community knowledge research theory practice

HERDSA news

Higher Education Research and Development Society of Australasia Inc

ISSN 0157–1826
Volume 33 No. 1 April 2011

Recent Policy Developments in Australian Higher Education

by Marcia Devlin

The closure of the Australian Learning and Teaching Council (ALTC) has prompted one of the most significant responses to a policy decision in the last two decades in Australian higher education.

The strength and depth of feeling across the sector appears to have taken the government by surprise and it has provided a useful backdrop for the successful negotiations that Independent Andrew Wilkie undertook with the government in relation to the ALTC.

Fifty million of the eighty-eight million dollars that was to be cut from the ALTC budget has been retained and the intention is that the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR) will assume responsibility for administering the grant and awards programs of the ALTC from next year.

In one of the dozens of emails doing the rounds of the sector leading up to the Wilkie deal, Debra Southwell pointed out that there is a long history of initiatives that have facilitated and funded large-scale educational reform in Australian higher education. These include the National Priority Reserve Fund (1990); the Commonwealth Staff Development Fund (1990); the Committee for the Advancement of University Teaching (1992); the Committee for University Teaching and Staff Development (1997); the Australian Universities Teaching Committee (2000); and from 2004, the Carrick Institute / ALTC. The move to DEEWR might be thought of as just another move in a long series.

However, there is some disquiet about how successful this latest move of the major functions of the ALTC to DEEWR might be. While some of the new knowledge that has been generated through ALTC work may be retained through ongoing networks created by the Council, there is a danger that the funding will be lost in a large department, especially where the value-add of the ALTC as an independent body appears not to be well understood.

This apparent lack of understanding is evident in recent comments from Minister Evans about the quality-related work previously undertaken by ALTC being taken up by the Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA) and the My University website in the future.

TEQSA is the new agency for higher education to be established this year. It is described as an independent body that will streamline current regulatory arrangements, joining together the regulatory activity currently

continued page 3

contents

HERDSA Office

Jennifer Ungaro (Office Manager)
PO Box 27, Milperra NSW 2214
Phone: +61 2 9771 3911
Fax: +61 2 9771 4299
Email: office@herdsa.org.au
Website www.herdsa.org.au

HERDSA News

Editor Roger Landbeck
28/242 Parklands Bvld, Currimundi, QLD 4551
Phone: +61 7 5438 2789
Email: landbeck@ozemail.com.au

Editorial Committee
Maureen Bell and Peter Kandlbinder

Issue Dates: April, September, December

Contributions for the next issue must reach the editor by **Monday 18 July 2011**. They should be sent to Roger Landbeck at the above address.

Advertising rates. Please contact the HERDSA Office.

Desk top publishing by Donna Bennett, Office Logistics, Brisbane

Printed by Instant Colour Press, Canberra

From the Editor

Since the last issue of *HERDSA News* a new Editorial team has been appointed to publish HERD, which is the international refereed journal of the Society. Currently it has an A ranking in the Australian system of journal rankings, which are about to be revisited following a public consultation to which members of HERDSA made submissions. The new team has contributed an article to this issue setting out their vision for the next few years. Quite appropriately they pay tribute to the work of the previous team, in particular the work of Ian McDonald, who was largely responsible for implementing the on-line system of handling submitted articles.

HERDSA News is not a refereed publication so contributors get no recognition for their articles. Nevertheless they willingly take time to write articles of quality and interest and I am very grateful to them for doing so.

I am pleased to be able to publish again a column on Policy in Higher Education and Marcia Devlin has written the article for this issue. She comments on the closure of the Australian Learning and Teaching Council. This action raised a storm of protest from the academic community which took the Minister for Higher Education by surprise. As a result some of the activities of the Council will continue from a government department. However as many have pointed out some really valuable functions such as networking academics and providing leadership in learning and teaching will be lost. The last few years has seen, thanks to the work of the ALTC, learning and teaching raised to high levels of importance in institutions.

If anyone would like to contribute an article on Policy in Higher Education in a future issue of the News please contact me.

It is interesting to note how many articles in *HERDSA News* in recent years relate to work done through funding supplied by the ALTC. In this issue we feature the very interesting media project in science education and the D Cubed Dissemination project. Principles from the latter project are of vital importance if new developments are going to be taken up by others outside the team originally responsible for the innovation.

Then we are delighted to publish the names of HERDSA members who were honoured by ALTC citations at the end of 2010. If we have omitted anyone please let us know.

We take you behind the scenes, first, to meet Donna Bennett who is responsible for the desk top publishing of the News and then, Sally Purbrick-Illek and Christine Grimmer, as they reveal something of what is involved in organising a HERDSA conference. I hope you will be stimulated to register for the conference and come and enjoy the experience. Queensland in July. Perfect.

There will be a new Executive confirmed at the 2011 conference on the Gold Coast. There will also be a new President as Geoff Crisp has completed three terms of office and so is not eligible to stand again. Geoff is taking up the post of Dean of Teaching and Learning at RMIT University. Congratulations Geoff and thanks for all your work for HERDSA.

Roger Landbeck

New Feature of *HERDSA News*

The hyperlinks and email addresses within *HERDSA News* are now active in the electronic file available on the website.

If you hover your mouse over any website, it shows you the link and if you click on it, will open your browser and take you to that website.

Great for those long web addresses in the references.

Recent Policy Developments in Australian Higher Education

from page 1

undertaken in the states and territories with that at the federal level. It will have the power to regulate higher education providers. It will also subsume the current quality assurance activities currently undertaken by the Australian Universities Quality Agency (AUQA) and carry out evaluations of standards and performance (DEEWR, 2011).

The TEQSA website says that its "primary task will be to ensure that students receive a high quality education at any of our higher education providers" and TEQSA will also "protect and assure the quality of international education" (DEEWR, 2011).

The website also says that TEQSA will be one element of the new regulatory and quality arrangements that includes a new National Register of Higher Education Providers, a new Higher Education Standards Framework, and the My University website.

Plans to launch the My University website were announced by the Australian federal government at the Universities Australia (UA) conference in Canberra in 2010 and were confirmed recently at this year's UA conference and through the media.

The My School website has provided parents with accessible information, simple data and easy comparisons between schools and is enormously popular. Following the positive response from the public to the My School website and the government's strong rejection of criticisms about the site, the My University website was predictable and inevitable.

There are at least four reasons why the My University Website is, potentially, a good idea.

First, universities derive some of their funding from the public purse and accountability to the public is important. This website will provide easily accessible information to the public about how public funds are being used to provide some aspects of higher education.

Second, universities derive some of their funding directly from students and their families. Users and potential users of universities have a right to see comparative data on the performance of different universities in various areas of operation and the website will aim to allow this.

Third, the site may help to de-mystify university for those with less familiarity with the sector. This might contribute to encouraging those who might be put off by "the unknown" to re-consider university as an option. However, not all who use the My University website will have sophisticated understanding of the contexts in which the measures are taken nor, therefore of how to interpret the figures and other data. The availability of easily understandable and clear contextual information will, therefore, be critical. Without this, it may be the case that universities that have low comparative scores on some indicators might be undertaking life-transforming work but that this not be immediately evident.

Fourth, the development of the My University website could encourage universities and the sector to work harder to explain to the public what it is that they do and offer – this is critically important and particularly so in a context of widening participation and encouraging those who might not otherwise do so, to consider going to university. Universities are spectacularly poor at articulating their benefits to individuals, families, communities and societies so the website might be the prompt the sector needs to take the requisite steps to better do this.

The TEQSA website says that a My University website will be established by January 2012 to assist prospective students to make choices about what and where to study. The information on the My University site, says the TEQSA site, could include information about:

- Student to staff ratios;
- The results of student satisfaction surveys;
- Measures of graduate skills;
- Graduate outcomes;
- Information about fees;
- Information about access to student services; and
- Quality of teaching and learning outcomes (DEEWR, 2011).

There are at least four concerns about the My University website.

First, the comparisons between universities on indicators such as those above will be nonsensical in many ways unless, like has been done with schools, the comparisons are made between "like" institutions. Comparing like with like institutions will pose a major challenge outside the existing groupings (Group of Eight, Australian Technology Network, etc) as new groupings would have to be created and agreed on to incorporate all institutions. To do otherwise would be to compare apples and pears and would, therefore, be invalid and meaningless.

It is curious that these comparisons are being planned at the same time that institutional diversity and specialisation is being strongly encouraged by the federal government. Comparisons should also be made between "like" disciplines. It would be nonsense to compare teaching and learning processes and outcomes in the discipline of dance with that of clinical nursing, for example. While it would be desirable to have evidence of broad principles of excellence in both, the ways in which each would be enacted would be difficult, if not impossible to compare meaningfully.

Second, some of the indicators to be used to derive the summary figures that will appear on the site are proxies for quality and this is problematic. A major concern here is that the indicators related to outcomes may not determine the "value add" of university education but instead measure attributes that students already possess at entry and to which university education may have contributed very little or nothing. Coupled with invalid comparisons between institutions with enormous differences in the social and cultural capital of their students in some cases, this is a major concern.

Third, like National Assessment Plan – Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) tests in the school sector, some of the indicators

used to derive the data for the website may be related to minimum standards. Focusing on the lowest common denominator is of limited usefulness to universities, all of who are striving for excellence and "higher" education in a number of ways.

Fourth, as indicated by its name and the initial announcement details, plans for the My University website appear not to include the 160 private providers of higher education in Australia and appear instead to focus only on the approximately 40 universities. To exclude a large and growing part of the sector where the less established institutions are concentrated would seem, at best, a strange way to approach this endeavour and at worst, a perverse approach to monitoring the quality of higher education.

The provision of information to the public, including prospective students and their families, about various aspects of universities will be a useful development if the sector proactively attends to the concerns outlined above.

However, a further concern is that the results that appear on the website will inevitably lead to ranking of, and "performance pay" for, institutions. The sector does not currently have a replacement for the "stick" that was the Learning and Teaching Performance Fund (LTPF). Despite the drawbacks of this scheme, and the ongoing questions about the indicators and adjustment processes the LTPF used, it did have some positive impacts. Across the sector, thinking and planning around teaching and learning increased and improved, as did senior executive attention to this aspect of universities' operations. The irony is that the now defunct ALTC was successfully continuing the attention on teaching and learning that the LTPF had sparked.

TEQSA and the My University website represent an increase in measurement and accountability and coupled with the closure of the ALTC, a big stick with no carrot for the sector as it moves to embrace a wider diversity of students. Many would argue that increased regulation in a tight budgetary context will not necessarily led to improved quality and may instead lead to perverse behaviour by universities seeking higher ranking on the inevitable teaching league tables and/or seeking to support and retain the students they have recruited. The devil will be in the detail of the indicators and how they are measured, combined, processed and reported.

Colleagues concerned about the quality of teaching and learning in Australian higher education would be wise to keep a close eye on the TEQSA developments and consider commenting on the potential impact of the proposed My University indicators as sector consultations are undertaken.

References

DEEWR (2011) TEQSA http://www.deewr.gov.au/HigherEducation/Policy/teqsa/Pages/Overview.aspx

Professor Marcia Devlin is inaugural Chair in Higher Education Research at Deakin University and a long-standing HERDSA member. Parts of this article were previously published in University World News.

Contact:
Marcia.devlin@deakin.edu.au

Introducing … The New HERD Editorial Team

As of February this year, we are pleased to take the helm of HERDSA's flagship journal *Higher Education Research Development*. We thank the former editors, Professor Ian Macdonald, Professor Izabel Soliman and Associate Professor Martin Davies, for their spirited efforts. They have left us a journal that is in incredibly good shape. Ian particularly has been instrumental in professionalising the journal's systems, overseeing its move to Taylor and Francis' *ScholarOne* platform, and growing and supporting the team of around 20 Associate Editors. He also played an important role in achieving the journal's ISI listing. Those HERDSA members who are yourselves involved in journal editorial work will know that these are not small achievements. We thank him for his leadership and forbearance in guiding the journal through a critical phase in its development. In going forward, our goal is to build on the excellent foundation laid for us and to take the journal in some fresh and (we think) exciting directions.

Our analysis of the journal is that its scope has broadened considerably over the years. *HERD* has published seminal research by both established scholars and first-time authors. Its pages have featured research on topics as diverse as doctoral supervision, phenomenography, the internationalisation of higher education, and the scholarship of teaching and learning. One of *HERD*'s strengths is that it has been a place for diverse discussion. We intend to build on this breadth so that, in a context of critical commentary about the shape and scope of higher education research, *HERD* takes on a leadership role in the international scene of tertiary and higher education scholarship. We aim to do this by explicitly inviting critical commentary and debate on learning, teaching and curriculum issues, research methods and directions, and leadership and policy matters, so that *HERD leads* the discussion on higher education as well as responds to it.

As an editorial team, our commitment for the next three years is to:

- **Prompt the field of higher education research to scrutinise itself.** After several decades of research containing a broad international and methodological basis, higher education research is a mature field, ripe for critical self-reflection.
- **Push the boundaries of higher education research** as a field by seeking more historical, philosophical and policy analyses, and more co-authored work from a range of national sites.
- **Strengthen the Australasia-wide** focus by including and soliciting articles from the wider Pacific and Asia.
- **Use *HERD* to develop and extend the next generation of higher education researchers.** We will pursue this through a number of Special Issues that explore methodological debates, or that link higher education research to the wider field of educational research, or through retrospective critiques of research to identify opportunities for new ideas.
- **Develop a forum for provocative reflections and commentaries** through adding a new section to *HERD* called *Points for Debate*. This section is designed to stir the *HERD* readership's thinking.
- **Provide a program of professional development** to potential authors and reviewers via the HERDSA conference on topics such as research methodologies, manuscript and book reviewing, and responding to reviewer feedback.
- **Improve *HERD's* international ranking**, for example, aiming, in the long-term, for A* status under the ERA.

