



Assessment and Learning

A linguistic perspective on multiple choice questioning

Moragh Paxton reports on an analysis of multiple choice test questions set in economics at the University of Cape Town. She reflects on the effects of this form of assessment on student learning particularly in the light of espoused aims of higher education to promote critical, analytical, problem-solving and communicative skills.

Introduction

The Draft White Paper on Higher Education (see Note 1) identifies one of the goals of higher education as:

9. *To produce graduates with the skills and competencies that build the foundations for lifelong learning, including critical, analytical, problem-solving and communicative skills, as well as the ability to deal with change and diversity, in particular the tolerance of different views and ideas. (1:27)*

However, if a reformed higher education system is to turn out graduates who are problem-solvers, critical thinkers and good communicators, universities and technicians will need to ensure that these are the skills that are assessed because as we know assessment measures tend to influence what is learned as well as the way in which it is learned. The South African Association for Academic Development (SAAAD) Report "Academic Development and Strategic Change in Higher Education" (1997) points to the importance of assessment procedures when it states in its conclusion that "assessment procedures should be re-examined and new ways of assessing students in a democratic context need to be developed".

There seem to be certain paradoxes, therefore, when at the same time as these sorts of ideals are being proclaimed, we are seeing at the University of Cape Town (UCT) and at other South African institutions of higher learning a shift towards increased use of objective tests such as multiple choice tests particularly at first year levels. These moves have come about as a result of huge increases in student numbers coupled with tightened staff resources and so tests that offer ease of marking as well as reliability have a certain appeal. By reliability we mean that the assessment would produce similar scores when marked by two different assessors and when it is given to the same student a second time and marked again by the same assessor.

However, the limiting and damaging effect of standardised multiple choice tests in the USA and other countries has been well documented and analysed in recent years (Resnick and Resnick 1992) and there has been a move away from this kind of assessment precisely because it tends to have had negative effects on the quality of teaching and the curriculum (Gipps 1994). The assessment community is now arguing that reliability has often been overemphasised at the expense of validity. Researchers (Gipps 1994, Linn et al 1991 and Moss 1992) point out that validity has been looked at too narrowly and that while reliability is important, it is a necessary but not sufficient condition for validity (Moss 1992). Thus, as the assessment paradigm has shifted, the notion of validity has been reconceptualised and broadened.

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Meet the new editor

It is with much pleasure that we welcome Roger Landbeck as Editor of HERDSA News. Roger has recently retired from the University of the South Pacific (USP) where he was the first Director of the Centre for the Enhancement of Learning and Teaching (CELT) for six years. During that time he collaborated with Dr. France Mugler, a linguist, to investigate students' approaches to learning and their conceptions of learning both with on-campus students and distance learners scattered throughout the South Pacific. Some results of this research appeared in the special edition of HERD last year.

He has held appointments at Griffith University, in the predecessor of the Griffith Institute of Higher Education, and with the Schools Council Integrated Science Project at the Centre for Science Education in London. He taught physics at the University of Botswana, Lesotho and Swaziland and the Middlesex Hospital Medical School.

Although technically retired from higher education Roger will be running workshops in teaching and learning for staff in theological schools in the South



Roger Landbeck

Pacific over the next few years and will be completing the research project in student learning begun at USP.

One of the greatest challenges for any editor is to get good copy, on time. Please give Roger your support in this endeavour.

Owen Hicks
President

From the Editor's Desk

First I appreciate the welcome given to me in the last issue by the retiring editor, Alison Viskovic, and would like to thank her for the hard work she put into the task. I wish her well in the added responsibilities she is undertaking in Wellington.

I returned to Australia from working at the University of the South Pacific just before Christmas 1997 and have been slowly getting familiar with some of the issues facing higher education in Australia and New Zealand. Clearly flexible learning coupled with the use of IT is high on the agenda. While there are undoubted benefits it would be well to listen to some of the more cautious voices, one of which is to be heard in this issue, who are urging some thoughtful evaluation of these benefits before being carried away in a tide of enthusiasm.

Michael Green from the ANU, writing in a recent issue of the Australian Higher Education Supplement (March 11), suggested that there was evidence (see eg. 'The Trouble with Computers' by Thomas Landauer, 1996) that the advantages claimed for the use of computers were not all that the advocates claimed. He was also concerned that managers would misuse technology in a bid to be more economically efficient.

While my experience in the Pacific showed me the possibilities for enabling people in these small nations to gain access to information and so overcome their isolation I fear that the increasing sophistication of the technology will only widen the gap between the rich and poor nations. Hence the need in these countries to continue to improve teaching and learning using more traditional methods.



This issue has had to assembled in haste and I am grateful to those who responded to a tight time-line to write articles. The haste can be blamed for the diversity of articles but I hope there is something of interest for everyone. I am particularly pleased to include the article on multiple choice testing and learning from Moragh Paxton of Cape Town. This is timely as shrinking resources make it increasingly difficult to set assessment

tasks that encourage meaningful learning. In spite of the difficulties facing those who care about teaching it is good to hear the experiences of John Deam and Darryl Jones. Congratulations, John, on winning the award last December.

Another important contribution comes from Angela Brew who introduces the new HERDSA portfolio on research and asks the important question 'what is a key researcher?'

The role of HERDSA News is beginning to be questioned by some, particularly in the light of new developments in IT, and it would be helpful to hear from members some ideas about the format and content of the News in the future. This is something that will be discussed by the small editorial committee that has just been formed to advise me as editor. We, of course, welcome articles and encourage you to get writing.

A linguistic perspective on multiple choice questioning

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Linn et al.(1991) describe some of the broader issues that we need to consider in evaluating all forms of assessment. In this paper I have undertaken a critique of multiple choice testing by considering them in the light some of these broader issues. I will try to illustrate my points where possible with insights from my own experience and examples from a small research project I conducted which analysed multiple choice tests in two departments. It is important to emphasise from the start that the paper critiques the overemphasis on multiple choice testing in some departments as well as the very poor design and construction of many of these tests and calls for the use of multiple choice questions as part of a broader and more varied range of assessment measures. The paper points to issues that need further research and calls for more systematic research in the South African testing arena because we know very little about the ways in which objective assessment instruments impact on the development of literacy skills or about how and why particular forms of assessment advantage some and disadvantage others.

The consequences of multiple choice testing

The first validity issue I want to focus on is the educational implications of multiple choice testing. What impact do these tests have on the quality of learning and particularly the quality of language and writing development? Linn et al (1991) argue that in order for a test to be valid we need to know whether it results

in classroom activities that are conducive to constructivist learning goals.

Economics courses at first year level place a heavy emphasis on multiple choice tests as the method of assessment and economics lecturers see real value in this form of assessment. In the Principles of Economics course, 66% of course work marks and 331/3% of exam marks are based on multiple choice testing and in the mainstream first year course the emphasis is even greater. In the test that I analysed 2/3 of the questions would be described as definition questions and 60% of these simply required students to reproduce the text book definition. This analysis supports the Resnick's findings that the tasks in multiple choice tests tend to measure low level learning such as factual recall rather than an ability to think critically (Resnick and Resnick, 1992).

The question below is typical of this kind of straight definition question which requires little thought and no application.

Oligopoly means

- A) a market in which there is only one firm but a variety of products
- B) a market in which the number of competing firms is large but the products differ slightly
- C) a market in which there are few firms selling identical products
- D) a market in which there are few firms selling identical and differentiated products
- E) a market in which the number of competing firms is large but the products are identical

Another first year course with which I have been working, used, as one of its course work assessments, a multiple choice test which came as part of an American text book package. The questions on the test almost exclusively tested recall of the factual details of the

Multiple choice tests construct particular kinds of learners because students establish meaning on the basis of their prior experiences with language and with text

text book such as the meanings of particular terms used in the text, cause-effect relationships and advantages/disadvantages of particular strategies. It did not call for any critical thinking or problem solving and placed unnecessary stress on the finer details spelled out in the text book, implying that students needed to rote learn the factual information in the text book, some of which was relevant only to the American context. Students were unfamiliar with the American terminology and questioned the relevance of such a detailed focus on text book facts. The following question was one of those they criticised.

Which of the following is/are effective non-traditional recruitment strategies?

- A. campus recruiting
- B. internships
- x C. career fair



D. *computer email, job posting*

E. *all of the above*

If students had not learned the list of non-traditional job recruitment strategies provided in the text book, they might have been very tempted to cite *D.computer email, job posting* as a non-traditional means of recruitment. It certainly would be regarded as such in South Africa.

Multiple choice tests construct particular kinds of learners (Kress 1985, Luke 1995-6) because students establish meaning on the basis of their prior experiences with language and with text and if students come to associate testing in economics with multiple choice questioning, then they will develop the appropriate multiple choice responding strategies. These may involve becoming good rote-learners, absorbing the detail of the textbook, reading through the discriminators carefully so as to be able to eliminate wrong answers, getting access to other tests for practice and revision. This might mean that students become quite skilled in multiple choice test taking. However, it does not mean that students develop as problem-solvers and thinkers and that they have the ability to go beyond the routine and to exercise personal judgement. Nor does it mean that they will be able to communicate their understandings in writing. These are the skills and competencies highlighted in the White Paper and they reflect the shift towards constructivist approaches to teaching and learning (Resnick and Resnick 1992 and Prawat 1992) as well as the needs of a rapidly changing global economy. Constructivist learning theories indicate that unrelated facts learned and tested in a decontextualised way quickly disappear from memory because they have no meaning and do not fit into the learners' conceptual map. Instead we now understand learning as a network with connections in many directions and learners need to organise and structure their knowledge in order to make it a part of their own mental schema (Resnick and Resnick 1992).

Multiple choice questions are presented as isolated and unconnected with each other with no hint that interpreting a text might involve an extended line of reasoning. My

experience has shown that repeated use of multiple choice question tests in economics means that students develop a decontextualised vision of economics - they "know" the content in the form of small "bites" of knowledge and fail to develop an understanding of how the concepts all fit together and impact on each other. It was only when students were asked to synthesise their understandings and express themselves in an extended piece of writing that they began to understand the content as an organic whole. This led me to believe that until our assessment practices come closer to capturing the organic whole, we cannot be said to be measuring true competence (Paxton in press).

...if we want students to become literate in a new discourse like economics, they must be given opportunities to carry out the social transactions and communications that economists consider important - they must learn to construct and negotiate meaning within the discourse.

Economists would argue that well constructed multiple choice questions do require that students solve a problem. However, as I have pointed out, multiple choice questions inevitably elicit answers to isolated and decontextualised problems and real life problem solving situations do not exist in isolation. Students need the opportunity to link the decontextualised problems they are solving and to recognise that they are a set of related systems in a whole problem.

There are further issues that need to be explored. For instance, we need to know what role the test plays in narrowing the curriculum to reflect the form and content of the test, a question which can only be answered by the discipline specialists themselves. Certainly in economics the emphasis on multiple choice tests for summative purposes seems to have led to heavy use of tutorial

practice materials that closely match the format of the final assessment.

