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Teaching and Learning in Universities in 2001

An interview with Ruth Dunkin, Vice-Chancellor, RMIT University Wednesday 4 July 2001

The interview with Ruth Dunkin was conducted by Alex Radloff, who is Associate Dean (Academic) and Director of Teaching Quality in the Faculty of Life Sciences at RMIT and was, until recently, a member of the HERDSA Executive Committee.

AR Ruth, from your perspective as Vice-Chancellor, what are the challenges that you see facing good teaching in universities today?

RD There are a number of challenges and I think that the emphasis on good teaching and the need for us to provide good teaching has never been higher. It has always been there as an obligation for our students but it is now there in ways that exercise the mind in relation to continued success and viability of our institutions, So, it's an issue that is requiring more management attention than previously. From my observations, one of the significant challenges relates to the basic capability that academic staff have in relation to understanding the business of teaching – the processes of teaching – and the extent to which as institutions we invest in our staff to develop and enhance those capabilities.

We have had in our institutions for a long time staff development units that have tried valiantly to work on improving teaching but their audience has typically been those people who have self identified as having difficulties, who have faced the trigger to learning, the crisis or the trauma, or who have a particular focus on self improvement more generally. What those units have not necessarily been able to address is the systematic building of the teaching capability or understanding of learning processes across the university. If we are going to raise the level of teaching quality across our institutions in a systematic way, it seems to me that that is the fundamental issue that we need to address.

Sitting behind that challenge are a series of sub-challenges as it were, and the first of those are the significant workloads that staff already carry in most institutions. So, the prospect of actually adding a major piece of staff development to those workloads is not an insignificant 'ask'. It's also a workload that comes within an increasingly uncertain environment in which for many staff there is fear and insecurity about ongoing job prospects, the ways in which new modes of performance evaluation are being carried out and a climate of fear which is not necessarily or usually associated with effective learning. It's not the kind of

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HERDSA Office

Office Manager Coral Watson

Administrative Officer Linda Chatel

PO Box 516, Jamison, ACT 2614, Australia
Phone: +61 2 6253 4242
Fax: +61 2 6253 4246
Email: office@herdsa.org.au
Website: www.herdsa.org.au

HERDSA News

Editor Roger Landback
32 Monash Road, Tarragindi, Qld 4121
Phone +61 7 3848 0589
Fax +61 7 3892 5502
Email landbeck@ozemail.com.au

Editorial Committee
Christine Bruce & Linda Conrad

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From the Editor

This issue of HERDSA News contains a message from the President, Angela Brew, appealing to members of the Society to recruit new members in view of the recent decline in membership. In addition to this decline in membership the income from publications has dropped considerably over the past few years. These two factors are making it difficult to sustain the activities of the Society. It is therefore heartening to read the President's report to the AGM this year detailing a considerable list of activities that have been achieved. Members may find this a useful reference when talking to colleagues about what the Society is doing. The HERDSA office can assist the membership drive with information packs and back issues of HERDSA News, please contact Coral Watson about this.

We welcome new members to the Executive Committee and they have supplied pen portraits to let you know more about themselves. We acknowledge the hard work over a number of years of those leaving the Executive.

I am very pleased to include another article by a Vice-Chancellor, the third in the past year. Ruth Dunkin, the Vice-Chancellor of RMIT, has some interesting things to say about teaching and learning in her interview with Alex Radloff, a former member of the Executive. The rest of the issue covers a variety of topics including a timely cautionary tale about multiple choice testing given the probable increasing use of this form of assessment to cope with large classes. It was encouraging to get the letter from Joanne Scott in response to Peter McMahon's article in the April issue. I would encourage more readers to respond in this way.

Readers might also be interested to read the final version of the Eidos Ideas Dossier, which was completely revised following comments on the first draft posted to the ADSIG email list a few months back. It is very helpful authors to get feedback in this way and the Editors of HERD are looking at ways of using the web to provide authors with feedback before publication.

The December issue will be devoted to articles written by colleagues in New Zealand which should give us interesting insights into developments in higher education across the Tasman, judging by the articles received so far. There is probably room for one or two more if folks across the water are feeling inspired.

Roger Landbeck

Apology

My apologies to my former colleague France Mugler, whose title was cut off at the bottom of her book review in the April 2001 edition of the News. It should have read:

France Mugler is Associate Professor of Linguistics at the University of the South Pacific, Laucala Bay Campus, Suva, Fiji Islands.

HERDSA
CONFERENCE 2002

See back page for important announcement about refereeing papers.

environment we try to provide for our students. It s not associated with good learning in those circumstances and I m sure that its not for our staff either. So, there is a bundle of issues in there that are pretty significant.

These issues sit alongside ones that are better known and most talked about, namely ones around declining resource bases for teaching within institutions, the declining public dollar for education, increasing levels of administrative accountability that eat up those resources, and higher levels of overhead consumed by the need to diversify funding bases in institutions, and so on. So, resources that flow through into staffing levels, into learning support resources —whether it s the form of libraries or newer forms of materials, into equipment, into how laboratories are equipped and continue to be maintained, into the very buildings and configuration of spaces within our buildings — all influence the quality of the teaching that is possible within our institutions. So in summary, there are two major aspects. One is the resource base and resource infrastructure to support good teaching. The other is the capability and understanding of what good teaching is and how it is enhanced.

“ What is needed is taking the system view and understanding and analysing where the capability needs to be built and then putting in intervention strategies. ”

AR What do you see as the key issues within the system that are going to facilitate this kind of staff capability? How do we do it?

RD I think that there are two parts to it. One is the capacity to take a systemic view an assessment of capability in and honest and non-accusatory way across the institution. The second is then to devise individual strategies that will actually build that capability. One of the difficulties that I have observed in working with people in those more traditional staff development units is scalability. In that, of course, they parallel the very difficulties the sector at large is actually facing, which is how to go from an elite system in education dealing with relatively few individuals to one that s mass education. It s an exact parallel. It s not clear to me that institutionally we have done the work that allows for the massification of the staff development effort. What is needed is taking the system view and understanding and analysing where the capability needs to be built and then putting in intervention strategies. From an RMIT perspective, that s about establishing and recruiting new sorts of experts to our staff who are expert in particular parts of learning experience design or implementation — getting a higher percentage of specialists who can actually work with people as they teach or that they can train through that process.

The second is having a recruitment process that actually makes it very clear to people that may arrive without formal underpinning capabilities in teaching and learning that it will be an expectation of us and them that they participate in the process whereby they will develop the theoretical underpinning to what will be a large part of their profession. There is also a need with existing staff to develop staff development programs that are cost effective in terms of individual staff time and the goals of the institution. And, again at RMIT, one of the ways that that s done is through program renewal, which is part of one of the major change initiatives of the institution designed to improve the quality of the teaching and learning experiences. But the approach to the program renewal process needs to be an action research process so that we re constantly tied into ensuring that we don t have one intervention, one outcome but we have one outcome, that is then fed by a series of intervention strategies. We need to get as many beans for our buck as we can around a scarce resource in the institution, which is staff time. Therefore, staff time has got to have multiple outcomes and the capability can be built that way. We also know from our own understanding of how students learn that action based learning and learning applied in context is a pretty powerful learning technique. So, we are actually starting to apply some of the theory to the very way in which we go about trying to build staff capability.

AR You mentioned academic expertise and presumably underlying that is the idea of team working and collaboration to achieve outcomes. That s quite a novel thing for many academics but it is something we know works well in terms of effecive learning. How can we encourage perhaps individualistic academics to participate in a more collaborative approach to the task?

RD Part of the culture that we are needing to change is the notion that the academic has to be a master of everything that she or he does. It s a very high level of expectation that we impose on our staff and we let our staff impose upon themselves. My observation has been that when people have been brave enough to break out and to share responsibility for tasks with others in teams; where they get to see the benefit that other people s expertise brings to their working lives, they are very willingly taking that up. The relief that comes from not having to be the master of every element of the process is enormous and obviously provides the workload relief that we are looking for.

“ The second is having a recruitment process that actually makes it very clear to people that may arrive without formal underpinning capabilities in teaching and learning that it will be an expectation of us and them that they participate in the process whereby they will develop the theoretical underpinning to what will be a large part of their profession. ”

But having said that, it is important in thinking about the future of academic work within institutions, that we don t confuse special roles with specialist people and that, when we put together academic work, we recognise that the very processes already require teams of

people to be put together. Whether it s one person in the Office of Prospective Students who recruits the student in the first place to the person who is in the classroom to the person who does the assessment to the person who is the Graduation Office that arranges for the student to graduate, there is a team at work. Whether we like it or not the student is in a process and the academic at the moment cannot control or even influence significant parts of that process. It s about taking that recognition, building a better systems view of what it is that we are on about with institutions and allowing new roles and teams to be created that relieve the expectations on the person who tries to do it all.

AR So far we have talked about teaching and clearly it s the core business of all universities but of course research is another goal to which universities are committed. There is often a real or perceived tension between the teaching and the research aspects of the job for many staff. What are some of the strategies to resolve this tension or to move beyond it?

RD There has been a lot written about the extent to which the nexus between teaching and research is real or not and clearly there are ways in which the nexus can be improved and should be improved if we are serious about having research and teaching as a practice. The second thing is that it has traditionally been the case that what is rewarded in academic careers is research performance, which is clearly around the building of the body of knowledge. At RMIT, since we introduced our academic promotion scheme in 1992, we have embodied within that scheme the notion of a holistic academic worker where there is an expectation that there be activity in both teaching and research. There is recognition that there may be different balances particularly at different levels but between individuals even on the same level, about the extent to which they focus on teaching and focus on research.

That notion of a holistic academic as a knowledge worker is clearly under threat as people try to deal with the new professionalism that has come into the higher education market in particular as a result of the new providers which have clearly got very strong production line specialisms applying. These specialisms go to the very pedagogy that underpins our institutions and which, as already indicated, is perhaps not as strong as it needs to be. Having said that there is a need to professionalise against those specialist elements, it doesn t seem to me that it follows naturally that we have to have people who are specialists and career paths that are specialist. When we look at academic promotion, there is a past which has tended to focus on research and understate teaching which clearly has exacerbated the issues around incentives to enhancing capability in teaching. But there is also a future that shows one scenario of a fragmented series of career paths. There are many staff within newer institutions such as RMIT who would like to see a teaching only profession. They want teaching rewarded in the same way that research is rewarded. However, it doesn t seem to me that that s any more satisfactory in terms of what we say we are on about as an institution than the view that says that there are research only rewards. If we believe in establishing or re-establishing in an effective way the nexus between teaching and research through adoption of devices such as the Boyer Scholarship concept, then we need to continue to have the holistic academic while recognising that there will be specialisation of function and perhaps specialisation of career at the choice of staff going on in parallel.

AR **And possibly also within any individual s career trajectory there may be different emphases along the career path?**

RD Absolutely. And one of the reasons for trying to get a three year perspective into thinking about staff development for both individuals and for supervisors is to try to allow people actually to think through what the shape of their academic career is going to be and to allow focus on particular aspects of the academic endeavour.

AR Our discussion so far has centred on how an institution might support, enhance and reward teaching. On a broader level, as I m sure you are aware, there has been talk about the accreditation of university teachers and a number of different schemes have been suggested. What are your views on accreditation?

RD I have been watching those initiatives and discussions with some interest. There is, as I understand it, not significant take up of the scheme in the UK which suggests that the rewards are not in place back in the institutions for those staff who actually go through that process though I suspect that that will change over time. The issue really is whether in fact we will be able to professionalise the teaching activities within our institutions without having some enforced external compliance body. If we are dealing with a profession one would have hoped that in fact that would not have been necessary.

AR But are we dealing with a profession? Do academics perceive themselves as belonging to a profession of that kind or do they see themselves as belonging to a particular profession such as physicists or sociologists or chiropractors?

