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FEATURES

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APRIL 1993

Editorial

A Meditation on Mentoring

There is a lot that is attractive about the notion of mentor relationships. They would seem to confirm some image of secure organic community where there is wise and kindly provision for the new generation to have the benefit of the best that the old generation has known and done.

In the academy's reproduction of itself, mentoring has been especially important - the supervisory relationship of research higher degrees has given it a built-in institutional basis, as have certain conditions of collaborative research. This is not to say, of course, that such relationships always flowered into the generous friendships between (often) older, higher status, more powerful academics and newer, lower status, less powerful people that we tend to think of as mentor relationships. But where mentor relationships did develop, they were often surprisingly comprehensive sites for the professional development of novice academics - motivating them, pushing back their horizons, bringing them into necessary networks, transferring to them routine skills and procedures, generally giving them advice and counsel.

But mentoring - of this kind - seems to have fallen out of fashion somewhat. There may be a couple of reasons. The seeds of the first reason lie in some of the description in the paragraph above. We have come to mistrust any mechanisms which are too directly reproductive, particularly when they are embedded in systems as conservative and elitist as the old university system; we have come to be aware of the problems of mentor relationships as well as their uses and pleasures. We can recognise that they often cannot encompass new paradigms of knowledge, that they can reinforce inappropriate gender stereotypes, that they can be exploitative, that they can block needed change.

The other reason is simpler. The higher education system is under pressure. There is pressure on everyone's time; there is stronger and more overt competition for all kinds of resources, and there is not much reward for mentoring in a system that is 'indicator' hungry.

It is a little ironic, then, that within the heightened regulation of our reformed academia, there is a new recourse to mentoring - this time more systematic. The generosity of the mentor and the tractability of the mentored might soon be almost elements of the duty statement. One cannot help but suspect that to those entrusted with the development of academic staff, it looks miraculously like something for nothing. 'The encouragement of mentor relationships' can be written into every department's staff development plan and into every institution's provision for quality improvement. Staff members can be organised into structures which have mentoring potential. Visitors can be pressed into mentoring service.

It's not quite the organic community, and personal affinities may have little to do with relationships that may nonetheless find a way of functioning constructively. The new mentoring probably won't be the primary source of developmental advice, but will rather be just a part of a broader provision that includes both formal development opportunities and a range of supervisory and collegial relationships.

Some of us will regret the passing of one-to-one mentorship as a major developmental mode - those of us, I guess, who had good mentors. And for women and members of minority groups the model is being dusted off and enthusiastically refurbished. It would be nice to think that with luck and a little judgment we could avail ourselves of the best of both models.

Margaret Buckridge

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A Competency-based Approach to Education and Training: Will it Improve Competence?

Competency-based education and training has not yet impinged very fully on higher education. It seems clear, however, that the higher education sector needs to develop considered, informed views on this movement which is already having effects in the secondary and TAFE sectors of education. In this article, Gloria Dall'Alba and Jörgen Sandberg take us through some different conceptions of the notion of 'competence' and point to some of the implications.

At various levels of the Australian education system, the notion of a competency-based approach to education and training is being discussed. A series of reports, commissioned by the Department of Employment, Education and Training, have been prepared which raise issues relating to the implementation of a competency-based approach to education and training in the secondary and TAFE sectors, and competency-based assessment for the professions. (A further study into implications of a competency-based approach for higher education is currently being carried out jointly by RMIT's Educational Research and Development Unit and the Australian Council for Educational Research.)

The major purpose of the competency movement is to improve the competence of the workforce and to recognise existing competence (including that acquired outside formal educational institutions). The way in which the competence of the workforce is to be improved is through the identification of national competency standards and the design of curricula that meet those standards. How can such standards be identified? What are the implications of a competency-based approach for educational institutions? A key aspect of the debate has concerned whether, or to what extent, competency-based standards can be established and assessed. This aspect has implications for designing curricula that are to meet specified competency standards.

In order to examine the issues being debated, it is necessary to clarify what a competency-based approach to education and training involves. Within the current debate, this issue is not unproblematic as there is a range of views about what such an approach means. The particular views expressed are often closely aligned with the roles and responsibilities of the contributors to the debate. The range of views about what a competency-based approach involves rests upon differing perspectives about what constitutes competence.

WHAT IS COMPETENCE?

According to one perspective, competence consists of attributes possessed by individuals, in particular, knowledge, skills and attitudes. A second perspective represents competence as oriented to tasks in employment situations, that is, the attributes possessed by an individual are identified and assessed in relation to the demands of employment tasks. Within a third perspective, it is not the knowledge and skills

themselves that constitute competence but, rather, the ways in which they are integrated to deal with practical situations in the workplace. Fourth, competence is seen as the way in which the work being undertaken is itself conceived. Each of these four perspectives is described below.

Masters and McCurry caution that any attempt to 'atomise competence ... runs the risk of focusing on the more superficial elements of professional practice and of ignoring research evidence concerning the ways in which professionals actually operate on a day-to-day basis'.

Individual-oriented Competence

Gonczi, Hager and Oliver (1990) represent competence as consisting of attributes possessed by individuals, particularly, knowledge, skills and attitudes (p. 34). Boyatzis (1982) provides a discussion of the use of a similar approach in the workplace. A question that can be raised here is how individuals demonstrate that they possess specific attributes. According to the Carmichael report (Employment and Skills Formation Council, 1992), 'the focus of a competency-based training (CBT) system is on outcomes, the attainment and demonstration of specified knowledge, skills and application by an individual' (p. vii). Similarly, the Mayer Committee (1992) state that 'competence requires both "heads on" and "hands on"; the capacity to think about performance and also to perform; it goes beyond pure or abstracted thinking to the skilled application of understandings' (p. 10). A similar view was expressed in the Australian Campus Review Weekly (1992, April 9-15 edition) in which the focus of CBT was described as being on 'outcomes, on what a student can demonstrate she or he can do'.

Hence, when competence is seen as the possession of attributes, it is demonstrated by what is done by the individual.

Within this view of competence, what types of knowledge, skills and application would be appropriate for competency-based education and training? For

post-compulsory education and training, the Finn report (Australian Education Council Review Committee, 1991) recommends the development of generic key areas of competence in broad domains, such as language and communication, mathematics and problem solving. The Mayer Committee has attempted to further develop the notion of key areas of competence by identifying key areas of employment-related competence.

Competence as Oriented to Tasks in Employment Situations

For the National Training Board (1991), skill and knowledge development focuses on the application of skills and knowledge in employment situations. They regard a competency as comprising 'the specification of knowledge and skill and the application of that knowledge and skill within an occupation or industry level to the standard of performance required in employment' (p. 18). Relevant skills are seen to include specific task skills, task management skills, contingency management skills (responding to irregularities and breakdowns in routine) and job/role environment skills (dealing with responsibilities and expectations of the work environment). Here the attribute that the individual brings to the task must be assessed in relation to the demands of the task. McClelland (1973) provides a description of such an approach in the workplace.

