Inside
Funding on completion rates; HERDSA New Zealand; Open educational resources; New directions for HERD journal; Living and teaching in Vietnam; Research Skills Development Framework in Fiji; Structured storytelling for evaluation.
The cover of this edition of HERDSA NEWS is a reminder that the eternal search for equity and demand for accountability are still alive and fostered within the university community. Equity is very much a theme of this edition of HERDSA NEWS, beginning with President Allan Goody’s column on the disadvantages in access and opportunity faced by our international colleagues, and thus the importance of HERDSA’s international outreach. Deputy Vice-Chancellor at Federation University, Marcia Devlin, has a long and strong background as an advocate for the transformative role of tertiary education as a mechanism for social justice. Marcia provides our Feature, discussing recent research into factors supporting successful completion of students from low socioeconomic backgrounds. Peter Kandlbinder’s Review of Sarah O’Shea’s article on first-in-family learners continues the equity theme.

The international perspective of HERDSA is always evident in HERDSA NEWS. In this edition, John Willison explains how his Research Skills Development Framework is used at the University of the South Pacific while in his Postcard from Vietnam Owen Hicks reflects on the nature of belonging and his own place in the international world of education. Craig Whitson and Wendy Green are the newly appointed editors of Higher Education Research and Development (HERD), a leading international journal in the field of higher education. Craig and Wendy explain some of the important decisions that have been made about the direction of the journal and continue Tai Peseta’s former Essential Reading column.

We present HERDSA members and OLT National Teaching Fellows, Lisa Tee and Jo Caldwell-Neilson; and we congratulate HERDSA-TERNZ medal winner Rachel Spronken-Smith from the University of Otago on her contribution to higher education in New Zealand. Of course you will find our regular columns Ako Aotearoa, Who’s who, STEM, HERDSA Fellows, Around the Branches, and HERDSA NZ and a second Showcase article from Lynne Hunt on story telling for teaching evaluation.

I am looking forward to catching up at the HERDSA conference on beautiful Sydney harbour. The HERDSA conference has an enviable reputation as both friendly and scholarly. Please do say come and say hello and let me know your thoughts about your magazine, HERDSA NEWS.
Contents

02 From the President

Feature
03 Funding completion rates spells danger
Marcia Devlin on institutional support for students from low SES backgrounds

Community
05 Who’s who in HERDSA
06 Around the branches
07 Fellows column
08 HERDSA NZ column
09 Ako Aotearoa column
09 HERDSA-TERNZ award winner
10 Recognising outstanding service
11 STEM column

Perspectives
12 Meanderings
Robert Cannon meanders through procrastination, acronyms and student evaluation of teaching

14 Open educational resources revisited
Roger Atkinson contemplates the changing world of open resources

16 From the HERD editorial desk
Craig Whitsed and Wendy Green

16 Essential reading

17 Postcard from Vietnam
Owen Hicks reflects on volunteering in a provincial Chinese university

Reviews
19 Sarah O’Shea First-in-family learners in higher education

Showcase
20 Using the Research Skill Development Framework
John Willison on the use of the RSF at the University of the South Pacific

21 Using structured storytelling for evaluation
Lynne Hunt offers the second of three articles on the uses of structured storytelling
Since leaving ongoing employment almost ten years ago, I have felt very privileged to be able to choose a range of opportunities and work with colleagues in a range of contexts. I am always mindful of ‘privilege’ especially when working with colleagues whose resources are far from ideal. In the past few months I have been on a number of Australian university campuses with shiny new buildings with all the frills and tech facilities; and yet there seems to be a never ending debate about the lack of resources for higher education. I have also been on a few campuses in other countries and the resources that academics on those campuses have at their disposal distinctly illustrate the privilege that we have in Australia and New Zealand.

A couple of colleagues from one of these under-resourced universities started pondering aloud about what they could do with their teaching if they had these well-equipped classrooms. Even some of the basics we take for granted like all students having an email account or teachers being able to access YouTube clips during normal teaching hours. And an even more basic expectation – consistency of electricity supply. What happens when electricity is cut, as happens regularly? Our conversation came back to the importance of having a basic understanding in scholarly teaching, that is, being able to engage students without all the frills and flash of the modern classroom and using pedagogy that is simply about teacher and students. But even then, many of these colleagues do not even have access to resources about scholarly teaching that they can refer to as they develop that foundational pedagogy.

This started me thinking once again about other ways in which HERDSA as a society of professional educators can use our privilege to reach out and support our colleagues who do not have access to some of the things we take for granted.

In my term as President I have pursued ways in which HERDSA and individual members can engage with individuals and institutions within our neighbouring region who would not normally have access to the opportunities and resources that HERDSA members may expect. The creation of the Roger Landbeck Professional Development Fund and the awarding of the first grant from the fund exemplify this outreach. Another strategy being proposed by the Executive is to create an additional category of membership - Affiliate Member. If agreed to by the membership at the AGM in June, Affiliate Membership could be offered to those institutions and individuals with an interest in the overarching purpose of HERDSA but where the cost of regular membership might be prohibitive. Affiliate Membership would be free and restricted to those institutions and individuals in our near region where similar organisations do not exist.

In addition to access to HERDSA resources and membership benefits, an important objective is the opportunity for HERDSA and affiliate members to develop collaboration and dialogues. From my own experience, there is certainly an appetite on the part of potential affiliate members for joining a professional teaching and learning community. There is a desire for conversation and to ask questions from those with knowledge of and experience in the foundational principles and practice of scholarly teaching. I hope that the HERDSA membership agrees to this addition to our membership base and begins to make these new connections which are a very rewarding aspect of our work and of belonging to the HERDSA community.

Outreach is also the remit of our existing HERDSA branches. The executive invited the chairpersons of each branch to our last executive meeting to have an input into how HERDSA works and how the executive can better support the branches which support our members, and promote HERDSA. Geographically HERDSA’s reach is enormous. It is the branches that engage with members and the broader higher education community. It is the branches that convene our annual conference. As an executive, we can do more to facilitate this engagement through our branches. I thank all the branch committees for their continuing work.

And on the topic of branches, I wish to acknowledge the Hong Kong branch that celebrates its 20th anniversary this year. You will read about the events they have planned. Congratulations to the dedicated group of members in Hong Kong who maintain and promote HERDSA and continue to assist members and the higher education community in that region to improve student learning.
The Australian federal government are showing a keen interest in university student retention and completion and in the notion of partially funding universities on the latter. This seems to make sense. After all, who could reasonably argue against improving university retention rates and increasing the number of people who complete their studies and gain a qualification? Not only do efforts to these ends meet each university’s duty of care responsibilities, retaining more students and for longer also helps maintain a university’s bottom line.

Some universities work particularly hard on student retention. They variously employ strategies such as: pre-enrolment advising; enabling and preparatory programs; concurrent academic support; counselling services; options to change enrolment internally with credit; scholarships and bursaries; equipment loan schemes; financial assistance; student-friendly approaches to administration; monitoring and responding to at-risk sub-cohorts; mentoring from experienced senior students; transition programs; senior appointments charged with improving retention; and significant funding directed at all of these efforts.

Yet despite universities’ concerted efforts, not everyone who starts a university program will finish one. The statistics on attrition range from below 10% for some elite universities to over 30% for universities with non-traditional student bodies. A wide range of factors contribute to attrition. Research shows that some of the major factors include demographic and personal factors.

Demographic factors that can contribute to the likelihood of attrition include being: part-time; mature-age; online; first year; an articulator from VET; the first in family to attend tertiary study; from a low socioeconomic status background; Indigenous; and/or a student with a disability. Certainly, if we excluded all students who met these criteria, retention would soar and we would retain a far higher proportion of students who commence university study. Most people think the ‘better’ universities are better at retention. In fact, the exclusive universities are better at retention. This is partly because they tend to exclude students with demographic factors that contribute to attrition.

The typical, commencing domestic university student at an elite Australian university is an 18 year-old, middle-class, unencumbered, school leaver who studies full-time on campus and lives at home with mum and dad or is financially supported by them to live on campus or in a shared house. Elite universities have relatively high retention rates and fast completion rates because their students are largely able to complete their program of study in the minimum time. Free from many adult responsibilities, one would expect them to do so. However, this stereotype of an Australian higher education student is out of date. While a large number of students in the Australian higher education sector are aged 18-22 years, with the latest available figures from 2015 showing almost 670 000 students in this age bracket, the same figures show there were over 181 000 students aged 30-39; almost 90 000 aged 40-49; over 36 000 aged 50-59 and almost 10 000 university students aged 60 and over.