RD I think that it is a separate issue from loyalties to particular discipline groups. But underlying both is the notion and acceptance that it is a profession as opposed to a trade. And so it faces all the same issues of the professions that we see amongst lawyers and doctors and so on including issues about self regulation as opposed to external regulation. And this issue about national accreditation is precisely that debate within the education sector. Will people self regulate or will they in fact only do so when somebody is requiring some sort of compliance? As I said, I would hope that we would do it on a self regulatory basis because we understand that that s the very basis of the profession. If you have people who are committed to learning both for themselves and for their students, one would expect that developing teaching capability would be part of continuous improvement.

Ruth Dunkin is Vice-Chancellor of RMIT. Previously she held several posts as Deputy Vice-Chancellor from 1989 to 2000. Before entering the academic world she held several positions in both the private and public sector.

President's Report to the HERDSA Inc Annual General Meeting, July 10th 2001

By Angela Brew

I recently decided to take stock of what has been achieved during the two years of this Executive. We have been constantly reminded that the days when people were able to give freely of their time to the Society are now past. The pressure on us all in higher education means that time is at a premium and people are having to make hard choices as to what they put their time into. Institutions are increasingly refusing to support the activities of the Society without asking something in return.

Moreover, the Executive has become increasingly conscious that we are not paying our way. During the past year we have had to call on our reserves to stay afloat. We have put a priority on putting in place structures and strategies to ensure that we plan initiatives with the financial consequences in mind and we have initiated new projects to bring additional benefits to members. But it will take time for the benefits to flow through. We are pleased that our advertising campaigns targeted at heads of institutions and new staff in universities has successfully resulted in a number of new members, but our publication sales and our memberships are down. On another front we are still weathering the effects of the introduction of the GST in Australia.

Unless the trend of a decline in membership is reversed this year, HERDSA will not be solvent this time next year. The Executive has discussed a number of strategies to raise additional revenue this year. But the long and the short of it is that we are dependent on members to do their bit for the Society. If every HERDSA member introduced just one friend or colleague to the society, then HERDSA's troubles would be at an end. The Executive has cut expenditure as far as is practically possible, but our income must increase if we are to stay afloat. You will hear more of this in our treasurer's report.

So what has been achieved by the current Executive? The list its substantial and real achievements is a long one.

1. The business of the Executive

- The changes to the Constitution agreed at the last AGM resulted in the Society being accepted for Incorporation in the ACT. Importantly the changes also recognised the Treaty of Waitangi.
- The Executive has worked to establish new ways of working with New Annual Projects (NAPs) and Ongoing Activities and Responsibilities (OARs). The NAPs are a way of involving members more in the work of the Society and we are pleased that there has been a good response to our call for NAP Proposals.

“ Unless the trend of a decline in membership is reversed this year, HERDSA will not be solvent this time next year. ”

- Earlier in the year, in collaboration with the Executive and based on ideas sent in by members, I prepared a submission to the Senate Inquiry on higher education. This is an important document and we shall await the report of the Inquiry with interest.
- The work of the HERDSA office has been affected this year by staff changes which have interrupted the flow of its work. Tracey Williams worked until April when we were joined by our current Administrative Officer, Linda Chatel. I would like particularly to thank Coral Watson for the excellent way in which she has kept the office going during what has been a difficult year.
- The Executive has also worked to redesignate the Office positions to ensure they more appropriately reflect current responsibilities. They have also established a position description for members of the Executive so they know what to expect when becoming an Executive member. We have finalised renegotiating and significantly altering the contract with Adult Learning Australia (ALA), so that the HERDSA Office is now completely self-managing.
- We have actively represented HERDSA in the International Consortium for Educational Development and we are delighted that our HERDSA conference next year will back on to the ICED Conference which is being held in Perth.
- We have made progress on developing a scheme for Teacher Accreditation, on the revision of the Prompts for Good Practice, the revision of the HERDSA website, and a strategy for responding quickly to media statements through our Rapid Response Team and we have developed a Communication Strategy to make the way we communicate with each other and with others outside the Society more effective.

2. Publications

Elaine Martin, Mike Prosser and Peter Ling ceased their work as editors of HERD and I would like to express thanks to them for the excellent work they did in sustaining the international reputation of the Journal during their time as editors.

We welcomed our New HERD Editorial group: Peter Taylor (convenor), Carol Bowie, John Dearn, Chris Trevitt and Richard James. Our new editors have moved HERD to on-line submission and refereeing and we are in the process of revising the peer reviewing process for HERD bringing the reviewing process for other HERDSA publications alongside it. We have renegotiated and signed the Carfax contract.

Susan Beatty has resigned as Occasional Publications editor. Susan did a great deal of work to reconstitute the Guides, establish guidelines for authors and reviewers, and carry out a review with the other members of the Occasional Publications Editorial Committee, of which guides should be

re-published. Peter Hodder has agreed to be our interim editor. Susan, together with Stuart Beatty, developed our great new stationery design.

I am pleased to report that the republication agreement with Witswatersrand Press has finally resulted in the volume: Makoni, S. (2000) *Improving Teaching and Learning in Higher Education: A Handbook for Southern Africa.* Witwatersrand Press and the Higher Education Research and Development Society of Australasia.

3. Conferences

We are pleased that conference venues are now booked for 2002 (Perth) & 2003 (Christchurch NZ). The Executive has revised, enlarged and updated the Guidelines for HERDSA Conference Convenors and we are now seeking offers to host the 2004 conference.

In a bid to raise additional revenue, two pre-conference workshops have been held at this year s conference. We are grateful to Carol Bowie and Alex Radloff for facilitating these workshops. It is with very great pleasure that I was able to award a New Researcher Prize to Cristina Poyatos Matos during this conference.

4. Visiting Scholar

We were pleased to welcome as our Visiting Scholar in 2000 Dr Charles Glassick of the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Higher Education. Dr Glassick carried out a full program of seminars in Australia and New Zealand on the topics of Reinventing Undergraduate Education, Scholarship Reconsidered and Assessed, and Trends in Faculty Scholarship with Emphasis on Developments in the Scholarships of Teaching and Engagement.

" If every HERDSA member introduced just one friend or colleague to the society, then HERDSA's troubles would be at an end. "

5. Branches and SIGs

The Executive has worked this year to complete a branches and SIGS liaison and information folder which we hope will make it easier for new branches and SIGs to form. We are in the process of redesigning the HERDSA Website, but a member s section has been established on the Website during the year. As the new Website comes on stream we hope usage of the member section will grow.

Conclusion

I would like to express my personal thanks to our office staff; to Linda Chatel, whom we are delighted has joined us recently and to Coral Watson who has served us so valiantly over the year. I would also personally like to thank all of the members of the HERDSA National Executive who have worked tirelessly for the benefit of the Society. In particular I would like publicly to thank them for the way in which they have supported me as President. All of these are dedicated people who find time for HERDSA from their very busy lives. Sometimes this is a real and genuine struggle. But I hope you can see from the things that they have achieved, the way in which the Executive has worked to the benefit of the Society, its members and ultimately to the improvement of teaching and learning in higher and tertiary education.

New Members of the HERDSA Executive

Several new members took their place on the HERDSA Executive at the annual conference. We asked them to write a pen portrait so that readers could get to know them

Here is the result.

Pip Bruce Fergusson

Dr Pip Bruce Ferguson has been a member of HERDSA since the late 1980s. She is a staff developer at The Waikato Polytechnic in Hamilton, New Zealand. Since the mid-1990s she has been the Waikato (province) representative on the New Zealand HERDSA Committee, along with Dr Neil Haigh from the University of Waikato. In 2000 she was elected as Chair of the New Zealand Committee, replacing Dr Mary Melrose who retired from the position after lengthy service, but remains on the Committee (much to Pip s relief!)

Pip gained her doctorate in 1999 with a thesis using action research to develop a teacher-friendly research culture in her polytechnic. It aimed to assist staff who had previously not seen themselves as researchers, to meet new research requirements, and has been effective in that aim. Pip is looking forward to working closely with Maureen Reid, the other new New Zealander on the Exec, and with the Australian members of the Exec, in these challenging times for both higher education and the Society.

Pip Bruce Ferguson
espmf@twp.ac.nz

Allan Goody

I am a lecturer in higher education development in the Centre for Staff Development at the University of Western Australia (UWA). My responsibilities include coordinating and teaching in the teaching and learning programs for academic staff and tutors at UWA. In addition, I coordinate the UWA Teaching Internship Scheme and contribute to Issues in Teaching and Learning, a monthly publication of the Centre for the Advancement of Teaching and Learning at UWA.

Prior to arriving at UWA in 1999, I spent 10 years at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign (UIUC) in the USA and completed masters and doctoral degrees in adult and higher education. During part of this time I worked in the Office of Instructional Resources as an academic developer and held an adjunct position in the College of Education, teaching in the adult and higher education graduate degree programs. I also co-authored a book Program Development in Continuing Education. My undergraduate degree is in accounting and agribusiness from the Darling Downs Institute of Advanced Education (now University of Southern Queensland). After spending

six years as an accountant I moved to Curtin University of Technology and taught agribusiness courses at Muresk Institute of Agriculture for several years.

My professional interests are in teaching and learning and professional development, particularly for new and future academics, continuing education program planning and service-learning. I am a co-editor of the HERDSA Guide Series, on the planning committee for the HERDSA 2002 conference and the ICED 2002 conference, a member of the HERDSA WA Branch committee and the Adult Learning Australia WA Branch committee. Personally I enjoy travel and photography and maintaining a stress free life.

Tony Herrington

Dr Tony Herrington is a Senior Lecturer in Education in the Faculty of Community Services, Education and Social Sciences at Edith Cowan University. Tony coordinates the Graduate Certificate of Education (Tertiary Teaching) where he works with staff across the institution on projects designed to improve teaching and learning. Tony also lectures and supervises students in mathematics education courses. His principal area of research has been in the professional development and use of technology to promote effective learning in higher education. Tony is the conference convenor for the HERDSA 2002 Conference being held in Perth at the Joondalup Campus of ECU.

Peter Hodder.

Dr Peter Hodder is currently Assistant to the Chief Executive at Waikato Institute of Technology in Hamilton, New Zealand, where among activities related to the management of the institute, he has responsibility for media relations and public relations

Originally trained as a geochemist, his previous appointments were in the publishing division of the New Zealand Department of Scientific and Industrial Research, and later at the University of Waikato in Hamilton, initially with the Centre for Continuing Education and then with the Department of Earth Sciences. His teaching and research interests were in natural hazards, environmental geology, geochemistry and geoscience education.

His interests in education were further extended by development of a national touring geoscience exhibition and associated educational programmes and his involvement n the establishment of Exscite (Explorations in Science and Technology), an interactive science-technology exhibition/education centre in Hamilton. He continues to chair the governing trust of Exscite and currently is chairman of the New Zealand Association of Science Technology Centres.

He has been involved with the schools science fair movement in New Zealand for many years, being the Waikato Regional judge for the past six years, and one of the judges of the national fair since 1999. He has also been involved with a number of science and technology promotion activities, most recently Technofest , a festival highlighting technology in the community.

Christine Jessup

Christine Jessup first became aware of HERDSA in the late 80 s as a beginning learning skills adviser recently returned from teaching overseas. In taking a position at Flinders University South Australia, Christine began working mainly with International postgraduate students. HERDSA was the source of a great deal of collegial support in dealing with the teaching and learning issues at the heart of the difficulties students face in negotiating university study.

It was a natural progression (under the tutorage of Dr. Vic Beasley) that she saw the potential of academic staff development as a liberating factor in making the teaching and learning experiences of staff and students better for both.

Now at her fourth university placement Christine has a particular interest in the role of language and learning and more recently identity as it relates to learning and is presently working at the University of Tasmania in the Office of the Pro-Vice Chancellor teaching and Learning .

In joining the executive of HERDSA Christine is interested in furthering the HERDSA message of excellence in teaching and is keen to bring the HERDSA conference to Tasmania.

