HERDSA NEWS

The Higher Education Research and Development Society of Australasia Incorporated

FEATURES

REGULAR ITEMS

EDITOR'S DESK

All appearances to the contrary, we do have a new editor. Just not quite yet. Alison Viskovic of the Wellington Polytechnic, a longtime member of HERDSA with a couple of terms on the Executive in her past, has been appointed as the new HERDSA News Editor. Alison's appointment is for at least the couple of years that it will take for the Society to assume its new constitutional and operational shape. At that stage we would plan to review the news and information channels within the Society to determine whether the present organs are still the most appropriate ones.

This is the first time that the editorship of either News or Journal has passed to New Zealand. In the case of the News, the move will redress the balance a little. Those members who are of 'the long white cloud' persuasion should be able to look for some more faithful reflection of their professional world. There may also be pointers for Australians on the lookout for intimations of future systemic directions.

Alison will take over the editorship reins for the third issue this year. Her various addresses will take pride of place in the next issue.

In the meantime, you must bear with me being back on the soapbox. And if we can leave aside the 'natural' topic (for Australians) of the spectre of the cuts, I'd like, instead, to do a brief meditation on a theme that has been preoccupying me lately.

I guess that in many institutions, as in my own, academic staff developers are having increasing contact with staff who have not volunteered for the developmental activity in which they find themselves, but are there rather as a result of having been press-ganged as a subject convenor or a chair of examiners, or as part of a committee or a program team, etc. A number of faculties at my institution have a Staff Development Week each semester where it is indicated that there is a strong expectation on all staff to attend. This leads, perhaps inevitably at this point in time, to situations where some proportion of the participants is not really on side.

What is this about? No doubt there are all sorts of factors involved, some of which staff developers need not take personally. Staff development takes up needed time; it may seem to assume some professional deficiency; it is variable in its usefulness; it doesn't happen in your own building. These reasons have reality and I'm not minimising their importance. But they don't in general provide the sudden flashpoint for the resistance that one sees every so often. And this is the thing about which I have been cogitating.

That flashpoint is occasioned by certain language or certain kinds of activities which are the stock-in-trade of staff developers. 'Share' or 'improve' or 'reflect' trip off the tongue; we set up exercises requiring professional/personal disclosure; we invoke concepts from particular analytical frameworks such as 'deep' and 'surface' which seem to make judgments, or worse, to derogate certain kinds of knowledge. One way of understanding this is to recognise that there is a moral or ethical note common to a number of staff development discourses. In some forms, it is almost the 'improving' ethic of Victorian reading books all over again. And although there is some return of this hortatory note in our culture (think of the plethora of self-improvement books and motivational speakers), it may well be that it is not a majority taste among academics.

There should be debate about the appropriateness of the development paradigm. Both as to its pragmatic usefulness and as to such matters as its ideological and epistemological assumptions. More to the point, there should be positive effort put into constructing alternative accounts of increasing professional knowledge or skill - accounts that are norm-based, or content-based or cognitive or that come more frankly out of a training stable, accounts that can be contested, that may imply somewhat different processes or discourses than the 'workshop' model, and that may leave the moral 'self' of the staff member who is doing this learning more or less inviolate.

For much of its life in higher education institutions, staff development has had a minority, voluntary audience. As it moves to cater to the needs of a majority audience on a not-always-voluntary basis, it will be sensible for staff developers to be alert to its historical and discursive roots. What is important is that this resource for academic staff - a resource that may stand between them and sanity if the cuts are bad enough - not be alienated for want of a few 'frank exchanges.'

Margaret Buckridge

Deadlines for future issues

July 1996:	**1 July**
November 1996:	**1 October**
April 1997:	**1 February**

Teaching Large Classes: The Silver Lining

Schools of Law have had, in cinematic quarters in particular, a somewhat glamorous reputation for effective large class interaction. It would appear, however, that this does not 'just come naturally'. In this article, which arose out of two Teaching and Learning seminars in the School of Law at Murdoch, Gary Davis and Neil McLeod explore the challenges and opportunities of larger classes. The News is running this piece in two parts: three of the teaching challenges are presented in this issue; in the next issue, a discussion of assessment challenges.

The purpose of this article is to identify some of the challenges associated with teaching large classes, and then to suggest some techniques that can be used to meet those challenges.

In preparing this article, we had specifically in mind (1) teachers of law (2) who have been used to teaching small classes. However, many of the challenges and responses suggested will be found to be of general application.

The Silver Lining

The challenges represented by large classes can be met by adopting strategies particularly tailored for them. Certainly this means letting go of strategies that produce excellent results in smaller groups. But the techniques which must replace them need not be compromise measures designed to make the best of a bad situation. Techniques tailored for large classes hold their own delights and advantages. They actually allow a teacher to achieve quite easily some things that are more difficult to achieve in smaller groups.

What is a Large Class?

Lectures involve communication between teachers and learners. For the purposes of this article, a large class is defined as one in which the strategies which are normally used by the teacher in talking to individuals or small groups begin to lose their effectiveness. Strategies which depend on close contact begin to break down as class sizes exceed 40 or so (and become increasingly problematic as numbers increase thereafter). To look at it from the perspective of the learner, a large class is one in which the student begins to feel anonymous, an invisible face in a sea of faces.

LOGISTICAL CHALLENGES

❏ Diseconomies of Scale

Challenge: When teaching large classes, it is necessary to plan ahead for a range of activities which normally would not need such careful planning. The distribution of essays and other papers can be a chaotic and time-consuming exercise in large classes.

Response: While papers can be handed out on the run in smaller classes, the appropriate strategy in a large class may be to ask students to collect them out of class, or during a break in the lecture.

❏ Noise

Challenge: While lecturers will be able to make themselves heard over the noise of a small class, this will be much more problematic with a large class. Even the simplest request put to the class as a whole can result in pandemonium and an accompanying loss of control.

Response: In a large class, any activity which requires students to move or engage in group discussions must be more carefully managed: the invitation to move or discuss should be carefully withheld until all the relevant instructions have been laid out.

These instructions will include, for instance, the nature of the exercise, the question for discussion, and most importantly, the signal which will indicate that the movement or discussion should cease and attention be returned to the lecturer.

Techniques tailored for large classes hold their own delights and advantages. They actually allow a teacher to achieve quite easily some things that are more difficult to achieve in smaller groups.

In regard to the latter, a signal such as the flicking on and off of the theatre lights, or the switching on of the overhead projector can be established with the class in advance. Another alternative is to play fairly lively music during these discussions or 'buzz groups', its cessation indicating that attention should return to the lecturer. This is an example of how the challenges presented by large class teaching encourage teachers to explore and enrich the array of sensory channels and signals through which they communicate - thereby actually increasing their effectiveness as teachers.

❏ The Struggle To Be Heard

Challenge: Where a teacher needs to wear a microphone to be heard, the trailing cord can be an awkward added dimension to the physical process of lecturing. And if the lecturer cannot be heard unmiked, student questions will also not be heard by all of the class.

Response: If their work environment does not include radio microphones for large teaching spaces, teachers might move to promote their acquisition by their school or department.

But even with radio microphones, there remains the problem of the audibility of student questions. In regard to this matter, a necessary strategy to adopt in such cases is for the lecturer to repeat the question to the whole class. While this may seem at first sight to involve a waste of time, it is actually an instance of a large class strategy which has distinct pedagogical advantages not so easily obtained in small classes.

The repeating of the question allows students more time to themselves consider an answer to it. It emphasises the importance and value attached to student questions. It allows the teacher to take what is in essence a request for the teacher to 'provide an answer' and reframe it into an invitation for the class as a whole to consider the question and come up with their own answers - that is, it emphasises learning. And it allows the teacher to rephrase a poor question so as to make it more pertinent.

When a question is not at all pertinent, but rather reflects some extraneous obsession or interest of the questioner, an effective strategy might be to gesture to the class as a whole and respond: "I wonder if you can help me understand how the point you have just raised will assist the class in learning about the topic of today's lecture?" Such a response will serve to refocus the questioner on the purpose of the lecture without alienating the rest of the class - all that has occurred is a statement that the interests of the class are paramount.

☐ **Maintaining Control**

Challenge: In a large class, the student who enjoys dominating interactions with the lecturer (either from sheer enthusiasm or to assert personal power) can pose a special problem. Opportunities for individual students to interact personally with the lecturer are a rarer and more precious commodity in large classes than in small ones. Furthermore, it is very easy for the posing of a question by one student in a large class to be interpreted by the other students as a signal that an interruption to the mass communication of the lecture is in progress and they should talk noisily about the plans for the weekend till the lecture recommences.

Response: The techniques appropriate to intimate interactions actually exacerbate, rather than solve, these problems. In intimate communications we tend to lean toward, or move closer to, a person addressing us as a means of acknowledging that they have our attention. The appropriate technique in a large class is to do just the opposite.