A growing number of university students have never actually set foot on a campus, having undertaken online and other external modes of study. An increasing number of students study part-time. Many start, stop and start university study over a very long period of time. Some take almost a decade to complete a three-year degree.

Students at regional universities such as mine rarely match the elite stereotype. A recent national research study I have led (see link below) indicates students from low socioeconomic (SES) backgrounds studying at regional universities often have complex lives and competing priorities. Many are parents and many have other caring responsibilities they must balance with academic study, which often include engaging in paid employment while studying.

Many are also the first in their family to attend university. This means a lack of familiarity with the peculiarities of university life and expectations of them as students, and an absence of university-specific cultural and academic capital in their families on...
which to draw. Financial pressures including the costs of study materials and travel, and sometimes supporting a family often while on a reduced income, lead to difficult choices about their priorities. These choices include leaving their studies, temporarily or permanently. Despite every effort by a university to assist and to encourage students to stay in study, when personal challenges intersect with demographic characteristics, the impact can be profoundly negative for the student and their retention and success.

The recent research study found eight key factors contribute to success of students from low SES backgrounds at regional universities. One key factor is students’ possession of particular personal attributes. Specifically, a student’s own attitude, motivation, determination and resilience helps them succeed at university despite challenges and obstacles. Another contributing factor was family support. Psychological or emotional encouragement, financial support or ‘in-kind’ assistance, all contributed to success at university. The other six key factors are: financial security and sustainability; reliable technology; universities understanding and responding to the particular circumstances and needs of students; the facilitation of students being and feeling connected to university; student preparedness for the realities of university study; and an inclusive, engaged approach to learning and teaching.

The research showed that students from low SES backgrounds studying at regional universities are doing it very tough financially. The significant challenges inherent in living in poverty and concurrently managing the demands of being a university student while balancing priorities related to those of finances, paid work and in many cases, family and/or carer responsibilities were clear. In addition to continuing the Higher Education Participation and Partnerships Program (HEPPP), adjustments to income support policy and improved arrangements for the provision of scholarships to students from low SES backgrounds at regional universities would increase their likelihood of completing their qualification.

Reliable technology is a key factor. While often difficult for low SES students in regional areas to afford and/or access, students feel connection to university. University staff, initiatives and approaches that take into account the realities of students’ complex lives and competing priorities contribute to student retention and success. The research showed that existing practices in promoting university support services, engaging in empathic support, respecting students and exercising flexibility, including through using technology, all have positive influences on students’ outcomes.

A feeling of connectedness to the university, staff and fellow students is critical to helping students feel encouraged to continue with their studies. Early engagement with students and approachable staff are important to this connection and technology is an important tool for facilitating such connectedness, including by enabling interaction through social media. Universities need to facilitate students being and feeling connected to university.

While some students who are first in their family to attend university are prepared in some ways for study and university life, many have gaps in their understanding of what is specifically expected of them as a university student. Building students’ capacity for success and their confidence, including through making the implicit expectations of them explicit, are key practices that assist students to succeed.

The research found that an inclusive, engaged approach to learning and teaching helps students to succeed. Taking into account individual learning needs, intelligently designed assessment, making sure expectations are understood, scaffolding learning and engaging students in interactive exchanges all assist students to successfully progress through their studies.

The research found that none of the eight factors is a ‘magic bullet’ for retention of students and proposes that they are inter-related and that the impact of each on an individual student will be different, depending on that student’s individual circumstances, priorities and needs.

Funding universities on completions is a dangerous and potentially damaging path for the Australian higher education sector. The attrition/completion ‘problem’ could be ‘solved’ by excluding from university study everyone except the previously educationally successful, rich, healthy, unencumbered young people without children, who live in cities and study full-time, on campus. But that solution would create some other issues that would be unpalatable to an egalitarian society. Doing so might precipitate regional collapse in some areas, given the significant contributions that regional universities make to regional economies. While we continue to grapple with this matter, our best individual and collective efforts to keep as many students as possible in study for as long as possible are where we should continue to have our focus.

Marcia Devlin is Professor of Learning Enhancement and Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Learning and Quality) at Federation University Australia.

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“Funding universities on completions is a dangerous and potentially damaging path for the Australian higher education sector to take”

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Links

I am a mentoring specialist working within higher education, Government and corporate contexts. My company is Petersen Consulting. My main areas of work are designing and implementing mentoring programs as a professional development support mechanism, facilitating training workshops for mentors and mentees, and coordinating communities of practice for teacher development.

I have been a committee member for HERDSA New Zealand and I am about to complete my second term as a HERDSA executive committee member. As an executive member, I have been actively involved in the New Scholars portfolio group, which has a particular focus on developing strategies to promote and enhance the scholarship of teaching and learning.

I am passionate about my core business which is assisting organisations to understand and value mentoring as a support mechanism for people to develop, grow, expand their networks, help each other in their career endeavours, the list is endless. And the organisation realises massive benefits as a result.

Being a HERDSA member over the last ten years has introduced me to people who share a common goal of achieving teaching and learning quality. My professional network has increased exponentially and continues to do so as I continue my membership.

What annoys me is people who put their hand up to participate in a committee/group and then do nothing to contribute to this.

To support HERDSA I am dead keen to continue my involvement with the New Scholars portfolio initiatives, even though I am no longer an executive committee member after June this year, designing and developing strategies and resources for the enhancement of SoTL.

Outside of HERDSA I love working with organisations to design and implement mentoring programmes. I love reading and walking too, but my mentoring work is a prime focus for me right now.

My greatest personal achievement has been completion of my PhD and being awarded the Walter D. Neal Award from Curtin University, Perth, for most outstanding PhD thesis in the qualifying year.

One thing that might surprise people is that I live and work in Australia for six months of the year, and New Zealand six months of the year. Within two years I have established an international mentoring consultancy business, working with universities and other organisations in Malaysia, China, Australia and New Zealand.

The quality I most admire in others is integrity.

If I could have dinner with two well-known people I would choose bell hooks and David Clutterbuck. bell hooks was an inspirational author for my Masters thesis and I would enjoy the opportunity to talk with her about her feminist and social activist ways of being. I have for a long time appreciated David Clutterbuck’s work in coaching and mentoring and a conversation with him would be gold.

If I could turn back time I would complete my PhD at a younger age.

Who’s who in HERDSA
Lesley Petersen

A HERDSA 2017 conference opportunity
Professional Buddies

The conference professional buddies program links new HERDSA conference goers with more experienced HERDSA members. The program gives new-to-conference delegates a network of advice and support through the conference.

Would you like the opportunity to be in a HERDSA professional buddy partnership?

Contact Deb Clarke: dclarke@csu.edu.au
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: Karin Oerlemans (ACT), Anna Siu Fong Kwan (HK), Rebecca Sealey (QLD), Sharron King (SA), Tracy Douglas (TAS), Elizabeth Levin (VIC), Melissa Davis (WA).

ACT
Chair: Karin Oerlemans
Following her departure from our shores, HERDSA ACT wants to acknowledge and thank Gesa Ruge for the incredible work she did in revitalising and leading the branch. This year has seen the successful launch of the new teaching and learning seminar series with a workshop at ANU on the use of video in teaching in higher education. Dr Naomi Dale from the University of Canberra presented a workshop in April: On the semantics of standards/thresholds. More seminars are planned. For more details contact Karin at the email below.
karin@kairosct.com

Hong Kong
Chair: Anna Siu Fong Kwan
To celebrate the 20th Anniversary of Hong Kong Branch in 2017, the project Redesigning Student Learning Experience in Higher Education has been launched. This project includes an awards scheme, a symposium and a publication, aiming to create and share local examples of student-centred, student-initiated, future-orientated teaching and learning experiences. The Awards Scheme has attracted twelve teams of students with topics such as: using experiential and case-based activities in learning; and, using ITC to extended and enhance learning and researching issues in inclusive education. Teams will share their experience and ideas at the Symposium in August.
Anna.Kwan@outlook.com
http://herdsahk.edublogs.org/