Impact of multiple choice testing on development of communication skills

A further consequence of overuse of multiple choice testing is that students are not given opportunities to develop communicative competence in the discourse of the new academic disciplines they are studying. Communicative competence, as defined by Kutz (1997), is a speaker's underlying knowledge of both the linguistic system of a language and the ways to use and interpret the language appropriately in particular discourse contexts (Kutz 1997:300). Communicative competence demands a whole range of discourse skills eg. using a style that is appropriate to a particular interaction, knowing whether its formal or informal and what dialect features such as vocabulary, pronunciation or syntax are appropriate to that particular discourse community. People acquire communicative competence through participation in meaningful interactions with the people around them. Kutz indicates that acquiring a new variety of a language is a similar process to children acquiring the mother tongue. In other words the language is learnt often unconsciously and implicitly in the context of actual communication in the culture or community. The learners need to develop approximative systems that are then refined further - they focus first on meaning rather than on surface features and discover the appropriateness of what they've generated for particular contexts and purposes by interaction with and getting feedback from the experts.

Therefore, if we want students to become literate in a new discourse like economics, they must be given opportunities to carry out the social transactions and communications that economists consider important - they must learn to construct and negotiate meaning within the discourse.

However, I would argue that in many departments faced with large classes of first year students, students are not being given the opportunity to develop communicative competence in the discourse or to become literate. For instance in the economics department at





UCT, students are seldom asked to use language to create meaning and express their understanding - all they are ever asked to write is the occasional short paragraph as a tutorial exercise. Multiple choice question tests do not require students to *generate* the language, but rather to select the right answer and to write down a number. This gives students opportunities to read the discourse but seldom to use it in written form. My own experience as language and communications lecturer in economics indicates that reading is not enough and that students need the opportunity to "try on" the discourse, to use it and practise it and this means that they have to express their understandings in their own particular way first, however incorrect it is (Paxton in press). It is true that economics is a very precise discourse and that there is often really only one acceptable way of expressing a particular concept and students must learn to communicate it accurately and precisely. However, I think that particularly for second language students there are prior stages that students need to work through before they acquire the appropriate discourse.

Unfortunately, even if we try to develop academic literacy through encouraging writing in language and communications classes, if students realise that assessment largely focuses on multiple choice testing, they will not see the need to develop their literacy skills.

This could have disastrous social consequences for our students because we know that most job descriptions for white collar workers now stress communication skills. Success in the working world, as economists or human resource managers, will depend on the young graduate's ability to communicate effectively. Critical discourse analysis reveals the way that discourse positions people in relations of power (Kress 1985, Fairclough 1992, Luke 1995-96). People are categorised on the basis of their ability to communicate appropriately and once this categorisation has occurred, it becomes difficult to shed the labels. Therefore university students have a pressing need to become comfortable and competent in the discourses required for their careers. Because language, discourse and literacy affect access and equity, these have become focal educational issues and

each academic discipline should now bear the responsibility for ensuring that students graduate as competent communicators.

Power relationships in multiple choice testing

Having recognised therefore that educational genres like tests shape the kind of learning that takes place, it seems important to acknowledge that all discourse is ideological (Fairclough 1992) and to try to understand the power relationships embedded in this particular genre.

Students that I have interviewed indicated that they found multiple choice tests disempowering...

Students that I have interviewed indicated that they found multiple choice tests disempowering and they felt that they would have been able to answer questions more successfully, had they been asked to express their understanding in their own words. In multiple choice testing all the agency is located with the test designer and the tests make available the meanings, ideas and versions of the world that the department and the examiner value. Multiple choice tests epitomise the idea of the "generic" student and no allowance is made for student difference or for autonomous action. There is no recognition of the diversity of discursive resources brought to the testing situation and no opportunity for this variety to be given a voice.

Luke (1995-6) points out that relations of power are constructed by limiting the choice of options, by not permitting students to write their own answers. The multiple choice format, as a very "closed interaction" (Kress 1985:26) reinforces the idea that someone else already know the answer to the question so original interpretations are not expected. The secret is to find or guess "the right" answer and not to engage in critical thinking. It would be interesting to discover whether extensive exposure to multiple choice testing serves to stamp out student creativity.

I think it would be tempting to explore what the reasons for such a controlled form of assessment might be. For instance in a discipline like economics does the choice of the multiple choice test as an assessment genre reflect the positivist nature of the discipline? Is there a link between the discourse of economics and the genre of multiple choice testing? Kress(1985:31) indicates that certain discourses tend to have preferred relations with certain genres and questions that call for rote learning of a definition or a formula may be one way in which the institution hopes to ensure that the complex and abstract discourse of economics is maintained and reinforced so that students learn "what it is possible to say and not possible to say" (Kress 1985 :7) in economics.

A further question that needs to be explored is whether multiple choice tests disadvantage more creative, critical thinkers and Linn et al (1991) regard this as another issue that undermines the validity of the test. They indicate that we need to ask whether there is material in the test that is the source of irrelevant difficulty to students. In my interviews some students said that the language of multiple choice questions was confusing and they had difficulty distinguishing between discriminators that were very similar in meaning. The issue of language medium for assessment is an area that is relatively unexplored in South Africa and it seems crucial that we know more about the ways in which particular assessment procedures impact on second language speakers of English because at UCT all testing is done through the medium of English. There is well-researched linguistic evidence indicating that many of the cognitive processes may work slightly less efficiently in the second language Cook (1996). This seems to be an important consideration for multiple choice testing which tends to have strict time constraints and presents questions in decontextualised chunks of language. It may be that second language students are taking longer to process information and arrive at the correct answer and therefore should be given more time to complete these tests.

My study of the tests in economics and human resources indicates that design and construction of test questions



needs far more research and careful thought and attention. Second language students are faced with the double burden of becoming competent in the second language as well as acquiring the disciplinary discourse and test designers need to ensure that language used in questions is clear and explicit. Far from being clear and explicit, there were examples of questions in the tests I looked at that were simply badly worded and ambiguous and would have confused a first language speaker. For example:

Specialisation involves one of the following:

- A) *interdependence*
- B) *division of labour*
- C) *need for exchange*
- xD) *all of the above are necessary for specialisation*
- E) *none of the above are necessary for specialisation*

Why does this question specifically ask students to identify one factor involved in specialisation, if it lists *all of the above* and *none of the above* as options?

Then there were many examples of questions that used unnecessarily complex language, and the students criticised it for its use of Americanisms such as "outplacement", "gate hires" etc.

The following question in the economics test asks students to give the meaning of the Latin phrase *ceteris paribus* but gives as the correct answer the direct translation 'other things being equal'. This is a strange phrase with a specific meaning which is not clear just looking at the words, so students might not understand the phrase at all. There are much clearer, more meaningful definitions of this term such as "all other factors remain constant" which are commonly used in the text books and could have been used in the test question.

Ceteris paribus means:

- A) *one by one'*
- B) *'equal under the law'*
- xC) *other things being equal'*
- D) *'in accordance with the law'*
- E) *'under the conditions of scarcity'*

If an economics multiple choice test

sets out to measure understandings of supply and demand but the test designer uses very complex technical language which students have difficulty understanding then the test might lack construct validity because it is measuring understanding of language rather than understanding of an economics concept. As Wiggins (1993) points out, it is important to remember that, although multiple choice tests allow no bias to the marker, they are not entirely bias free. In a sense the test designer becomes the marker and his own biases might be built into the test. eg if the test disadvantages second language speakers. Wiggins (1993) indicates that testers have an obligation to validate test results by exploring reasons for the students' answers and yet this is something that happens very seldom in coursework or final assessments.

Do the skills and knowledge that led to successful performance on the multiple choice test transfer to other tasks? Do they transfer to real world problems? These questions certainly serve to highlight the limitations of multiple choice testing.

Transferability

The third issue I would like to focus on very briefly is the issue of generalizability and transfer. Linn et al (1991) stress that we need to ask whether on the basis of a particular test we can make generalisations about achievement more broadly defined. Do the skills and knowledge that led to successful performance on the multiple choice test transfer to other tasks? Do they transfer to real world problems? These questions certainly serve to highlight the limitations of multiple choice testing. Linda Flower points out that "there is an uncertain relationship between what the standard tests measure and what people do" (1994 :10) While students may be able to select

correct answers to questions about economics, the multiple choice test cannot tell us how literate they are. Can we say that the multiple choice test is in fact a valid assessment of the learners' grasp of the subject matter?

Multiple choice tests as a learning tool

Despite my criticisms of multiple choice tests, I do believe that part of the problem lies in the way multiple choice tests are used. Too often these tests are used purely for summative purposes so that testing is seen as separate from learning, a way of monitoring performance and not a way of improving it (Wiggins 1993). When multiple choice questions are used in more formative ways they have great potential as a learning and teaching tool.

For instance, multiple choice questions can be used as a language awareness raising exercise. Subtle differences in language and the need for precise use of economic terms should be brought to students' attention in quite an explicit way. Russell (1990:52) says that unless this is done, so that the discourse of the discipline is made accessible, we simply "preserve the integrity and status of existing communities and limit access to coveted social roles".

Students might read a text many times and not pick up the nuances of language, but if the same language was used in multiple choice questions in a tutorial worksheet and they realised that interpreting the language incorrectly might lead to failure in a test situation, they might be more likely to take note of it.

I think it would be particularly powerful if ways could be devised to access the process that students go through in order to arrive at an answer. In the typical testing situation, students do not have opportunities to have questions rephrased and when they get "feedback" in the form of the correct answer and realise that possibly they had not understood the question, they are not permitted to have a second chance. Feedback on multiple choice tests is often not very helpful because students are simply given a list of the correct answers and not shown the process by which the





answer was arrived at, or it may be that the time lapse has been too great. And yet, much useful learning can come about as a result of effective feedback on "wrong" answers. Wiggins (1993) points out that teaching has "inherent limits... as a means of achieving mastery" (1993:187) and the successful performance of complex tasks will only be achieved with the use of "concurrent" feedback.

All genuine problems that lead to understanding involve a testing... by the student whereby suggestions or hunches are redefined in the light of concurrent feedback (Wiggins 1993:193)

This implies that in multiple choice testing, students need to get feedback during or immediately after the test if it is to be useful. In fact, in a true teaching and learning situation, students should keep getting feedback until they have achieved mastery. It would be important that the feedback attempted to tap all the possibilities for error. Wiggins' notion of a "performance trouble shooting guide" (1993:197) could be developed for the computer which would anticipate likely errors in reasoning and present a series of recommendations. In this way the students would be able to self-assess and reanalyse and self correct which is more productive as a learning process. Wiggins' suggestions might enable us to get access to the cognitive processes which are normally so hidden in multiple choice testing.

