwards,
Hon. Sec.

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Conferences

Standing Conference on Educational Development Services in Polytechnics Two-Day Working Conference
Theme Self and Peer Assessment: Practices, Problems and Solutions
Place Oxford Polytechnic
Date 11 — 12 September 1986
Information Graham Gibbs, Education Methods Unit, Oxford Polytechnic, Headington, Oxford, OX3 0BP

Centre for Administrative and Higher Education Studies Jubilee Conference
Theme Turbulence and Change in the Administrator's World
Place Duval Conference Centre, University of New England
Date 9 — 11 October 1986
Information Grant Harman, CAHES, University of New England, Armidale, 2351, NSW

International Educational Technology Conference and Exhibition
Theme Teaching, Learning and Technology
Place University of Western Australia
Date 2 — 5 December 1986
Information Australian Society of Educational Technology, PO Box 271, Leederville, 6007, WA

Changing the Learning Climate (27th SCEDSIP national conference)
Place Birmingham Polytechnic
Date 5 — 6 December 1986
Information Bob Farmer, Educational Development, The Polytechnic, Perry Barr, Birmingham, B42 3SU

56th ANZAAS Congress
Place Palmerston North, New Zealand
Date 26 — 30 January 1987
Information (General) Administrative Secretary, 56th ANZAAS, PO Box 5158, Palmerston North, New Zealand.
(Special Interest Group in Distance Education) Brian Shaw, Education Department, Massey University

Association for the Study of Higher Education Annual Meeting
Place San Diego, California
Date 14 — 17 February 1987
Information ASHE, George Washington University, One Dupont Circle, Suite 630, Washington, DC, 20036, USA

First International Conference on Experiential Learning
Place Regent's College, London
Date 26 — 30 June 1987
Information Ed Rosen, Friends World College, Regent's College, Inner Circle, Regent's Park, London, NW1 4NS

HERDSA 86 IN

THE LEARNER IN HIGHER EDUCA

A sad fact of life in these times of financial constraint is that it is hard to obtain support to attend conferences. So, for absent friends, here are impressions of HERDSA 86 from the President, John Bowden, and two conferees. Rod McKay is New Zealand's South Island HERDSA Executive member. Neil Quintrell convened last year's study skills conference in Adelaide.

NOT FORGOTTEN AT CANBERRA

Three overriding impressions emerged from the wealth of detail at the 1986 Conference — the primacy accorded to learners, the depth and maturity of much of the research that was presented, and the significant way teachers from the disciplines were involved in both generating and discussing research studies with inter-disciplinary relevance.

Almost half the papers dealt directly with the concerns or behaviours of students, and most others addressed pressures influencing learning in its contexts. Emphasising the general theme, an opening student-led symposium reminded conferees of some of the realities of student life: poor working environments, unclear requirements, the struggle to establish personal goals, instances of indifferent teaching, and limited opportunities to exercise choice and personal responsibility for learning. With this basis, the invited keynote addresses on research into learning (Leo West and Paul Ramsden) were illuminating and challenging. Illuminating in that the differing perspectives offered by current research strategies (How does the brain handle information? How do students approach learning? What do they gain as a result of learning?) were succinctly portrayed, with suggestions about how they might interact. And challenging as we realised the importance of seeing learning as a dynamic interaction, of the need to integrate skills development into course content, and of seeking practical ways to capitalise on research to help students gain greater control over their thinking processes. Study skills specialists were well represented amongst participants, and their experiences of working with students helped ensure that practical realities — and limitations — were well-aired when, almost inevitably, implications of learning research arose during discussions at the paper sessions.

Not surprisingly, parallel paper and workshop sessions resulted in the usual conflicts of interest. Papers were, however, coherently grouped to address a variety of topics from learning strategies, study skills, and individual differences, through course planning, problem based and laboratory learning, and teaching styles, to research skills and equal opportunities. It was in the scheduling of the dozen workshops, where one encounters most directly materials and processes, that conflict between topics created most difficulty (for example, having to choose between sessions on problem based learning, experiential learning, and improving writing). Those that I joined worked well — they were practical and generated group involvement, and it may well have been that placing a

The Presidential Address

session of workshops early in the overall program did much to establish the climate allowing ease of general communication that developed.

This year also saw a number of poster presentations (on "study skills" and "involvement in staff development", for example) and although these were self-contained and informative, and made handouts available, their impact was lessened by not being more centrally placed by the assembly area. Well-staged and varied poster sessions can be very effective in a conference, but they need greater exposure.

The great variety in HERDSA membership is a particular strength of the organisation, and it must have been encouraging to the Conference Committee to see all

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TION: A FORGOTTEN SPECIES?

areas of the tertiary sector so well represented. It was particularly valuable to have so many subject teachers present (they were, for example, involved in the presentation of about half the papers) to interact with those of us more directly concerned with staff development, research, or counselling.