Over the next three years, members can expect to see the editorial team actively engaged in HERDSA conferences and meetings. Members can expect the editorial team to (in some cases) solicit high quality manuscripts and they can expect the team to keep the *HERD* journal on track, with reasonable turnaround times for reviewing and the notification of outcomes. At present, the journal is committed to the publication of six issues per year with a number of Special Issues in-train. The new Points for Debate section will begin in 2012.

This is the first time that the core of the editorial team has ever been comprised entirely of New Zealanders – led by Barbara Grant (Executive Editor) and ably supported by Mark Barrow and, soon-to-be based in Aotearoa/New Zealand, Catherine Manathunga sharing co-editor responsibilities. Ian Brailsford, a New Zealand citizen, will take on the role of Book Reviews Editor while Bruce Macfarlane, based in Hong Kong, and Tai Peseta, based in Australia, will assume responsibility for the Special Issues and Points for Debates sections respectively. And finally, the wonderful Meaghan Hughes, *HERD*'s Administrator, holds the whole team together, along with a group of around 20 very capable Associate Editors from Australia, Hong Kong, Malaysia and Aotearoa/New Zealand. In this way, we take seriously the *Australasian* dimension of HERDSA's membership and remit.

Our team also brings a diversity of disciplinary perspectives and roles to our editorial work: we have three members located in Academic Development/Higher Education, two in Education and one in Medicine & Health Sciences as Associate Dean Education.

These are exciting times for our editorial team. We are confident that our collective experience as researchers, editors and scholars, together with the direction we have in mind for the journal, will position *HERD* as an important international leader in the debates and discussions about the future of higher education and higher education research.

Executive Editor: Dr Barbara Grant, Centre for Academic Development, The University of Auckland

Co-Editors: Associate Professor Catherine Manathunga, Faculty of Education, Victoria University, Wellington and Dr Mark Barrow, Faculty of Medical and Health Sciences, The University of Auckland

Special Issues Editor: Associate Professor Bruce Macfarlane, Faculty of Education, University of Hong Kong

Points for Debate Editor: Dr Tai Peseta, Curriculum, Teaching and Learning Centre, La Trobe University

Book Reviews Editor: Dr Ian Brailsford, Centre for Academic Development, The University of Auckland

Administrator: Meaghan Hughes, Melbourne

Contact: bm.grant@auckland.ac.nz

The Sound of HERDSA 2011

By Sally-Purbrick-Illek and Christine Grimmer

Every year in July HERDSA members assemble for the annual conference. For the previous two years the organising committee has worked very hard to make the event possible. It is an enormous task on top of their regular work. But what exactly is involved in organising a HERDSA conference? I asked Christine Grimmer and Sally Purbrick Illek, who are taking major roles in the organisation, if they could spare time to write about their experiences. This is the result. Editor.

Sally belongs to an acapella ensemble. She sometimes regales us with accounts of the perils and pleasures of singing together with other enthusiasts. Sally lists five foundation principles for a successful choir: meet regularly to practice, make sure everyone is singing in tune, keep your repertoire current, promote and check the venue beforehand.

So we would like to share with you how the HERDSA 2011 Conference choir is getting its act together for the Big Show in July 2011.

Choosing the correct venue to showcase your talents is of primary importance. It should be large enough to accommodate all of your audience members. Don't underestimate the number of fans and companies who will want to be in on the action – a venue that seems to be too large may end up being just the right size.

It may seem like July would be an ideal time for holding some of your gatherings in the great outdoors, given that it is the dry season. Don't plan on it, though – Mother Nature has a playful sense of humour and you may end up singing in the rain!

Make sure you promote yourselves using a professional when developing your website, and keep it up-to-date and interesting so that your fans keep coming back for more. Explore the use of social networking sites such as Facebook and Twitter if you are keen to involve a young (and young-at-heart) crowd.

Start with a catchy theme and try to build connections between the theme and all other aspects of your performance. Don't worry about thinking outside the box – you want your event to be memorable!

Invite other like-minded performers to join you – there's much to be said for collaboration and the sharing of ideas and talent.

Get the word out far in advance of the event, as there is major competition for time and dollars among your prospective fan base.

Engage the most talented and eclectic guest performers that you can afford. Variety is the spice of life, and you should try to find something that will be of interest to even the most discriminating participant. Make a point to involve not only world-famous names, but try to seek out local talent as well – who knows – your event may be the springboard to a promising career!

Try to be discriminating when choosing your supporting cast. Although you may want to invite everyone who has asked to join the show, quality is preferable to quantity.

If you have engaged out-of-town performers and you are responsible for their upkeep during their stay, take the time to explore their outside interests and try to plan an interesting program for them when they are not on stage. If they enjoy themselves with you, the good word will spread and you may be reciprocated for the efforts. If they don't have a good time, you may also suffer the consequences of being a poor host.

Communicate your appreciation for the help you receive from others, and don't be shy about asking advice from those who have hosted similar events. Be generous and offer your support to those who may follow in your footsteps.

For those who don't sing there are many other parts to play. You could consider the jobs of directing or producing the gig. Directing is not such a big deal – although the buck does stop with you and the show needs to be relevant, inspiring and memorable. It's best if you work with a distributed leadership model because you might already have a full-time job. You can make it an opportunity to call on all your friends and contacts in high (and low) places, near and far and bring them and their great ideas into the show. All you have to do is hold out for quality, meet regularly with your cast and crew, and take a few risks.

Or you could be the producer. For you there are the joys of managing promotion, the budget, the sponsors, the auditions, communication, production, the audience and … MyReview. For this role all you need is stamina, the capacity to weather storms, nerves of steel and an extraordinary project worker. Remember there is nothing permanent except change. If you do decide to play, get right into the production and you will have a lot of fun.

Go into training for the performance early by doing without sleep one or two nights a week. Look up remedies for RSI and brush up on your Excel skills. When it comes down to it, spreadsheets are really your best friends. Buy yourself a green coloured HERDSA Conference notebook – soothing to the eyes, signals you to keep going and reminds you that you are in fertile territory – something will always pop up to surprise and often delight you.

Never underestimate the prism-like minds of your colleagues in higher education. What appears as a single instruction in guidelines or a template can be dispersed into a rainbow-like array of interpretations, in each of which it is possible to argue there is glory and value to the whole.

No matter how much it goes against the grain, surrender early and totally to the superior knowledge and wisdom of your PCO (Professional Conference Organiser). Humbly seek their advice on everything – especially the budget. They deal with black, not red. Black is classic and red is definitely out. They are adepts in the field. They know that if you want to avoid suffering,

you must commit to the middle path – to balance and a sensible bottom line.

Enrol in first semester in a rigorous study of MyReview. Engage in early formative assessment to identify pitfalls, tricky spots and areas for improvement. Resist the temptation to plagiarise from previous years, as you will inevitably be caught out. Schedule at least three full dress rehearsals for this part of the show and practise all roles.

Engage in risk management from the start – check the tenure of your cast and have some understudies for key roles, keep your website ready in the wings to launch, and be ready to work around unpredictable and annoying interruptions like regular jobs, holidays, illness and life in general – the show must go on. Always "phone a friend" to help with troublesome questions – namely Geoff Crisp – or the current HERDSA President. Make sure you have HERDSA members in the cast. An Executive member will be a jewel in the crown.

If you are invited to host the next HERDSA conference, definitely take the plunge, but do go in with eyes wide open. You won't be the same again – but that's a good thing! We consider it a privilege to have been invited to work with such a great team on the conference. Our knowledge and understanding of the field has been greatly enriched and we've forged wonderful new friendships. We are particularly admiring of the courage and fortitude of our colleagues in New Zealand, who in spite of devastating and tragic events, have maintained their commitments to submit and review full papers and various presentations at the conference.

Highlights of the 2011 HERDSA Conference – ***Higher Education on the Edge***:

- Address from Emeritus Professor Denise Bradley at the welcome reception;
- Three great keynotes – Professor Ann Austin from the US, Professor Paul Trowler from the UK and Dr Carol Nicoll from the ALTC;
- Four symposia on key issues in the field including a session on assuring academic standards with input from TEQSA;
- Lots of interactive sessions including thirteen special interest round-tables where you can enjoy robust discussion – even argument;
- A lively Q&A panel session facilitated by higher education analyst and commentator, Dorothy Illing;
- Showcases, workshops and posters featuring research and innovations;
- An ALTC showcase stream;
- Millennium Band at the conference dinner; and
- Balmy (?) July nights around the pool at the Radisson Resort.

We look forward to seeing you at the Gold Coast in July!

Christine Grimmer, Coordinator of the HERDSA 2011 Conference, is the Manager, Teaching Quality Enhancement, at the Griffith Institute for Higher Education. Christine has a background in teaching, Adult Education and Educational Management and Leadership.

Sally Purbrick-Illek is the project worker for the HERDSA 2011 Conference. Sally is a teacher, ex School Principal, tutor in the School of Education and Professional Studies at Griffith University and founding member of Champagne, an acapella ensemble at the Gold Coast.

Professor Kerri-lee Krause, Director of the Griffith Institute for Higher Education and Dr Calvin Smith, Associate Director of the Griffith Institute for Higher Education are co-convenors of the HERDSA 2011 Conference.

For more information visit http://conference.herdsa.org.au/2011/

Update on TATAL (Talking about Teaching and Learning)

The HERDSA Branch of the ACT Region, in conjunction with the Teaching and Learning Centre at the University of Canberra, has been running TATAL groups for three years. TATAL currently has three groups operating with monthly meetings. As has been reported in previous newsletters (McCormack & Kennelly 2009, 2010) TATAL seeks to establish a safe collaborative environment in which to investigate the challenges and successes of teaching and learning leading to the articulation of a personal teaching philosophy statement for use in the preparation of a HERDSA fellowship or a teaching award application.

The first TATAL group, which began in 2008, is currently working on the final draft of a HERDSA Guide *Using stories in teaching*. This TATAL group hopes to launch the Guide at the HERDSA Conference in July. This would complement the awarding of Fellowships and the facilitation of a parallel session "Applying for a Fellowship". Following is a brief description of the content of the Guide.

> [Stories] *can be used to explain content, help students make links between different subjects studied, act as a revision tool, or simply make a topic more interesting. Stories can be used as a precursor to a new topic or to summarise and revise a topic. They can provide a way to introduce a different perspective, challenge assumptions, or help students clarify their own perspective*. (Miley et. al., 2011, p. 3)

Members of the 2009 TATAL have completed philosophy statements and a number have completed enough stories for a HERDSA portfolio. Members of TATAL 2010 have completed their philosophy statements and have commenced story writing.

The facilitators have published two articles in early editions of this newsletter describing how TATAL was set up, its content and the facilitation process. A workshop proposal has been accepted for the Canadian Society for Teaching and Learning in Higher Education 2011 Conference. In this workshop delegates will:

- Be introduced to a model suggesting key factors contributing to the development of an ongoing conversation community

emerging from the TATAL groups' experiences.

- Reflect on the model and its applicability to their personal teaching context.
- Critique and assess the model for its applicability in teaching and learning contexts beyond their institution.

An article for the Journal of *Reflective Practice International and Multidisciplinary Perspectives* has been accepted with moderate revisions. This article investigates the question: How can university teachers develop a community where conversations about learning and teaching continue to flourish?

References

McCormack, C., & Kennelly, R. (2011). Rediscovering the lost art of talking about teaching and learning. Presentation to the Canadian Society for Teaching and Learning in Higher Education Annual Conference *From Here to the Horizon: Diversity and Inclusive Practice in Higher Education*, 15-18 June, Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, Canada.

McCormack, C., & Kennelly, R. (2010). Talking about Teaching and Learning (TATAL) – The sequel. *HERDSA News*, 32(3), December, pp. 8-10.

McCormack, C., & Kennelly, R. (2009). Talking about Teaching and Learning (TATAL) – The sequel. *HERDSA News*, 31(1), April pp. 8-10.

Miley, F., Cram, B., Griffin, A., Kennelly, R., McCormack, C., Read, R. (2011). Using stories in teaching, Draft HERDSA Guide.

Behind the Scenes – Who is the Person that Produces *HERDSA News*?

By Donna Bennett

Since 2003, Donna Bennett has been producing the *HERDSA News*, taking the raw files the editor sends her and transforming them into what you receive in your mailbox. "I enjoy seeing each issue come together – taking the text and photos and displaying them in a way that is both pleasing to the eye and easy to read." After receiving the files, Donna imports the text and graphics into the desktop publishing program and formats it to a consistent style. Once all the text is placed the next step is to work through her checklist, and ensure all the articles are consistent in punctuation, references and formatting and edit accordingly. She then liaises with the editor regarding providing any additional information needed and final checking before sending off the printers. An electronic copy is also sent to the HERDSA office for uploading onto the website.

Donna is owner/manager of Office Logistics who specialise in managing the administration of professional not-for-profit associations which includes memberships, events and bookkeeping. Office Logistics also provides publication support to editors encompassing every stage of the publishing process. From receiving papers and referee administration right through to desktop publishing, printing and distribution.

Donna Bennett has over 25 years of secretarial and administrative experience in various roles, including an administrative role at Queensland University of Technology working closely with numerous academics for five years. This provided the opportunity to gain extensive knowledge and experience in the secretariat operations of academic associations and publications. Donna then built a business that allowed her to continue her career while raising a family. One of the key values in her business is enabling skilled people to continue working without sacrificing their families. Some of her team continue to work remotely, but leverage modern technologies to ensure clients receive quality service. Many have since outsourced work to her business based on its reputation of knowledge, experience, speed and efficiency.

Donna is married with 2 daughters now both in Middle School and in her spare time enjoys scrapbooking, which is also about creating a pleasing page layout, as well as enjoying the memories the photos evoke.

Since starting her business in 1997, Donna has been providing secretariat services and editor support to professional associations, academics and the business community. As her team grew it became necessary to describe the expanded services offered and in 2002 the Office Logistics trading name was established. Office Logistics has continued to grow and in July 2009 registered as a company.