Queensland
Chair: Rebecca Sealey
It is our pleasure to announce the new branch executive committee. We thank Glyn Thomas and Angela Hill for their work and commitment to the Queensland executive over the past few years. We thank Glyn for service that goes back even longer than that. Continuing officers are Rebecca Sealey as chair and Kylie Readman. New committee members are Christy Collis, QUT; Kerry Russo, JCU; and Sara Hammer, USQ.
Rebecca attended the HERDSA national executive meeting. With other branch chairs she presented suggestions for improving member experiences. The committee has discussed how to best represent the geographic spread across the state. We will use the responses to our events planning survey to drive our plans.
Rebecca.sealey@jcu.edu.au

South Australia
Chair: Ann Luzeckyj
As part of our planning for the 2017 program and the 2018 conference, the HERDSA SA executive surveyed South Australian members. Thanks to all who responded and your suggestions have been taken on board. The survey included an invitation to join the conference committee and branch executive. The SA executive now includes Don Houston from Flinders University. The conference committee has expanded with Sheridan Gentili, Rowena Harper, and Ruth Fazakerley from University of South Australia; Cally Guerin, University of Adelaide and Don and Helen Stephenson, Flinders University. If you did not receive the email about the survey and would like to make a comment or join one or both of these committees please contact Ann.
Ann.luzeckyj@flinders.edu.au

Tasmania
Chair: Tracy Douglas
Tasmanian HERDSA members presented papers and workshops at the University of Tasmania Teaching Matters conference Transforming Practice through Innovation and Partnership. Most members of the Tasmanian branch are employed by UTAS, they are immersed in the development and implementation of the curriculum renewal project Degrees with a Difference with some HERDSA members leading the project.
In 2017, the Tasmanian branch aims to present a number of activities, in particular focusing on scholarly writing; a key professional development activity sought by our members. Some branch members are currently working towards award or Higher Education Association fellowship applications, mentored by HERDSA members. Members of the
Tasmanian branch will be invited to contribute ideas for workshop activities for the second half of the year in a meeting to be held in June, 2017.

T.douglas@utas.edu.au

Victoria
Chair: Elizabeth Levin
Elizabeth attended the HERDSA national executive meeting. Branch chairs have made a commitment to be in touch regularly to share and discuss branch activities, as well as regularly stay in touch with the national executive and strengthen these ties.
elevin@swin.edu.au

Western Australia
Chair: Melissa Davis
The Western Australia branch is delighted to welcome a number of new members to the branch committee: Ajanthy Arulpragasam, Susan Blackley, Alma Dender, Natalie Lloyd, Katrina Strampel, and Lisa Tee. We also thank retiring committee members Ratna Selvaratnam and Barclay Jones for their contributions.

We started the year by offering peer feedback on HERDSA Conference abstracts which was enthusiastically taken up by a number of early-career academics and student authors. The committee is planning a number of events for the year, including a focus on engaging sessional academics, facilitating collaborations for scholarship of teaching and learning, and increasing connections with staff in dual sector institutions.
m.davis@exchange.curtin.edu.au

FELLOWS COLUMN
Lee Partridge

Leading up to HERDSA 17 in Sydney there are a lot of exciting developments to report in the HERDSA Fellowship space. In the wake of last year’s foray into the Fellowship community to seek thoughts, ideas and suggestions, some significant changes have been instigated. The first is around the recognition of the important role of the Fellowship portfolio assessors. From Jan 1, 2017 assessors will be paid an honorarium of $100 for each portfolio they assess. To support consistency and rigour of the processes assessors will need to undergo assessor training. This is to ensure a shared understanding of the standards expected within submitted portfolios.

Any current Fellow who would like to join the group of assessors can register for the free training workshop that is being held as a pre-conference workshop on Tuesday 27th June. HERDSA is also offering a $150 supplement to non-Sydneysiders to assist with accommodation costs associated with coming a day earlier to the conference. It is the intention to ensure all assessors are trained and this is a great way for you to engage more actively in the Fellowship community. Mentors of Associate Fellows are also encouraged to attend the workshop so that they become more familiar with the criteria and the way in which the portfolios are assessed.

In addition to the assessors’ workshop there will be another preconference session, also on June 27th, for Associate Fellows or those thinking about undertaking the Fellowship journey. Progressing your portfolio will be the focus of this session and there will be the opportunity to clarify any questions you may have about the process.

The Annual Fellows Dinner will also be held during the conference on Thursday 29th June. Fellows attend at no cost. Associate Fellows are invited to join the dinner at a cost of $55. Bookings are necessary and information will be forwarded to Fellows and Associate Fellows.

If you are a HERDSA Fellow or Associate Fellow and haven’t already done so please request access to the HERDSA Fellowship closed group on Facebook at: https://www.facebook.com/groups/130729257399909.

If you have any queries about the HERDSA Fellowship please direct them to: fellowships@herdsa.org.au

See you in Sydney!
Recently I met with the other branch chairs from across Australia and Hong Kong. I realized that New Zealand’s branch committee is unique as, geographically spread across two large islands, we always meet online. Currently, our treasurer is in one city, the secretary in another and the chair in a third. So, how do members build and sustain relationships?

Each meeting starts with a brief ‘check-in’: committee members report on something that they are working on, something they are looking forward to, or something new. A number of members, particularly new ones, found this has helped make them feel that they belong and have something to contribute: “I personally feel more at ease with our group online communication and am more likely to use humour or empathy when the opportunity arises!” Another shared: “[When I started] there were quite a few people I did not know on the committee, but everyone else seemed to know each other, making it difficult for me to be part of something [at first]. A while ago you started asking everyone at the start of the meeting to speak briefly about what they had been up to. I found that very helpful, as before I didn’t know much about some members. Even for the ones I know better it was good to hear what they are up to.” Members appreciated that “It is great to have the opportunity to meet up with the other committee members online, and get to know them, as we may not get the chance any other way, and it is difficult for me to travel, so I often don’t even get to meet them in conferences”. Informal talk enabled them to “build a sense of team identity, while also identifying who might be a person to access advice from, work within a sub group, or act as a point of contact in their university”. And it inspired: “Just hearing about what is going on at other organisations is refreshing and encourages you to try out some new ideas”.

Yet not all members were happy with the starting exercise, feeling “relationships will be better met through events rather than online”. And another said: “I am not particularly interested in team building exercises; I don’t think we need that or have the time for it. But when people are able to work on challenges together in online spaces, then relationships become more natural”. One summed up: “If you want to develop relationships, then I think the agenda gets in the way, simply because we are focused on getting through items, which is a good thing to get the job done, but not for generating great ideas”. Thus, the challenge of running online meetings is the balance between supporting newcomers into the community while keeping those who don’t need to do that motivated.

Despite the geographical spread, the group meet in person at the annual Tertiary Education Research New Zealand (TERNZ) national conference: “The success of the group probably stems from earlier and continued ‘kanohi ki te kanohi’ or face-to-face interactions between committee members”. The conference provides “a welcome change to the online environment. … it is nice to share a drink with colleagues face to face”. A new member shared: “I suspect that it would have been harder for me [if I had not met] most people on the committee in person during the last three TERNZ conferences”.

We recognise the importance of building relationships, so we ensure that meetings balance action points and community-building. Action points are worked through efficiently, while community building involves less formal sharing, support, advice, information and friendship. Some members operate in very small teams with limited opportunity for collaboration. For these members, the committee is one opportunity to bridge the gaps a bit: “Without that support and community, I would find it very hard to do my job, but knowing the people through TERNZ and the HERDSA-NZ executive, I now have no problems picking up the phone or emailing a colleague elsewhere in the country if I need some tips/tricks/resources”. Somehow, despite our geographical separation, it works. We are slowly building relationships which have become sustainable.

The branch committee: Barbara, Rob, Erik, Jennie, Nell, Nikki, Tanya, Tony, Clinton, Kathryn, Julia, Eva, John, Rajand Luk.

HERDSA NZ
Barbara Kensington-Miller
It’s been a fascinating six months in my new role, an intense period of professional learning about the range and depth of the tertiary sector in Aotearoa NZ. I’ve spent most of my academic career in the higher education sector and there is much to admire and learn from institutions and practitioners who work in wānanga, institutes of technology and polytechnics (ITP), independent/private training establishments (ITE), industry training organisations (ITO) and the wide diversity of adult and community education (ACE) initiatives. While the HERDSA NZ branch does include members from most of these areas, it’s fair to say that the emphasis is on university issues. But what I have learned so far is that there are many instances of excellent practice and innovation that happen beyond the walls of academe.