Of course, there was the lighter side. We appreciated an afternoon's break to enjoy Canberra's autumnal beauty. With a relaxed conference dinner, and a vigorous bush dance that was thoughtfully provided to counteract more sedentary activities, social necessities were not forgotten.

To sum up. It was valuable to be reminded of the importance of process and dynamic interaction in learning; as John Bowden said in his President's address, "Don't ask of students have they achieved *our* aims, but what have *they* got out of their education". Ultimately, the value of a conference comes through the enthusiasms, ideas and contacts participants leave with. I will not be alone in leaving Canberra well-satisfied. Thank you, Alan Miller and your team, for arranging a reaffirmation of the central importance of the Annual Conference to HERDSA.

Rod McKay,
University of Canterbury.

The Student Panel. L to r:

Leslie Ward (A.N.U.),

Jill Evans (Bruce TAFE),

Kok Swee Nguan (A.N.U.),

Brian Yates (A.N.U.),

Alan Harris (CCAE)

THE PRESIDENT'S BLACK HOUSE

It was my privilege to present the final Keynote Address at the 1986 HERDSA Conference in Canberra and I wish to mention a couple of the points I made on that occasion.

The conference was a resounding success. It drew a wide range of participants — educational researchers, developers, teachers, learning skills advisors, counsellors, undergraduate students, administrators, postgraduate students, graduates, and representatives from a range of organisations including CTEC and CAPA. There was a good feeling around, not much heat but plenty of light — and warmth. It was a very positive experience, both professionally and socially.

Why was it such a success? I think there were many factors contributing but one major factor was the presence of such a diverse group of professionals all focusing on the one matter they had in common — students as learners.

Leo West sparked a thought in my mind when he spoke about the three current research methodologies in student learning. He likened them to three windows in different faces of a black box. He regretted that some barriers existed between the three groups of researchers — especially given that they were all peering into the same black box.

I took the analogy further. The field of student learning can be considered not as a black box but as a black house. There are many windows through which one can see inside the black house. In a conventional house, with internal walls, you could ask each of three observers looking into different windows to describe what they see. If you put the descriptions together you would have a picture of three rooms, not a picture of the house. However, if the black house were open-plan, without internal walls and again you asked the three observers to describe what they could see, their combined descriptions would give you a sensible picture of the whole house. Each of their individual descriptions would give great detail about the part closest to their window — not dissimilar to that obtained from the conventional house. However each description would present that detail against the background of the rest of the house, most of which would be visible from any window.

The HERDSA conference in Canberra provided an opportunity for looking in windows of the open-plan house. Apart from the three researcher windows first mentioned by Leo West there were learning skills windows, student windows, teacher windows and the rest. We were presented with the views from each of these windows throughout the conference, all against a background. Some of us got the chance to move around and look in someone else's window. Generally I think we all discovered something about the way our own special areas of concern fitted into the overall context. By that

we all gained.

I think that it is important that we maintain that openness in the future. Researchers need to be aware of the needs of teachers and teachers need to be aware of what researchers have discovered about learning. And so on with all the groups involved in student learning. I think that is the only way to progress. I am not arguing for everyone to be a generalist, doing a little of everything. I am arguing for all the specialists to be aware of what is going on in the other areas and to see their own work in context.

HERDSA provides almost a unique opportunity in that regard. Where else are you likely to get such a range of professionals interested in student learning? This was an important part of the success of the Conference.

Also of great importance however was the organisation. The selection of the theme; the formulation of interesting questions around the theme; the setting up of the student symposium and the symposium on underrepresentation of women in science; the invitations to Anderson, Fisher, McGaw, Ramsden and West as keynote speakers; the emphasis on discussion rather than presentation of research papers; and the tireless work of conference committee members both before and during the weekend all contributed to the universally acclaimed success of the conference. Congratulations to Allen Miller and his colleagues.

John Bowden,
University of Melbourne.

At the A.G.M.

SEARCH FOR RELATIONS BETWEEN TASKS, CONTEXTS, LEARNERS

Between 1980 and 1985, "tertiary study skills advisers" — a gaggle of study skills specialists, literacy advisers and counsellors — met in annual conferences separate from, although sometimes immediately following, HERDSA conferences. In 1986, "study skills" was incorporated as a special interest area within the HERDSA conference.

Coming from the rather narrower and necessarily practitioner-focused study skills conference, I was interested by the wide range of issues addressed by HERDSA, and I became aware of some sense of gap between the activities of researchers and the activities of practitioners.

In Adelaide in 1985, at the study skills conference, the question of the need for effective evaluation of the work of language and learning skills advisers was raised consistently, so it would appear that a complementary need exists between adviser and researchers. Advisers wish to know if what they are doing is effective, but have neither the time nor tools to evaluate their own work adequately. If researchers have these commodities, the possibility of involvement with practitioners and "learners" exists.