Maureen Reid

Maureen Reid is the Treasurer of HERDSA New Zealand branch. Maureen has been a member of the HERDSA since 1988. She has actively contributed to the organisation of local HERDSA seminar presentations and was the programme co-ordinator for the HERDSA Conference on Transformation in Higher Education, held in Auckland in 1998.

Maureen is currently the Manager of the Staff Development/Research Office in the Corporate Services Directorate at Auckland University of Technology (AUT). This role has widened her perceptions of the role of the infrastructure of the University in supporting learning, teaching and research and finds that her previous role as a Lecturer assists her to promote better liaison between the Faculties of the University and Corporate Services. Maureen has recently chaired the Charter Secretariat for AUT where a new Charter was developed through a public consultation process and is currently assisting with the review of the Constitution of AUT Council. Previous roles have included Manager of The Career Centre, and RPL Co-ordinator for Student Services Division where she undertook research into both career pathways and non-formal credit processes.

Maureen is keen to hear and represent the views of HERDSA members at Executive level and to promote the contribution of new members to HERDSA forums. Maureen supports the current HERDSA membership drive and in particular the recruitment of new members with an interest in higher education policy, leadership and discipline-based research.

Heather Sparrow s pen portrait will appear in the next issue.

HERDSA Conference 2001

The annual conference of HERDSA was held at the University of Newcastle from the 8th to 11th July. This report presents a summary of the paper presented by the winner of the prize for the best paper written by a new researcher and some brief impressions of the conference.

HERDSA Prize for the Best Paper by a New Researcher 2001

The HERDSA prize for the best paper written by a new researcher went this year to Cristina Poyatos Matas, a lecturer in Spanish Studies in the School of Languages and Linguistics at Griffith University. The prize was presented by the HERDSA President, Angela Brew, during the annual conference at Newcastle in July.

Cristina's paper was entitled '**The IGCRA (Individual, Group, Classroom Reflective Action) technique: a partnership to improve teaching and learning.**' It reported the development and evaluation of the IGCRA (Individual, Group, Classroom Reflective Action) technique, which allows educators and learners to monitor and evaluate teaching and learning in a subject as a continuous process to enhance the quality of their educational experiences in a supportive and dialogical environment. The model of the technique which was implemented involves three stages: 1) The creation of personal diaries by the learners and the teacher to encourage reflective learning and teaching at the end of each class; 2) the creation of a small group diary twice or three times in the semester, based on the individual diaries; and 3) the students-teacher negotiation to promote exchange of ideas for improvement based on the outcomes of the group and teacher's diaries.

The research was carried out with a class of 20 evening students taking the subject Intermediate Spanish I. The teacher was a Spanish native speaker who had been teaching Spanish as a foreign language for 10 years, five of those at University level in the Australian context.

The Classroom Procedure.

1) The individual stage: The creation of individual weekly diary entries by the learners and the teacher. These diaries were written in Spanish at the end of every class. The learners reflected on their learning experience, including comments on their opinions and feelings towards the teaching and teaching environment, the learning strategies that they employed, and the learning problems that they experienced, as well as their views of the possible reasons and solutions for them. The individual diaries were written in the last 10 minutes of each class, except for 4 occasions in which students took them home. In addition, the teacher reflected on her teaching and perceptions of the learning environment by writing a personal journal entry at the end of each class at the same time that students were writing in their diaries

2) The group stage: The creation of a group diary entry. In this stage students discussed, in small groups of 4 or 5, the contents of their individual diaries in order to create an entry for their group diary. The discussions took place in Spanish. This group diary entry reflected the opinion of the group and a representative member selected by the group wrote it while the exchange process was taking place among the members of the group. These group diaries were created in weeks 4, 8 and 12 of the 14 weeks of the teaching semester and students took around 20 minutes to produce them

3) The classroom stage: The students-teacher negotiation. This stage followed the creation of small group diaries and it lasted between 20 and 30 minutes. The different groups reported to the rest of the classroom. Then, taking into account the outcomes of the different group diaries and the teacher's diaries, negotiation took place in order to evaluate and improve the teaching and learning process and to find out solutions for the problems encountered.

The Results.

A. Benefits for Students

There were several benefits for students. The technique encouraged reflective learning. It also provided the opportunity to influence the teaching processes to improve the way in which students learn and gave the students a better understanding of the choices made by the teacher in the teaching process.

In relation to learning Spanish the students could practice the language in a meaningful and motivational context and in a non-threatening and supportive environment in which learners help each other.

B. Benefits for the teacher.

The use of Learners Diaries helped the teacher to improve teaching through:

1. Getting continuous feedback from the learners on their learning.
2. Providing space to clarify students queries of different teaching choices, learning problems and assessment.

C. Benefits for the teaching and learning environment.

The technique created a positive dialogue between the learners and the teacher on the teaching and learning process, leaving room for negotiation and for improvement. A partnership between students and the lecturer was thus created through which students were able to express what they really thought about the teaching received and their learning with the protection of the shelter created by the group.

The problem of using the model with large classes was recognised and an alternative model using short reports instead of diaries was described. The value of the model is that it has the potential to be used in other discipline areas and is not confined to language teaching.

The project was funded by a grant from the Committee for the Advancement of University Teaching (CAUT).

Impressions from the HERDSA Conference.

Cristina has contributed these impressions of the conference .

Participating in the HERSDA congress has opened my eyes to a New World. If being part of the congress per se was as great as having a chocolate cake, receiving the HERSDA award to a new research in the area of Higher Education was like getting the cherry on the cake! I would have never dreamt that my first publication in this area was going to be so well received. The award gave me a real boost of confidence.

❝ This made me realize once more how much we can learn from sharing with each other our research, and how important is to break the boundaries among disciplines and to support each other's work in our common cause to enhance teaching and learning in Higher Education in the world. ❞

The congress was a great learning experience. This was a great opportunity to find out about what is currently taking place in this area in Australia, New Zealand, UK, South Africa, Singapore, USA and other countries, as well as to meet and chat with experienced researchers in this area from all around the world. The slow bus ride between the different hotels and the University of Newcastle was one of the best venues to network and get to know other researchers participating in the congress. There, I also managed to practice my rusty Portuguese while talking with Isabel Huet Silva, a researcher from Portugal, about her study in Aveiro.

I was very impressed with the diverse range of disciplines present in the congress (mathematics, medicine, accountancy, law, medicine, IT and many others). This made me realize once more how much we can learn from sharing with each other our research, and how important is to break the boundaries among disciplines and to support each other s work in our common cause to enhance teaching and learning in Higher Education in the world. I also learnt that cutting edge research and developments are taking place in Australasia, as this was mentioned by international speakers such as Professor Norman Longworth, who referred to the use of learning communities in Newcastle and other parts of Australia.

One of the highlights of the congress for me was meeting Angela Carbone, a senior lecturer in IT at Monash University and the recipient of the 1998 Prime Minister s University Teaching Award. As a current Griffith University nominee for the Australian awards for University teaching 2001, it was very useful for me to listen to Angela s experiences in her journey towards her deserved national teaching award. Now I know that the award goes to the best candidates, she is such an inspiring lecturer!

At the end of my paper, I mentioned my next research venture with Associate Professor Chew Ng to develop and use the Web-based version of the IGCRA technique with Accountancy students learning on-line. Then, I found out that Angela has been working with her IT students in a similar evaluation technique. We spent some time talking about the possibility of engaging in a collaborative research study to bring together the knowledge that we have acquired implementing her technique in the IT context, and the IGCRA technique in the Spanish and Accountancy contexts. Therefore, we would be approaching HERSDA in the near future to find out if they may be interested in us writing a guide on the topic of Teacher-Student collaboration to evaluate and enhance the teaching and learning processes in a constantly changing Higher Education world .

Finally, I would like to take this opportunity to thank Dr Carol Bowie and Professor Peter Taylor from the Griffith Institute of Higher Education for their positive feedback on the IGCRA technique and encourage me to participate in this congress. I will also like to say that I will always be in debt with the HERSDA 2001 committee for helping me to start my career in this area with their award.

And regarding HERSDA, I hope to continue learning from all the knowledgeable, experienced and cheerful members of their society, as well as contributing to enhance the quality of Higher Education in the world with all of them.

Cristina Poyatos Matas
Email contact:
C.Matas@mailbox.gu.edu.au

Here are some further impressions of the conference written by Debbie Herbert who was the winner of the prize for the paper written by a new researcher at the 1999 conference.

Reflections on the HERDSA 2001 Conference

Being a Queenslander, I have to admit that one of things I was looking forward to about the conference this year, was the opportunity to experience a few winter days for a change! Of course, this was in addition to hearing about the variety of learning partnerships that have been, and are, operating in universities around Australia and overseas. I wasn t disappointed on either count. The weather was sufficiently cold (particularly along the beautiful beachfront — if you were lucky enough to be staying oceanside of the city), and it was evident that partnerships in research, teaching, learning, and staff development are an important feature in higher education landscape.

An obvious difference between the HERDSA conference this year and those of previous years, was the variety of presentation formats: round table; case study; show and tell; and paper presentations. This flexibility of format encouraged delegates to present their work in ways they may not have considered before, and also to present work they may not have seen as conference suitable before. I particularly enjoyed the show and tell presentation by a team from the University of Wollongong with their UniLearning project for online academic skills learning. Despite the technical glitches, they were able to give the audience a guided tour of this web-resource from the users perspective.

On a social level, the welcome reception at the Conservatorium of Music was a treat, with performances by students playing piano, violin, flute, classical guitar and the pipe organ. It was a wonderful introduction to Newcastle and the Conference. This was the 3rd HERDSA conference I have attended - my first was in 1999 as a postgraduate student. I continually enjoy the collegial feeling that surrounds these conferences, and the opportunity to meet new delegates and catch up those I have met before.

Debra Herbert

Debbie is now Evaluations Manager of Academic Consultancy and Evaluation Services, at the Teaching and Educational Development Institute, The University of Queensland

Contact email:
d.herbert@tedi.uq.edu.au

Practical Advice for Tutoring Undergrads

By Peter McMahon

What university courses are

University courses are two way exchanges of information between the university and the student with the tutor in the middle. The tutor should be a two way conduit to inform students what the university wants and to inform the course coordinator what the students think about the course The university communicates mainly through the course lectures and readings, and the course guide, plus whatever the tutor says. The student communicates formally through assignments, exams and tutorial participation, and more informally through contact with the tutor and course coordinator.

The role of tutors

The tutor must ensure the content of the course is covered; that is, that at least students do the readings (and hopefully attend lectures) and get a chance to discuss course content in tutorials. Tutors must also promote the generic learning skills of students.

Generic learning skills

Generic learning skills are those abilities essential to academic success and subsequent professional life. The most important generic learning skills are: critical thinking; essay writing; reading in depth; group participation; and doing exams.

Critical thinking

Critical or analytical thinking is the essential academic skill. Students must be made aware what it is and why it is so important, not just for university success but for all subsequent life experience. Remind students that skill in critical thinking is, quite simply, the means to power and wealth. It is, however, a very hard thing to do at the levels required for academic success, especially for those students from socio-cultural backgrounds which ignore or even discourage such endeavour. Students must be directed to study hard enough to understand essential concepts and then be encouraged to try out their own ideas. Student confidence to question and propose alternative positions is crucial to effective critical thinking. Tutors must try to avoid closing down discourse in favour of allowing the student to work it out for themselves (with guidance from the tutor where appropriate).

Essay writing

Communication skills are necessary to convey the results of research and thought to others, and still the essential communication skill is structured writing, or essays. The academic essay is the result of thousands of years experimentation in trying to say a lot in the least time. Hence the specific form of academic essay structure. The essence of good essay writing is effective structure, which is basically the existence of three parts - introduction, body, conclusion. Structure and the need for linking are the two most important aspects of essay writing. Remember that ultimately essays are stories that use information and argument to convey meaning about some subject matter. Furthermore, the way information is communicated seriously affects the intake of that communication - so good writing really matters. (The poor quality of much academic writing is one of things students most complain about, and quite rightly).