Conclusion

It seems possible to draw a few rather limited conclusions from this exploratory analysis. The situation in first year economics is particularly problematic because of the overuse of one form of testing. Given the diversity of students at South African universities, the validity of any single form of assessment needs to be seriously questioned and in order for assessment to be considered equitable, multiple and varied forms of assessment should be used in order to allow students who are disadvantaged on one assessment, the opportunity to offer alternative evidence of proficiency (Gipps and Murphy 1995). This problem was illustrated in my research project (Paxton in press) by the fact that the top ten students on the supply and demand

multiple choice test were different from the top ten students in the essay on the same topic.

Secondly, there seems to be clear evidence from these tests that more care needs to go into the development of the questions and the tests. Questions need to be constructed so that they encourage problem solving and critical thinking and they need to be carefully validated so that there are no irrelevant difficulties for students.

Overall the paper seems to throw up more questions than answers and there are a number of interesting issues that could be taken further and systematically researched. For instance, we need to know more about the ways in which the testing procedures in economics are impacting on student learning and the

teaching methods used in lectures and tutorials. Are students able to transfer what they learn for a multiple choice test to more complex real life problems? Think aloud protocols on multiple choice questions might give us a sense of where the stumbling blocks come and whether language medium is in fact a disadvantage.

Note 1. The Draft White Paper on Higher Education was published by the Department of Higher Education on 24 July 1997. It outlines a set of initiatives for the transformation of higher education through the development of a single co-ordinated system with new planning, governing and funding arrangements (ie towards reconstruction and development in the post apartheid South Africa).

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Confessions of a slow learner, or Why I enrolled in a Graduate Certificate of Higher Education.

In this article *Darryl Jones* shares some personal experiences about a Graduate Certificate course in teaching and provides interesting food for thought for the academic developer.

It took me a remarkably long time to realise something that was much clearer to others. I may have been teaching at University for more than six years, but it took one of those really bright undergraduates to state the obvious: "So, you have never actually been taught how to teach!" (This had been preceded by "Let me get this straight: you got your job here because you study sex in birds?". The research/teaching/ administration nexus can be a rather difficult concept even for non-politicians.)

This was brutal but completely factual: at no stage had anyone ever even queried my abilities or asked whether I needed any assistance. Apparently, reasoned this sharp and cynical student, University teachers, unlike those at Primary, High School or even Child-care assistants, are born with the skills or acquire them via some mysterious process while completing a PhD.

But, if I was honest, I also knew very little about the teaching part of my job apart from what I had picked up by trial and error from hundreds of hours in front of classes.

It was a conversation that somewhat unsettled me. After all, I was quite proud of my academic achievements and knew that I was regarded as an enthusiastic lecturer. But, if I was honest, I also knew very little about the teaching part of my job apart from what I had picked up by trial and error from hundreds of hours in front of classes. Any 'learning' was rather unconsciously incorporated into my skills

via the self induced operant conditioning that seemed to characterise those early years. About the only really deliberate reflection was associated with avoiding the really appalling features of some of my own lecturers. And, in this context, being naturally slightly extroverted and enthusiastic may actually have masked plenty of the poorer aspects of my own teaching; getting them to laugh at the antics but failing to understand the concept being explained.

The emphasis is on the student's apparent lack of response to what, it is assumed, is the effective delivery of information that equates with teaching in Higher Education.

These doubts were obviously close to the surface. I had, for example, long been concerned over the crudity of a lot of assessment and the remarkable faith placed in those quantitative numbers. And there was a multitude of apparently trivial issues which appeared, even to me, to have a major influence on many student's ability to learn. Like those deeply conscientious and effective students that just go to jelly in the deliberately nasty pressure cooker of the exam room.

Sharing these puzzlement's and concerns with others was not particularly easy either. It soon became apparent that the most common approach to these ubiquitous problems was to blame the students. The standard line went something like: "These days (i.e., as opposed to our days) students are lazy and poorly motivated (optional insert "its the high schools you know"). They expect everything to be handed to them in an easily digestible form, they can't concentrate, they don't want to learn."

The emphasis is on the student's apparent lack of response to what, it is assumed, is the effective delivery of

information that equates with teaching in Higher Education. Of course, there are lots of ways to improve the delivery mode - improve your OHTs, plan your lectures, a thousand tricks and tips to keep them awake. All very well, but while I felt I was reasonably good at the crisp, clear and colourful delivery of all that information (it was biology, mainly), I still wondered about what was really going on behind those expressions of my seemingly attentive, busy congregation.

It was about this time that the concept of 'learning' as opposed to 'teaching' actually began to impinge on my slowing emerging conceptions of the process of education. And I don't mind being a bit evangelical here and mentioning one of those apocalyptic events that really did make a big difference to my ideas and practice: I read 'Learning to Teach in Higher Education' by Paul Ramsden. I can't even remember why I started it (because something must have prevented me from muttering 'airy-fairy social science gumf' like some of my esteemed colleagues) but in his careful, scholarly way, Ramsden demonstrated clearly how so much of what happens in the lecture theatre is a product of what both the teachers and the students are doing. In particular, both groups have particular conceptions of what learning is, and this translates into what they do: their approach.

This may be either be pathetically obvious or hopelessly obtuse to many readers but these were and are revolutionary concepts which greatly enhanced my interest in the connections between teaching and learning. But such an interest does not necessarily translate into improved practice. What was needed was a deeper immersion into the field itself, to have an opportunity to explore these often complex issues with colleagues suffering similar levels of frustration and fascination. Thankfully my University had a specialist unit (the Griffith Institute for Higher Education, whose Director, I was astonished to learn, was the Ramsden of the book!) that ran an intensive year-old course leading to a



Graduate Certificate in Higher Education. It was a few years before I could arrange things but eventually I did enrol.

My second major impression, and one that continues to impress, was the intellectual rigour and the breadth and depth of a field that I, as a practicing academic, was not even aware of.

My first impressions were of relief. The group (of about 12) was made up of academics from fields including music, pure maths, accounting, ancient history and nursing, as well as (for the first time) several University administrators keenly interested in gaining a deeper understanding of issues that would inform the academic decisions they were required to make. The relief? Because I had wondered whether my concerns about teaching were a product of my biological science background. No, everyone had similar stories to tell, including about the reaction of their colleagues to the news of their enrolling in that post-modern philosophical nonsense.

My second major impression, and one that continues to impress, was the intellectual rigour and the breadth and depth of a field that I, as a practicing academic, was not even aware of. To my amazement there were dozens of entire journals devoted to issues of teaching and learning in tertiary science. Why had I never heard about the many studies that had investigated the reasons why science laboratories are so universally poor in terms of learning (an issue especially close to my heart)? Why weren't all teachers at least slightly aware of the concepts of deep and surface learning, or of the fact that every class contains students at many levels of understanding, and of the profound implications this has on ones teaching?

The other big impression, one I currently reflect on deeply (about a year after starting), is that, while the thinking

and discussing we did came from a solid and sound scholarly base, the outcomes were entirely practical. The major assessment item I worked on for Semester Two involved delving into the less tangible aspects of the learning that occurred in the biology labs I had designed and ran for years. After interviewing a number of students who had just completed the subject, and closely investigating the methods and instructions we espoused and practiced, I came to the unavoidable conclusion that the reason that so many students seemed to get good grades yet show terrible understanding was, largely, my own fault. I had established (both implicitly and explicitly) that the best way to get through all that material was to cram and rote-learn. I set a really tough practical exam that guaranteed high levels of anxiety and few chances to prove any real level of understanding. And then I blamed the kids for doing just what I had set up.

I came to the unavoidable conclusion that the reason that so many students seemed to get good grades yet show terrible understanding was, largely, my own fault.

Well, I may be slow, but this year its going to be different!

Reference:

Ramsden, P. (1992). *Learning to Teach in Higher Education*. Routledge, London.

Darryl Jones is a lecturer in the Australian School of Environmental Sciences at Griffith University. His field of research is animal behaviour and he has made a 14 year study of the behavioural ecology of the Australian Brush-turkey. He is a co-author of "The Megapodes" (1995 OUP) and is the subject of a forthcoming ABC natural history documentary on this topic. These days he is trying to be informed as well as enthusiastic in lectures.

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Call for Expressions of Interest

Special Issue of Higher Education Research and Development, 1999.

The special issue of HERD in 1999 will have as its theme 'Evaluation of Innovative Teaching in Higher Education'. The main aim of the issue will be to provide 'showcase examples' of sound evaluations, but some articles will be commissioned to examine the principles and practices of effective evaluation.

Persons interested in publishing showcase examples in this special issue are invited to submit to the guest editor a two page proposal by the date shown below. Proposals should aim to produce scholarly articles which:

- indicate the ways in which the teaching/learning intervention is noteworthy and innovative
- draw upon the student learning and evaluation literatures to frame and interpret the innovation and its impact
- carefully examine the learning processes and outcomes targeted by the innovation
- provide sound evidence for the influence of the innovation on learning processes and outcomes.

There is no restriction on the type of innovation that may be considered.

Expressions of interest are due by: Monday May 25, 1998

Guest Editor:

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REFLECTIONS ON THE AUSTRALIAN AWARDS FOR UNIVERSITY TEACHING

Last November John Dearn from the University of Canberra was awarded the inaugural Australian Award for University Teaching in the category Science.

"And the winner is"

I *t was hard to avoid images of those dreadful film award nights. We had our first indications of the form the awards ceremony was to take during the afternoon briefing. We assembled in the function room of a Canberra hotel, nervously looking around trying to guess the identity of the other finalists in our category. "Please try and keep your acceptance speech brief" we were told. You could see the instant horror upon a dozen faces. This was clearly going to be no ordinary night. And what a night it turned out to be. Getting over thirty university academics into evening wear must have represented something of a first in a culture where to wear a tie usually invites an inquiry about whether you are attending a job interview or a funeral.*

"You must sit in your allotted places and under no circumstances move seat." The reason, we were informed, was that the TV cameramen were privy to the contents of the envelopes and at the announcement of the winner of each category the relevant table would be flooded with bright lights and the image of the winner, looking appropriately surprised, would be displayed on giant TV screens erected on either side of the stage. The suppressed schoolboy in a few of us momentarily surfaced while we contemplated swapping tables.

The award announcements were interspersed with music and each preceded by brief profiles of the finalists – prepared without their involvement and relying heavily on material taken from web sites. Remember that next time you put something "up" on your page – you might have to suffer the shock, as I did, of seeing it blown up on a big screen.

In the end, the evening turned out to be a great success and thoroughly enjoyable, a real celebration of university teaching. It wasn't till a few days later, however, when prompted by a local radio reporter, that I began to seriously think about what the evening really signified. "Why did you win?" I was asked. Good question, and one that I didn't have an

immediate answer for. Apart from the other two finalists, I have no idea who else applied in my category and didn't get selected and, of course, there was the interesting feature of these awards of having thirty of your students filling in feedback forms and returning them in sealed envelopes. I never got to see the responses and I guess I never will. Pity, because I always enjoy finding out what students think of learning in my classes.