Competence as Integration of Skills and Knowledge in Practice

To what extent is it possible and practicable to identify the range of skills, knowledge, attitudes and application of understandings that are relevant to a domain of study in higher education? At what level of generality should such an assessment be carried out? Masters and McCurry (1990) argue that competence is not limited to a defined set of skills, knowledge and attitudes but, rather, relates to how these are integrated and used in flexible and creative ways, in practice. They suggest that the conceptualisation and assessment of professional competence should include an 'analysis of the kinds of knowledge and skills required by practising professionals', where 'in general, skills will be those involved in a range of professional tasks, and knowledge will be that required for a number of areas of practice'. They regard competence 'as the ability to draw on and to integrate a variety of knowledge and skills to address realistic workplace problems' (p. 15). In seeing competence in relation to realistic workplace problems, they are in agreement with the National Training Board but their emphasis is on how the knowledge and skills are integrated in practice, rather than on the application to specific tasks. They caution that any attempt to 'atomise competence ... runs the risk of focusing on the more superficial elements of professional practice and of ignoring research evidence concerning the ways in which professionals actually operate on a day-to-day basis' (p. 10).

Competence as Conception of the Work

Sandberg (1991) carries further the argument against atomising competence. He regards skills, knowledge and attitudes as a precondition for competent performance but claims that they do not represent competence itself. Rather, he describes competence as the conception of the work, that is, the meaning which engagement in the work has for the worker. The meaning can be developed both through

workplace-based activities, as well as through learning an appropriate approach in settings such as educational institutions. Hence, a conception of the work is experience-based. Sandberg demonstrates that particular work being undertaken is conceived in fundamentally different ways by practising professionals and that their conception of the work underpins their capacity to carry it out effectively and efficiently. Furthermore, he shows that the way in which the work is conceived provides a framework for developing particular skills and knowledge relating to the work. The individual's conception of the work precedes and works as a base for the development of subsequent knowledge and skills.

In the education context, Sandberg's research means that students learn skills and knowledge in accordance with their developing conception of the content related to the professional. Hence, in order that students master the necessary knowledge and skills, they must learn to conceptualise the content in ways that are appropriate to the aims of education and to the profession. What students learn differs in accordance with the conception of the subject matter that they hold. As the perspective taken differs from one discipline or profession to another, the conceptions that we aim for in our students differ accordingly (See Dall'Alba, 1992). Hence, critical thinking or problem solving in history differs from that in other disciplines or professions; what is taken into account and the perspective that is adopted differ. General notions of critical thinking or problem solving ignore what it means to think critically or solve problems in relation to particular content.

IMPLICATIONS OF THE VIEWS OF COMPETENCE

The range of views of competence outlined above indicates that there is no consensus about what constitutes a competency-based approach, nor about the view of competence that underpins it. Many questions can be raised in relation to each of the views of competence. For example, what place do skills and knowledge have within each view. What comprises a skill? Given that there are differences between educational institutions and workplaces, to what extent does the acquisition of skills and knowledge in one context allow their application in another?

Each of the views about what constitutes competence have implications for the establishment and assessment of national competency standards. As there is variation in what is regarded as competence, the national standards that would be established within each view would vary accordingly.

Despite the differences, three of the views of competence outlined above are based on a common assumption. The views that competence consists of (a) knowledge, skills and attitudes possessed by individuals, (b) task-related attributes possessed by

individuals and (c) integrated knowledge and skills to deal with practical workplace situations all assume that competence consists of attributes to be acquired by individuals. These views vary only with respect to the nature of the attributes and the extent to which they are task-related. They are based on the assumption that individuals and tasks can be separated and described independently of each other when identifying competence. On the other hand, the view of competence as conception of the work does not rest upon attributes to be acquired by individuals. Rather, it is based on the work-related experience of the person who performs, or is to perform, the work. Tasks and individuals are not seen as separate from each other. The relation between them is what constitutes competence.

Each of the views about what constitutes competence have implications for the establishment and assessment of national competency standards. As there is variation in what is regarded as competence, the national standards that would be established within each view would vary accordingly. For example, if competence is seen as attributes to be acquired by individuals, establishing standards would focus on identifying knowledge, skills and so on. In contrast, if competence is seen as conception of the work, establishing standards would be directed to identifying what it means to adopt the perspective of particular disciplines and professions. Similarly, the way in which standards are assessed would vary from one view of competence to the next.

A broader question concerns whether it would be appropriate for educational institutions to be directed solely or primarily to the development of competence that is suited to the workplace.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

In order that positive outcomes be achieved from the current emphasis on a competency-based approach, it would be necessary to formulate a coherent view that is appropriate to educational institutions and workplaces. This means that a consistent, underlying view of competence would be essential. What is the view of competence that is appropriate for the educational and workplace contexts? The views of competence outlined above have been developed and described with reference to differing contexts. A question can be raised about which of these, if any, is appropriate for the education context. Alternatively, is it necessary to employ a different view of competence at differing levels of the education system and/or in the workplace context? A broader question concerns whether it would be appropriate for educational institutions to be directed solely or primarily to the development of competence

that is suited to the workplace. Is it the principal role of educational institutions to prepare students for the workplace on entry to it?

The question of whether students are, or should be, prepared for the workplace on entry can be answered negatively or affirmatively, depending upon the view of competence adopted. If competence is seen as attributes to be acquired by individuals and required in the broad range of workplace contexts, educational institutions can never totally prepare students for this broad diversity of work. If, however, competence is seen as the way of conceiving issues and problems that are relevant to professions and workplaces, then education can develop in students this form of competence. On entry to the workplace, the specific attributes that are required in each environment would then be developed within the broader framework of those conceptions. Such a focus for educational institutions would enhance the acquisition of specific skills, knowledge and attributes in the workplace and could be carried out in such a way as to avoid the undermining of broader educational aims.

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Support Strategies for International Postgraduate Students

Many institutions are increasing their numbers of overseas postgraduate students. Although many of their needs are common to undergraduate international students as well, there are some differences. Uschi Felix provides us with this timely account of specific postgraduate student needs and the kinds of strategies which might meet them.

International students have to cope with a learning environment that demands of them considerable cultural, social and intellectual adjustments. A great deal has been written on the needs of undergraduates. This article focusses on the less extensively investigated group of international postgraduate students, identifying areas of need and discussing support strategies to address those needs in the context of experience at Flinders University. Systematic pilot support programs for 165 postgraduate students from a variety of cultural and educational backgrounds were installed during 1991. Individual and small group sessions were offered. Analysis of students' needs led to the introduction of a summer bridging course in 1992, together with a formal course for credit in first semester. The recommended teaching emphasis is on tasks that are authentic, contextualised and meaningful to the students, in which the skills of critical thinking, academic writing and communication are integrated.