Referencing

The academic essay is also identified by the existence of referencing. This is not a simple concept and needs explaining to students. Referencing is designed to enhance the authority of the essay and to enable further research to precede from it. All technical details, although important in themselves, are to achieve these ends. My personal rule is that as long as the referencing system is logical and consistently used it is satisfactory.

Originality

Students are often confused about how originality (the student s own ideas) and the need to reference (other peoples ideas and information) relate to each other. In essays students must use other peoples work to construct an argument; it is in combining source material to build a new analysis that students can show originality. To use a metaphor: an essay (or argument) is like a brick wall with source material being the bricks and the student s own conclusions being the mortar.

Reading

Students often do not know how to read academic texts and there is a large waste of time because of this. There are some useful remedial methods (eg previewing, looking for the structure), but it is important to stress the need to engage the student in the reading process. This can result in negative responses to the text by students, but as long as these responses can be explained, this is a good thing. Remind students that the reading process is the mirror image to the (essay) writing process.

Group participation

Being able to communicate verbally in front of others, especially strangers, is an essential academic and life skill, and to develop this skill is one of the purposes of tutorials. It is however, extremely difficult for some students and although there are some practical methods of minimising such difficulty, ultimately I know of no short term solutions. In my view, the best approach is practice and this is best achieved through group work (ie breaking the tutorial into smaller groups). This both increases the opportunity for students to talk and reduces their audience to a more comfortable number.

Running tutorials

Tutorials are the student s time to ask questions and develop further their understanding of course content and generic learning skills. As tempting as it sometimes is, the tutor should try not to turn them into tutor-focused mini-lectures. Like any other formal mode of communication, tutorials should be structured, both over the session and over the semester. Thus, tutors should tell students what each tutorial is doing and why. Tutors should use the first tutorial to establish the basic rules and for familiarization; use the last to review and provide closure. For the first tutorial I recommend reading aloud important parts of the course guide; never assume it will otherwise be read. I also suggest eliciting written feedback on students perception of the course and how it relates to them. To do this I use two paragraphs: one paragraph expresses the students hopes for the course, the other any fears about the course. This is an extraordinarily useful early guide to what is on the students minds.

Variety adds to the enjoyment and thus efficacy of tutorials. Various kinds of group work, debates, role playing and other forms of participation give students the opportunity to behave differently and show different parts of their personalities, thus engaging with the course content in different ways. Students do not always respond positively to such activities, but do not be discouraged; do, however, pay real attention to exactly how the exercise is to carried out: how to place the chairs; whether and when to use the whiteboard, overhead projector, etc; when to give instructions; whether to appoint group leaders or spokespersons or scribes, etc. Such details can radically effect the success of such activities.

Some general points

Never forget that learning is done by students and that tutors only facilitate. Thus, do everything possible to promote the students' sense of responsibility regarding their work. Accordingly, develop the students' sense of authorial identity in their essays; encourage them to 'believe' in their work and their arguments. Institutions inevitably endeavour to reconstruct people to fit the desired institutional form, and universities do this, but genuine education arises from the individual accepting personal responsibility for their own learning and the ideas that arise from it. So, within the necessary boundaries, nurture individuality in students.

Marking

This is, without question, the worst aspect of tutoring, but it is part of the job and it must be done properly as it is the main way the university communicates with the student. Although little discussed, marking is usually done with an eye to a certain grade profile (usually one third passes, one third credits, one third distinctions and high distinctions). Thus, students are being assessed relative to other students, not relative to some ideal achievement level. Students should know this and it is a useful thing to keep in mind when trying to explain why certain students got certain marks. Remember that it is their work, not yours, and so it should be marked not by what you might have done but by what they did do. So, while maintaining appropriate standards overall, do not be hard on students if they do not meet your own personal standards. Marking should always be backed up with the availability of further feedback and then remedial assistance, and this is especially true if the assessment has been negative. From my experience students will respond well to negative assessment as long as it is placed in overall context and as long as they are directed towards meaningful response. For this reason, it is bad practice to mark exams hard since there is no opportunity for further feedback or remedial contact.

Student contact outside tutorials

Students do need to see tutors outside tutorial times, sometimes quite often. In my view, tutors need to show some flexibility in this regard (ie not just a two hour slot on Tuesday morning in their office) and should provide students with a reasonably reliable mode of contact, such as by phone or e-mail. Such contact can be very effective in alleviating student confusion and angst and thus allow them to direct their efforts and precious time efficiently.

Limits to responsibility

Keep in mind that for some students tertiary education is a difficult, even confronting experience. It is thus necessary sometimes to understand the personal, professional or other aspects of a student's life to assess whether extensions or other forms of special assistance are justified. The university does not pay you for this, but it can really matter to students. Beyond this, there are professional counsellors to help students with the more difficult problems.

Student feedback

The best feedback tutors get on their work is from students because they are the only people who really know how the tutor is doing, and this applies to the formal student assessment as well. In truth, such formal feedback tends to reflect popularity, which is not the same as real educational ability, and in any tutorial there will usually be one or two students who think the tutor is wonderful no matter what, and one or two who think the opposite no matter what. Nonetheless, within these extremes there are significant messages for astute tutors in all forms of student feedback.

Tutor's attitude

A tutor's attitude to the course they are teaching really matters, so drum up some enthusiasm. Furthermore, if the tutor enjoys the tutorials this will be communicated to students with beneficial effects. Humour, for instance, is a very effective educational tool. Finally, tutors are (or should be) important role models for their students; although tutoring should not be a dramatic performance (because this places emphasis on the tutor and not the students), give them someone to remember and respect.

Dr. PeterMcmahon has taught as social sciences lecturer and a specialist learning skills teacher over a period of ten years at Murdoch University. In December 2000 he was awarded one of twenty five Murdoch University 25th Anniversary medals. Recently his PhD thesis was accepted for publication as a book titled 'Global Control: Information Technology and Globalisation Since 1845,'

Contact:

peterjohnmcmahon@bigpond.com

LAUNCHING...THE HERDSA GUIDE SERIES

The progressive blurring of the boundaries between the roles of researcher, teacher, curriculum designer, manager and professional development or learning support specialist, has made redundant the distinction between the Society's "Green Guides" and its "Gold Guides". The providers of higher education represent a mix of skills and attributes that all contribute to preparing students who, as Ingrid Moses has previously described "will be prepared as educated, culturally and socially aware people to lead the professions, and will be life-long learners".

HERDSA Guides incorporate the Green and Gold Guides and will continue to produce new volumes. The first – *Reciprocal Peer Coaching* – was launched at the conference in July. All guides contain pragmatic ideas for immediate use by teachers, curriculum developers and managers. Others describe, analyse and discuss particular challenges for teaching or learning and suggest ways in which those challenges can be resolved. While early drafts of a Guide may be designed to serve the needs of a particular subject area or educational purpose, as it develops most are found to have wider application. The refereeing and editorial process to which all Guides are subjected, generally seek this wider applicability in manuscripts. Both this transferability and the sharing of innovative practices within and across disciplines are hallmarks of a HERDSA Guide.

Reply to Peter McMahon's 'Lessons from ten years at the coalface'

by Joanne Scott

While I enjoyed reading many of Peter McMahon s insights in his article Lessons from ten years at the coalface (HERDSA News, April 2001), I was disturbed by some of his comments about bad teaching. Of particular concern to me were remarks about academics with inappropriate personality types for teaching and the statement that some people will never make good teachers, a harsh fact that is almost completely evaded at the present .

Perhaps I am simply contributing to that complete evasion of a harsh fact , but I think that a more productive approach to minimising bad teaching and maximising good teaching is to rework one of McMahon s comments about students and apply it to academics. McMahon writes that students apparent academic inferiority lies not in intrinsic inability but instead in the fact that they are simply at a different stage of education . He urges colleagues to accept that statement rather than assuming that students have a lack of basic intelligence . Reworking McMahon s comment so that it applies to academics I end up with this: academics apparent inferiority as teachers lies not in intrinsic inability but instead in the fact that they are simply at a different stage of education about how to teach .

In an ideal world all academics would be good - and preferably great - teachers. Moreover I recognise that, whereas students pay for their education, we as academics are paid to play a key role in the provision of that education and we should be required to meet certain minimum standards.

But deciding that some people will never make good teachers seems to leave us with no options other than to accept bad teaching as an inevitable part of university life or to look forward to (largescale?) dismissals of academics; neither option strikes me as palatable. Why not, instead, embrace the view that we can all improve our teaching? McMahon refers critically to academics with little evident natural ability . The most empowering moment of my career as a teacher was the realisation that natural ability was not a requirement for effective teaching; that I could learn to become an ever improving teacher.

As a new academic in the early to mid-1990s I was disappointed in how I taught. I decided to ignore those individuals who assured me that you ve either got it or you haven t when it comes to teaching and there s nothing you can do about it , and sought ways to become a better teacher. For me that included enrolment in a graduate certificate in education where I encountered a number of inspiring colleagues from a wide range of disciplines, all engaged in the same activity. Those colleagues included academics at the beginning of their careers who were anxious not to replicate the poor teaching that they had encountered as students as well as older academics who had recognised deficiencies in their teaching and were determined to remedy those faults.

McMahon considers that a very good teacher can compensate for a lot of bad teaching elsewhere, because given experience of both students can compensate by choosing the example set by the good teacher . The obvious question is What is a good teacher? . I would suggest that one definition - or more accurately, part of a definition - of a good teacher is a teacher who keeps learning. One of the unexpected delights of improving my teaching was discovering how supportive my students were of my efforts; the example of a teacher deliberately seeking to learn - quite apart from what I learnt - seems to have had a positive effect on my and my students classroom experiences.

Drawing on McMahon s call for an assumption of equality between teachers and students, I believe that an assumption that academics as well as students are capable of learning is a valuable starting point in efforts to improve teaching.

Joanne Scott is a lecturer in Australian Studies at the University of the Sunshine Coast.

Email contact:jscott@usc.edu.au

Peter McMahon was asked if he wished to respond to Joanne s letter and he wrote:

Joanne Scott is indicative of the best kind of teacher, one who acts quickly to rectify perceived weakness (and we all have them). Sadly, that is one of the most alarming traits of the teachers I have condemned as bad - they either do not realise they are bad or they don t care. This is a tricky issue, but monitoring own s own work is an important responsibility.

Students are typically made aware of their weakness, and the need to improve, by poor grades, and in that sense there is little comparison between students and teachers. Teachers have very little incentive to improve because they are simply not encouraged to do so.

But I stand by my comment about some teachers just missing the boat entirely. Hopefully, with much time and effort all teachers could improve, but the worst would never be really good. Why should we not aim for good quality, instead of just okay? And why, of course, should students suffer (as well as other teachers) while some take their time to learn the trade.

This is especially relevant when there are great numbers of alternative teachers who cannot get any academic work or too little, since teaching ability seems a minimal criteria for employment, and drift off into other professions and are lost forever. Teaching really matters, and so I suggest demanding the highest standards of those who do it from the beginning.

I liked Joanne Scott s positive response and essentially agree with her view, but I also think it is time someome took a little responsibility for a growing problem. The students I talk to certainly think so.

Peter McMahon

MCQs – yet another cautionary tale

by Jackie Lublin

In the early 60 s I was reading about the deleterious effects of multiple-choice examining in USA before I had ever seen a multiple-choice question (MCQ) in Australia (Hoffmann, 1964). Over the next decades MCQs crept into the repertoire of testing strategies employed in Australian colleges and universities, undoubtedly aided by technology like machine marking and the development of computer routines for the provision of limited automated feedback. MCQs became the way to cope with the assessment of large classes for summative purposes. So pervasive did MCQ testing become that in some technological faculties in Australia it was possible for students to successfully negotiate assessment throughout most of their entire undergraduate program without having to express themselves in writing.

But given the ubiquity of MCQ testing, it is amazing that there is still so little appreciation of the need to pay attention to the protocols involved in the design of good MCQs — in other words, some dreadful examples of MCQ tests are still to be found, which violate the most basic rules which ensure validity and reliability in testing. The following is a true story.

