HERDSA
news

The magazine of the Higher Education Research and Development Society of Australasia

Inside
2015 conference highlights – networking, buddies, prizes and awards; teaching in Vietnam; who's who in HERDSA; around the branches; mentoring; the dark side of technology; free textbooks; problems with peer observation

From the Editor
Maureen Bell

Welcome to our new look HERDSA NEWS. Thanks to our designer Rachel Williams who has given HERDSA NEWS a modern look in an easy to read format with section headings. Of course readability is the key so we hope that you will be able to easily find the articles that interest you and perhaps be tempted to read our new columns. Thanks also go to the members of the HERDSA publications committee and in particular Peter Kandlbinder for comments on the various design iterations.

The HERDSA 2015 conference in Melbourne takes centre stage in this, the conference edition. We have included a few photographic highlights – you might find yourself in one of the group shots – and a couple of short articles from 'newbie' conference goers on how to negotiate the "I don't know anyone here" feeling. We congratulate prize winners, awards winners and our new HERDSA Fellows and honorary Life Members. The report from our conference convenor, Liz Levin, is a must read for anyone who attended or missed the conference.

President Allan Goody reminds us in his column of the importance of international networking so it is appropriate that our feature article is from HERDSA Life Member Owen Hicks who has spent a number of years as a volunteer teacher in Timor Leste, China and Vietnam. Owen tells an interesting tale as well as offering his candid thoughts on the importance of the teacher-student relationship. The teacher as role-model is a key idea in Asian education. Graham Hendry carries on the role-model theme in his article on peer observation and teachers as role models for their peers.

The Community section of the NEWS now comprises a series of columns from the increasingly widespread HERDSA community in Australia, New Zealand and beyond. Our Perspectives section includes regular contributions from Roger Atkinson and Bob Cannon. I am really grateful to these two stalwarts who never fail to provide well researched and seriously thought-out pieces. The importance of the link between HERDSA and the HERD journal is underscored by our (almost) new regular column from HERD Editor Barbara Grant and our Review section offers a useful introduction to two new HERDSA publications.

We would love to hear what you think about the new HERDSA NEWS and what else you would like to see in our magazine.

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Save the date!
HERDSA Conference,
Fremantle, 4-7 July 2016

Photo: Patrick Halloran

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From the President
Allan Goody

Over the past couple of months I have been fortunate to participate in a number of international meetings including the HERDSA conference. These meetings present wonderful opportunities for us to share and learn, sustain our networks and forge new ones.

For me, one takeaway from these meetings is the importance of including the student voice in our conferences and meetings. At both HERDSA and STLHE (the Canadian Society for Teaching and Learning in Higher Education) students were panellists, presenters and even served as Masters of Ceremonies. But how many students are actually engaged in the study of higher education in Australasia?

By North America standards we fail miserably in providing formal programs in the study of and research into higher education including teaching and learning support, the student experience and administration. Those who study higher education are armed with the knowledge, skills, attitudes and the language to understand the environment in which they work and people who they work with and for. This is not meant to devalue the excellent and often unacknowledged work of these professional staff in our institutions who come into these roles with a passion for working with students and academics. But we fail them by not providing the study opportunities to prepare them for these critical roles.

This is just another example of how teaching and the support of teaching and learning are undervalued. Certainly in Australia, there is scant regard by government for the Office for Learning and Teaching and its predecessors. While Australia and New Zealand are world leaders in contributing to the growing body of literature on teaching and learning in higher education, much of this has come about through the drive and passion of individuals rather than systematic support from government and university leadership.

While working in Singapore recently (where the Government contributes significantly to the improvement of teaching and learning) I was engaged in discussions about the scholarship of teaching and learning (SoTL). I was reminded of the wise words of Angela Brew that higher education will only be taken seriously by the broader community if it is based on rigorous research and analysis and the engagement of academics in sustained and substantial study of higher education.

SoTL is a very powerful form of professional development but many academics lack the appropriate research training to be able to engage more broadly in higher education research. Let's put some serious money into encouraging further research into higher education (and not just teaching and learning in the classroom) as well as the initial training and ongoing development of academic and professional support staff. In the midst of all the arguments between politicians and university leaders about funding, the basic foundations of student learning and all that goes into supporting and promoting student learning, seems to get forgotten.

International networking was another takeaway from the HERDSA conference. When I first became President of HERDSA I was keen to see HERDSA looking outwards and engaging with colleagues beyond our traditional community, particularly in neighbouring countries in Asia, the Pacific and Africa. Our membership of the International Consortium for Educational Development (ICED) is one way we are already doing this, for example, funding a project that is bringing together academic developers from a number of countries in southern Africa to assist them to develop capacity in teaching and learning in their home countries. ICED also assisted China and Thailand to establish networks and is working with colleagues in Singapore to form a network.

The Roger Landbeck Professional Development Fund, which was launched at the Melbourne conference in a very special ceremony involving Roger's wife Margaret, is one direct way that we can achieve this aim of outreach. The Fund honours Roger's contributions to HERDSA and higher education by bringing into the HERDSA community and furthering the professional development of colleagues from a disadvantaged background, emerging academic community or a developing higher education institution. I encourage you to follow the lead of Roger's family and his colleagues by making a contribution to the Fund and assist us to bring into the HERDSA community a colleague who would not otherwise have that opportunity. I know Roger would be truly delighted by the establishment of the Fund and I thank the Executive for supporting this initiative. It is something of which all members of HERDSA should be proud.

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Putting the teacher back into student learning
Owen Hicks

According to my head of department at the small regional university in Vietnam where I worked, Uncle Ho Chi Minh once said *"Nothing is achieved without the teacher"*. As one who championed student-centred learning for many years it seems odd to me that I am now, in a sense, championing 'teacher-centred' learning.

One of the benefits of working in a foreign environment is that you are challenged to reconsider many basic beliefs, research findings and practices that determine your academic conduct. In my situation this has meant reflection on my time, over recent years, as an academic at the North West University for Nationalities (NWUN), China, and at Pham Van Dong University (PDU), Vietnam, starkly in contrast to the University of Western Australia where I spent most of my academic life. My hope is that the observations and ideas that follow will prompt some reflection on the context of the learners *you* interact with.

A little background on my foreign teaching situations will, I hope, prove insightful. For a year I lived and worked at the North West University for Nationalities, teaching at an isolated campus located in a rural area 50 km from a small Chinese city (of 7 million people!). Teachers were bussed from the city to this new campus each day, through weather conditions that ranged from dust storms and heat in the summer to below freezing snow and ice in the winter. The students lived on campus, 12,000 undergraduates quota selected from the 56 ethnic minorities (some numbering more than the population of Australia) drawn from right across the country. The students were housed on campus in twelve accommodation blocks, 1,000 students per block. My observations led me back to early writings of Erving Goffman on 'total institutions', where inmates lived, worked and played in a very bounded environment, and developed a means of survival under conditions of duress.

A snippet from a day in the life:

It's dark. Pitch black. The 7.30am bus again. Through thick snow and ice our bus grinds along the 'freeway', slowly, slowly, horn blaring regularly at anything else moving. Occasionally we are forced to weave around heavy haulage strewn across our path at oblique angles. We'll get there eventually, but classes will start late… It's now past nine, and it comes to me that there is a group of twenty-nine young people (first-year English undergraduates) waiting ... to see me! They're eager, keen to learn, some a little anxious at the challenge of speaking English in front of their foreign teacher and classmates. … The wheels of the bus grind on. Travel time has doubled, but at last I can enter the room … a room of smiles! … "Sorry I'm late. So much snow!" Unnecessary, but said anyway. They are still beaming, not quite ready to start. 'What?', I ask. 'We thought you wouldn't come!' they reply, then we're into a lesson on appropriate use of the terms 'possible' and 'impossible'.

Most recently I have spent two years working at Pham Van Dong University, a small institution in warm-to-hot and humid Central Vietnam, where the student population is almost exclusively rural and very local. A tiny percentage of students with high enough grades and families with enough money seek higher education in the bigger cities, the rest appear happy where they are. Most, if lucky, will become teachers in small schools scattered across the province, a few will be engaged in commerce and service industries. Some will return to the fields.

For the first few months, my wife and I were accommodated on campus in the spartan (but adequate for a short stay) guesthouse, just inside the university

gates. We had a room and a small en-suite. The students were very keen to see us and disappointed when, in the evenings, we needed a little privacy and closed the door to our room.

Some of the realities of rural Vietnam are difficult to appreciate. The students, what can their world view be? Let me share a brief pre-lunch scenario:

> "...rarely is attention given to the potential of academics as role models"

My wife and I arrive late for lunch at the cafe just up the road from the university. Cheap good food at about 75 cents (AUS) a plate, and even cheaper for students. The place is full but I spy three young women from the final-year English-major class. They are very pleased for us to join them, bright, talented, attractive, happy young women, with enough English for a conversation. A couple of extra plastic stools are whisked into place.

As we wait for our food I ask, "Have any of you been out of Vietnam?". It stops the flow. It seems they don't understand the question. "You know, outside of the country, Vietnam, to somewhere else?" This is dismissed lightly enough with a shake of the heads. I persist, "What about Hanoi or Ho Chi Minh City?" They laugh at this. "No, not yet", is their reply. "Hoi An?" It's the next nearest town of any size. It's World Heritage listed! Giggles and a unison of "No, not yet." Then Hoa (means flower, same as in Chinese but spelt differently) says, "Da Nang! Have you been to Da Nang?" Yes, I've been to Da Nang, and Hoa has too. It begins to impact on me. For Western Australians this is a little like three young people living in Busselton, and about to finish university there (if that were possible). "Been outside of Australia?", "What?", "Been to Perth?", "Nah", then one of them says enthusiastically, "I've been to Bunbury."

The students are interested in me! This is in large part because I am a 'foreigner', but they do show significant interest in my local colleagues as well. They are interested in their teachers as people, as windows into the future. We are observed, studied, questioned.

At PDU, I also taught English communication to a cross-disciplinary class of academics. They confided some weeks into the program that while they came to improve their spoken English, they also came to observe how I taught and to consider how they might apply what they saw to their own teaching in their discipline!