All I can do, then, is to say what I have done in the area of teaching and only guess what it was that attracted the attention of the Selection Committee. I do know, however, that it wasn't high technology. For the last fourteen years (can it be that long!) I have been teaching the introductory biology unit at the University of Canberra, a period that has seen a startling increase in student numbers and a decline in resources. I guess under those circumstances you sink or swim, and swimming meant getting a few hundred students, many of whom had a limited background in science, through the unit each year and even hopefully enjoying the experience along the way.

Having come from a very rigorous background of research and teaching in the biological sciences, mastery of the knowledge domain became less and less of a problem for me while gradually another set of equally fascinating issues emerged in the area of teaching and learning. In this sense the focus of my scholarship gradually shifted from issues related to evolutionary biology to those related to how people come to know about and interpret their world.

"Why did you win?" I was asked. Good question, and one that I didn't have an immediate answer for.

If I had to pinpoint experiences that nudged me in the direction of looking seriously at learning and how it might be facilitated, one would probably be being a writer for the national year 11/12 biology text book, *Biology: The Common*

Threads. I was employed, not as a "scientist", but as a writer, which turned out being an interface between the publishers wanting the text to be simple and clear, and the research scientists themselves, who wrote the notes which were to be the basis of the text, and who were striving for rigour and complexity. Under these circumstances you can't avoid confronting central questions related to meaning, language, relevance and experience.

In this sense the focus of my scholarship gradually shifted from issues related to evolutionary biology to those related to how people come to know about and interpret their world.

Since then I have been on a path of discovery, delving into the labyrinths of constructivist epistemology, intellectual development and education as a cultural phenomenon, a process greatly facilitated by being awarded a CAUT National Teaching Fellowship in 1994 which allowed me to spend three months based at Harvard University, reading and talking about education. During that period I "discovered" many ideas for the first time, perhaps the most important being the evidence that exists on the failure of traditional didactic teaching for most students, at least in the sciences.

In terms of my classroom practice, this has resulted in me gradually exploring ways of creating a learning environment that better reflect students' ways of knowing. I have introduced various forms of collaborative learning into large lecture classes and have embedded classroom assessment exercises into each class as a way for both myself and my students to obtain continuous feedback on the learning process that is taking place. I worked hard to create metaphors, examples and images that link the ideas of biology to the students' own world of experience. I organised a meeting room with armchairs and tea/coffee facilities next to the biology laboratory, reflecting my own growing understanding of learning as a deeply social phenomenon.





Since receiving the science teaching award last November I have taken up the position of Acting Director of the Centre for the Enhancement of Learning, Teaching and Scholarship (CELTS) at the University of Canberra (some people find this highly amusing having just won an award for teaching) and I have begun thinking more than ever about what it takes to get people to change the way they teach and whether award systems such as the Australian Awards for University Teaching help.

For myself, it has been the intellectual interest of teaching and learning that has led me to do what I have done over the last few years. I am conscious of the fact, though, that I am in a highly privileged position, having already established myself as a university academic. For an individual just embarking on their career a decision to immerse oneself in teaching, especially at the level of introductory classes which takes so much time and energy, would have to be regarded in most cases as "courageous". In the case of the sciences, which I know best, keeping oneself at the leading edge of ones research field in terms of grants and publications is so demanding that most people attempting this would simply not have the time or energy to devote themselves to anything other than specialised teaching. Yet it is in the large first year classes that attitudes to study and higher education are established and where we need to foster meaningful learning.

I offer no simple answers to this dilemma, just a hope that innovations like the Australian Awards for University Teaching will help, in some way, to create an environment in our universities where our best teachers will be encouraged, and get institutional support, to take up the challenges of teaching, especially in first year classes.

John Dearn is an Associate Professor and Acting Director of the Centre for the Enhancement of Learning, Teaching and Scholarship at the University of Canberra. He is the Chair of the ACT Branch of HERDSA and earlier this year was appointed to CUTSD. He can be contacted on (02) 6201 5290 or at dearn@isd.canberra.edu.au.

Meet the HERDSA Office Staff

Have you ever wondered who are the people who run HERDSA on a day to day basis and what kind of office they work in? I did, so as part of my orientation to becoming editor of HERDSA News I made a trip to Canberra to find out. I was met at the airport by Coral Watson who runs the office assisted by her colleague Heather Koch. We drove to the suburb of Cook in the Belconnen area, a few kms north of Canberra city centre, where HERDSA has its office in the Cook Primary School which it shares with the Australian Association of Adult and Community Education. This is a very friendly arrangement. The enrolments in the primary school have dropped thus making a number of classrooms available for other uses. In addition to an office there is a large store room containing HERDSA publications. There are plenty in stock so do find ways of encouraging staff to buy and read them.

Coral is the administration officer which means tackling a great variety of work that is required to keep the Society running. She also maintains the HERDSA email list while she and Heather keep the Website up to date.

Heather looks after membership records on the data base and also mails out publications. When I was there in February she was busy sending off parcels containing the new Staff Induction Pack for staff to interest them

in becoming HERDSA members. If you haven't seen copies ask Heather to send you a few to distribute around your institution.



One of the vital jobs undertaken by the office is the technical production of this newsletter. Material for the HERDSA News is assembled in Canberra by a desk top publisher then printed and finally distributed through a mailing service, so there are a few stages involved before it arrives on members' desks.

Rick Nunes-Vaz, a member of the Executive, working at the Australian Defence Force Academy, calls in to keep contact between the office staff and the Executive which is a useful personal contact to supplement the inevitable stream of email which arrives and departs from the office by courtesy of the ANU.

Coral and Heather work part time but you should be able to contact one of them during office hours. They are doing a great job and I wonder how HERDSA ever ran without people like them. Send them an email to say hi and thanks and look out for one of them at the Conference so you can have a chat.

They can be contacted on email at herdsa.office@effect.net.au while the office phone is +61 2 6253 4242 and the fax is +61 2 6253 4246

Roger Landbeck



Heather Koch and Coral Watson



WHAT IS A KEY RESEARCHER?

Angela Brew introduces the new HERDSA Executive Committee Research Portfolio and asks an important question.

This is a question which one member of the Executive asked me when I said I was compiling a list for the new Research Portfolio. The idea of the Portfolio is to work to strengthen Research with a capital R in HERDSA. The Research Portfolio aims to support and encourage research into higher education by:

- promoting research into higher education in general and the research of HERDSA members in particular within the academic community and elsewhere;
- building up HERDSA membership amongst higher education researchers;
- encouraging the establishment of research networks;
- establishing mechanisms inside HERDSA whereby research of its members can gain funding and lobbying for this in funding organisations;
- publicising the research achievements of HERDSA members;
- disseminating important research throughout HERDSA and elsewhere.

There are perhaps five broad areas of Higher Education Research to be considered:

1. Research into the policies, practices, strategies of higher education in general. For example, work on quality measures, managing change, effects of government policies, the academic role etc.
2. Institutional evaluation. This may include evaluation of policy and strategy, student course perceptions, evaluation of students performance and so on.
3. Basic research into student learning, teaching methods and their effectiveness, conceptions of the subject matter held by students and their teachers, effects of particular aspects of the learning environment on students' learning experiences and so on.

4. Action research as an integral part of professional practice. This includes researching the effects of teaching interventions on one's own students.
5. Research into methodologies for educational research including basic research into the validity, viability and scope of particular research methods.

The Executive was concerned that the R in HERDSA was getting left out. True HERDSA has an important role in encouraging practitioners many of whom may engage in research which is of type 4 above, but the Executive feels this must not be done at the expense of the other areas and kinds of higher education research.

The distinction between research and teaching development is not a clear-cut one. In the higher education discipline over the past thirty years or so much of the research on teaching and learning has moved towards the integration of research and practice. Action research in relation to teaching is, as we know, one of the most prevalent methodologies in this area. In my work as an academic developer I often find that academics are unaware that higher education teaching and learning is a field of research with its own scholarly literature as well as a field of practice. This perhaps also applies to funding committees since, in Australia and elsewhere many researchers in this discipline experience difficulty in acquiring funding for research projects which by the nature of the issues they are exploring, may lead to teaching development.

Development and research go hand in hand. Research into teaching and learning which sets out to understand a phenomenon and to contribute to the scholarly literature in the discipline of higher education will be excluded if we do not pay attention to nurturing it. Such projects tend to be carried out by people who have a professional interest in the higher education discipline. This research, by its very nature, can and often does lead to changes in teaching but those changes of themselves do not make the project a teaching development one. Their focus is on research i.e. on understanding a

phenomenon in relation to higher education, and perhaps teaching and learning, in general. The wider academic community may fail to recognise the discipline of higher education but HERDSA must not. If HERDSA focuses its attention exclusively on development, then what happens to research? Well established researchers have no doubt found ways of gaining the support which they need to do this work, but what of junior academics trying to establish themselves in the field?

So what will the Research Portfolio be doing? Your views are invited. What about establishing HERDSA scholarships and research grants or endorsing research projects? Perhaps HERDSA should give awards to the best doctoral thesis in higher education research or to the best research papers at conferences. HERDSA has a well established visiting scholar program. Should this be extended to a visiting research scholar in alternate years? The Research Portfolio coordinators will be working with conference organisers to ensure that the needs of established as well as new researchers are met. In the longer term we might facilitate collaborative proposals to research funding bodies. We could usefully establish a register of research interests of members. Already we are establishing links to other educational research organisations in Australia and overseas.

There is a lot of work to be done. We would like to hear from members what they would like from a Research Portfolio. The question is: in what ways could HERDSA assist you with your research? And then a subsidiary question: is HERDSA giving you, as a higher education researcher, the support that you would like from your organisation?

If you would like to nominate an Australasian "key researcher" or to participate in a debate about these issues please email me.

Angela Brew Convenor Research Portfolio.

Angela is currently acting Director of the Centre for Teaching and Learning at Sydney University. Her email contact address is: A.Brew@ctl.usyd.edu.au



COMING EVENT

HERDSA Visiting Scholar Tom Angelo

Dr Tom Angelo, HERDSA's 1998 Visiting Scholar, arrives in Auckland on 10 May to commence a six week schedule of workshops and presentations in New Zealand and Australia.

Tom is an Associate Professor and Higher Education Program Coordinator at the University of Miami in Florida and has an international reputation in the fields of

- classroom assessment
- improving teaching and learning
- academic development
- the scholarship of teaching.