INTRODUCTION

International postgraduate students form a significant part of the student body at Flinders University, representing 18% of all postgraduates. Like their undergraduate counterparts, postgraduate international students experience a number of difficulties arising from the circumstances of their preparation as students in other cultures. Detailed work with about 30% of these students at Flinders during 1991 identified the following major difficulties:

- Understanding the conventions of academic writing.
- Thinking critically and presenting a logical argument.
- Performing effectively in seminars.

This assessment is reflected in a growing body of recent literature that suggests that international students, at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels, face a number of difficulties in their studies in Australia (Bradley & Bradley 1984, Phillips 1985, 1988, 1990, Samuelowicz 1987, Munro 1988, Gollin 1990, Burke 1990, Barker *et al.* 1991, Ballard & Clanchy 1988, 1991, Burns 1991). Students and staff often attribute these difficulties largely to an insufficient proficiency in English (Ballard 1987, Samuelowicz 1987). However, while English often needs improving, experience has shown that students also need to learn conventions for academic writing, analytical skills and strategies for participating effectively in tutorials and seminars (Phillips 1990).

While undergraduate international students on the

whole readily seek out academic support, in many cases considering it a right, postgraduate students are more reluctant to ask for assistance. Their situation is delicate. Here we have mature age people from an educated and professional background who in their own countries were well respected and functioning successfully at high levels of expertise, but who now need help with such basic tasks as writing an essay. For these students, an admission that they cannot cope means a loss of face. A high ranking Indonesian male government official being *sent* to a female study skills adviser, for example, is put into a compromising position. The basic dilemma is that these students often need even more help than their undergraduate counterparts. While their academic skills in terms of writing and critical thinking are generally comparable to those of the undergraduates, they are required to perform at a much higher level. The gap in quality between the work produced by international and native students at postgraduate level is in many cases greater than at undergraduate level, which makes the task even more frustrating and stressful for both students and supervisors. Generally, these students quietly suffer a great deal of humiliation and pain. It is unfortunate that during the course of their studies abroad so much emphasis is placed on their deficiencies when they might be congratulated for taking on a task as sophisticated and courageous as theirs. The fact remains that they need substantial, on-going support. How this may be provided efficiently and effectively is the subject of this article.

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SUPPORT STRATEGIES

If Universities are to ensure that the support they offer is effective, the task needs to be approached systematically, with outcomes evaluated and findings fed back into teaching strategies. At Flinders, this has involved co-operation between students, discipline staff

and support staff. Flinders currently has two full-time Academic Learning Skills Advisers for international students, one working predominantly with undergraduates, the other with postgraduates. Of the 165 postgraduates, 50 took part in pilot programs during 1991. Many more are expected to participate when the programs are expanded and formalised.

1. Exchange Tutor Program

This program was initiated by the Overseas Student Adviser for Indonesian students, who make up a large contingent of international postgraduates at Flinders. The program, co-ordinated by a committee of students, brings together small groups of Indonesian postgraduates and Australian students of Indonesia on a regular basis for social, linguistic and academic purposes. The program is in the process of being evaluated. So far the most important psychological benefit for the international students has been that they are for once placed in a position of strength where they have something of value to offer to native Australians who are otherwise seen as performing in a greatly superior manner.

... it became clear that a considerable number of students also needed help with critical thinking in general - understanding and preparing an argument, the intellectual organisation of theses, and the effective use and presentation of sources.

2. Individual Programs

Students with unique or very severe problems are usually taught individually in two-hour weekly sessions.

One successful and efficient strategy has been to teach by means of a Macintosh, a computer used by many postgraduates at Flinders. The student arrives with about 8-10 pages produced during the week and works through the text with the Academic Adviser at the machine. Each time a problem arises, it is discussed in detail and, if necessary, paraphrased by the student and filed in a separate document entitled *Thesis Items*. The item may be a specific problem with English expression, grammar, appropriateness, organisation, interpretation of data, or many others. Handy hints about word-processing techniques may also be filed on another document entitled *Macintosh Items*. The student, therefore, works on three documents simultaneously, deciding which particular items are worth recording. At the end of the session the student leaves with a revised version of the text and two further learning documents.

This activity is superior to oral discussions of the written work, in which the student makes hand-written amendments which can easily be misinterpreted later. It is also less time-consuming. The students seem to feel that they understand the concepts dealt with better, repeat the same mistakes less frequently, and appreciate having personalised written documents to which they can refer at any time.

3. Small Group Workshops

These workshops were initiated by the Academic Learning Skills Adviser as a result of a comprehensive needs analysis in disciplines with large contingents of international postgraduates. Problems were identified by means of

- (1) discussions with discipline staff,
- (2) interviews with groups of students,
- (3) a detailed analysis of the students' writing, and
- (4) a series of pilot workshops held during first semester.

This process highlighted the problem of assessing these students' needs accurately. A two-way pull emerged. On the one hand, staff, especially those working with these students for the first time, wanted students to learn English, preferably basic grammar, and preferably instantly. On the other hand, students have learnt basic grammar *ad nauseam* in various EFL courses before coming to Australia as well as after arriving here. Their problem is to apply this knowledge to academic writing. What they need is to improve expression and clarity, and to learn the techniques of writing assignments. During the workshops, it became clear that a considerable number of students also needed help with critical thinking in general - understanding and preparing an argument, the intellectual organisation of theses, and the effective use and presentation of sources. While such concerns had been expressed by staff and students in the initial discussions, they had not always been clearly defined and were sometimes confounded with poor English proficiency. It also became clear that students need to be involved in practical activities rather than abstract instruction about procedures.

A series of weekly two-hour workshops offered in second semester was designed to cover the students' most immediate needs in homogeneous groups (M.A. students finishing this year, M.A. students finishing next year, and Ph.D. students, all if possible from the same discipline). Problems were addressed in an integrated manner and emphasis given to authentic, contextualised and meaningful exercises. Materials were taken exclusively from the students' own work. Techniques for writing conclusions, for example, were discussed in general terms, but students worked on their own assignments. Content related as far as possible to the work students were involved with at the time. Attendance, while not compulsory, was encouraged by disciplines, with an average attendance rate of about 70%. Close to 100% attendance was achieved in a series of workshops offered in team-teaching mode with the subject lecturer, which suggests the value and importance of involving discipline staff.