I was also struck by the way in which the focus of activity affects the questions addressed by the people engaged in their activities. HERDSA, in posing the question of whether the learner in higher education is "a forgotten species", was clearly expressing some concern about lack of contact with individual learners. Learning and literacy advisers, whose primary task is involvement with learners as they struggle for understanding, were asking the question, "How do we relate this activity to the academic context?". So in both the study skills and HERDSA conferences, the question of the relationships between the task, the context and the learner was being raised.

It would seem to follow from this and the previous observation on evaluative research, that both study skills and education and research conferences have overlapping interests.

Many papers focused on the influence of cognitive and structural variables on the learning process, but surprisingly little time was committed to a consideration of other psychological variables. In all the (many) study skills groups I have run, I believe that I am dealing with student anxiety and trying to encourage students to have the confidence to try different approaches to learning. High levels of anxiety (in learners *and* in teachers) leads to poor, performance, inattention, regression to "safe" methods and ways of thinking, excessive searching for "cues" which may provide the answers to a puzzling environment, and may lead to ultimate withdrawal. An understanding of the role anxiety plays in the learning process, and the ways in which teachers create and can productively use anxiety, could lead to a richer understanding of the process of learning. Any takers for the 1987 conference?

In Adelaide last year, it was pointed out to the language and learning advisers that

> "People working in English as a second or foreign language programmes, study skills advisers, counsellors, teachers, and people from educational research and staff development units . . . [are] . . . concerned with similar problems and shared perspectives, but all too often . . . work independently."

I felt the same thing this year. So perhaps the challenge is for us all to create reasons for closer liaison between language and learning advisers, developers and researchers within our own institutions for the benefit of the learner.

Neil Quintrell,
Flinders University.

REVIEWS

A New Look At Postgraduate Failure, Ernest Rudd. Society for Research into Higher Eduation and NFER — Nelson, 1985. ISBN 1-85059-0095, 140 pages. No price given.

Now prominent on policy agendas is the disparity between the stated time of three or four years for research training which leads to a doctorate, and the reality that many students do not complete within that time, and some gradually abandon their work and never complete. This issue is the core of Ernest Rudd's latest addition to his writings and research on postgraduate education. His "new look at postgraduate failure" is a concisely organised monograph which focuses on the reasons and causes for failure to complete or for taking an unduly long time to do so. His account does not claim comprehensiveness in a statistical or sampling sense. Rather, it is a wide-ranging exploration, through interviews of over a hundred home students from British universities, covering a variety of fields of study, thirteen institutions and students of different ages and life stages.

While the focus is on "postgraduate failure", the issues covered are broad. They include students' entry showing some drifting in without clear commitment or enthusiasm, their experiences of supervision and different approaches in various subject fields, the adequacy of training in the skills and techniques needed for their research, the experience of handling competing activities and personal problems of many kinds (Rudd writes "in general what interferes with postgraduate study is not marriage but a family"), the links between higher degree study and on-going and prospective employment, the examination, and so on.

Both in his interview accounts, and in the conclusions and proposals he advances in consequence, Rudd emerges as sensitive and humane, yet astute and quite hard-headed. He does not subscribe to the view that all or most able honours students should immediately proceed to postgraduate training. He writes:

> "There can be no reasonable doubt whatsoever that, in most cases, postgraduate study reduces graduates' earnings in the early years of their careers and turns them from the kinds of graduates employers want to the kinds they want less... One implication of this is that those postgraduate students who were more than usually dilatory or were unsuccessful in their research would almost certainly have gained higher incomes, and have been regarded by employers as more valuable, if they had never entered postgraduate study at all".

He urges a far more careful process of selection, both of supervisors and of students, recognising that this would reduce intakes and lead to a lessening of postgraduate activity. Before enrolment as a full-time student "supported by public funds", Rudd would require explicit demonstration of research aptitude through preparation of a detailed research proposal and literature search, developed with a prospective supervisor. This may take two or three years part-time. "The preparation of the research proposal and the students' examination on it should be treated as seriously as a Ph.D. examination." To improve supervision Rudd joins those advocating supervisory committees and he would restrict supervision to those who have done first rate research and who have extensive research experience, "not just the pedestrian work that often gets by for a Ph.D.". He is highly critical of "the handing out of students ... on the basis of fair shares for everyone ... (a practice which) represents a total subjection of the interests of the students to those of the staff". He does not discuss the profound implications of admitting the evolution of a pattern where perhaps senior members of university staff are deemed not suitable for supervising research. I noticed in passing his "impression that Education departments are especially ready to accept ill-prepared students".

Rudd sees us in a period where a rising expectation of the level of achievement required for a higher degree is pushing supervisors and students to conclude a greater amount of research before submission and in turn needing more time to complete it. The consequence is a reduced success rate, despite what is described as "easier availability" of studentships.

Not only in the UK, but also in the USA and in some countries of continental Europe, the view is being articulated that completion times are markedly longer in the social sciences and humanities than in the physical sciences and allied areas. While this comes as no surprise to most of us, attention is turning to what is being called the "research environment", the ethos of particular departments, and sanctions are being proposed and implemented against departments which "allow" long completion times.

