HERDSA NEWS
The Higher Education Research and Development Society of Australasia

ISSN 0157-1826
VOLUME 20 NO.3
November 1998

Encouraging Active Learning at University

by Richard Fuller

Richard Fuller gave a paper on this subject at the Auckland conference and it seemed so interesting and useful that the editor asked him to write a personal account of his journey to encourage students to learn.

In this paper I describe an approach to university teaching which I have developed over the past few years. My motivation for developing this approach came from a growing sense of frustration about my teaching. Even though I thought I was teaching well, in my more honest and reflective moments I had to concede that many students did not seem to understand the subject matter very well, but just memorised and reproduced what seemed important for them to learn. Few students did the recommended reading before class, and students generally did not display a lot of interest in the subject.

I tried to overcome these problems. I revised my lectures, and illustrated them with examples that were more relevant and interesting. I searched for better texts and references. I arranged class activities that involved students in applying the ideas that we presented in lectures. However, none of these changes made a real difference. I have since learned why they made little difference: I was making the wrong changes. Instead of trying to improve what I was doing, I should have focused on changing what the students were doing.

I gained this insight through some research that I was doing into ways of teaching students how to learn at university (Fuller, Chalmers & Kirkpatrick, 1994). We investigated how we could teach students learning strategies in the context of their regular units of course work. While doing this, I gradually began to understand why my teaching had not been as effective as I would have liked. For instance, I learned that the units I taught were overloaded with content, and this encouraged students to cover it superficially. I realised that my teaching methods and assessment processes encouraged students to be passive learners who focused on memorising and reproducing material. I became aware that I believed learning to be a process of memorising information in order to be able to apply it, and teaching to be a process of presenting information for students to memorise. These were very low level conceptions, in light of what is now known about conceptions of learning (Marton, DallAlba and Beaty, 1993) and conceptions of teaching (Kember, 1998).

Over the next couple of years, my understanding of learning and teaching grew. I moved away from seeing learning as memorising and applying, and began to see it as a process of getting a deep understanding of the subject matter and being able to see related phenomena from a different perspective. That is, my conception of learning moved to a higher level on the hierarchy identified by Marton, DallAlba and Beaty (1993). I also realised that effective learning is not just about learning the subject matter, but also involves developing an interest in it, being able to communicate it to others, and be willing to continue learning beyond the formal university context. My conception of teaching changed to match my newly acquired conception of learning. I came to realise that effective teaching is more about the learner than the teacher, and more about learning activities than presentation methods.

More specifically, I learned that if my teaching was to result in effective learning, I should

- use a constructivist approach to teaching (Glatthorn, 1993), and get students to actively process the ideas being taught;

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Issue dates: April, July, November

Contributions for the next issue must reach the editor by Friday 5 February, 1999.
They should be sent to Roger at the above address.

Research in Progress reports should be sent to coral.watson@effect.net.au

Advertising rates: Full page $300, half page $150, quarter page $75
Inserts $80

Designed and Printed by CPN Publications Pty Ltd

From the Editor's Desk

It has been very heartening as editor to have had a good supply of articles for the News. In fact this time I have reluctantly had to hold some contributions over until April next year. The titles of these articles together with email contacts of authors have been included elsewhere in the Newsletter in case some people would prefer not to wait until then! Once again I am conscious that there is a lack of coverage of activities from the other side of the Tasman and hope to redress the balance next year.

There are a variety of articles about teaching and learning and once again it is good to welcome overseas authors. I thought the remarkable simulation exercise at the University of the South Pacific deserved to become more widely known and so was pleased that my former colleague, Robert Nicole, responded enthusiastically to my request to write an account of the event. It is great example of what students can achieve when given the opportunity.

The value of the world wide web is again evident in the pages created at the University of Queensland to assist staff implement criterion based assessment. Through these pages others far away can benefit from the work being done there and so the value of the article by Geoff Isaacs is greatly enhanced.

In this issue there are several book reviews but one review had to be held over until next April. We are grateful to publishers who have been sending books for review and so look forward to making this a regular feature.

Finally there is a one page questionnaire designed by the Promotions and Publications Portfolio of the HERDSA Executive Committee. We are keen to get feedback not only about the News but about HERDSA generally so please take time to complete the questions and return the sheet.

I would like to apologise to readers for the late appearance of the last few editions. Each time we have run into some unexpected production difficulties but hope that this November edition will get to you in November.

Roger Landbeck
News Editor

A BRIEF WORD FROM THE PRESIDENT

Recognition of Courses for University Teachers - Update

Members would recall that the Executive was to explore the development of a 'HERDSA Certificate of Recognition' in relation to programmes or courses in higher education teaching and learning. This was noted in the minutes of the 1998 AGM. To further this initiative letters were sent to all vice-chancellors in the region seeking expressions of interest of institutions in the proposal. This letter was also copied to heads of academic development units, or equivalent, where such existed.
From the responses received we will have a better idea of the demand for such certification and the likely institutional support for the idea.

Advance Notice of Elections

Under the Constitution, HERDSA elects its executive committee every alternate year. The next election will occur towards the middle of 1999. While a number of members of the executive will certainly stand for re-election, the Constitution provides for all elected positions to be declared vacant. I have indicated that I will not be available for re-election as President. I would urge all members to consider standing for election to the executive.
The work is challenging and demanding but also rewarding. Please contact me if you wish to discuss any aspect of serving on the executive.

Executive meetings

The Executive Committee of HERDSA will be meeting in Canberra 19–21 November. The main item for discussion will be the Strategic Plan for the Society for the next few years.
The Executive decided to publish the minutes of its meeting on the website http://sunsite.anu.edu.au/education/herdsa/execmin.htm
Copies are also available on request, from the HERDSA Office.

Owen Hicks
HERDSA President

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- encourage students to use cooperative learning processes, which can help them clarify their understanding of the material they are learning, as well as improve their ability to work as part of a team (Slavin, 1991);
- make use of students existing knowledge about the subject, so that they can develop their understanding by relating the new material they are learning to their present knowledge base;
- ensure that students understand the material before I expect them to apply it;
- encourage students to be metacognitive, to reflect on the learning processes they use, and to develop skills in evaluating the quality of their own learning;
- use assessment practices that reward learning of high quality and provide informative feedback to students.

In teaching this understanding, I was strongly influenced by my co-researchers, Denise Chalmers (now at the University of Queensland) and Denise Kirkpatrick (University of Technology, Sydney), who frequently challenged my beliefs about effective learning and teaching. I was also influenced by student approaches to learning theory (eg Biggs, 1993, 1994; Ramsden, 1992), and became aware that well intentioned teachers could have a negative effect on the quality of learning. These ideas led me to identify a paradox of effective teaching: I had to do less teaching in order that my students could do more learning.

How could I do this? How could I teach less so that the students could learn more? An opportunity presented itself when I introduced some new units into our teacher education program, initially at fourth year Bachelor of Education level, and then at first year and Master of Education level. I decided to run these units in a completely different way (different for me), and try to implement some of the ideas that I had been thinking about. After some initial planning, I went into my first class at the beginning of the year and announced very confidently, but with my fingers crossed, "This unit will be different from others that you've taken, because I teach in a different way". My confidence was not misplaced, for the new approach worked well. Students responded enthusiastically and seemed to achieve a good level of understanding. Accordingly, I persevered with this approach, and have developed and refined it over the next few semesters.

How I incorporate these beliefs into my teaching

My teaching context

I teach in the area of Educational Psychology within the School of Education. Much of my teaching is done in three hour long classes with 20 to 40 students. Some classes follow a mass lecture presented to groups containing up to two hundred students. Most of the students are either trainee teachers or experienced teachers who are undertaking further study. Many of the latter are part-time students.

"I came to realise that effective teaching is more abut the learner than the teacher, and more about learning activities than presentation methods."

Teaching and learning activities

In planning teaching and learning activities, I start by asking myself What can I get students to do that will help them understand this material? rather than How can I teach them so that they will achieve the objectives? This reflects the belief that effective teaching focuses on the learner rather than on the teacher, and it results in classes that are quite different from what students often experience. Many students are accustomed to class time being used to present the subject matter, with an expectation that they will work with this information in their own time. However, I structure my classes so that students acquire the subject matter in their own time, and then use class time to work on this information. In order to do this, I specify readings or other information gathering activities that students should do to prepare for the next class. That is not new: most university teachers do this. What is different is that this is how the students acquire most of the subject matter. I do not present it to them in class. Instead, at the end of each class, I assign some work for students to do in preparation for the next class. This usually requires them to read a chapter of the textbook or unit reader and prepare some questions on it. I stress that it is essential for students to do this preparation, and that the first activity in the next class will require them to use it. This is one of the critical points in my approach to teaching. It is by doing this reading that students learn the main ideas of the subject. Further, unless students do the preparation, they cannot do the planned activities in class. But it has not been a problem. Provided that I set a reasonable amount of work, virtually every student comes to class well prepared. They acknowledge that it is sometimes difficult to do the preparation, but most of them are prepared to find the time to do it because they know that the work is important and will be followed up in class.

Each class starts with an activity in which students work in pairs on some aspect of the reading that was assigned for that class. These activities are designed to enrich their understanding of the information they have read about. For instance, they may use the question stems developed by King (1990) to question each other about its meaning and significance, or they may take turns explaining key ideas to each other. These simple activities are surprisingly successful in developing understanding, and the knowledge that students have to work with a partner on the assigned reading ensures that virtually everyone comes to class well prepared.

After this, I get students to work in small groups to use a variety of elaboration and organisational learning strategies (McKeachie, 1987) to clarify key ideas, extend their understanding of the topic, or apply the information in some way. Typical activities include:

- Interpret some ideas in terms of a particular theoretical perspective
- Explain a diagram or table
- Write a paragraph summarising what you learned today
- Identify the most important ideas in this topic, and justify your choice
- Find examples from your own experience to illustrate ...
- Present a summary of a reading
- Rearrange ideas into a matrix or table
- Construct a concept map of the main ideas presented in this unit
- Present 5 guidelines for doing X, and justify them in terms of theory Y.

These are the core activities which occupy most of our class time. In addition, we devote time to work on assessment activities as the need arises. I explain this in the next section.

One of the main differences between these activities and those I formerly used is that they are more explicitly focused on developing understanding of the subject matter. Previously, I just

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assumed that students understood the subject matter and could apply it in a meaningful way. Now we spend class time on developing this understanding before I expect students to be able to apply it.

"I structure my classes so that students acquire the subject matter in their own time, and then use class time to work on this information."

My role is to manage these activities and work with students in their small groups. I find that I do not need to spend much time explaining the subject matter, other than to present a brief overview of a topic or review it after students have completed the class activities. Students who need help with an activity or topic usually get it from a fellow student. This of course contributes to the learning of both of them.

How I assess students and give them feedback

In my faculty it is usual for assessment to involve both assignment work and examinations. Recognising that assessment is one of the most important influences on the way that students approach their learning, I try to arrange these assessment components so that they support students learning. My first step is to minimise the competitive element of assessment. I emphasise that all grading will be done on a criterion referenced basis, so that students will benefit from collaborating with other. This is different from what students are accustomed to, for the school has a long history of norm referenced assessment.

Assignments

I try to make each assignment a significant learning experience that will help students develop their understanding of the subject matter and also improve their learning and information processing skills. For example, the following assignment topic requires first year students to collaborate in searching for information, selecting information that is relevant to the topic, organising ideas in a coherent way, and presenting it to their class group in the form of a poster presentation. By completing this assignment, students improve their capacity to collect and process information, as well as learn the subject matter.