While there is now a considerable Western literature on 'academics as role models', the major focus is on mentoring of junior academics with little attention to the impact academics may have on their students. Concern has been expressed about the need for ethical practices in business and the community, however rarely is attention given to the potential of academics as role models for students. Southern Cross University does provide a useful downloadable pdf, 'Be a good academic role model and mentor'. It encourages us to:

> Make the academic approach to thinking, learning and knowledge an everyday part of your interactions with students. In this way, students will see how to think, behave and react in academically sound and robust ways. Your modelling, mentoring and encouragement will help develop learners who truly engage with knowledge, problems, issues and questions in an academic way.

I would like to extend this further, noting that unless you are completely faceless, invisible, to your students (and some forms of technology may be heading us in that direction), then you are something of a role model (good or bad) for your students, more broadly than just in the context of their academic pursuits. You give them some direction (albeit incidentally) as to what they might 'become'.

For further reading on the concept of 'becoming' as a curriculum construct, I would strongly recommend Barnet and Coates (2004), 'Engaging the Curriculum in Higher Education'.

On May 9 this year, The New York Times carried an opinion piece titled 'What's the Point of a Professor?' in which author Mark Bauerlein notes that students 'enroll in courses and complete assignments, but further engagement [with academic staff] is minimal.' The article has a challenging conclusion:

> You can't become a moral authority if you rarely challenge students in class and engage them beyond it. If we professors do not do that, the course is not an induction of eager minds into an enlarging vision. It is a requirement to fulfill. Only our assistance with assignments matters. When it comes to students, we shall have only one authority: the grades we give. We become not a fearsome mind or a moral light, a role model or inspiration. We become accreditors.

Owen Hicks, an Emeritus Professor of the University of Western Australia and formerly responsible for academic staff development, is a HERDSA Life member and a past national and branch president. He worked as a Senior Consultant for the Australian Learning and Teaching Council and has recently enjoyed Australian Volunteers International assignments in universities in China and Vietnam.

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Links

What's the Point of a Professor?
www.nytimes.com/2015/05/10/
opinion/Sunday/whats-the-point-of-a-professor.html

On becoming as a curriculum construct: Barnett, R. and Coates, K. 2005
Engaging the curriculum in higher education, Berkshire, UK: SRHE & Open University Press.

Empowering delivery: Be a good academic role model and mentor, Southern Cross University.
scu.edu.au/ teachinglearning /download.php?docid=16278 &site_id=301&file_ext=.pdf

Conference Highlights

Photos: Simon Fox, Deakin Univeristy

Learning for Life
Elizabeth Levin

The conference organising committee for HERDSA2015 set out to create a vibrant and engaging conference around the core theme of 'Learning for life and work in a complex world'. We wanted to give delegates the opportunity to listen to thought leaders from academia and industry at the 2015 conference which was held at the Melbourne Convention and Exhibition Centre from 6-9 July and hosted by HERDSA Victoria Branch. Registrations were above expectations with close to 500 delegates and invited speakers, and 30 student volunteers including MCs and panel members who enriched our discussions and understanding of the issues they face.

Conference delegates spanned the spectrum of post-secondary education, from the most senior university academics to those who are new to the profession, coming from Australia and New Zealand, as well as across the globe including Asia and the Pacific Rim, the Americas, and Europe. The conference provided opportunities to discuss and debate, both personally and digitally, the pressing issues that are impacting and changing the nature of Higher Education, how it is perceived and the value placed on post-secondary education. Delegates new to HERDSA conferences had the opportunity to participate in a Buddy scheme to meet other new members as well as established HERDSA members.

Nearly fifty new delegates signed up for this initiative.

Throughout the conference we had the opportunity to celebrate achievements of our HERDSA members. Three new HERDSA Fellows were inducted. They are Liam Phelan, Abigail Lewis, and Shirley Scott. At the conference dinner, Coralie McCormack and Lorraine Parker were recognised for their contributions to HERDSA and higher education development through Life Memberships. Roger Landbeck's service to HERDSA and his passion for education were recognised through the launch of the Roger Landbeck Professional Development Fund. It was lovely to have members of Roger's family including Margaret, Nick and Megan Landbeck join us for the launch. Several prizes were awarded.

In addition to over 200 concurrent sessions, 9 pre-conference workshops and several sessions showcasing OLT projects, keynote and panel sessions for each of the four conference sub themes were presented. The panel sessions were capably led by senior academics from Australian universities, including Professors Sally Kift, Jennelle Kyd, Suzi Vaughan and Hilary Winchester. Each panel included student and industry representatives. Young entrepreneurs Bennett Merriman, co-founder of Event

Workforce and Gen George, CEO of One Shift inspired us with their ability to create start-ups that provide opportunities for students and graduates. In the panel session that explored the value of higher education, Adam Baker, Associate Dean, School of Business, Federation University asked how universities can make graduates more appropriate. Anthony Matis from CPA Australia replied by saying that universities need to work with students to change their attitude from a 'can I have?' to 'how can I help?' orientation. Anthony also highlighted the importance of students developing and growing their own personal brand. This resonated with the 'Me in a Minute' project which was showcased at the conference by Deakin University.

The presentations from the four keynote speakers complemented one another and added richness to the discussions and debates. Dr Helen Chen from Stanford University as the first keynote speaker challenged us to consider how universities can provide evidence that captures and demonstrates the impact and value of higher education beyond academic grades and credentialing. Dr Chen asked us to look more holistically at learning and to provide opportunities for our students to integrate and evidence the skills, knowledge and capabilities that they have acquired both inside and outside the classroom, rather than assuming that they will be able to connect the dots for themselves.

Anne-Marie Lansdown, Deputy Chief Executive of Universities Australia (UA) presented on graduate outcomes and employability, discussing trends and the importance of collaborations such as the National Work Integrated Learning (WIL) Strategy. Whist having an education does not guarantee outcomes it does improve prospects, and Anne-Marie reminded us of the important role UA plays as the interface between higher education and our government.

The third keynote Dr George Siemens, Executive Director of the Learning Innovation and Networked Knowledge Research Lab at University of Texas, Arlington presented on the topic of *Exploiting emerging technologies to enable employability quality of life*. Education is about quality of life and

work is simply a part of that. Dr Siemens was very optimistic about the future of education and reminded us that it is incumbent on universities to equip students with skills and capabilities that will enable them to engage with and shape the world, as well as understanding that learning is a perpetual journey not a destination. He suggested that universities should focus on learning needs rather than being concerned with what courses should be offered, and stressed that public funding is crucial to support universities in a 'knowledge age'.

The final keynote presenter was Dr Gardner Campbell, Vice Provost for Learning Innovation and Student Success at Virginia Commonwealth University. Dr Campbell addressed the delegates on the topic of Educating for uncertainty. He advocates four fundamental understandings: complexity and how it differs from complication; the nature of technology; understanding of learning; and understanding of understanding.

According to Dr Siemens, Dr Campbell's keynote was "deeply provocative, engaging and motivating… symbolising igniting rather than filling".

In addition to the formal program we were exposed to the thinking of Justin Heazlewood an Australian songwriter, author, actor and humourist; we had a lively and entertaining Pecha Kucha session; launched a new HERDSA guide entitled Quality Learning and Teaching with Sessional Staff; and had opportunities to visit the Deakin CloudMobile, a purpose built mobile studio. Throughout the four days of the conference over 3900 tweets were posted. At one stage we were trending number 5 on Twitter! Some have created summaries of the tweets. We were also fortunate to have Gavin Blake from Feverpicture illustrate two days of conference, including all panels and three keynotes.

In the wrap up session just prior to handing over to Allan Goody who is convening the 2016 conference in

Fremantle, 2015 Conference Chair, Professor Beverley Oliver highlighted a recurring theme throughout the conference and something that we need to focus on in order to remain relevant. Those of us committed to higher education need to consider and make explicit not only how we educate but why! Education is not just about employability, but about personal growth, quality of life as well as enhancement of society.

Links

Conference tweets summary
https://storify.com/
PleagleTrainer/herdsa2015
-day-one
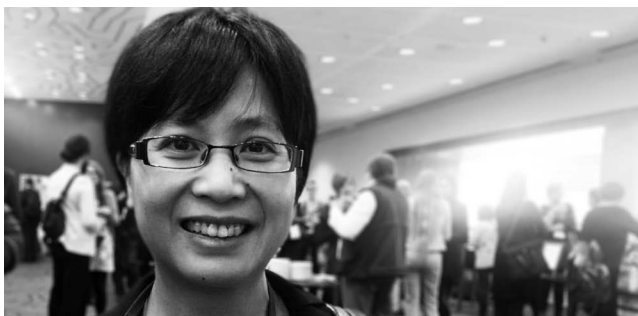
https://storify.com/public/
templates/card/index.html?
src=//storify.com/PleagleTrainer/
herdsa2015-9-july-2015

Feverpicture
https://twitter.com/feverpicture

Deakin CloudMobile
http://teachassist.deakin.edu.au/
cloudmobile/)

2015 OLT Fellowships

OLT and HERDSA congratulate the 2015 Office of Learning and Teaching Fellows

National Senior Teaching Fellows

Dr Ruth Bridgstock
Professor Denise Chalmers
Professor Amanda Henderson

National Teaching Fellows

Dr Adam Bridgeman
Associate Professor Kathleen Butler
Associate Professor Trevor Cullen
Dr Kelly Matthews
Associate Professor Mauro Mocerino
Dr Sarah O'Shea
Dr Jessica Vanderlelie
Associate Professor Jason West

Australian Government | Office for Learning & Teaching

Conference newbies find warm welcome

Althea Blakey, University of Otago, Dunedin

I attended the HERDSA 2015 conference in Melbourne with a mix of trepidation and excitement. The former was because I had not travelled to such a big city for 3 years, the latter because the presentations that I was due to make were the culmination of my PhD journey. I was also rather unsure of what the other delegates would think of my work, and where I would fit in to the grander scheme of it all. I have attended other higher education conferences and been pleasantly surprised by the collegiality and welcome that was extended to me. I was warned that "this conference you might find rather different, mate".