In March this year (2001) I was preparing a workshop for the academic staff of a faculty of Veterinary Science on the assessment of student learning. Trawling through the Web looking for MCQ material I came across an examination paper from another university s Veterinary Science faculty in a subject for the first semester of the first year which dealt with whole animals rather than with elements of basic science. The MCQ section of the paper seemed to be so idiosyncratic that I decided to administer this test to the assembled faculty staff I was working with, and to do the test myself. I am not a vet. The test consisted of 12 MCQ items each with one right answer or key, and three distracters.

Staff did the test anonymously using a separate answer sheet, and the results were collated so that distribution across the range of four possible responses (each response constituting one cell) could be scrutinised for each item (question). The point about an MCQ item is, of course, that there should be agreement among experts about the right, correct or best answer.

I thought that questions about animals at this elementary level should be a simple task for academic vets, but the results were illuminating. There were 19 respondents, excluding myself. Of the 12 questions:

> **“ How is it possible that an exam paper can produce such a range of results from faculty teachers in a situation where there should be unanimity about the correct answer, and where a layperson can score so well without experiencing the teaching in the subject? ”**

2 questions scored all 19 responses in the one cell i.e. there was unanimous agreement about the right answer

1 question scored 17 responses in the one cell i.e. there was nearly unanimous agreement about the right answer

2 questions scored 13 responses in the one cell i.e. probably the right answer

1 question scored 12 responses in the one cell i.e. possibly the right answer

These six questions constituted half the test, and I decided arbitrarily (and generously) that the results constituted the correct answers or the key for each of these six questions.

After that, the results became very much more problematical among this group of Veterinary Science teachers, with spreads of scores in each of the four cells in the remaining six questions — the most notorious of which was probably the spread 5, 6, 5, 3 for one question. In other words, among this group of experts there was no agreement about what constituted the right answer to at least half of these elementary questions. Furthermore, while my results could not be interpreted on the latter six questions, where there was no consensus about what constituted a right answer, I scored 4 out of 6 in the six questions where there did seem to be an agreed right answer. How is it possible that an exam paper can produce such a range of results from faculty teachers in a situation where there should be unanimity about the correct answer, and where a layperson can score so well without experiencing the teaching in the subject?

It is possible because of a disregard for or ignorance about the principles of MCQ test construction on the part of teaching staff who use this form of testing. The mistakes made in constructing this test would appear to be:

1. ***Guess what is in my mind but you will only be able to do so if you come to my lectures and pick up my eccentricities*** . Some of the questions will not otherwise make sense, or will be seen to be quite trivial by other people who ought to know, nor will some of the right answers be agreed to as being right .

2. ***I feel like indulging my sense of humour a bit, so I will throw in a quite ridiculous distracter now and then.*** What this means in terms of the test is that such a distracter can immediately be eliminated, leaving the student with less to choose between and therefore more chance of achieving the right answer or of guessing correctly, if guessing is what they do.

3. ***This is merely a first- year exam and it is my subject, so I do not need to consult anyone else about the MCQs I have written for it or, I am a junior staff member who has been told to go away and produce 12 MCQ items for the exam*** . In either case, what has been violated here is the absolute need to protect students from the random bias of a single examiner. In the development of effective MCQ items it is imperative that items be trialled by a panel of cognate colleagues i.e. that colleagues should work through the test without knowing the key for each item. When the results are collated then group discussion of the

results will lead to the honing and improvement of the item. If this is not done then the item remains subject to the interpretation of one person only (i.e. the writer of it), and the results above show how fallible this interpretation can be.

4. ***"It is my subject, so I say what is correct or not".*** There was general agreement among my group of Vet teachers that at least one of the questions had no right answer (or "best" answer) and that at least one other question clearly had more than one correct answer – again, this exhibits the random bias of the test writer which would have been picked up in any trialling process.

5. ***"I am testing the objectives of the subject"*** – in that case, the objectives of this subject merely required recall or regurgitation of information. All the questions were at Bloom's Cognitive Level I(Bloom et al, 1971) or Biggs' Unistructural level.(Biggs, 1999). Unless attention is paid specifically, it is fatally easy for MCQs to require recall only. Students know this, and MCQ tests tend to trigger rote learning procedures in students (Scouller and Prossser,1994)

6. ***"These questions test the course i.e. the specialist knowledge I am imparting".*** Not necessarily, as I was able to achieve a better than pass on the basis of general knowledge and intelligent guessing, not on the basis of being a student enrolled in this course.

7. The point of any good MCQ test is that it should be kept secure, not published. This stops students from rote-learning the items, and it allows the item to be analysed for difficulty and discrimination and used again in a properly designed test. If you publish every MCQ test you write, then if you continue to test in this way you are obliged to write new items for each subsequent test, rather than bank and reuse the items (questions) which have performed well. The test in question, however, was so poor that it would not have been worth keeping or analysing – indeed, it may well have been an example of the deterioration in quality that may occur when MCQ tests must be continuously rewritten.

The bottom line in all of this is the effect such a test will have on student learning in the subject, and on the degree of confidence one can have that a score from this test is an accurate reflection of a student's ability in the subject. Concerning both these issues, a good score on this test would be fairly meaningless because of the faults identified above – in other words, the test is neither valid nor reliable. What a good score would indicate in this instance is the student's ability to play the exam game as laid down by the lecturer.

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Jackie Lublin is a life member of HERDSA. She was formerly Director of the Centre for Teaching and Learning at the University of Sydney. Nowdays she continues her contribution to higher education through consultancy work.

Email contact: J.Lublin@ctl.usyd.edu.au

Eidos Ideas Dossier No. 15

Group teaching: Is Small always Beautiful, or can Big be Better?

First we'll clear out some things this piece is NOT trying to say. It's emphatically not an argument, not even a discussion, about:

- Teacher Workload because workload (how many students we're responsible for) is only contingently, not at all conceptually, related to the size of group one chooses to deal with at a given time.
- Teaching Style Similarly how we decide to teach is conceptually independent of the size of the group in front of us. People lecture to small groups, even one person; others work interactively with enormous numbers. We're not talking about "lecturing" versus "small group teaching" which is another topic altogether.
- Astronomically large groups That's when a group becomes a veritable mob, a horde, a legion. I'd say above twenty, probably not above a hundred, but above the size widely regarded as the ceiling for "small group" work, and below the size when you can't see the eyes or hear the voice of people across the room. That's a group whose size is not too large to make some kind of discussion (as in a large forum or public meeting) imaginable (forget about the quality question that's for later).
- Teaching logistics or practical considerations How to implement a bright idea is very important, but I'm talking about the bright idea itself. Work out the practicalities elsewhere. Get the ideas straight first. This is an essay about the idea of large group discussion.

It's a politically-incorrect proposition that we generally overlook or avoid in the rush to rubbish and denigrate all large group teaching and idolise the small group as the (unattainable, but truly wonderful) ideal or epitome for all class teaching.

Let's get a couple of other things straight. There's a big difference between the deliberate intentions of teaching and the potential outcomes of learning. We know how convention demands that we describe teaching intentions in terms of subject matter content (even if that is elasticised to include skills, attitudes and values). Is that the end of the story about what students learn?

There's ample evidence to challenge that. Take Perry's work to start with (I certainly wouldn't regard a university teaching program complete without close study of that research). It taught us how a

host of worthwhile and fundamentally important things happen as an outcome of a university education, which go far beyond what most of us would normally dream of including in a curriculum statement.

That includes profound, lasting and crucially important (if the future of a society is important) developmental changes, transformations of moral and intellectual orientation of the most radical kind. To say students know more when they graduate (even if literally correct, which it often isn t) is to recognise a paltry fragment, a mere scratching-of-the-surface of what has actually been happening.

These generally unintended outcomes seem to happen more or less of their own accord given the proper circumstances. There s the rub. But if these beyond-the-stated-curriculum changes didn t happen, I seriously doubt if anyone could ever defend university learning as having any value beyond that of an advanced technical college or super-high-school (if that s the concept readers hold about a university, they can stop reading now, as we have no common ground).

A second distinction is between things we can state on a learning objectives document, and things we generally either can t, or don t know how to, nor know where to put them, nor even whether anyone will believe us if we were to put them somewhere. Once it was popular to talk about the hidden curriculum ; today I prefer to talk about successive layers of subtext within curriculum statements.

Just as any good stage play has its explicit text the words the actors speak, the set, the costumes and so on so it has its several layers of (more or less implicit) subtexts. It s hard to say, at first anyhow, what these subtexts are (certainly not until you ve seen the play). It s actually dangerous to speak about them over-much because like all good things (friendship among them) the more you strive after and talk about them the less likely you are to achieve them. That doesn t mean they re not there, or not important. They re hidden, elusive, and terribly important maybe too much so for words.

Without them the play would be thin, unidimensional, un-memorable, transient, even trivial. The subtextual realms of great theatre keep us going back for more, to see the classic plays, the ageless works of stage art. Each new production probes afresh into the deep levels underneath the text, and each new generation of audiences are taken afresh into confronting the deep issues of life and death, love and hate, fate and striving, destiny and human will, nobility and shame, good and evil.

Consider the text/subtext within a small discussion group. We see a learning context, up to about 15 people. They re able to know one another s names; to get to know personally most, if not all, the others; to interact one-to-one with most, maybe all the others in a discussion-hour. The group persists over an extended period, enabling interpersonal relationships and mutual trust to develop. It s led by someone who (if they know their job) does things to encourage these outcomes. It s also the model of every wisely-parented nuclear family. A university education needs small group discussions because of the subtext that the small discussion group generates.

From effectively-led small-group experiences students learn things more or less unavailable in other learning contexts. Such as exploring the boundaries of knowledge within the safety of trusting personal relationships with peers. Or developing their own selves in directions that enable them to profit, in future life outside the ivory tower, from personal, even intimate relationships with other human beings. These are family outcomes. Absolutely vital. But enough for a full educational experience?.

Now do the same exercise for a large discussion group. It s now maybe 100 people. They re each likely to get to personally know only a handful of the others; not really able to personally interact with more than a handful at a time (then only with difficulty). It persists over an extended period so that (potentially anyhow) a particular micro-culture develops. It s led by someone who knows what to do to encourage these outcomes. And it s the model of every wisely-governed small society, every village, every work-place, every company, every large institution, and every local community.

Large-group discussion experiences should therefore play a part in every university experience. The world out there, life at large beyond the university, is emphatically not a family. It s hardly ever a small group; certainly small group rules don t even remotely describe the way the real world works. If students are to some day perform a constructive, even creative role in the cultural minefield of global living, they ll need to know how to operate outside and beyond the comfort-zone of small-group relationships.

They ll be people who can stand and be counted, and present themselves and their messages to others who are definitely not in a trusting, known, face-to-face personal relationship with them. Like across a board-room, or at a committee, or in a local council chamber, or a university senate, or a P&C group, or a shareholder s meeting, or a parliamentary assembly, or a public meeting, or a courtroom, or on the internet. Those are NOT small-groups. They are LARGE ones. But groups like those one way or another decide the fate of every democracy.

It equally means producing people able to listen and accept others (and what they say) who are operating in the same non-personal fashion within those assemblies and forums of the world of science, business, politics and art. Given the logistics and probability regime operating in up to 100 people, that means people comfortable with encountering ideas and value-systems utterly unlike their own, even in complete conflict with it, where the owners of the ideas have neither the intention nor the time for small-grouping empathically with us. It means learning the art of listening and trying to understand the utterly foreign worlds this roomfull of total strangers inhabit, all the time being a heard, seen and influential part of it.

The large group is potentially far more dangerous, more fraught, when it comes to discussing anything rationally. Just like real life. Interaction is, by and large, necessarily impersonal. You hear a voice from a cross the room; you respond with another voice across the room. On the positive side, it s much more straightforward to deal with the argument and not the personality than any small group can ever be.