These are timely matters for consideration in Australia. Academics in our staff development units are developing something of a data base from which important issues are highlighted. The question of how these can be circumscribed and completion times reduced confronts those in the universities with responsibility for coordinating and legitimating programs and student admissions. The prospect of extending doctoral research beyond the university sector is under active discussion, and the Australian Vice-Chancellors' Committee has a working party addressing, among other things, postgraduate supervision and examining practice, means of ensuring comparability of standards, and the development of codes of good practice.* At this time, Rudd's monograph is a helpful and positive contribution which deserves promulgation beyond those of us who will read it anyway.

Kwong Lee Dow,
The University of Melbourne.

* *Editor's note:* The reviewer chairs that working party.

Post-Education Society: Recognising Adults as Learners. Norman Evans, Sydney, Australia: Croom Helm, 1985, 157 pp, ISBN 0-7099-0919-5, $13.95.

This book is a publication in the Radical Forum on Adult Education Series edited by Jo Campling of Hillcroft College, United Kingdom.

The editor notes that the purpose of the series is to

provide a forum of discussion for the whole field of adult and continuing eduation. A major focus of the series is on the consequences of social change and the need to formulate an educational response to new technologies and new economic, social and political conditions as they affect all members of our society.

In chapter 2 of the book Evans notes that the work is primarily about the needs of adult learners in the late 1980s: This chapter is titled Adult Growth and Development and is followed by a chapter titled An Adult Society. These two chapters do provide a detailed study of the adult person; Chapter 2 in terms of stages and characteristics of development and Chapter 3 in terms of the adult and work. The author draws frequently on the works of Erikson, Kolb and Chickering and associates. Evans has also found the writing of Gail Sheehy helpful in developing his own work. For people who appreciate overviews or who need specific insights from the literature in this field these two chapters will be a useful resource.

The first and fourth chapters of the book provide the material on social change which is the focus of the series. Chapter 1, "Post-Industrial Society", provides a very useful analysis of the current "state of affairs". The analysis is summarised by this extract: "So we have an economy which baffles people, an education system which does not seem to be able to make much difference to people's prospects or the economy, and most of all, we have a population which is different". The factor that makes the population different is choice.

The fourth chapter (the last) does in fact carry the title of the book, and it is in this chapter that Evans draws his conclusions about the changes to be made. They are:

(i) the acceptance that sources of academic learning are diverse and that institutions should be prepared to accord such learning official recognition;

(ii) arising from the studies of human growth and development the acceptance of the implications for curricula of the psychological roots of readiness for learning,

(iii) a variation from current practice of the modes and patterns of study designed for adult learners; and

(iv) money questions of the funding of institutions and of students.

Evans has provided the market with a very readable statement on this ever-expanding field of consciousness — Adults as Learners. While maintaining a professional approach to the subject, it is devoid of much of the technical and quantitative analysis that is characteristic of some of the early input to the subject. Again, while the book is written out of the education ethos of the United Kingdom and reflects its conclusions in that context, there are more than enough theory and generalisations to make it relevant to the interested reader in other contexts.

I regard the book as a useful addition to the resources of anyone engaged in adult and continuing education.

John A. Pender,
Board of Education,
Uniting Church in Australia.

Independent Learning in Higher Education, Euan S. Henderson and Michael B. Nathenson, Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Educational Technology Publications, 1984, ISBN 0-87778-188-5.

The Institute of Educational Technology at the Open University is one of the largest higher education units in the world with about 60 academic staff. For the most part the number of publications emanating from them has not seemed commensurate with the size of the unit. What have they been doing for the past 15 years? Glimpses have appeared in the specialist literature and a few books on aspects of their work have been published. With the availability (not readily in Australia unfortunately) of *Independent Learning in Higher Education* we can see at last examples of their achievements across the range of their activities. They are impressive indeed.

The chapters are grouped in seven main headings. Theoretical Perspectives on Adult Education, Alternative Forms of Preliminary Organiser, Self-Assessment and Self-Remediation Strategies, Activity-Based Learning, Learning through Case Studies, Project-Based Learning and Developing Study Skill. For each topic there is a theoretical introduction and discussion of the literature followed by two or three case studies describing an application of the ideas to an Open University course. I would challenge any higher education specialist not to find something interesting and informative on any one of these areas. For the non-specialist there are sufficient overviews and summaries to find one's way around the richness of the text.

In any collection as wide ranging as this a reviewer can find points to quibble with. The title is misleading as the book discusses the form of distance learning at the Open University which I would hardly label as 'Independent'. The section on self-assessment takes a curiously limited approach to its main concept, ssuming that self-assessment questions are written by course-designers and reflect their goals alone. The editor's theoretical introduction attempts too much and leaves the reader unsatisfied with his race through a wider range of concepts and notions. Some chapters are inevitably less insightful than others.