Teachers should place as much of the class as is feasible between themselves and the student before taking the question. This is, fortunately, much easier to do in a large class than a small one. Firstly, the grander scale of larger lecture theatres allows a lecturer to roam around much more naturally. Secondly, the 'sea of faces' enables the lecturer to pretend not to have seen the questioner without giving offence.

Upon noticing the student begin to raise a hand, the lecturer can move away, pause to ask if there are any questions, and then acknowledge the questioner from this greater distance.

This manoeuvre forces the questioner to speak up, and it forces the question to be directed (in the full physical sense of the word) to the class as well as the teacher. In repeating the question (see above) the lecturer can use a sweeping gesture of the hand which takes in the whole class and begin by saying "The question that is being put to us is ..." thus further defining the question as a communication with the class as a whole.

It allows the teacher to take what is in essence a request for the teacher to 'provide an answer' and reframe it into an invitation for the class as a whole to consider the question and come up with their own answers - that is, it emphasises learning.

With nuisance questioners, the plausibility of the pretence that the lecturer has not seen them, and the ample availability of other places for the lecturer to look, can limit their 'air time' without giving offence. It may also be useful to avoid moving in the direction of such people. (It has been noticed that students generally begin to put their hands up as a lecturer moves towards them - presumably this is linked to the signal discussed above, namely that movement towards someone indicates that they have captured one's attention.)

☐ **Equipment**

Challenge: Theatres designed to hold large classes are not always equipped with blackboards or whiteboards. Staff are often expected to use overhead projectors instead.

Response: Overhead projectors are not a substitute for whiteboards - they cannot be used in the same way. Far less detail, and far fewer words should be used on overheads. The staff member used to relying on whiteboards will need to acquire new techniques - including the effective use of overheads.

ANOTHER CHALLENGE: ENGAGING STUDENTS IN THE LEARNING PROCESS

Low Student Expectations

Students may expect less personal involvement in large classes. They may see smaller classes as the only appropriate places for them to think, discuss, and play around with ideas. They may mistake the purpose of lectures to be to provide occasions for a lecturer to do no more than disseminate information for them to take down as dictation and only subsequently digest.

This anticipation of disengagement produces lower levels of concentration, making it that bit harder for the teacher to establish and maintain rapport.

Of course, if a faculty as a whole successfully employs engagement techniques in large classes, not least in the early years of studies, this culture of disengagement can be more easily turned around.

☐ The Students up the Back

Challenge: These low expectations, these feelings of anonymity, may lead to problems with students sitting up the back of the class, cutting themselves off, defining themselves as mere observers, and in so doing, undermining the atmosphere of communication and rapport on which the lecture depends if it is to be a successful learning experience.

(Where a class fills the lecture theatre there will inevitably be students at the back. But the message they send to themselves and to others is not as subversive. Their location is not so obviously a statement of their expectations.)

The teacher will need to adopt a strategy to encourage students to choose seating conducive to communication. But an authoritarian insistence that the students move forward to facilitate the lecturer ("so I don't have to shout") will meet with little success, and will tend to introduce its own barriers to rapport.

Response: This problem presents an excellent opportunity for the lecturer to incorporate, as an integral part of an appropriate strategy, an explanation that lectures are about students reaching understandings rather than taking dictation, about communication rather than mass eavesdropping on a soliloquy. The lecturer can redefine the concept of the "lecture" as involving student participation and learning.

This point will be the more effective and convincing given that it is not just thrown in for effect, but rather combined with a concrete demonstration of the lecturer's seriousness about its benefits: namely, the lecturer's concern to get the students to move closer.

The teacher should emphasise the benefits to the students that will flow from maximising their ability to remain engaged. Students will be able to increase their concentration in lectures and increase their marks at the end of the year merely by moving down to where they can actually learn.

☐ The Limitations of Small Group Techniques for Communicating with Students

Challenge: As the size of the class increases, it becomes much more difficult for lecturers to learn the names of all their students.

Indeed, new techniques must be adopted if teachers are even to make successful human contact with their students. Subtle facial expressions useful in intimate contact are scarcely visible to those more than a few rows back (eyebrow movements, increases in eye moisture, pupil dilation, muscle tonus, skin colour, changes in lip size: whether we know it or not we often rely on these in close-up communicatins).

Attempts in large classes to magnify the signals used with small groups lead to exhaustion (wild shoulder shrugging, going into vocal over-drive with regard to volume and pitch).

The temptation to maintain control of a large class through adopting an authoritarian stance (for example, harsh voice tones, patronising phraseology) can serve to distance teachers further from the students with whom they are attempting to communicate. It is hard for an aggressive despot to gain the trust of students and establish the rapport necessary to encourage in them an enthusiasm for the subject they are studying.

Response: These challenges can be met by calling into play aspects of body language usually left untapped in smaller classes. For instance, hand gestures are usually left to look after themselves in close contact. As a result they often add very little or even distract the listener. In large classes, the teacher can learn to consciously use distinct gestures to mark out particular concepts or topics.

In the same way, a large lecture theatre (unlike smaller venues) offers much more scope for the lecturer to move to various positions in the teaching space so as to correlate them with different aspects of the subject matter under discussion. (For instance, a particular spot can be moved to whenever the class is being called to order, or whenever assessment is being discussed. Such a position becomes thereby a useful one to move to whenever the teacher needs to re-establish control over the class. Or, as another example, a lecture dealing with two distinct views or concepts can be choreographed so that discussion of each is located in a distinct area of the teaching space, the lecturer literally moving from one to another as they are discussed.)

When discussion time has ended, students reporting back to the whole class need not fear humiliation since it cannot be assumed that the views they express are necessarily their own.

A THIRD CHALLENGE: GETTING ALL THE STUDENTS TO SPEAK

☐ The Impossibility of Individual Attention for All, and the Fear of Humiliation

Challenge: In a small class it is possible for the teacher to give intensive attention to the shy or reluctant students, and still have ample time to speak individually with the rest of the class. In the large class, individual attention to all is not possible.

Students who may be willing to venture an opinion before a small informal group will feel far more reticent in taking up the time of a much larger class. They may feel greater pressure to have something worthwhile to say before such a large forum, and they also stand a chance of making a fool of themselves before a large and intimidating group.

What is more, the crowd makes it easier for the shy and the timid to hide away, harder for the lecturer to find them and draw them out.

Response: One of the best ways to cope with the challenge of creating adequate space for all students to speak in a large class is the use of buzz groups.

Large classes do, in fact, lend themselves more easily to buzz grouping than smaller classes. The silver lining

First Among Peers:
An Essay on Academic Leadership

'Say this word and you'll get the grant'. One of the front-running concepts in higher education at the moment is 'leadership' – it is being made to contain the hopes and desires of the system. But in universities, leadership has some very particular elements to its mode of existence. Gabrielle Baldwin from Monash University provides us with this fascinating analysis of the workings of leadership. Close to the bone for both the leaders and the led!

COLLEAGUES, COMMITTEES AND CONSENSUS?

One of the most significant challenges facing the Australian higher education system is the development of models of leadership and management that work in the peculiar context of academic culture - a culture based on conceptions of the professionalism and autonomy of academic staff and the principles of collegial decision-making.

Universities are governed by committees - hundreds of them. Typically, they are structured in a hierarchical pyramid at the apex of which sit the large representative bodies of Academic Board and Council, presiding over a complex, multi-level network of committees and associated working parties. In my university, a proposal relating to curriculum development can, in extreme cases, proceed through eight levels of committees, each receiving recommendations from below. One wonders whether any other organisations in the society generate as many committees and commit themselves as thoroughly to this form of decision-making.

At times, I have been tempted to turn this material into a satirical novel, but the more productive course is to draw from it the lessons of effectiveness which are certainly there to be read.

The collegial model may not always work very collegially in practice. Anyone who has sat on university committees will be familiar with the techniques for manipulating them. A favourite is the move from the chair which goes something like 'Well, I think the feeling of the meeting is . . .'; often the summation comes as a great surprise to all who have participated in the discussion but few are bold enough to challenge it. In my experience, formal votes are surprisingly rare in these meetings. I suspect that the collegial tradition is uncomfortable with votes; consensus is the goal. However, the system works well enough in practice to give most academics (though usually not junior ones) a crucial sense of ownership and control over their affairs. Despite the frequent complaints about meetings, this is a precious aspect of academic life, one of the intangible factors that make up for diminishing financial rewards.

Yet, in recent years, critics of this system have argued that it is too cumbersome and conservative to deal with the demands imposed by rapid and radical change in the society. Universities are not immune to the slightly hysterical mood of the times which dwells on images of future change accelerating at an exponential rate, transforming life in scarcely conceivable ways, and responds with a mixture of panic and excitement - surely a manifestation of millenialism.