The purpose of this assignment is to encourage you to think about some issues in teaching and learning by exploring a topic on teaching or learning and sharing your findings with others in class. Working in groups of three, identify a question about teaching or learning that you find interesting, read the literature that addresses this question, reflect on it and discuss it. Then produce a poster that provides an answer to the question you have explored. These posters will be used as the basis for class activities on (date), and will be assessed by other students in the class. Detailed advice on preparing posters will be given in class. (From unit outline).

In order to maximise the learning that comes from doing an assignment, I allocate class time to various aspects of assignment preparation, beginning with a full analysis of what the task involves (Chalmers & Fuller, 1996, p. 96). I get students to identify different ways in which the assignment can be arranged, and we discuss the relative merits of each possible approach. I provide time in class for students to work in small groups to discuss their progress with the assignment, to share ideas and to help each other with any difficulties they are having. Explicitly working on the assignment in this way improves the quality of the work that students submit, and helps develop their understanding of the topic.

I find it useful to involve students in determining the standards of work that they should achieve, and in developing a marking key for the assignment. One method I have used is to get students to identify the characteristics of an excellent response and of a bare pass, and then to suggest what marks should be allocated to each important feature of the assignment. I collate this information, and give students a copy before the assignment is due, so that they can refer to it when they are preparing the assignment.

I have found that some students do not make effective use of the feedback that we give them on their assignments. One reason for this is that we do not give them an opportunity to improve an assignment in light of our feedback. To overcome this, I prefer to set only one assignment, and require students to submit it in two parts. The first part is a plan of the whole assignment, and a draft of some specified sections. This allows me to monitor their progress and give them feedback which they can use to improve the quality of the full submission.

Examinations

I use an open book examination format, and make it clear at the beginning of semester that the exam will assess understanding rather than knowledge of the subject matter. Many students are apprehensive about open book examinations, so I devote time in class for them to prepare for the examination (Chalmers & Fuller, 1996, p. 107). I give them a question that was used in a previous semester, and get them to write an answer to it in their own time under open examination conditions. In the next class, I provide them with a copy of some answers that were written to this question when it was previously used, and get them to evaluate these answers. I ask them to focus on the quality of understanding indicated in each answer, rather than the amount of subject matter presented. I also indicate the grade that each answer would receive, so that students have a better understanding of the criteria associated with the various grades. Once this has been done, I get students to work in small groups evaluating the answers they have written and giving each other feedback on the quality of their answer. Of course, while students are working with these examination questions, they also improve their personal understanding of the particular subject matter.

The outcomes of using this approach

How well does this interactive, student centred approach to teaching work? Much better than I initially expected. Students display more interest in the subject and more understanding of it, they cooperate with each other, they help each other learn, they read more widely, they prepare better for class, submit work of better quality, and generally seem to be more effective learners. Here are some typical comments provided in end of semester feedback:

The small group work on what we read before class was very useful in clarifying thoughts and understandings I had formed. This approach not only helped me get a better insight into the content from the readings, but also provided some good feedback with other students.

The way the class was broken down into small group work, activities, explanations and information sharing kept me interested for the whole time.

I liked the high expectations you had of our work and performance.

I liked the way that we the learners

were actively involved in seeking to understand the concepts and their relevance to our teaching and our own learning.

I have changed my approach to learning in this unit, since it encourages me to think and to take risks.

Whereas I often had to drive students to keep them on task, I now find that I have to intervene to stop them working on a class activity. At the end of class, more students stay behind to talk about the subject matter, instead of just rushing off. Students tell me that they apply the learning strategies taught in my unit to their learning in other subjects. These benefits come at a price: students report that they have to work much harder than usual to in order to keep up with the reading, develop an understanding of the subject matter, and meet my expectations. But they also say that this investment of extra time and energy is worthwhile, because they learn more.

However, not all of them find it easy to adjust to this approach to teaching. Some find having to do the reading on a regular basis quite onerous, and would prefer that I lectured the content to them (entertaining lectures, please!). As one of my graduate students remarked: "I'm a part-time student, and I'm tired at the end of the day. I would prefer that you just lectured to us so that I could relax and take notes without having to think."

Some students do not like having a major assignment that they have to write and revise, especially when it carries a high proportion of the unit marks. While they acknowledge that it is good for their learning, most of them are accustomed to writing assignments that they do not have to work on once they have submitted it. I think this reflects a belief that is associated with a surface approach to learning: that learning consists of a set of discrete tasks that have to be completed (Biggs, 1987). It can take a long time to change these beliefs.

Some students would prefer to submit several small assignments instead of one large assignment, so that they could get more feedback about how well they are going. I am constantly surprised at how many students do not trust their own judgments about the quality of their learning: what does this tell us about the extent to which we help students become self-directed learners?

Overall, both my students and I find that this approach to teaching works really well. In the end of semester feedback, students often comment that they wished other units were taught in this way. Why is it so successful? It does not involve any technology or gimmicks, and none of the teaching and learning activities are novel in themselves. I think the answer lies in what Biggs (1996) calls constructive alignment: that the teaching context, objectives, approach to teaching and assessment all require use of cognitive learning activities that are directed at achieving high levels of understanding. I try to ensure that everything done in a particular unit of study is directed at the same goals: that students will develop a good understanding of the subject matter, and also become more effective self-directed learners.

"However, it is not just a matter of rearranging class activities, but requires teachers to understand and accept the beliefs about teaching and learning that underpin it."

Will this approach to teaching work for you?

This approach works well in my teaching context, and I could not imagine going back to teach in the way that I used to. I believe that it will also work in other contexts. After all, it implements what the research tells us about effective teaching and learning in higher education. However, it is not just a matter of rearranging class activities, but requires teachers to understand and accept the beliefs about teaching and learning that underpin it so that they can implement it with confidence, and explain and justify it to their students. That is very important: I am often asked to explain why I teach in this way, and to explain how I know that a particular activity is beneficial to students learning. The approach also requires a high level of cooperation from the students. In particular, they must do the preliminary reading for each class, or else the class activities will not work properly. But that applies to any situation in which we want students to actually engage with a learning task. We delude ourselves if we think we can transmit knowledge and understanding to them: instead, we rely on them to cooperate with us in making a teaching-learning partnership actually work.

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Creating a Centre of Excellence in Flexible Teaching and Learning

Flexible learning has rapidly become a feature of university programmes in Australia. One example of how it is being provided is described here.

In February 1999, the University of Queensland will open a new campus in Ipswich, a major regional centre fifty kilometres west of Brisbane. This is not simply an expansion of a city based university into a regional area, but a deliberate and bold move into more flexible ways of teaching and learning. The new campus is being purpose built for flexible delivery, with hi-tech facilities, state of the art computer rooms for students which accommodate a high ratio of computers to students, and library facilities to support online teaching, learning and research.

The campus is situated on a 25 hectare historical site containing a large number of existing heritage-listed buildings. These buildings are being refurbished to accommodate hi-tech facilities yet retain their heritage qualities. UQ Ipswich has the potential to develop into a unique educational facility: a hi-tech university in a heritage setting. This is in keeping with the City of Ipswich, itself a heritage city, which has enthusiastically embraced new technologies and boasts community and business facilities with global information links. There are expectations that UQ Ipswich will become an important social, cultural and educational resource for the community.

What is particularly relevant about UQ Ipswich is that it is a systematically planned and coordinated approach to flexibility in teaching and learning with facilities provided at the outset to support this approach. Unlike many other institutions, where moves into flexible delivery could be described as more sporadic and random and often the cause of additional stress on academic staff, the UQ initiative is centrally supported and driven. It emerges from thorough policy development matched with appropriate levels of funding. Professor Trevor Grigg, Chair of the UQ Ipswich Campus Planning Group, is aiming for the campus to become a leading centre for University-wide online teaching and research, flexible delivery and open learning.

Commitment to improving learning

Given the hi-tech nature of the campus it would be easy to conclude that the emphasis is all on delivery. This is not the case. One of the outstanding features of this campus development is its commitment to learning. UQ Ipswich aims to be a centre of excellence in flexible teaching and learning. In support of this, an early move has been the establishment of the Learning Resources Development Unit (LRDU), a centrally funded academic support unit. This Unit, a new arm of the existing UQ Teaching and Educational Development Institute (TEDI), is working with academic staff on curriculum and resource development and identification for flexible learning.

There are expectations that UQ Ipswich will become an important social, cultural and educational resource for the community.

The educational developers within the LRDU combine their knowledge of teaching and learning with an understanding of the educational potential of the new technologies. They help academics to design resources and learning experiences that will foster a deep understanding of the subject content, and encourage analytical and communication skills in their students. They are building on lessons learned from the early introduction of technology into teaching and are being driven by the learning agenda rather than by the technology. Decisions regarding delivery modes are being based upon judgements about their appropriateness and usefulness in providing new opportunities for students to learn. Plans for the use of the new technologies are being made judiciously within a learning context, or where, in Shirley Alexander's words, 'they can help students to visualise, to understand, to see complex relationships in ways that are not possible using any other media.'

In addition to curriculum and instructional design, the LRDU also manages the overall development of the learning resources liaising with other sections within TEDI and the University. There are strong links between the well established and award winning Educational Multimedia Services (EMS), another arm of TEDI, which develops multimedia and web-based material for UQ generally and the UQ Ipswich courses in particular. Another service centre of the University produces video and audio material; and the professional production and publication of print-based resources is managed by the LRDU. Editing staff within the LRDU ensure that there is correlation between all of the various media resources for a particular course and that these resources meet quality standards. The project management side of the LRDU ensures that resources are developed on time and to cost.

The provision of these central services means that academic staff are supported at every step in developing and delivering flexible learning materials and teaching approaches. This is another outstanding feature of UQ Ipswich, one which contrasts starkly to the more usual scenario of the lone academic working even longer and later hours learning how to use complex multimedia and web-based software to develop their own flexible learning materials.

While the initial priority of the LRDU will be to developing UQ Ipswich courses, there are plans for it to service the whole University, promoting high quality flexible teaching and learning options across all campuses.

The student-focused philosophy

The philosophy of flexible delivery at UQ Ipswich will go beyond a traditional, narrow, delivery-focussed approach, to one which encompasses an educational philosophy and a set of strategies, a variety of media and new technologies for teaching and learning. The UQ Ipswich environment will be student-centred and learning-focussed. Courses will be designed and developed to increase student access to a wide variety of stimulating learning

resources and delivery media. Students will be able to self pace, to explore content of particular interest in more depth, to access different media and to experience different ways of learning through the new technologies.

The educational approach will emphasise active and collaborative learning rather than the one-way flow of instruction from lecturer to students in the more traditional university teaching environment. The design of the courses will allow students more choice in what and how they study; more flexibility in when and how often they access the range of learning resources; and more interaction with each other, the learning material and their teachers. Throughout all of the learning resources and delivery media, students will be encouraged to take a more active, searching and questioning approach to their learning.

The potential of the WWW to create communities of learners across boundaries will be a significant feature of the courses and every UQ Ipswich subject will have a WWW presence, premised upon learning and interaction rather than just delivery of information. Problem solving and cased-based approaches will be enhanced by a rich array of traditional media and hypermedia and these will be combined with the communication facilities of the new technologies to promote collaboration, communication and ultimately, improved learning. We will use the technologies to allow increased dialogue, where learners can clarify, challenge and build on ideas and concepts, and the see the relationship between them. Laurillard(1995) argues that this is crucial to effective teaching and learning.