That said, we still have an intriguing book about the mysterious core of one of the most innovative tertiary institutions in the world. Whether you are an educational technologist or psychologist, physicist or mathematician you will find something to stimulate you here.

David Boud,
University of New South Wales.

ERDU's Newtech / Hitech / Inftech Glossary (abbreviated to **ERDU Inftech Glossary): A Concise Explanation of Jargon Terms Likely to be Encountered by Educators**, Educational Research and Development Unit, Queensland Institute of Technology, 1985, $10.00, ISBN 0-949477-03-6.

Anything purporting to help educators cope with technological jargon is welcome, though it's a trifle daunting to find such a collection of information age newspeak in the book's title. But the content is in truth "very much biased towards terms likely to be encountered by educators", which is the Foreword's way of warning "hitech" and similar experts that this is not really intended for them. On the contrary the definitions are uniformly "couched in language comprehensible to the non-technically inclined".

That's it for the audience and the language; what about the coverage? AV, television, satellites, and information storage are all included. There is also good basic coverage of the standard computerese we novices encounter with increasing frequency and which is rapidly becoming de rigeur for holding a conversation with almost anybody in education. So we meet just about everything, from the rudimentary — disk, programme, and database; Beta,

(Continued on page 16)

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.

Educational or other non-profit organisations may reproduce a limited number of these abstracts in their own publications provided that HERDSA receives suitable acknowledgment.

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

Caulley, D. and Douglas, M., **Evaluating Instructional Film or Video: Suggestions for Feedback Before the Final Print.** Educational Technology, XXV, 6, 1985: 29-33.

This article suggests several ways to assess audience reactions to a film or video by using a test audience to review the work print. The authors offer a checklist of 12 questions which could be used as criteria to assess the quality of the film or video. They also suggest six review procedures to evaluate the effects of a film or video on an audience, with each technique answering different questions. The techniques used are: (1) observation, (2) the questionnaire, (3) the group interview, (4) the connoisseur or expert, (5) evaluating by machine and (6) controlled experiment.

The authors note that none of these techniques is the way to evaluate impact but in different combinations, two or more of these techniques can provide valuable information on which to base final editing decisions.

(PB)

Crawshaw, B., **Contract Research, the University and the Academic.** Higher Education, 14, 6, 1985: 665-682.

With the decline in the funding of university research activities from traditional sources, many universities are instigating contract research programs as a means of funding research. This article examines some of the implications of university-based contract research, drawing largely on the author's own experiences. The problems which are examined include the moral and ethical implications, the legal aspects, problems over ownership of research results, the implications for staff rights, the status of contract researchers, the implications for publication, problems of authority, responsibility and social justice, and the conflicts between teaching and research. The article concludes with eleven points for successful university-based contract research.

(SRHE)

Lange, J.C., **New Technology and Distance Education: The Case of Australia.** Distance Education, 7, 1, 1986: 49-67.

New technology can help cut costs and improve quality, equity and participation in distance education, but the choice of technology, medium and carrier is application specific. Different goals, methods and philosophies dictate different systems and different cost-benefit ratios. This paper examines five major requirements if Australia is to take advantage of the new technologies in distance education, looks at their social, economic and pedagogic implications, and suggests some specific actions.

(Journal abstract)

B SYSTEMS AND INSTITUTIONS

Brown, D.W., **Bringing Vocational Education to North-Central Victoria.** Unicorn, 11, 3, 1985: 208-215.

The paper describes the problems experienced by rural secondary schools in providing an adequate range of programs and the unique way in which secondary vocational education and technical and further education was brought to the north-central region of Victoria in 1978. Also described are developments and difficulties that have occurred in the intervening years and some thoughts for the future are given.

(Journal abstract)

Karmel, P., **Quality and Equality in Education.** Australian Journal of Education, 29, 3, 1985: 279-293.

During the past 25 years there has been a five-fold expansion in educational activity in Australia. There has also been a change in the atmosphere; the supportive environment of the earlier years has been replaced by hostility. In the education debate, this has been manifested in a switch from an inputs to an outcomes orientation and an emphasis on accountability.

An assessment of quality involves the selection of the relevant elements of the educational system, the assessment of their quality, and the weighting to be attached to them. The selection of the relevant elements depends on the avowed purposes of education and these include social objectives as well as objectives for the individual.

One of the social purposes of education relates to equality. The concept of educational equality can be interpreted at three levels: equality of educational provision, equality of educational opportunity, and equality of group educational outcomes. These have a bearing on social mobility and, to a lesser degree, on the distribution of occupations, income, and power.

Quality and equality in education have many dimensions, and discussions of them are necessarily value-laden. Public debate abounds with simplistic conclusions. There are no simple summary measures of trends in quality and equality in education. Detailed analyses, with all the appropriate reservations and warnings, are required.

(Journal abstract)

Newman, W., **The Training of Teachers for Rural Schools in New South Wales.** Unicorn, 11, 3, 1985: 202-207.