Office Logistics employs a team of 6 and moved from Donna's home into its own premises at the start of this year.

Contact: dbennett@officelogistics.com.au

ALTC Citations for Outstanding Contributions to Student Learning Awarded to HERDSA Members, 2010

We are delighted to congratulate the 21 HERDSA members who received citations for Outstanding Contributions to Student Learning from the Australian Learning and Teaching Council at the end of last year. Citations for Outstanding Contributions to Student Learning recognise and reward the diverse contributions made by individuals and teams to the quality of student learning. Citations are awarded to those who have made a significant contribution to the quality of student learning in a specific area of responsibility over a sustained period, whether they are academic staff, general staff, sessional staff or institutional associates.

Citations provide an opportunity for distinctive institutional missions, values and priorities in learning and teaching to be recognised. Citations are awarded for a range of contributions to student learning, both direct and indirect. Up to 210 Citations with prize value of $10,000 each will be given in 2011, including up to 10 in the Early Career category.

The names of those who received citations appear below together with their citation.

Dr Debra Bateman
Deakin University, Victoria

For the sustained use of highly innovative and imaginative pedagogies and curriculum, and leading-edge design of learning spaces, that significantly enhance student learning.

Dr Natalie Brown
University of Tasmania, Tasmania

For encouraging a focus on student learning by promoting, modelling and working with colleagues to advance scholarship of teaching and learning through a "value-adding" approach.

Ms Diane Clingin
University of Ballarat, Victoria

For long-term contribution to the development of innovative services and pastoral support to higher degree research candidates, contributing to a strong postgraduate life at the University of Ballarat.

Mr Paul Bethell
Deakin University, Victoria

For engaging and creative teaching strategies that take the newsroom into the classroom and build a bridge between the academy and industry for journalism students.

Dr Derek Choi-Lundberg
University of Tasmania, Tasmania

For development and enthusiastic delivery of constructively aligned, diverse, active learning sessions that motivate undergraduate medical students to learn human anatomy in a supportive environment.

Dr Fernanda Duarte
University of Western Sydney, New South Wales

For effectively facilitating transformative learning in a management school through sound scholarship and engaging experientially-based approaches that inspire students to think more critically and ethically.

Associate Professor Katie Dunworth
Curtin University, Western Australia

For leadership and innovation in nurturing the enhancement of English language proficiency among students and staff from linguistically diverse backgrounds.

Ms Patty Kamvounias
The University of Sydney, New South Wales

For sustained commitment to enhancing student learning in business law through an integrated approach to assessment and feedback.

Dr Catherine Lang
Swinburne University of Technology, Victoria

For sustained leadership in building a Women in ICT community providing student leadership opportunities, engaging with diverse groups and creating successful academic and social experience.

Robyn Muldoon
University of New England, New South Wales

For leadership in the development of the New England Award, an innovative program which fosters students' personal and professional development at university through extra-curricular activity.

Dr Jackie O'Flaherty
University of South Australia, South Australia

For sustained use of innovative learning initiatives that engage nursing/midwifery undergraduates and which significantly contribute to a supportive learning environment and positive learning experience.

Professor Beverley Oliver with Sue Jones and Sonia Ferns
Curtin University, Western Australia

For implementation of an evidence-based and scholarly Comprehensive Course Review process leading to increased student satisfaction.

Beverley Oliver

Sonia Ferns

Ms Carol-Joy Patrick with Calvin Smith
Griffith University, Queensland

For being an agent-of-change, over more than a decade, institutionally and nationally through practitioner-driven contributions to work-integrated learning scholarship.

Professor Robert Reed
Central Queensland University, Queensland

For developing engaging and effective resources to support student learning across the sciences.

Dr Robyn Prior
University of Canberra, Australian Capital Territory

For using step-wise knowledge building approaches to help reluctant learners understand and apply complex concepts in difficult biochemistry areas.

Ms Catherine Snelling
The University of Adelaide, South Australia

For sustained excellence in team teaching in a lively, imaginative and engaging manner that inspires enthusiastic, independent learning in the field of oral health.

Dr Josephine Pryce
James Cook University, Queensland

For sustained and enthusiastic teaching that creates a positive learning environment and involves, empowers and transforms students through their learning of management theories and practice.

Dr Denise Wood
University of South Australia, South Australia

For sustained excellence in engaging undergraduate students through service learning and research activities that promote social and ethical action and enhance the student learning experience.

Engage Students by Having Them Publish in "New Media"

By Will Rifkin, Joanne Righetti, Nancy Longnecker, Joan Leach, and Lloyd Davis

http://newmediaforscience-research.wikispaces.com/Project+information

Use a boxing match as a metaphor for an acid-base reaction. That is clever if you are the lecturer. The metaphor employs something familiar to characterise in a vivid way concepts that are unfamiliar to the students. But this metaphor was not developed by the lecturer. It was created by students. This particular team of students impressed the lecturer early in the session as being unlikely to send her a Christmas card the following December. That is, she was initially concerned about their engagement in the first-year, service, chemistry subject.

They did engage, though, with their two-minute podcast composed as commentary on a boxing match between an acid and a base in a style reminiscent of the overblown sports casting of matches of Muhammad Ali. The short podcast formed the basis of a 5-percent assignment where students needed to describe in their own words a key concept to be tested on their final exam. Other students in the class had devised fantasy and romance scenarios along with straight description. Is this assignment a gimmick or a portent of things to come, where the laboratory notebook surrenders to the laptop and video camera?

Science lecturers are now assigning students to create blogs, wikis, video, and podcasts based on course content. A number of the dozen "pioneers" whom we have interviewed have stated that they are driven by a concern about "engagement". They are willing to take a risk on "new media" assignments because they are sure that more conventional approaches will lack punch (no pun intended). Others suggest that they have been painted into a corner by a decline in lab space or a lack of funding for the desired number of laboratory sessions. They are not blind to the many challenges imagined by the hundred or so lecturers whom we have had in focus groups. They have not been daunted either and have been drawn by the attractions identified by those same focus groups – engagement, creativity, developing students' new media skills and insights, and providing students with practice in teamwork.

Such experiments with new media assignments are the focus of our ALTC New Media for Science project. We are identifying, characterising, evaluating, developing, and working to disseminate these strategies, a familiar mantra to those who have undertaken other grant-funded initiatives. The assignments are meant to get students more engaged with course content – which science lecturers and their heads of school should appreciate. As well, students will be learning key graduate attributes through the "authentic" nature of group work, peer review, and composing for — publishing on—the web. The new media can represent a Trojan horse to embed graduate attributes in core science subjects.

Student publication on the web, we have argued (Rifkin et al, 2010), exploits a medium of learning and viewing that students find engaging, staff increasingly see as practical, and employers value as relevant. The rapid pace with which web publication is being simplified presents a lecturer with the challenge of having to assign students to do something that the lecturer may not be confident in doing. The lecturer may have to lead from behind, much as one might guide a dogsled (there is a cross-cultural metaphor). Some students will know how to create a better podcast than the lecturer. However many, if not most, students will face the task as complete neophytes, or so our experience and recent surveys suggest (Kennedy et al, 2007).

For the past decade, we—four project principals—have developed teaching strategies and resources for our classes: blogging assignments; video submissions; podcasts; and web write ups of interviews of professionals. Students record using their mobile phone, laptop, or still camera – all of which typically have capacity to record audio and video. Some of these student creations are shared just within the class through peer review exercises. Others are made visible to the outside world, garnering dozens, sometimes hundreds and even thousands of views.

The fact that these productions are created by students can add authenticity and accessibility when they are aimed at an audience of high school or university students or nonscientific citizens. After all, the students have just cleared a hurdle of understanding that their audience is facing. This sort of approach echoes the assignments focusing on learner and community concerns that were championed by Paulo Freire, who is known for developing highly effective programs to teach peasants how to read.

On completion of new media assignments, we have seen evidence in students' reflective essays, as well as their written assessment of classmates' contributions to a group effort, development of abilities in teamwork, oral and written communication, critical thinking, and ethics. Deeper knowledge of science content may be gained through the engagement and repetition that the processes of creating new media affords, according to theory that is being explored by Hoban (in relation to Slowmation) and colleagues (Hoban, *personal communication*).

Current experience suggests that students do put additional hours into class work. However, evidence is still being collected to identify whether this engagement with content is followed by a corresponding boost in exam marks. One pioneering lecturer who has not yet noted a boost suggested that the fault may be a condemnation of exams as a measuring instrument rather than evidence of a lack of additional learning. In depth evaluation of a podcasting assignment in

first-year chemistry is currently under way by Bartle, Longnecker, and Pegram (*in review*).

We have argued that the educational promise is there with sufficient vigour to land a grant from the Australian Learning and Teaching Council. Prior experience in our classes and subsequent experience in this project have taught us lessons about where this potential might emerge and what hurdles might stand in the way. Three themes emerge: (1) pedagogy and new media; (2) the process of becoming familiar with new media; and (3) methods for engaging lecturers in evaluation, development, and dissemination. Below, we have space only to discuss the first item, pedagogy, though we will refer obliquely to the other topics. They will be covered in more depth in a future article if our kind readers show interest. For now, we are looking for further examples of new media assignments and a sufficient number of collegial experts and receptive lecturers to spread these practices where they might show a positive educational impact.

Pedagogy and New Media

We have identified over two-dozen types of new media assignments or extensions of existing assignments that can readily be done in new media formats. We originally categorised these assignments according to which new media technology the lecturer was asking the students to employ. That is, were students assigned to make a podcast or assigned to create a wiki?

Surveys of lecturers at our conference workshops helped to turn that categorisation inside out. The technological medium could be understood to be a secondary consideration in the types of assignments that lecturers would be interested in employing. So, we re-named assignment types in more conventional terms, in terms where the medium of submission could be paper or new media. Here are the categories along with examples that we have identified.

Types and examples of assignments

1. Explaining science concepts in a student's own words. Students in a service subject in chemistry in first year at the University of Western Australia worked in small teams to create podcasts on key concepts – acids and bases or oxidation and reduction. Chemistry students at Curtin University created wikis on elements in the periodic table.

2. Documenting a process, such as a lab, fieldwork exercise, or site visit. First-year biology students at the University of Western Sydney have been creating animations of fieldwork techniques. Students studying molecular and cell biology at the University of New South Wales have been working in teams to create a website on a new laboratory technique.

3. Commenting/reflecting on topics relevant to class for classmates or a broader audience. Students at UWS who are studying environmental issues have been making podcasts about site visits. First-year biology students at the University of Queensland have been working in teams to film videos on environmental topics, as well. Science communication postgraduates at UQ are tracking science issues in the media and in blogs via their own blogs.

4. Peer assessment of teamwork/self assessment. First-year chemistry students at UQ are writing blogs to reflect on their learning processes. Chemistry students at UWA are employing a wiki or online quiz to assess project team mates.

5. Report on research or for consultancy. An ALTC project has students at the University of Sydney using open laboratory notebooks for sharing data and analysis. Analysis in forensic science is presented by student teams in a blended learning subject (mixed local and distance-learning students) at Charles Sturt University.

6. Report for public consumption. Food chemistry students at the University of South Australia filmed videos of students explaining a basic chemistry concept to a lay person. Science communication undergraduates at UNSW have created websites for school students on topics such as the solar system.

Preferred approaches

Which of the two-dozen or more approaches that we have identified are preferred? Surveys from a very small sample of lecturers suggest possible trends, as there is a concentration of preferences despite respondents being spread across biology, physics, and chemistry. Thirteen science lecturers submitted completed surveys at the 2010 UniServe Science conference (the largest national gathering of teaching-focused science lecturers, with attendance of up to 200 academics).

Eleven of the thirteen respondents nominated two exercises that they might like to try: student use of a blog to reflect and peer assess group work activities in the laboratory or fieldwork; and a student team creating a lab report video. Nine of the thirteen respondents expressed a preference for students creating a short video of a person, place, or item that is relevant to the subject. Eight of the thirteen wanted to assign students to create an online *PowerPoint* presentation with an opportunity for peer review. Eight also nominated to have students blog regularly on a controversial topic. Half of respondents wanted students to collaborate online with science students at other universities using wikis or *Facebook* sites. Similarly, half were interested in students creating a performance, such as a science show for children on YouTube or a radio show on a science topic.

Again, the number of respondents is small, and these lecturers are likely to be self-selected as being more interested in new media. Plus, they were attending a teaching-focused conference. That said, their preferences represent a mix of assignments that could readily be done on paper, such as a lab or fieldwork report, and assignments with a definite "new media" flavour, such as a radio show or *PowerPoint* presentation.

Perceived hurdles

What do lecturers see as challenges in assigning students to work in new media? We asked focus groups of lecturers from biology, chemistry, and physics. The groups ranged from a half-dozen across a range of disciplines to thirty physicists, with one group of thirty mixed biologists and chemists. The groups were asked to brainstorm what they saw as hurdles.

All three groups identified as challenges the time and effort needed to learn how to use the technology as well as the time needed to create and mark assignments. Two of the three groups expressed concerns about how to assess the assignments, about equity in access to technology, about whether a one-

off new media assignment scaffolds learning appropriately, and about the traditional trade-offs of group work versus individual work. The following topics were raised by just one focus group each: originality and copyright; showing work publicly versus keeping it private; assuring that the assignment is appropriate to the discipline; and addressing graduate attributes.

How to make a video?

Instructions on how to make one's first video, podcast, wiki, or blog are readily available on the web in written or video format. *Commoncraft* makes simple and clear animations about the basics, both concepts and mechanics. *Vimeo* provides an entire set of videos on how to make and upload your first video. Some lecturers have created nicely detailed guidelines, which assist students in focusing on the academic content of their production and not get lost in creating special effects. We have been adding these materials to our project wiki – http://newmediaforscience-research.wikispaces.com.