However, students will not be left to go it alone. Student self access to learning resources will be combined with small group work, workshops and other forms of face-to-face teaching. Additionally, students will have greater access to teaching staff via email, bulletin boards and WWW discussion groups. All of this will lead to a richer, more purposeful teaching and learning environment which promotes more learner autonomy and self direction yet maintains traditional supports within a planned curriculum framework. We are aiming to enhance not only the quality of the learning experience of our students, but also the quality of the teaching experience for our academic staff.

Innovative new degrees

The use of the new technologies integrated with learning will be a common thread amongst the degree programmes currently being developed for UQ Ipswich. Nine undergraduate degrees and one graduate level entry degree will be on offer at the new campus. These are innovative new degrees which have been designed to emphasise the development of graduates with skills relevant to the workplaces of the next millenium.

The Bachelor of Contemporary Studies deals with the key forces for change in our culture and points the way to dealing with the problems of the future. This course recognises that flexibility and adaptability are the key attributes for the professionals of the future.

students will not be left to 'go it alone'.

The Bachelor of Electronic Commerce will produce graduates with skills in business transactions via information technologies and data communication technologies. Students will learn from building, managing, operating and maintaining electronic commerce application systems.

The Bachelor of Information Environments will produce the designers, architects and implementors of the highly sophisticated, networked, distributed computer based information environments of the future. Students will have exposure to the latest developments in multimedia and access to state of the art multimedia laboratories to become the architects and engineers of cyberspace.

The are a number of Bachelor of Business degrees, specialising in Communication, Leisure Management, Travel Management, Tourism Management and Property Studies, as well as a general Bachelor of Business. All of these degrees will produce professional and capable graduates suited to todays complex business environment. This suite of degrees is designed to advance the skills and knowledge needed to manage and improve business practices in the context of changing 21st century business structures and processes and to take advantage of the global electronic superhighway.

The Bachelor of Social Science is concerned with the changing conditions within the world and changing roles in society. Two majors of this degree are being offered at the Ipswich campus, one concerning economic development and the other, applied communication. The latter provides students with advanced levels of expertise in communication, including competence in the use of information technologies.

The Graduate Bachelor of Education is a post graduate degree which will give students skills in instructional design, communication, assessment of learning and the instructional use of the new technologies. This will advantage graduates in applying for a range of employment in non-traditional fields such as paramedical work, educational software design and training related employment in business and industry.

The University of Queensland Vice-Chancellor, Professor John Hay, sees the opening of the Ipswich campus as a major event in the Universitys history. The innovative courses, the hi-tech facilities, the flexible approach, and, most importantly, the emphasis on learning, will combine to ensure that the Ipswich campus development will further strengthen the University of Queenslands well established reputation for high graduate employment rates and teaching excellence.

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SPICOL: Building a Learning Community Through Simulations

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The Student Pacific Islands Conference of Leaders (SPICOL) is a simulation modeled on the South Pacific Heads of Government Forum Meeting. It began in 1996 at the University of the South Pacific in Suva (Fiji) through the initiative of Dr Ward Mardfin, a visiting Lecturer in Economics, and was such a resounding success that it has now become an annual event. The conference runs for a week and a half and involves students taking on the roles of Heads of Government (Presidents and Prime Ministers), government ministers, senior public servants, experts consultants/activists, journalists, etc.

A central theme is chosen which reflects regional, national and local preoccupations. For instance in 1996 the theme was on the impact of the World Trade Organisation; in 1997 the main topic was tourism; this year the theme was Tuna Fisheries in the Pacific: Regional hope, national sovereignty and community participation.

SPICOL typically begins with briefing sessions for leaders and speakers a few days before the official opening. This orientation is mainly intended to induct students into their roles of representing their countries at the highest regional political meeting. The leaders from each of the 12 countries of Pacific region (which own the University) first get to meet each other. Each delegation will have been appointed through its respective cultural association. The leaders are then briefed on matters of protocol and etiquette, diplomacy, negotiation skills, on how to chair meetings, and as they leave the venue, their respective country files are handed over to them in a brief ceremony. This handing over ceremony launches the simulation. Meanwhile in an adjacent room, another group of students whose role will be to address the Heads of Government during the conference are briefed by staff from the Centre for the Enhancement of Learning and Teaching (CELT) on how to present an effective conference paper.

The opening ceremony is an elaborate affair which involves a traditional ceremony of welcome by the host country (Fiji hosted the first conference, Samoa the second and Tonga the third; next years will be hosted by the Solomon Islands). This is followed by an address by the chief guest (in 1996 the University's Samoan vice-chancellor Esekia Solofa played the role of President of the Republic of Fiji; this year the conference was opened by Mr. Noel Levi CBE, current secretary-general of the Forum Secretariat), the cutting of the SPICOL cake, and a brief introduction of the leaders and their delegations.

We have found that the educational benefits of this simulation are enormous.

The conference really gets going during evening sessions over the next three days when various (student) consultants/experts/lobbyists/activists present papers which are intended to influence the decisions of the leaders during their deliberations. Each presentation is followed by a short discussion.

The leaders then leave the conference centre for their weekend retreat. There they will attempt to digest the meaning of the week's discussion papers and synthesise their significance for collective regional objectives as well as narrower national interests. Much of the negotiations during the retreat will then focus on finding key points of agreement and on a proposed plan of action for inclusion in the official SPICOL Communiqué.

SPICOL is officially closed on the first day of the following week with the reading and signing of the Communiqué, a brief closing ceremony and a press conference.

The debriefing which follows the end of the conference is a feedback session where all participants (including academic advisors) evaluate the organization of the conference, the relevance of the topic chosen, the time frame allowed for SPICOL, the training given prior to beginning of the conference, the retreat, the Communiqué, and how various aspects of the conference could be improved. The participants are divided into teams of three and each member of the team must be from a different country or a different functional part of SPICOL. Together, they discuss the strengths and weaknesses that surfaced throughout the conference and things that they learnt about themselves and about others. Each student is then presented with a certificate of achievement.

Much of the success of the conference rests on the work of the organising committee whose task it is to plan and manage the entire conference. Students who choose to be in this committee need to identify and recruit other students to take on the roles of country leaders (Presidents, Prime Ministers, Government Ministers), senior civil servants (who will research and write position papers for each government delegation), guest speakers (experts and consultants), pressure and lobby groups, activists (eg. women, environmentalists, church leaders, etc.), journalists, etc. In addition, the organising committee is charged with all logistical arrangements, including developing and submitting a budget, finding sponsors to finance the conference, providing publicity, making room bookings, helping with the decorations, arranging for refreshments, preparing a daily conference agenda, finding country flags, printing banners and name tags, liaising with the host country delegation for entertainment and the opening ceremony, inviting a chief guest, arranging for transport, photocopying, etc. The students who choose to become involved in SPICOL through this committee are expected to work very hard under sometimes very trying circumstances. They need good organisational and time-management skills, a high level of dedication and commitment and a positive mental attitude. The size of this committee has been increasing steadily as the conference has become bigger and more ambitious.

We have found that the educational benefits of this simulation are enormous. First, SPICOL is entirely student oriented. Because staff are only involved in an advisory manner and remain on the periphery throughout the exercise, the learning environment tends to be less intimidating and less frightening. Over the last three years, it has become very clear to us that such a safe learning environment gives students the opportunity to express their ideas with more confidence and conviction. This comment was made during this years debriefing session by Johnny Koanapo who acted out the role of Prime Minister of Vanuatu: "I always thought of myself as a shy person. I would never say anything in class. SPICOL made me realise that I can say things publicly in a concise and coherent manner and that I'm quite good at it!"

The conference is a fantastic interdisciplinary melting pot which brings students from all sections of the University together.

Secondly, students rely entirely on each other in the process, content and outcome of the simulation. This helps them realise that they can and should depend on each other as valuable and reliable resources. And because SPICOL participants come from very different backgrounds, a context is created which can help students make connections between a multiplicity of different perspectives. The conference is a fantastic inter-disciplinary melting pot which brings together students from all sections of the University. For instance, a group of biology students previously isolated in the School for Pure and Applied Sciences discovered that they shared common interests in conserving marine ecosystems with students in sociology, economics, politics, tourism studies, geography, management, and even psychology. One of the biology students, Joanna Nakaora from Fiji (she played the role of marine biologist and consultant to the conference) remarked that as a science student, she had found it invaluable to see how all disciplines could link up together. She regretted missing out on the previous two conferences.

The commitment, intensity and seriousness of the intellectual debates which took place during the conference can seldom be achieved in ordinary classroom settings (at least at this university). Yet, academic skills such as critical thinking, presenting coherent arguments, active listening, respecting other opinions, being quick and persuasive in conversational situations, etc. which are normally so difficult to teach, seemed to occur almost naturally in the SPICOL environment. It was particularly comforting to witness students converging together for long intense periods after sessions were officially finished to discuss and plan strategies to move ahead, to compromise or to convince outstanding delegates in efforts to reach a consensus for a proposed multi-lateral agreement. These discussions spilled over in the dining area or in small groups in the hotel bar during the retreat. Special committees with special terms of reference were appointed from among the delegations and would meet late into the night and then report back to the larger conference on the next day with important diplomatic and other procedural breakthroughs.

Time spent together over this period also helps to foster strong inter-cultural exchange and understanding. Students find that they need not necessarily wait for the odd social event or sporting occasion to come together and establish lasting relationships. They need not confine themselves to the usual ethnic, cultural, gender or age parameters which often seem to keep students divided rather than united. SPICOL is providing an alternative medium of association and interaction which is intellectually, socially and culturally stimulating and rewarding. Together the students can develop a sense of a common regional identity while maintaining a healthy sense of national uniqueness. Ana Pahulu from the Kingdom of Tonga commented rather emotionally on the closing night: "when I joined SPICOL last week I only knew about three people. Now, I feel like I know so many people from all parts of the Pacific and that they've become friends for life."

Because simulations are meant to recreate real life situations and problems, this exercise also places students in positions very similar to those they will encounter in the real world when they graduate. For instance, the journalism students who edited the SPICOL daily and aired parts of the proceedings on Radio Pasifik (our student radio station), experienced the exigencies of producing daily news stories (newsroom deadlines, editing and printing emergencies, personality clashes, etc.) while several participants got a taste of what its like to be in the public eye and to be accountable for their words and actions.

It is hoped that the leadership skills that they acquire while 'playing roles' will serve them well for the realities which await them in their countries.

In reality, once they graduate, these students will take up positions of responsibility in their various island states and become influential policy-makers and powerful members of their society. It is hoped that the leadership skills that they acquire while "playing roles" will serve them well for the realities which await them in their countries.

And lastly, on the question of assessment, it must be noted that most students get credit for their participation. But it is a measure of the value of SPICOL that many choose to take part knowing that they will probably not receive any credit for it. As more faculty are drawn to the idea, it is expected that course credit will soon be given to all students who take part in the simulation. Much depends on faculties willingness to include SPICOL as an option in their course outlines and assessment. Several staff are already supporting SPICOL and grant students who organise or present papers to the conference credit for the equivalent of a major assignment. Because of the diversity of SPICOL activities, we cannot confine ourselves to one method of assessment. The criteria for assessing members of the organising committee will obviously differ from that of the researchers, paper presenters, or journalists. Still, because no one is forced to take part in SPICOL, the most important measure of educational worth cannot be reduced to points scored. In the words of Finau Soqo, Fijian member of the organising committee, "I got a lot more out of SPICOL than just marks!"