One example is the He Taunga Waka project that Ako Aotearoa has led for the past two years with funding from the Tertiary Education Commission (TEC). While focused on adult basic literacy and numeracy for Māori and Pacific learners, the project has also yielded a rich set of resources around cultural capability that are applicable to all tertiary contexts (see Links below).

The Productivity Commission released its final report on the inquiry into new models of tertiary education (also below). While the findings met with a largely lukewarm reception—especially from the university sector—Ako Aotearoa was encouraged by recommendation 14.7, that “providers develop and adopt frameworks of standards for tertiary teaching, suitable for New Zealand’s tertiary education system.

The development of these frameworks should incorporate evidence about effective teaching of Māori and Pasifika students in tertiary settings.” Building on projects already underway, our next step will be to engage the sector in debate about the nature of these frameworks—starting with a good look at the momentum building on both sides of the ditch with many institutions adopting the HEA accreditation model. More about this in the next column.

Links
http://www.productivity.govt.nz/inquiry-content/2683?stage=4
https://akoaotearoa.ac.nz/

AKO AOTEAROA
Stanley Frielick

HERDSA-TERNZ award

Professor Rachel Spronken-Smith, Dean of the Graduate Research School, University of Otago, has been awarded the HERDSA-TERNZ medal for 2016 for her sustained contribution to the higher education research environment in New Zealand. TERNZ is Teaching Education Research in New Zealand. The HERDSA-TERNZ medal is awarded annually. The award recognises outstanding service to higher education research and the tertiary education community, and recognises the contribution of original, quality ideas.

Rachel was appointed as a Senior Lecturer in the Higher Education Development Centre, University of Otago in 2004 and was Head of Department from 2009-2012.

Rachel still teaches and supervises in higher education and geography and is an active researcher in higher education. Her teaching was recognised with a University of Canterbury Teaching Award, a University of Otago Teaching Award and a national Sustained Excellence in Teaching Award.

Rachel’s interests in higher education research include learning through inquiry and undergraduate research, the teaching-research nexus, curriculum change, graduate attributes and the student experience. She regularly undertakes consultancy work for university and polytechnic staff.

Rachel has been part of the organising committee for the HERDSA TERNZ conferences. She has been an active contributor to the field and has been prolific in her publications in higher education. Rachel is supervising eight PhD candidates and has published ninety-seven scholarly articles.

Links
A number of HERDSA members have been awarded National Teaching Fellowships by the former Office for Learning and Teaching, Australia and we have featured some in previous editions of HERDSA NEWS. Here we highlight two more National Teaching Fellows and HERDSA members, Associate Professor Jo Coldwell-Neilson and Associate Professor Lisa Tee.

**OLT National Teaching Fellows**

**Jo Coldwell-Neilson** (left) is Associate Professor in the Faculty of Science, Engineering and the Built Environment at Deakin University. Jo has been an academic for 30 years and has built a strong research and teaching profile engaging students in and with technology. Jo worked in the ICT industry in the UK and Australia for 13 years and developed extensive experience in administration, management of teams and projects as well as building an excellent understanding of business processes and practices.

Jo’s current research includes investigations into gender issues in IT; digital technology uptake in schools and higher education; and preparing students for careers in a digital environment.

Through an exploration of the digital literacy literature and in consultation with academics, alumni and industry, Jo’s Fellowship, *Unlocking the code to digital literacy*, will build a shared understanding of digital literacy. The fellowship will develop a digital literacy benchmark for students entering and graduating from Australian higher education institutions, bridging the gap between school skills as defined by the Australian National Curriculum; and the workplace skills demanded by employers. This understanding will provide grounding and insight for disciplines to interpret digital literacy graduate learning outcomes in their context and thus improve graduate employability. An extensible and sustainable diagnostic tool will be built and provide a means to self-assess whether the assumed knowledge benchmark is reached and will include pointers to resources so users can fill the gaps in their knowledge.

**Lisa Tee** (right) is Associate Professor in Pharmacology in the School of Pharmacy, Curtin University of Technology and a Curtin Academy Fellow. Lisa’s mission statement is *Learning and Teaching with the Triple E: Energy, Enthusiasm and Empathy*.

In her capacity as Director of Learning and Teaching, Curtin Academy Fellow and Chair of Pharmaceutical Biology Subject Committee, Lisa actively contributes to strategic plans, building leadership capacity and excellence in learning and teaching, participating in many committees and working groups. Lisa’s teaching aims to empower students with the learning skills to understand difficult concepts by approaching them in a systematic, logical and memorable way. She utilises 21st century learning tools and technology to empower students to engage effectively in the new wave of blended learning. Lisa created the *MyCourseMap*, an innovative visual interactive curriculum map to provide students with clear vision as they navigate through the complexity of their course.

Lisa’s Fellowship, *Making curriculum visible: Engaging students in learning outcomes and career relevance through a multi-dimensional, interactive map* will enable academics and students to employ a whole-program, interactive map from the point of enrolment. The Fellowship represents a sector-wide program of change using *MyCourseMap*, a unique curriculum visualisation tool which has been extensively trialled, and refined. *MyCourseMap* utilises digital-touch technology and is designed for use on all mobile devices. By presenting curriculum in a more student-centred and visible form, academics engage students as active participants in the negotiation of their study choices. Outcomes include multi-dimensional, interactive curriculum maps for participating institutions, guides through which the broader sector will be able to adopt the tool, and a community of practice to address the issue of engaging student with curricula within and beyond the Fellowship.
In March I joined over six hundred and fifty people at the Engineers Australia International Women’s Day lunch in Melbourne, and participated in Science Meets Parliament in Canberra. Both events drew my attention to the current interest in women in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) in Australia.

At the Engineers Australia lunch the guests surprisingly indicated majority support for gender targets in a web survey. At Science Meets Parliament, I represented Women in STEM Australia as one of two hundred scientists who met more than seventy politicians over two days, and we heard numerous presenters speak of their passion to support women in STEM.

Although many projects improve awareness, visibility and the skills of women, women in STEM continue to be undermined by personal interactions. Women and men doubt the technical credibility of women in STEM, questioning or ignoring their contributions, and making assumptions about their roles and capabilities based on their sex. This is even more significant where SAGE Athena SWAN is an especially promising initiative that is supported the Government and others. Research institutions are collecting and analyzing shocking data about women in STEM in their institutions and developing plans. Brian Schmidt, Nobel Laureate and Vice Chancellor of The Australian National University, was one of the two major donors who established SAGE Athena SWAN – a clear signal to university leaders in STEM that the moment has arrived to improve higher education in STEM disciplines.

Most STEM teachers and students are unaware of the ways in which the status of women in STEM is threatened by everyday interactions. Let’s train STEM teachers and students to recognize the interactions that marginalize women. With awareness, language and skills, teachers and students will be empowered to improve the efficacy of STEM education and the validity of assessments in STEM, and eventually our STEM graduates will improve the culture and practice of STEM.

**Science, technology, maths and engineering = STEM**

Sally Male

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**Links**

Distraction is the enemy of writing. Brimming with ideas, I sat down one hot afternoon last month to write my Meanderings. But what happened? Email arrives; write a response. Check weather forecast (in hope of a change – a 44 degrees day). Notification of Word software update arrives. Proceed with update. Go to kitchen to make coffee while computer updates. Notice plants outside kitchen window wilting in heat. Water plants. Wash hands, change bathroom towels and place towels in washing machine. Finish making coffee. Drink coffee. Washing machine finishes; hang towels on line. Observe allure of swimming pool; go for a quick swim, rationalising that this will freshen me up for writing. Return to desk. Google “procrastination”. Scan a tedious item titled Why procrastinators procrastinate. Return to writing Meanderings – what an appropriate title that is proving to be!

What happened to all those good ideas now wallowing in a mush of coffee, gardening, washing and swimming? Some lost forever.

The important writing idea I had for this occasion was to produce something more positive about higher education than has become my habit. I realized from my reading how we are bombarded with negative reporting and fault-finding opinion – and often outright lies, often led by some of our elected representatives. A kinder, gentler approach was needed I reasoned, one that reflected less of our failings and focused more on achievements.

But as I searched my collection of material, I found that this was going to be difficult, quite apart from any predisposition to procrastination. Maybe HERDSA should set out guidelines for regulating procrastinators like me, perhaps in a HERDSA Guide?