Web platforms for publishing student work

Students can upload videos to *YouTube*, for example, tick a box to restrict viewing to a selected audience, and e-mail the URL of their video to their lecturer. *YouTube* provides guidelines and instructions for translating the format of a student video into one that can be viewed online, thereby saving the lecturer a technical nightmare. Similarly, podcasts can be "published" privately on a range of free sites. A sufficient number of students in any class is now familiar with this process so that little or no guidance from the lecturer is needed. The use of such existing platforms gets around the need to ask for server space within the university bureaucracy, as life is too short for such endeavours.

Technical developments are needed to address privacy and access for different types of viewers of online student submissions. That is, how can a student make their podcast available within their project team or across their tutorial before sending to the lecturer for submission? If their lecturer likes the podcast, and classmates vote it to be one of the best, how is it made available for the following year's class or on the campus, as a whole?

It is here that intellectual property and copyright issues arise, as students often employ music and images found on the web without asking for copyright clearance. They will note the source in the "credits", when reminded, but permission for public use is rarely gained. So, like a crocheted bikini, their proud compositions need to be kept from the public sphere. However, the "fair use" doctrine is expanding to the web domain.

Overcoming this near term hurdle is not rocket science, but it does require a bit of development. In the near term, lecturers may need to pay for use of suitable platforms. How many lecturers are accustomed to budgeting a couple of hundred dollars a year for web space? And how many would like to add administering that space—not to mention learning to administer it—to their crowded diary? Some would recommend letting the current generation of lecturers die out, to be replaced by those who are versed in these processes from primary school age.

Assessment

How do you assess a video or podcast, a wiki or blog? That question is thrown up often, and two strategies to engage with new media have emerged as a result. Some lecturers create their own videos or podcasts and have yet to assign their students to do the same. So, the lecturer is becoming familiar with the new technology but has not released control to students. Alternatively, some lecturers assign students to create a podcast, for example, but they do not assess it. Students have already begun adding videos to project reports when they are not requested, and one imagines that some impact on their marks will result.

That said, it is not difficult to assess new media assignments. They traditionally do not count for many marks, at least in these early days. So any uncertainty in how the mark is determined can be mitigated by reducing the impact of any possible unfairness (as though that ever kept a pre-medical student from arguing for additional points). We have found that consternation about how to mark a video, for example, tends to evaporate when we propose counting eighty-percent for content and twenty-percent for presentation. The balance is readily shifted once the option is placed on the table. Some lecturers prefer greater weight for content and others less.

We have been adding marking rubrics to our project wiki as examples as well as asking participants in conference workshops to critique these rubrics. These initial versions are sometimes quite detailed, and that level of detail may be either an attraction or a deterrent to other lecturers adopting new media approaches.

Educational Evaluation

Measuring learning impact is not the highest priority for innovators, we have found, as they have faith, and faith is a wonderful thing. Pioneering lecturers have been buoyed by the enthused engagement of students, the technical accuracy of their content, and the general lack of condemnation of the new media exercises in student evaluations.

Theory-supported evaluation, which is being pursued by Hoban, should be a reasonably convincing measure. He has argued that students learn in these production processes because they need to revisit science content from several different perspectives for scripting, production, and evaluation of the impact of the animation that they create. Production processes, such as scripting, require repeated reading of scientific material and a sufficiently thorough understanding to reproduce conceptual understanding.

Such repetition for performance could be seen to relate to the Western image of traditional Chinese learning processes, which are seen to rely on memorisation through repetition. The need for performance (i.e., public performance in the sense of reciting for class or an oral exam, where issues of face are involved) can make pursuing repetition and memorisation a more compelling strategy than memorisation merely for regurgitation on an exam paper that only the lecturer sees. So, new media could be understood to replace the oral recitation in classrooms of a bygone era.

Such thoughts remain speculation until they can be substantiated via exploration of the literature and evaluation of students at work, which is being proposed by Hoban. That said, theoretical explanation for educational impact is coming.

Another conceptual challenge is discriminating between impacts on learning of science content and impacts on the uptake of graduate attributes. The latter is a moving target, as assessment of graduate

attributes in science subjects, which could yield a baseline for our purposes, appears to be still in its infancy. Lecturers can cite qualitative and anecdotal evidence about their students' abilities to write coherently or present orally, and they can recount marks on assignments. However, the predominant weight of a mark in a science subject—as well as expertise of the lecturer—remains in content knowledge.

References

Bartle, E., Longnecker, N., & Pegrum, M. (*in review*). Collaboration, contextualisation and communication using new media: Introducing podcasting into an undergraduate chemistry class.

Kennedy, G., Dalgarno, B., Gray, K., Judd, T., Waycott, J., Bennett, S., Maton, K., Krause, K.L., Bishop, A., Chang, R., & Churchwood, A. (2007).The net generation are not big users of Web 2.0 technologies: Preliminary findings. In ICT: Providing choices for learners and learning. Proceedings ascilite Singapore 2007 (pp. 517–525). Retrieved April 25, 2009, from http://netgen.unimelb.edu.au/publications/published.html

Rifkin, W., Longnecker, N., Leach, J., Davis, L., & Orthia, L. (2010). Students publishing in new media: Eight hypotheses – a House of cards? *International Journal of Innovation in Science and Mathematics Education*, *18*(1): 43–54.

Biographical note:

Four of the authors are principals of the ALTC New Media for Science project. Righetti, a zoologist, served until recently as project officer. Rifkin led the Science Communication Program at UNSW from 2000 to 2010. Longnecker, a plant biologist by training, leads the program at UWA. Leach, with a doctorate in the rhetoric of science, heads the program at UQ. Davis, a zoologist, is in charge of the postgraduate program in science communication at the U of Otago. Only Righetti really knows how to use Twitter.

Contact: willrifkin@unsw.edu.au

The D-Cubed Dissemination Investigation Project

By Bianca Berry and Deanne Gannaway

In late 2009, the Australian Learning and Teaching Council (ALTC) funded a special project to determine to what extent the promoted dissemination strategies had led to the effective dissemination and consolidation of outcomes of completed ALTC Grants Scheme projects in the period 2006 to 2009. The project, named *D-Cubed: A Review of Dissemination Strategies used by Projects Funded by the ALTC Grants Scheme*, was led by Deanne Gannaway (The University of Queensland) and Tilly Hinton (University of the Sunshine Coast), and supported by Project Officer, Kaitlin Moore, and Research Officer, Dr Bianca Berry.

The D-Cubed project developed a new dissemination framework, grounded in both the literature and the empirical research, designed to increase opportunities for achieving productive change in learning and teaching. The project developed a series of resources based on the framework to support future teaching and learning innovators in developing a coherent, consistent dissemination strategy. The new framework particularly attends to exploring the climate of readiness for change, which previous project leaders identified as a challenge. These resources are aimed at those who are looking at developing a dissemination strategy for teaching and learning innovation projects and those who are coordinating institutional changes in teaching and learning practice.

Background to the project

Dissemination is crucial if learning and teaching research is to inform decision-making and affect change. If the ultimate purpose of dissemination is indeed for the intended audience to take up or adopt an innovation, information or resources, as argued by Fincher (2000), it is understandable that funding bodies would be interested in ensuring that there is a return on investment and that innovative practices move beyond project or investigation teams.

The effectiveness of dissemination has long been a concern in the Australian higher education sector (see, for example Hicks, 2004). Two investigation projects were commissioned in 2004 to identify dissemination strategies that would increase the likelihood of achieving change in teaching and learning practices to inform the newly formed ALTC. The projects resulted in *Dissemination, Adoption and Adaptation of Project Innovations in Higher Education* (McKenzie, Alexander, Harper, & Anderson, 2005) and *Strategies for Effective Dissemination of Project Outcomes* (Southwell, Gannaway, Orrell, Chalmers, & Abraham, 2005). These reports were the basis for the ALTC Dissemination Framework (2006), which has guided grant proposals since its introduction.

What did the project investigate?

The D-Cubed Project explored the effectiveness of this approach for ALTC

Grants Scheme projects funded in the period 2006 to 2009. This study investigated dissemination practice by exploring project leader understandings of dissemination and how those understandings are enacted in sharing project outcomes beyond the project team. The investigation used an illuminative evaluation strategy (Parlett & Hamilton, 1972) to identify how effective "in practice" project dissemination strategies are in embedding and consolidating outcomes from projects funded under the ALTC grant schemes and completed between January 2006 and December 2009. Illuminative evaluation is by its nature participatory, iterative and open-ended. It invites the construction of meaning through a multi-pronged investigation that draws upon the feedback of external participants and observers. This methodology allowed for the development of resources informed by a strong evidence base for future grant applicants and support staff applicants.

What did the project find?

The study revealed that while grant recipients espouse an approach to dissemination which occurs systematically throughout the project and is highly-engaged, practice suggests that often dissemination is in fact a collection of atomistic activities, rather than a clearly planned strategy designed to achieve sustainable change. In summary, D-Cubed found that an opportunity exists for the ALTC to provide clearer definition of key terms and a new dissemination framework.

What were the project deliverables?

As a result of the project findings, both a new definition and a new framework were proposed by D-Cubed. The new framework particularly attends to explaining the concept of climate of readiness for change, which project leaders grappled with identifying, articulating, and responding to or developing in their project contexts. The project outputs include a series of resources based on the framework that support potential grant applicants in developing a coherent, consistent dissemination strategy.

Dissemination Framework and Definition

The project found that the provision of a dissemination framework is valuable, and that there is a compelling case for a new framework that reflects the understandings of dissemination that have emerged through the project. In response to these findings, the D-Cubed team proposes a new definition and framework for dissemination. The proposed new definition is *the planned process of understanding potential adopters and engaging with them throughout the life of the project, to facilitate commitment to sustained change*.

The framework consists of three interlocking elements—assess climate, engage, and transfer – and indicates that dissemination is most effective when all three elements are in place.

- *Assess climate of readiness for change*: The climate of readiness for change is the existence of "a fertile environment [which] nurtures a climate of risk taking and systematic change […] essential conditions for successful innovation and dissemination" (Southwell et al., 2005, p. 53). To be most effective, assessing the climate occurs at the planning stage, and is revisited frequently throughout the project. The considerations for assessing climate of readiness for change are listed within the framework.
- *Engage*: Engaging with targeted potential adopters throughout the project invites authentic involvement of targeted potential adopters and includes them in the evolution of the project findings to have "mind changing encounter[s] [not] to articulate your own point of view but rather to engage the psyche of the other person" (Gardner, 2004, p. 163). To be most effective, engagement is planned for, and takes place throughout, the life of the project, not merely at the project's end. The considerations for engaging throughout the project are listed within the framework.
- *Transfer*: Transfer describes the processes undertaken to maintain momentum and impact beyond the funded life of the project and beyond the project team. It is concerned with sustaining the influence of the project in the long-term. The considerations for enabling transfer of project outcomes are listed within the framework.

The *Engage* element appears to be the prime point of focus in terms of project design, grant application assessment and requirements from the ALTC. The investigation findings suggested that project leaders learnt through the process of their projects that the other elements were important, but that these elements were not necessarily easily developed or well understood at the beginning of the project. To support future teaching and learning project applicants and innovators, the D-Cubed project developed a series of resources designed to be used at the point of project design, to support potential applicants and innovators in developing a project design which had a focus on future embedding and upscaling project and innovation outcomes.

Dissemination Resources

Resources for prospective grant applicants are designed to support the planning and undertaking of effective dissemination and are collated in the booklet: *The D-Cubed Guide: Planning for Effective Dissemination.* This booklet is a practitioner-focused guide for prospective applicants and those who support them which provides a brief overview of the project, and then explores the nature and purpose of dissemination, argues the importance of planning projects with sustained change in mind, and presents a range of effective dissemination activities. Examples of good practice are included to illustrate the range of ways that project teams have successfully approached dissemination.

The guide also includes a number of dissemination resources. The dissemination resources are:

- *Thinking about planning a dissemination strategy*
  This resource supports prospective applicants to design a dissemination strategy that facilitates engagement with potential adopters across the life of the project
- *Thinking about identifying your target groups*
  This resource encourages consideration of who comprises the project's potential target groups. It classifies the target group in terms of end-users, potential adopters, enablers, and the wider sector; and it provides guiding questions to identify each of these groups.
- *Thinking about assessing the climate of readiness for change*
  This resource provides a series of questions to ascertain the degree to which there is a climate of readiness for change. Based on the climate considerations from the

D-Cubed Dissemination Framework, it also provides advice for responding to situations where the climate is not yet ready for change.

- *Thinking about dissemination budget planning*
  This resource outlines key considerations of budgeting for dissemination. It achieves this by working through cost factors, offering suggestions for reducing expenditure, and posing questions to prompt project sustainability for a detailed list of dissemination activities.

- *Thinking about sustainability of dissemination*
  This resource prompts applicants' thinking about the sustainability of their dissemination strategy by raising a series of questions related to effort, costs, and findability. Prompts for environmental sustainability are also included.

- *Thinking about dissemination literature*
  This resource summarises a collection of useful articles about dissemination. It compresses an extensive reference list into a top-ten list of readings, with hyperlinks and summaries for each.

A series of four one-page quick guides was also produced to provide brief summaries of salient points for senior managers, prospective applicants, assessors and evaluators, and support staff. Findings specific to groups of individuals are available in the quick guides.

Where to now?

With the future of the ALTC still unclear at the present time, the D-Cubed project team are endeavouring to ensure the sustainability of its resources for the benefit of grant applicants and support staff. The project deliverables will be available on the ATLC website.

An additional outcome of the D-Cubed project has been the invitation for Deanne Gannaway to participate in dissemination activities in the United Kingdom. Deanne has been invited to engage in a sharing practice session at the University of Bath to share perspectives from UK, Indian and Australian points of view; to participate in an informal discussion around dissemination for innovations grants support staff at the Universities of Bath, Gloucester and Northumbria; to host workshops for potential applicants at the same institutions; and to lead a regional SEDA workshop on dissemination to be hosted at the University of Bath in May 2011.