New Assessment Policies for the University of Queensland Challenges for Staff and for Staff development

Geoff Isaacs describes how the University of Queensland took a bold step of introducing an assessment scheme which strongly linked assessment and learning.

The University of Queensland until recently had a very traditional system of assessing students. Assessment consisted largely of formal invigilated examinations and some assignment work. The grades of students were principally assigned by reference to a recommended distribution of grades. Such a system, often called "grading on the curve", essentially says that a certain percentage of the students taking a subject will get the top grade, another percentage the next grade down, and so on. Students grades are mainly determined by their rank order in the class. Such a grading system is called a norm referenced grading system.

The focus on traditional modes of assessment remains, but grades are no longer norm referenced.

Opponents of norm referenced systems often say that it is not what you know, but whom you can beat, that determines your grade and that this is not appropriate (are you interested in whether the pilot topped the examination in flying, or would you rather know that she can fly the plane?). Proponents say that in the real world only winners get prizes no matter how good you are, if there are enough better than you then you will not be rewarded. Both of these positions are caricatures. In real norm referenced systems grades may be determined on rank order, but the top student will not get the best grade available unless their performance is, in some absolute sense, of high quality. Moreover, in the real world not all rewards are given competitively: for many it is necessary simply to apply and to qualify (the getting of a drivers licence is a good, if simplistic example)

Change at UQ

By the mid 1990s some at the University of Queensland were concerned that the assessment system had outlived its usefulness. Students certainly were being graded and awarded degrees but, increasingly, assessment was becoming an activity separated and often divorced from teaching and learning. Ever increasing enrolments and the gradual extinction of subjects with low enrolments were exacerbating the problem.

The focus on 'traditional' modes of assessment remains, but grades are no longer norm referenced...

In 1995 the Academic Board of the University of Queensland set up a Task Force on Assessment Policies and Practices to review the Universitys policies and procedures and to recommend any necessary changes. The Task Force was drawn largely from the Board's Examinations, Education, and Teaching and Learning Committees.

Key Recommendations

The Task Force came up with a large number of recommendations, but key among them were the following:

1.1 That the primary focus of assessment be to encourage, direct and reinforce learning.

1.2 That assessment should continue to indicate achievement, maintain standards and provide certification.

1.3 That in making judgements about the assessment approach to adopt (including method, marking and feedback), emphasis should be placed on encouraging high quality learning.

4.1 That the quantity of assessment which contributes toward a final result be the minimum amount necessary to ensure a valid result.

The recommendations so far amount to assess less, but assess to encourage better learning.

6.1 That marks and grades be awarded by reference to predetermined standards rather than by reference to the performance of other students in the subject.

6.2 That each piece of assessment be accompanied by clear assessment criteria which are effectively communicated to students and markers.

6.3 That the current recommended distribution of grades be replaced by a grading system developed according to quality assurance mechanisms established at the departmental and faculty levels.

7.3 That the University's existing policy relating to the compulsory provision (at the beginning of each semester) of a written statement on the purposes or goals of the subject and the nature of assessment, be affirmed.

7.9 That subject coordinators consider carefully the way in which marks or grades are aggregated within a subject, with a view to ensuring that the validity of the final grade is not inadvertently compromised.

These next recommendations require the adoption of an assessment system where grades are linked to the extent to which students have achieved the clearly specified goals of a subject or a course. This method of grading and assessing often is called criterion referenced assessment.

Criterion referenced assessment does not seem to be the most general practice at Australian universities. Indeed, looking at their regulations on their Web sites it seems that many Australian universities have no grading policies at all (but this may reflect deficiencies in the Web sites rather than lacunae in policy!). However, both Queensland University of Technology and Griffith University do have criterion referenced systems, and Sydney University is in the process of implementing such a system.

Staff development and support

To some staff who are accustomed to grading in a norm referenced way criterion referenced assessment seems strange and unnatural. Criterion referencing, as adopted at UQ, requires that things be made explicit and public which, under the old system could be kept private or implicit. Thus subjects now must have explicitly stated goals (as they did under the old system but this was rarely enforced), assessment must be linked to these goals, each piece of assessment must be accompanied by a statement of the criteria (dimensions) against which it will be assessed, and the derivation of grades from the results of individual assessments must be done in an overt, rational and defensible way. The Teaching and Educational Development Institute was charged with developing materials to assist and support staff in implementing these policies.

Criterion referencing, as adopted at UQ, requires that things be made explicit and public which, under the old system could be kept private or implicit.

Modules and workshop

Initially we developed a set of self instructional print based modules, supported by a workshop program. However, it was decided that the modules needed to be replaced by something more easily modified and which was more of an aid to implementation of the policy and less overtly a teaching vehicle. Thus, when in the third quarter of 1997 the print run of the modules was exhausted, they were allowed to remain out of print.

Web site and workshops

We still offer a program of workshops for staff on various aspects of assessment (not just criterion referenced assessment, of course theres a lot more than that to be learned in order to assess fairly and effectively). However, the new vehicle for helping staff is a site on the World Wide Web.

The site, called About Assessment (http://www.tedi.uq.edu.au/Assess/assessment/), is quite extensive and is at present aimed principally at helping staff implement criterion referenced assessment while assessing in a way which enhances and promotes effective learning by students. We have built the site around completing two documents: a subject profile and an assessment portfolio there is a template to download for each of these documents. Much of the site contains information that will help staff to complete these documents. However the information on the site is useful and useable even if you are not working with the downloaded templates. The site also contains a bulletin board where people can ask questions, respond to questions or make comments, links to relevant documents (including University policy documents), and examples which may be downloaded.

But will it work?

The Web site is still relatively new (it went live in the middle of this year and was first widely publicised early in October), so we do not yet know either how extensively it will be used (hit counters have recently been installed to get some idea). Some colleagues in other units have told us that they have found it very difficult to get staff to use the Web for their own staff development. On the other hand, we have had tentative feelers from universities both in Australia and overseas regarding their possible use of material on the site (the site is, of course, public anyone with Web access can visit it). Moreover, the use of electronic communication (especially electronic mail) within the University of Queensland seems to have risen exponentially in the last year or so. It has now reached the stage that some important official communications are disseminated only by email, with a note to see that our email-challenged colleagues are supplied with a copy. It seems that access to the Web is also likely to be very widespread, increasingly widespread, and increasingly natural or normal. Staff development via the Web may now be viable.

Staff development via the Web may now be viable...

We would be most interested in any feedback on the site or any aspect of its contents. Please send this feedback to Geoff Isaacs (g.isaacs@mailbox.uq.edu.au).

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Research in Progress

Bachelor of Pharmacy Students: communication skills, progression rates and selection criteria

The aims of this work were to identify students entering the BPharm course at the University of Sydney with deficiencies in written communication skills, to follow the progression of all students through the degree, and to examine other possible selection criteria which address communication skills. Inadequate written communication skills in first year students starting from 1992-1995 were revealed by the use of the MASUS (Measuring Academic Skills of University Students) diagnostic instrument, developed by the University's Learning Assistance Centre. An analysis of progression rates indicated that the failure of students to graduate in the minimum time of 3 years was better predicted by the MASUS results than by the TER. Using the 1997 intake cohort admitted to the course by TER or tertiary rank alone, the communication skills of students were assessed by the MASUS and an interview. All students also wrote the STAT (Special Tertiary Admission Test multiple choice test, designed by the Australian Council for Educational Research). The inter-relationships between the interview, MASUS and STAT scores, and year 1 performance were assessed. The results of the STAT were predictors of interview and MASUS scores, and correlated with both first year WAM and subject scores. This work is continuing. Both the performance of previous graduates at their professional registration assessment, and the progression and performance of undergraduates selected using additional admission criteria are being investigated.

Key Words

Communication skills; progression rates; selection criteria.

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Beginning university: The need to rethink

The article draws attention to the need to assist students in the process of beginning university studies. This may require academic staff to adopt new approaches and new roles. However the development of lifelong learning resulting from the assistance given to students in their first year of study should be worth the effort.

It has been common for the transition to university to be viewed as a temporary aberration associated with students beginning their tertiary career and referring to an initial period during which they may be confused, disorientated, and struggling to adjust to the process of beginning university study. It can be argued that such a view has considerable limitations. Transition, particularly to the status of becoming a self-regulated, independent life-long learner, should be considered as a developmental process involving an extended period of time possibly beyond an initial degree.

Students beginning university study are likely to experience a wide range of problems. These include confusion about self and institutional organisation, the need for greater autonomy, and the emergent tension between their expectations and the university's (Blunden, 1996; Trindle, 1996). As they try to desperately adjust, many are reluctant to make the effort to check, clarify or reduce the gaps in their knowledge and understanding.

Students beginning university study are likely to experience a wide range of problems.

From the university's point of view, there is a perceived need to provide some means of assisting students during this transition and keeping them enrolled so that they will not withdraw before census funding dates. Thus one view is that both parties are involved in a survival process, one to adjust to a new and possibly different learning environment, the other to retain a source of funding.

For the recent school-leaver, university clearly involves changes in behaviour and forms of support requiring levels of independence and self-regulation beyond that generally associated with high school. Students who may feel underprepared academically for university may feel further threatened as the academic demands become clearer. Here, student self-perceptions, particularly their self-efficacy, are thought to significantly affect their expectations of success and ability to cope.

Prior to entering university, students, particularly recent school-leavers, will have a history of learning which may involve a significant degree of external environmental guidance and support particularly from parents and teachers (Glasser, 1996:305). This guidance and support is likely to include external controls, external motivation, other- directed goal setting, set activities and precise expectations.

These external influences, together with each students internalised view of their own competence, will be evident in a range of academic behaviours, learning strategies and goal orientations. Some are likely to be aware of the overt and covert differences between their previous learning environment and university and acknowledging that difference may warrant changes in their learning behaviour. Others who may not, are more likely to be at risk and therefore needing particular assistance if they are to be successful in their university studies.

Considering transition as the beginning of a life-long process offers a different interpretation of the notion. Rather than being seen as a temporary state, it is conceptualised as a developmental process in which students not only are exposed to a higher level of learning, but also learn appropriate academic learning skills and processes. Such skills and processes will help them throughout their working and learning life. In this sense, the successful completion of a first degree should not be seen as an end in itself but an interim step in a pathway of professional development (Boud, 1988).

For this development to eventuate, particular skills and learning behaviour may need to be taught throughout the period of the students university enrolment. It is necessary for students to develop thinking and behaviours that will not only enable them to complete the degree but encourage and enhance the continuing process. Problems during the initial semesters of study may indicate that students are not ready for the style of learning expected.

Readiness for university and a role as independent lifelong learners involves more than the possession of a body of knowledge and particular academic skills as certified by success at secondary school.

Readiness for university and a role as independent lifelong learners involves more than the possession of a body of knowledge and particular academic skills as certified by success at secondary school. Students also need to be highly motivated in the face of competing demands and be willing to develop as learners. The changing student population with lower entry standards includes some students who may not enter with the desired motivation,

necessary skills and habits, or a belief in the efficacy of these behaviours.