However, HERDSA 2015 was no exception to my good experiences. I had contact from a helpful professional buddy prior to the conference; we made a date to hook up for a beer (thanks, Margaret Wallace) and another colleague showed me around some of the town. I was due to present my work on the last day, which, after a lot of worrying, I instead found rather good timing, as several people I had chatted with said they would come to listen and support – which they did.

All in all, I was met by smiling faces and interesting questions about my work. This only served to top off a super week in which I had learned lots, met some great people, and experienced a very efficient staff and venue. Nice work HERDSA!

Kim Anh Dang, Monash University

My experience at this first HERDSA conference couldn't have been better. The induction from Angela Carbone, who introduced me to HERDSA, and my voluntary professional buddy, Elke Stracke, helped me feel most welcome, less lost, and quickly build my sense of belonging to the HERDSA community. Thanks to the organising committee for the Professional Buddy initiative!

Coming to this intellectual banquet, I was struck by diverse flavours and tastes of topics. Interesting papers on peer learning and English language proficiency, my areas of research interest, excited me… and easily connected me to others sharing common interest. Employability was undoubtedly the flavour of the conference, with an impressive range of innovations across institutions, such as ePortfolios, Me-in-a-Minute and Beyond Bond, to name a few.

In this international conference it was also delightful to hear the keynotes around the questions of Why, not just How to. George Siemens reminded us of the quality of life and seeing the student as a whole, in developing their whole potentials. Gardner Campbell's thought provoking talk challenged us to rethink 'education' in 'education for uncertainty'. I left the conference with more questions to ask and more connections to make. Looking forward to seeing you again at HERDSA 2016 in Fremantle!

Prizes and Awards

HERDSA Award for the Best Scholarly Paper

Recognising learner autonomy: Lessons and reflections from a joint x/c MOOC.

Shane Dawson (University of South Australia); Vitomir Kovanović, Srećko Joksimović, Dragan Gašević (University of Edinburgh); George Siemens (University of Texas Arlington).

Taylor & Francis Best Paper by a New Researcher

Daring to lead with feminism: Stories from gender studies academics in Australian higher education.

Briony Lipton (Australian National University) and Liz Mackinlay University of Queensland).

HERDSA Best Poster Prize

On becoming a professional: The role of emotional work-readiness.

Sue Bandaranaike, John Willison, Lynette Torres.

HERDSA Prize for Best Presentation by a Student

The sense of efficiency and productivity among PhD students.

KwongNui Sim (University of Otago).

Student Travel Award

Eryn Thomas (University of New England).

Life Members

HERDSA acknowledges the distinguished contribution individuals have made to higher education research and development in our region. At the 2015 Conference the HERDSA President conferred three new honorary Life Members. We will profile these Life Members in future editions of HERDSA NEWS. Congratulations to:

Dr Coralie McCormack, Adjunct Associate Professor, University of Canberra, Australia

The nomination commented on Coralie's consistent commitment, excellence and influential leadership in educational capacity building, sustained development for communities of practitioners and scholarly contributions to the Australian Higher Education sector.

Lorraine Parker, Learning and Development Consultant, New Zealand

The nomination commented on Lorraine's sustained contribution to HERDSA and the wider community of tertiary educators as a teacher, researcher, manager and leader.

New Fellows
Glyn Thomas

The Fellowships Committee of the HERDSA Executive are very pleased to advise that we welcomed three new Fellows to the Fellowship Community at the 2015 conference.

Dr Shirley Scott has made a strong contribution to the field of higher education at UNSW through her commitment to learning and teaching. She has been instrumental in the development of a Faculty-wide tutor development program.

Dr Liam Phelan (above) is the co-ordinator of Online Teaching and Learning with the GradSchool and University of Newcastle. He works collaboratively with colleagues across all Faculties to improve student learning through communities of practice, and research on online pedagogies.

Dr Abigail Lewis (above) joined Edith Cowan University as the first clinical coordinator within the Speech Pathology program. She has successfully established the practicum components of this program, and introduced the ePortfolio.

The Fellowship Community continues to grow. We now have 22 Associate Fellows. A band of mentors are working with these folks to prepare their fellowship portfolios. We recently inducted 4 new Fellows into the Panel of Assessors. Thanks to Jackie Walkington and Susan Bolt for their leadership of this panel and the important role it plays in advancing the quality of Portfolio assessments.

At this time we are sad to say goodbye to Sue Jones, Coralie McCormack, and Cristina Poyatos-Matas after their faithful service to the Fellowship Community on the Executive Committee. They helped steer the Fellowship scheme through some challenging times of renewal. Finally, in more sad news, we note the passing of HERDSA Fellow, Professor Nicholas Tonti-Filippini late last year after a long struggle with illness. Nicholas was one of the leading anti-euthanasia advocates in Australia and our thoughts are with his family.

Networking opportunities gain tick of approval

The *Professional Buddy* program was an initiative of the Melbourne HERDSA conference committee. This program offered first time conference delegates the chance to partner up with an experienced HERDSA member. By all reports the idea was a great success so if you are attending Fremantle 2016 as a first-timer make sure you join up for the program. Why? Three buddies – Paula Myatt, Craig Agnew and Kathryn Harden-Thew explain.

Craig Agnew, Nelson Marlborough Institute of Technology

I have experienced several welcoming moments at HERDSA. The first being the TATAL workshop where I met a number of wonderful people from varying institutes and faculties. Together we battled through the cognitive ordeal of attempting to articulate our philosophies of teaching. Little did I know, but my 'buddy', Paula, was actually one of my fellow battlers at a different table. I met her on day 1 of the conference.

I came to the conference without knowing anyone and although I do believe that I have attained the graduate capability of 'being able to talk to strangers', the professional buddy program meant that I would at least have someone to chat with during tea breaks, instead of milling about awkwardly pretending to read posters and checking my phone.

Seriously though, I thoroughly recommend the buddy programme for first time HERDSA attendees. It really does provide what we would call in NZ 'manaakitanga' - to care for a person's well-being. In fact, my buddy had the brilliant idea of buddying two people so that if she didn't feel like talking to us, we could talk to each other - a tactic that I'm intending to steal should I ever find myself in a similar situation.

Huge thanks to Paula, Kathryn (my fellow noob), the TATAL team and others who made me feel welcome.

Kathryn Harden-Thew, University of Wollongong

When the invitation to be part of the HERSDA Buddy Program came I signed up straight away. I'd heard that this conference was quite big and while I knew a number of people attending from my institution, I wanted to find a way to begin networking early.

My experience of having a buddy was excellent. Paula, our HERDSA Veteran, was friendly and quick to set up a meeting for Day 1. She had the foresight to Buddy two new HERDSA delegates, giving us a further contact straight away.

 The program helped me feel a sense of belonging at the conference and I think that's essential. It was great to hear about

Paula's experiences of being a member and great to touch base with Craig, the other first time delegate.

Following this experience I would encourage everyone attending a HERDSA Conference to take part. It's an easy way to begin networking and I hope to give back through this program next year.

Paula Myatt, Griffith University

I had a great personal and professional experience recently as a HERDSA2015 conference Buddy. When the email arrived earlier in the year announcing a program to enable new members to connect with (hmm… old? Experienced?) HERDSA members, I knew I would be a part.

My first HERDSA was Adelaide 2007 where I met Roger Landbeck. Roger and others made me feel very welcome - maybe that is one of the reasons I was a buddy in 2015. It seemed like a great way to "give back".

I mentored two new members and at the first morning tea we met up as pre-arranged (we had exchanged emails leading up the conference). Craig and Kathryn were easy to talk to, really interesting for me to meet, they laughed at my jokes (!), and we had conference coffee (with a really nice raspberry and white chocolate muffin). We talked about the first session, the conference generally, NZ wines and a bit about our careers. We just talked. We met again on several occasions. Each time we networked with each other and I checked that the conference was working for them. I think it did. It was great to meet them both and I really hope to see them again at future HERDSA conferences.

I would like to think that this type of friendship made a difference to their first HERDSA, and for me it felt like the right thing to do.

Who's who in HERDSA

Kathryn Sutherland

I am the Associate Dean Students, Learning and Teaching; Faculty Of Humanities And Social Sciences, Victoria University of Wellington.

I joined HERDSA at my first HERDSA conference in 1998. I found the community so supportive and interesting that I got involved in the HERDSA New Zealand branch committee, then served on the HERDSA executive for six years, and I've also been on the HERDSA Guides committee for 15 years. HERDSA is a place to feel like you're not the only one trying to make a difference in higher education. I've made lifelong friends and the conference is one of the highlights of the academic year for me. I also like to make sure that people remember the 'A' in HERDSA stands for Australasia, and that includes New Zealand!

One of the accomplishments for HERDSA New Zealand was the establishment of the TERNZ network and conference in 2002. That was Tony Harland's idea and he got Stanley Frielick and I to help get it off the ground. TERNZ is a really good stepping stone into bigger conferences. Another was organising, with Mark Barrow, the 2008 HERDSA Conference at Rotorua. One of the wonderful things about HERDSA is that it's a collective community that works together to make things happen.

I am reading Neel Mukherjee, The Lives of Others. When The Luminaries won the Man Booker prize in 2013 I loved it so much that I am now making my way through the 2014 Man Booker finalists.

Next I am going to make a donation to the Roger Landbeck Professional Development Fund and encourage people to apply. It is a wonderful initiative and a good honouring of his memory and his passion for social justice.

I love running, well, slow jogging really. I always manage to get some good runs in when I go to the HERDSA conference. I love coming to different destinations and going for a run on the first morning of the conference and getting a feel for the city that I am in.

What people may not know about me is that for the last three years I have been to Nepal with Habitat for Humanity to build a house for a family in a different location each year. All of the houses that I helped to build survived the earthquake earlier this year, thank goodness, and the families are safe, though obviously hugely affected by what was a massive disaster. Hopefully people won't forget about Nepal now that the story is out of the headlines.