This should work well. Australians are enamoured with regulation and control. Have you noticed the rules and regulations on display on return home from an extended overseas stay? Not only airport terminals, but in taxis and public places. A visit to a Sydney park or beach is something to behold; signs setting out warnings of dangerous creatures and things you cannot do relating to alcohol, archery, glass bottles, barbecues, bicycles, camping, dog faeces, sharks, fires, horses, golf, skateboards, smoking, trading, collecting, and kite flying. In Western Australia, some business regulations defy logic according to an article in The Weekend Australian of 25 February 2017: a hardware store can sell outdoor lights before 11am but not indoor lights; petrol stations can sell pantyhose after 9 pm on Thursdays but not underpants; and a pub can sell takeaway liquor on Sundays but the liquor store opposite cannot.

It is not only airports, parks and beaches. Depressing evidence of regulation exists on university home pages. Here are a few examples of rules and regulations from university home pages I visited. Adelaide University lists a copyright notice and a disclaimer, a privacy statement, statements of authorisation and another on site maintenance, and a CRICOS Provider Number. Other universities list these notices and others such as an Australian Business Number (Sydney and Melbourne), and an acknowledgement of the Traditional Owners of the lands upon which campuses are situated (Melbourne and South Australia). The University of South Australia’s home page goes much further and sets out its commitment “…to ensuring access to online materials for people with disabilities. As such we aim to meet the ‘Level AA’ rating of the World Wide Web Consortium (W3C) Web Content Accessibility Guidelines 1.0 which covers Priority 1 and Priority 2 guidelines”. I am not saying these are unnecessary at all. What I am saying is they are there and evidence of an Australian penchant for regulation.

Our friends across The Ditch seem less enamoured with regulation. Both the Universities of Auckland and Canterbury declare copyright, privacy and disclaimer notices whereas Victoria University of Wellington only has a copyright notice.

The abbreviations CRICOS and W3C led me to meander to the web site of Academia Obscura, subtitled as “the hidden silly side of higher education”. With cross-referenced examples from journals, this amusing site demonstrates how abbreviations and acronyms are popular in academic publishing – and sometimes distastefully so.

The most startling example comes from a paper ‘Electrochemical synthesis of metal and semimetal nanotube–nanowire heterojunctions and their electronic transport properties’ published in Chemical Communications, 17, 2007. The development of ideas shows how
some acronyms evolve on their own accord, descending on their authors with an inevitability suggesting that the hapless author has lost control and suffers from acronymophilia (a disorder characterised by excess reliance on acronyms). Either that or some authors are stunningly naive!

To illustrate: the acronym considered from the paper begins with carbon nanotubes, abbreviated as CNTs. Then someone comes along and develops copper nanotubes. Of course, copper nanotubes need their own acronym. Now, proceeding from the chemical symbol for carbon, C, in carbon nanotubes (CNTs) and then Cu for copper ... yes, there you have it, the inevitable acronym!

Grouch Marx would say if you don’t like that one I have others. From the same Academia Obscura source, how about McSELFIE from the McGill Self-Efficacy of Learners For Inquiry Engagement; PENIS for Proton Enhanced Nuclear Induction Spectroscopy; and BITCH for the Black Intelligence Test of Cultural Homogeneity?

A warning. Acronyms may not mean what you think they do. Here is an example from the International Journal of Cardiology in 2010 where the acronym “HEART” is shown to represent 22 different things! The author of the article, Tsung Cheng, in an earlier letter to the British Medical Journal in 1994 titled ‘Acronymophilia’, asserts that acronymophilia is a worldwide problem. He complains that journals do not demand definition of acronyms the first time they are used. More than 20 years later, we find newspapers commonly avoiding this long-standing editorial practice and now tend to define acronyms implicitly by the association of ideas and context. The declining writing standards of several leading newspapers demonstrate they now apply the same principle to spelling and grammar.

On my quest to find positive material, I turned to two books about universities by Richard Hil. Sadly, both increased my anxiety about universities today. The first book has the attention-grabbing title Whackademia, the second from 2015, Selling Students Short.

Whackademia is one academic’s brave attempt to lay out his experiences and concerns about the radical transformation of academic work that is now so far advanced that the likelihood of any return to older-style collegial governance of academic work is unlikely. This is partly due to the dwindling number of academics who have any experience of it at all. The more recent Selling Students Short presents a similarly distressing account of university life from the experiences of students.

I did find something personally troubling from these books. It was the realization that I had been an unwitting contributor to the development of some of the issues that now create distress for many academics. I refer to the management tools that Hil shows are sometimes being used against academics. Two of these tools are student evaluation of teaching (SET) and performance reviews.

Student evaluation of teaching began partly as a response to academics seeking feedback about their teaching and partly in response to student demand for better teaching. My own experience beginning in the 1970s with SET parallels those in other universities where development was initially a two-way response to the needs of individuals and small groups of teachers. Sometimes it was a response to whole departments where democratic processes led to a collegiate commitment to evaluate courses and teaching and to share the outcomes among departmental members. Slowly this practice of feedback for the improvement of the teaching morphed into summative uses such as promotion, quality audits, and staff appraisal.

The tensions and contradictions between these various uses makes the use of SET “fragile”, a useful descriptor introduced in a 2013 review of the validity of SET in the Review of Educational Research. SET is considered fragile because many university teachers are convinced of its value for formative feedback that helps them to improve the quality of their teaching. Yet, on the other hand, administrators use SET as a summative measure for quality assurance and for determining whether teachers have achieved required standards in their teaching, partly as a response to marketing demands.

What went wrong? My guess is that our collaboration with academic colleagues to develop formative evaluation was based on the assumption of the continuation of that collegial environment. This assumption has proven to be wrong. Now those tools developed in good faith for learning have become tools of management.

So good work done in one context can lead to unintended consequences in another. In the first half of the nineteenth century, French economic journalist, Frédéric Bastiat, distinguished between the seen and the unseen. The seen are the obvious consequences of an action and the unseen the unintended consequences. In his essay What is seen and what is not seen, Bastiat wrote of the difference between bad economists and good economists. Bad economists confine themselves to the visible effect but the good take account of both the visible and those effects that must be foreseen. Is it too much of a stretch to apply this idea to educationists? Writers on the unintended consequences of high stakes testing in education would certainly say it is no stretch at all.

On that gloomy note, I conclude and will continue my quest for something more positive to meander about next time.

Robert Cannon is an evaluation adviser to USAID in Indonesia. Recently, he worked with the USAID-funded Palestinian Faculty Development Program. Robert was formerly Director of the Advisory Centre for University Education at the University of Adelaide.
OER: Open educational resources revisited

Roger Atkinson

This musing came from two starting points. In February 2017 New York’s Metropolitan Museum of Art and the Creative Commons organisation announced MMA’s release of ‘375,000 digital works for remix and re-use online via CC0’. In March 2017 I noted an announcement by Western Sydney University that it ‘will provide all students enrolled in first-year and Diploma subjects with free digital textbooks for 2017’. Though apparently quite diverse, I perceive the two announcements as closely related, and a good reason for revisiting the topic of open educational resources, and how ‘OER’ may be used for teaching and learning purposes as structured or unstructured resources.

Finding the announcement by New York’s ‘Met’ was not initially related to my interest in ‘OER’. Finding it was accidental, a spin off from some browsing in preparation for our next indulgence, an Eastern European tourism extravaganza, in which one highlight will be the Hermitage Museum in St Petersburg (that’s Google searching for you, can take you accidentally to a museum on the other side of the world). The Met’s announcement did not mention OER specifically, but their aspirations were broad and bold:

This announcement will shape the future of public domain images online and underscores the Met’s leadership role as one of the most important open museum collections in the world. ... Sharing is fundamental to how we promote discovery, innovation, and collaboration in the digital age ... Today, ‘The Met’ has given the world a profound gift in service of its mission: the largest museum in the United States has eliminated the barriers that would otherwise prohibit access to its content, and invited the world to use, remix, and share their public domain collections widely and without restriction.

The Met can grab attention in that way, perhaps quite deservedly, as 375,000 is an impressively large number. It is indeed ‘one of the most important open museum collections in the world’, and the particular Creative Commons licence chosen, CC0, is very open, being nearly equivalent to saying ‘in the public domain’. Other art galleries around the world typically have much smaller numbers of digital copies online. For example, the response to an unlimited search at the website for the National Galleries of Scotland is ‘Found 95,465 artworks’, whilst for Australia’s National Portrait Gallery, you can ‘show all 2306’.