The leader has little hope of ever controlling the streams of talk, short of adopting the most totally authoritarian role (or maybe God forbid! lecturing, which is the same thing). But won t the stream of talk flow into whatever direction the strongest or loudest speakers decide?

Yes, it may appear to for a time. But as the group is not based on trust and definitely not on personal relationships, there will eventually be discord, revolt, split, schism. Conflict will reign until peace is negotiated, or until the next leadership-by-domination takes over. Given the uncanny capacity of people to throw in ideas that have nothing to do with what the previous person said, the number of potential talk-streams or

threads is virtually unlimited. Pretty much like society itself?

In the large group discussion we re looking at the inevitability of cacophony, conflict, maybe even warfare and riot. And that s what living in the real world is like. Once leave the security, reliability and predictability of a supportive family, and we face a world that s run along very different lines. Hence the large discussion group, if it can ever be managed and tolerated and sustained, is to be a campus microcosm of the larger world itself, something the small group can never be. That s its genius, and why we must have it as part of the university experience.

I earlier disclaimed responsibility for dealing with practicalities. But only an idiot would deny that they exist and they have to be sorted out. I ll relent a little and mention the most obvious ones. To me anyhow, these fall into two clusters:

- **Question 1: How could anyone lead such a group what skills are needed? What kind of setting (room, seating, audibility, etc) would be optimal? What ground rules apply?**
- **Question 2: How could any participant tolerate being in such a group? What persistence, rewards, support, etc would be needed in order to endure the chaos, inconclusiveness, conflict and uncertainty it would appear to bring? What to do if people can t cope?**

Not easy, I admit. So I ll not even try to defend it in practical terms at this stage. Instead I ll mention a few of my own motives in raising the issue.

Whenever a particular approach to teaching achieves a kind of moral ascendancy, it always seems to me a good thing to challenge it. There s no doubt that small group teaching and teaching-by-discussion have had that status for a couple of decades, and continue to enjoy it. Challenging doesn t mean rubbishing the method it s a good method, but (like every good thing) it s good for the things it s good for, and that might not mean everything.

Until recently, when ideas about large group discussion began slowly emerging from a couple of interesting directions (see below) there was little way of presenting a challenge to small-group ideological hegemony.

Now it is becoming possible, and I believe the arguments are worth listening to. Even if one doesn t accept them, the business of listening to them and weighing them up can be educative.

The term dialogue has become attached to the large group discussion approach I ve been (very roughly) outlining here. Unfortunately it s a term used with many other meanings, including even what happens in small-group discussion (which can be very confusing). Like Let s dialogue a while about that issue! However if we qualify it, for example by calling it large-group-dialogue or (my preference) impersonal dialogue that may help.

I ve a hunch (which may turn out to be false) and it s that the nature of internet discussion actually resembles large-group or impersonal dialogue much more than it resembles small-group personal talk. If there s anything going for that idea, it alone may strike a blow in favour of challenging the hegemony of the ideal of small-group work as the ultimate in university education.

What do readers think?

Some references.

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Research in Higher Education Reports

Discursive practices, experiences and perceptions associated with academic writing in a university setting.

by Margaret Fletcher

In this research I investigated how university students conceptualised the tasks of assignment writing, the stability of this conceptualisation across the years of undergraduate study, and the consistency between their views of successful writing and the views of academic staff. Two questions framed the organisation and analysis of data collected in relation to the first of the three research elements, viz.:

What does a student construct as success when conceptualising successful writing of university assignment essays?

How does a university student develop the literacy practices needed to write successfully against such constructions?

In this paper I have outlined some of the preliminary findings in relation to the first of these questions.

Literacy is instrumental in the construction of knowledge and skills, and in presenting what learners have learned. Thus, students performances in writing assignments represent a fairly routine example of what lay at the heart of university concerns about literacy (Australian Vice-Chancellors Council, 1994, p.4). The need to recognise and accommodate literacy needs of students entering university remains a concern today.

How such recognition and accommodation might be achieved is itself problematic. During the closing session of the First National Conference in Australia on Tertiary Literacy, Terry Threadgold (1996) stated, the greatest single problem we face at present is the disjunction between what Literacy Workers and academics in the traditional disciplines actually know about literacy

and practice as the teaching of literacy" (p.291).

Acts of composing and comprehending meaning occur in particular socio-cultural contexts and are influenced by perceptions of the demands of those concepts.

In this study, I attempted to document what students report that they know and do as writers of assignments. Such knowledge is framed within a socio-cognitive view of writing as practice. The view holds writing is an interpretative act where a composer's role is to comprehend the writing task, and to record information in a way that will facilitate its comprehension by a reader. The reader's role is to interpret the composer's intended meaning. Reading plays a reciprocal role as writer "reads" a reader's needs and reader "reads" a writer's meanings.

Writing as practice is interactive in the production of meaning. Writers draw on knowledge types to compose a message (Alexander, Schallert & Hare, 1991). They conceptualise declarative knowledge to create concepts about information to be incorporated in the text. Procedural knowledge conceptualises a rhetorical problem as context. Task requirements such as writing purpose and roles played by writer and reader are contextual factors where constraints of time and location come into play.

Literacy practices are viewed as a set of socially-constructed practices (Brodkey, 1987; Kress, 1985). Readers and writers compose and comprehend texts according to their view of the roles they play as literacy members within particular socio-cultural contexts. These roles and the literacy practices in which people engage reflect an understanding of the expectations they have of social and cultural contexts, and of its demands and influence.

Writers are socialised into literacy through participation in a kind of social dialogue (Bakhtin, 1981) and through interactions with their literacy communities (Green & Ackerman, 1995, p.370). Bakhtin (1981) described how social languages create social identities within communities that enable members to interact and engage with other community members. Literate practices such as writing develop with experience. The act of writing informs one's knowledge about how to write. Berkenkotter, Huckin and Ackerman (1991, 1989) described this process as learning "through exposure, practice and reinforcement" 1991, p.212). It is important to understand how students engage with members of the university community and in what ways such engagement may facilitate their developments as writers of that community

Research Design

The research design involved case study as an embedded design using several units of analysis (Yin, 1989) and methods of data collection within these units as described in the figure below.

Purpose of the study	Understanding assignment writing as a phenomenon of academic writing
Theoretical paradigm	Constructivist paradigm
Case definition	Embedded case study
The case of unit of analysis	Assignment writing as a phenomenon of academic writing
Bounded context	
• Setting	Australian University, Faculty of Education
• Time frame	1995-1999
• Units of analysis	Within case sampling • Undergraduate students • Academics • Documents

Figure 1: The case and parameters of the study

A case study approach was instrumental in achieving my objective. "The case study is a way of organising social data for the purpose of viewing social reality" (Best & Kahn, 1998, p. 248). It involved considering the students' views of writing and themselves as writers, their experiences as academic writers and the literacy practices they described.

The first of three phases in this study is reported here.

Phase 1 data were collected from 40 students. They were interviewed in the second semester of 1995. In 1998, 23 students from the group of 40 volunteered for a second series of interviews. At this time, they were completing the final semester of their course. Three key questions were used: (1) What do you understand to be successful academic writing? (2) What do you when you are writing an assignment? and (3) What has influenced your development as an academic writer?

The large corpus of data represented in the transcriptions was read several times to check my initial interpretations of the meanings. This enhanced the range and precision of the analysis as I recursively moved from one interview to another. Using the inductive analytic process described by Yin (1984, 1989) as pattern matching, data were compared systematically to establish converging or diverging evidence from various sources. Pattern matching identified chains of evidence in the data that established consistent and repeated themes. QSR NUD*IST is a Non-numerical Unstructured Data Indexing Searching and Theorizing computer program and was used to manage and analyse qualitative data

Findings

At the beginning of their university studies, students believe two factors contribute to successful assignment writing. First, they must write to the topic, usually by answering the question correctly. Second, they must do so clearly. In relation to the former, they consider correctness depends on understanding the assignment topic. For example,

> Well, I think there's two parts to an assignment. It's answering the question and it's also then your written expression, so I guess it would be a fluent um either of the assignment or an essay that reads smoothly and makes sense and also answers the question. So it's also grammatically correct. Yep. I have a tendency to ramble on because that's what I do when I speak so naturally it comes out when I write. (JK, 95).

They set about developing topic knowledge strategically. They research the topic, focus on understanding and using correct vocabulary, and discuss and clarify their ideas with lecturers, peers and members outside the university context.

I think you need to know the topic and back it up with research. Finding an argument and backing it up. I probably would have more trouble in trying to relate my research with my quotes with my thoughts kind of integrated. Research linked to the ideas, a strong conclusion. I am good with my introductions. (BC, 95).

To meet the requirements of the second of the factors they see as crucial, students must answer the question clearly. That is, they must write the assignment in a specific way. They report that structuring their understanding of the topic at the text level and at the sentence level to produce a coherent essay is an essential attribute of successful essays.

You need to have correct referencing and cross-referencing, a structured argument supported by appropriate research, with a structure using introduction, body and conclusion to reinforce and summarise (KS, 95).

Students engage in metacognitive practices in their efforts to apply structure. They develop plans and goals, brainstorming and mapping their ideas. They draw on strategy knowledge as they engage in the writing process, revising, editing and proofreading. They get peers, friends and relatives to read their writing. They actively pursue communally constructed meaning in their consultations.

Um oh yeah no I ah I went through two processes. I took it to my uncle and the only reason I took it to my uncle was because I I've only just moved to Brisbane to come to University so I don't know anyone up here um and I do know a few people but as far as academic writing is concerned, I don't know many people. I discussed it with my father in law on the phone. My fathers a retired news director / editor um so he's got a fairly good command of the English language and writing. (AH, 95)

Typically, a first-year student s view of successful assignment writing is described in terms of meeting specified writing expectations. The role of declarative knowledge in knowing what to write, and procedural knowledge, knowing how to write were characteristic features described by students.

You've got to actually look at the topic, look at how it's set out and look at it from the point of view of the person who has set the assignment. What they would want from you in relation to the topic. (KA, 95)

Furthermore, they identify three variables that contribute to this success. The **first** is interference of affect. Interest and confidence in the topic moderates their effort.

Oh, I just, I just don't really feel like, I don't know, I might be wrong but I don't feel like I know what I'm doing as far as writing an assignment. I don't know that I'm writing. I don't feel enough trying for it but I don't know (???). Um, although I mean at TAFE I did do a lot, but it's different to Uni. (GA, 95)

I've never written like this before. Its' totally different like I've finished ( ) I've finished school ( ) three years and I've come back here and all of a sudden I've got to, I've got to um reference my material [yes] um. I've got to write a lot longer assignments then I ever had to do at school so[that's ( ) making things a bit more difficult] yea [ok] (RS, 95)

The **second** of the perceived variables is time management. Generally, they see that their management of life in general, and of studies in particular, affects their engagement with specific assignment tasks.

I think it's really important to think about what you are doing before you begin like, I realise that time management and organisations are really important but I happen to be not very good with organisations and time management myself. So in my case what really important to me is to think about what I really want to say and to think about what's umm your ideas (MH,95).

The **third** variable is the lecturer. His or her willingness and ability to identify expectations about how students will interpret the topic and the task of writing, is perceived as likely to affect how well they will perform.

He put a lot into Um talking, talking about um the things we should be looking at and the topic. He made the topic really clear [mmm]. We didn't actually do much with how to go about writing . (SMc, 95).

Well I went to him and asked him for help and he sent me away and said ask your friends and at that stage I thought that was very hard on me because at that stage I didn't have any friends much. I was basically sticking to myself first semester (SP, 95) .