A new learning and teaching institute

As part of the 2015-2016 Budget the Australian Government has announced that from 1 July 2016 a new learning and teaching institute will be established, replacing the Office for Learning and Teaching. Universities will be invited to bid to host the new institute.

The key elements of the current highly regarded grants, fellowships and awards will be retained, and they will continue to be competitive and peer assessed. Governance arrangements will be collaborative and draw on sector wide expertise to provide oversight of the grants, fellowships and awards, administration of the institute and deal with any perceptions of conflict of interest. The Minister will continue to approve grants, fellowships and awards.

The Minister for Education and Training, the Hon Christopher Pyne MP, has announced the 2015 OLT Fellowships. The Fellows are listed on page 10. Congratulations to them on their achievement.

Minister Pyne has also announced the successful applicants for Round 1 2015 OLT Innovation and Development grants. The grants focus on a number of priority areas including enhancing employability skills, improving pathways to higher education, and increasing the effectiveness of the PhD.

Congratulations to all HERDSA members who have been successful as project leaders or team members.

Applications for Round 2 2015 OLT grants are being assessed. Successful applicants will be announced in November.

2016 OLT grants - intending applicants and nominees should, in the first instance, discuss their intention with the relevant OLT Institutional Contact Officer (ICO) via: www.olt.gov.au

Australian Government | Office for **Learning & Teaching**

Around the branches

Across Australia, New Zealand and Hong Kong our branches continue to offer added value to HERDSA members. HERDSA Branch Chairs are shown above, from left to right: Gesa Rouge (ACT), Anna Siu Fong Kwan (HK), Rebecca Sealey (QLD), Sharron King (SA), Tracy Douglas (TAS), Elizabeth Levin (VIC), Melissa Davis (WA).

ACT

Chair: Gesa Rouge

HERDSA ACT have offered a workshop series offering insights into current educational research along with practice focused activities for enhanced student learning engagement.

Workshops included Student Engagement and Assessment for Learning (Tim Grace and Peter Copeman); Constructive Alignment for Professional, Global and Lifelong Learners (Naomi Dale, ADA BGL, Gesa Ruge); and Evidence Collection for Teaching and Learning Awards and PDR (Gesa Ruge, Shane Nuessler).

Accompanying this series, Coralie McCormack and Gesa Rouge facilitated a regular forum for reflective practitioners interested in Talking about Teaching and Learning (TATAL) to extend topics and offer peer support.

Thanks to Gesa Rouge (UC) and Beth Beckman (ANU) have now taken on the role of joint ACT Branch coordinators. Thanks to Catherine McLoughlin for her work as previous Branch Chair.

gesa.ruge@canberra.edu.au

Hong Kong

Chair: Anna Siu Fong Kwan

HERDSA Hong Kong Branch held the Annual General Meeting. Activity and financial reports were presented and the executive committee for 2015-16 was elected. To contribute to the local development on benchmarking exercises in higher education, a Dinner Dialogue on eLearning Benchmarking will be conducted as a starting point to build a learning team on benchmarking procedure.

All HERDSA members who are working and visiting Hong Kong are most welcome to HERDSA HK activities. Please visit the website or contact Anna for the most up to date information.

herdsa.edublogs.org/
anna.kwan@outlook.com

South Australia

Chair: Sharron King

SA Branch hosted two research seminars with Deanne Gannaway. What's up with the Australian BA? had good representation from the three SA universities interested in Deanne's research on the place of BA programs in contemporary Australian higher education. Participants were encouraged to examine the trends and practices of their own BA programs and consider possible strategies to future proof their Arts curricula. Deanne provided tools for a Design thinking approach to engage with alternative ways of scaffolding their curriculum.

David Birbeck offered another interactive session presenting the findings from a multi-institutional collaborative OLT seed grant developing the Course Handover Assistance Tool (CHAT): a resource that seeks to support new course coordinators to understand the management and the teaching and learning requirements of their course. A seminar on the outcomes of a NCSEHE funded project exploring the experiences of first in family students at university was presented by Sharron King, Ann Luzeckyj, and Ben McCann. The workshop enabled participants to develop insights from the experiences of these FiF students to reflect on their own teaching and support strategies.

sharron.king@unisa.edu.au

Queensland

Chair: Rebecca Sealey

The executive team is in communication with QPEN and CADAD to run mini conferences in northern and southern QLD in late 2015.

www.jcu.edu.au/learnand teach/
professionallearning/herdsa/
rebecca.sealey@jcu.edu.au

SAVE THE DATE

QLD Branch mini-conference *Shaping higher education with new ideas and emerging initiatives*

Friday November 6th 2015 in Townsville and Brisbane. QLD members re-present their 2015 HERDSA conference presentations and potential 2016 HERDSA conference presenters to pilot their presentation prior to HERDSA 2016 abstract submission.

Contact
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Victoria

Chair: Elizabeth Levin

Congratulations to the VIC branch for their support of the HERDSA 2015 Conference in Melbourne.

A joint workshop with Australian collaborative education network (ACEN) entitled Non-placement authentic WIL (WIL refers to work integrated learning) drew 50 registrations with some virtual participation. The workshop highlighted a variety of non-placement WIL approaches that offer students the opportunity to engage with industry and community in order to develop and collect evidence of employability skills. Presentations were by Leoni Russell, Karen Le Rossignol, Sally Parrot and Viet Le.

Examples of non-authentic WIL included a multidisciplinary final year industry project where groups of up to 50 students provide solutions for clients with complex business problems. Students can leverage off these experiential learning activities when they seek employment.

The level of engagement was evident from the animated and extended discussions and comments like "there's a paper in that". A wonderful opportunity to bring together practitioners to explore the opportunities and issues related to non-authentic WIL.

elevin@swin.edu.au

Tasmania

Chair: Tracy Douglas

Branch members Susan Salter and Jane Pittaway opened the 2015 BIOTA conference in Launceston. Their presentation considered how students can prepare for study at the University of Tasmania. Susan facilitated a microbiology workshop for biology teachers.

Branch members Tracy Douglas and Susan Salter presented a webinar: Perspectives of online discussion boards through different lenses at the Open and Distance Learning Association of Australia research i-Byte-series.

The Aspiration Matters symposium showcased ongoing work in Tasmania to inspire the community to engage in higher education. Members of the Tasmania branch were on the organising committee and took part in the symposium. Branch members also attended TechEx 2015 in Launceston where they heard about a number of innovations and initiatives in technology enhanced learning and teaching at the University of Tasmania.

Members of the Tasmania branch continue to engage with colleagues on the mainland on a variety of projects, for example, Emeritus Professor Sue Jones is working with Professor Liz Johnson of Deakin University examining the impact of the National Science Threshold Learning Outcomes on science curricula. Branch members are engaged in an OLT extension project on Peer Assisted Learning Schemes. The project is led by branch member, Jo-Anne Kelder.

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Western Australia

Chair: Melissa Davis

WA has been busy planning the next HERDSA conference to be held in Fremantle in 2016.

In addition, a number of events have been held including Curriculum Upside Down (Process Oriented Guided Inquiry Learning) presented by Daniel Southam; Is it possible to internationalise an undergraduate research program in teaching and learning? by Sally Sandover, Lee Partridge, Wayne McGowan; What if students made up their own programs of study? presented by OLT National Teaching Fellow Joe Shapter; and Showcase of Indigenous Cultures and Health as best practice in educational partnerships by Marion Kickett, Julie Hoffman, and Louise Austen.

m.davis@curtin.edu.au

Pathways
Peter Coolbear

At the end of June Ako Aotearoa jointly hosted the fifth annual Te Ara Whakamana pathways and transitions conference with Manukau Institute of Technology's Centre for Studies in Multiple Pathways. We have come quite a way since the first conference. We no longer have to explain pathways and pipelines, but we are still looking at many of the challenges we face to ensure that every learner in New Zealand has the best possible opportunities for access to successful tertiary education.

New Zealand has a strong national qualifications framework which is also inclusive of workplace learning opportunities. Our Ministry of Education has done some great work identifying six vocational pathways within the framework which sit alongside the well-established academic routes into degree study. So we have a great road map. Why then, does this not translate so well into effective geographical systems for many individual learners?

Unsurprisingly, it is about the need for better systematic support for many students and families to remain engaged with education and to provide them with the wrap-around support they need, to make the right choices as they develop their own pathways. There is considerable scope for solutions-focused research here, in particular exploring why some great initiatives are effective and what might be the enablers to support the development of these models on a national basis. The Manukau Institute of Technology Tertiary High School is one such example that offers students - very often those at risk of dropping out of tertiary education altogether - a seamless opportunity to complete both their secondary schooling and a vocational tertiary qualification.

www.akoaotearoa.ac.nz

Uncharted Waters: Evaluation and the quality of teaching and learning in tertiary education

Clinton Golding

Every April the New Zealand branch of HERDSA hosts a day-long symposium in Wellington in partnership with Ako Aotearoa (the NZ equivalent of the OLT). This year our topic was evaluation, the role of learner feedback in improving teaching practices, and how the changing nature of higher education may affect the nature of such feedback. Sid Nair gave one keynote, and I gave the second, and we finished the day with a panel of two student representatives from different tertiary institutes.

While our discussion sometimes followed well-charted routes, in this article I thought I would share some of our thoughts which went outside the normal shipping lanes.

Sid Nair, Professor of Higher Education Development from the University Of Western Australia, launched our day with a provocative talk on the student voice. He challenged our reliance on hearing from students through a questionnaire, and suggested various alternatives such as a web page where students can leave feedback at any time, and where the institution would respond to this feedback

and let students know what had been done.

For me, the big challenge from Sid's talk was: Who is the evaluation system for? We tend to use it to get information for teachers going for promotion or to get information for institutions for quality assurance. But maybe student evaluation systems should instead be designed for students, and provide opportunities for them to have their say?

I led the discussion for the next part of the day. My aim was for us to explore how we can use evaluation data to improve our teaching. For 20 years I have used evaluation feedback to help me hone and refine my own teaching, but I was surprised that this is not widespread. Many use student feedback for promotion purposes, but fewer use this feedback to improve their teaching, and many teachers seem to think that evaluation questionnaires are useless for improving their teaching.