Historically, part of the difficulty has been that universities, particularly through their teaching processes, have at times, demonstrated false expectations and assumptions about their commencing students. While claims of falling standards and weaker students abound, the expectation that all students commence their university studies with adequate cognitive preparation is somewhat limited. Rather, for a positive transition and subsequent effective learning, there is a need to identify what skills students have or have not and build from there. At the risk of being simplistic in view of what is known about the adult learner is another aspect of the debate, the identification of symptoms of poor adjustment. Often students are treated as adult learners when in reality, not all have yet adopted adult learning styles.

Facilitating this development in students as part of their progressive transition to independent, self-directed learners may require academic staff to adopt new approaches and new roles.

There is a risk in establishing the need for students to become the ideal learner too early in their development. Falling short has significant self-referent consequences. The acceptance of increased personal responsibility for learning behaviours and outcomes inherent in this self-regulatory process means that students cannot really attribute their failures to others or external influences. Learners self-referent thoughts are evaluative and can be judgemental and threatening. The associated feelings of unreadiness and insufficient competence (low self-efficacy) underpin dropout and inadequate attempts at self-regulating in learning and assessment tasks. If academic staff are expecting learners to become self-regulated then it seems incumbent on them to provide for this development.

Promoting the development of self-regulation in students suggests that academic staff may need to adopt new approaches and embed tasks in their units that require and teach for self-regulation. But in doing so they need to consider the progressive development of the thinking and behaviours that compose self-regulation and remain aware of the self-referent cognitive cycle and the possible effect of feedback students receive about their learning and themselves as learners.

Facilitating this development in students as part of their progressive transition to independent, self-directed learners may require academic staff to adopt new approaches and new roles. For learners and lecturers to make such changes, both must expect the changes will produce valued outcomes (ie efficacy of behaviour). Both parties must value the expected outcomes of the behaviour change and subsequently value the behaviour itself. Both operate under value-expectancy cognitions (Bandura, 1982, 1986) so the adoption of new behaviours is problematic. Such a change raises a number of issues for teaching staff within universities.

It also seems important to challenge the prevailing view of the efficacy of instructional education with its acceptance of the passivity of learners and the emphasis on content knowledge if the learning process is to be enhanced. For this reason alone, it appears essential to promote a learning paradigm in which learning-to-learn and frameworks for thinking, that is, metacognition, are valued processes and outcomes.

Such a position of course means that the learning process may initially have to pre-empt the content coverage and there is little doubt for some academic staff, such a view would be totally rejected. However, unless learning difficulties are diagnosed early and addressed, students will continue to struggle throughout their university career with an increased likelihood of eventually withdrawing or failing, two actions that cost the community. It should not be argued that the university is maintaining its academic standards because such students are not succeeding. In order to deliberately change students learning styles, academic staff should and can, through the learning experiences they provide, encourage independent learning approaches in their students. Such action really begins the development of lifelong learning.

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by Allan Doring, Bob Bingham and Ann Bramwell-Vial

Located at McAuley Campus, Australian Catholic University, the three authors share a research interest in lifelong learning and student transition. Allan Doring is Associate Professor, School of Education, Bob Bingham is Lecturer in Education, School of Education and Ann Bramwell-Vial is Senior Lecturer in Social Sciences, School of Arts and Sciences.

Do students suffer when teachers learn?

Roger Lindsay and Alan Jenkins

Roger Lindsay and Alan Jenkins from Oxford Brookes University visit the old question of whether research affects teaching and find some new insights.

"I think on the whole, its brilliant, because they're obviously showing some interest. They're still keeping up-to-date and pursuing the matter, instead of stagnating and "I'm now teaching and I'm going to run this lecture every year, at the same date at the same speed, from the same script". It keeps it alive and up-to-date." (3rd year student)

Traditional views of lecturing and research

The core mission of western universities has traditionally been seen as the creation, analysis, and dissemination of knowledge. It has been thought that the people best able to explain and justify knowledge are those centrally involved in its discovery and that the people best placed to criticise mistaken orthodoxy are those who have investigated its weaknesses, and are most skilled in detecting and rectifying error. These beliefs have formed part of a shared consensus that post-school education should not only involve learning what is generally accepted in a discipline, but should also take the form of an apprenticeship in the craft of knowledge creation. This consensus in turn has led to the view that those best equipped to teach undergraduates are those who are most able as researchers. The result is that research expertise is commonly treated in universities as a key criterion for employing and rewarding lecturers.

Universities, have begun to re-examine whether it is necessary for good university teachers to be first and foremost good researchers.

Traditional views under fire

Technological and social change during the 20th century has undermined this cluster of views about the relationship of universities to knowledge. As the participation-rate in HE has accelerated, university funding has become a critical issue. Costs could be reduced if full-time teachers in HE didn't have to be trained and equipped as researchers as well. Universities have begun to re-examine whether it is necessary for good university teachers to be first and foremost good researchers. The most persuasive evidence has come from correlation studies which examine the relationship between research productivity (e.g. publications per year), and student ratings of teaching quality. Though there are occasional exceptions, in general correlations are negative: the more active academics are in research, the poorer students tend to rate them as teachers. This finding has been reported from studies in many countries including the UK, the US, Australia, and Canada. For example Ramsden and Moses (1992, 273) in an empirical study in Australia concluded that "there is no evidence in these results to indicate the existence of a simple functional association between high research output and the effectiveness of undergraduate teaching ". It is now often claimed that traditional views are wrong. Far from being essential for good teaching, research activity may be damaging to it or is not necessary .

Trouble with correlation

Our own research (Jenkins, Blackman , Lindsay and Paton-Saltzberg, 1998) arose from practical questions about research policy in a Department of Social Sciences in the UK. Should all lecturers be encouraged to do research? Should research be relevant to teaching? When we looked to the recent literature for guidance, we found that the correlation studies suffered from a fatal flaw in design. Because they used research productivity as the measure of research quality, time spent in research activity was also being unintentionally measured. Perhaps highly productive researchers are seen as poorer teachers just because they have less time to be available to students. As none of the correlation studies had actually asked students why they didn't like being taught by active researchers, we set out to do it. Eight focus group of 4-6 students, each drawn from a different discipline (38 students in total) were asked what they thought about the relationship between academic research and university teaching. Half of the participants were first year and half were third graduating year, and there were controlled differences in the UK external (Research Assessment Exercise) rated quality of the disciplines included. Our methodology and findings parallel Ruth Neumann's (1994) research where she interviewed in a large Australian research university some 28 students to uncover their views on teacher involvement in research.

As none of the correlation studies had actually asked students why they didn't like being taught by active researchers, we set out to do it.

Student views on teaching

"They have to be able to keep you interested and make you understand what they're actually teaching. ... So many lecturers are so clever, and they know everything, but they don't know how to teach it. You know, they don't know how to make you interested in the topic. ... The way they communicate with students is really important" (3rd year student).

It is pretty clear that the traditional view needs updating. Students believe that lecturers are paid to teach and that there is a set of core teacher characteristics on which lecturers should at least, perform adequately. These core characteristics are

- **communication skills**
- **approachability**
- **availability outside class**
- **ability to enthuse students**
- **up-to-date knowledge**

The first 3 characteristics will not develop automatically from research training, and time spent in research will certainly reduce availability outside class. Can this explain the negative correlations?

Complaints about research

The reduced availability of lecturers as a result of research involvement was a definite source of distress to students. This was made worse by lack of information, so much so that the researchers came to describe student views of lecturer research as the **alien abduction** theory:

The reduced availability of lecturers as a result of research involvement was a definite source of distress to students.

"I think it makes quite a good relationship between the lecturers and students as well, if you know what their work involves, rather than them just going off and getting, doing something, and you don't know what it is, and then coming back and they've been away a few months..." (3rd year student)

"We just don't know what they're up to really ... It's not something were actually told ... its only from things that they've almost let slip in lectures" (1st year student).

Another source of annoyance was the "otherwise engaged" notice:

"There are about three lecturers that have got it on their doors: "Do not disturb. I am doing research on Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday. Do not come in" ... If you are a university lecturer you've just got to realise that you're there to work with students" (3rd year student)

As well as feeling in the dark about staff research, students knew nothing about academic contracts of employment and conditions of service. Research involvement was often seen as a private vice rather than an employer requirement. Several students believed that lecturers earned extra money from research activity. Academic researchers were seen as doing their *own* work.

"If we knew a little more about what they had to do we might be a bit more gracious and let them get on with it" (1st year student)

On the other hand

Complaints about availability were far from being the whole story. Students aren't just rejecting the importance of staff research. They want information: when staff are going to be away, what do they intended to do?, and then when they return, what they have done. Students are aware that publication lag often means that research done when they are in Year 1, will not appear in print until after they have graduated. They also think that staff who do research benefit as teachers:

"They're university lecturers they're not just teachers at school....they'd get very stale teaching the same things all the time" (1st year student).

"The younger ones like, who may not have got the practical experience, but have come through the research department, they always seem to be far more enthusiastic, more on our wavelength" (3rd year student).

"I would rather be taught by a lecturer who has done research than one who hasn't" (1st year student).

"... without people doing research, I mean it's almost dead in a way" (3rd year student).

"They'd want to keep learning, I think that the whole point of ... well, one of the points of being a university lecturer, so that you can carry on doing what you love whilst trying to teach it to someone else" (1st year student).

The findings from our study are that all groups made about twice as many positive statements about lecturer research as negative statements. The higher the external (RAE) research rating of a department, the more negative statements students made about teaching and research, but the number of positive statements also increased in proportion. Most students believe that research has some negative effects upon their learning, particularly in terms of lecturer availability. They are also aware of positive benefits related to the enthusiasm of lecturers, the currency of their knowledge, their ability to illustrate from personal experience, and their credibility. In departments where more research occurs, students complain more about the negative effects of research, but they also show greater appreciation of the benefits. A follow-up questionnaire survey of one hundred students carried out by our research student Rosanna Breen, (Breen and Lindsay in press), suggests that student motivation is an important variable in understanding attitudes to research. Students who have negative attitudes to research are those who come to university to make social contacts or gain a useful qualification Students who claim to be interested in learning for its own sake also express positive attitudes towards academic research and communication with lecturers outside class. A rational policy must move beyond the idea of competition between lecturing and research and seek to maximise the benefits which students enjoy as a result of lecturer research, while minimising the disbenefits.

In departments where more research occurs, students complain more about the negative effects of research, but they also show greater appreciation of the benefits.

What is to be done?

Our data suggests that we can retain the positive impact of research on teaching but reduce negative effects in the following ways.

- Ensure that threshold levels of core teaching competencies exist through selection and appointment procedure.
- Organise annual timetables so that lecturers don't have to try to do both research and teaching 100% of the time?
- Publish reliable information about lecturer availability.
- Inform students about the duties and obligations of lecturers.
- Make sure that students know how they, and the university, benefit from research.
- Tell students who is planning to do what research, when, and why.
- Create opportunities for students to be regularly updated on the outcomes of staff research.
- Encourage relevant links between research and teaching.
- Build such links into staff development programmes to improve teaching.