The staffing of isolated schools in New South Wales, as elsewhere in Australia, has always presented problems to employing authorities. Teacher training institutions must accept some of the responsibility for this because of their tendency at times to overlook the issues involved in rural education. When the problem is closely examined, however, it is seen to be a very complex one involving social and professional factors which are largely beyond the control of training institutions. This article

looks at the history of the problem in New South Wales and examines some of the solutions which have been suggested during the last decade.

(Journal abstract)

Selvaratnam, V., **The Higher Education System in Malaysia: Metropolitan, Cross-national, Peripheral or National?** Higher Education, 14, 5, 1985: 477-496.

This article takes issue with a theoretical formulation which views higher education institutions in terms of academic organisation governed by elements which are unique to the system and a disciplinary logic which was proposed by Burton Clark in *The Higher Educational System: academic organisation in cross-national perspective.* These unique attributes have, according to Clark, a cross-national convergence. The article demonstrates through an analysis of the origin, growth and development of the Malaysian higher education system that the overall theoretical formulation of Clark has inherent weaknesses, as it underplays the role national policies and environmental imperatives play in determining national higher education systems. However, the author does show that, barring these limitations, the framework does provide a useful tool for systematically studying how higher education systems are organised and governed in different cultural milieux. In spite of their wider environmental constraints, specific higher education systems have evolved and retained certain features and elements which are cross-national in character.

(SRHE)

Thornton, D., **A Future for TAFE.** Unicorn, 11, 4, 1985: 309-322.

It is now ten years since the publication of the Kangan Report which established an identity and role for technical and further education. This paper seeks to review present practices and questions the present-day applicability of the Kangan philosophy of TAFE being all things to all people.

(Journal abstract)

West, P., **Education in Western Sydney: Federal-State Relations are the Core of the Problem.** Unicorn, 11, 4, 1985: 301-308.

Increasing participation in education in outer suburban Sydney and Melbourne has become a priority for state and national governments. The problems derive from Federal immigration programs and State resettlement of homeless people as well as Sydney's steady westward expansion. Cumbersome Federal-State arrangements for the financing and control of tertiary education prevent solution of these problems. The recently announced committee of inquiry into the problems, and a developing local demand for education, may provide a possible solution.

(Journal abstract)

C TEACHING AND LEARNING

Bloom, L.M., Comber, G.A. and Cross, J.M., **Use of the Microcomputer to Teach the Transformational Approach to Graphing Functions.** International Journal of Mathematical Education in Science and Technology, 17, 1, 1986: 115-123.

The purpose of this paper is to detail the possible involvement of the microcomputer in teaching the transformational approach to graphing functions.

(Journal abstract)

Bloom, L.M., Comber, G.A. and Cross, J.M., **Using the Microcomputer to Simulate the Binomial Distribution and to Illustrate the Central Limit Theorem.** International Journal of Mathematical Education in Science and Technology, 17, 2, 1986: 229-237.

The authors have two programs, written initially for the BBC Acorn B microcomputer, which they have used in the teaching of the binomial distribution and the Central Limit Theorem. These programs are discussed here in detail, together with an indication of their possible use in the classroom situation.

(Journal abstract)

Brittain, T., **Chymotrypsin — a Combined Experiment and Computer Simulation of Pre-steady State and Steady State Enzyme Kinetics.** Biochemical Education, 14, 1, 1986: 33-34.

The paper describes the use of a computer simulation combined with a laboratory experiment to make students aware of the limitation in mechanistic information available from steady-state kinetic measurements and the significant additional mechanistic information available from pre-steady state measurements. The combination of computer simulation and laboratory experiment is considered crucial in developing a clear understanding of kinetic mechanisms in undergraduate students.

(HBG)

Bynner, J., **Masters Teaching in Education by Distance Methods.** Distance Education, 7, 1, 1986: 23-37.

The central aims of Masters teaching in Education are considered against the background of controversy about the viability of teaching the whole of such courses by distance teaching methods. The components of course design in Masters teaching are then examined via distance teaching experience in universities in Australia and the U.K. Design requirements of the main vehicle for Masters teaching, the advanced project, are then considered, leading to a specification of the main types of support facilities: tutor support, library resources, and residential schools. Finally, some distance teaching models for successful Masters teaching are suggested.

(Journal abstract)

Fraser, B.J., Treagust, D.F. and Dennis, N.C., **Development of an Instrument for Assessing Classroom Psychosocial Environment at Universities and Colleges.** Studies in Higher Education, 11, 1, 1986: 43-54.