References

Australian Learning and Teaching Council. (2006). ALTC Dissemination Framework. Retrieved from http://www.altc.edu.au/resource-dissemination-framework-altc-2008

Fincher, S. (2000). *From transfer to transformation: Towards a framework for successful dissemination of engineering education*. Paper presented at the 30th ASEE/IEE Frontiers in Education Conference.

Gardner, H. (2004). *Changing minds: The art and science of changing our own and other people's minds*. Massachusetts: Harvard Business School Publishing.

Hicks, O. (2004). *Composite report on projects funded through the Australian Universities Teaching Committee 2000-2003*. Canberra: Australian Universities Teaching Committee.

McKenzie, J., Alexander, S., Harper, C., & Anderson, S. (2005). *Dissemination, adoption and adaptation of project innovations in higher education*. Sydney: University of Technology, Sydney.

Parlett, M., & Hamilton, D. (1972). *Evaluation as illumination: A new approach to the study of innovatory programs*. Edinburgh University Centre for Research in the Educational Sciences.

Southwell, D., Gannaway, D., Orrell, J., Chalmers, D., & Abraham, C. (2005). *Strategies for effective dissemination of project outcome*: Carrick Institute for Learning and Teaching in Higher Education.

Bianca Berry is a research officer in the University of Queensland Teaching and Educational Development Institute (TEDI). She was a member of the D-Cubed project and helped to develop the project deliverables.

Deanne Gannaway is the Head of the Evaluation Services Unit in the University of Queensland Teaching and Educational Development Institute (TEDI). She was the co-leader of the D-cubed project, with Tilly Hinton, Senior Academic Advisor (Strategy and Scholarship) at the University of the Sunshine Coast.

Deanne can be emailed at d.gannaway@uq.edu.au

The Happy Marriage of Grammar and Content

By Susan Carter

As I child I failed to learn multiplication tables. I could handle addition and was even quite quick at long sums. Clumping up into bigger figures seemed a natural and honest thing for numbers to want to do or to be required to do. I'd seen how that worked in the world: two shoes, four bananas, six children, that kind of thing. But multiplication entailed a numerical engagement that looked problematic and possibly sinful. I liked going to Sunday school as a child, which might be why I was suspected a sinister dimension to the verb "multiply." Multiplication complicated the trustworthiness of numbers.

Another cognitive obstacle was that I read the numbers as characters, except for that 10 was a transition epiphany, which at that age I took to mean marriage (or, less probably, the alternative: becoming a nun and joining a convent). 10 changed an ordinary number, any innocent and prepubescent number under 10, to an exalted version of itself. Each number gained the solid ring of a zero in the final place. After that its life would not be the same again. The nature of numbers was revealed when they were multiplying.

The numbers probably lived together in a castle when not called into service. Packs of cards play a role in this construct. Inside this closed and worrying society, five was the beautiful heroine, selfish because in relationship with others she either demanded the status of a zero ending or else a reflection of her own image. For five it was all about five, take it or leave it. Seven on the other hand was villainous, demanding outrageously improbable endings as a result of his relationship with others. He would have been the sadist, the addict, the bondage and car boot man had I known about those things. He must have also been caddishly attractive to persuade a drab and rather dim handmaiden like 4, the plodding servant 6, or the slightly elevated subaltern 8, to take a whirl with him when inevitably they would end up in a questionable situation like 54 or even, good grief, implicated by a line of associations in something as numerically sordid as 49. Numbers multiplying themselves were a bit of an embarrassment, if easier to remember than when they flirtatiously multiplied with each other, but you got an insight into who they really were when they did it. As a result of this approach to mathematics—my mother termed it an "over-active imagination"—I was one of a "special" group permitted to sit outside in the sun and learn times tables for the duration of arithmetic classes. To this day I add numbers instead of permitting them to multiply: 6 times 7 will be 28 and 14.

All is not lost; that is not the end of the story. If this habit of hermeneutic reading was an inappropriate learning strategy with multiplication tables that has blighted me forever, I am beginning to find that it works quite well with grammar and the clear conveyance of meaning. I use it now when teaching writing. It works to illuminate the potential of verbs and nouns. Northrop Frye elaborates on the idea that religious understanding errs in designating God to be a noun, whereas, Frye proposes, God ought to be a verb (Frye, 1982). I like Frye's attention to the way that grammatical construction affects the deeper levels of conceptualisation. His suggestion also spotlights the different implications of noun and verb forms.

Nouns are substantive. They are static. Their best quality is that they have presence. Their weakness is that they cannot get anywhere without verbs. Verbs lack substance, but they motivate the world of nouns. They exert their own presence only by animating nouns. Nouns perk up and come to life (or occasionally death, but at least it is a change) once verbs engage with them. You have to feel that it is the verbs that activate the marriage. The nouns, I expect, sit along one wall like girls at a school dance hoping that the right verbs will waltz them into purposefulness. The verbs always drive. Yet the nouns are entirely necessary. If a verb cannot secure a noun partner, it is just an empty gust or a shiver that no-one takes seriously. The good thing about this is that although both nouns and verbs have quite severe limitations, they work very happily together. Between them they provide the basic linguistic grid through which we conceptualise our experience of the world.

Questioning whether abstract ideas ought to be bundled up into language as verbs or nouns, and insisting that it is significant which form they are given, helps writing revision, especially for those who write in disciplines like Higher Education. Higher Education's discourse squealches with abstraction, which makes for rather stodgy writing. I don't have to claim originality with this criticism: Helen Sword has already performed a quite brilliant anatomy of Higher Education style (Sword, 2009). Education is also perhaps more appropriately a verb rather than a noun (and this is why it is so hard to measure with any degree of honest trading/academic rigour). Abstract nouns are much less vivid than concrete ones, and if you are able to slyly slip in some concrete ones like "dance-floor" and "balcony," readers will welcome the sense of the real world coming back into existence.

When I teach what I call advanced grammar in a writing workshop for doctoral students, I point out that nouns are static entities with presence whereas verbs are an impulse, an energy. These "doing or being words" are like a charge of electricity. So besides arguing the case for active verbs rather than passive ones unless it is to hide agency or because you do not know who did something, I also ask students to scrutinise their habits with nouns and verbs as they pack their own abstract, complex or theoretical ideas into prose.

At a macro-level, verbs drive the nouns into contributing to an argument, the thesis. On one hand you need the right material—the substantive matter needs to be shrewdly chosen—but this requirement is secondary to the need for a live charge

of argument throughout the thesis. You are likely to begin by feeling at the start of a doctorate that the substance matters most. When you envision yourself becoming an expert, expertise is due to possession of a field of nouns. However, acceptance that actually the verbal drive of argument is the essence of the thesis enables you to inhabit the process of researching more consciously than becoming an expert in X. Hermeneutic practice could shake out a moral here about life in general: I suspect at the end when we look back on our lives it will be the doing that makes them worth while rather than the substantive.

Some points about grammar usefully enable the revision of writing so that the ideas inhabit the most efficacious grammatical positions possible. The main clause should have the main substantive bit of the idea as the subject, and the main spasm of energy as the main verb. An example of a tautological main clause devoid of content is "An indication of how far these ideas had developed and been generally accepted by the New Zealand public was shown by the Homosexual Law Reform bill of 1984." "An indication…was shown" exemplifies a verb idea "indicate" being packaged up as a noun and then having to dance with a very close relative in the main clause. Of course, if prose is clear and the supervisor isn't muttering negatively, then leave well alone, but for passages that are clunky, or stodgy, or simply unclear, a door check of what is an authentic noun and what an accredited verb, and the banishment of imposters inhabiting inappropriate grammatical forms, can enable the meaning to be more readily apparent.

Copular verbs (is, are, was and were, for example) are the drab dullards of prose. Sword points out that copular verbs are like equal marks in mathematics: they merely allow an appositive relationship to be established rather than a movement forward (Sword, 2007). Sword speculates that we overuse these in academic writing because copulars provide a comfortable, easily-at hand-formula for building thoughts. They slow down the speed of advancement just a little each time they are used. Too many, and those clumpy abstract nouns are shuffling on the spot from behind zimmer frames, or just wiggling vaguely from chairs. A reader may lose their fascination in the dance of meaning.

Frye, N. (1982). *The great code: The Bible and literature* (1st ed.). New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich.

Sword, H. (2007). *The writer's diet*. Auckland: Pearson Education NZ.

Sword, H. (2009). Writing higher education differently: A manifesto on style. *Studies in Higher Education, 34*(3), 319–336.

Susan Carter has coordinated the Student Learning Centre Doctoral Programme at the University of Auckland since 2004. Her own doctorate (2001) explicates the literary motif of the loathly lady in medieval literature, with resulting publication on medieval, Renaissance and fantasy literature, but her focus is now on the practice, process and pedagogy of the doctoral degree. Her research interest ranges between the experiences of candidates, the structure of the thesis, the support of doctoral students, and the way that institutional and national policy affects candidate experience.

Contact: s.carter@auckland.ac.nz

*ATN Assessment Conference 2010 Assessment: Sustainability, Diversity and Innovation. A report from Sydney

By Katrina Waite and Nicola Parker

***ATN =Australian Technology Network of Universities. The members of the network are Curtin University of Technology, the University of South Australia, RMIT University, the University of Technology, Sydney, and Queensland University of Technology. The web site is www.atn.edu.au**

On November 18–19, 2010, the University of Technology Sydney hosted the ATN Assessment Conference which was attended by over 100 academics from Australia and New Zealand. Feedback from attendees indicated that this was viewed as a high quality conference. This was evident not only in the keynote speaker presentations, but in the papers, workshops, and poster sessions which showcased the work of around 90 academics. Many presentations provided significant opportunities for discussion and the sharing of ideas. Highlights of the conference included presentations by the keynote speakers (available on the conference website: http://www.iml.uts.edu.au/atnassessment/conference-team.html) and a panel discussion on academic standards by a number of ALTC Discipline Scholars.

International keynote speaker, Professor Dai Hounsell, University of Edinburgh, challenged many of the tertiary sector's traditional and accepted practices in his presentation, "*Assessing the 21st-century graduate: Seven challenges*". Dai questioned current exam practices, and suggested that the use of traditional handwritten exams could be reviewed and redesigned to more effectively incorporate the types of technologies that students are familiar with

and will use after they graduate. He also discussed the benefits of broadening the range of communication genres in which students learn and are assessed, so that these more closely reflect the communication genres in which they will engage in their professional lives (whether within a university research field or in work outside the university context). Dai suggested that assessment task genres should be explicitly described in terms of form, purpose and audience. This theme was also developed in asubsequent presentations by Clair Hughes and by Tim Moore and Andrew Johnson – a zeitgeist perhaps?

Keynote Speaker and ALTC Fellow, Professor David Boud from the University of Technology Sydney positioned the use of formative assessment in the context of a graduate's learning within and beyond their degree. He suggested that by modifying approaches to assessment, academics have the opportunity to develop students' informed judgment and reflexivity in a way which is more closely aligned with the skills that graduates will need as they move into their chosen career. This approach to sustainable assessment—which inspired part of the conference's theme—implies a re-thinking of programs of study so that students have the opportunity to develop judgement throughout their degree.

The keynote by Professor Keithia Wilson and Associate Professor Alf Lizzio of Griffith University presented findings from an ALTC funded project investigating the perceptions of first year assessment from the perspectives of academics, students, and professional staff. Their study suggested that the most effective and sustainable framework might be a Supported Independence Culture, with scaffolding, dialogue, and data-driven engagement. This appeared to be an effective framework, although they presented many examples from their research showing that this type of approach may be the exception rather than the norm. Further resources on this project will be made available on the ALTC website.

Three ALTC Discipline Scholars, Assoc Prof Mark Freeman (Business, Management and Economics), Assoc Prof Sid Newton, (Architecture Building and Design), and Professor Brian Yates (Science), participated in a panel session on the ALTC Learning and Teaching Academic Standards project. The panellists outlined their progress on consultations with stakeholders, such as employers and professional bodies within their respective disciplinary communities, to establish agreed threshold learning outcomes for graduates. They also highlighted the tensions between the pressures for disciplinary standards, the desire to maintain distinctive curriculum in different institutional contexts, and a commitment to continuing innovation in higher education teaching, learning and assessment

Presenters at the parallel papers sessions, workshops and posters, demonstrated that many of the challenges raised by the keynotes were already the subject of innovative assessment practices within many institutions; and that within the Australian and New Zealand there is a considerable commitment to further innovation to develop assessment approaches which are engaging for students, facilitate sustained learning and are sustainable for academic staff.

An assessment conference would not be complete without its own assessment. Apart from the conference evaluation, there were two other non-summative assessments. ALTC Teaching Fellow Dr Keith Willey gave participants the opportunity to review the reviewing process using the SparkPlus online assessment software (http://www.spark.uts.edu.au/). On a lighter note, thanks to Assoc Prof Jo McKenzie, Director of IML (UTS's teaching and learning unit), the conference dinner guests were treated to an Assessment Trivia Quiz. This was a collaborative assessment, there were no restrictions on the technology which could be deployed. It was self assessed and proved to be a highly engaging and popular assessment activity. Where else could dinner guests win prizes for answering that Black and William's paper was titled "Inside the Black Box"? Or win points for the most creative "why my assignment is late" excuse?

Closing thoughts

Shifts in the nature of academic conferences in Australia

Whilst the opportunity for interaction and discussion at the conference was highly valued by attendees, current Australian rankings for academic conferences provide no recognition for the fully peer reviewed conference paper in many disciplines. This seems to be creating an environment which may influence participation in future higher education conferences. On the other hand, while the current policy is in place, there may be opportunities for more flexible conference content – including greater emphasis on more interactive formats such as workshops to further enhance conference experiences?

ALTC support for the development of assessment scholarship in Australasia

A quick search of this article would show numerous mentions of the ALTC. Dai Hounsell's keynote presentation was made possible thanks to sponsorship from the ALTC. ALTC Discipline Scholars, Fellows, project leaders and team members featured prominently in the conference in both keynotes and other presentations. A number of the presentations shared the outcomes of ALTC funded projects, and the resources produced through this funding are freely available to all universities.