However, exploring the simple question of how many artworks are online, open access, leads one into more complex questions, from an OER perspective, about how these resources may be used for teaching and learning purposes. Indeed, is an open resource, such as the Met’s huge collection, also an open educational resource? In my view, yes, as I favour a wide ranging, concise definition for OER, such as ‘... freely accessible, openly licensed documents and media that are useful for teaching, learning, and assessing as well as for research purposes’ (from Wikipedia, a source for a convenient list of definitions of OER). One key point in that simple definition is the phrase ‘are useful for’, because it leads into the next question, what is needed to build up from ‘are useful for’ to a higher level, such as ‘provide courses for’? The Met’s ‘375,000 digital works for remix and re-use online’ are certainly ‘useful for’ educators and independent students in a number of disciplines, but the works do not provide a ‘course’. The structuring and scaffolding of learning has to be somehow added. Very many museums and galleries do provide such ‘adding’, most notably in the form of structured learning activities such as ‘worksheets’ for primary and secondary school students, usually designed for groups on excursions, but some are online, offered as components of ‘virtual tours’. Anecdotal evidence from my four young grandchildren and their primary schools suggests an appreciation of such activities: lesson preparation done by the zoo, botanic gardens, museum or gallery reduces the teachers’ lesson prep time, and can give students access to specialised knowledge and experiences that classroom teachers cannot provide.

How does this diversion into schools education relate to OER in higher education? It’s part of a search for patterns and trends amongst the diverse educational applications of open and free resources, where sometimes it seems to me that provisions for the schools and community sector are better represented than provisions for the higher education sector. Looking across all sectors will alert the reader to great diversity amongst providers and their purposes, the conditions of access they offer, the
topics they present, and the structuring for learning they provide. However, within this diversity, some general trends in OER may be discerned from wider browsing, beyond the examples of galleries and museums.

Provisions of OERs, or at least open resources, are expanding rapidly on the Internet, facilitated by a wide range of contemporary trends and developments. There are the ‘usuals’ in ICT, namely advances in information storage technologies, in digital network transport, and the efficiency of Internet search processes, which have enabled lower costs and higher capacities for giving away learning resources and reaching much larger audiences. Notable among other developments concerning academia are the emergence of MOOCs; an increasing use of open access, online only publication of academic books and journals; and greater attention to the public and community dissemination of research.

Global OER logo (Mello, 2012)

However, there seems to be little attention being given to monitoring the extent to which OERs are being used for undergraduate teaching and learning in universities. Are OERs a threat to the long established dominance of the prescribed textbook? Is the amount of academic staff time required for good integration of OERs into a unit of study a barrier to expanded use in teaching and learning? One indicator we can use is to consider the strategies which could be emerging from the multinational publishing companies that provide most textbooks, especially in the case of first year undergraduate units. This brings my musing to its other starting point, Western Sydney University’s recent announcement about ‘free digital textbooks for commencing university students and is exclusive to Western Sydney University. ... With the average cost of a text book being $100 per book, our students will receive up to $800 worth of value. ... this innovative initiative means every student in every first-year subject will have free and simple access to the textbooks, delivering learning benefits individually and collectively to the entire class. ... delivered as digital textbooks, providing access on campus or at home. ... can be read and used on any device.

Of course these textbooks are not OERs, but from the perspective of the students and academic staff involved, free textbooks are the same as OERs. Such textbooks could be regarded as highly structured learning resources, requiring relatively little unit design and preparation time from academic staff, contrasting with unstructured OERs which may require considerable unit design and preparation time. The very likely trend could be towards textbook publishers defending their ‘territory’ by moving towards selling large ‘bundles’ of high quality online textbooks to individual universities, at attractively low (but still profitable) prices, sufficiently low to enable universities to offer students ‘free’ textbooks.

There are potential benefits for all parties. Textbook publishers can add a new and perhaps more sustainable business model, students will access high quality textbooks for free, and university managers can change the staffing mix to higher proportions of junior tutors and sessionals, with lower proportions of more senior staff, as the need for unit design and preparation is decreased. Reliance on traditional lectures may be decreased, thereby increasing the scope for more attention to tutoring, mentoring, and small group interactive learning. Staff time freed up by good adoption of a ‘free textbook’ model may go into research, or into preparation of advanced, specialised units of study.

Hopefully, some of that ‘freed up’ time will go into expanding the use of OERs, perhaps with emphases upon greater independence in learning, in problem-based learning, work-integrated learning, group learning projects and peer learning. From a learning resources perspective, degree courses could aim for a judicious blending of highly structured resources, as in the new style of online textbooks, and unstructured resources, as represented by the ‘Met’, the Hermitage, and a great range of other providers.

Roger Atkinson retired from Murdoch University in 2001. His current activities include honorary work on the TL Forum conference series and Issues in Educational Research. Website: http://www.roger-atkinson.id.au/ Contact: rjatkinson@bigpond.com

Links
See http://www.roger-atkinson.id.au/pubs/herdsa-news/39-1.html for this article in HTML, including links to numerous references for this topic.

Teaching Education Research in New Zealand (TERNZ) 2017
Massey University, Palmerston North
29th November – 1st December.

TERNZ is a forum for enquiry into learning and teaching in the New Zealand tertiary sector. It aims to support and develop a community who share a common interest in research. Take the opportunity to examine the direction in which education is moving, and the means by which practitioners might influence that direction. Take time to continue a dialogue that transcends disciplinary boundaries, and to promote further exploration of a research approach to teaching and learning.
Late last year, on the cusp of taking up our role as HERD’s new Editorial Team, we met in Brisbane to decide our key priorities for our first year. Not surprisingly, given that we are from disparate disciplinary backgrounds and institutional contexts, agreement did not often come easily.

Nevertheless, by the time our meeting closed, we had agreed on how we will build on the previous team’s strategic directions for the Journal and what we will change. As Executive Editors, we left that meeting buoyed by the experience of decision-making with such a diverse, committed, and intellectually robust team.

We made some key decisions, importantly to build on the previous editorial team’s success in expanding the Journal, while enhancing its quality and relevance. We move from six to seven issues per year, which should enable us to maintain, and perhaps reduce the time between submission and publication.

We plan to continue with the Colloquia and Virtual Issues. HERD’s commitment to ongoing professional development in writing for higher education journals will continue, for example, through workshops at HERDSA and other higher education conferences. We will also introduce some changes.

Like the previous HERD editorial team, we believe that the Journal should play a key role in extending the boundaries of higher education research. We intend to build HERD’s leadership role in the field, broadening and enriching its scope of critical inquiry, both methodologically and theoretically. We are aware of the importance of large-scale quantitative studies, particularly when we consider the emerging possibilities of ‘big data’. With this in mind, we have revised the journal’s aims and scope to emphasise the journal’s broad methodological scope, and we have begun to recruit additional reviewers with strong quantitative backgrounds.

Recently the HERD editorial team commissioned annual Special Issues. This practice has enabled the team to extend the field of higher education by introducing different methodologies, new and under-scrutinized topics, and new theoretical perspectives. While our aim is the same, our team will extend the field by making open calls for expressions of interest (EOI) from the field while maintaining editorial direction. Our first call for EOIs for the 2018 Special Issue has closed. The call for EOIs for the 2019 Special Issue will be advertised on the journal website later this year.

Taking our cue from Tai Peseta’s popular Essential Reading column in previous issues of HERDSA News, the new HERD team will highlight an article of special interest in each issue of HERD.

Meanwhile, many members of our new team are planning to attend HERDSA 2017 in Sydney, and we hope to engage in conversations with many of you there.

FROM THE HERD EDITORIAL DESK
Craig Whitsed and Wendy Green

ESSENTIAL READING
Our pick from HERD Vol 36 (3) 2017 Special Edition.

We love the focus of this Special Issue: Academic life in the measured university: pleasures, paradoxes and politics. While each of the articles speak loudly to us, we are drawn to Bruce Macfarlane’s article, The Paradox of Collaboration: A Moral Continuum, given we are co-editors, co-authors and collaborators.

In the measured university, as Macfarlane observes, collaboration is both encouraged and dis-encouraged in relation to performativity, academic production, reward and career progression. The conditions of working within the contemporary university, which Macfarlane outlines, are not new to us. Macfarlane, however, problematises collaboration through the lens of a moral continuum encompassing six ethical positions based on orientations he defines as ‘other-regarding’ and ‘self-regarding’, which for us, echo the I/Thou, I/It orientations Martin Buber describes in his iconic work.