I argued that what makes the difference between using evaluations to improve or ignoring the feedback is the teacher's approach to the student feedback.

This conclusion was backed up by the results of a study where I interviewed award-winning university teachers who use evaluation data to improve their teaching. These teachers take what I call an improvement approach: They take a reflective approach, and aim for constant improvement, rather than simply trying to be good enough. They see their evaluation data as formative feedback, and feel duty bound to use this feedback to improve learning outcomes for their students. I argued further that this approach should be fostered by institutions to encourage more teachers to actively use student evaluations to improve their teaching.

Because of our discussion in the symposium I started to wonder what evaluation system would best encourage the improvement approach. Perhaps a system that simply asks for staff to use evaluations to show they are good enough to confirm their job or good enough to be promoted would actually discourage the improvement approach? If staff are only concerned with getting good enough they do not seek the constant improvement needed for the improvement approach. But what system then would encourage staff to seek constant improvement with their teaching?

The penultimate session involved a discussion with a panel of two student representatives: Paul Smith, the President of Auckland University Student Association and Linsey Higgins, President of Massey University Student Association, Palmerston North. They answered questions about student perceptions of the process of evaluating teaching. It was really useful to get a student perspective here – they busted some of our myths (apparently they do care about giving feedback and would like the opportunity to offer feedback) and confirmed others (they do tend to think their feedback is largely ignored). Basically, students do not always understand the point of student evaluation questionnaires, but they were happy to fill them in if they were convinced the feedback would be taken seriously and used.

We finished with some more discussion led by Sid. In response to this discussion, Tony Harland—Professor of Higher Education at the University of Otago, and

one of the organisers of the symposium— had this to say:

> Sid has a wealth of knowledge about evaluations and takes some interesting perspectives. He moved from seeing evaluations as something that belonged to the academics and students for the purpose of learning, and then suggested we should set up a State evaluation process across all tertiary institutes. But this seemed to give evaluation away to the State so that government could gain more control over academic work, which I found troubling.At the very end of the symposium he told a story about the unsuccessful Australian initiative that sought a national evaluation scheme. I was surprised by his suggestion that New Zealand should pick up such an initiative, and also with his argument that it would stand a better chance of success in this country. Are New Zealand academics more docile than their Australian counterparts? Unfortunately, we did not have space to debate this proposal which I am sure would have raised interesting questions about university sovereignty and academic freedom. Nor did we debate the wisdom of giving a hostile government more power over the sector. However, if we had had the chance, I am sure Sid would have engaged with such concerns in a friendly, considered manner and with his usual good spirits.

Overall, this was a fruitful exploration of some uncharted waters, and I hope it encourages you to plan your own voyage.

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NEW SCHOLARS
Getting the most out of mentoring
Lesley Peterson

A mentoring partnership can be formal or informal, depending on the needs of the mentee. There is a strong theme in the mentoring literature that structured meetings are a sure way of achieving value-for-time by both the mentee and the mentor. Mentoring can encourage active, critical reflection by the mentee as they make links between their professional development goals and their progress towards achieving these goals. Establishing a clear framework for how the partnership will work significantly supports this.

Trust in the mentoring partnership is paramount for success. A central determinant of trust creation is confidentiality which is the responsibility of both the mentor and the mentee. Other factors which can influence the level and sustainability of trust in the partnership include:
- Mutual respect
- Setting ground rules (boundaries)
- Mutual sharing
- Willingness to engage and listen.

To support the effectiveness of the partnership, in addition to developing trust, there are a number of considerations for the mentor and the mentee in terms of the partnership framework and specific actions each partner can take. For example:
- How to start the partnership - clarifying and agreeing on roles and responsibilities
- How to continue the partnership
- How and when the partnership will end
- Agreeing on the purpose of the mentoring support
- Confirming a feedback process
- Meeting timing and frequency
- The meeting environment - place, space, privacy
- The mode of meeting, such as online or face to face

- Mutual sharing of knowledge and skills
- Ongoing evaluation of the partnership effectiveness
- Celebration of successes.

Other influences include the degree of commonality between the mentor and mentee, demographics such as age, gender and ethnicity, academic discipline and legitimisation of mentoring by management.

Although the focus of the mentoring is to support the mentee, the partnership is also beneficial for the mentor. A number of authors talk about the mentee being a catalyst for the mentor's professional development, and the process of mentoring can prompt mentors to re-evaluate established practices and assumptions. Partnering a new academic can lead the mentor to reflect on their own practice, their underlying values and beliefs.

So whether you are a mentor or a mentee, developing an effective mentoring partnership which is supportive, purpose-bound and has a clear framework to ensure the mentoring happens is an invaluable part of the mentoring process.

Links
Would you like to experience effective mentoring? Find out about the HERDSA FELLOWSHIP scheme: www.herdsa.org.au

Huling, L., & Resta, V. (2001). Teacher mentoring as professional development.

Petersen, L.K. (2011). Implementing a support mechanism through mentoring for teaching practice by academic teaching staff in the higher education context.

FROM THE HERD EDITORIAL DESK

Want to be read? Publish in HERD
Barbara Grant

The editorial team recently gave a comprehensive report of *HERD*'s performance to the HERDSA Executive: herewith some highlights.

HERD's Impact Factor (IF) and ranking in the *Education & Education Research* cluster of journals rose for the third consecutive year: with an IF of 0.911, we are now ranked 84th of 224 journals in the cluster. The five top-cited articles contributing to this IF are (in ranked order) Mary and Michael Ryan's *Theorising a model for teaching and assessing reflective learning in higher education* (32.2); John Biggs' *What the student does: Teaching for enhanced learning* (31.1); David Spencer, Matthew Riddle and Bernadette Knewstubb's *Curriculum mapping to embed graduate capabilities* (31.2); Patrick McNeil, Helen Scicluna, Patrick Boyle, Michael Grimm, Kathryn Gibson and Philip Jones' *Successful development of generic capabilities in an undergraduate medical education program* (31.4); and Barbara de la Harpe and Christina David's *Major influences on the teaching and assessment of graduate attributes* (31.4). Congratulations to these authors!

In a similar vein, Google Scholar Metrics rank us 5th on their list of the top 20 higher education publications. This placement is based on Google's own citation analysis, using the h5-index (the h-index for articles published in the last five years). HERD's h5-index is 29, which means that we have 29 articles published in the past five years with at least 29 citations. (An individual's h-index is the largest number of publications cited at least h times: for example, an h-index of 9 means you have 9 publications that have been cited at least 9 times.)

HERD has some other favorable statistics for 2014. By the end of the year, there had been 114,950 full-text downloads of HERD articles, distributed across Australasia (37%), Northern and Central Europe (28%), North America (14%), Asia (8%), Africa (5%) and Southern Europe (5%), with about one percent each in South Asia, Middle East, Eastern Europe and Latin America. Again, the journal has seen a steady year-on-year increase in downloads since 2010, when 37,372 were recorded. This expansion results from significant growth in *HERD*'s availability through libraries in both the developed and developing world through online-only sales package agreements and partner philanthropic arrangements. In addition, 8400 individuals have signed-up for Taylor & Francis' Education Bulletin Alerts for the content of each issue of *HERD*, which contain embedded links taking the reader directly to individual articles. If you don't have an Alert for *HERD*, we urge you to get one.

To other *HERD* activities.

At the recent HERDSA conference in Melbourne we offered a well-attended workshop entitled *Critical discourse analysis and close reading of texts: Powerful methodologies for analysing HE data*. A basic premise of the workshop was that higher education researchers over-use the descriptive-thematic approach to analysing qualitative data and need to spread their wings into more complex, theoretically self-aware modes of interpreting – such data. We hope you have enjoyed the latest special issue, *Queering the Academy: New directions in LGBT research in higher education*, guest-edited by Associate Professor Louisa Allen of the University of Auckland. We are pleased to contribute to what is an emergent area of HE research and scholarship by offering a range of interesting pieces (articles, interview, conference report, book review and Points of Debate) by leading and new authors from a variety of places, geographically and theoretically.

Lastly, in a new development for *HERD*, we have established a YouTube channel for *Points for Debate* pieces. Thanks to Robyn Philip (QUT) for being willing to trial this for us!

Barbara Grant,
Executive Editor, HERD, on behalf of the editorial team
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Links

Watch our first YouTube video:
https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCqf-DloutKhOWjd_E-JWhFw

Follow us on twitter: @HERDJournal

Find the latest journal and sign up for a HERD email alert:
http://www.tandfonline.com/toc/cher20/current#.VdZuuJdvA-N

Meanderings

Robert Cannon

"What society are we building here? Jarvis asks. And that question should be at the beginning of every conversation about the Internet. Like it or not, the digital world is reshaping our society with bewildering speed. The fate of employment, identity, privacy, prosperity, justice, and civility are all being transformed by networked society." Andrew Keen, The Internet is Not the Answer.

Andrew Keen's words provide the text for today's sermon.

As a social skills experiment, I am applying the principles of Facebook to make new friends. When I walk down the street I tell people how I feel and gratuitously declare my opinion on the political issues of the day. I also freely give out pictures of my breakfast and my children, and I show them videos of our cute family cat. I listen in to their conversations, generously 'share' these with all and sundry, and I tell people I 'like' them.

Incredibly, my new social skills work! I already have four new 'friends': two psychiatrists, an intelligence officer and a policeman.

I was about to put this edition of Meanderings to bed when I became conscious of the rising tide of comment about the disruptive and darker sides of digital technology and the Internet.

Recently, three articles with implications for education attracted my attention.

First, in the article *In an Uber World, Fortune Favors the Freelancer* (The New York Times, 27 June 2015), Tyler Cowan argues that disruptive technologies like Uber benefit workers who are disciplined and ambitious. He notes that 48% of Uber drivers have degrees. If the Uber idea spreads, Cowan argues that it will have profound implications for education and professional development.