Whatever the cause, the mood is having a dramatic impact on the discourse and procedures of university life. University planning documents and speeches are full of exhortations to pro-activity, warnings that the whole nature and structure of education must change - very quickly - and that institutions must be able to respond immediately to shifts in the 'market'. Cautionary metaphors of dinosaurs, snails and unmanoevrable super-tankers abound; such metaphors, of course, are powerful persuasive devices.

Some senior managers in Australian universities have reacted to this sense of urgency and their frustration at the slow pace of change in a committee-driven system by attempting to cut through the red tape with decisive action. Too often, decisive action means bullying and the arbitrary issuing of edicts. I think of it as the Rambo style of university management. It is often accompanied by aggressive language - talk of kicking heads, 'fingering' people, colourful threats and curses - which would amaze many outsiders still working with traditional images of academic decorum and gentlemanly converse.

Academic staff do not respond well to such tactics. Let me correct that: *nobody* responds well to such tactics. But academics find them particularly offensive because of the strong traditions which construct academic leaders as the 'first among peers'. It seems to me that a good deal of the unhappiness, resentment and low morale among academic staff, revealed in several recent studies, stems from these misconceived attempts to adopt a strong leadership style, a style which we are told has been discredited and discarded in the world of business.

Thankfully, there are some individual academics in positions of responsibility who still value the collegial traditions and work very hard to maintain them, while striving to bring about change in their departments,

faculties or institutions. It is hard work, because there is no doubt that they have to try to push things through the system more rapidly and more decisively than in the past. There is a lot to be learned from observing the most effective of these 'operators'. The circumstances are so peculiar to university culture that theories of effective leadership in these institutions must be constructed through an ethnographic approach - that is, through the close observation of what works by people who understand the system sufficiently to be able to tell what 'working' means (and this usually involves being a participant in some way). Theories imported from other cultures, such as those of large corporate enterprises, can be useful and stimulating, but cannot really engage with the procedures which academic leaders have to use every working day. (It is likely that some vice-chancellors and their deputies spend 80% of their time in meetings, and many of these are formal committee meetings supposedly operating by more-or-less democratic procedures.)

In the last two years, I have been well placed to observe styles of leadership in a large Australian university. I have been engaged in relatively high-level policy work, associated with a senior academic who had an agenda for significant change. The role of adviser allowed me to be simultaneously involved and detached - deeply involved with the issues but detached from the politics. Early in this period, I realised that the material was fascinating and decided to keep some rough notes of my observations and reflections. At times, I have been tempted to turn this material into a satirical novel, but the more productive course is to draw from it the lessons of effectiveness which are certainly there to be read. These conclusions are based on the behaviour of a number of academic leaders observed during that time, some of them operating at the highest levels of responsibility, others in the more mundane, but vital, committees and working parties which govern operations in the faculties and departments.

I present the lessons as a series of instructions for aspiring leaders. An echo of Machiavelli is inevitable and, on balance, appropriate. My stance is not cynical: the principles outlined below are based on faith in democratic processes and collegiality, but it would be disingenuous to deny that there is an element of manipulativeness involved. My second instruction, for example, has been described as a 'softening up' process by a senior manager (from a university other than my own). The mixture of attitudes and values involved is complex and has to be, as academic leaders operate in an intensely political environment. They have to be acutely aware of how they are affecting other people; such a quality can be both a virtue and a vice, depending on the context, the motive and the approach.

My prescription for successful academic leadership is as follows:

1. Have a clear and passionate vision of what you want to achieve.

The word 'vision' has been over-used and mis-used in recent years, often in relation to schemes which are in no sense 'visionary'. The term has also been devalued by the universal banality of so-called 'vision statements'. A meaningful vision for the future must be coherent and thought-out, going beyond slogans and advertising hype. It must be more than a assortment of 'bright ideas', plucked out of the air to advance a career. It must be based on an understanding of the interests and

needs of all the different groups involved, and a strong historical awareness. In my experience, members of universities can tell the difference between the genuine article and the glitzy fake.

2. Prepare for change by canvassing the issues and exploring the arguments - in other words, engage in intellectual analysis and debate (this *is* a university).

There is no short-cut in this process and it is very demanding. Academics love to debate and challenge, and the trend of discussions is usually towards the sceptical and critical. At its most negative, this can mean that they move in for the kill. But the process has the great advantage of exposing things which are waffly, not thought out, based on empty slogans. An effective academic leader must really relish the cut-and-thrust; otherwise she will never last the distance. A major part of the role is to persuade, but through the marshalling of arguments, not through exhortations. And the process must be carried to all parts of the university - from my observation, nothing is more effective in establishing the authority of an academic leader than the preparedness to discuss important matters with people at all points on the academic hierarchy, including students. Of course, in large universities, this activity has to be managed on a selective basis. And a round of ritualistic 'visits' will do little good unless there is a clear agenda (see 1 above).

3. Encourage participation and provoke reflection by posing questions.

This needs to be done in a systematic fashion. A very useful strategy is the development of a set of questions organised around clear themes and categories, to which relevant individuals and/or groups are invited to make response. The vision or agenda determines the categories and the form of the questions, and therefore shapes the thinking. The question is an open-ended form and genuinely invites contributions (it is our basic method for involving students), but the process needs to be organised and controlled (as it does in teaching). Where control becomes manipulation is a difficult point to judge, as it always is in tutorials and seminars.

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4. After such exploration, move decisively with concrete proposals.

This is a crucial step. Some individuals with good intentions and strong commitments never move out of the exploration-of-issues stage. And this is an particular danger for academics, who are educated to see the endless complexity of all important matters. The tendency can be seen in a number of university documents which continue to take refuge in the 'this problem must be addressed/issue must be investigated' mode, even after exhaustive canvassing of the arguments and facts. It is a matter of syntax as much as

anything else. At some stage, it is essential to take a deep breath and move into the 'we will do this' form - as a proposal to put on the table for agreement, modification or rejection. And part of the courage involved is refusing to hide in 'fudge' or equivocation. Having a clear, specific proposal to respond to will often galvanise people, and the change process suddenly accelerates.

5. Charge a small group with the task of preparing such proposals, with the responsibility for writing to go to one person.

Significant policy and planning documents cannot be written by a committee. The process takes far too long and inevitably produces a confused and fragmented piece, in a graceless mixture of styles and voices. Members of a small group can produce ideas for sections (the ubiquitous dot points), and can have input at every stage, but one person must take responsibility for conceptualising the document and making the crucial decisions about format, structure and logic. To organise such statements is conceptually very demanding. And, even in bureaucratic prose which aims to efface as much as possible of the personal voice, it is important to have a consistent style. Once drafts are on paper, they can be subject to many stages of revision, but again the principal writer must have control over this process.

6. When the proposal is ready to go to the relevant committees, have a clear strategy for pushing it through.

This does not mean that the proposal cannot be modified, but it does mean that the basic policy thrust must be maintained. The leader must have a clear sense of what can be given away and what must be fought for tooth and nail. If the policy is important, it will have to go through several committee stages. There is most room for negotiation at the lowest committee level. The proposal/policy document should be considered there in some detail. One effective strategy is to work through section by section, suggesting at the end of each that, subject to agreed modifications, that section is 'signed off'. This gives the committee a sense of ownership and commits them to supporting the document in other forums.

7. While the proposal is working its way through the various committees, put a lot of energy into 'selling' it

This is a more focused, strategic version of 2 above. Again, it demands of the leader a significant personal commitment. He must lobby in different parts of the University, putting himself on the line. If trusted advisers are available (see 12 below), they can do some of this, but if is vital that the leader establishes very clearly that this is his 'baby', something to which he is deeply committed.

8. As part of this lobbying, cultivate supporters in the faculties and among students.

An effective strategy is to arrange meetings with small groups of staff and students (usually separately) with food and drink provided. This can be simple and inexpensive, but is really appreciated and achieves a disproportionate return - it makes people feel special. Attention must be paid to the traditional powerbrokers (for example, Deans), but it is important to go right down the academic hierarchy. This will give a much

broader picture of the feelings of the university community, and to be seen to value the opinions of lowly lecturers, tutors and students creates an enormous pool of good will. It is also essential to establish good working relationships with the unions, and to discuss important initiatives with them at an early stage, rather than dealing with them always in terms of confrontation and crisis.

An enormous amount of time is wasted and many important decisions are endlessly deferred because of ineffective chairing.

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9. On important matters, call for feedback from the whole institution.

This is not as daunting as it sounds. It is best handled by circulating the proposal or policy at a late stage, when it has been through the preceding processes, and issuing open invitations for written comments. To take a cynical view, few will be bothered and yet will know they had the opportunity. To put it in a positive light, it *is* a genuine invitation and it is reasonable to count on not being overwhelmed.