We find further points of connection between the ‘other-regarding’ forms of collaboration MacFarlane explores and other contemporary writing on the university, such as Ronald Barnett’s work on the feasible utopian university. Neo-liberalisation is asserting a significant influence on the university and academic life and values. Macfarlane challenges us to reflect on core values, ideals and practices, such as collaboration, and to consider the complexity and inherent paradoxical tensions in the measured university. MacFarlane’s article has helped us think more clearly, critically, and now, differently about the values we ascribe to the co in collaboration and those of the measured university.

By the time this edition of HERDSA News goes to print I will be ‘home’, having completed my most recent volunteering assignment in northern Vietnam. I say ‘home’, home in so many ways. What meaning do I attach to ‘home’? I am an academic. I have been one most of my life. Now in the turbulence of changing my existence from life in an environment of significant professional isolation; opportunities that are limited or at least different; and significant restrictions on the professional freedoms I take for granted at home; I am interested to ponder our ‘sense of place’ as academics. Do you, my colleagues, have a sense of place? Do you knowingly live ‘the life of an academic’, whatever you conceive that to be? What sense of place do you have, both in and beyond the ‘cloistered environment’? There is a considerable literature on academics’ perceptions of themselves, on student expectations and perceptions of institutions, and on relationships between universities and industry. Little exists that gives community reflections on academics. As the Scottish poet, Robert Burns expressed it:

O wad some Power the giftie gie us To see oursel as ither see us! It wad frae mony a blunder free us.

(English translation: Oh would some Power give us the gift, To see ourselves as others see us! It would from many a blunder free us.)

Who are we? What are we? How do others see us? Are we recognised at all?

In my Vietnamese world, I live about 500m from the university where I work. I walk to and from, including home and back for lunch, five days a week, along a very busy road cluttered with traffic ranging from enormous container lorries trading between Vietnam and China, with old women in traditional dress and conical hats carrying vegetables to the local market on rickety bicycles, with university students on electric bikes, with small children and babies in cloth harnesses attached to the backs of motorbike riding parents or grandparents. I am one of few people who walk any distance at all. It is not part of current culture and possibly an indication of stigmatising poverty. I make direct personal contact with an average of a dozen people every journey; eye contact, waving, greetings in Vietnamese and sometimes English, handshakes, the occasional high-five, long hard stares from people out of the district and totally unused to seeing ‘a foreigner’. I’m invited to sit and have tea, occasionally a beer. I walk through a small local street-side market. More greetings. Body language exchanges about the weather, about fatigue, about being in a hurry sometimes and not being able to stop. These people have an idea of who I am. They relate their reality to mine. They know how old I am. I know many of their ages. They know where I’m from, Australia, and where I work, at Đại Học Tân Trào (Tan Trao University).

Their understanding of what I do extends as far as that I teach English. Those few who haven’t caught up with my volunteer status think that as a foreigner I must be in receipt of a high salary (so why does he walk?). Not true, though many would be envious of the very modest (by Australian standards) allowance I receive. I am 182 cm. I am often asked. They tell me I am strong, for my age. For many I’m the tallest person they have seen ‘in the flesh’. They are aware of my physical presence. They know something of my routine, how long I spend at the university, seeing me come and go every day. A number have asked, would I teach their children in my free time and are puzzled, perplexed and disappointed when I try to explain that my brief as a volunteer excludes such activity. As I walk, while feeling acutely aware of being out of place on occasion, I do feel some sense of place. I am part of a community and included in most community activities, sometimes (and I am loathe to acknowledge it) to give added status to the event being attended, given that I am a foreigner, work at the university, and am old.

What sense of ‘place’ do I have in ‘the workplace’? I am actually based in the Office of Scientific Management and International Affairs. Most of my immediate colleagues have some administrative/management responsibilities as well as an academic role in a specific faculty. Their work appears largely responsive to immediate demands. When ‘nothing much needs to be done’ little gets done; when events are
being planned and operationalised it’s ‘action stations’. I sit at a modest desk, in an office shared by five others.

There is a ‘plan’ for my volunteer activities that includes academic responsibilities mainly related to teaching English to colleagues across the university, and what I would describe as academic support related mainly to a range of interactions between the

participation from all students, not just the brightest. Questioning in class is not for the purpose of hearing an echo of correct responses but rather a formative learning activity. The focus of most classes is English language speaking and listening. This is what the learners must be attempting. In this context, because I have a significant influence on the learning environment, my ‘Western’ sense of place is reinforced, though also confronted on occasions. The students expect to learn. I expect them to learn.

I am seen as a ‘fount of knowledge’ and a conduit for engagement with all things related to Western higher education. Almost all of my colleagues across the institution are hampered by my limited Vietnamese language and their limited English. Communication on matters academic is a significant challenge. Nevertheless, I am frequently consulted on current developments in teaching and learning in the West, on ‘modern management approaches’, on the use of assorted social media for academic purposes, on strategies for effective engagement with the international academic community through conference attendance and publication of research in recognised journals, … I have given keynote papers, presented workshops at local and national academic conferences, and published in the University journal.

While it impacts considerably on my ‘sense of place’, I have given a commitment not to comment on things political concerning the country and the assignment. Before leaving Australia, volunteers in the program of which I am a part of are required to sign a code of conduct that places significant limitations on academics. I can say little more other than to note that I have felt free to teach what I want (in the broad context of English language teaching), using accessible methods and resources I see as appropriate for the required learning, while I am also aware of scrutiny. I hope it is also permissible for me to note, without further qualification, that ‘the Party’ plays a very significant role in the life of the university where I have worked.

Owen Hicks, UWA Emeritus Professor and formerly responsible for the institution’s academic staff development, is a HERDSA Life member and a past national and WA branch president. As a Senior Consultant for the Australian Learning and Teaching Council he engaged with a wide cross-section of academics. He has enjoyed volunteer assignments in East Timor, China and Vietnam, recently returning from eighteen-months at a provincial university halfway between Hanoi and the Chinese border.

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University and international higher education institutions. My brief also includes some direct engagement with students in their learning of English and also responsibilities concerning raising the quality of teaching methodologies.

Working with my students, both colleagues and undergraduates, I experience both the opportunity and the challenge of facilitating their learning, of engaging with them in ways that are different to common conventional Vietnamese approaches to learning. Classes are often noisy. I expect

“I am one of few people who walk any distance at all. It is not part of current culture and possibly an indication of stigmatising poverty.”

Graduating students - the same the world over

President Ho Chi Minh oversees activity in the University Hall
When it comes to looking at student diversity in university settings there is a tendency to consider some students’ prior experiences as deficits rather than strengths. Sarah O’Shea (2016) argues that it is a mistake to ignore the capabilities students bring with them when they join a university. Whereas capabilities such as resilience, motivation and tenacity are not always those admired within the academic environment they are essential qualities for academic success.

Instead of a focus on student abilities O’Shea sees a tendency in higher education to categorise student diversity into single equity groups. Her concern is that singular categories, like gender, economic status, ethnicity, or disability do not capture the complex nature of student disadvantage. Instead, this kind of categorisation leads to different groups being conceived of as a problem that needs to be fixed. O’Shea argues that difficulties arise for all students as they go about their studies. The difficulties faced by non-traditional students only have the additional feature of being related to structural inequalities within universities rather than simply the shortcomings of an individual.

To understand the impact of structural inequalities on student success O’Shea uses the multi-dimensional concept of first-in-family students to identify students who may be experiencing multiple levels of disadvantage in their educational journey. By first-in-family O’Shea is referring to students who are the first in their immediate families to have attended university. As well as having limited experience of university life and no tangible network to ease the transition into university, these students may come from different equity groups such as the working class who often didn’t go to university because it was assumed they would go out to work. First-in-family women often experience pressure from their family that their university studies will not impact upon the household, particularly if they have parenting responsibilities.

While historically there has been a focus on developing social networks to support students within universities, O’Shea is interested in how participation in university study impacts on the lives of students outside of university. She wants to describe how the multiple identities of students intersect. A common experience for the first-in-family student is she or he gets limited encouragement at home to pursue a higher education. The reasons for this are as diverse as the group itself. With no tradition of attending university in their family it is a steep learning curve for everyone. They tend to be unprepared for what is expected of them in an academic setting. They also find the transition from school to university more difficult due to feelings of isolation and loneliness. They may not relate to the language used within universities, their traditions or their procedures.