During his visit, Tom will offer workshops and presentations at universities in the capital cities, as well as many regional centres. Topics of his sessions include:

1. "Making real the scholarship of teaching: Developing your own classroom research agenda"
2. "Strengthening the linkages: Using assessment to focus and connect learning improvement efforts at program, department and classroom levels"
3. "Seven shifts and seven levers: Using assessment to build more productive learning communities"
4. "A teacher's dozen: Fourteen general findings from research that can help us understand and improve college teaching, assessment and learning"
5. "An academic developer's dozen: Fourteen general findings from research that can help us (help academic staff) understand and improve college teaching, assessment and learning"
6. "Finding out how well our students are learning what we're teaching: An introduction to classroom assessment"
7. "Using assessment to improve instructional technology and using instructional technologies to improve assessment"

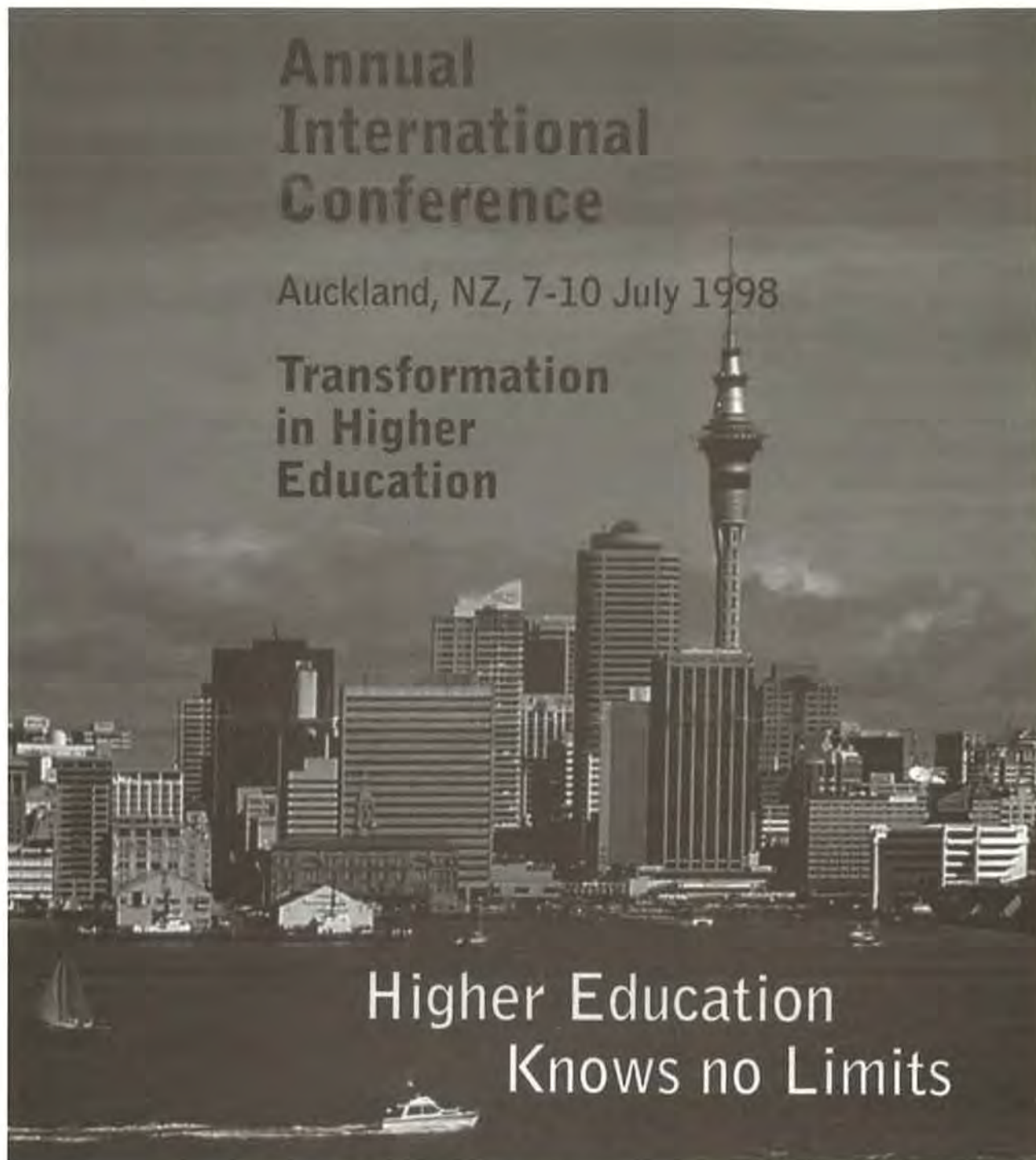
A brief outline of his schedule follows, further details are available on the web site <http://sunsite.amu.edu.au/education/herdsa/vischol.htm>

12 May	(am) Auckland Institute of Technology (pm) Manukau Institute of Technology
13 May	(am) University of Auckland (pm) University of Auckland
14 May	(am) Massey University (pm) Massey University
15 May	(am) University of Waikato (pm) University of Waikato
18 May	(am) Victoria University of Technology (pm) Victoria University of Technology
19 May	(am) Lincoln University (pm) University of Canterbury
21 May	(am) University of Otago (pm) Otago Polytechnic
25 May	(am) Australian Defence Forces Academy (pm) HERDSA branch function
26 May	(am) ANU (pm) University of Canberra
27 May	(am) University of Sydney (pm) University of Western Sydney, Macarthur
28 May	(am) Macquarie University (pm) University of New South Wales
29 May	(am-pm) University of New England
1 June	(am) University of Technology, Sydney
2 June	(am) La Trobe University (pm) RMIT
3 June	(pm) University of Melbourne (pm) Deakin University (City Campus)
4 June	(pm) Monash University
5 June	(am) University of Ballarat
9 June	(am) University of South Australia, Underdale Campus (pm) University of South Australia, Underdale Campus
10 June	(am) Flinders University (pm) Flinders University
11 June	(pm) Edith Cowan University, Claremont Campus
12 June	(am) Edith Cowan University, Claremont Campus (pm) Edith Cowan University, Claremont Campus
15 June	(am) Queensland University of Technology (pm) Griffith University
16 June	(am) University of Queensland
17 June	(am) Southern Cross University
18 June	(am) James Cook University (pm) James Cook University
19 June	(am) Central Queensland University
20 -21 June	Sunshine Coast University College for HERDSA (Qld) State Conference

For more detailed information, look at the web page <http://sunsite.amu.edu.au/education/herdsa/vischol.htm>

or contact:

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Annual International Conference

Auckland, NZ, 7-10 July 1998

Transformation in Higher Education

Higher Education Knows no Limits

1998 HERDSA Conference

The 1998 HERDSA Conference is hosted by the New Zealand Branch of HERDSA and held in Auckland, New Zealand on 7-10 July 1998.

The purpose of the conference is to promote research and development in tertiary education and to explore a diversity of perspectives on contemporary issues that affect the missions of teaching/learning

and research in higher education. This 1998 conference will consider the full range of interests of participants and intends to explore in particular the theme of 'Transformation in Higher Education'.

We chose this theme for a number of reasons, not least of which is that higher

education in Australasia and worldwide seems to be going through fairly traumatic change processes. We in HERDSA New Zealand wanted to put a positive spin on these changes and try to focus the conference on the transformative aspects of these changes. In all environments



where change is rife there are those who wish to maintain the status quo and those who promote and welcome the changes. In New Zealand we have the deregulation of higher education as an example. The polytechnics and institutions of technology want to develop into broader based institutions while the universities resist encroachment on their traditional territory. Higher Education in New Zealand will be transformed by the resolution of such a conflict. In Australia other forces are at work that will transform higher education as we know it while the reunification of Hong Kong with China will undoubtedly result in a transformed higher education system in that environment. South Africa is another example where higher education is being radically transformed through the fires of social change.

We are fortunate to have participants registering for the 1998 HERDSA Conference from all the above countries as well as from several others. Hopefully the conference experience, discussion and presentations will result in attendees and contributors having a better understanding of many aspects of the transformative processes in higher education.

At the time of writing we have received over 200 offers of papers, workshops and other types of session. We have accepted without comment the great bulk of these while a few have been referred back to the authors for further development. We were very pleased however at the standard of submissions and especially how authors had heeded our request to tailor their work to the conference theme within the following categories -

- global and international educational policy and practice
- teaching, learning and assessment of student achievement
- learning support
- organisational policy and systems
- leadership and management in tertiary education
- the subject discipline in society
- staff development and staff appraisal
- research directions and development
- education for indigenous peoples
- equity policies
- curriculum development and evaluation

Keynote Speakers include

- **Professor Pam Denicolo**

Faculty of Education and Community Studies, University of Reading in the UK specialising in higher education studies.

- **Professor Dato Zawawi Ismail**

Vice-Chancellor of University of Malaysia (Sarawak) who has been instrumental in transforming his university into a modern institution in many ways

- **Dr John Hinchcliff**

President of Auckland Institute of Technology, who is at the forefront of transforming his institution from a technical college into one with all the characteristics of a university except the name

Many other distinguished higher educationists will have a significant part in the programme on panels and as respondents to keynote addresses. However it is the presenters of papers and workshops as well as the participants in their sessions who have perhaps the most important role in making this conference a success.

A very full programme begins with a traditional powhiri or Maori welcome followed by a reception and networking session. All sessions of the Conference will be at the University of Auckland or at the Hyatt Regency Hotel adjacent to the University. We can assure attendees that they will not only have plenty of intellectual and academic stimulation but lots of fun as well.

Conference Publications.

The 'proceedings' of the 1998 conference will be a refereed publication comprising those papers deemed worthy of publication according to generally accepted refereed journal criteria. This publication will follow the procedures of a normal journal and will be produced subsequent to the conference. However all accepted abstracts and descriptions of papers, workshops and symposia will be published in the conference pack given to all participants on registration. In addition the text of all papers in the conference programme will be provided on disk to attendees.

Further information about the conference can be had from the Web at:

<http://www.ccc.auckland.ac.nz/herdsa98/> or by mail to Barry Williams, Centre for Continuing Education, The University of Auckland, Private Bag 9201, Auckland, NEW ZEALAND or email to:

b.williams@auckland.ac.nz

Although deadlines for presentations are well past we would hope all those interested in higher education will participate in this conference.

Please note that Earlybird Registration closes 14 May 1998

Time will be allocated at the Conference for Special Interest Groups (SIGs) and General Interest Groups (GIGs) to form, meet and socialise.

Tony Morrison

[email t.morrison@auckland.ac.nz](mailto:email.t.morrison@auckland.ac.nz)

Tony is the Deputy Director of the Centre for Professional Development at the University of Auckland.

**Check out the
HERDSA Web Site
hosted by the
Australian SunSITE:**

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



Research in Progress

Teaching, research and learning in a community of inquiry

This research project (which is still in its very early planning stages) will consider the nature of the relationship between teaching and research in two institutions of higher education and how this relationship might be further developed to the benefit of staff and students. Despite research evidence to the contrary and political moves to further divorce the research and teaching functions, academics continue to stress the significance of the relationship. This study accepts the proposition that there is, or can be, a significant link between teaching and research; that the vital connection between the two is the act of learning and that further investigation can reveal how this connection can be used to best advantage. The study will be carried out at the University of Canterbury and the Christchurch College of Education, institutions which occupy contrasting positions on the teaching/research continuum. A qualitative research design will be employed with an emphasis on in-depth individual interviews, focus group interviews and document analysis.