10. Even if determined not to change essential features at this stage, concede what you can on minor points.

If people have taken the trouble to put something on paper, they deserve to have it considered. It is likely that most suggestions will be about points of detail, if the preceding steps have been successful. Often a slight re-phrasing will meet an objection. The sense of ownership is greatly enhanced if individuals can recognise their suggested wording in the revised document. It may be worth giving this to them, even if the original is fine. There will be a few submissions which launch comprehensive attacks on the whole proposal. There is nothing much that can be done about these; what is involved is a conflict at first principle level. However, if there are only, say, four or five in a large institution, they can be acknowledged as hostile and set aside. This should be admitted 'up front' - there is no way of pleasing everyone. If the feedback is overwhelmingly negative, then the whole situation has been misjudged. This should not be possible if the earlier stages of consultation have been handled properly.

11. When chairing committee meetings, direct the discussion with authority.

This comes back to the point with which I started - that universities operate through their committees. To achieve change and produce significant decisions, a leader must give strong direction to deliberations. An enormous amount of time is wasted and many important decisions are endlessly deferred because of ineffective chairing. A good chair allows a reasonable time for discussion on any point, ensuring equitable access to the floor, and then moves decisively towards a resolution and a firm proposal for action. This is particularly important where there is disagreement - and academics will almost always find some ground for disagreement,

and more of it the longer they talk. A good chair proposes a solution, perhaps a compromise, and a way of proceeding from this point. The next step is never left up in the air. If disagreements are really intractable, the sensible move is to propose that a small group thrash things out and make recommendations. This is a vital mechanism, but it is over-used in universities. Whenever it is clear that it is simply a way of deferring a decision, it should be resisted. If there is more investigation to be done, then it is justified. In formal meetings, the chair who can resolve difficulties by actually finding the words for a motion is invaluable. Members of committees are enormously relieved when someone does this for them, even if they want to modify the wording. The chair can trade on the gratitude.

12. Find people to trust and win their loyalty.

In large, complex, modern universities, leaders cannot possibly do all of this on their own. However, they have to be very careful in delegating responsibility. It is a truism of management that effective leaders must be prepared to delegate; but it is seldom acknowledged that people sometimes find themselves with subordinates they wouldn't trust to run a chook raffle. Charismatic leaders may be too prone to think that they are the only ones who can handle things properly, but there is sometimes some justification for this conclusion. On the whole, I think the solution is to allow people in positions of responsibility to find advisers and other support staff they can work with and trust. This may involve some creative movement of staff, and it must be done tactfully and with a sense of people's dignity. The quickest way to create ill feeling is to move individuals arbitrarily and without consultation. Academic leaders need the courage to talk things through with staff, even if (or particularly if) there are some hard things to be said. It is surprising to observe the cowardice of some senior managers who do not have the guts to deal directly with these matters, but resort to memos or instructions conveyed through another person. Once trusted advisers have been found and tested for a reasonable period, they should be given a lot of latitude. Without it, they will add to the burden, not lighten it. They should be backed up strongly in public and their work should be generously acknowledged. In private, they should be allowed a lot of room to disagree and challenge - nothing is more dangerous and corrupting for a leader than to be surrounded by sycophants. They should be praised when they do well (but not patronised) and they should be told directly and constructively when they make mistakes.

13. Neutralise your opponents.

This can be achieved in several ways, depending on the personalities of the opponents. They can be won over, by a mixture of respectful attention, argument and flattery. This may involve some small, selective lunches, where the leader's undivided attention is given to addressing the opponent's arguments - a highly flattering situation in itself. Particularly effective is the move to co-opt the opponent by making her part of the leader's team in some way, preferably working in an area where common ground can be established. An opposite tactic is to set an opponent up as the kept radical, the speaker who makes the ritual objection at every meeting and satisfies honour by doing so. This strategy depends also on the leader paying courteous attention to the statement - perhaps thanking the opponent for making these points - before moving on. It also depends on being able to keep this person relatively

isolated, which is easy if her main interest is in 'grandstanding', not so easy if she is a good grass roots organiser.

. . . a leader who gets into a habit of apology and self-deprecation, conveying the impression that he does not know what he is doing, will make everyone very nervous.

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14. Be ready to admit mistakes.

Since this is a fundamental principle of a good life, it is not surprising that it is also a fundamental principle of good leadership. Without this capacity, a leader is brittle and paranoid, since a great deal of energy must go into defending the ego against threatened breaches of the fortress wall. Such a person is likely to be out of touch with the rest of us who are fallible, and therefore to be quite unpopular. There are those who won't concede an inch, and others, a little more subtle but even more objectionable, who shift ground while vigorously denying that they have done so, implying that it is the stupid listeners who have misunderstood. Some individuals are capable of blustering their way through even the most profound embarrassment, when they have been caught out very publicly. One gets the impression that to admit a mistake would almost kill them - it would be the ultimate sign of weakness. Another unappealing response is to blame others, publicly to offer up a scapegoat. This not only gives an impression of moral weakness, but creates an atmosphere of fear which undermines the loyalty and initiative of staff. It is not just clear errors which should be admitted, but limitations - of knowledge, skill, capacity. Such openness can be very endearing, and is therefore politically astute. It can win people more quickly than any strategy, particularly if it is handled with self-deprecating humour, which is, of course, a form of control. However, it must be used judiciously - a leader who gets into a habit of apology and self-deprecation, conveying the impression that he does not know what he is doing, will make everyone very nervous. Leaders must be able to carry people along with them, inspiring a confidence that they may not feel. But to admit mistakes and limitations in appropriate circumstances will not threaten this role - it will strengthen it.

15. Watch your back at all times.

The danger is from enemies rather than opponents. Enemies may not publicly oppose the leader at all. Their concern is not really about issues, but about egos. They can lie low for some time and lull the leader into a false sense of security. The only ways of guarding against attack are eternal vigilance and the establishment of a personal power base. For in-depth studies of this area, the leader - and the reader - are directed to Shakespeare's history plays and Robert Graves' *I Claudius*.

Recently, I was involved in interviewing a number of bright, young students seeking admission into a course. One of the set questions was about their conceptions of leadership. They had obviously been tipped off that this

Student Learning
S I G
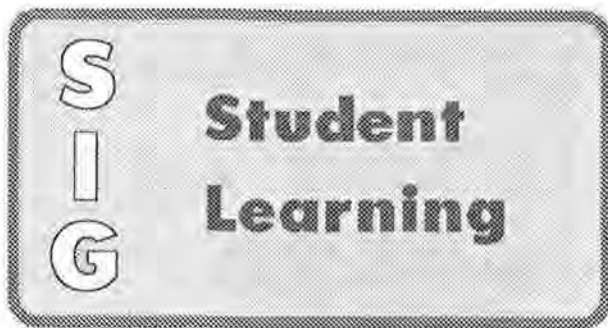
A regional meeting of the "language and learning" Special Interest Group of HERDSA was hosted by the Teaching and Learning Centre of the University of Western Sydney, Hawkesbury, on Friday 22 March 1996. Participants came from universities in NSW, but interest in the proceedings of this meeting has been expressed from many Australian and New Zealand subscribers to the Unilearn discussion list. This message provides a potted summary of the day's proceedings, with a brief preamble to set the scene.

PREAMBLE

This is the seventh year that regular meetings have been held amongst NSW and ACT university staff interested in "language and learning" issues. Until 1994, the group was known as TELL: for Tertiary Education Language and Learning (or Learning and Language - no-one can remember which). In 1994, the Language and Learning Special Interest Group of HERDSA was established, and subsequent meetings came to be referred to under this umbrella. The topics we have explored in these meetings (about 6 full-day sessions per year) have ranged from presentations of teaching/learning initiatives, through discussions about institutional policy development, to discussions about professional and industrial issues. Whenever possible, we have scheduled meetings to allow for reports back from participants at key conferences for those who could not attend. The meetings are always well attended, and well-appreciated for facilitating the sharing of information and ideas, and providing an important professional development forum.

GETTING THE MESSAGE AROUND

Until this year, information about the meetings had been disseminated within NSW and ACT. It is clear from the interest expressed in our first meeting this year that the Unilearn discussion list may prove to be the easiest means of communication about the HERDSA S.I.G. across Australia and New Zealand, even though regional meetings would be unlikely to attract participants across large distances. If you know of colleagues who do not have access to e-mail, would you please arrange to print this message and distribute it.

BRIEF SUMMARY OF MEETING ON 22ND MARCH

Mary Harvie (University of Western Sydney Hawkesbury) spoke about initiatives she is undertaking within the School of Health on "teaching and assessing critical literacy for the reflective journal". Mary welcomes contact from others who are researching the assessment of critical literacy in reflective practice (m.harvie@uws.edu.au). Beth Murison (University of

Sydney) provided a brief summary of some themes and issues from the recent Tertiary Literacy Conference held at Victoria University of Technology, for the benefit of those who did not attend.