2011 conference

The forthcoming ATN Assessment Conference will be held at Curtin University in Western Australia on October 20–21 2011. For further information contact J.Yorke@curtin.edu.au

Katrina Waite was a Co-convenor of the ATN Assessment Conference 2010. She is an academic developer in the Institute for Interactive Media and Learning at the University of Technology Sydney. She has worked in the area of business education in Australia and in the Middle East, and is currently undertaking research on the practice of business curriculum change in the post Global Financial Crisis era.

Contact: Katrina.Waite@uts.edu.au

Nicola Parker was a Co-convener of the ATN Assessment Conference 2010. She is a Lecturer in the Institute of Interactive Media and Learning at the University of Technology Sydney working on projects and liaising with the Faculty of Law.

Contact Nicola.Parker@uts.edu.au

International Column Exchange

Teaching, Learning and Globalisation

By Peter Felten, President POD

Globalisation has become an obsession in higher education. Across the planet, professional associations like STLHE, HERDSA, ISSOTL, and POD all will host 2011 conferences exploring boundary-crossing in a rapidly diversifying academy; HERDSA's conference theme, for example, emphasises the "seismic" shifts and "tectonic" transformations occurring in the sector, both in Australia and internationally. Many seem to agree with Thomas Friedman's 2005 contention that the world is flat.

My past year as the POD Network's president has me wondering whether Friedman's thesis actually holds for teaching, learning and academic development in higher education. In other words, do we have a level playing field that allows innovators from anywhere to influence practice everywhere? Additionally, as a historian, I harbor a certain skepticism toward claims about the progressive nature of change over time. So, even if we could have one, would we want a flat world in teaching, learning and academic development?

Some evidence supports Friedman's thesis in our context. Technology makes it simple for our ideas to cross oceans. Most of us can access the world's academic literature from our computers. As the literature spreads, we do too. POD's 2010 conference, for instance, attracted participants from every continent except Antarctica, including more than 30 from Japan alone. New professional organisations also are flattening our academic world. The International Consortium for Educational Development (ICED) and the International Society for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (ISSOTL) are relatively young associations (founded in 1993 and 2004) that bring together scholars in their fields from across the globe. With their conferences and journals, both contribute to an environment that allows innovation in teaching and academic development to spread rapidly.

In published scholarship, however, the boundaries in our fields seem to be less permeable – at least in the United States, where we habitually read work by our national colleagues. This fall I conducted an informal research project comparing citations from a recent volume of POD's annual *To Improve the Academy* (#28, 2010) with a similar sample from ICED's *International Journal for Academic Development* (3 issues, September 2008–June 2009). Over that period of time, *TIA* and *IJAD* each published 21 articles, representing some the best academic development scholarship in the world. All 48 of the authors of the *TIA* articles reported being at North American institutions, while only 8 of 52 *IJAD* authors were. The works cited in these articles echoed the authors' institutional affiliations. Of the nearly 250 books cited in *TIA,* some 94% were published in the United States, while 39% of the books referenced in *IJAD* were published in the U.S. Journal citations followed a similar pattern. More than 400 journals were referenced in the *TIA* and *IJAD* articles that I examined, yet only 25% of those journals were cited at least once in both *TIA* and *IJAD*. Although some variation should be expected, the lack of overlap is striking. Around the world, academic developers are doing similar work but reading and producing different scholarly literature. I suspect that I would find comparable results if I expanded my sample to include HERDSA's *Higher Education Research & Development*, or if I explored volumes focused more directly on the scholarship of teaching and learning, such as STLHE's *The Canadian Journal for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning*.

Our scholarly world, it seems, is *not* flat. We tend to read, cite, and write with colleagues from our own neighborhoods, particularly those of us in the United States. Effective innovation in teaching, learning and academic development anywhere may not be influencing practice everywhere. Friedman's thesis, it seems, does not describe our professional world.

That might be unfortunate but it is not particularly surprising. Academics are busy people, furiously juggling multiple obligations. Staying current in the global literature on teaching, learning and academic development might be too much to expect. Additionally, most of us will not, and probably should not, transform our teaching practices as new research emerges. Instead, pedagogical change tends to be contextual and evolutionary. Effective teachers and developers often make small intentional changes, and then assess the learning that results from those changes, before committing to further action.

Taking this deliberate approach to our work, however, is not the same as adopting a parochial view that local practices are good enough. Anna Carew and her colleagues argue in a 2008 *IJAD* article (13:1) that we should aim for "elastic practice" — the capacity to tailor our local work to reflect both a deep knowledge of our own context and an adaptive view of our profession's best practices.

If we can be elastic, then globalisation doesn't need to flatten us. Instead, we can attend to our own contexts while we learn from and contribute to our increasingly global profession.

Peter Felten is the current President of POD. He is the Assistant Provost for Teaching and Learning and Director, Center for the Advancement of Teaching and Learning and also Professor of History at Elon University, North Carolina USA.

Contact: pfelten@elon.edu

www.elon.edu/teaching

www.podnetwork.org

I.T. in Higher Education Column

Technology and control of feedback: My encounters with ROCI

By Roger Atkinson

I surmise that some readers will arrive at this line because they are curious to know what this strange thing *ROCI* might be. If you have been *Facebooked* and *YouTubed* and *Twittered* and *iPadded*, now brace yourself to be *"ROCIed"* (at least in the journal publications part of your CV)!

ROCI is the Australian Research Council's "Research Outlet Consultation Interface". It is the ARC's computer program that presents an Internet interface [1] for collecting reader feedback during their *Phase 1: Public Consultation, 14 February – 4 April 2011* [2]. That states the "what" and the "when" (when it is happening), which are the simple preliminaries to this column's long sections, firstly on the "how" (which is more like a *how artfully*), and secondly the most difficult part, the "why" (which to some extent is a *why bother*).

Starting with *how* ROCI works, I hope that all many members of HERDSA have encountered it themselves, as urged by Roger Landbeck in a February issue of HERDSA's *The Weekly Email News* [3]. Unfortunately, it is likely that ROCI will be shut down promptly at the end of 4 April, and by the time this issue of *HERDSA News* is published, it will be too late to undertake for yourself an initial or further exploration of *how* it works. Thus the observations that have led me to use the word *control* in the title, and the phrase *how artfully* cannot be repeated. To complicate matters, my observations were during two periods, 15–16 February and 17–19 March. At some unknown date between those periods, ROCI received a major upgrade that corrected a number of deficiencies. It is a useful digression to comment on these corrections, because an unknown number of early respondents may be unaware of the corrections, and may need reassurances that their inputs were not "lost" when ROCI "Mark I" was upgraded to ROCI "Mark II". The most notable deficiency was that "Mark I" did not allow respondents to revisit their own comments. With "Mark I", hitting the "Save" button really meant "Save, exit, no further access to your comments". With "Mark II", respondents could log in again, view and edit their own comments. It's possible that "Mark I" was disconcerting to many other respondents, as it was for me. Perhaps we have been spoilt by too much experience with better designed interfaces? In my second period of ROCI observations and entries, I noted that the entries from my first period could not be retrieved and I felt it prudent to re-enter my text, just in case. Being cautious, I had my own copy on disk, as I use copy and paste into text boxes on interfaces like ROCI, rarely doing direct typing. Re-entering was not a problem, but was it necessary?

A second deficiency in "Mark I" was the lack of proper advice on length limits for text box entries. My carefully composed, evidence-based text for ROCI's "Step 3 Ranking" received a tart and incorrect error message, "The field Ranking Evidence must be a string with a maximum length of 1024." It was incorrect because the word "field" should have been "Tiers" (field ranking evidence was a matter for "Step 4 Fields of Research"). It needed some painful editing and an awareness that a carriage return has to be accompanied by a line feed, i.e. two characters. Painful editing, because the journal I was commenting upon, AJET, has plenty of evidence for promotion relative to several of its peers [4, 5]. I had to leave out the key URLs to get below the magic number 1024 and that for me was very frustrating indeed. Why 1024? Because that is binary 010000000000 or hexadecimal 400, some unknown programmer(s) having a bit of fun, I guess. However, the unknown programmer(s) came good in "Mark II", which features a "counter" for each text box, telling you the number of "Characters left in your quota". Neat, used Microsoft's ASP.NET AJAX [6].

Why quibble about interface design errors that have been corrected? Because if there is poor attention to detail, inadequate initial testing and premature release in one area of ERA, should we examine critically all other areas of ERA for similar faults? To be prudent, "Yes". For example, on interface design, everyone is familiar with the standard advice to examination candidates, "Read the whole of the exam paper before starting to answer questions". Not a principle heeded by ROCI, it did not allow you to do that readily. Taking another aspect, everyone is interested in some kind of indicators about the views held by others, a principle understood very well by media organisations in their solicitation of reader and viewer opinions, for example as in the ABC's *The Drum* and its *Current Poll Results* [7]. A principle that ROCI does not attempt to adopt, as each individual's comments and any overviews that the total feedback may reveal will be available only to "contracted peak bodies and academic groups" [2]. Two more points about this quibble. The ARC can remain indifferent, as it could claim to be understaffed in relation to the tasks it has been given (or *gave to itself*), and it could regard ROCI as being like a sacrificial pawn that diverts critics from bigger targets (such as the ARC's *definition of research excellence*).

Returning to the main theme in *how*, ROCI requires a respondent to "Search ranked outlets" to find a journal or conference. Selecting a journal leads to two functions, "Comment on this Outlet", and "Add Peak Body". Here is the first major element of technological *control*, a channelling of feedback into an individual journal's pigeon hole in ROCI's database. You have to work through to "Step 5 Comments and Conflicts" to find space ("no more than 200 words" or 1024 characters), and of course that space is pinned down to just

one journal even though your comments may be pertinent for all journals. Comment upon the concept of *Tiers* is not encouraged!

Other instances of *control* are subtle put downs. "Step 1, Outlet eligibility" seeks information on "why you feel you are qualified to comment on this outlet", and asks about "your academic expertise relevant to the field (e.g. professor of the area)". How about "part time postgraduate student in the area"? "Step 5 Comments and Conflicts" asks respondents to "Declare Conflict of Interest" (the prescribed choices are "None", "Editorial Role", "Previous Editorial Role", "Publisher" and "Other"). I for one prefer to view "Editorial Role", for example, as a *virtue*, not a *conflict*. "Step 3, Ranking" seeks evidence, which "… may include your knowledge of the field and how the outlet compares with other outlets, journal metrics, acceptance rates, editorial committee, editorial process and any other supporting evidence to justify your rank submission." Quite a number of readers may want to ask, "Did the ARC *really* consider proper evidence in those categories when it produced Tiers 2010?" Different rules for ROCI respondents?

Moving on to the *why* aspect of ROCI, it is useful to adopt the perspective of a hierarchy of objectives, for example as used in *Bloom's Taxonomy* [8]. At the bottom of the hierarchy seems to be the ARC's concern about being overwhelmed by a large volume of feedback. The main clue to defining this objective appears to be clause 1.1.7 in *ATM 66* [9].

- Public consultation 1 – feedback was sought from the sector regarding the draft journal rankings initially developed by the four Learned Academies. Approximately 100,000 pieces of feedback from 109 organisations were received in this phase of consultation.
- Public consultation 2 – the ARC released the draft list without ranks and FoR codes to allow the sector to identify eligible missing journals. The ARC received over 4,000 requests for new journals to be added.
- Direct Consultation – the ARC approached over 700 expert reviewers and peak bodies to assist with the finalisation of the ERA 2010 ranked journal list. [9, clause. 1.1.7]

Well, "100,000 pieces of feedback", "over 4,000 requests", "over 700 expert reviewers"! Needs a technological control mechanism! Thus at the simplest level, ROCI's objective is to cope with volume. For the next level of objectives, consider the phrase "over 700 expert reviewers and peak bodies to assist with the finalisation". Seemingly, this is an unwieldy number and the objective must be to reduce it, whilst continuing to minimise the scope for criticism if a "reviewer" or "peak body" who should have been consulted, was not consulted. The main clue here is on ROCI's home page [1]:

> … individuals are encouraged to recommend the peak body or disciplinary group that they believe is the most appropriate to review the public consultation feedback for an outlet during Phase 2. The peak bodies nominated by individuals during Phase 1 of the public consultation will be checked and verified by the ARC before being uploaded on to the Public Consultation website. … Please note that a peak body's representation on this list does not ensure participation during Phase 2 as this is a formal tender process. [1]

This is *artfully* done. Encourage a blow out in the numbers of "peak bodies" nominated. The blow out can be monitored using the ERA's "list of suggested peak bodies" [10]. The "PeakBodyList" appears to have started from the ARC file "ERA_expert_reviewers.pdf" containing a list of 62 "Learned Academies and Discipline Peak Bodies involved in developing and reviewing the ERA 2010 Ranked Journal List", and has grown steadily during the current Phase 1: Public Consultation. Regrettably I don't have a full record, but the numbers nominated grew quickly, 97 on 15 February, 304 on 13 March, and 343 on 20 March (the data entry clerk could not keep up, a simple spell check revealed 14 errors in 343 lines). Sounds overwhelming, but the key phrase is "Phase 2 … is a formal tender process". If a "nominated peak body" does not tender, either by itself or as a partner in a consortium, then it can safely excluded from further participation as far as the ARC is concerned. It will be a matter for successful tenderers or "service provider(s)" to deal with (or not deal with) "nominated peak bodies" that did not tender or did tender but were not awarded a contract. Numbers problem solved! Most of the "nominated peak bodies" will be deterred from tendering, I guess, by the complexity and verbosity in *ATM 66* [9]. That gets the numbers down, and then a modest number of contracts (probably much less than ERA 2010's 62 "academies") may be awarded. Make them work hard, especially in the cases of "multiple service providers responsible for a title":

> 1.2.10 The service provider(s) will be required to review the public consultation feedback, consult with relevant individuals and groups, work with other service provider(s) if cross-over of the ranked outlet titles occur, seek international peer review and finalise recommendations of the ranked outlets lists.
>
> …
>
> 1.2.10 The service provider(s) must also provide final rank and FoR code recommendations to the ARC. If there are multiple service providers responsible for a title, differences in recommendations must be resolved amongst the service providers before the final recommendation is provided to the ARC. [9]

It's not clear from *ATM 66* whether service providers are obliged to maintain confidentialty with respect to their reports and recommendations to the ARC. *ATM 66* says cryptically, "Our Confidential Information includes the information listed below: … [*insert details.]" [9] That illustrates another level of objectives (we need a numbering scheme here, let's say "Level 3"!), concerned with giving "flexibility" or "wriggle room". If the ARC receives *confidential* recommendations from its "service provider(s)" it will a have good degree of "flexibility".