In the second article, we read that the Chief Executive of online ghost writing service ACAD Write asserts in respect to universities where clients for ghost-written essays come from, "One of the things these universities should think about is why clients are coming to us – why there is a market for the services we provide" (The Australian, Higher Education, 27 June 2015). Why indeed! The development of this industry challenges the veracity of claims made in the slick advertising from universities proclaiming their high entry standards, teaching excellence and quality of student support.

The final article is self-explanatory and has emphatic messages for educators: *How the Internet is ruining your memory* (The Washington Post, 1 July 2015). An earlier book traverses similar ground – the title says it all! *The Flickering Mind; The false promise of technology in the classroom and how learning can be saved* (Todd Oppenheimer).

Some commentary about the Internet is presented as humour – such as the Facebook story doing the rounds that I related here – and some as cartoons. One of my favourites shows a young woman looking at her boyfriend in a coffee shop. He is ignoring her as he stares at his smartphone. She says "Do you mind if I strap your phone to my forehead so I can pretend you are looking at me when I talk?"

Misgivings about the impact of the Internet are not new. However, the frequency of publications on this theme is increasing. Alarm bells were sounded five years ago in The Shallows: How the Internet is changing the way we read, think and remember (Nicholas Carr). The finding that the use of the Internet has weakened the deep processing necessary for analysis, imagination and reflection, is one of the many findings discussed that will disturb teachers. In his recent book, *The Glass Cage* (2014), Carr discusses how shifting our attention to computer screens can leave us disengaged and discontented. The disconnect is wonderfully illustrated by Randi Zuckerberg's story, sister of Facebook founder Mark, of the child who, because of a Skype relationship, thought their grandfather lived inside a laptop! (The Australian, 9 July 2015).

Central to Andrew Keen's book quoted in my introduction, is the important question for democracies: can elected governments manage the waves of disruption sweeping through societies, especially through the largely unaccountable and wealthy corporations such as Google, Amazon, Facebook and Uber? Keen's answers lie in the ideas of digital elites becoming more accountable for their disruption, and in a new social contract of responsibility for every member of networked society. That everyone has responsibility for their conduct is also central to Bernard Salt's plea in The Weekend Australian (June 27 – 28, 2015, Life) for civility in the use of social media. He deplores the relentless ridicule, bullying and abuse suffered by politicians and others in public life. But how a new social contract to address such ills might be achieved remains a profound challenge.

Another 'dark side' of the Internet is copyright abuse. Most of us now expect to be able to go on the web and read, watch, listen, copy, and, yes, even plagiarise anything we like. The essays in Copyfight, edited by Phillipa McGuinness (2015) examine the culture and morality of copyright and the impacts on creative professionals. Some suggest that we are looking in the wrong direction and it is not digital technology or copyright law

> "…why is it that our society continues to be beguiled by the promise of technology with sweeping solutions to vaguely articulated educational problems?"

that is the problem at all but big digital corporations, neoliberalism, and our own selfish behaviour.

These issues remind me of sex-mad animals and the idea of unintended consequences, where the outcomes from a change are not the ones intended. Anyone who has seen Cane Toads, a movie detailing the spread of imported cane toads through Australia will understand unintended consequences! It turns out the toads would not eat the grubs they were meant to at all but they would multiply like fury. A bit like rabbits, actually, another libidinous animal, introduced for food and hunting. Rabbits also multiplied like fury, and subsequently devastated large swathes of New Zealand and Australia in the process.

The unintended consequences of digital educational technologies were noted as far back as 1998 by Kearsley who opined that technology has become a distraction from what matters most—effective learning and good teaching ('Educational technology: A critique', Educational Technology, 38, 2, 1998: 47-51). Kearsley lists hacking into systems to cheat, surfing the Web, shopping, checking the breaking news, and playing games, as impediments to learning and creating a "wall of separation" between the student and their

teachers. And that was in 1998, 17 years ago, well before the impact of social media applications!

Challenges to our faith in technology to address the problems of education go back further. Early last century, Harry Wise responded to Thomas Edison's effusive faith in educational technology. Edison wrote: "The education of the future, as I see it, will be conducted through the medium of the motion picture…" (cited in H. A. Wise, Motion Pictures as an Aid in Teaching American History, 1939).

Wise responded with the outcomes of his own research, and concluded that the confidence and enthusiasm for using motion pictures in schools was not well-founded.

This does not mean the Internet does not have some wonderful benefits.* But why is it that our society continues to be beguiled by the promise of technology with sweeping solutions to vaguely articulated educational problems? Examples that come to mind are the botched Digital Education Revolution policy of the Australian Government in 2007-8 and the recent assertion in the Opposition's Budget Reply Speech that, as coding is the 'literacy of the 21st Century', it should be taught in every school as a national priority.

"What society are we building here?", as Jarvis asked in the introduction. A society where technological solutions push themselves to the front of the queue on key social issues? A globalised society tied together by shared experiences on the Internet? A global society that is gloomy and alarmed?

Many educators believe quite strongly in the seemingly neutral idea of globalisation and that the Internet fosters this. Others believe that globalisation is not neutral but a strong manifestation of Western values, an argument apparently supported, somewhat surprisingly, by humour research conducted back in 2007. This found the vast majority of humour to be in English and that humorous topics reflect the values and priorities of Western youth-oriented cultures rather than

universal values (Limor Shifman, *Humor in the Age of Digital Reproduction*, International Journal of Communication 1, 2007).

Humour may be a good way forward, as the title of this book optimistically suggests: *Humor, Laughter and Human Flourishing: A philosophical exploration of the laughing animal* (Mordechai Gordon, 2014). Gordon makes the point that among philosophers, Nietzsche recognized that our uncritical attachment to various inherited conventions makes our lives burdensome and gloomy. By taking ourselves less seriously, we can become more open to the possibility of creating new values and new ideas.

* One benefit for the reader is that I was able to evaluate this edition of Meanderings using the SMOG Index on the Internet. SMOG is the acronym derived from 'Simple Measure of Gobbledygook'. The score was 11.3, an estimate of the years of schooling required to understand this piece. I hope you did!

Robert Cannon is senior evaluation adviser to the large USAID PRIORITAS education project in Indonesia. He has been an external evaluator, and former Acting Chief of PARTY, and of the USAID-funded Palestinian Faculty Development Program. Robert was Director of the Advisory Centre for University Education at the University of Adelaide, 1977-2001.
Contact: cannonra@icloud.com

Links

SMOG Index:http://www.
readabilityformulas.com/smog-
readability-formula.php

An entertaining video on the Internet as weakening deep processing:
http://tinyurl.com/nfatkxw

Cane Toads official trailer:
https://www.youtube.com/
watch?v=gYUHnf7Uy1k

Textbooks free and online! What are our universities doing?

Roger Atkinson

My local government area, the City of South Perth, is again skirmishing in the long running war over residential density zonings, "R-codes" in our State. In my newspaper clippings file, I found a headline, *'Student ghetto' warning (Southern Gazette*, 2010). A Councillor from a ward adjoining Curtin University was concerned that "... if there was an increase in residential zoning there could be a situation where big units are being built for student accommodation ... could turn into a student ghetto". That five year old, "town versus gown" clipping reminded me that many students face rising costs for accommodation. Whilst my own local government is tending towards negative rather than facilitative responses! So the clipping diverted me to a less parochial topic: the overall cost of student living. Whilst academia's influence upon this topic is small, one component is controlled by academic influences. This is the cost of textbooks. Academics prescribe textbooks, students buy as instructed. The textbook prescription may be quite expensive, or may be for a *free and online* textbook.

So, what are Australian universities doing to utilise *free and online* textbooks? What constraints inhibit greater use of *free*

and online? To begin with, we can assert quite strongly that ICT (information communications technology) is not a limitation. To illustrate, for many years the ICT industries have continued to deliver almost never ending advances in computers, digital storage, networking, software and network access services. Better, cheaper, faster! To illustrate further, free wifi access for students is now widespread and trending towards universal adoption on university campuses and in residential colleges. Campuses now have a decreasing dependency upon computer laboratories, as students move into 'BYOD' (bring your own device), with powerful laptops and tablets now costing less than the textbooks for a typical undergraduate year. Furthermore, compared with previous generations, the current generation of undergraduates is much better equipped with ICT skills and anticipations about using these skills in their learning.

The key point is that there's no doubt about the demand side concerning *free and online* textbooks (e.g. Knight, 2015). The demand side will 'lap it up' (enthusiastic adoption with desktops, laptops, iPads and other tablets, smart phones). The problems

are on the supply side. For example, are Australian academics searching, finding and prescribing free and online textbooks, or obtaining licences under which the university absorbs the access fees? Are Australian universities publishing free and online textbooks? How many universities are following or considering this example:

> Free technology
> The faculty knows that technology and educational tools can add to financial stress for students. To minimise this stress the Faculty of Sciences provides access to free online textbooks and online educational resources. First year courses in Biology, Geology and all but two Physics courses have no requirement for a printed textbook. (University of Adelaide, *Undergraduate Program Guide 2016: Sciences*, p.4)

Too many questions for one brief column! So just consider one particular category on the supply side for free and online. Table 1 is illustrative, though not comprehensive, for Australian university publication of free and online scholarly works, listing four Australian 'early adopters', a term from Everett Rogers' *Diffusion of innovations* (Rogers, 2003). Except for the last row, USQ, the 'early adopters' publish very few undergraduate textbooks, though many books in their catalogues may be valuable advanced references for later year undergraduates and postgraduates. However, all four may be important as 'bridgeheads' into the territories of commercial publishers, that over time will help change and broaden academic attitudes towards *free and online*. Of course, there are other 'bridgeheads', such as MOOCs and open educational resources (e.g. Atkinson, 2014), individual self-published online texts for a specific course), and many universities publish guides for locating and using open educational resources (e.g. La Trobe University, Griffith University). The more 'bridgeheads' the better, if one accepts the desirability of replacing students' *purchases of something expensive* with *something free and online*.