Jan Skillen (University of Newcastle) spoke briefly about the use of poster presentations at conferences, highlighting their advantages but pointing out the need for careful integration of such presentations into conference programs.

Janice Catterall (University of Western Sydney Macarthur) summarised the approach taken at her university to ensure graduates are equipped with communication skills, and briefly reviewed institutional policy developments as presented at the recent Tertiary Literacy conference at Victoria University of Technology.

Peter Ninnes (University of Western Sydney Macarthur) presented information about his institution's approach to the use of the World Wide Web to make study resources available for students.

(http://www.macarthur.uws.edu.au/ssd/ldc/welcome.html)

A summary by Anita van der Wal (University of Newcastle) of the outcomes from small-group discussions at the conference in Bendigo (La Trobe University) last December was distributed. Anita will be placing this summary on the Unilearn Discussion list, and inviting comment.

Participants discussed a range of issues that arose at the Bendigo conference, and emerged from Anita's summary, including the following (thanks to Peter Rogers, from Macquarie University for his notes on this discussion):

☐ whether it was appropriate to establish a professional association for language and learning staff in universities (it was agreed to continue operating as a Special Interest Group within HERDSA)

☐ whether it was appropriate to invite input from the NTEU on industrial-related matters (it was agreed that this may be appropriate at some later stage)

☐ that it will be important to discuss professional and industrial matters with the HERDSA Executive, perhaps asking that an item be placed on the agenda for the AGM in Perth

☐ that it will be important to establish a link with the proposed Academic Developers Special Interest Group of HERDSA

☐ that the Language and Learning S.I.G. of HERDSA should consider ways of raising revenue.

REGIONAL MEETINGS IN NSW AND ACT DURING 1996

15 May - Language and Learning Unit, Faculty of Health Sciences, University of Sydney

June (t.b.a.) - Learning Assistance Centre, University of Sydney (Camperdown)

August (t.b.a.) - Learning Development Centre

September - University of Wollongong

21 October - Learning Development Centre, University of Western Sydney, Macarthur (Campbelltown)

December (t.b.a.) - Learning Skills Unit, University of Newcastle.

With kind regards to all, and hope to see you at HERDSA in Perth this July.

Carolyn Webb
University of Sydney.

Cancellation of Visit by Sheila Tobias
Herdsa's Visiting Scholar for 1996

HERDSA regrets that Sheila Tobias has had to cancel her visits to Universities in Australia and New Zealand because of the critical illness of a family member.

Sheila asks that her sincere apologies are conveyed to all HERDSA members and hopes that, if her family situation improves, she will be able to make the visits next year.

Her projected visit had attracted a great deal of interest, such that Gay Crebert, the national convenor for her visit, has suggested that 'in view of the high level of interest in Sheila's work I urge that the executive reconsider its invitation to her to be the 1997 Visiting Scholar.'

Report of the 1995 Annual Conference of the Victorian Branch

Kym Fraser from Monash University, one of the members of the Victorian Branch Executive, provides us with this account of the Branch's conference in December.

BREAKING DOWN THE BARRIERS

The 1995 annual conference of the Victoria Branch of HERDSA Inc. offered a creative mix of paper sessions, workshops, poster presentations, discussion groups, reports on work in progress and a panel discussion.

Posters addressed areas which included seminar presentations in the humanities, teaching argumentation, and the identification of communication barriers between students and instructors in tertiary science laboratories. Workshops explored the world wide web, accelerative learning, enhancement of student choice when learning, measurement and evaluation and critical reflection.

Papers addressed issues of Breaking Down the Barriers between: teaching and learning; academia and the professions; teaching and multimedia; disciplines; and between different centres within a university.

In the conference evaluation, participants stated that they chose to attend the conference for a variety of reasons including:

☐ to inform their teaching practice,
☐ to learn about the types of teaching and learning research and projects being carried out,
☐ to network,
☐ to gain experience in presenting their work to colleagues,
☐ to gain feedback on their work and ideas,
☐ to recharge their enthusiasm for teaching; and
☐ to have fun.

Participants' perceptions of the effect of attending the conference on their work included increased confidence, new research and project ideas, increased awareness of barriers to their work and strategies to use to try to overcome some of these barriers, increased reflective preparation, new teaching ideas, and feeling re-energised. Participants also commented that the conference was well organised and offered a high degree of constructive, supportive interaction.

Past experience at HERDSA Vic. conferences indicated that lecture style presentations were generally not well received. In order to facilitate discussion in the paper sessions, each paper was introduced by a discussant who outlined the main ideas of the paper, the strengths, interesting components, and the weaknesses of, or concerns about, the work. The paper contributor then responded to the discussant's opening remarks. Approximately 70 % of the survey respondents commented that the use of discussants in the paper sessions worked particularly well. Respondents included statements such as: *the discussants were able to focus the discussion, prevent contributors from simply reading their paper, provide a view from someone outside the contributor's discipline and draw links between different people's work.* However, some participants expressed a concern that some discussants went over time and also dominated the discussion time which had been allocated to open discussion.

In summary, the 1995 HERDSA Vic. conference "Breaking down the Barriers" was a highly successful conference which brought together an enthusiastic group of people, all of whom are committed to the improvement of teaching in Higher Education.

HERDSA's OFFICE

Just over a year ago the HERDSA office moved from Problarc, Sydney to Canberra. It is now located in a wing of the Cook Primary School which is largely occupied by other curriculum, adult education and related project people. The HERDSA Office is for administrative purposes operating as an agency of the Australian Association of Adult and Community Education (AAACE).

Heather Koch has been working as the HERDSA Membership & Publications Officer in Canberra. As a result of the decision made at the 1995 conference to to extend the work done by the office - to identify and develop enhanced services for members, for general promotion of the Society, and to assist the executive – **Coral Watson** was appointed as the Administrative Officer at the end of last year. Both Heather and Coral work just over half-time each; the office is staffed Monday to Thursday 9am – 4pm and Friday 9 – 12.30pm

Phone	(06) 253 4242	fax	(06) 253 4246
email	herdsa@netinfo.com.au.(NOTE NEW EMAIL ADDRESS)		

PUBLICATIONS

The HERDSA publications list has recently been updated, and is included in this newsletter. The Green Guides continue to be valued, as there is a regular demand for single and bulk copies, both within and outside Australasia (e.g. a recent UK order for 180 copies). Note the good savings to members on the R&D Series.

Branches or Special Interest Groups (SIGs) with publications are welcome to add their details to the publications list. Let Heather or Coral know.

HERDSA NEWS INSERTS

If you have an event or information of interest to HERDSA members you can arrange through Heather to have a brochure or flyer inserted into every Newsletter at a cost of $80.

ADULT LEARNERS WEEK

The second annual Adult Learners Week is set for 1 - 7 September. The ALW Office just happens to be in the same room as the HERDSA office!!. One of the international guests is Dr Darlene Clover an environmental educator who may be of interest to University groups - contact Coral Watson for more information or speak directly to the national ALW coordinator, Vicki Kapernick, on 06 251 7933.

New Members

Welcome to the following people who have become HERDSA members this year.
Greetings also to the renewing members!

New South Wales

Helen Goodacre	School of Orthoptics University of Sydney
Dale Mattock Student	Macquarie University
Edward Brady	School of Civil Engineering UTS
David Green	Dept of Applied Physics UTS
Barbara Hilliard	Aust Catholic Uni
Yve Repin	University of Wollongong
Simon Barrie	Centre for Teaching & Learning University of Sydney

Australian Capital Territory

Annie Bartlett	Grad Studies ANU
Susanne Holzknecht	National Centre for Dev. ANU
Trish Carroll	Canberra Institute of Technology
John Martin	University of Canberra
Van Le	Faculty of Info Sc & Eng University of Canberra
Belle Alderman	Faculty of Communication University of Canberra
Philip Thompson	ADFA
Phillipa Weeks	Faculty of Law ANU
Peter Clayton	Faculty of Communication University of Canberra

Queensland

Mary Keyes	Law Faculty Griffith University
Margaret Fletcher	Griffith University
versityJohn McCollow	Qld Teachers Union
Helen Carberry	QUT
John Lidstone	Faculty of Education QUT

South Australiaa

|	
Kerry O'Regan	University of SA
Mary Ann Sabine	University of SA
Marigold Francis	Flinders University
Anna Chur-Hansen	Dept of Psychiatry University of Adelaide

New Zealand

Peter Coolbear	Faculty of Science & Technology Hawkes Bay Polytechnic
Dale Waldron	Manukau Inst of Technology

Victoria

Judith Lyons	Faculty of Nursing RMIT
Amanda Pearce	Student Learning Unit Vic University of Tech
Reem Al-Mahmood	Aust Catholic University
Val Clulow	Monash University

Western Australia

Frances Rowland	Academic Services Unit Murdoch University
Barbara Groombridge	Curtin University
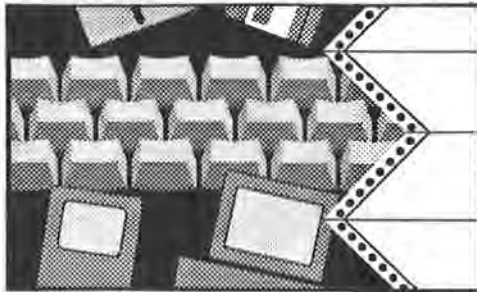
Keeping Up-to-date Electronically

NEW EMAIL ADDRESS

The office has just updated its email service
- herdsa@netinfo.com.au. *(for general enquiries)* also
- heth.herdsa @netinfo.com.au   (Heather)
- coral.herdsa@netinfo.com.au

HERDSA HOMEPAGE

Our homepage has recently been established on the internet, you can find it at.

http://sunsite.anu.edu.au/education/herdsa/

It includes a HERDSA publications list, membership application details, and a link to the Perth conference homepage. Comments and suggestions are welcome.