The research we have summarised is still in its early stages, and funding agencies permitting, we need to

extend it and to check its generalisability across institutions. Perhaps others would wish to test it in different national systems for these issues may be shaped by culture and different funding and reward systems. However focus group evidence concerning student attitudes to research already suffices to show that the claim, based on correlation evidence, that the dominant student attitude is one of hostility, is greatly exaggerated. It seems that the superficial appearance of conflict between research and teaching is superimposed upon an underlying relationship which is actually positive. The source of the conflict seems to lie in the fact that while both activities compete for time, universities do not regulate or monitor time spent in research but rest content with prescribing teaching duties and simultaneously exhorting lecturers to maximise research output. Failure to protect students from too much of a good thing at university level has in the UK recently been exacerbated by the structural separation of external reviews of teaching and research agencies at national level which faithfully replicates the same flawed control structure.

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Ideas Dossier

The Assets of Academia - Thoughts Regarding our Intellectual and Moral Value-Capital

Eidos continues to stimulate us with thought provoking topics, this time we are faced with values in higher education, which is appropriate as we look forward to the annual conference in Melbourne in 1999.

After choosing an education conference in the Northern Hemisphere instead of HERDSA 98 I was keen to see what I missed at Auckland, and invested in the highly recommendable CD Rom containing all of HERDSA 98's presentations (in hypertext files - a great leap forward). I'm struck by intriguing commonalities in the Keynote messages of the two events. It is highly unlikely to be a mere coincidence.

Something is afoot, I'd say. Perhaps a tentative, cautiously quiet, but unmistakably articulated move to return to values - to redefining and reappropriating the unique capital assets of academia. To clinch the deal and prove I've not been daydreaming, the forthcoming HERDSA 99 in Melbourne is themed "What do we value in Higher Education?" What more need be said?

Well, plenty more. It's one thing, and a good one, to rediscover the values underlying our enterprise. Its another thing to do it intelligently and productively. I'd like to do a bit of serious thinking about how to develop a post-modern discourse about the most un-post-modern things of all: *values* as comprising academia's most significant capital assets.

One way of making next year's conference noteworthy might be to start planning NOW to offer papers and workshops about values. Here's a kick-start, if you haven't begun already.

A problem with values-talk, and how to get around it

One HERDSA 98 Keynote speaker, John Hinchcliff, tells us how to make values-talk more substantial than motherhood, warm feelings and nobly unattainable ideals. Distinguish, he says, between *modal values* (the sort we WON'T talk about) and *purposive values* (the sort we MUST talk about). Modal values, like honesty, integrity, loyalty, respect, express fine moral sentiments but unless they are directed towards *specific objects* that are themselves of value, they are relatively useless.

Hitler, as Hinchcliff points out, was honest, loyal and respectful to things he believed in, and showed integrity in pursuing his own cause. We need to ask *to what* he was honest and loyal, to *which values* he showed respect, and *what goals* his ethics were integrated around. Then, and only then, can we see why he and his projects are so unspeakably abhorrent.

Hinchcliff mentions some *purposive values* he personally holds, falling under the modal value respect. These are: respect for: people; Nature; 'the whole'; personal involvement; and community. We may disagree with his choice –that is not the point. He demonstrates how values can be purposively demonstrated by adding to the model term 'respect' a range of other 'purposive' terms that indicate clearly what kinds of things it is that we hold worthy of respect. Now thats the kind of value-talk we need to work at in preparation for HERDSA 99!

Don't limit the task to respect, of course. You can do the same thing by taking honesty as your modal term, and unpacking it to articulate things you believe honesty HAS to apply to in the academic life. And so with loyalty. This leads, anyhow, to my 'Resolution #1' for writing about values for HERDSA 99. Which is

Resolution #1: Distinguish between modal and purposive values, and make your talk focus on explicitly articulated, clearly organised, purposive values.

Otherwise your audiences will close down their minds and your efforts will be wasted, because we'll having nothing to argue with you about unless your values-talk is of the purposive kind. Read Hinchcliff's full text on the CD Rom for more about this - pages 6 to 8.

The post-modern 'dis-position' on values

Most readers will be impatiently asking when I am going to get to the real point about values today, the fact that the post-modern condition involving the death of meta-narratives and knowledge traditions, and the deeply suspect nature of all epistemic certainty and 'totality' claims, renders values-talk - if not totally

meaningless - at most a pursuit merely for those with a penchant for nostalgia. This is the stuff of yester-year; get real, live in the present, and forget values!. Or so they tell us.

It may have been more difficult to handle that charge a year or two back, but for those who bother to read, that post-modern put-down of values (which I have caricatured, but only slightly) is now passè. What some authors are now calling the dis-position of the personal, the re-orientation we adopt in relation to how we will intersubjectively engage with our post-modern world at the everyday level of experiencing, thinking and acting, evidently has a very clear place for values (even if they are not called that). We have passed beyond crude post-modernism as the denial of everything, and into a space when we can seriously discuss what things those inhabiting that condition *do* believe in.

Philip Higgs (in *Studies in Philosophy and Education* 17,1) cites Nicholas Burbules's recent (1995) work as source of the following, which I abridge and interpret. The postmodern dis-position, Higgs argues, is marked by moments which are manifestations of something fundamental about us as individuals. That is, things I would say fall into the realm of personally-held values. Burbules identifies four fundamentals characterising post-modern humankind. I'll take them in turn.

1. A *sense of plurality* is shown by people who have been exposed to a wide range of perspectives and have learned to engage with them in a way that considers seriously the merits of each; a capacity to regard alternative positions without a 'rush to judgement.' It is not an intellectual skill, but a disposition demonstrating a cultivated capacity for restraint in which we recognise our own prejudices, acknowledge the limits of our own capacity to appreciate others' viewpoints fully, but also caring enough about others to seriously try to understand and comprehend what they are saying.

It is not a position that holds no view but one that distances oneself from the attitude that there has to be (or even can be) one best way of all. It places the fact of difference, even irreconcilable difference, as a condition of the social world. It warns us against ethnocentric presumptuousness and invites a thoughtful and sensitive engagement across differences. It asks that we be aware of, and reflect on, positions we ourselves hold, and what their consequences might be for other people. (Higgs, pp 7,8)

2. A *sense of fallibilism* recognises that we must commit ourselves, and that commitment is risky, always involving the possibility of error. Hiding behind obscurantism, withholding commitment and playing it safe by conformity to the conventional and obvious are all ways of avoiding mistakes and ultimately of avoiding learning and change. This value involves cultivating the capacity to recognise that one is wrong and to admit it to oneself and others, to hear and respond to the criticism of others, and to reflect on not only that we make mistakes but why we make them and how we can change to avoid some of those mistakes in the future.

Such a capacity to change needs support from a social environment in which the process is regarded with favour and not disdain. It also implies a view of learning, that we learn not only by accumulating novel information but by actively reconstructing our frameworks of understanding, through encountering radically different points of view from our own. (Higgs, p.8)

3. A *pragmatic sense* involves a belief in the importance of practical problems in driving the process of intellectual, moral and political development. It is tolerant of uncertainty, imperfection, and incompleteness, yet recognises the need for persistence in confronting such difficulties with intelligence, care and flexibility.

The point is that (following Popper) we proceed, not towards truth, but away from error. It is much easier to know when we are wrong than when we are right. We must learn to deeply distrust obtaining sought-after results. The modes of inquiry we will prefer, such as 'conversational ones,' are chosen not because they tend towards convergence or agreement or consensus, but because they have been shown to be ways of avoiding the most egregious kinds of mistakes. Failure and frustration are inevitable concomitants of human growth. (Higgs, pp. 8,9)

4. A *sense of judiciousness* involves a capacity for prudence and moderation, *even in the exercise of reason itself.* We know when to try to work out things in a rational way, and when not to, within the process of deciding what to believe and what to do. Not every situation demands or benefits from the application of logical analysis, the rules of evidence, or the critique of fallacies. We will respect them for when they are applicable, and disdain them when they are not.

In acknowledging that we are not always reasonable, we also accept this in those around us, and ask them to accept it in us. We are willing to embrace imperfection and incompleteness. There is often more than one thing to believe, to say, or to do. We judiciously cultivate discernment about when and where to follow the dictates of argument, and we cultivate a range of interlocutory styles, including questions, allusions, unsubstantiated suggestions, metaphors, gestures, tonal utterances, touches and plural modes of communication and conversation. (Higgs, pp. 9-10)

All this leads (at last I hear you say) to my 'Resolution #2' for writing about values for HERDSA 99. Which is (sound of trumpets please)...

Resolution #2: Dont believe that living in the nineties means that the days of values are past. Explore novel, ingenious and daring approaches to describing the values we live by, and those we need to cultivate and honour for the Academia we intend to inherit in the next millennium.

Forthcoming articles

The April 1999 issue will feature the following articles:

- Using the Curriculum to Improve Participation of Indigenous Students in Legal Education by Tina Cockburn from QUT (t.cockburn@qut.edu.au)
- Space for Learning by Alex and Peter Radloff from Curtin University. A look at how we can use classrooms for learning (radloffa@cea.curtin.edu.au)
- Kym Fraser will write about her experiences as visiting scholar in Hong Kong
- Bob Ross will review the book Academics Responding to Change. New Higher Education Frameworks and Academic Cultures by Paul R Trowler Open University Press/SRHE 1998
- We hope to have contributions about work in New Zealand

Report of a Herdsa Postgraduate Scholarship Holder

John Burke

Each year HERDSA provides scholarships to enable a small number of postgraduate students engaged in research in higher education to attend the annual conference. We asked one of them, John Burke from the Northern Territory University in Darwin to write a short account of his experiences.

Owing to the late acceptance of my application to present a paper in Auckland, there was insufficient time within the conference for the actual presentation. I had intended to workshop a session which would have been of considerable interest to indigenous people or those working with higher education indigenous students. The workshop concept revolved around my own personal experience of what success means in terms of personal happiness and fulfilment when seen in the context of identity construction and identity acceptance. There are intersections with other indicators of self-acceptance for example sexuality; gender; age and others.

The workshop was not intended to be grounded in any particular theoretical framework but rather was of a personal nature, being one indigenous man's account of the struggle to make meaning of epistemological and ontological systems outside of his cultural world. Despite having many markers of success within the academic and the publishing world, I was unable to find any meaningful evidence of the real transformational potential of tertiary education until certain issues were faced. These were issues of personal and group identity.

It is my firm conviction that attempts by indigenous people to benefit from western education are fruitless unless there is recognition that wisdom does not occur in the context of 'knowledge' input but of bringing one's whole self to the world of books and classroom. If that self or part of it has to be left at the door, it is my experience that despite success (very rare statistically over the indigenous population in Australia) success is hollow and unrewarding. It is my conviction that the optimum result of education is personal happiness and serenity. Education is a necessary but not sufficient factor in achieving these goals. Valuing by the teacher that students have different ontologies and epistemologies even if only dimly understood, is the beginning of being a true educator. It needs to be made explicit that the dominant culture's denial of the self-hood of indigenes' is a social construct grounded in hidden agendas, often political and/or economic. Failure to realise this is counter-productive to the true meaning of any educational endeavour.

John Burke is an Aboriginal person originally from Wiradjuri country in NSW. He is a full time PhD student at the Northern Territory University on leave from his position as Associate Dean in the Faculty of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies at NTU. He is researching the recuperation, maintenance and construction of identity within what used to be the Aboriginal Task Force at the old Darwin Community College. This study is being contextualised in a history of the ATFs formation and programs from 1980 - 1989 when the ATF became a Centre and which has now evolved into a faculty within the NTU.