Feedback from 36 participating students obtained by questionnaire and discussions was generally positive. 48% found the activities *very valuable*, 43% found them *valuable*, while the remaining 9% found them of *some value*. The students also felt that their confidence had improved. In many cases, this was reflected in improved marks. Adding these workshops to their mainstream activities, however, carries two dangers. The first is simply the burden of time: students cannot afford to undertake a great deal of extra work. The second is the perceived status of the work: whether or not students need to acquire the skills, a topic that does not have appropriate academic status is likely to be treated with less priority (Gollin 1990). The approach is also explicitly remedial in focus. This is inappropriate because it misrepresents the nature of the problem: students do not always need remediation but need to

acquire the basic skills of academic writing and critical thinking to succeed in their programs.

4. Formal Courses

In an attempt to overcome these problems of time, status and remediation, two programs have been introduced at Flinders in 1992 and are in the process of evaluation:

- A 60-hour bridging course during January and February to alert students to the expectations of their academic programs and introduce them to strategies for meeting them.
- A 42-hour accredited course in critical thinking leading to the consolidation of these strategies during first semester.

Both courses are integrated and teach writing, thinking and communication strategies in the context of mainstream course content. Discipline lecturers as well as support staff are involved in the teaching.

The goals of these courses have to be realistic: students will not typically produce at the end of the semester perfectly argued work in faultless English, but should be able to demonstrate some level of critical analysis expressed in reasonably clear English. Their writing should at least no longer be "out of control" as one supervisor described it, but reasonably structured, and expressed in such a way that it reflects more accurately the often highly intelligent thought processes which are almost without exception carried out in a language other than English.

Close to 100% attendance was achieved in a series of workshops offered in team-teaching mode with the subject lecturer, which suggests the value and importance of involving discipline staff.

CONCLUSION

Pilot work at Flinders has shown that a large number of postgraduate international students need detailed support during their studies. Although the students' English generally needs improving, this is not always the most serious problem: critical thinking skills as well as techniques for academic writing and seminar presentations also need to be developed. Experience suggests that an integrated model where these skills are learnt in the context of the students' own work may be effective. Co-operation between subject lecturers and support staff is essential for determining needs and developing materials for workshops. Peer tutoring by

the students themselves and practical task-oriented strategies in small homogeneous groups, or when necessary in individual sessions using the Macintosh as a medium of instruction, produced valuable outcomes at Flinders. There are, however, problems with time and the perception of this work as remedial in focus and low in status. These problems are being addressed by offering a substantial bridging course as soon as students arrive in Australia, followed by a credit bearing course during the first semester. Follow-up workshops during the rest of the students' studies are also available.

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Deadlines for future issues

July 1993:	1 June
November 1993:	1 September
April 1994:	1 February

News From The Executive

There are several items from the November meeting of the Executive that will be of interest to members.

'Valuing Diversity' Strategic Plan

Acting in accordance with the motion passed at the 1992 AGM in Gippsland, the Executive commenced work on constructing policy in the area of gender inclusiveness. The overall rubric for this policy commitment has been identified as 'Valuing Diversity'. Although gender is the first area to receive detailed attention, the policy will, in the near future, include strategic plans for positive action in relation to Indigenous peoples.

Work on the gender strategic plan had a productive beginning in a day-long workshop for the Executive which was led by Janet Dash, the Equal Employment Coordinator at the University of Western Sydney and contributed to by Eva Cox, a well-known consultant in the area of women's affairs.

The plan is currently in late-draft form, and the Executive anticipates that a copy of it may be able to be circulated to members for discussion prior to the 1993 AGM.

Portfolio Structure for Executive Work

It has been evident for some time that the ways of organising work within the Executive have not been equal to the demands upon the Society. This will be increasingly true if HERDSA wants to establish itself as one of the premier professional organisations within the area of higher education. Not only is the ongoing administrative and publication work expanding, but the 'occasional' work which we would need to do if we are to become a serious player is also expanding – the work of responding, writing submissions, organising visiting scholar programmes, taking initiatives with particular events, etc.

In order to cope with this, the Executive has devised a system of 'portfolios' of work. At present, there are five portfolios:

- Membership Services
- Communication
- Policy Advisory Group
- Administration
- Publications

Executive members have been asked to commit themselves primarily to one of these areas of work, with each area having a convenor who is responsible for ensuring the portfolio group works both proactively and reactively in the appropriate area.

It is hoped that this restructuring of Executive work will mean that HERDSA is a more active and a more public organisation. Members planning to nominate for the Executive should be aware that the time commitment is a significant one.

Challenging Conceptions of Teaching

Members will have received their copy of this document, which was finally launched in December of last year, both here in Australia in Brisbane, and also at the SRHE Conference in Britain, where considerable interest was shown in it. The document received a further airing at the National Teaching Workshop which was held at Griffith in February of this year. Philip Candy, as the Australian spokesperson for HERDSA, was one of the keynote speakers at this event and commended the document strongly to the audience of participants and invited guests.

Conferences

HERDSA Annual Conference 1993

Theme Challenging the Conventional Wisdom of Higher Education
Place Main Building, University of New South Wales.
Date Friday 2 July - Tuesday 6 July, 1993.
Information Ian Dunn, School of Physics, University of NSW, PO Box 1, Kensington, NSW. 2031.
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Eighteenth International Conference on Improving University Teaching.

Themes Accountability; Diversity, Multiculturalism and Global Awareness;
Employability of University Graduates.
Place Schwabisch Gmund, Germany.
Date 12 - 15 July, 1993.
Information Improving University Teaching, University of Maryland University
College, University Boulevard at Adelphi Road, College Park, MD 20742-1659. USA.

Fifth International Conference on Assessing Quality in Higher Education

Themes Aspects of assessment; specific quality topics
Place Gustav-Stresemann Institute, Bonn.
Date 19 - 21 July, 1993.
Information H&E Associates, 18 St John's Close, Saffron Walden CB11 4AR, UK.
Fax: 44 799 52 7853.

Straight or Circular? Academic Writing and the Non-traditional Student

Most universities are actively recruiting overseas students to their programmes. It is important that the kind of assistance provided to support these students in what is often a radical leap across cultures is well informed by what we know about important features of cultural difference. In this article Glenda Crosling analyses some manifestations of culturally different discourse and rhetoric systems and offers some suggestions for how institutions might help.

WRITING AND CULTURE

Different groups of students are at varying removes from the culture of academia. In terms of Ballard's table (see page 13), those from non-traditional groups are the furthest away. Of these, it seems that overseas students have the greatest distance to travel. These students are not only working in a second language in Australian tertiary education but also within a second culture. (Non-English Speaking Background students may also fit this category, depending on their time of residence in Australia and acculturation). This article will argue that in tertiary education, cultural differences are one feature that may affect students' academic writing. It will also indicate methods that may be useful in assisting students to make a transition to the style appropriate to Australian tertiary education.