Despite a strong tradition of research and practical applications involving perceptions of classroom psychosocial environment in primary and secondary schools, surprisingly little analogous work has been conducted at the tertiary level. Consequently, in order to facilitate such work, an economical new instrument called the College and University Classroom Environment Inventory (CUCEI) was developed to assess students' or teachers' perceptions of seven dimensions of the actual and preferred environment (e.g. personalisation, involvement, task orientation, individualisation) of university or college seminars and tutorials. Validation data collected from a sample of 499 students and 20 instructors supported each scale's internal consistency, reliability and discriminant validity in either its actual or preferred form, with either Australian or American students, for both students and instructors, and using either the individual or the class mean as the unit of analysis. Potentially useful applications of the instrument for research purposes and for improving teaching in higher education are considered.

(Journal abstract)

Holdsworth, D.K., **Conductivity Titrations — A Microcomputer Approach.** Journal of Chemical Education, 63, 1, 1986: 73-74.

Many third world countries find it increasingly difficult to purchase commercially produced chemical apparatus and instruments to equip school and university laboratories. Low cost electrochemical equipment, together with recommended experiments, has been developed in a project centred at the University of Dehli, India. The paper describes the use of an inexpensive microcomputer system to complement experimental work in chemistry at the University of Papua New Guinea.

(HBG)

Hubbard, R., **A Comprehensive Scheme to Assist Mathematically Deficient Tertiary Entrants.** International Journal of Mathematical Education in Science and Technology, 17, 2, 1986: 247-251.

The most useful aspects of earlier programmes to assist tertiary entrants with weak mathematics backgrounds have been incorporated in the operation of a Remedial Mathematics Facility.

The operation of the facility is described in the context of the Australian educational environment. The main features of the scheme are a more personal approach, the use of specialised tutors and the provision of additional support throughout the first semester.

(Journal abstract)

Kinnear, J.T., **Using the Domestic Cat in the Teaching of Genetics.** Journal of Biological Education, 20, 1, 1986: 5-11.

The domestic cat has the potential to enrich the learning experiences of students of genetics. Not only is it an animal that is very familiar to students, it also displays genetic polymorphism that is expressed in the readily visible variations in coat colour, coat pattern, and coat composition. The domestic cat can provide exemplars to illustrate many of the concepts of transmission genetics, including dominance, incomplete dominance, multiple allelism, X-linkage and lethality. The cat can also be used to illustrate other relevant concepts, including X-inactivation and the effect of environment on the phenotype, as well as concepts of population genetics. The use of computer simulations or discussions with cat breeders can substitute for breeding experiments.

(Edited Journal abstract)

Pearce, J.M. and O'Brien, R., **Microcomputers in a Beginning Tertiary Physics Course.** Physics Education, 21, 2, 1986: 35-41.

The paper describes the use of a network of microcomputers in a first year physics course at Melbourne College of Advanced Education. The microcomputers are used to promote the doing and learning of physics. Students are exposed to four kinds of applications of computers:

- as a calculator and manipulator of data
- as a tool for curve fitting and word processing
- for control of experimental operations and as a data logging device; and
- to explore the implications of a physical model.

These uses are described in the paper. Student response to the use of microcomputers in the course is discussed.

(HBG)

D INFORMATION NETWORKS

E STUDENTS: GENERAL

Linke, R.D., Barton, A.R. and Cannon, R.A., **Deferment of Entry into Higher Education.** Adelaide, Tertiary Education Authority of South Australia in association with Advisory Centre for University Education, The University of Adelaide, 1985, 118p.

It became increasingly common during the 1970s for students to defer the formal commencement of their higher education studies by a year or two. Why students chose to defer and what the effects of deferment are on academic performance and personal development are among the aims of this study which looks at deferring students entering higher education courses from the South Australian matriculation examination in the years 1979 and 1980. Information was obtained by survey questionnaire and the results of formal assessment. In all, 4199 students were included in the surveys.

The analysis of data indicates that deferment acts as a filtering process in which female students from metropolitan areas and both male and female students from non-metropolitan areas are diverted from entering higher education. However, for the great majority of students who defer, deferment is perceived as valuable personal experience with relevance also to their ability to cope with subsequent academic studies. In terms of academic performance, as measured by weighted GPA scores across all subjects, deferring students consistently obtained higher scores than those who had enrolled directly from school. For the great majority of students, deferment appears to provide an experience rewarding in itself and in its influence on their personal development and academic achievement.

(RAC)

Taylor, J.C. et al, **Student Persistence in Distance Education: A Cross-cultural Multi-institutional Perspective.** Distance Education, 7, 1, 1986: 68-91.

The author coordinated an International Research Project in which essentially the same empirical study was conducted in a variety of settings. The study took its lead from Rekkedal's (1973) study on turn-around time.

Contributors to this first ICDE International Research Project were: L.J. Barker and V.J. White (Darling Downs IAE, Australia), G. Gillard (University of the South Pacific, Fiji), D. Kaufman (Open Learning Institute, Canada), A.N. Khan (Allama Iqbal Open University, Pakistan), R. Mezger (Tasmanian State Institute of Technology, Australia) and the ICDE Research Committee regional coordinators.