ELECTRONIC NETWORK

The moderated electronic network was established for use by all members, and for further specialisation by branches and Special Interest Groups. For anyone not subscribed, what it means is that messages of general interest to HERDsA can be sent and come up on your email. The network is moderated which means that all messages go to a central point where they are perused for appropriateness to HERDSA members - this means that you do not get 'junk mail'. Messages consist of notes about conferences, queries, visitors, etc. You are welcome to join to the network by sending an email message to the address contained within in the following marks <HERDSA@listproc.anu.edu.au> and then give your details in the following way <subscribe firstname lastname>.

Helping HERD

Higher Education Research and Development, HERD, is the Society's learned journal. It is a flagship for HERDSA. Its very high standards rely on the willingness for members of HERDsA to act as referees. We like to regard all members of HERDSA as potential referees.

We are now seeking to boost the numbers of people who actively contribute to the refereeing panel. Please may I ask every member of the Society to nominate which of the areas of expertise listed below you are able to offer. Please send answers to:

E-mail: b.brassard@mailbox.uq.oz.au **or**

fax: 61 7 3365 1075 **or**

mailing address:
Dr David Warren Piper
The Tertiary Education Institute
University of Queensland, QLD. 4072.

Please write now before you forget.

David Warren Piper, Editor

HERD Journal

Areas of Interest for Referees

1.0 Student Learning and Teaching
- 1.1 Mental processes, cognitism, disabilities
- 1.2 Problem-based learning
- 1.3 Resource-based learning /educational technology/ multi-media/ distance education
- 1.4 Postgraduate/PhD/Research supervision

2.0 Student Assessment and Examinations
- 2.1 Degree standards
- 2.1 Competencies
- 2.3 Academic outcomes - achievements

3.0 Curriculum Development
- 3.1 Course Evaluation
- 3.2 Open Learning

4.0 Staff Development Services
- 4.1 Mentoring

5.0 Student Services
- 5.1 Study skills

6.0 International Education/Cross Cultural Issues

7.0 Equity
- 7.1 Gender issues

8.0 Management/Leadership
- 8.1 Quality assurance

9.0 Higher Education Policy
- 9.1 Funding
- 9.2 Structure of system

10.0 History of Education

11.0 Economics of Education

12.0 Philosophy of Education

13.0 Discipline Specialities
- 13.1 Health Sciences/Medicine, Physical Education
- 13.2 Biological Sciences
- 13.3 Physical Sciences, Mathematics
- 13.4 Engineering - Technical
- 13.5 Social Sciences/Geography/Education
- 13.6 Languages
- 13.7 Humanities
- 13.8 Management/Business/Accounting
- 13.9 Professional Education (General)/Vocational Education.

Higher Education Research in Progress

The first column for 1996 includes a record number of projects. Researchers from Australia, New Zealand, Canada and England have contributed. All would be glad to hear from interested colleagues, so do use the e-mail addresses and world wide web addresses provided. Some are also looking for collaborators in the research endeavour. **Details of how to contribute to the column appear after the abstracts.**

96.1

Project Title: A modular approach to teaching information retrieval skills to postgraduate students.

Researchers: Information Services Staff at the University of Wollongong (Project Leader- Sue Craig, Information Services Librarian)

The aim of the project is to develop a series of teaching modules to effectively address the research and information retrieval skills required by postgraduate students. The modules will cover information resources across disciplines and provide access to a broad range of information sources held in the University of Wollongong Library, around Australia and internationally. Modules will include instruction in the use of reference resources within the library, print and electronic indexes, access to other libraries, online databases, E-mail, electronic discussion groups, electronic journals and subject-specific Internet sites. Modules will be developed so that the program can be used as a complete package or in parts as appropriate to course and/or student needs. The generic nature of the modules will allow the program to be extended to the whole academic community.

Keywords: postgraduate students, information skills

Granting Body: University of Wollongong Teaching Development Grant

Name and Address for Correspondence:
Sue Craig, Information Services Librarian
Library, University of Wollongong
Northfields Avenue, Wollongong NSW 2500
E-mail: s.craig@uow.edu.au
Phone: (042) 21 3550

96.2

Project Title: Exploring postgraduate supervision: student and supervisor perceptions.

Researchers: Sally Wijesundera, Owen Hicks, Sarah Mann

This study aims to explore the consonance and dissonance between student and supervisor preferences for different styles of postgraduate supervision. It is hoped the results will lead to a better understanding of style preferences in the supervisory relationship and hence more effective supervision practices. This may also illuminate some of the dynamics of the student-supervisor relationship. Late in 1994 the Centre for Staff Development made available on a trial basis a system for the evaluation of research supervision by research students and their supervisors. The service aims to provide a non-threatening dialogue between students and supervisors based around parallel questionnaires completed by student and supervisor. These instruments ask the students to rate their preferred supervision style and the supervisors to rate their current style. A direct rating of the performance of either the supervisor or the student is not sought. Student and supervisor are then invited to exchange questionnaires and discuss the relative ratings. Approximately 100 paired questionnaires have been completed and are being analysed to identify patterns of supervision style preference on the part of students, current supervision styles as identified by supervisors, and the correlation between individual student preference and the current style of supervision they appear to be receiving.

Keywords: perceptions, postgraduate students, postgraduate supervision, supervision style, supervisors, supervisor-student relationship.

Granting Body: internal

Name and Address for Correspondence:
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Email: sallyw@csd.uwa.edu.au

96.3

Project Title: Assessment of Medical Students' Clinical Performance.

Researchers: Eleanor Long & Jenepher Martin

The focus of this project is on the assessment of clinical competence of 170 final-year medical students. The assessment process involves fourteen "stations" at which students are required to perform a variety of clinical tasks. Each station is constructed by a team with relevant medical and educational expertise and experience. Criteria for competent performance in the skills involved are articulated for each station. These criteria provide a framework for student assessment. Issues of validity and reliability of the assessment process have been addressed in the project. The objective is to maintain practices which are working well and identify those which are in need of improvement. Pre-assessment activities have involved the analysis of the content of each station, and overall, against stated student learning objectives and attainment expectations. A particular challenge involves the formulation of how pass-fail decisions are to be made in the case of borderline students. Further activities, which aim at consistency in assessment, across assessors and students, are the training of assessors in the application of assessment criteria, the use and training of simulated patients for selected

stations, and the briefing of students prior to assessment. Post-assessment analyses will yield statistical measures of assessment reliability.

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Dr Eleanor Long, Malcolm Eley, Teaching & Learning Group, Professional Development Centre, Monash University, Clayton, Victoria, 3168, Australia.
+61 3 9905 6812 (FAX +61 3 9905 6801)

96.4
Project Title: Changes in university teachers' conceptions of teaching

Researcher: Jo McKenzie (PhD topic)

The emphasis or the focus being very much on enabling people to learn rather than having to feel that you have to teach them has really made a huge difference to me."
Recent research has suggested that improvements in university teaching require changes in conceptions of teaching, but there is little research on how this change in conceptions might occur. This research project, for the researcher's PhD study, explores changes in university teachers' conceptions of teaching, the kinds of changes which happen and the factors which influence change.
The project explores conceptions of teaching and influences on conceptions with 30 participants (a pilot group of 10 and main group of 20) at semester intervals over two years, using extended interviews. It includes both new academics and participants in higher education courses. Initial findings suggest interactions between conceptual changes and changes in participants' confidence and other feelings about themselves as teachers - the above quotation is from one participant. A range of personal and contextual factors appears to influence whether and how change occurs.
Current issues for the research include the description and interpretation of these change factors and the relevance of previous conceptual change models for teacher conceptual change.