The main clue to the next level of objectives ("Level 4"!) is also on a home page, that for ERA 2012, titled *Review of the ERA 2010 Ranked Outlet Lists*, first sentence [2]:

> The ranked journal and ranked conference lists form an integral part of the ERA evaluation process. [2]

That's it. Principal conclusion of the *Review* given in the first sentence. Objective is to establish beyond question that journal and conference ranking is here to stay. *Why bother*? End of story. However, there may be a suggestion of a limited "flexibility" emerging from the *Review*. Consider clues in the elaborateness of the process mapped out for the *Review*, the stimulus it has given to the emergence of new consortia tendering to become a peak body (for example, the AARE led consortium that

includes HERDSA, ascilite, AVETRA, CADAD, PESA, MERGA, SORTI and ACDE, tendering for the whole of FoR13 Education), and the growing amount of public criticism of journal ranking [for example, references cited in 4 and 11; 12; 13; 14]. The ARC can afford to be quite flexible about the review outcomes in relation to *rank order*. Some journals promoted, some demoted, perhaps the rankings of Australian-based, open access, newer generation journals may creep up a bit relative to European or US-based, paid subscription only, traditional or older generation journals. However, *rank order* is not as important as the *cutoffs* between Tiers:

> The ARC may intend to ease the pressure a little by softening its stance on the rigidly normative nature of Tiers (5% A*, 15% A, 30% B, 50% C), as a recent article in *The Australian* [14] may suggest. In commenting upon some data tables concerning high-performing disciplines, ARC CEO Professor Margaret Sheil is reported to have said, "It shows that the proportion of A* and A journals did not correlate directly with the performance of different disciplines" [14]. We note that references to 5% A* ... seem to have disappeared from the ERA website [15], or have become deeply buried. Could we be on the verge of something less severely normative, e.g. 10% A*, 20% A, 35% B, 35% C? [4]

Whilst it seems likely that the ARC will reserve an exclusive, closed doors prerogative over any decision to become "less severely normative", it would do no harm if our "service providers" urge the ARC to go in that direction. After all, in recent years we have become "less severely normative" in relation to % professors, % associate professors, % senior lecturers, etc., and that was not ruinous to universities.

Now, we are up to "Level 4", and borrowing again somewhat loosely from *Bloom's Taxonomy*, there are more levels in the hierarchy, analogous to "analysis", "synthesis" and "evaluation". But the ARC's effort seems to end at about "Level 4", and for "Level 5" and higher objectives, researchers into these matters have to go elsewhere, for example the analyses by Pontille and Torny (2010) [12], and Cooper and Poletti (2011) [13] (readers may decide for themselves whether these papers, both in Tier B journals, are representative of "only a few papers of very high quality", as *Tiers* allows for B journals, or are something less).

Rather than engaging in the current debates about the ARC's *definition of research excellence*, I will tender an example, which for me personally is illustrative, and it's about time I revisited the problem. Over forty years ago I was a young researcher in soil chemistry, enjoying some quite satisfying successes in getting my work into A* journals including *Nature*, *J. Phys. Chem.* and *Proc. Roy. Soc. A*. From those years, I remember some conversations during a visit back home to the family farm, around seeding time. At a time when my father Bill and farmhand Colin were working the seeding dayshifts and my older brother Gordon worked the nightshifts. Short growing season, you had get the seeding done quickly. This was in WA's north eastern wheatbelt, before the time that climate change really started to hit the district, and back in the days when tractors did not have air conditioned cabs and superphosphate came in 180 pound bags. Not surprisingly, journal prestige and basic research papers in soil chemistry were of little interest to them, containing nothing that would lighten their loads. So, who is to have the main say on what constitutes research excellence? They certainly felt they were not a part of the constituency addressed by research excellence in agricultural science. To represent one aspect of their views as best I can remember, the phrase "ego trip for professors" comes to mind, though their words at the time would have been different – sadly, I cannot check, all three are now dead.

Ego trip for professors? Isn't that a bit overstated? Surely ERA has higher level purposes than that? It's debatable. As first item of evidence I tender the ARC's own phrase from its official, formal definition of Tier A* journals (and I look forward to the ARC's tendering of evidence to the contrary):

> ... journals ... where researchers boast about getting accepted [15]

References

1. ARC (2011). Welcome to the ERA 2012 Ranked Outlets Public Consultation. https://roci.arc.gov.au/
2. ARC (2011). Review of the ERA 2010 Ranked Outlet Lists. http://www.arc.gov.au/era/era_2012/review_of_era10_ranked_outlet_lists.htm
3. HERDSA (2011). *The Weekly Email News Wed*, 23 Feb 2011. ERA Ranking of Journals – Public Submissions.
4. AJET Editorial 27(1). *Review of the ERA 2010 Ranked Outlet Lists*. http://www.ascilite.org.au/ajet/ajet27/editorial27-1.html. Includes key URLs. Portions of the text appeared also in the ascilite Executive Committee's advice to Members (email from Caroline Steel to Members list, subject "Learning technologies and ERA2012", 21 Feb 2011 08:51:46 +1030).
5. AJET Editorial 26(5). Idle Moment 40: Impact Factor revisited. http://www.ascilite.org.au/ajet/ajet26/editorial26-5.html
6. Microsoft Corporation. ASP.NET AJAX. http://www.microsoft.com/downloads/en/details.aspx?FamilyID=ca9d90fa-e8c9-42e3-aa19-08e2c027f5d6&displaylang=en
7. ABC. *The Drum*. Current Poll Results. http://www.abc.net.au/polls/thedrum/vote/total.htm
8. Bloom, B. S. (Ed.) (1956). *Taxonomy of educational objectives: Handbook 1: Cognitive domain*. London: Longman.
9. ARC (2011). *ATM 66 – Provision of review and recommendations for the ERA 2012 ranked outlets*. Obtain via http://www.arc.gov.au/about_arc/tenders.htm ("ATM" is "Approach to market", i.e. a call for tenders)
10. ARC (2011). https://roci.arc.gov.au/Home/PeakBodyList
11. Atkinson, R. J. (2010). ARC announces a Tier Review Process. *HERDSA News*, 32(3). http://www.roger-atkinson.id.au/pubs/herdsa-news/32-3.html
12. Pontille, D. & Torny, D. (2010). The controversial policies of journal ratings: Evaluating social sciences and humanities. *Research Evaluation*, 19(5), 347–360. http://halshs.archives-ouvertes.fr/halshs-00568746/fr/ (also at http://www.ingentaconnect.com/content/beech/rev/2010/00000019/00000005/art00004)
13. Cooper, S. & Anna Poletti, A. (2011). The new ERA of journal ranking: The consequences of Australia's fraught encounter with "quality". *Australian Universities' Review*, 53(1), 57–65. http://www.aur.org.au/archive/53-01/aur_53-01.pdf

continued page 27

The Philosopher's Column

This way
that way
I do not know what to do:
I am of
two minds.

Sappho

By Ann Kerwin

Centuries ago, philosophers were comparatively earthy. Plato wittily elaborates on metaphors of sex and childbirth, while sixteenth-century sage Michel de Montaigne details his own challenged digestion and elimination in essays on how to live. Today in contrast, intestinal matters are rarely mentioned by philosophers, at least not in their professional capacities. While I imagine some of my own students could offer witty alimentary analyses of education as they know it, this column is not so tending. I am interested in learning and unlearning – in biological terms, in absorption and elimination. I am concerned as well about the antagonism between shame and engagement that learning and unlearning, especially in institutional settings, can evoke.

Education, as I conceive it, is formal and informal, public and private. It is a safe bet most of us learn daily. We ingest ideas, techniques and observations. Some nourish, others bloat. We assimilate information, assumptions and preconceptions. Some we digest with evident relish, others pass through unnoticed. When we've a mind to, we feast on learning, refreshing and renewing ourselves; we grow.

We also unlearn. Periodically, we discard facts past their prime. We jettison discredited opinions. We purge knowledge, attitudes and skills no longer useful, releasing once-cherished practices and paradigms. As individuals and co-creators of families, disciplines, institutions and cultures, we are awash with intakes and egresses. I need not cite academic research. You can easily audit your own recent migrations. What have you eliminated recently? What have you absorbed? What do you wish others to discard? What do you offer for their delectation? Trifling or mind-altering, unlearnings have the potential to leaven or deflate. They can open our hearts or break them.

However cognitively tidy we strive to be, we cannot rigidly demarcate processes of learning and unlearning. Permeable, interdependent, they tend to somersault, and blend imperceptibly.

We shall enjoy it.

As for him who finds
fault, may silliness
and sorrow take him!

Sappho

Learning is sometimes depicted as an endless shopping spree, a giddy accumulation of novel understandings, attitudes and skills. But, as any committed collector knows, space, currency and the thrill of the chase demand we expand <u>and</u> edit. Life, ever-fluid, prompts archival updates, obliging us to expunge, rearrange and make space for the new. "The greatest enemy of one of our truths," wrote William James, "may be the rest of our truths." Once the game of learning is afoot, we may find ourselves tossing once-prized goods from our mental storehouse. Only then, perhaps, will solutions we crave wriggle into view. Some individuals, cultures or institutions learn and unlearn avidly; others resist, but none are impervious.

In workshops with teachers, I ask them to expound on one thing, academic or non-academic, they love to learn about. I have never known a participant, however shy, hesitate to enlighten us. Devoted to their learning loves, aficionados absorb and eliminate with relish. If they thought they knew it all, these perpetual students would have no catalyst to continue exploring, enjoying, enthusing. On their turf, with their chosen passions, learning lovers are enamoured, engaged, empowered. For them, learning and unlearning interweave in fascination's seemingly effortless lambada – learning delights, unlearning liberates. It is addictive, this pleasurable, self-nourishing interplay of absorption and elimination. And it would be lamentable, a sorry shame, were these enthusiasts nevermore to say, "Why that is an amazing surprise, I never would have guessed it ... I didn't know that ... Have they really come up with something new? ... How can I find out more?"

If you are squeamish,
don't prod
the beach rubble.

Sappho

I have written, over the years, about venerable philosophies, in equal parts liberating and consolatory, premised on acknowledging our inherent human fallibility in the face of vast unknowns. We are finite. Of this we have ample evidence.

On the other hand, that-to-be-known is unimaginably large. It dwarfs our hard-wired capacities to perceive, conceive and process. Learn we must. Survival demands it. Resolute awareness of our pervasive ignorance ought to inspire a zestful humility which, even in eras of relentless measurement, remains a great leveler. Life is dynamic; humanity is ingenious; still, in the face of all to be known, we are, and must remain, enormously ignorant. Our inventories of knowns and unknowns will shift with inquiry, discovery and revision; nevertheless, we can bet: humans will be learners and unlearners always. It is a good thing we have capacities to enjoy it.

That said, there are dark sides to encounters with ignorance. Not all learning is enjoyable. Not all unlearning uplifts and exhilarates.

Pain penetrates

Me drop
by drop

Sappho

In their important book, *The Spirit Level, Why Equality is Better for Everyone,* Richard Wilkinson and Kate Pickett provide an insightful analysis of status, pride, and shame. "To be human," they write, "means to be highly sensitive to being regarded as inferior ... How people see you matters." Drawing on the work of Thomas Scheff, they characterise shame as "the range of emotions to do with feeling foolish, stupid, ridiculous, inadequate, defective, incompetent, awkward, exposed, vulnerable and insecure ... Scheff called shame *the* social emotion because pride and shame provide the social evaluative feedback as we experience ourselves through others' eyes."

Searing, shame has a long half-life: it reflects and influences not only who we think we are but who we think we can be. Synonyms for "shamed"—as in "he was shamed in public"—are squirm-inducing: to "humiliate, mortify, chagrin, embarrass, abash, chasten, humble, take down a peg, cut down to size, show up, make someone eat crow." In contrast, to "put to shame" is to "outshine, outclass, eclipse, surpass, excel, outstrip, outdo, put in the shade, upstage, run rings around." Shame, as in "she brought shame on the family" – to "disgrace, dishonour, discredit, degrade, debase, stigmatise, taint, sully, tarnish, besmirch, blacken, drag though the mud" contrasts painfully with "she was held in high esteem" – respect, admiration, acclaim, approbation, appreciation, favour, recognition, honour, reverence, estimation, regard, high opinion." We all know shame. It is an excruciating self-conscious embodied emotion. We share heightened sensitivities to pains of public, conspicuous comparative unlearning. Bearing in mind our shared aversion to shame's corrosion of our precarious sense of self and our shared ignorance, it seems *silliness and sorrow* to judge ourselves and others harshly by scales of value known to corrode our core potential for power, value and safety.

Although *Homo sapiens* has been around for one or more hundred thousand years, we have yet to normalise relations with our pervasive ignorance and fallibility. Accordingly, we remain of two minds. We experience learning and unlearning *this way* – as entrancing, engaging, enhancing. Absorbed, happily submitting to not knowing, we lose ourselves in delighted puzzlement, perplexity, exploration and deconstruction. But we also experience learning and unlearning *that way* – as disabling, dispiriting, disempowering. Feeling vulnerable, fearing exposure, we panic, shrink, shut down, lash out, wither or flee from real or imagined sarcasm, ridicule and denigratory comparison. Alternatively, we shield ourselves in dogmatism, obfuscation and defensive aggression. Human, I recognise both ways in myself. While I don't know how best to progress, I seek a more cordial *entente* between my two minds on unknowing. Personally and professionally, this is no small matter.