O’Shea argues that understanding how first-in-family students experience university has become an important question because of the world-wide push to encourage more learners from a greater diversity of backgrounds to attend university. These students remain a high-risk group with proportionally poorer educational outcomes than traditional students. They remain overlooked in the research with few statistics collected that are specific to their experiences.

O’Shea has done much to correct this lack of research, coming to understand first-in-family students-experiences and the repercussions for their home life. O’Shea cautions us against seeing first-in-family students as necessarily coming from disadvantaged backgrounds. They are just as likely to be the high achievers of their social class. As such, O’Shea wants first-in-family status to be framed as a positive, celebratory quality that recognises students arrive at university with assets that can facilitate their success among diverse student populations. By including growth in confidence and transformations in their self-identity as part of what it means to be successful within the higher education sector, we get a much richer understanding of the impact of diversity in all its complexity.

The author Sarah O’Shea is an Associate Professor in Adult, Vocational and Higher Education in the School of Education at the University of Wollongong. She has published widely on issues related to educational access and equity and was awarded an Office of Learning and Teaching National Teaching Fellowship in the field of educational equity in 2015.

The reviewer Peter Kandlbinder is Executive Editor, HERDSA Review of Higher Education.

Links
The Pacific region is sorely affected by problems including submersion, environmental degradation and contamination, resource depletion, social and cultural change, language disappearance, under-employment and economic instability. The peoples of the Pacific are looking to their own University for solutions, striving for graduates with research skills, critical thinking and problem solving capacities.

The University of the South Pacific (USP) serves the peoples of the Pacific, with one or more campuses on each of its twelve member nations. Led by Vice Chancellor Rajesh Chandra, in 2010 the University embarked on a major overhaul of all programs. One curriculum renewal initiative the nations perceived to be critical was to build the research capacity of the region’s peoples. This core initiative would equip people with the critical thinking, problem solving and research skills needed to deal with the problems facing Pacific Island nations.

The curriculum initiative to build research capacity was directed by Professor Jito Vanualailai, his colleagues, and academics representing each faculty. The working group investigated the use of the Research Skill Development (RSD) framework as the conceptual model for the initiative. They visited the University of Adelaide and Monash University to see the RSD at work. The University’s Senior Management team endorsed the plan to use the RSD to inform curriculum change, in part because it placed research capacity building as a graduate attribute development initiative.

Since the end of 2011, USP has been pursuing research capacity building. While the problems facing the Pacific peoples are daunting, the University has shown great poise in pursuing the initiative with consistency and passion. The senior executive have all been supportive of the research capacity-building curriculum initiative.

Initial workshops to build staff capacity around explicit Research Skill Development were held in 2012. Initially the RSD was used in four subjects that were core to all students at USP, including English for Academic Purposes, Communications and Information Literacy, Pacific Worlds and Ethics and Governance. Each subject has enrolments of 1000-2500 students. The 2013 workshops were attended by first year subject coordinators and tutors, and a number of Foundations College staff from various disciplines in the Faculties of: Arts, Law and Education; Business and Economics; and Science Technology and the Environment.

Second year subjects were the focus of RSD workshops in 2014 and third year and Masters subjects in 2015. So, from 2016, students who had explicit and coherent development of their research skills from their first year of study began to graduate from USP.

A signature graduate attribute of USP is ‘Pacific Consciousness’, and the university is currently striving to ensure that explicit research skill development plays a strong role in developing students’ sense of place, culture and belonging. Graduate Attribute development especially requires seeing the conceptual connections between subjects to provide program-level thinking. Therefore adaptation of the conceptual framework to each discipline and context inclusive of the cultural and social aspects of the Pacific Peoples has been vital. For example, various metaphors have emerged at USP to describe the RSD, such as Pacific Island mat weaving, and the structure of a coconut, symbolising in South Pacific terms the six facets of research.

USP has generously shared its resources from this initiative. Other institutions, such as the University of Wisconsin Stout, have adapted these resources for their own use. The curriculum initiative to build the research capacity of the region may take a generation to ensure its longevity, but early signs of adoption are positive. One such sign is the willingness of USP academics take on leadership roles in running workshops. In 2016 some workshops were presented independently by USP colleagues. As an example, Shazna Buksh and Bruce Yeates ran the RSD workshop for their School of Social Sciences. Shazna was awarded the inaugural HERDSA Roger Landbeck Professional Development award.

Professor Vanualailai will present a keynote at the I-MELT conference in Adelaide, December 2017.

Photo: Professor Vanualailai (second from left) with Research Office and International Office staff and interns

Links
RSD: www.rsd.edu.au
USP resources: http://research.usp.ac.fj/?page_id=135
Using structured storytelling for evaluation
Lynne Hunt

This second, in a series of HERDSA showcases about structured storytelling, applies the process to issues associated with higher education – specifically the evaluation of university teaching.

Storytelling is an empowering process that facilitates analysis of work-related stories through four structured questions focused on description, explanation, synthesis and action. Stories should contain some tension or a dilemma that requires resolution. In essence, it is a process that gives voice to people who feel that, if only their story could be heard, it would lead to improved work practice and outcomes, a more harmonious work environment, and a reduction of obstacles to getting the job done.

The stories in this series arise from the necessity to de-clutter my attic, which contains hard copy materials stored during a forty year career in Australian universities. The scattered papers reveal themes and tell interesting tales that would be a shame to lose, so they are retold here as ‘starter stories’ to prompt readers’ own reflections on their experiences of university teaching.

As I de-clutter my attic, old summaries of student evaluations are quickly discarded, though they serve to remind of the variety of evaluation methods I used, in particular the negative evaluation, administered about half way through a unit. Students liked this form of evaluation because it gave time to fix things for them. For example, in the 6-9pm evening workshop, we took a break at 7.30pm. However, the refectory closed at 7pm. Needless to say, students addressed this matter in their negative evaluation.

The important hidden curriculum of the negative evaluation was the transparency of the summary comments that were returned to students, warts and all, for discussion. Often they challenged each other if they perceived unfair commentary and this gave rise to discussion about how to give and receive feedback, something students need to learn for their own careers. In brief, students found this a meaningful process of evaluation.

I pulled back on the variety of evaluations I used after the advent of formal university evaluations because students showed signs of survey fatigue. I get what they were thinking. I feel the same about endless surveys from large corporations asking how they handled my complaint. Actually, I’d prefer they got things right in the first place. Speaking of corporations, I was reminded that students see routine evaluation as mechanistic and corporate when I found a student union badge proclaiming ‘We are not clients’.

I also found an old copy of a self-evaluation I used to encourage students to reflect on their own learning. At the start of semester each student committed to learning processes such as reading and going to the library. I took a copy of their contract (today that would be done online) and returned it to them during the final workshop, asking them to evaluate themselves and discuss their progress in groups. I never saw their self-evaluations. Those insights belonged to students themselves.

So, the analysis. What’s happening? Why is it happening? What might be learned? What can be done? There will be as many responses to these questions as there are readers, but, in overview, key issues might include the growth of accountability and transparency of outcomes as the government demands value for money invested in university teaching. This has led to the emergence of strategies such as the Course Experience Questionnaire (CEQ) and Quality Indicators for Learning and Teaching (QILT). The growth of evaluation is also synonymous with the professionalisation of university teaching, which requires an evidence base for quality improvement. Trends in formal evaluation may have resulted in some loss of diversity in informal evaluations, though a recent HERDSA Review of evaluation argues that all sources of evidence should be used holistically to provide the richest possible picture to capture context, processes and outcomes.

One thing is clear from the stories: both staff and students want the evaluation process to be meaningful. So what can we do to make the evaluation of teaching and learning meaningful? This depends on your reflections on your own stories of evaluation. In my case, I slumped in response to students’ comments about the refectory closing too early, privately thinking, “But I want to know about teaching and learning!”", but it proved to be a valuable lesson about getting the context right for effective learning, which doesn’t happen when students are hungry for food rather than knowledge.

Emeritus Professor Lynne Hunt, USQ, is a HERDSA Fellow. She won the 2002 Prime Minister’s Award for University Teacher of the Year and a 2009 Australian Executive Endeavour Award. She is co-author of the textbook ‘University Teaching in Focus’. Her publications may be found at: https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Lynne_Hunt/contributions

Links
QILT: https://www.qilt.edu.au/

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