The ramifications of a different culture for these students are more than having to adjust to different types of food and the like. An adjustment also has to be made to the requirements of academic writing. In writing in English, they could be transferring a discourse and rhetorical system from their first language and culture. This can result in written English that seems alien or strange, despite being relatively correct grammatically (Ostler, 1987:169). So, level of expertise in English, understanding of the subject and cultural factors form a battery of factors to be taken into account in assisting students with academic writing.

Just as Fillmore (1980:25) argues that cultural differences are considerations in second language acquisition, this article maintains that these differences, in terms of discourse and rhetorical systems, should be appreciated in evaluating the academic writing of ESL students. In line with Fillmore, (1980:23) this article also advocates caution concerning a blanket application of cultural differences to all members of a particular culture. Cultural features should be seen as trends only. Kaplan, the originator of the notion of cultural differences in styles of discourse and rhetoric, has himself stated that "... all the various rhetorical modes are possible in any language ..." but "... each language has certain clear preferences for particular forms ..." (1987:10).

In this article, the discourse of academic writing is considered in terms of its "linear" orientation. This is the mode that is expected and preferred in tertiary education. Of course, different disciplines interpret this in differing ways; an answer for a legal question takes a different form from a report for a computer subject. However, it would be true to say that all prefer a mode that states at or near the beginning the main point or

purpose of the piece of writing, so that the focus and direction of the piece of work is clear. Indeed, academic writing texts prescribe a format wherein the introduction outlines the argument and then introduces its major points. The body develops the ideas or the argument presented in the introduction, and the conclusion resummaries, but does not introduce any point not already made.

The basis of these cultural differences in discourse and rhetoric is the inter-relationship of language and culture. Wierzbicka (1990:43) has clearly encapsulated this entwined relationship, in saying that "Differences in the ways of speaking prevailing in different societies and different communities are profound and systematic, and reflect the different cultural values". On this point, Clyne (1985:13) has noted intercultural variation in communication rules in five areas. The areas that have particular application to this article include rules for honorifics and those governing the organisation of discourse.

THE SHAPES OF DISCOURSE

There is variation in honorific rules governing politeness and deference. Vietnamese is an example of a culture where an alternative to the Australian system of honorific rules is apparent. It seems that it is a "people-oriented culture" (Commonwealth Department of Education, 1979:8) where the value of formal personal relations is reflected in the language's pronoun usage. The translation of "I" from Vietnamese to English is "servant", or "subordinate". "You" has four forms, and the one selected by the speaker depends on the rank and age of the person spoken to. "Ông" is used where this person is superior to the speaker, "bà" as courteous respect to an older person, "anh" to a young man and "cô" for a young woman.

A practical example of the application of a system of deference and politeness that varies from the Australian English system is the close of this Business Communications letter written by an Indonesian student. She states:

I would love to get a great customer like you. I have missed my contact with you in recent months since our business interests have diverged. Perhaps we could still a good clients. My thoughts are with you.

Seeming somewhat ludicrous from the perspective of cultural values appropriate for Australian business, it could reflect the operation of a different system of deference and honorifics.

Intercultural variation is evident in discourse rules concerning the organisation and structuring of written discourse. Kaplan, (1987: 245-262) mentioned previously, has characterized different systems of discourse. Some of these are the linear system (the preferred English system), the circular system (Asian/Oriental) and that of parallel structures (the Middle Eastern system).

This circular notion of Vietnamese discourse could reflect the Taoism inherent in the culture which warns against conflicts and confrontations flowing from absolute judgements.

The Asian/Oriental discourse system is said to be circular "...with the topic viewed from different tangents" (Clyne, 1979:128). Considering the Vietnamese system, Nguyen (1990:29) has maintained that the Vietnamese way of presenting an argument differs substantially from the British and the Australian. She says that the Vietnamese have an expression "rao tuoc, don sau", which means "considering all implications and answering all possible objections". In practice, this means, "beating around the bush". The writer does not come straight to the point, but looks at various aspects that have some bearing on that point. Nguyen notes that Australians may interpret this language behaviour as "rambling". This circular notion of Vietnamese discourse could reflect the Taoism inherent in the culture, which warns against conflicts and confrontations flowing from absolute judgements. (Department of Education, 1979:9).

The following piece, written by a NESB Vietnamese student, is "considering all implications and answering all possible objections". Although the narrative topic of "Write about yourself and why you are studying this course" could evoke this style of writing, its foundation could be transference of an alternative rhetorical system into English. He wrote:

My name is , I have been Australia for three years already. I the first two years, I worked in Hot Bread Factory as a process worker. When I was out of work for the Factory was shut down. I was be down for Digital Technology course in Monash University. At this time I'm a first year student of that school. English is my second language therefore I can't speak English very well as everyone in my class. However I will do my best to learn English each day, little by little my English will be improved that's the reasons I expected to study Communication 170. Further more the COM 1970 how to conversation with everyone friendly.

He is explaining all reasons leading to his enrolment at Monash (He worked as a factory worker and, on being retrenched, took up the opportunity to study at Monash). In indicating why he is studying this course, he is, in explaining about his poor English, "... answering all possible objections" that may arise as to why he is studying at Monash.

Another Asian language, Chinese, apparently seeks to build a case that gradually unfolds, taking the reader or the listener through the speaker or the writer's steps so that the reasoning behind the conclusion reached is transparent. In this way, the speaker/writer and the listener/reader arrive at the same conclusion together (Brick, 1991:106). Brick also maintains that an introduction in terms of the English system and topic sentence to each paragraph are rarely present in Chinese writing. The introduction, it seems, outlines aspects of the background to a problem, especially the historical background, and this may appear irrelevant and unfocussed to an Australian reader.

The following paragraph, where a Chinese student is explaining why he is studying at Monash, gives the historical background to his enrolment. It could be argued, though, that some transition to English rhetoric has been made in that the writer begins his paragraph with the topic (that is, his entrance to Monash).

By entering to Monash University this dream of my dated ten year ago. At that time I have only having lower education Certificate, no University will accept. That did not stop me instate of going to University I enrol myself to Technical School.

The Middle Eastern system of discourse and rhetoric, said to be typical of Arabic and some Semitic languages (Ostler, 1987:169) is described as that of "parallel structures" based on oral traditions. Even though the Qu'ran, the greatest Islamic text, is written, its structure is oral. As Ostler points out (1987:173) in mosques and market-places in the Islamic world even today Moslems sit together rhythmically swaying as they chant verses. The language, it seems, strives for this balance. Syntactically, there is rhythmic co-ordination between the related components. Adjectives are not used, but rather there is co-ordination of two nouns. So, instead of saying, "King James", "James, the King" is used. Instead of "We need a new educational system", "We have to put a new system for our education" is used (Ostler, 1987:174).