Table 1 is illustrative with respect to at least five quite interesting aspects. Firstly, the books are all free to the Internet, and not subject to restrictions,

such as being placed within a learning management system that confines the free access to students enrolled in a particular course. Secondly, there is recognition, most explicitly in the USQ example, that special funding is desirable for stimulating interest from academics. Thirdly, confining author recruitment to a university's own staff is a common option (Monash is the exception in Table 1). This restriction may be related to the perceived importance of the publications as a dissemination of a university's research effort, compared with the lesser importance of expanding the publishing house work to attain economies of scale, or building its reputation as an innovative publisher - though this may discourage inter-university teams. Fourthly, there is usually an implied recognition that publishing house services are highly desirable or even essential for attaining a high quality and 'in demand' work. Usually these services are available already, though oriented towards teaching and learning resources, via existing units that provide learning design, media,

online publishing, library and related services, in the cases of universities which do not have a 'press' or 'publisher' unit.

Finally, behind Table 1 there is a perceived need to project textbooks as research publications. That inhibits the free and online direction, especially in the case of elementary or first year textbooks! The pressure towards 'textbooks as research'underlying Table 1 reflects the influence of Australian Government policies on recognition of research publications, as imposed by its agencies. These agencies state that textbooks "are unlikely to meet the eligibility criteria for the 'Book' research output type" (ARC, 2014, p.37) and "The types of books that do not meet the criteria include: textbooks ..." (DET, 2014, p.23). Prior to about 2010 the DET criteria for eligibility of books and book chapters as research included an additional hurdle, a clause "... must be offered for sale ... - for e-books, on subscription or fee basis", thereby excluding free and online books. This 'cultural shift' by DET/

ARC when they removed this hurdle has enabled university publishers to offer free and online as the way to maximise the "reach, readership and impact" for many scholarly publications (Table 1).

So, do academics need to work diligently and astutely to counter the DET and ARC constraints upon textbook publishing initiatives? Work diligently, that is more hours, upon individual or group authorship for a 'non-research' textbook, whilst concurrently working to produce one's expected tally of 'research outputs' in the form of journal publications? Or, work astutely, writing a book or book chapter that is on the better rewarded side of the fuzzy dividing line between 'research' and 'non-research' publication? Both paths are likely to persist, though with increasing prominence for free and online as the prime strategy for maximising "reach, readership and impact" (Table 1) and challenging commercial publishers such as Information Age Publishing, Pearson, Wiley, Kogan Page, Elsevier, Springer,

Table 1: Some Australian 'early adopters' and promoters of *free and online* publishing initiatives

University	Illustrative quotation
University of Adelaide Press	Refereed scholarly books in print and free PDF... We only consider submissions by current University of Adelaide staff and title holders... The Press is recognised as a commercial press by HERDC and ERA. We are not a vanity press for automatic publication of any work, it must be recommended by two anonymous peer-reviewers. ... in contrast to the average sale of just 350 copies world-wide of a traditionally published academic work, titles can achieve many 1000s of downloads.... As of this week (19 June 2015), University of Adelaide Press has clocked up more than 503,000 downloads of its 47 book titles. Illustrative URL: www.adelaide.edu.au/press/authors/
Australian National University Press	In 2013, ANU Press launched its newest imprint, ANU eTEXT ... open access option for ANU academics ... ... eTEXT Grant Scheme ... provide ANU scholars with funds for production of their textbooks as freely available ebooks... ... is recognised by the Department of Industry as a commercial publisher, enabling ANU Press authors to gain full recognition under (HERDC). Illustrative URL: press.anu.edu.au/anuetext/anu-etext-grant-scheme/
Monash University Publishing	... open access titles (read online for free)... Monash University Publishing's scholarly titles pass through a rigorous process of peer review prior to being accepted for publication. They are counted in the Higher Education Research Collection Data (HERDC). ... Authors outside of Monash University ... Monash University Publishing offers: ... publication of your work online open access, thereby enabling for this work the maximum reach, readership and impact... Illustrative URL: www.publishing.monash. edu.au/about.html
University of Southern Queensland	Open textbooks ... made available online to be freely used by students, teachers and members of the public. ... goal of the Initiative is to provide the opportunity for USQ academics to experiment in finding new, better and less costly ways to deliver learning materials to their students... ... academics can receive funding to develop an alternative or Open Textbook... Successful applicants will receive $15,000 to support their activities. They will also receive support and advice from the Academic Services Division... Any academic staff member ... may apply. Illustrative URL: www.usq.edu.au/learning-teaching/excellence/landtgrants/OpenTextbooks

etc. Specialised scholarly books with low average sale) are a weak point in commercial publishing and thus are targets for free and online bridgeheads.

However, establishing free and online textbooks for large enrolment undergraduate courses is much more difficult, owing to the dominant, entrenched positions held by the major multinational publishers. To illustrate, consider McGraw-Hill Education Australia's website marketing of a widely adopted textbook for first year biology:

Biology: An Australian focus reflects on worldwide biological research ... with Australian examples and cases woven throughout. ... Available in a traditional textbook form [AU$162.95] or as a SmartBook™ [AU$64.96], this fifth edition combines authoritative, peer-reviewed content with superior educational technology. Including a Connect® package [AU$20.00] with interactive activities, animations, conceptual testbank and a full suite of instructor resources, and a newly developed, fully localised LearnSmart® [AU$19.95] for a truly adaptive and personalised learning experience. ... Biology: An Australian focus offers a complete learning package for all Australian biology students (Knox, Ladiges, Evans & Saint, 2014).

With eminent authors from prestigious universities, numerous previous editions, attractive optional extras, a large discount for online only, adoption at many Australian universities, and the promise of being "a complete learning package for all Australian biology students", *Biology: An Australian focus* sets a formidably high rampart to deter competitors. However, there is a potential chink behind the terms "personalised" and "a complete learning package". For many students a preferred interpretation of "personalised" may mean relating personally to tutors, lecturers and fellow students, in contrast to relating to a "package" that personalises through solitary activities such as a "conceptual testbank". For the free and online camps, the way to exploit this chink could be emphasising social constructivism in class and online activities, which may be staff labour intensive, but can add great

value to a free and online, though less prestigious textbook.

Our universities have attained some bridgeheads in a developing struggle to replace some or even many expensive commercial textbooks with free and online equivalents. Promotion of free and online for scholarly works, including textbooks (Table 1) is an important force for 'cultural change', as we may reasonably expect that choosing free and online for one's research output will be associated with increased willingness to find free and online for students' textbooks. It is important to persist, as sometime soon the Australian Government will attain its goals pertaining to making students pay more for their degrees. If academics can take a few hundred dollars off the cost by choosing free to the Internet textbooks for many or even most courses, please try to do so!

Roger Atkinson retired from Murdoch University in June 2001. His current activities include honorary work on the TL Forum conference series, and Issues in Educational Research. Website (including this article in html format): http://www.roger-atkinson.id.au/

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A POINT FOR DEBATE

Points for Debate Editor (Tai Peseta) provides her pick of an article she thinks is of special interest in each issue of HERD. Here is an extract from Tai's latest pick.
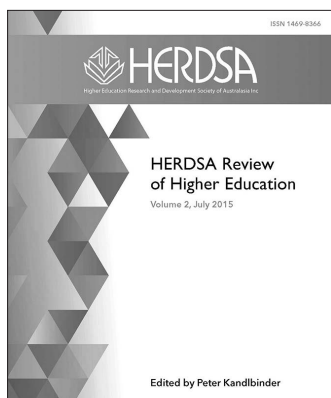
Tai's Pick Vol 34(3)

I have to confess: I was suckered in by the title, in particular, the word 'mutiny' in the Nairn et al. article 'Negotiating the challenge of collaborative writing: learning from one writing group's mutiny'. It suggests a piece that has a story – with a bit of spectacle thrown in – where something has come unstuck. In this case, it's a group of colleagues figuring out how to be with each other when the pressures of the academy pull them (and their writing commitments) in all sorts of competing directions.

It's refreshing to read a piece that recognizes the pitfalls of collaborative writing groups and the emotional labour it takes to maintain them. Nairn et al. remind us that that the pleasures of writing should not be sacrificed entirely to productivity.

Negotiating the challenge of collaborative writing: learning from one writing group's mutiny. Karen Nairn, Jenny Cameron, Megan Anakin, Adisorn Juntrasook, Rob Wass, Judith Sligo & Catherine Morrison. Higher Education Research & Development. Vol 34(3) pages 596-608.

Read the abstract at: http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/07294360.2014.973383

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**HERDSA Review
of Higher Education**
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Edited by Peter Kandlbinder

Gerlese Åkerlind

From Phenomenography
to Variation Theory

There would be few occasions when theory is not made better by a close engagement with practice. Practice provides the necessary understanding of a particular situation that gives theory relevance and practical application. By describing what people actually do, theory becomes more tangible and less abstract or opaque.

Yet, we cannot simply abandon theory in favour of practice. Deciding on the right course of action at any particular moment can be difficult. Theory makes practice a better kind of knowledge when it provides a structure and logic to the complexity experienced in a disorderly situation.

Getting closer engagement between theory and practice is the challenge Gerlese Åkerlind (2015) confronts in her description of the evolution of variation theory from its roots in phenomenographic research practice. Åkerlind begins this story with the new understanding of student experiences of learning uncovered when educational researchers in the 1970s asked students how they go about learning the information presented in their texts. Starting from these common student practices these researchers discovered that students had a range of ways for describing their understanding of the same concept. Phenomenographic analysis went on to show that some of these ways of understanding learning were more sophisticated, and therefore better than others.

Missing from phenomenographic descriptions of student learning was an explanation of how students could develop towards the more desirable, sophisticated understandings of a concept. Åkerlind argues that this is where

variation theory can provide guidance for curriculum design. She illustrates this with an example taken from her own practice.

Åkerlind, McKenzie and Lupton (2011) worked with a group of lawyers to develop a deeper understanding of what lawyers mean when they talk about legal reasoning. By completing a phenomenographic analysis of their descriptions of legal reasoning the researchers were able to show that there are three levels in understanding the concept. Either legal reasoning could be seen as a formula to be applied to a legal situation, or it can be an interpretation of law that benefits a client, or it is a generative process by which law is developed to reflect society.