(Edited Journal abstract)

F STUDENTS: SELECTION AND PERFORMANCE

Carpenter, P.G. and Hayden, M., **Academic Achievement among Australian Youth.** Australian Journal of Education, 29, 3, 1985: 199-220.

The importance of various attitudinal and motivational dispositions and of various external influences on the academic achievement of students completing the final year (Year 12) of secondary schooling in three Australian States (Victoria, Western Australia, and Queensland) is examined. A model of academic achievement is proposed, and step-wise multiple regression is used to analyse the data. While social origins and type of school attended are found to be significant in predicting Year 12 achievement, the most important predictors are the motivational and attitudinal dispositions of the students, the influence of significant other people, and type of Year 12 course studied. Students who do well in Year 12 are more likely to have parents who are well educated, to have fathers who hold higher prestige occupations, and to have attended an independent rather than a government school. Factors which appear to be most important to Year 12 success are: how students regard their own ability; what type of course they study at Year 12 level; and the amount of positive teacher encouragement to proceed to further studies perceived by students.

(Journal abstract)

G STUDENTS: CAREERS AND EMPLOYMENT

H STAFF

Anwyl, J. and Bowden, J., **Attitudes of Australian University and College Academics to Some Access and Equity Issues, Including Distance Education.** Distance Education, 7, 1, 1986: 106-128.

The paper points to the increasing role governments and

their agencies have in defining the educational tasks of Universities and Colleges in Australia. The paper examines the sympathy of academics in both sectors to selected participation and equity issues of concern to government, including the provision of distance education. Unless there has been a recent and substantial shift in academic opinion, the paper clearly indicates government policies will have only cautious, modest and patchy support from academics. Academic caution and conservatism also challenge the orthodoxies of distance educators. Clearly those involved in distance education will have to give a high priority to demonstrating that past practices and behaviours, which have helped to shape and consolidate conservative academic attitudes, can be improved upon when modern technology and adequate resources are provided to those who believe in what they are doing.

(HBG)

Moses, I., **High Quality Teaching in a University: Identification and Description.** Studies in Higher Education, 10, 3, 1985: 301-313.

At the University of Queensland an increasing number of academic staff use the Tertiary Education Institute's system for the evaluation of teaching. The paper describes the teaching approaches and attitudes to teaching of those staff who were rated by students as superior teachers. Staff who received high ratings included tutors and professors, young and old staff, men and women. They taught in lecture, tutorial, clinical and studio format and in a wide variety of subjects.

Exemplified in five case studies, student responses to the question: "What are this staff member's strengths in teaching?" are categorised. They show that despite the diversity of teacher characteristics and teaching contexts, common elements of "good" teaching are evident. All are professional and personal skills and attitudes: competence in subject matter is a prerequisite: the outstanding teachers are able to communicate their knowledge in a variety of classroom contexts. They have a commitment to facilitating student learning and show concern for the individual student. They are professional in their teaching and serve as a role model for their profession.

(Journal abstract)

I CONTINUING EDUCATION

ABSTRACTORS

H.B. Guthrie, The Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology
R.A. Cannon, University of Adelaide
Society for Research into Higher Education

(From page 12)

VHS and VCRs — to the somewhat more advanced — acoustic coupler and baud rate, geosynchronous satellites and global beams.

The book is not, and does not claim to be, a dictionary or encyclopedia of technical terms for the sophisticated technologist. Think of it rather as what the naive or moderately conversant educator needs on hand to keep up with the new vocabulary demanded by contemporary educational discourse, and without a good smattering of which we will be utterly unintelligible to vast numbers of professionals outside education.

On the debit side, but not of sufficient gravity to put you off buying it, are a few gripes about its production and language. The paper is a bilious green, great for posters but never for a book; in the "Renown" computer typeface which is used, upper and lower case "l"s are totally indistinguisable; the author(s) lapse into the sexist "he" on occasions and quite often display the execrable habit of complicating simple statements by quite unnecessarily adding the word "situation".

In sum, however, it's a useful, timely and very recommendable little book ideally suited for the people it's intended to help.

Lee Andresen,
University of New South Wales.

REVIEW IN BRIEF

Improving Undergraduate Education through Faculty Development. Kenneth E. Eble and Wilbert J. McKeachie, London: Jossey-Bass Ltd, 1985, ISBN 0-87589-643-X, $49.95. (Available from Methuen LBC Ltd, 44-50 Waterloo Road, North Ryde, NSW 2113).

The authors report on an evaluation of a number of faculty development programs supported by Bush Foundation grants to institutions in Minnesota and the Dakotas. They attempt to place their findings in a broader context by surveying the history of faculty development in the USA, and by suggesting what considerations might be especially useful to institutions of similar types to those under review. The final chapter concludes that successful programs were, for the most part, supported from the beginning by senior administrators; they involved academic staff in the planning stages. Traditional forms of staff development, such as study leaves and travel grants, seemed less effective than workshops, seminars and other programs. In the evaluation, curriculum projects were the highest rated activity within the development programs assessed.

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