Another Asian language, Chinese, apparently seems to build a case that gradually unfolds, taking the reader or the listener through the speaker or the writer's steps so that the reasoning behind the conclusion reached is transparent.

Farquason (1988:8) makes the point that, in the Arabic linguistic system, the main points are over-asserted and exaggerated, often resulting in repetition, increased use of superlatives and frequent restatement. It also seems that paragraph development is a relatively recent concept for Arabic writers. Previously, what occurred was the "stringing together" of a series of parallel constructions.

The following part of an answer to a Commercial Law question, written by an Egyptian student, displays repetition and rhythmic co-ordination. The lecturer's

comment "Why repeat the facts?" is also testimony to this interpretation.

An offer has clearly made by A who is an accountant that he would pay B who is an accountancy student and at the same time he is A's son \$50 per week if he helped out at the practice on Saturday and Sunday mornings.

Before the pressure of study forced B to give up the work, he did work for four weekends. But A has not paid him anything. In this case we are in front of a father and son. If we want to advise B "as a son" we will tell him according to the law when there is a family agreement there is a legal presumption that there was no intention to be legally bound. The agreement may be morally binding and so there is a moral obligation and a son cannot sue his father.

However, there is other view that a father is an accountant and needs special skills to be used in his work. A son who is an accountancy student and has these requirement skills.

A offers B \$50 per week in return for his helping during the weekends.

The sentence, "... B who is an accountancy student and at the same time he is A's son ..." is an example of co-ordination achieved through word order. Using subordination, which is the preferred style in English, this would be written "An offer has clearly been made by A, an accountant, to his son B, an accountancy student ...". The writer, however, has co-ordinated the two pieces of information by use of the phrase "... and at the same time ...". An example of the use of parallel structures is the repetition and completion of the ideas expressed in the first paragraph in subsequent paragraphs. In paragraph 3, the father-son relationship of A and B is reiterated, and completed with the idea of the skills possessed by one and required by the other. In paragraph 1, the idea of payment is introduced, and repeated in paragraph 5.

The next piece of writing of a student strongly influenced by Middle Eastern culture indicates "stringing together" of parallel ideas rather than paragraphing.

My name is I am 21 years old and I was born in Iran. When I was 8 years old, my parents and I left Iran to Honduras.

In Honduras we lived only 1 year and we left Honduras to Spain.

In Spain I made my primary school and I learned to speak Spanish fluently but after 5 years my parents decided to move to Ecuador (South America).

In Ecuador I finished my secondary school. After 7 years in Ecuador finally we moved to Australia 8 months ago.

In Australia all is different now, because I have to face new problems in my life like learning a new language, making new friends, etc. This is all about my self.

Whereas an English writer would most likely group the ideas presented under a topic sentence of, for instance, "I lived in several different countries during my childhood", this writer has "strung together" the information. Oral traditions can also be sensed with the repetition of the sentences beginning with "In", and the rhythmic balance achieved by the language usage. This is achieved through the co-ordination of

ideas by the use of "and" and "but". For example, "In Honduras we lived only 1 year and we left Honduras to Spain".

APPROACHES THAT WORK

From the above examples of writing, a "sense of difference" may be noted. This may be because the rhetorical system employed by the students violates the expectations of the native reader. To assist students to adapt to the rhetorical requirements of English and thus improve their academic writing, it seems that these requirements need to be made explicit.

One such program was run by Language and Learning Services at Monash, Caulfield for students who were judged as likely to face difficulties with academic writing. Working on the tutor's intuitive premise that students of Digital Technology would have cognitive styles that would respond to visual representation of the written text, diagrams of the structure of paragraphs and pieces of writing were used. Students "decoded" pieces of writing to determine how the information was organised. They also created frameworks or structures before they began writing (as in Arnaudet and Barrett, 1990:11).

It also seems that paragraph development is a relatively recent concept for Arabic writers. Previously, what occurred was the 'stringing together' of a series of parallel constructions.

The students responded well to this approach, and the following piece of writing was produced by one student following the program (this is the same student who wrote the preceding piece).

There was two main things that I expected to learn in communication, expected to improve my writing skills. When I began this course I didn't know very much about writing skills, like writing a report, or a essay, etc. I knew to write but I did not know how to express my self fluently when I had to write. So the principal thing that I expected to learn in COM170 was to improve my writing skills. Secondly I expected to improve my oral presentation. Because I am a overseas student, this kind of skill was very important for me to improve, because I knew that I will need it when I am going to work after finishing this course. Both of this skills that I expected to learn were very important for me in order to achieve my aims in this course.

Organisation of information in the above piece is closer to rhetorical norms in terms of the English academic system. The topic sentence summaries what the paragraph is about, ("There was two main things that I expected to learn in communication, expected to improve my writing skills".) The remainder of the paragraph expands on the ideas pre-empted in this sentence.

Subject lecturers and tutors can also facilitate the students' knowledge of the discursive requirements of, firstly, English and then their particular area by modelling answers to questions in tutorials. Implicitly, this can also be conveyed by using overheads in lectures which indicate the mode of development of ideas and organisation of material for that particular lecture.

In summary, cultural differences in the organisation of material and expression of ideas are one of a battery of considerations in terms of NESB and overseas students' difficulties in academic writing. By making explicit the discursive requirements of English and of particular discipline areas through special programs or by modelling on the part of lecturers and tutors, students can be actively assisted to make a transition to the required style.

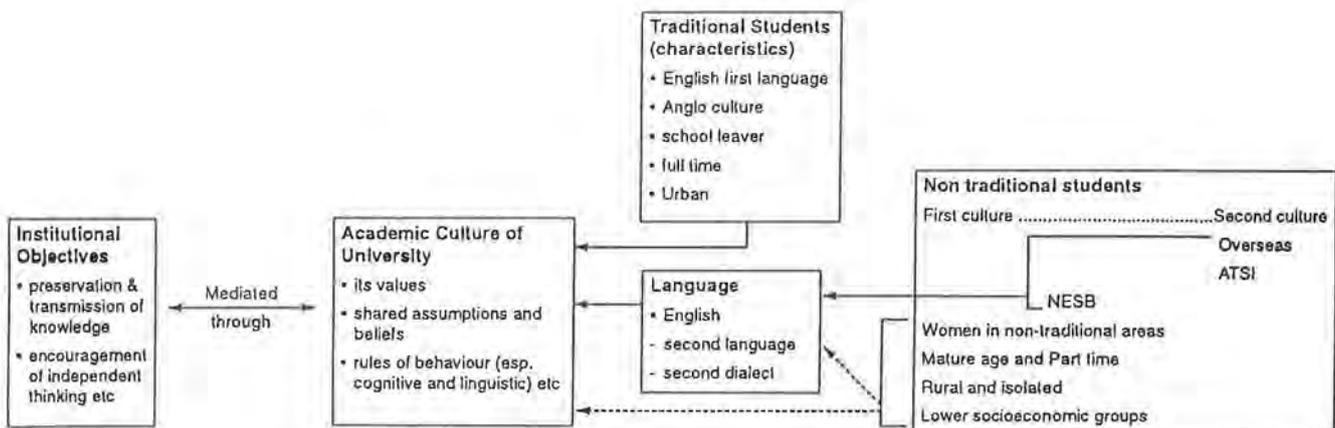
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Relative degrees of 'Distance' of different groups from goal of cultural competence
 (Ballard B. 1991)



Conferences

Peer Tutoring: Learning by Teaching

Place University of Auckland Conference Centre
Date 19 - 21 August, 1993.
Information Iris Greenland, HERO, University of Auckland, Private Bag 92019, Auckland, NZ. Phone: 09 373 7599 ext. 8356. Fax: 09 373 7474.