Email contact:
jburke@banda.ntu.edu.au

Staff induction packs

The HERDSA Office has produced packs to provide information about the society to academic staff who could become members. They are useful to have available at new staff induction programmes. The office has a good supply so why not stock up now ready for the new academic year. Contact Heather Koch by phone (02 6253 4242) or by email (herdsa.office@effect.net.au)

The packs contain

- A general information brochure
- A list of HERDSA publications
- Valuing Teaching checklist
- Challenging Conceptions of Teaching; some prompts for good practice
- A list of branch contacts and SIG information
- A copy of HERDSA News

HERDSA Life Members

Rod McKay became the ninth person to be given a life membership of the society at the Auckland conference. In case you are wondering who the other eight are, we are publishing a list of names below. In the next edition we will provide a few details about what they are doing now together with notes about the positions they held.

Don Anderson
Ilma Brewer
Ian Dunn
Peter Karmel
Alan Lonsdale
John Powell
Alan Prosser
Ernest Roe

Members are invited to suggest the names of those they consider worthy to be given life membership of HERDSA.

Please submit suggestions to Coral Watson in the HERDSA office.

Book Reviews

Guides on Postgraduate Supervison, Teaching and Management

The Society for Research in Higher Education and the Times Higher Educational Supplement are co-publishing a series of guides on the supervision of postgraduate students. The idea for the guides was developed by the SRHE Postgraduate Network. Pat Cryer, who is the convenor of the network, is the editor of the series. HERDSA members offer the following reviews of the first three publications of this series.

SUPERVISING INTERNATIONAL RESEARCH STUDENTS

Eunice Okorocha. London: Society for Research into Higher Education and the Times Higher Education Supplement. £6.

Reviewed by Glenda Crosling, Language and Learning Services, Monash University.

This guide by Eunice Okorocha on supervising international postgraduate students should be of immediate interest to many supervisors. Most often, supervisors appreciate their international students' intellectual and academic abilities, but these can be shrouded by misunderstandings which are based on cultural and educational differences. As a result, supervisors may attribute problems in the supervision process to the more readily identified non-standard spoken and written English of international students. Although language difficulties may contribute, other issues could be at play. It is at this point that the Okorochas guide is of most assistance.

Supervising International Postgraduate Students is a well-presented and well-structured guide of 17 pages in all, which is easy to access and easy to understand. It presents a lucid, introductory background to issues related to cultural and educational misunderstandings that may be encountered in the supervision process. It also provides practical strategies to overcome these. As the author states, such strategies should enhance the process for both parties. The information provided in the nine sections of the guide is based on the author's experiences as an international postgraduate and her doctoral research on this topic, by way of literature survey and interviews with international postgraduates in British universities. Reflecting the research basis, footnotes are provided throughout with suggestions of materials for readers who wish to investigate further into particular areas. Despite the British focus to the research, the information is relevant to the Australian experience.

Following the Introduction,

- Section Two in the guide is devoted to the enrolment of international students and makes positive suggestions to supervisors, such as assessing informally, through email or phone contact, the language competence or academic suitability of prospective students.
- The third section on student misunderstandings of the supervisor role follows, wherein the author focusses on the cultural origins of differing role expectations. Okorocha explains that these are based on the deference and respect inherent in other educational systems. Practical advice is provided for supervisors to assist students to adjust their expectations,
- and this is continued in Section Four on dealing with undue demands.
- Section Five on misunderstandings arising from cultural differences is wide-ranging and considers aspects such as attitudes to time, interpersonal space, and body language. The author appropriately emphasises that supervisors who are unsettled by such differences need to broaden their knowledge of alternative cultural modes of behaviour.
- Dealing with language problems follows in Section Six. Okorocha emphasises spoken English and, in a general form, discusses difficulties for international students in comprehending the hidden assumptions in communication, which are more difficult to master than grammar and vocabulary. Again, she aptly suggests that supervisors should enlist the aid of specialised university language and study centres. Surprisingly however, given its central role, it is only in the last few paragraphs of this section that she considers thesis writing. At this point, greater assistance could have been given.

  For example, concept maps and diagrams (Fraser, 1996) may be used to demonstrate visually the structure of the research and a thesis. This approach, used in conjunction with the setting of regular written work recommended by Okorocha, allows the student and the supervisor to communicate in a form that does not highlight the students language and thus allows confidence and trust building (Sillitoe and Crosling, 1998).

- Sections Seven and Eight briefly consider problems associated with religious beliefs, prejudice and discrimination. Useful recommendations (Section Nine) follow and highlight issues related to institutional management as well as supervision. The guide concludes with further reading, but the useful contacts listed would be irrelevant for Australian readers.

The author could be accused of overgeneralising by labelling the students only as international students, thus failing to recognise differences across this broad category. She does explain in the introduction, however, that international students are not a homogeneous group and, to avoid stereotyping, readers need to be aware that this important point underpins her discussion. Moreover, to avoid rigidly classifying students, readers should also be aware of the evolving nature of international students understandings as they interact in the host countrys culture and educational system. However, somewhat paradoxically, Okorocha's use of the broad brush approach

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seems to focus the reader on the patterns of behaviour rather than the particular group within international students that may exhibit them. This draws the reader's attention to the needs and situation of students, thus encouraging a student-centred approach to teaching and supervision. As Martens (1998, p.134) points out, this is to the benefit of all students, regardless of background.

The guide is a very useful means of highlighting the situations of postgraduates but, as Okorocha warns, should not be used in a prescriptive way. Its major benefit seems to be that it provides supervisors with a repertoire of understandings and strategies that may be drawn on to understand students if problems emerge in the supervision process.

References:

Fraser, K. (1996). Student Centred Teaching: The Development and Use of Conceptual Frameworks. Canberra: HERDSA Inc.

Martens, E. 1998. Book Review, Higher Education Research and Development, Vol. 17, No. 1. pp.133 -135.

Sillitoe, J. and Crosling, G. 1998. Thesis Planning and Writing: A Structured Approach. In Y. Ryan and O. Zuber-Skerrit (eds.). Supervising Students From Non English Speaking Backgrounds, Open University Press, London. (forthcoming)

HANDLING COMMON DILEMMAS IN SUPERVISION

P. Cryer. London: Society for Research into Higher Education and the Times Higher Education Supplement. £6.

Reviewed by Kym Fraser, Centre for Higher Education Development, Monash University.

Cryer has conducted research into the practices of supervisors and academic managers and has conducted seminar discussions on postgraduate supervision in the United Kingdom, Australia, Thailand, Sweden and Singapore. On the basis of this experience, she is well qualified to write this guide. Cryer achieves her undertaking to provide a practically helpful handbook which is easy to dip into and designed to stimulate readers to think about their own preferred courses of action in certain circumstances (Preface). Well written and easy to read and comprehend, the material would be of value to both experienced and inexperienced supervisors. While its purpose is in not being an academic treatise, the author provides scholarly references for the individual interested in reading further. These readings are grouped under headings which help the reader to choose those of most relevance to his/her interests.

The handbook itself can be used in different ways by different people. For example it takes little time to read the entire handbook; only 19 pages are dedicated to the discussion of the actual dilemmas. Alternatively an individual may use the table of contents to read about selected dilemmas. A word of caution though, the headings for dilemmas five and eleven do not adequately reflect the areas covered.

The first three dilemmas discussed are those Cryer perceives to be the most frequently raised concerns. The following ten dilemmas are raised in roughly the order in which they are likely to be met (p 2). The author deals with the dilemmas associated with originality versus conformity, control versus autonomy, reviewing students written work, the selection of students, the conduct of meetings, planning student programmes, students personal problems, NESB students, students concerns over other supervisors, ownership of research, supervisor expertise, plagiarism, and preparing students for their final examinations. The sections on each dilemma provide a brief overview of the dilemma, often with contrasting responses of different supervisors outlined. Cryer then suggests several ideas which may be of use in addressing the dilemma. In two of the thirteen dilemmas she employs to good effect a specific case to illustrate the dilemma. While Cryer was probably hesitant to use cases to illustrate all of the dilemmas because of concerns of differences between disciplines, supervisory relationships, the ability of different students etc., it would have been good to see the use of cases with some of the other dilemmas. Generally each dilemma is clearly and thoughtfully addressed.

In the introduction Cryer suggests that you may find it helpful, early on in the partnership, to negotiate a form of agreement or expectation between yourself and your students (p 2). It could be argued that specifically clarifying student and supervisor expectations before entering into a supervisory relationship is essential. Moses (1985) discusses this very issue and concludes that openness in the initial discussions may prevent years of frustration for you and your student if your personality and learning-teaching styles are mismatched and no common ground or style is found (p. 8).

While providing a useful coverage of many significant supervisory dilemmas, the guide does not address several key supervisory issues, such as how to guide students who are not making progress, how to work with students who have writers block and ways of dealing with supervising too many students. However Cryer's guide makes a valuable companion for Ingrid Moses publication Supervising Postgraduates which comprehensively discusses key supervisory issues such as supervisor responsibilities, student writing, and selecting the research topic.

Cryer's handbook is a must read for new and inexperienced supervisors and will be of value to individuals who wish to explore possible options for addressing specific supervisory issues.

Reference:

Moses, I. (1985). Supervising Postgraduates. Canberra: HERDSA Inc.

DEVELOPING POSTGRADUATES KEY SKILLS

Edited by Pat Cryer. London: Society for Research into Higher Education and the Times Higher Education Supplement. £6.

Reviewed by Roger Landbeck.

The development of key skills in undergraduates has recently received considerable attention, particularly in the UK. Now attention is turning to postgraduate education as evidenced by the variety of approaches described in the third guide in the series.

After a brief introduction to the

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nature and development of key skills seven case studies are presented, all from UK experiences. The case studies provide examples of what individual supervisors can organise, institutional programmes and outside courses such as the National Graduate School Programme of the UK Research Councils. One interesting contribution describes a two day outdoor activity programme which would seem suitable for team building in any organisation. Another study seeks to assist students identify the varied skills that it is expected that postgraduate programmes will develop naturally, purely from the experience. This is very valuable especially where supervision is weak; however the growth of programmes to improve postgraduate learning indicates the failure of the postgraduate experience alone to develop the necessary skills. Thus something more than the experience needs to be provided for the students.

The case studies are about four pages long so their content can be quickly grasped. Most consider the costs and resources involved in the programmes.

Thus the guide provides examples of a wide variety of approaches to the development of skills in postgraduate education and will be helpful for supervisors, administrators and staff developers. Addresses of contributors are included and readers are encouraged to contact them for further information.

FOR FURTHER DETAILS ABOUT THE THREE GUIDES CONTACT

SRHE, 3 Devonshire Street, London W1N 2BA.
Email: srhe@mailbox.ulcc.ac.uk
www.srhe.ac.uk/srhe/

How to Get a Research Degree: A Survival Guide

Leonie Elphinstone and Robert Schweitzer (1998) *How to Get a Research Degree: a Survival Guide*, Allen and Unwin: St Leonards. ISBN 1864485604, 134p. AUD$22.95.

This title joins the growing parade of resources designed to help research students understand the process of postgraduate study and succeed in obtaining their chosen qualification. *How to Get a Research Degree* is clearly targeted at students; most supervisors, once familiar with the content, would be likely to recommend it to candidates approaching them for supervision. The guide will help those who are just considering the possibility of enrolling, as well as students who are already engaged in the process. The text is easy to negotiate, the ideas readily understood. Most students will find that they need refer to very little other than this clear, practical and concise handbook in order to survive their degree!