Name and Address for Correspondence:
Jo McKenzie, CLT, UTS
PO Box 123, Broadway NSW 2007
email: jomc@uts.edu.au

96.5
Title: Developing the academic skills of students with a learning disability at university.

Researcher: Ms Karen Scouller

With increased community access to higher education, there has been a significant increase in the number of students with a learning disability attending universities. Universities have slowly acknowledged that these students are present in sufficient numbers to warrant special consideration and are beginning to provide services which will support their academic progress.
Although not a homogeneous group in terms of their academic difficulties, the term 'learning disability' defines a person of normal intelligence who has significant difficulty in acquiring and using at least one of the following categories of academic skill or ability areas: listening, speaking, reading, writing, reasoning, memory, mathematics and organisation. Practitioners working with these students frequently express frustration at their relative lack of success in overcoming their difficulties despite enormous effort and patience exhibited on both sides.
In order to support the academic development of students with a learning disability in a university setting, a workshop package has been designed which covers areas such as time management, reading strategies, how to be analytical, spelling and handwriting, preparing for and performing in exams and dealing with exam anxiety, and enhancing self-esteem and self-confidence. The workshop materials have been trialled and are in the final stages of preparation for publication.

Name and Address for Correspondence:
Karen Scouller, Learning Assistance Centre, Education Building A35, University of Sydney, NSW 2006
Phone: +61 2 351 3853, +61 2 351 4865

96.6
Title: Assignment essays versus short answer examinations: Students' learning approaches, perceptions and preferences.

Researcher: Ms Karen Scouller

Recent research aimed at understanding learning from students' perspectives has identified a complexity of situational and contextual variables that may influence the way tertiary students approach their studies. One of the most salient contextual variables has been found to be assessment method, which appears to act as a very powerful indicator of the value given to their learning by course designers. The influence of the form of assessment (essay assignment versus MCQ examination) on student learning has been previously investigated (Scouller 1994).
The short answer examination, like the MCQ examination, is most commonly employed as an assessment method in physical and social science faculties. Given the widespread use of the short answer examination, there is surprisingly little investigation into students' approaches to and perceptions of this form of assessment or whether these vary from one assessment context to another.
The current research project investigates through questionnaires the changes in students' learning approaches and perceptions within two assessment contexts of the same course, an assignment essay and an end-of-course short answer examination. The relationship between these variables (learning approaches and perceptions) and students' preferences as well as their learning outcomes in relation to both the assignment essays and the short answer examination are also examined.

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Karen Scouller, Learning Assistance Centre, Education Building A35,University of Sydney, NSW 2006
Phone: (02) 351 3853, (02) 351 4865

96.7

Project Title: Electronic communication in university teaching: Strategic, practical and research issues.

Researchers: Professor Beryl Hesketh, Maree Gosper, John Andrews, Mark Sabaz

The purpose of this study is to estimate the extent to which different modes of computer mediated communication will penetrate traditional instruction in the next five years and to identify barriers and resistance to the introduction of these modes.

The Delphi technique will be used to collate the views of an expert panel consisting of key informants from universities throughout Australia. Views will be sought with respect to the timing, level of uptake and likely impact on teaching of several different forms of sophisticated multi-media and simpler electronic communication systems.

The panel will be formulated using representatives from a wide range of Australian Universities in each of five categories: staff with an executive responsibility for setting information technology strategies; staff with an executive responsibility for information technology operations; staff working in educational development and the promotion of technology; academics reflecting a range of views and experience in the use of information technology; and staff with an executive responsibility for the provision of distance education.

The research will provide a schedule of current modes of delivery, a summary of the strategic and futuristic views of technology in teaching and a summary of the possible barriers. These will be used to analyse and project the implications for Australian higher education.

Keywords: delivery methods, electronic communications, information technology, telecommunications, computer-based learning.

Granting Body: Department of Employment, Education and Training (Evaluations and Investigations Program)

Name and Address for Correspondence:
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School of Behavioural Sciences
Macquarie University, NSW, 2109
Email: beryl.hesketh@mq.edu.au

96.8

Project Title: Teaching Improvement Practices Survey

Researchers: Carol O'Neil and Alan Wright.

Exploring the attitudes of members of the higher education community regarding ways to improve teaching and learning is the focus of research being undertaken by Alan Wright and Carol O'Neil of Dalhousie University in Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada. In an earlier investigation, over three hundred faculty/instructional developers in Australasia, Canada, the United Kingdom, and the United States were surveyed in order to determine their confidence in the teaching improvement potential of thirty six policies and practices. (See W.A. Wright & M.C. O'Neil, 1994, To Improve the Academy, 13; 1995, The Canadian Journal of Higher Education, xiv-3; W.A.Wright and Associates, 1995, Teaching Improvement Practices: Successful Strategies for Higher Education, Bolton, MA: Anker Publishing.) In their current research, an extension of the earlier work, the same questionnaire was administered to academic staff in seven Canadian and one US universities.

Two groups of practices were seen by the various respondent groups as having the greatest potential to improve teaching: first, deans and heads who play an active role in supporting teaching, and second, employment policies and practices which reward, recognize, and value effective teaching. Significant differences were found on other policy and programme dimensions.

The researchers are willing to collaborate with others in Australasia interested in investigating the views of their academic staff regarding teaching improvement practices.

Name and Address for Correspondence:
Carol O'Neil, Research Coordinator, Office of Instructional Development & Technology
Dalhousie University, Canada
Phone: (902) 494-1894 or 494-1622
Fax: (902) 494-2063

96.9

Project Title: Equity Plan: Rural and Isolated Students

Researchers: Dr Eleanor Long, Dr Kym Fraser, Ms Cynthia Jenkins

Tertiary educational opportunities for students from rural and isolated areas are of on-going concern to Monash University. This project seeks to determine and subsequently inform university personnel of the special educational needs of students from rural and isolated areas. Associated activities include: a literature review, identification of relevant students, survey of student perceptions (including use of questionnaires and focus groups), development of a workshop programme to inform about, and advise on strategies to address the educational needs identified, liaison with faculties and support services and investigation of the use of written and electronic forms of communication to disseminate information.

Keywords: rural students, isolated students

Granting Body: Higher Education Equity Plan Program

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96.10

Project Title: Practice to Theory: Developing Academic Skills in Nursing Students

Researchers: Elizabeth Murison/Dr.Judith Godden

The aim of this project is to identify those academic skills necessary for nursing students to make a

successful transition from clinical practice to tertiary study and to incorporate the teaching of these skills within an existing course curriculum. Identification of the types of problems students are experiencing will be determined by interview, analysis of students' written work and a survey of the relevant literature. Based on an analysis of the problem areas, skills that need to be targeted will be identified and framed as a set of learning outcomes. The course curriculum and materials that incorporate these skills will be trialled in Semester 1, 1996.

Keywords: nursing, education, academic skills, writing.

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96.11

Project Title: The Writing Skills of Polytechnic Students

Researchers: Barbara Day, Heather Ker, Paul Reynolds

The research aim is to determine the need for a course in fundamental written skills in English for polytechnic students for whom English is a first language. We intend to identify students' writing needs through the use of a survey instrument, and through a content analysis of samples of students' work. The survey instrument will make use of an idea developed by Maxine Hairston, University of Texas, in 1982 (with permission). The survey will test student ability to identify a range of errors in writing. We aim to survey 400 students. A content anlysis of 50 samples of student work should give additional insight. We have also conducted a focus group with 12 employers from a range of occupations to determine the written requirements of these occupations.

Keywords: Written communication

Granting Body: The Waikato Polytechnic Research Committee

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96.12

Project Title: Adult Learning as a Lived Experience: A Comparative Phenomenographic Study

Researcher: Mr Stuart Jeffcoat (doctoral candidate)
Supervisors: Dr. Janet Burns (chief supervisor), Assoc. Prof. John Codd, (supervisor), Dr. Anthony Morrison (advisor)

This study will investigate how adult learning is experienced as a "lived" phenomenon, and possibly as lived phenomena because it might be experienced in significantly different ways across various adult learning situations. Through a phenomenographic study of adult learners' conceptions of adult learning across a variety of adult learning situations, the study will seek to identify and characterise the variety of qualitatively different ways in which adult learners conceptualise adult learning. By doing this, the ways in which "directedness" and "meaning making" (two key concepts in adult education theory and research to date) are experienced as part of adult learning, along with their nature and relationship to the aspects of the phenomenon(a) will also be elucidated.

In order to investigate the lived nature of adult learning, it is first necessary to locate or situate the phenomenon (a). This is currently being done through an exploratory phenomenographic study which is identifying a variety of "situations" where adults conceptualise adult learning happening. The main study will then focus on conceptions of adult learning within several of these situations and the outcome spaces will be treated as cases for the purposes of comparison.