Key words

Teaching, research, learning, inquiry

Researcher and contact

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Transition to University

About 80 first-year students have been surveyed about how they were taught and studied in Year 13, their attitudes to study and what helped/hindered their learning. Later in the year, in a parallel survey, the same students will be asked to reflect on their experiences at university. Similar surveys were carried out of first-years in the late 80s and it will be interesting to see if there are any changes in the ways students are taught and studied at school or university.

Key words:

Student learning
Researcher and contact

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email: s.hunter@erau.canterbury.ac.nz

Determining the Professional Development Needs of Confirmation Track Academic Staff

The Higher Education Development Centre (HEDC) has a responsibility and commitment to providing appropriate induction procedures and ongoing professional development for academic staff in order to ensure high quality teaching and learning. In order to satisfy this responsibility effectively it is important to identify the needs of academic staff. This study focuses on the identification of the needs of those academic staff recently appointed to the University in confirmation path appointments.

Although confirmation of appointment is an expectation of the University, it is apparent that successful progress towards confirmation is not an experience common to all academic staff. Concerns have been raised by the University Staffing and Advisory Committee with respect to the level of preparedness of eligible staff for the confirmation at the completion of the probationary period.

This study seeks to identify patterns that emerge from consideration of the experiences of staff who have been recommended for confirmation of appointment within the University since 1990. In addition, recently appointed academic staff who are currently within their probationary period will be consulted.

This project seeks to investigate:

- the level and standard of teaching and research that confirmation path staff members are expected to and able to maintain during their probationary period;
- the degree of ongoing support available to and experienced by staff at a departmental and an institutional level;
- the degree to which confirmation path staff are cognisant with the

procedures and their responsibilities with respect to confirmation; and,

- the degree to which Heads of Departments demonstrate an awareness of the requirements of confirmation of appointment.

Key Words

Staff development, appraisal, higher education

Researchers and contact:

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Scholarship in Teaching

Aims to develop a framework for enhancing academics' understanding of how teaching can be practised as a form of scholarly activity. This aim will be realised through the production of a manual comprising explanations and interpretations about the notion of a "scholarship of teaching", complemented by a set of practical exercises, activities, checklists and guidelines.

In developing the conceptual framework of this project, the researchers have drawn from current literature in higher education in order to elaborate: (i) ways of understanding teaching as scholarship and (ii) ways of stimulating academic units and subject groupings to make their teaching a form of community property and something of which they can be as proud as they would be of their research achievements.

The historical starting point is Boyer's work, and much has been also drawn from current work by the AAHE and the Carnegie Foundation, with the intention not of replicating this but finding ways of extending, applying, and adapting it to the Australian academic scene.

A set of original theoretical essays have been written, establishing a coherent rationale on which the practical instruments are based, some developed from existing instruments in the literature but others original.

Major modular sections of the work are:

Understanding the Scholarship of Teaching;
Mentoring within Academic Units;





Peer Review;
Evaluating Teaching;
Preparing Grant Applications;
Researching Teaching;
Getting Published;
Preparing Teaching Documentation;
Teaching Portfolios;
Getting Recognised for Teaching.

Materials are currently in a late pre-publishing stage of development, and will be trialled in workshops during 1998.

Keywords

Teaching as scholarship; scholarship in teaching; community of practice; discipline-based pedagogy; peer review of teaching

Researchers and contact

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Conceptions of learning held by Aboriginal students in tertiary education

The aim of the research is to investigate the conceptions of learning held by Aboriginal University students. Conceptions of learning influence approaches to learning and hence success in study. There is little research in CONCEPTIONS of learning held by such students. Attrition rates for Aboriginal students at University are at least twice as high as those for other students. The research will provide longitudinal data for conceptions of learning held by groups of students in 3 (or more) universities and these will also be examined in terms of learning outcomes. Implications for teaching such students will be proposed. The data will also complement research in conceptions of learning in other cultural contexts thus adding to knowledge of the range of human conceptions of learning.

Key words

Learning, Higher Education, Aboriginal, teaching, cross cultural

Funding body

ARC Large Grant, 1997-1999

Researchers and contact

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Teaching for diversity: quality learning outcomes with international students

This project aims to investigate the teaching and learning needs of international students at the University of Tasmania. The aim is to identify and promote innovative practice for improved learning and teaching outcomes that may be easily adapted to other groups of students with special needs. Using questionnaire surveys and the Delphi iterative technique, we will first seek the views of a cross-departmental sample of international students and teaching staff regarding their needs as learners. After extracting consensus views, we will clarify matches and/or mismatches between teachers' and students' perceptions. Possible differences between cultural groups will also be identified. The outcomes of the project will be recommendations of practical solutions for improved teaching and learning strategies that should facilitate best practice benchmarks for teaching international students.

Key words

International students, learning strategies, Delphi study

Funding body

University of Tasmania Teaching Development Grant

Researchers and contact

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

The purpose of this study is to investigate the discursive practices, experiences and perceptions associated with academic writing in a tertiary setting. Such terms as tertiary literacy, academic writing and

academic genres have been appearing frequently in recent literature. Also, calls for accountability, standards and economic rationalism reflect a heightened focus on lecturer and student performances in tertiary institutions. Literacy demands associated with academic writing appear to be a worthy source of investigation in attending to these phenomena.

My study will document and report student and lecturer experiences, and examine how and if these experiences affect decisions related to the academic writing task.

To date, over 400 students and 25 academic staff have contributed to this study. Interviews, surveys, case studies, reflective diaries, writing samples and subject and course materials provide data for analyses. Four outcomes are anticipated: The experiences, grounded in the reported reality of the students, will be better documented and understood. Comparisons in preconceptions, models of writing, attitudes and beliefs will be possible between those who set and evaluate students' academic writing, and students who do the writing. The understanding will contribute to the knowledge and action of all stakeholders. They will be informed of ways to improve practices related to the experience of academic writing and tertiary literacy.

An early outcome has been the development and trial of a web-based writing program which is the subject of another research project described below.

Key words

Tertiary literacy, academic writing, writing experience, knowledge acquisition

Researcher and contact

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IDEAS DOSSIER

A radish for your thoughts: irreverent reflections on the fate of radical educational ideas

How is it that some really brilliant ideas that start out with great promise and enormous potential seem to get sooner or later get co-opted, colonised, mainstreamed by the system? Eventually they become trivialised, dull, and marginalised. They get cunningly "redirected" and "redefined" till the very focus, the target, they were intended to transform gets missed, deliberately avoided, and left safely alone. Their genius gets lost in the banality and brutality of public utility.

"The mystery of the great mainstream take-over"?

The problem was put to me by a colleague; I've ever since been trying to find a way of handling it. So, if he ever reads this, will he please tell me if there's anything much going for what follows - "The Eidos theory of the inevitable fate of radical changes"? I'll explain it through a test for readers - and a bunch of radishes to the lucky winner! [Radix (Latin) = "root" in my Pocket Oxford]

Readers may nominate their choice of the three or four most radical educational ideas emerging in the past thirty-or-forty years. Then justify them by citing for each why you regard it as being "radical" (Note: I don't mean important, or influential, or even valuable, just simply "radical").

Now, turn this page down and when you have written your nominations read it again and compare with mine which, in no particular order, are:

- Open access. The idea that anyone, regardless of formal study background and acquired credits, might benefit if permitted to study university subjects. This one is closely connected with putting formal value onto prior experiential or "life" learning, and also with part of the original ethos of the UK Open University.
- Self- and peer-assessment. The idea that it might be possible, practicable,

The Sydney Morning Herald's "Monday Viewpoint" of Feb 16th presented two opposing views of the value of the Tertiary Entrance Rank used for HSC results in new South Wales. In the Herald's own words "The TER is not the final word in assessing a student says Michael Jackson. But Gareth Gaudry argues that without it Australia would become a drop-out from the competitive world".

and sufficiently valid and reliable if learners themselves were taught and permitted to evaluate their own and one another's intellectual achievements, and this valuation had real recognition.

- Independent study. The idea that people could undertake worthwhile educational programs by themselves deciding what should be in their courses. The best known implementation of this was probably in NE London Polytechnic's School of Independent Studies.
- and, for a fourth, the idea behind certain Interdisciplinary Studies programs - those based around marginalised groups and stigmatised causes, where intellectual respectability is given to transgressive (awkward, rule-breaking, badly fitting, often largely unwritten) bodies of knowledge. Examples are womens' studies, black studies, gay studies, peace studies.

Future columns will publish arguments from readers supporting completely different ideas. Send yours to the Editor, HERDSA News, who'll be only too glad to redirect them into my direction.

But where are my justifications? My central justification for all four can be caught under just one principle - Eidos's principle of radicalism in educational thought.

"The most radical propositions - those touching on the deepest possible root, hence the origins and very nature of things - are those that, if widely implemented, would tend to the formation of characters and personalities who would be the most conspicuous misfits within the prevailing socio-economic and socio-cultural system."

So, a radical idea, one that challenges at the root, is one that would cause a

revolution if allowed to be implemented without control. Things would start to fall seriously apart, and that's the test.

I thought my choices were all ideas that had been allowed a trial, but whose extent of implementation has been severely controlled by the dominant system. They have been allowed their little day, and some continue to prosper within strictly curtailed and delimited areas, but nothing more. They have been sidelined into safe conformity with the systemically necessary means of formation of character. The kinds of person produced by an educational system in which such ideas had free rein would be far too upsetting for the system to tolerate in large numbers.

Which particular characteristics are in question here? I suggest the following highly prized human qualities, all greatly admired, as being under potential threat by such innovations ...

- competitiveness - that assigns supreme value to being on top, being the greatest, slaughtering the rest whenever necessary
- acquisitiveness - that turns wealth generation into the supreme good of public and private life, wealth (national or personal) being the dominant source of status and power
- exploitation - that regards everyone else and everything else in the natural world as existing only for the purposes of advancing one's own interests
- ethical cynicism - that regards principles to be valid only when they serve one's own advancement
- gender-based hegemony - phallogocentrism, to give it its technically correct title.

My guess is that open access, self- and peer-assessment, independent and marginal group based interdisciplinary studies might all be instances of brilliant educational ideas that must be kept under





control. Maybe you can suggest others like them - even more dangerous, more subversive?

I think these each exert their challenge by tending to educate people who would resist competitive, exploitative, acquisitive, male-hegemonic and ethically cynical systems. The people they produce would probably work for - or contribute to - the system's downfall; no system can tolerate that. So it would represent a revolution; being truly radical, such things must fail and be seen to fail. You don't need sinister conspiracy theories - it happens automatically, almost without anyone knowing. Like apples falling from Newtonian trees, it must just be in the nature of things.

Maybe there are readers who nominated information technology, digital telecommunications or multi-media. Were there any? Own up, please; nothing to be ashamed about.