Toward the conclusion of their university studies, the students were more expansive in describing what constituted success when writing assignments. Now in their final semester of four years of study for most, their words echoed descriptions given three years earlier, particularly in relation to answering the question and answering clearly . However, the later descriptions are more confident and elaborated. For example,

It has to answer the question. um it has to be relevant and up to date. And that's what I mean by using the relevant research. And also has to tell a story it can't be just listing facts, I don't think. I think you have to have some kind of um angle or perspective a point of view. And make it interesting to the reader. Because you've got to know he's going to get 100 assignments 100 essays of the same thing. so I think if yours has a bit of twist or angle to it or something and still covers the question I think that's um that's good for assignment writing. Um and then just have all the technical things that they're looking for. If they want it APA style referencing you have to know how do that and um make sure again your are answering the question. if it's an analysis make sure you are doing an analyse. Um and the rest will follow I think once you get the confidence in those then you can start looking at it from a different point of view and putting twists in it and doing things like that. Yeah (AC, 98).

Furthermore, there is a group of fourth year students whose view of success is no longer described in terms of writing assignments to meet lecturer s expectations. This group talks about writing differently. They describe a successful essay as one that will meet their own expectations as a teacher. They evaluate successful assignments in terms of how the task may contribute to their vocational knowledge.

Um not really. There is one I did a few weeks ago which was a reading assignment. .... And I realised that when I actually did the first lesson with him that he was a good reader but he did have some problems and um so I did the five lessons and we taped it afterwards and I could see the marked change and through out the assignment we had to say what sorts of things we noticed and how we did the lessons and justify everything. And that was a good experience for planing wise I suppose more that anything. And making me more confident in why I do things. And being able to justify the reasons for what I'm doing. That was probably the only one that stands out..

Successful assignments are those that are personally meaningful and vocationally relevant. Those that see this pursue this view of writing actively. They re-construct the assignment question in ways that make it relevant to their field of interest. Some students do this overtly by re-negotiating the topic with the lecturer. Others do it anyway, prepared to sacrifice grades in an effort to produce an essay that is personally relevant to them.

Others say that they simply play the

game , giving a lecturer what he/ she wants.

> He really liked one particular um model ..... I thought aspects of it were good but not all of it. Like if I was going into a school I would only have meet half of that model. Um but you knew that you couldn't go wrong with him if you did that model. and so I wrote a lot of things thinking. " Do this and this and this but not that" but I put it all in anyway. Do you know what I mean? (SM, 98)

In this research, students constructions of success reflect a complex interplay of declarative and procedural knowledge mediated by affect. Over a four-year course, students deliberate about their investment in the production of assignments and they make choices.

> In some cases I haven't put as much effort as I would have usually put in. um that might be due to um lack of interest. Lack of time um oh percentage how much like I'd rather put more effort with a 50 % assignment than a 20% assignment. If I had two assignments I had to do I would spend more time on the 50% one. (MF, 98)

These distinctive, qualitative differences illustrate how construction of knowledge results from the instantiation of existing knowledge in ways that will facilitate the interchange between what is already known and what is to be understood. When first year students see successful writing in terms of answering the question, they concentrate on the role the lecturer plays in determining what is to be understood. For some students as fourth-years, this view and concentration remains unchanged. For others, it does change and their concentration shifts to the personalised role they play in that determination. The locus of control has moved. This group of students no longer asks what does the lecturer want to know? They ask, what do I want to know?

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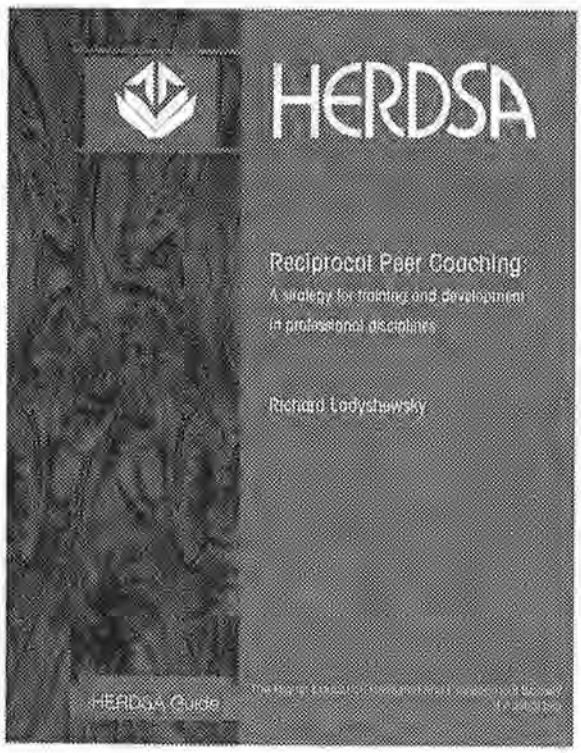
Margaret Fletcher is a lecturer in the Faculty of Education, Griffith University.

Contact Email:
m.fletcher@mailbox.gu.edu.au



and INTRODUCING A NEW GUIDE

RECIPROCAL PEER COACHING:

A strategy for training and development in professional disciplines

By Richard K Ladyshewsky

This guide was launched at the HERDSA Conference in July by the HERDSA President, Angela Brew. She said:

One of the most under utilised resources in higher education is students learning from each other. Ways to structure this process are desperately needed.

This guide provides a clear introduction to Reciprocal Peer coaching and describes how it relates to other kinds of peer assisted learning.

The Guide relates the notion of peer coaching to literature on cognitive development and behavioural learning theory and then looks at the question of the use of reciprocal peer coaching. This is a scholarly work with over 75 references.

It also describes in clear terms the benefits of reciprocal peer coaching and sets out some strategies for implementation and lists the key features for successful reciprocal peer coaching in a useful checklist.

The Guide is available for sale at $16.50 for HERDSA members. Order forms are available on the HERDSA website, or from the HERDSA Office (office@herdsa.org.au, phone 02 6253 4242, fax +64 2 6253 4246)

A FULL LIST OF ALL HERDSA GUIDES IS FOUND AT

www.herdsa.org.au/guides

Social identities in an academic world: women beginning a Diploma of Teaching (Early Childhood Education) programme

By Caroline Jewkes

As a crucial aspect of a discourse of quality within early childhood education, requirements for training and qualifications for staff have been a site of significant change in recent years. Increasing professionalisation in the field has seen the promotion of the Diploma of Teaching (Early Childhood Education) as a benchmark qualification for staff in a variety of early childhood settings. Field-based programmes, designed to make the qualification more accessible for people already working in the field, are drawing in students from non-traditional academic backgrounds. This has implications not just in the education field but also in the lives, homes and communities of those who choose to train and work in this area.

This research is part of my Master of Education studies at the University of Waikato. In this project I examine issues women beginning a field-based early childhood teacher training programme at a New Zealand polytechnic identify as significant in terms of their experiences of education, both prior to and during their first year of study.

A narrative approach was employed in the project, drawing from unstructured interviews with participants. Eight students out of a class of twenty chose to participate. They range in age from a teenager to a woman in her early fifties. Six of the group are mothers. All of the students and staff on the programme in the year of study were women.

Emerging themes

"I could have done better ... but friendships came up. Far more important."

A strong social relational discourse was evident throughout the stories from the participants. For several students success in relationships was chosen over academic achievement in secondary school. In a tertiary setting students for whom relationships may have precluded academic success in high school were now using a variety of relationships as a resource for facilitating achievement. Support and encouragement from friends and family were instrumental in keeping them going on the programme, as was the sense of responsibility to self and others to complete their studies. Relationships with tutors, classmates and colleagues were significant in facilitating academic achievement.

“In this project I examine issues women beginning a field-based early childhood teacher training programme at a New Zealand polytechnic identify as significant in terms of their experiences of education, both prior to and during their first year of study.”

"When I've finished I really want to devote a bit of time to the kids ... just a motherly thing I suppose."

On the other hand, for the mothers particularly, the competing demands of social identities and a student identity caused increasing pressure. Although the participants saw their entry into the programme as a positive step for them and their families it also required sacrifice and compromise in all areas. As the women developed new identities as student, academic and professional, existing identities as carer, home manager, parent, partner and friend were redefined.

"When I've finished my diploma, if I get it, which I'm positive that I'm quite sure I will ..."

Some participants are embracing developing academic and professional identities readily, while others remain tentative. All the participants in this project considered that they were "doing well" even though some were struggling academically. Success for these women was measured not just in terms of grades but also in terms of learning, experience and the integration of new identities with those already established within their homes and community contexts.

It makes sense that a field which draws on social relational attributes such as caring and nurturing would attract people who are positioned or position themselves within a social relational discourse. As social relational attributes are professionalised in early childhood settings, spaces are created for participants to identify as academic and professional. For the participants in this project social identities are a necessary support for their emerging academic and professional identities. An acknowledgement of this in their study programme necessitates a view of education which is wider than purely "academic" or "vocational" but takes into account the contexts in which learning and development take place.

Acknowledgements

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Caroline Jewkes was a Master of Education student in the Department of Education at the Waikato Polytechnic, Hamilton, New Zealand.

Contact E-mail: escmj@twp.ac.nz

Book Reviews

Making Managers in Universities and Colleges

By Craig Prichard, (2000) Buckingham UK SRHE and Open University Press Paper 242 pp AUD 62.95

Reviewed by Sally Lord

..moves are afoot to slow down and offset the increasingly desperate financial circumstances faced by most universities and colleges between 1995 and 1998.. These are some of the most positive statements in an otherwise bleak commentary about the changes to the work and culture of universities and colleges in the UK in the Thatcherite era.

The stated focus of the book is the tensions between ways of knowing management and the people who are enmeshed in this tension; in particular, the nature of the problems surrounding the formation of the manager in Further & and Higher Education (FHE). Material for this book came from interviews, participant observation and observation in four UK universities and four UK colleges.

In the Preface Prichard identifies two issues he says will be pursued. The first is a question of managerial levels. And rather than define a set of levels in an organisational structure (management posts) Prichard is concerned with positionings which are an effect of management practice: ie a discussion of the tension between conflicting and overlapping discursive practices (px). The second issue is the difference between further and higher education. The author suggests that there are overarching similarities between the sectors whilst acknowledging obvious differences. Such differences are socially significant as a means of producing institutional, managerial and academic identity.

The author provides an overview of the book in the Introduction and states that the epistemological approach underpinning the book is tempered poststructuralism . (p5) He indicates that Chapters 1 and 2 establish the framework for discussing the manager . Chapter 1 examines some recent literature and establishes the debate between orthodox (Dearing Committee s manager) and critical (broader political programs) accounts. Chapter 2 establishes the focal framework that maintains these crucial tensions.

Chapter 3 specifically addresses recent fiscal, regulatory and audit practices that have been both damaging to FHE and responsible for the rise of managerialism contextualised in the historical, political and economic dimensions. Chapters 4-9 contain many examples and narratives from the people interviewed and observed — all within a commentary that should be seen as the author suggests all discursive practices must be seen, as highly political . (The author indicates that versions of Chapters 5, 6 and 9 have been published elsewhere.)

The basic premise established in Chapter 1 is that the Higher Education and Further Education sector (like most others) are involved in a fundamental reconstruction of the sector from public service to public enterprise — at the level of identities and relations, not just accountabilities and bottom lines . Chapter 2 is primarily concerned with an exploration of the development of managerial language and its effect on FHE managers and management. Prichard draws heavily on the work of Fiske, utilising his notions of station and locale in relation to organisational management. He provides an interesting example of a senior woman introducing sticky buns to formal University meetings as a challenge to station particularly.

Chapter 3 examines the effect of Thatcherism on FHE management. Prichard specifically states that this book will not attempt to assess the impact of the new regime. The chapter moves through the politically inspired notions of the accountable manager, the enterprising manager, and the beneficiary manager. He also addresses the impact of funding, planning auditing and performance management changes on academic and administrative staff within the sector.

Chapter 4, as might be predicted from that which has gone before, takes a none too positive view about academic working and the making of managers. The chapter is liberally sprinkled with interesting and relevant interview excerpts to support Prichard s arguments, and concludes by stating that Managing is a systemic exercise carried out through a cascade of paper-based discursive practices which seek to codify, report, categorize (p99)

Through Chapters 5 to 7 there is a fairly jaundiced discussion of the general commodification of education and the increasing privilege of managerialism. Examples from different institutions are compared and contrasted, with particular attention to individual style (personal and organisational) and how this may evoke positive or negative organisational responses. One indicator of this pronounced change is seen in the shift to far more formal attire for senior managers eg the woolly jumper being replaced by the suit for men.