Keywords: Adult learning, andragogy, self-directed learning, critical thinking, formal, non-formal, informal, phenomenography

Granting Body: Massey Univ. (doctoral scholarship)

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96.13

Project Title: Dynamic Ecology: understanding population processes through interactive simulations

Researchers: Dr Rob Day, Zoology, University of Melbourne; Associate Professor Michael Nott, Science Multimedia Teaching Unit, University of Melbourne

It is difficult for biology students to grasp the way in which populations of organisms grow and change, but teaching this is central to developing students' understanding of many practical issues such as pest management in agriculture, fisheries management, forestry, and wildlife conservation. A powerful strategy in helping students to develop mental models of dynamic processes like population growth is to use simulations. We therefore propose
an innovative combination of simulations with several other strategies to enhance learning. This project draws on ten years' experience in using a population growth computer simulation for teaching.
None of the existing population dynamics simulations has a sound pedagogical approach with clearly defined learning goals. Nor do they place the simulation within the context of actual examples. Yet students frequently mention the need for these features. We plan to develop a multimedia program on the World Wide Web that allows students to discover how aspects of reproduction and mortality influence population dynamics in example animals, from marsupial mice to elephants. It will include: questions to answer; "what if?" scenarios (previously developed and evaluated as paper- based exercises); reference information on background concepts; images of example animals and their habitats; and illustrated explanations of key concepts (informed

by interview and written feedback from students from 1985 to 1995).

The program will encourage collaborative learning and direct feedback to and from the tutor and discussion groups (moderated by a tutor) - all served by the World Wide Web. Students will submit electronic reports that incorporate graphic examples generated using the simulation, for assessment and feedback. The package will be evaluated, refined and used in 2nd level Animal Ecology courses. It will then be used in a pilot development to enhance delivery of this topic to first year biology, agriculture and forestry students. Being served by the Web, the program will be easily disseminated to other institutions, including the University of NSW which will participate in development.

Keywords: Zoology, Multimedia, Collaborative Learning, World Wide Web

Granting Body: CAUT

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96.14
Project Title: Reasons for student non-attendance at lectures
Researcher: Sally Hunter

Since we began in 1994 to administer mandatory standard surveys of teaching and courses we have become aware that average student attendance at lectures is about 60%. There are variations across the university but low attendances are observed in all faculties.

Various reasons have been offered for low attendance (e.g. students involved in part-time employment, students attending to urgent assessment tasks). We have begun a pilot survey interviewing a small number of students as to their views on: the purpose of lectures, their attendance at lectures, their reasons for not attending lectures, what they do to 'make up' missed lectures, etc. The information obtained will be used to help frame a more extensive survey in 1996.

Keywords: Student perceptions, lectures

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A word of farewell from the editor

As this is the last column which I will prepare for Higher Education Research in Progress, I would like to take the opportunity to thank all members for their support over the last two years.

The column has grown steadily over that time, as I hope it will continue to do in the future. We have also seen interest from all members of the academic community, including lecturers, staff developers, librarians, learning advisors and other counsellors.

In more recent issues contributions have also been made from many parts of the world. Perhaps this means that the column is serving a need beyond the Australasian higher education community.

I am sure that the column will 'live' as long as it continues to meet the need for information about 'what everyone else is researching'.

Christine Bruce, Editor (retiring)
Higher Education Research in Progress.

Society members and other readers of this column are invited to send new project details to:

Ms Coral Watson,
HERDSA Inc. PO Box 516, Jamison Centre, A.C.T. Australia. 2614.
Fax: +61 6 253 4242
E-mail: herdsa@netinfo.com.au.

Calls for abstracts will also be posted to the HERDSA electronic newgroup, prior to the publication of new issues.

Conferences

Twenty-third annual HERDSA Conference

Theme   Different Approaches: Theory and Practice in Higher Education
Place   University of Western Australia, Perth
Date   8 - 12 July, 1996
Information Sarah Mann, Centre for Staff Development, UWA.
              Telephone: (Aust) 09 380 1502; Fax: (Aust) 09 380 1156
              E-mail: smann@csd.uwa.edu.au

Fifteenth International Seminar on Staff and Educational Development (ISSED)

Theme   Higher Education's Interface with Vocational Training and Business
Place   St Kilda Road Travelodge, Melbourne, Australia
Date   8-11 July, 1996
Information Barbara Cargill, Head, School of Management, Swinburne University of Technology. Hawthorn. 3122.
              Telephone: +61 3 9214 8074; Fax: +61 3 9819 2117

Eighth International Conference on Assessing Quality in Higher Education

Place   Pan Pacific Hotel, Gold Coast, Queensland. Australia.
Date   14 - 16 July, 1996
Information David Warren Piper, Tertiary Education Institute, Uni. of Qld.
              Telephone: (Aust) 07 3365 2788; Fax: 07 3365
Abstracts   By 15 March, 1996.

Tertiary Students And Adults with Learning Disabilities and/or Attention Deficit Disorder

Place   UWS Macarthur, Bankstown Campus
Date   22 - 23 July, 1996
Information Phyllis Parr (p.parr@uws.edu.au)
              Telephone: (Aust) 02 772 9401.

21st International Conference on Improving University Teaching

Theme   Lifelong Learning and the Information Age
Place   Nottingham, England
Date   22-25 July, 1996
Information Improving University Teaching, University of Maryland University College, University Boulevard at
              Adelphi Road, College Park, MD 20742-1659 USA. Fax: (US) 301 985 7226
Abstracts   Call for papers and workshop proposals by 15 February, 1996.

Australian Communication Conference

Theme   Teaching Communication Skills in a Technological Era
Place   Monash University, Clayton. Victoria.
Date   16-17 September, 1996.
Information Anita Jawary. E-mail: anitaj@cs.monash.edu.au.
              Telephone: +61 3 9905 5210. Fax: +61 3 9905 5146

20th AITEA Conference (incorporating AAPPA)

Theme   Management Strategies for the New Millennium: Tertiary Education at the Crossroads
Place   Perth, WA.
Date   24-28 September, 1996
Information Conference Web site: http://www.ecel.uwa.edu.au/aitea/conf96.html
              Also, via AITEA Web homepage.

Preparing University Teachers in Australia and New Zealand

Place   Griffith University, Brisbane
Date   1-2 October, 1996
Information Griffith Institute for Higher Education, Griffith University, Nathan, Q. 4111.
              E-mail: N.Scott@edn.gu.edu.au

here is that buzz groups have some distinct advantages over and above allowing each student to speak.

The shy student will be even more comfortable venturing an opinion to a couple of classmates than they would be addressing the lecturer and class in a small group.

When discussion time has ended, students reporting back to the whole class need not fear humiliation since it cannot be assumed that the views they express are necessarily their own. (Besides, they will have trialed them on a couple of classmates and will therefore be more confident of their worth.)

Another advantage the buzz group has over the direct question and answer is that the latter may be confused with an exercise in information dissemination; the buzz group emphasises student involvement and learning.

☐ **The Flood of Questions After Lectures and During Lecture Breaks**

Challenge: The problems discussed under the previous heading often manifest themselves in the phenomenon of students approaching their lecturer during breaks and after lectures with just the kind of question that the lecturer would have loved to have been able to use in the lecture itself. Not only is this frustrating, students do not seem to realise that lecture breaks are for staff too - they not only need to refresh themselves, but often have tasks to attend to associated with the next segment of the lecture.

Response: One strategy that can be adopted is to explain all this to the class and invite them to consider that you, as the lecturer, are better placed to decide whether or not a particular question is relevant for the whole class. Assure them that if you think a question is not pertinent, you will be happy to say so and to discuss it later on an individual basis. But you will only do so if they have not usurped your prerogative of judging its relevance for the whole class first.

(To be continued in the next issue)

Gary Davis and Neil McLeod
School of Law, Murdoch University

The authors would like to acknowledge the valuable contributions made by colleagues at the Teaching and Learning seminars in the School of Law at Murdoch University in 1995.

was a likely question, because almost all answered readily and rather glibly. They gave what I assume they thought to be the 'politically correct' line. They talked about facilitation of teamwork and support for colleagues, helping people to realise their potential and sharing responsibility, etc. I thoroughly approve of all of these things, but by the time I got to the fifth, an irreverent voice within wanted to shout 'Oh come on, kids, get real! Enough sharing and caring and facilitating. What about a bit of vision, some grand ideas and passionate commitment? What about the courage and determination to fight difficult things through?'

Both sides of this balance are important. Let's not pretend that only one counts. The great challenge of leadership is to hold them in equilibrium.

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McInnis, C. (1992) Changes in the nature of academic work. *Australian Universities Review*, 35, 2, 9-12.

Gabrielle Baldwin
Monash University

Special Interest Group: University Leadership and Management

Margot Pearson, the convenor of the University Leadership and Management Special Interest Group has set up a moderated electronic network for the group. Those interested in university leadership and management are invited to subscribe to this list. The list allows subscribers to communicate with one another, and to raise issues and discuss anything of interest regarding University leadership and management, and in particular University leadership and management development.

To subscribe:

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