It is these three levels of understanding that can make legal reasoning difficult for law students to master. The multifaceted nature of the concept makes it hard for students to discern what is different—and therefore important—for their focus of attention. Viewed through the lens of variation theory Åkerlind et al. speculated that students would continue to struggle to grasp the complexity of the concept until they are presented with the underlying variation demonstrated in the different levels.

Marton and Booth (1997) laid the foundations of variation theory by describing learning as an expansion of awareness. It is this insight, according to Åkerlind, that solves a common problem in higher education curriculum design. Instead of giving little thought to the elements that need to be changed in order to be learned, Åkerlind wants us to concentrate on only the parts that make a concept more complex and more sophisticated.

The goal of variation theory is to get the students to experience the full range of ways it is possible to understand a concept by systematically changing only one aspect of the concept at a time. Starting with the simplest formulaic level and changing one variable while the others are held constant, allows students to bring elements that are normally outside of their awareness into focus and make that where they concentrate their learning. The role of curriculum design is to ensure that they have experienced all possible aspects of the concept, including the most sophisticated.

It is this insight about the systematic changing of the various ways to understand something that Åkerlind says leads to a comprehensive understanding of a concept. Her study shows that by only varying the student's awareness of the part that constitutes a new level of learning, students will learn more quickly and go to higher levels of understanding than they previous would.

Åkerlind acknowledges that the phenomenographic analysis and application of variation theory requires an intensive level of work that can only be justified for the most important concepts of a discipline. Whether these are identified as 'threshold' (Meyer & Land, 2003), or by some other means, the concepts for analysis need to be selected because they have the greatest transformative impact on student understanding. Once they are structured using variation theory, time will be saved when the outcomes of this kind of analysis are shared and used by others teaching the same concept.

Variation theory suggests that a poor understanding is not so much about being wrong as being limited in one's

perspective. My own understanding of what can be dense theorising was certainly limited. Åkerlind's description of the evolution of phenomenography to variation theory provided me with practical examples of how I could use these insights in my own work with academics. I am sure that this tale of engagement with theory will likewise encourage others to use it in their own practice.

Peter Kandlbinder
Executive Editor HERDSA Review of Higher Education

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Gerlese Åkerlind was the Director, Teaching & Learning Centre, University of Canberra and before that she was the Director, CEDAM, The Australian National University. Her research focuses on the nature of academic practice, including academics' experiences of teaching, research and their own growth and development as academics.
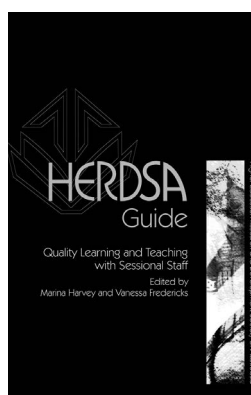
Marina Harvey and Vanessa Fredericks
Quality learning and teaching with sessional staff

Many years ago I started out in academia as a sessional teacher. During this time I felt like a turtle, carrying around everything I needed on my back and retreating into my shell after class. Over time my role and employment status has evolved and I have interacted with, employed and mentored many sessional staff, always mindful of the important role they play as well as the fragility of their employment. Having the experience made me a more empathic manager. Thankfully this new HERDSA Guide takes the place of years of experience. It provides a comprehensive overview of the working with sessionals lifecycle taking into account all university stakeholders.

This new guide synthesises the findings of the OLT funded BLASST project (Benchmarking Leadership and Advancement of Standards for Sessional Teaching). The Guide incorporates a holistic and systemic view of sessional or casual staff, who currently undertake the majority of teaching in our universities. This is a refreshing approach as it takes a multi-level organisational approach and as such the Guide will have broad appeal to anyone who may be involved in the hiring, management, and support of sessional staff who are such an important part of the teaching teams in our universities.

Individual chapters are dedicated to various stakeholders and interest groups such as managers and administration, subject coordinators, broader institutional areas such as departments and faculties, and of course the sessional staff themselves. Each chapter follows the same structure and includes a background and context, vignette, reflective prompts, key criteria for good practice, good practice strategies with authentic case studies, and a really handy and practical checklist.

The Guide is very readable and one of the highlights of each chapter is an opening cartoon from Simon Kneebone. The Key Criteria for Good Practice provide well considered strategies which have been informed by the BLASST criteria and standards. Good practice examples from several Australian universities are provided and practical advice on all aspects relating to the employment of sessional staff is included. Many tried and tested recommendations are provided that will lead to effective and efficient use of university resources but more importantly, optimum outcomes for students who are being taught by sessional staff.

The Guide will have broad appeal as it considers all facets of employing and working with sessional staff, from the micro level to the big picture, university wide perspective.

Elizabeth Levin
Swinburne University of Technology

Link
http: blasst.edu.au

What's wrong with peer observation of teaching?

Graham Hendry

For many years, peer observation of teaching has been recognised as a successful strategy for helping university teachers to improve their practice. Peer observation involves a person reviewing a colleague's teaching practice, often with the use of a feedback form or checklist. Feedback provided to the observed colleague is intended to help them reflect on and improve their practice. There is ample evidence to show that when this process is conducted appropriately university teachers enhance their skills and confidence in teaching. For example Bell and Cooper (2013) showed that educational leadership from the unit academic head, training in giving peer feedback, and a voluntary trial of the process all contributed to its success. When peer observation is not conducted appropriately, for example, when an element of appraisal creeps in, then the outcome(s) can be less desirable. But regardless of whether peer observation is conducted appropriately, there remains one defining aspect of it that may be limiting: it relies on people discussing the effectiveness of what has been observed in order to improve their practice.

There is at least one other way apart from 'trial and error' for people to better their skills, which is to watch other people performing successfully. As Bandura pointed out in *Social Learning Theory (1977)* most human behaviour is learned through modeling. By observing others we form an idea of how new behaviours may be performed.

Yet learning observationally by watching colleagues teaching well is not common in most Australian universities. Early career academics in particular are often thrown into their teaching roles without any peer observational learning experience. Senior and experienced academics do not generally visit each other's classrooms or lecture theatres

to learn from each other. Access to teaching unit websites is rarely open to all academics in the university or department. Why is learning about teaching through modeling not more common in universities? Perhaps more to the point is the question of whether university teachers could learn anything from observing teaching models. Our recent research shows that they can.

In a study of peer observation in a foundations program (Hendry, Bell & Thomson, 2014), 23 out of 28 academics both new to teaching and academics experienced in teaching, who had observed a colleague teaching, reported that they had learned about at least one new teaching strategy. Of these 23 staff were motivated and felt confident to try at least one new teaching strategy that they had seen modeled.

Of the 19 academics who tried new things after observation, 74% thought that their trial of the new strategy was successful. A key theme was that academics perceived which strategies were effective by watching students' level of engagement in their colleague's teaching situation. Staff also commented that they felt reassured and less isolated in their practice as a result of their observational learning experience.

Similar findings come from a qualitative study of peer observational learning and review in a business education peer assisted study session program (Hendry, Tarr & Morrison, 2015). New student facilitators who had observed a peer facilitating a small-group study session learned about effective facilitation strategies from seeing them performed. As one facilitator commented, "You've got almost a bird's eye view of what is going on and how the students are engaging with each other". As in the study above involving academics,

facilitators thought that their observation experience was affirming and helped them to develop confidence in their role. They thought peer observational learning was particularly beneficial early in their facilitation, and that it should occur prior to peer review.

In summary, university teachers/facilitators can and do learn from being immersed in a colleague's teaching situation, through watching and listening to colleague and student actions and reactions. In learning observationally through modeling, agency by definition lies with the observer, who feels empowered to try new things. Yet it seems opportunities to develop this agency are not well supported in many universities. Instead as Gosling notes in *Collaborative peer-supported review of teaching (2014)*, the agency that tends to be promoted is that *of the reviewer* for making judgements about a colleague's practice to communicate *after teaching*. While constructive feedback from a peer reviewer may indeed become important later, when a teacher is in the process of refining new strategies, perhaps the first step must always be to see strategies modeled successfully. Conducted in this way immersion in modeling experiences could complement peer review, and form an integral part of the professional learning of university teachers to improve their practice and enhance their students' learning experience.

Graham Hendry is a Senior Lecturer in The Institute for Teaching and Learning University of Sydney; his research interests include teaching and student learning in higher education, and academic staff professional learning.

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Science, technology, engineering and mathematics education

NEW Special Interest Group formed

We invite you to join the inaugural *HERDSA STEM Education Special Interest Group*.

The STEM Education SIG will investigate means of integrating STEM in the tertiary setting as well as reaching out to schools and pre- and in-service teachers. The STEM SIG will use the data and findings to inform public and government action.

The 2016 HERDSA conference in Fremantle will foreground STEM Education related presentations and posters. SIG members will come together for some robust discussion to share perspectives and passions. International keynote Professor Alistair Summerlee (President and Vice Chancellor, University of Guelph) will be guest of honour at a STEM Education SIG dinner.

Australia's Chief Scientist Professor Ian Chubb launching the 2013 position paper *STEM in the national interest: A strategic approach* pointed out that it is imperative for Australian education that we attend to our STEM enterprise - education, research and innovation. As teachers in higher education, we need to focus the spotlight on STEM, illuminate it and prepare STEM students for future challenges.

Join the STEM SIG. Email: susan.blackley@curtin.edu.au or visit the HERDSA SIG Facebook page: https://www.facebook.com/HerdsaSIGs/

Photo: UOW Solar Decathalon Team
Engineering student Teiya Thornberry, University of Wollongong, winning Solar Decathalon team, China 2014
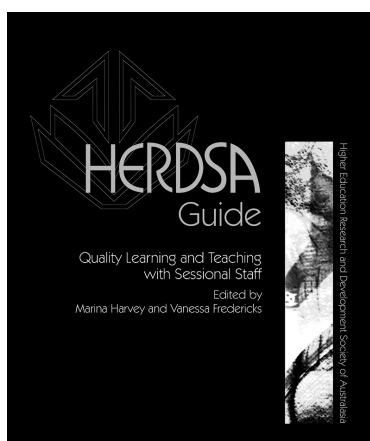
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Edited by Marina Harvey and Vanessa Fredericks

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