For a handbook to succeed it needs to be well designed. This guide is laid out with an easy to read font size and with plenty of white space. There is evidence that the authors have taken care to develop material in a form useful to students. They make ample use of bullet points; and the many headings and subheadings make it easy for readers to find interesting sections. There is an index containing useful terms, such as: *literature review; research proposal; mid-thesis blues; examiners, choice of; papers, presenting; procrastination; student expectations.*

What about the content? Elphinstone and Schweitzer adopt and communicate the philosophy that students need to take responsibility for their successful progress. This perspective permeates the thirteen chapters which the authors suggest may be divided into three parts:

- the first seven chapters deal with life as a researcher
- chapters eight to twelve focus on the technical aspects of thesis writing
- chapter thirteen examines life after the thesis

It is a notable feature of this guide that whole chapters are devoted to the post-thesis experience (chapter 13); the emotional side of postgraduate study (chapters 6 and 7); intellectual property (chapter 10); and thesis assessment and examination (chapter 12). Other chapters carry titles such as Managing your time effectively; Thesis design and construction; Drafting, revising, editing and proofreading; and Presenting papers and seminars.

Overall the content is detailed, practical and inter-disciplinary. There is ample advice on important topics such as the difference between masters and doctoral degrees, choosing a topic, structuring a research proposal, choosing supervisors, faculties and departments. Of particular interest are the regularly interspersed case studies and comments from students interviewed by the authors. These come from a range of disciplines including Engineering, Arts, Science and Architecture making the text relevant to students from all disciplines.

What does the guide not provide? First, there is no emphasis on the role of the librarian in the process of postgraduate study. As the information environment becomes increasingly complex most students would find the assistance of information professionals invaluable in directing them to important sources and in assisting them to set up current awareness strategies and other information management processes. Second, these information management processes are not attended to. Students need to value and acquire skills in acquiring, evaluating, storing, and controlling the material they work with; this includes notes, papers, bibliographies and the developing thesis. The inclusion of a chapter, or a portion of a chapter on these matters would have added to the utility of this guide*. Thirdly, a list of further reading towards the back of the volume suggests resources directed more towards supervisors than students.

The omissions to the guide, although unfortunate, will not detract from its value. All research students would do well to access this text and supervisors should recommend it, perhaps add it to their reading lists and personal libraries.

Reviewed by Christine Bruce, Queensland University of Technology

*** Supervisors who wish to direct students to useful material dealing with these areas should consider *Managing Information For Research (1995)* by Elizabeth Orna and Graham Stevens, Open University Press, Buckingham, *or Developing Students Library Research Skills [HERDSA Green Guide No 13] 1992)* by Christine Bruce. Section three of the HERDSA Green Guide focuses on the specific needs of postgraduate research students.**

Book Reviews

The Academic Career Handbook

The Academic Career Handbook

L. Blaxter, C. Hughes, & M. Tight. Buckingham
Open UP, 1998. ISBN 0-335-19828-7 (hb), 0-335-19827-9 (pb). 230pp. RRP in Australia: $42.95.

This is a book intended for early-career academics and advanced students who are thinking about taking up an academic career. Apart from the introductory chapter, the book deals with the nature and development of academic careers (3 chapters), and academic roles and tasks (5 chapters, on networking, teaching, research, writing and managing). The authors have drawn extensively from research into academic activities and careers, the 'advice' literature for neophyte academics, and their own experiences. The book therefore taps into a broad range of sources on most aspects of academic life and how to make and get the most out of it. A lot of the detailed material is contained in about 120 'boxes' distributed throughout the book. Each box contains a set of numbered or bulleted points or tips, or a collection of short quotes from academics, often from external sources. A typical strategy for dealing with a topic is to describe an issue (such as departmental politics), or to define some concept, in the body of the text and then refer the reader to boxed pointers or suggestions. In this way, the book presents a distillation of information from the wider literature. I found this quite an effective strategy.

The coverage of the book is wide, and the style is mostly descriptive, friendly and informative. The flavour is decidedly from the UK perspective. Specific conditions and contact details of research grants bodies are of limited use outside the UK. The focus in Chapter 2 is on the UK higher education system (subsectors, enrolments, league tables and salary scales), again of more local value. Most of the issues and advice can, however, be readily translated into and interpreted within an Australasian context.

Each chapter contains an annotated list of published resources, making it possible for the reader to go into depth on issues that are important to them. At the end of the book, the authors list about 30 (mostly British) organisations together with national and international journals that work towards the betterment of higher education generally. A comprehensive bibliography and a good index conclude the volume.

Overall, the book makes an excellent contribution to helping budding academics develop a sensible perspective on the nature of academic work. It is a source of useful, practical ideas on becoming an academic and developing a sense of career. The tone is positive throughout, and the book is likely to be referred to repeatedly as various issues and phases arise during the course of academic life. Of course, in a book of this length (or any fixed length for that matter), choices have to be made as to what to include and what to exclude. My wish list would have included more specific advice on how to organise and manage time, on how to make decisions in favour of long term career advancement at critical choice points, and on how to balance compering claims on one's personal resources from both within and outside the institution.

Blaxter, Hughes and Tight have put together a helpful, up-to-date handbook, which deserves to be available in every higher education institution.

Reviewed by Royce Sadler, Griffith University
September 1998

Green and Gold Guides– Interested in writing a Guide?

Green and Gold Guides
Interested in writing a Guide?

I wish to take this opportunity to explain to members the difference between the Green and the Gold guides and to ask for expressions of interest in the proposal of specific topics for future guides.

Both the Green and the Gold Guides are well regarded, relatively short, easy to read handbooks on different aspects of higher education. They have done much to contribute to improvements in the quality of higher education throughout Australasia.

- The Green guides are typically cross disciplinary and offer pragmatic advice on a wide variety of the tasks and responsibilities of staff within higher education in the areas of teaching and learning, research and management.
- The Gold guides are handbooks which are set within the context of a discipline or subset of disciplines and are primarily a medium for the dissemination of innovative teaching practices within disciplines. They provide a means for authors to describe, analyse and discuss particular teaching/learning challenges which they face and the ways in which they have met those challenges.

While I am delighted to hear from anyone wishing to investigate with me a proposal for a guide, I am currently particularly interested in hearing from anyone who is interested in developing a proposal in any one of the following areas: Teaching Art and Design; Getting students to be self directed learners; Moving from face to face teaching to mixed modes of teaching; Incorporating life long learning skills into the curriculum; Redesigning your subject for the next millenium; Situated learning (workplace based education); Helping first year students to succeed; Managing group work/group dynamics; Inclusive teaching in a multicultural environment; teaching online; and Teaching international students.

Anyone who is interested in developing a proposal for a guide is very welcome to contact me
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Meritorious Service Award

The Victorian Branch of HERDSA has instituted a Meritorious Service Award to recognise exceptional service to Higher Education in Victoria and beyond. The intention is to grant the award when the Branch considers it appropriate to recognise someone who has demonstrated leadership and excellence in higher education in the past five years, in any or all of the areas of scholarship described by Boyer (1990): discovery, integration, application and teaching.

It was with great pleasure that the first Meritorious Service award was made to **Peter Ling** at the Branch's Annual General Meeting in June this year.

Contributions to the profession

Peter Ling is co-editor of the Australasian Higher Education Research and development journal and an active member of the editorial board of the USA Innovative Higher education journal. He has served on the national executive of HERDSA for many years and has been President of the Victorian branch. He is Vice-President of the Victorian Institute for Educational Research.

Peter holds a ministerial appointment to the General Academic Panel and the Technical Panel of the National Office of Overseas Skills Recognition (NOOSR), providing advice on the standing of overseas qualifications and improving access for immigrants to Australian education.

He contributed in 1993 to research development in Vietnam at the invitation of the vice-Minister of Education of Vietnam through research workshops for all Provincial Directors of Education. He has been engaged as a Visiting Scholar at the University of Georgia, USA on two occasions and has conducted tertiary education development workshops by invitation in several universities in the USA.

Development of systems for the provision of tertiary education

Peter contributed to knowledge on tertiary education policy, building on his PHD on the history of Australian educational policy and publishing Education Policy in Australia 1880 1914. He has undertaken research into aspects of current tertiary education policy and processes for the national agencies: Higher Education Council, National Office of Overseas Skills Recognition, Australian National Training Authority (ANTA), Australian Vice-Chancellors Committee, Curriculum Corporation, and the Australian Credit Transfer Agency. He has published associated journal articles and presented conference papers.

The investigations into aspects of cross sector program articulation and credit transfer resulted in educational policy and process reforms nationally. He contributed to the ANTA research project The Theoretical Underpinnings of Assessment, 1997, a project which will inform revised staff development procedures for competency based assessment in Vocational Education and Training.

The adoption of modes of educational provision which provide flexibility and enhance access

Peter headed the RMIT Flexible Learning Environment Unit in 1996 and 1997, advising on and producing teaching materials which improve access through time, pace and place flexibility. He contributed the research methodology and resource based learning practice elements to an investigation into quality, costs and equity in resource based learning commissioned by the Higher Education Council. At the institutional level, credit transfer and program articulation arrangements, which he introduced at RMIT as manager of the Pathways Project, were cited as best practice in the Report on Good Practice in Higher Education CQAHE, 1995.

Nomination forms for the Victorian Branch's Meritorious Service Award can be found on the branch website: http://sunsite.anu.edu.au/education/herdsa/vic/home.html

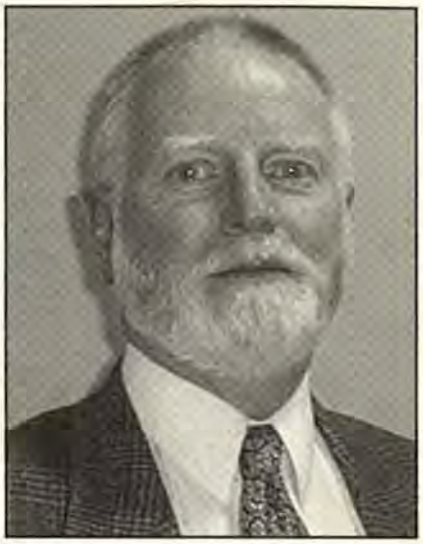
Conferences

HERDSA Annual International Conference

Place:	University of Melbourne
Date:	12 – 15 July 1999
Information:	The Victorian branch of HERDSA is convening the conference. Further information is available from Conference Professionals: Conprof@netspace.net.au Ph +61 3 9899 2996 Fax +61 3 9899 0368

1999 Teaching and Learning Forum

Place:	University of Western Australia
Theme:	Teaching in the Disciplines/Learning in Context
Date:	3 – 4 February, 1999
Information:	Opportunities for teaching staff to share teaching and learning methods, problems, projects and research with their colleagues. Ph +61 8 9380 3502 tlf@csd.uwa.edu.au



Peter Ling, recipient of the Victorian Branch Meritorious Service Award

Cornerstones

What do we value in Higher Education?

HERDSA Annual International Conference, 12-15 July 1999

The purpose of the conference is to promote research and development in Higher Education and to explore a diversity of perspectives on contemporary issues that affect the missions of teaching/learning and research. The unifying theme will focus on the underpinning values of the work we are doing. It is appropriate that we analyse and reflect on what are the significant constituents of our philosophy and practice.

The conference will build on the tradition of past conferences by providing an outstanding venue for the dissemination of cutting edge research, techniques and knowledge in all aspects of the field of Higher Education.