Fourth International Conference of the Australasian Association of Institutional Research

Theme Implementing the Quality Review Process: Strategies, Systems and Experiences.
Place Sydney, Australia.
Date 29 September - 1 October, 1993.
Information Dr Ken Doyle, Director of Planning, UTS, PO Box 222, Lindfield, NSW, 2070.

SRHE Annual Conference

Theme Governments and the Higher Education Curriculum: Evolving Partnerships
Place University of Sussex at Brighton
Date 14 -16 December, 1993.
Information SRHE: 344-354 Gray's Inn Road, London WC1X 8BP.
 Phone: UK: 071 837 7880; Fax: UK: 071 713 0609.

ABSTRACTS

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

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A. GENERAL

Hill, Brian V. **Ethical Considerations in Evaluation** *Evaluation Journal of Australasia* Vol. 4, No. 1, 1992 pp 3-15.

The evaluating of any operation involving human participants raises both empirical and ethical questions. Appropriate ethical guidelines must draw on notions both of rights and of the common good. They must also recognise the legitimate stakes in the exercise of all the interested parties. Some procedures require the temporary suspension of some rights, and four scenarios are discussed: studying victims of past injury, subject to their consent; putting consenting subjects at risk; failing to obtain informed consent; and obtaining consent through deception. The interplay of ethical and empirical elements in evaluation generates six distinguishable areas of concern: ethical and logical evaluation of program goals, empirical and ethical evaluation of program strategies, and empirical and ethical evaluation of the evaluation procedures themselves. Evaluation includes moral obligations not only to the client but to participants in the program, particularly those under the client's authority; to one's peers in the field of evaluation; and to the general public. A trend towards internal evaluations is commendable but has some hazards.

(journal abstract)

B. SYSTEMS AND INSTITUTIONS

Reid, C.N. and M Robertshaw **The quest for quality, East and West** *Distance Education* Vol. 13, No. 2, 1992, pp. 270-287.

The paper describes the development of a new distance education institution in Hong Kong. The methods and systems used to assure that its courses and degree programmes are of the highest quality are described. The paper addresses the

means by which new courses are produced; a direct import from another institution, adaptation of an imported course, an in-house production. Although established by the Hong Kong Government the institution is required to become self-financing within four years - the paper describes some of the consequences of this policy especially in quality. The paper concludes by comparing the performance of Hong Kong students on courses taken from the British Open University with that of their British counterparts.

(journal abstract)

Craig, Mark **Are Between 2.45 and 4.5 Million Australians Disadvantaged by Our Medical Education System?** *ANZAME Bulletin* 20, 1 (Jan/93) pp. 11-18.

Depending on definition, between 2.5 and 4.5 million Australians live in rural and remote centres. Medical services to this group, therefore, are largely provided by rural general practitioners who are expected to acquire and apply a wide range of skills, particularly in procedural disciplines, in caring for their patients.

These people are disadvantaged by reduced access to medical services, due in part to a maldistribution of the medical workforce favouring urban areas. That is, there is a relative shortage of both general practitioners and specialists to provide these services.

The factors which contribute to this maldistribution are multiple and complex and include elements of our medical education system. These are: the selection of medical students, the socialization and training of both undergraduates and graduates, and the support provided to graduates in their continuing education, which influences their satisfaction with their practice of medicine.

Recommendations as to how the medical education system might respond to these challenges conclude this paper.

(journal abstract)

C. TEACHING AND LEARNING

Leffa, Wilson J. **Reading with an Electronic Glossary** *Computers in Education* 19, 3 (1992), pp. 285-290.

Reading texts in a foreign language is sometimes a frustrating experience for people who need the information in the text but lack proficiency in the language. The purpose of this paper is to describe an electronic glossary that was used with a group of 55 undergraduate students. The paper summarizes the microcomputer program that was written to create the glossary, the preparation of a bilingual word list and the experiment that was conducted to test the electronic glossary. The results show that students read the passages faster and understood them better when they used an electronic glossary instead of a traditional bilingual dictionary.

(journal abstract)

Meacham, David and Afa Shafeea Zubair **Models of Distance Education for Developing Island States** *ASPESA Papers* No. 12, (Dec/92), pp. 27-34.

Distance education has in some ways been more a model of cultural imperialism than a model of appropriate development. Attempts have been made to export models of western systems to cultures and context which render them inappropriate.

What is needed is a model of distance education for developing countries, especially isolated small island states, which takes into consideration the following:

- Historical influences: changes from colonisation to independence; the danger of technological neo-imperialism.
- Cultural factors: differences between and within states; languages; customs; beliefs, learning styles.

- Geography and infrastructure: dimensions of isolation; production and distribution facilities.
- The technological environment: electronic media and computers; availability and support; relevance and unavailability.
- The political dimension: national and local government; national and community development; politics of aid.

(article summary)

Kemp, R.H. Intelligent Computer Assisted Instruction: a Knowledge-based Perspective *The Australian Computer Journal*, 24, 3 (Nov/92), pp. 121-129.

Research into using the computer for teaching has been in progress since the 1960's but, except in a few specific areas, there has been a distinct lack of success. Over the years various new approaches have promised to solve some of the outstanding problems. In this article the impact of knowledge-based methods on the development of teaching systems is considered.

(journal abstract)

D. INFORMATION NETWORKS

Goumans, Marleen What about healthy networks? An analysis of national healthy cities networks in Europe *Health Promotion International* 7, v (1992), pp. 273-281.

The World Health Organization (WHO) Euro Healthy Cities Project has received much attention since the first project cities were selected in 1987. In fact many more cities than can participate showed (and still show) their interest. Thus initiatives have been taken to establish activities similar to the Healthy Cities Project, not only in Europe but all over the world, 'national networks of Health Cities' have developed. The national networks in Europe call themselves 'EURONET', a European network of national Healthy Cities networks. EURONET is not a formal association; how this initiative will develop in the near future is under discussion.