There is substantial discussion about the constant state of hostility between managers, the professionals and the administrators around the intention to measure, reward and increase productivity. The notion of being between two identities, one professional and largely satisfying, the other managerial and oppressive is canvassed. A number of direct examples are given which include an exploration of gender issues in FHE management.

Prichard points out that his analysis of the gender issue is from a post-structuralist reading of gender . He argues that in fact the difficult, conflict-ridden job that is managerial work is falling to and being taken up by women. There is a suggestion that many women are being seduced by managerial privilege and then used in major change situations ie they are providing the emotional labour required to achieve reconstruction.

Chapter 9 examines the extent to which Universities in the UK continue to be managed by men. He identifies that (at the time of writing) only 10 out of 146 institutions were led by women — and that most of these were post-1992 colleges or universities.

Acknowledging that this is still only a small number Prichard argues that the intensification of strategic, imperialising knowledge practices — of management — in universities does appear to have opened up in some cases space for women as senior post-holder. (p187) This appears a little simplistic and cynical given that their male colleagues have much more vested in the old ways than they do in any differing power sharing arrangements.

This book provides an interesting and quite real glimpse of some of the issues facing post-secondary education in the

UK today. The wealth of interview material gives depth to the discussion and literature review provided. Whilst many of these issues also face managers and staff in Australian universities and colleges I consider we have perhaps moved the debate a little further along — probably due to our own funding imperatives! I consider it is worthwhile reading as an alternative means of viewing the development of managers in Australia also, although I would suggest our context is considerably different.

Sally Lord is Manager, Staff Development at the University of Technology Sydney. She was previously a secondary school teacher, a curriculum consultant and a Regional Principal Education Officer with the New South Wales Dept of School Education.

Contact Email:

sally.lord@uts.edu.au

Good Practice Working with International Students

Edited by Gina Wisker. SEDA Paper 110. December 2000. Birmingham, UK. Published by the Staff and Educational Development Association Ltd. ISBN: 1 902435 13 3 (Paper 154pp.)

Reviewed by Caroline McSwiney

A publication that directly addresses the differential needs of international students, and aims at sharing examples of good practice in the UK and Australia, is likely to attract the attention of many involved in the learning, teaching and research programs in the Higher Education Sector.

Gina Wisker is editor of this collection of twelve papers, and presents them under four headings: Induction and Systems for International Students, Teaching Strategies and Supportive Programmes, Postgraduate Students, and Staff Development and Quality. The papers report on experiences and research projects involving international students. There is a strong UK focus with nine of the papers from UK universities (six from the Anglia Polytechnic University) and one from the London Centre of the University of Syracuse. The other two contributions are from Australian academics: Margaret Kiley formerly at the University of Adelaide, now at the University of Canberra and Terry Evans of Deakin University. It is these two papers that merit particular attention.

Terry Evans, in his paper Post(al) Colonialism and Liberation Methodology: International Off-campus Postgraduate Research in Education , underlines the importance of recognising differences between the cultural and political contexts of supervisors and candidates. He questions the appropriateness for overseas candidates of research methodology, methods and outcomes, when the research training of the supervisor emanates from the West. He signals that these and other limitations are thrown into sharp relief in the supervision of students in developing nations offshore. He adds that the limitations are just as real, though less apparent, with on-campus supervision for international students from these nations.

Evans addresses dilemmas, contradictions and issues that are highlighted by the shift of emphasis from importing students to exporting expertise demonstrated in the growing number of off-campus candidates who follow postgraduate studies from offshore. He warns of the danger that the supervision of offshore postgraduate students could become a form of postal colonialism unless strategies are found to deal with problems arising from cultural and political differences. I agree with Evans s viewpoint that there is need for supervisors to be culturally aware and informed of the diverse contexts and learning backgrounds of their students. I also support Evans s claim that there is need for further research in this area.

Margaret Kiley s paper Providing Timely and Appropriate Support for International Postgraduate Students reports on the results of a longitudinal research study involving Indonesian students in Australia. Kiley presents an interesting and cohesive report on the three phases of the students candidature that her research identified. Cultural and psycho-social issues are given due attention and there is a comprehensive bibliography including references to the work of Ballard and Clanchy at the ANU Study Skills Centre. Appendix A (pp.107-108) is a checklist of expectations in supervision that could be used by both supervisors and candidates to great advantage as a communication tool for permanent residents and international students alike.

Two other papers attract particular attention. David Killick explores strategies for developing the cross-cultural knowledge, attributes and skills required for effective cross-cultural encounters. Killick s paper offers an outline for a workshop programme for staff development in this area. In the final chapter of Good Practice , Mike Woolf discusses the vexed question of quality and international education. He comments on quality in relation to international education, and also in relation to the national system of higher education in the UK. He concludes with a warning of the complex variables that come into play when international education is being evaluated.

Good Practice Working with International Students provides interesting - rather than thought-provoking - accounts of methods, approaches and helpful hints for teaching international students. The value of this SEDA Paper is that it identifies practical ways for university staff to address the differential needs of international students. On the whole, however, it fails to challenge the reader to dialogue and deal with the serious staff development issues brought about by the growing cultural complexity of the student cohort. The papers of Evans, Kiley, Woolf and Killick are notable exceptions.

The bold print and unusually large font of the running headlines on each page tend to distract from the body of the text.

Carolyn McSwiney spent twenty years as a teacher and education administrator in South Asia. She is currently completing PhD at Monash, School of Information Management and Systems. The title of the thesis is Internationalisation of the University: Implications for the Academic Library.

Contact E mail:

Carolyn.McSwiney@sims.monash.edu.au

South Africa's Women Academics Praise Australian Project

On 11 August, ten senior academics from four Australian universities travelled to South Africa to undertake a week-long Concluding Workshop for the 20 key leaders in a Government-funded project entitled: "Leadership Development of Academic Women through Action Learning and Action Research" and to assist them in writing and presenting their research findings at a conference, and subsequently publishing their project results.

Funded by the Australian Government's Overseas Aid Agency (AusAID) and managed by IDP Education Australia, this exciting $168,300 project will conclude at the end of 2001. The Program has been undertaken in both South Africa and Australia over two years (2000-2001).

The Project has aimed to develop leadership skills of academic women in six technikons in Gauteng. This has been pursued through training and support for staff development personnel and other senior academic staff of the institutions, to conduct collaborative Action Learning programs within and across institutions.

Ortrun Zuber-Skerritt, Adjunct Professor in the Faculty of Education, Griffith University, and in the Graduate College of Management, Southern Cross University, successfully applied for this innovative and far reaching Australia – South Africa Institutional Links Project that is hosted by Southern Cross University and has been staffed by Ortrun and other senior leaders from:

- Southern Cross University: Professor Sandra Speedy (Director of the Graduate College of Management) and Professor Angela Delves (Pro-Vice-Chancellor).
- Griffith University: Professor Marilyn McMeniman, (Dean of the Faculty of Education), Associate Professor Mary Farquhar, (Faculty of International Business and Politics), and Associate Professor Robyn Zevenbergen (Faculty of Education)
- University of Queensland: Associate Professor Nanette Gottlieb (Head, School of Languages and Comparative Cultural Studies) and Dr Linda Worrall, (Director, Communication Disability in Aging Research Unit)
- Queensland University of Technology: Associate Professor Penny McKay, (School of Cultural and Language Studies), and
- Dr Lyn Cundy. Senior HR Consultant to the Public Sector and Editor of the International ALAR Journal (Action Learning and Action Research).

The Project has been highly successful to date. Activities commenced in April 2000 with a one-week Residential Start-up Workshop in Gauteng to introduce key staff developers to the Action Learning and Action Research approaches and skills for implementation. These staff developers have since undertaken action learning projects with other women academics in the six technikons, with regular monthly progress review meetings.

Key participants in South Africa attended a ten-day Leadership Program in Australia in September 2000 during which time each 'shadowed' a senior Australian female academic, who acted as a mentor. They also participated in the Fifth World Congress on ALARPM (Action Learning, Action Research and Process Management) and presented their progress reports.

These South African women academics have praised the Australian project and appreciated the benefits it provided to them. As a professional staff development opportunity, it has emphasised the role of leadership of women academics in the six technikons, with participants gaining confidence and skills for further action learning and innovatory initiatives. Project activities have developed the women academics' understanding, experience and skills of action research. These concepts and skills have been incorporated into regular teaching programs in the technikons for wider dissemination. Increased professional linkages, publications and networking of women academics in the two countries have been an additional feature of the Project.

Ortrun Zuber-Skerit
Email contact: ortrun@bigpond.com

HERDSA Conference
7 - 10 July 2002

"Quality Conversations"
7 – 10 July 2002
Perth, Western Australia

Hosted by Edith Cowan University • www.ecu.edu.au/conferences/herdsa

You are invited to come from around the world and share rich and varied quality conversations about improving teaching and learning in tertiary and higher education.

Invited Keynotes include David Woodhouse, Executive Officer Australian Universities Quality Agency.

Please note that this year the DETYA Referencing Standards will be applied and to ensure your paper is eligible for publication in the fully refereed conference proceedings, full papers are due 14 January 2002.

Call for Papers and Registration brochures will be circulated shortly. A postcard is included with this mailout, please give it to a non-HERDSA member who might be interested in attending the conference.

Refereed proceedings

The difficulty that potential delegates face in obtaining funding to attend conferences if they do not have a refereed paper accepted for presentation has been brought to the attention of the HERDSA 2002 Conference committee. The Committee was aware of these concerns and made an early decision that all potential conference participants would have the opportunity to have their papers refereed and upon acceptance, included in a refereed conference publication.

The conference committee will publish a Refereed Conference Publication on CD-ROM and provide a copy to all participants at the conference. The publication will also be posted on the conference website prior to the conference. A hard copy will be available for purchase. All papers submitted by the 29 January 2002 deadline are eligible for this publication, subject to a refereeing process to satisfy Australian DETYA (Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs) standards.

Participants who choose not to submit a paper for the refereeing process can submit an abstract (by 29 January 2002 deadline) and upon acceptance of the abstract, authors can develop a paper which will be published on the conference website as non-refereed conference proceedings. Full papers rejected for publication in the Refereed Conference Publication may also be posted on the conference website with the non-refereed papers at the discretion of the Conference Publications Committee.

The submission process is as follows:

Submissions will be accepted in two forms.

- Full paper. You may submit a full paper to be considered through a peer review process for inclusion in the refereed conference publication. Submit by 29 January, 2002.
- Abstract. You may submit an abstract, which, upon notification of acceptance, can be developed into a full paper to be included in the online non-refereed conference proceedings. Submit by 29 January, 2002.

The call for submissions will be released soon and full details of submission guidelines will be available on the conference website.

Also in Perth...

4th International Consortium of Educational Developers Conference
3- 6 July 2001
"Spheres of Influence: Ventures and Visions in Educational Development"

The 4th World Conference of the International Consortium for Educational Development in Higher Education (ICED) to be held in Perth, Western Australia, 3-6 July 2002, promises to be the greatest gathering yet of educational development interests in universities, colleges and institutes of higher learning.

Spheres of Influence recognises the various ways in which educational development acts to improve teaching and learning in higher education: through knowledge and skill development in workshops and seminars; through the provision of consultation to individual teachers, groups institutions and governments; through developing and influencing institutional policy on teaching and learning; and through the promotion of scholarship and professional practice in educational development itself. The theme also recognises influences that act upon educational development, such as government and institutional policy and advances in educational technology.

Within this context, Ventures and Visions asks "What are we doing now? What will we be doing in the future?"

This preliminary announcement invites you to mark the event in your diary and begin planning to be in Perth in July 2002. A call for contributions and registration details will be released closer to the conference. Further details and updates of information (multilingual) can be found at http://www.csd.uwa.edu.au/iced2002/

There is a discount fee being offered for dual registrations.