I wonder whether you have perhaps mistaken the quantitative for the qualitative. Sure, these technologies are capable of making, and are already making, are of such magnitude that the mind boggles. They are a revolution in the

way we do things, but are they a revolution in what we do? Or are they qualitatively insignificant - leaving the educational status quo unchallenged? To me they're not a new education at all, just the old familiar one made even more efficient, effective, uniform and universal. The very opposite of radical.

I marvel at the blind, uncritical, unquestioning enthusiasm with which the system embraces, and invests in, these innovations. The technologies are not threats (except to those who don't know how to use them yet). Surely they feed directly into producing the same kind of people the system has always needed - compliant, obedient and subservient to superiors; competitive, exploitative to the environment; value-slippery towards peers; repressive and dominating toward inferiors.

Educational practices must at all costs support the radical core of the inherited world. Subversive experiments are permissible, even welcomed, but must never proceed beyond that. Or, if they do, they must have a genius-bypass inserted. By permitting a few radical variations, the effect is to wonderfully reinforce our

general belief in the prevailing socio-economic system as being inherently good - probably the best of all worlds we are likely to be able to invent. The flexibility to radically innovate within carefully guarded limits is something every free and open political body needs in order to ensure that, in return, a nicely blind eye will always be turned to its own economic and social shortcomings.

"Plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose"?

A radish for your thoughts.

Eidos

Readers may wish to note that the contribution from Eidos is circulated for comment on the ADSIG list (see details in this edition) prior to publication.

We were pleased to receive a comment from Bob Ross on the last piece by Eidos which critiqued the special issue of HERD on phenomenography. We print it to encourage others to respond similarly. All comments should be sent to the HERDSA Editor.

continued from page 17

Evaluation of an interactive website to guide tertiary students in the writing of assignments.

This project evaluates an interactive web site titled "Student Writing Program" as a resource for students learning to write assignments. The program was designed in response to writing needs which students expressed. The program targets "assignment writing" as a recurring literacy task for tertiary students, and one for which support from academic staff varies.

It guides students in how to text analyse an assignment topic, to research content components and to organise and present a written response in terms of the relational components of the topic text. A second purpose is to help students monitor the effectiveness of their own thinking as they do these things,

The first module develops skills so that students actively learn: a form of discourse analysis for short texts, a strategy for making the language of assignment task descriptions understandable, and a plan for allocating research time and quantum.

The second module has two parts. The first is a series of steps to increase the likelihood of interaction with academic staff, to organise their ideas coherently and to align their written language cohesively with the topic. The second part provides a Referencing Guide.

Key words

Technology; tertiary literacy; university; writing; assignments

Funding body

Griffith University Higher Education Research Grant

Researchers and contact

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CHANGE OF EMAIL ADDRESS

Due to the Australian National University changing dialin service for external users, HERDSA has had to change its email address. Please note the new email addresses:

herdsa.office@effect.net.au
coral.watson@effect.net.au

HERDSA is extremely grateful to Margot Pearson, Director of the Centre for Educational Development and Academic Methods (CEDAM) who had sponsored us to have access to email through the ANU.



On Eidos' Dossier on the 'Phenomenography' volume of HERD (Nov '97 News)

Like Eidos I read the whole of the special issue of HERD on Phenomenography, and like Eidos that was certainly unusual for me - though I didn't manage it in two sittings. What's more I read it in published order on the assumption that the editors had had some strategy in mind. Also like Eidos I had a set of preconceived prejudices about phenomenography that I brought to my reading.

For me one of the frustrating things about the collection (which I very much enjoyed) is that it's a good contribution to what is obviously an ongoing debate (see Eidos' PS for example). The debate will clearly continue - but in places of which I'm not familiar and hence to follow the debate I'll have to work hard and will probably miss most of it!

My view of Eidos' critique is that it doesn't give sufficient weight to the volume as a contribution to that debate. So, for example, while Eidos mentions Saljo's paper favourably it's almost as if none-the-less Eidos isn't reading Saljo's contribution - or perhaps, like me, Eidos is anxious to see what response the phenomenographers make to Saljo (and the other critiques in the volume).

However that comment on the "Dossier" may be nothing more than a reflection on the difficulty of covering the whole HERD volume in such an abbreviated space.

Perhaps it's precisely because phenomenography is "a tradition in its infancy" (to quote Eidos) that it is possible for there to be such a debate - the approach not having yet been 'set in stone' and hence unchallengeable!

In addition to Eidos' concerns (most of which I share) about phenomenography I'd still like to see some good analysis of the extent to which the 'conceptions' that arise in some studies are 'created' by the mode of analysis and also the related extent to which the outcomes of the interviews (where that is the research procedure) arise from the approach (or can be shown not to be, in each case).

One comment I do have doesn't arise directly from the volume but refers to a comment made towards the end of Eidos' critique on "Rigour". It's the comment, picked up from Saljo's discussion, on the translation of the term 'uppfattning' and the difficulty Eidos has with some of the language in some of the papers. No doubt everyone else like

myself with an English-as only-language background who reads the contributions in English from the Swedish developers of phenomenography notices the distinctive English style: rather convoluted and often quite difficult. I dubbed this "Swinglish". This is not a failure in their understanding or mastery of English but presumably reflects an influence of the Swedish (academic?) language on their written (academic) English. In this context I noticed what I thought was a very interesting phenomenon when I spent a short time with the Gothenburg group. One of the researchers in the group had an English background and was educated to first degree level in that language and generally would have still been instantly identified as a native speaker of English, but the person concerned had done all their advanced study in Sweden and wrote their learned papers in "Swinglish"!

Bob Ross

Professor Ross headed the Centre for the Advancement of Learning and Teaching (now the Griffith Institute of Higher Education) at Griffith University from 1974-92. Previously he was a Pro Vice-Chancellor at the Open University in the UK.

Jacob's Musings on Meanings — 'Flexible Learning' - higher education's "fast food" ?

In this article a new anonymous contributor, Jacob, reflects on the growth of flexible learning and wonders about the meaning of the term.

I've been puzzling for some time about the meaning of 'flexible learning'. It clearly is the latest "thing" - everyone seems to have a 'flexible learning' unit and be urging the extension of 'flexible learning' as a good thing - but what does it mean? There seems to me to be plenty of evidence that the term has different meanings for different folk and that many use it without any clear idea themselves as to what they mean.

It does seem that the term 'flexible learning' is now replacing the previously popular (and equally confused or confusing?) term Open Learning, current just a wee while ago.

This leads me to wonder whether 'flexible learning' is just the latest in quite a line of terms designed in part to legitimise correspondence education. Is 'flexible learning' perhaps just correspondence education incorporating computer communication technology of one sort or other?

It is not clear to me that the such developments could be described (legitimately) as offering increased "flexibility" to students unless all that is being claimed is that students are able to study "at their own pace, in their own

place and at their own time". But this is nothing more than a cleverly worded claim that external studies programmes made some three decades ago (from where the quote arises) - certainly well before the existence of the Internet. In any case Australia still has an uneconomic proliferation of such programmes (according to Global Alliance in the advice commissioned by the West Committee) and has had for many years, in spite of previous Government dictated 'restructuring' (the Distance Education Centres) that attempted to tackle that problem (among others). But "flexibility" has only appeared recently as a desirable goal for university education so perhaps it implies something more than this? But what?





Are we returning to the educational catch-cry of targeting education to individual students' needs and abilities? Slogans incorporating this idea were common a few years back but very little was ever done to find ways of actually incorporating features that achieved such desirable aims - even some things that can be done are universally ignored or denigrated.

The key component of 'flexible learning' seems to be use of 'information technology', particularly the 'net'. Are we, then, about to see yet another 'computer-aided learning' revisited? That is: technology driven course development with little if any thoughtful educational input. Let me be clear on this point: I am NOT attempting to denigrate or belittle those enthusiasts who put considerable effort into developing ideas that excite them - all without much recognition and

within their own hard-pressed spare time. But it is true that many such staff don't have a very sound knowledge of educational principles - how could they? Of course some folk might say that this claim is merely an attempt to 'colonise' a field or establish a role or that I am just being precious!

In any case 'flexible learning', like its predecessor Open Learning, seems to have little to do with 'learning' but much to do with the 'delivery' of 'instruction'; so the term 'flexible delivery' might be more accurate in most cases. But even then I puzzle over how courses so described are actually 'flexible' for anyone - let alone the students. It seems to me that the vast majority give students as little 'flexibility' as any standard course - and frequently place them under rather greater constraints.

So is 'flexibility' for the staff the key?

I doubt it. Most staff involved, as I indicated above, are doing it 'for love' and place themselves under considerably increased time-pressure and strain as a result.

'Flexibility for the institution perhaps?'

Or is it really just a nice-sounding but meaningless slogan?

Oh well, does it matter?

Oh! And 'fast food'?

Well, in the middle of these musings I had a memory from a bit over a couple of decades ago of a humanities colleague's fascination with the term 'fast food' - at the heyday of 'deconstruction'; and you thought I was constructing a metaphor!

Happy musing

Jacob

BRANCH REPORTS

During May and June, HERDSA branches offer a wonderful program with the seminars/workshops/dinners/conferences organised around Tom Angelo, the HERDSA Visiting Scholar. The program of Tom's events is published in this newsletter, you are encouraged and invited to participate in any of the sessions organised by your closest branch. Tom has an international reputation in the fields of

- classroom assessment
- improving teaching and learning
- academic development
- the scholarship of teaching.

ACT

Di Adams

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At the first meeting for 1998 Clare Burton spoke about a recent EIP project of DEETYA entitled "Gender Equity in Australian Universities".

This project aimed at identifying the cultural and structural barriers to the achievement of equitable employment outcomes for academic and general staff women, and the implications of these barriers for staffing policies and management practices in Australian universities. All 36 publicly-funded

universities participated in the project. A positive relationship was found between stronger EEO programs and women's employment profiles. Clare discussed the issues that this raises for universities.

At the next meeting Kathleen Quinlan will talk about the US scene for contract and sessional academic staff.

The branch meets with Tom Angelo on 25 May, 4 - 5.30pm

Western Australia

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Our first seminar this year was given by Dr Ann Deden, Director of Penn State's Center for Learning and Academic

Technologies. Her theme 'The Challenge of the Web: Can Universities Adapt in Time?' provoked us to think not only about the appropriate use of technologies such as the WWW for supporting student learning, but also how the focus on web-based teaching and learning in any university needs to be market driven. The next seminar with Dr John Biggs promises to be another stimulating one!

Queensland

John Lidstone

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Iain McAlpine has arranged with Professor Bert Frost to have a discussion starter on the list-serv facility to which any HERDSA member can subscribe. Contact Iain by e-mail on imcalpine@hotmail.com for further information.