A national network is an example of a social network, but because of its complexity and different levels of 'networking', is difficult to analyse. However analysis, and evaluation, is needed to review the functioning and impact of the healthy cities idea. To study and analyse the networks in Europe which are as a whole rather large, a selection has been made to reduce the number of participants (n = 14), number of resources (n = 4) and (categories of) activities (n = 9) which were examined. The analysis provided information about the development of the network; among other things it looked at: why they started, who took the initiative, what changes occurred during the period of development, who were the participants at a national level, what activities were undertaken, and the relationship between activities and participants. As expected, the findings did not provide a uniform picture of 'what a national Healthy Cities network should look like' nor did they give the recipe of 'how to become a Healthy Cities network'. However, the strength of national networks is that they have the potential to continue the Healthy Cities project aims and objectives, even if the WHO project ever ceases.

(journal abstract)

E. STUDENTS - GENERAL

Rajacich, Dale and others An Institutional Response to Date Rape *The Canadian Journal of Higher Education* XXII-2, (1992), pp. 41-59.

This article reviews the existing literature on date rape and its prevention. As a result of an analysis of the literature, a model for date rape prevention on university campuses has been developed. The model is based on an adaptation of Roark's (1987) prevention strategies at the institutional level and Neuman's (1989) Total Systems Model. It provides a comprehensive approach to date rape prevention at the primary, secondary and tertiary levels of prevention. The model also includes a date rape assessment guide and sample date rape prevention program.

(journal abstract)

Norton, Marian and Ian Falk Adults and Reading Disability: A New Field of Inquiry *International Journal of Disability, Development and Education*, 39, 3, (1992), pp. 185-196.

This paper first describes the development of adult literacy pedagogy and philosophy in Australia, then reports and discusses two studies of research into reading disability for adults. The first study uses a quantitative approach with a sample of 102 asthma patients and has important implications for the assessment of adults' reading. The second study is a theory-driven, critical case study of 11 adult literacy learners. These stated literacy needs are argued to be socially constructed, influenced by the external environment of more general socio-political contexts as well as particular civic, personal and workplace literacy requirements. These needs are also influenced by the adult learners' reconstructions and memories of schooling and the views about literacy of significant others, all of which affect the adult learners' perceptions of their 'reading failure'. The perspectives offered by the two different studies provide understandings and insights into this new field of inquiry.

(journal abstract)

F. STUDENTS: SELECTION & PERFORMANCE

Minichiello, Victor Meeting the Educational Needs of an Aging Population: The Australian Experience *International Review of Education*, 38, 4 (1992), pp. 403-416.

The number of older people in Australia is growing fast, and gerontology has recently become a recognised area of study in tertiary institutions. However, negative attitudes persist among health and welfare professionals, and ways in which gerontology courses can combat the myths associated with aging and the aged are discussed. It is pointed out that people do not grow old in isolation, but in a social context. Education for older people should be seen as part of social policy, recognising the lifelong right to education. The University of the Third Age (U3A) is a response to the demand for education from older people. The origins of this movement in Europe, and its spread to North America and Australia, are outlined. To meet the needs of older people, courses offered by U3A's have to be multidisciplinary.

(journal abstract)

Gannicott, Kenneth Student Fees and the Demand for University Places Policy (Summer 1992/93), pp. 19-22. Higher student fees need not be inconsistent with equity considerations. The article applies a model of supply and demand to the Australian situation and concludes that 39,000 additional places could be created if fees were increased by one third.

J. COSTS

Tatto, Maria Teresa and others **Comparing the Effectiveness and Costs of Different Approaches for Educating Primary School Teachers in Sri Lanka** *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 9, 1 (1993), pp. 41-64.

The effectiveness and costs of three approaches to elementary teacher education in Sri Lanka – preservice, conventional inservice, and distance inservice – are examined. The effectiveness of these approaches was measured by teachers' theoretical and applied knowledge, classroom performance, and pupil achievement. Costs borne by the sponsoring institution and the teachers were evaluated. Although distance

education was the most cost-effective of the approaches, graduates of colleges of education were significantly effective in producing high achievement in their pupils in mathematics and language. This finding is particularly important given the more difficult teaching situations in which they are taught. (journal abstract)

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Review

Teaching for Learning. The View from Cognitive Psychology. Biggs, J.B. (ed) (1991) Victoria 3122:ACER (242 pp)

This edited book focuses on successful practical applications in teaching of some of the more recent research on learning processes. The contributions are written from a cognitive psychology perspective. The practical applications are taken mainly from the Australian school context. However a considerable amount of the content of the book is applicable to teaching in higher education.

In his introduction Biggs summarises the principal areas which contribute to a 'new' research perspective and presents an overview of the structure of the book. It is evident that the practical applications described in the various chapters reflect his view of the contextualised nature of learning: a view he espouses in the introduction. All the examples of the applications, implicitly and sometimes explicitly, adopt a constructivist theory of learning. The examples emphasise the importance of encouraging the student to be a reflective learner, and the importance of metacognition. The student is acknowledged as someone who actively seeks meaning in a specific educational context. This approach is modelled for the reader by the choice of Australian studies for the Australian context.

In the first chapters Biggs and then Goodnow present the ways in which students are known to respond to the context of school in relation to: motivation and cognitive processes; their conceptions of learning and growth of cognitive competence; their approaches to learning; and the acquisition of cognitive values. This is followed by a group of chapters which presents some approaches to the understanding of student learning through cognitive and metacognitive processes; student

control over learning (Evans); myths about the relationship between cognition and teaching (Sweller); planning and the use of cognitive organisation to cope with complex learning tasks (Lawrence); and reading to learn (Kirby). A further group of chapters presents some aspect of learning in the school context; the processes involved in problem solving, how they can be regulated and how analysis of problem solving can be used in the classroom (Lawson); learning how to learn more effectively, including the development and implementation of the Project for the Enhancement of Effective Learning (PEEL) (White and Baird); students' use of the reciprocal teaching of study skills (Moore); and the Strategy Program for Effective Learning/Thinking (SPELT) (Mulcahy et al). Most chapters in the book end with a section which describes the implications that the specific application has for teaching and learning.

In the final chapter John Biggs draws together the main threads of the book by examining the nature of good learning within the framework of previous chapters. He discusses the problems which affect the implementation of change in the existing school context within the framework of the community, the school and the classroom as individual but hierarchically related systems. The book presents a coherent account of learning and the learner and draws clear implications for teaching practice.

Among other things, Biggs reminds us that 'attempts to improve learning that do not involve changes in the delivery system will leave learning unimproved'. Despite the difference in context this message must surely apply to higher education.

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