The THIRD QUEENSLAND BRANCH CONFERENCE will be held at the Sunshine Coast University College on 20-21 June this year, with Associate Professor Tom Angelo as the guest speaker. Strands within which papers will be presented include:

- the secondary-tertiary education interface
- learning and technology
- language and literacy
- improving the quality of teaching and learning

Dr Carol Davis has a top quality team on the organising committee. Interstate visitors to Queensland during June are very welcome to participate in the conference. Registration forms are available from Dr Carol Davis at Sunshine Coast University College, phone 0754 301221 during work hours, or e-mail davis@scuc.edu.au



In 1998 the branch will try breakfast meetings using keynote people in higher education who are visiting Brisbane for other meetings.

Victoria

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So far this year our activities have concentrated on preparations to host the 1999 international conference. The title/theme is "Cornerstones: What do we value in higher Education?" and the venue will be the University of Melbourne. The proposed dates are July 12, 1999 to July 15, 1999. We have

contacted appropriate senior staff at the various Victorian universities and have had a good response in terms of interest and support, including representation on the conference sub-committee.

Because of the international conference, we have decided there will be no state conference in 1999 and the 1998 state conference is likely to be replaced by a two day symposium in November. Our first Meritorious Service Award will be given at the AGM.

The branch meets with Tom Angelo on 4 June.

New Zealand

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At the moment, all branch energies are directed towards organising the HERDSA conference. However there is an evening meeting when the branch meets with Tom Angelo on 12 May.

South Australia

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ABSTRACTS OF RESEARCH IN HIGHER EDUCATION

EDITORS NOTE

This used to be a regular feature of HERDSA News but it has been missing for about two years now. I decided to include a very limited number of abstracts for this edition but am reviewing the question of whether they should be included. Publications like 'Research into Higher Education Abstracts' and facilities like Ulitbase on the Web can provide a far more comprehensive coverage of literature in the field. However it may still be useful to have a limited coverage in each issue. Your views on this would be appreciated. Note all abstracts included here are those that appear in the journal.

Assessment

'Assessment for Learning: quality and taxonomies,' Brad Imrie, Assessment and Evaluation, 20, 2, 175-189, 1995.

Assessment for student learning and of student performance, formative and summative, is a crucial quality issue and the paper discusses principles and procedures of taxonomies for good practice in regard to assessment. Five taxonomies, with some variations, are described as and exhibits are used to present details. The implications of a taxonomic approach to assessment are profound in that the use of taxonomies requires peer discussion and provides a framework for accountability and quality

assurance. From a pedagogical point of view, there should be a clear and justifiable link between objectives, assessment and outcomes, with appropriate teaching and assessment methods selected by teachers. From a quality point of view, a taxonomic approach is an indicator of quality assurance.

Appraisal of Teaching

'Teaching appraisal in higher education: an Australian perspective,' R. John Casey, Patricia Gentiles, Stephen W. Bigger, Higher Education, 34, 4, 459-482, 1997.

The current literature on the evaluation of teaching in higher education institutions is reviewed critically and evaluated from an Australian perspective. The issues of what constitutes "good teaching" and how effective teaching can lead on to quality in teaching are discussed together with reasons for introducing appraisal systems. The "professional development" and "duties-based" models of teaching appraisal are summarised and assessed along with the various sources of information that can be used as inputs to the appraisal process. The problems are identified and recommendations are made as to the design of appraisal systems which are valid, reliable and have high user acceptability.

Curriculum Design

'Enhancing Teaching through Constructive Alignment,' John Biggs, Higher Education 32, 347-364, 1996

Two lines of thinking are becoming increasingly important in higher educational practice. The first derives from constructivist learning theory, and the second from instructional design literature. Constructivism comprises a family of theories but all have in common the centrality of the learners' activities in creating meaning. These and related ideas have important implications for teaching and assessment. Instructional designers for their part have emphasised alignment between the objectives of a course or unit and the targets for assessing student performance. "Constructive Alignment" represents a marriage of the two thrusts, constructivism being used as a framework to guide decision-making at all stages in instructional design: in deriving curriculum objectives that represent a suitably high cognitive level, in deciding teaching/learning activities judged to elicit these performances, and to assess and summatively report student performance. The "performances of understanding" nominated in the objectives are thus used to systematically align the teaching methods and the assessment. The process is illustrated with reference to a professional development unit in educational psychology for teachers, but the model may be generalised to most units or programs in higher education.



Conceptions of Teaching

'A reconceptualisation of the research into university academics' conceptions of teaching.' David Kember, *Learning and Instruction*, 7, 3, 255-276, 1997.

Articles about the conceptions of teaching of university academics are reviewed. There is found to be a high level of correspondence between largely independent studies reported in 13 articles. An attempt to synthesise the body of research places conceptions under two broad orientations characterised as teacher-centred/content oriented and student-centred/learning oriented. Each orientation has two associated conceptions. A transitional category, labelled student-teacher interaction, links the two orientations. The five conceptions beneath the orientations are visualised as well-defined points within a continuum, and there is some evidence of lecturers shifting beliefs across the spectrum over time. Teaching conceptions have shown to be related to measures of the quality of student learning, so are modelled as influencing teaching approaches which in turn effect student learning approaches and learning outcomes. It is argued that measures to enhance the quality of teaching should take account of teaching conceptions if they are to be effective, as teaching approaches are strongly influenced by the underlying beliefs of the teacher.

Learning

'Reading to Learn,' Effie Maclellan, *Studies in Higher Education*, 22, 3, 277-288, 1997

Learning from text has long been a central activity in higher education. While it is doubtless important, there is evidence that the task of 'reading to learn' is problematic for students in higher education. The article provides a conceptual analysis of what 'reading to learn' means in terms of conceptual and strategic knowledge and then explores what intervention could usefully help students learn more effectively from text. A case is made for 'reading to learn' in higher education being viewed as requiring a 'deep' approach and that as an aid to, and manifestation of, the intention to interact vigorously with the text, students should be both enabled and required to engage routinely in the summarisation of what they read.



HERDSA PUBLICATIONS

The Green Guide and Gold Guide series meet the needs of busy staff in tertiary education who seek ideas and pointers relating to their particular circumstances, tasks and responsibilities. The Guides are deliberately short, inexpensive, easy to read and concentrate on supplying ideas rather than attempting to be comprehensive. All are written by academic teachers.

Green Guide Series

<i>Reviewing Departments</i>	Rod McDonald & Ernest Roe	<i>Design of University Courses and Subjects: A strategic approach</i>	Geoff Foster
<i>Up the Publication Road</i>	D. Royce Sadler	<i>Multiple Choice Testing</i>	Geoff Isaacs
<i>Supervising Postgraduates</i>	Ingrid Moses	<i>Considering Gender</i>	Peggy Nightingale & Cathy Sohler
<i>Improving Student Writing</i>	Peggy Nightingale	<i>Student Centred Teaching: the development and use of conceptual frameworks</i>	Kym Fraser
<i>Implementing Student Self-assessment</i>	David Boud	<i>Collaborating in Research</i>	Carol Bond & Briony Thompson
<i>Conducting Tutorials</i>	Jacqueline Lublin	<i>An Introduction to Educational Media</i>	Alison Viskovic
<i>Lecturing</i>	Robert Cannon	<i>Role-Play</i>	Edward Errington
<i>Assessing Student Performance</i>	Terry Crooks		
<i>Heading a Department</i>	Ingrid Moses & Ernest Roe		
<i>The Desktop Teacher</i>	John Hedberg		
<i>Organising Academic Conferences</i>	Amy Zelman and Lynn Zelman		
<i>Tutoring Distance Education and Open Learning Courses</i>	David Kember & David Murphy		
<i>Developing Students' Library Research Skills</i>	Christine Bruce		
<i>Improving Teaching Through Action Research</i>	David Kember & Mavis Kelly		

Gold Guide Series

<i>Clinical Teaching</i>	Rick Ladyshevsky
<i>Making Connections: Using Student Journals as a Teaching/Learning Aid</i>	Roy Ballantyne & Jan Packer
<i>Teaching and Learning Social Responsibility</i>	Alan Prosser

For more information or just to order the HERDSA Publications List contact the HERDSA National Office at:

HERDSA, PO Box 516, Jamison, ACT 2614, AUSTRALIA.

Telephone: +61 2 6253 4242 Facsimile: +61 2 6253 4246

Email: herdsa.office@effect.net.au Web site: <http://sunsite.anu.edu.au/education/herdsa>

HERDSA web site and News Index

The web site continues to be upgraded. We apologize that a part of the HERDSA News Index was not formatted correctly soon after it was previously advertised. Visit the site again!

HERDSA SPECIAL INTEREST GROUPS

For details see Herdsa Web site.

<http://sunsite.anu.edu.au/education/herdsa/sigs.htm>



Conferences

3rd Pacific Rim Conference: First year in Higher Education

Theme: Strategies for Success in Transition Years

Place: Auckland, New Zealand

Date: 5 - 8 July 1998

Information: Maria Lamari
Email: m.lamari@qut.edu.au

25th Annual HERDSA Conference

Theme: Transformation in Higher Education

Place: Auckland, New Zealand

Date: 7 - 10 July 1998

Information: Barry Williams
Email: b.williams@auckland.ac.nz
<http://www.cce.auckland.ac.nz/herdsa98>

Australian Communication Skills Conference

Theme: Communication Skills in the Disciplines. The main focus is the teaching and integration of communication skills within tertiary level courses.

Place: The University of Melbourne

Date: 1 - 2 October, 1998

Information: Email: Paul Bruba or Joanna Tapper
acsc98@unimelb.edu.au

<http://www.unimelb.edu.au/acsc98>

Pathways IV National Conference:

Theme: People with Disabilities in Tertiary Education Creating the Future. Over the last decade there have been significant legislative and social changes, which have resulted in the increasing participation of people with disabilities and medical conditions in tertiary education

Place: Perth, Western Australia

Date: 1 - 4 December 1998

Information: Email: keynote@ca.com.au
<http://www.cowan.edu.au>

Society for Research into Higher Education Annual Conference

Theme: Tomorrow's World: the globalisation of higher education

Place: University of Lancaster

Date: 15 - 17 December 1998

Information: SRHE '98 Conference Secretariat
Email: inconference@cableinet.com



ANNOUNCEMENT

The Committees of **HERDSA** and **1st Year in Higher Education Conferences** have agreed to offer 20% discount to those people who wish to attend both conferences which are being held in Auckland in July this year. As there has been a lot of interest for participants to attend both conferences [5-8 July for the First Year In Higher Education and 7-10 July for HERDSA], it makes sense to offer the discount to allow people to extend their stay or arrive earlier. Please take advantage of this reduction in costs if you wish to attend both conferences.

Further details of the Pacific Rim conference "First Year In Higher Education" available from Conference Management: **m.lamari@qut.edu.au**

Keynote speakers include Prof. Patricia Cross, Prof. Dame M Anne Salmond, Prof. Ian Lowe and Dr. Craig McInnis.

The same discount also applies to attendees of the NZ Action Research Network Retreat. Details from Eileen Piggot-Irvine: **epi@igrin.co.nz**