This way and *that way* – empowerment and shame – inscribe vastly different arcs of human transformation. They construct different lives.

Wilkinson and Pickett reprise research delineating two very different profiles in subjects testing high for self-esteem. Subjects with so-called healthy self-esteem possess "a fairly well-rounded sense of confidence with reasonably accurate views of [their] strengths in different situations and ability to recognise [their] weaknesses." Healthy self-esteem is "correlated with positive outcomes – happiness, confidence, the ability to make friends and accept criticism." On the other hand, subjects with insecure, defensive or narcissistic self-esteem (also labeled threatened egotism) display "a denial of weakness, internal attempts to talk [themselves] up and maintain a positive sense of self in the face of criticism." "Prone to violence [and] racism ... insensitive to others and bad at personal relationships ... [they] show an excessive preoccupation with themselves, success and image and appearance in the eyes of others."

Absorption and elimination will always be with us. So will ignorance, social evaluation, healthy self-esteem and shame. Still, there are humane reasons for devising healthier attitudes toward learning and unlearning. Were we resourceful beings to commit to updating and enhancing our personal and communal relations with the great unknown, we will still generate *silliness and sorrow.* We are human, after all. But, with respect to learning and unlearning, there's every chance we'll enhance the odds *we shall enjoy it.*

We have inherited mostly tantalising, evocative fragments of Sappho's poems, not the entire works. These are from *SAPPHO A New Translation by Mary Barnard,* University of California Press, Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1958.

This column draws on Chapter 3 "How inequality gets under the skin," in *THE SPIRIT LEVEL Why Equality is Better for Everyone* by Richard Wilkinson and Kate Pickett, Penguin, London, 2010, pp. 31–45.

Synonyms found in *Oxford American's Writer's Thesaurus*, courtesy of Apple, Inc., spelling modified.

Ann Kerwin was the HERDSA Visiting Scholar in 1994. Ann migrated from the U S.A. to be Philosopher-in-Residence at Auckland University of Technology. New Zealanders may know her as Resident Philosopher on Radio New Zealand National, Nights with Bryan Crump, where she speaks on philosophy and philosophers.

Contact: akerwin@aut.ac.nz

Meanderings

By Robert Cannon

Experiencing good design in facilities and services is one of life's pleasures. However, recent travels in Australia revealed many instances of very poor or thoughtless design. Have you ever noticed, for example, how the design and location of the direction signs on freeways is really there for knowledgeable locals rather than for the benefit of strangers in that area? I challenge anyone who has never attempted it before, to drive on the M1 from Brisbane Airport to the Tweed Coast in NSW without ending up on the road to Ipswich, an exit road, or in a fuel and service centre, simply by faithfully following the poorly positioned direction signs. The same is true in Sydney if you wish to cross from the northern suburbs over the Sydney Harbour Bridge, and in other Australian cities as well.

Examples of poor design are everywhere. Hotels and motels provide good examples. Soap wrappers that demand a pair of scissors to cut them open; labelling on the small plastic bottles provided in bathrooms so tiny that it is impossible to read in the shower; hot and cold tap configurations that present their own unique challenges and at the most inconvenient of times; lack of adequate lighting; and so it goes on.

Have you also noticed when renting a car these days how common design practices of the past, such as the placement of handbrakes, fuel-release caps and boot-release buttons are not only inconsistent across model of car but also downright dangerous when they cannot be located at all in an emergency? First prize in bad design goes to Holden for the design of the car's instrument panel on their recent Commodore: against all the rules of legibility, the speedometer has small white lettering against a grey background! Aesthetically pleasing perhaps, dangerous certainly, as the display is almost impossible to read. I ask myself: "In what ways have the designers of the soap wrappers, the freeway signs and cars been adversely influenced by the quality of design they experienced during their education?"

All this is by way of introducing Edward Tufte's fascinating book, *Beautiful Evidence* (Graphics Press, Connecticut, 2006). Sentences from the introduction signal the nature of this book that is likely to appeal to academics and teachers from all disciplines: "Science and art have in common *intense seeing*, the wide-eyed observing that generates empirical information; Evidence presentations are seen here from both sides: how to *produce* them and how to *consume* them, and Making an evidence presentation is a moral act as well as an intellectual activity".

How fortunate is Tufte – unlike almost all of us – to have the freedom to boldly assert in his introduction that "My books are self-exemplifying: the objects themselves embody the ideas written about. This has come about, in part, because my work is blessedly free of clients, patronage, or employers."

Most academic readers will likely go directly to Tufte's essay on PowerPoint. His chapter heading very firmly asserts his disdain for this presentation tool: *The Cognitive Style of PowerPoint: Pitching Out Corrupts Within*. (The essay can also be obtained at: http://www.edwardtufte.com/tufte/powerpoint)

Tufte introduces his critique with this searing comment: "The evidence indicates that PowerPoint, compared to other common presentation tools, reduces the analytical quality of serious presentations of evidence [and the PowerPoint templates] corrupt statistical reasoning, and often weaken verbal and spatial thinking."

While I cannot agree with all that he says in his essay, I nevertheless formed the view that his analysis is a "must-read" for those of us who use PowerPoint (and, dare I say, likely spend more time on the design and layout of slides than on their substantive intellectual content)! The interesting discussion of reactions to Tufte's critique is well-worth reading: http://www.sociablemedia.com/articles_dispute.htm.

A concluding comment I love from this engaging book is: "PowerPoint allows speakers to pretend that they are giving a real talk, and audiences to pretend they are listening". Something, perhaps, lecturers might ponder. This reminds me of a joke…

> A young lecturer asked a senior and highly regarded educational development specialist to observe his first lecture. The developer came to the lecture, but slept through the entire performance. The young lecturer was quite indignant, saying: "How could you sleep when you know how much I prepared for this and needed your expert feedback?"
>
> "Young man," the educational developer said, "sleep *is* feedback."

One final thought on PowerPoint is this from the *Genuine Evaluation* website: "PowerPoint Ranger: Someone with no real-world experience who relies heavily on PowerPoint presentations to express even the simplest ideas. Term likely originated in the Department of Defense." Source: http://genuineevaluation.com/ (a site worth visiting for both humorous and serious materials on evaluation, one of which is the March 12, 2011 "Friday Funny" on evaluation survey questions from *The Pink Panther Strikes Again*, 1976.)

Tufte's critique of PowerPoint recalls the 2008 essay by Nicholas Carr in the July edition of *The Atlantic*. In his essay, *Is Google Making Us Stupid?* Carr speculates that his use of the Internet has had an unwelcome impact on his reading habits and the deep reading that used to come naturally has become a struggle for him as concentration drifts. As Carr so graphically puts it: "Once I was a scuba diver in the sea of words. Now I zip along the surface like a guy on a Jet Ski."

(Not wanting to make you stupid, but simply to help, you can easily locate this article by using Google! The Spelling and Grammar checking facility in Word is also good at helping us to be more stupid than we are unless we are very careful – in the

case of Carr's essay title, Word suggested "*Is Google Making We Stupid?*")

One of Carr's passages about reading books has particular appeal for those interested in the concepts of deep and surface learning: "The kind of deep reading that a sequence of printed pages promotes is valuable not just for the knowledge we acquire from the author's words but for the intellectual vibrations those words set off within our own minds. In the quiet spaces opened up by the sustained, undistracted reading of a book, or by any other act of contemplation, for that matter, we make our own associations, draw our own inferences and analogies, foster our own ideas. Deep reading, as Maryanne Wolf argues, is indistinguishable from deep thinking. If we lose those quiet spaces, or fill them up with "content," we will sacrifice something important not only in our selves but in our culture."

To what extent lack of intellectual depth among our political leaders is reflected in the recent attack on the Australian Teaching and Learning Council, as part of the Commonwealth Government's cost-cutting measures to support the victims of natural disasters, is open to conjecture. What is indisputable, is that it is an attack nevertheless, in this case on the intellectual life of Australia, and on those Donald Horne would say are "…are all those people, whether scientists or artists, scholars or popularisers, journalists or educators whose special realm is the development, circulation and criticism of ideas." (Quoted in *The Australian Literary Review*, 6, 2, March 2011). Horne's list most emphatically includes university teachers.

Research on the "circulation and criticism of ideas" – a.k.a. teaching – strongly suggests that humour can aid in the process and this is a theme that *Meanderings* has being pursuing for some time now. I was delighted to discover a most entertaining book that shows just how the teaching of a serious, academic subject can be assisted in this way. In *Plato and a Platypus Walk into a Bar: Understanding Philosophy Through Jokes* (Penguin, 2007) Thomas Cathcart and Daniel Klein set out to teach philosophy through jokes.

One joke I particularly like from page 34 (and the authors are at pains to explain that philosophy is *not* the same as jokes) is used to help teach the concept of deductive logic. In the joke presented below, I have taken the liberty of changing the subject of the joke used by the authors from a cowboy to that of a university academic. However, the change in no way alters the nature of the joke.

> A senior academic, dressed in his academic robes, tired and thirsty having attended a long, summer graduation ceremony, goes into a bar near to the university in the city and orders a beer. As he sits sipping his cold beer, a beautiful young woman sits down next to him. She turns to the academic and asks him: "Are you a real academic?"
>
> He replies: "Well, I have a PhD, I have spent my whole working life in universities teaching undergraduate and postgraduate students, winning research grants, conducting research, serving on academic committees, publishing books and papers and editing prestigious academic journals. I am also now head of my academic department. So, yes, I guess I am a real academic."
>
> She says: "I am a lesbian. I spend my whole day thinking about women. As soon as I get up in the morning, I think about women. Whatever I do, everything seems to make me think of women." She then leaves.
>
> As the academic contemplates this interesting exchange over his beer, a couple of middle-aged tourists sit down next to him. "Are you a real academic?" they ask.
>
> He replies: "Well, I always thought I was. But now I realise I am a lesbian!

This joke is used in the context of teaching deductive logic to illustrate how arguing from a false premise screws up a deductive argument!

How I wish I could have command of a full suite of jokes like this to sustain my own teaching and presentations! I started a collection for such a purpose over twenty years ago and I still find some useful items there from time to time. Some items, on the other hand, seem to be well past their use-by-date and can only be used discretely and with the greatest of care with close friends!

Another (unlikely!) title by these two authors is *Heidegger and a Hippo Walk Through Those Pearly Gates; Using Philosophy (and Jokes) to Explore Life, Death, The Afterlife, and Everything in Between*, Penguin, 2009. (A good example of a title substituting for an abstract!)

Finally, this month's winning journal title comes from *Teaching in Higher Education*, 15, 4, August 2010: "I'm a dancer" and "I've got a saucepan stuck on my head": metaphor in helping lecturers to develop being-for-uncertainty, by Daphne Loads.

Robert Cannon is a consultant in educational development and has recently concluded working with UNICEF and USAID on several research and evaluation studies in Indonesian education. He can be contacted at: robert.cannon@uni.sydney.edu.au

---

from page 23

Technology and control of feedback: My encounters with ROCI continued ...

14. Rowbotham, J. (2011). Journal rankings don't reflect performance. *The Australian*, 9 March. http://www.theaustralian.com.au/higher-education/journal-rankings-dont-reflect-performance/story-e6frgcjx-1226017977717
15. ARC (2009). Tiers for the Australian Ranking of Journals. http://www.arc.gov.au/era/tiers_ranking.htm. Obtaining the percentages is now a little more difficult: Google "Frequently Asked Questions Bibliometrics" to locate http://www.dest.gov.au/NR/rdonlyres/8F12ADCB-C221-421E-A128-2C344CD58BDF/18968/FAQBibliometrics_17October2007.pdf

Roger Atkinson retired from Murdoch University's Teaching and Learning Centre in June 2001. His current activities include publishing AJET and honorary work on the TL Forum and ascilite Conference series, and other academic conference support and publishing activities. He composed the phrases "blood, sweat and four tiers", "tier review process", and "clique bodies". Website (including this article in html format): http://www.roger-atkinson.id.au/

Contact: rjatkinson@bigpond.com

The HOW TO ... Teaching Series

How to…

Answer Tough Questions

By Peter Kandlbinder

Normally we encourage students to ask questions. We want to find out where they are confused and what they find interesting. You don't want to dismiss a chance to hear from your students just because you might struggle to come up with a credible answer. Still, no one enjoys being put on the spot to answer questions that they are not expecting.

Questions become hard when you feel a responsibility to provide an answer but the consequence of the answer worries or confuses you. More often than not you can quite easily deflect the question without showing your inability to answer in a way that damages your academic credibility. Usual strategies for not answering involve delaying tactics like saying "That's an interesting question. I'll look up the answer and post it on the class web site tomorrow" or "I'd like to answer that but I don't have enough time right now. Come and see me at the end of the class". Another common way of not answering is to ask the questioner why they want to know or what they think about the situation? You can even invite other students to suggest answers.

Linda Nilson says that loaded questions are often designed to embarrass you. If the question is too personal, it is acceptable to flatly refuse to answer. As long as it is done politely but firmly, you can state that you won't be answering that question because it crosses the boundaries of appropriateness or is too intimate. David van Reyk from the University of Technology Sydney is well aware of how easy that boundary can be crossed. He wants students to see that he has opinions on controversial subjects but he doesn't want it to get in the way of students learning. He always tries to ensure that his answers to questions are non-confrontational so that the controversy is not the only thing the students remember at the end of the class.

The challenge of trying to answer tough questions is that you are thinking on your feet. Controversial or challenging topics don't have easy right or wrong answers and you'll often be thinking aloud as you try to work out a satisfactory answer. Reframing the question will make this process more manageable.

Pause to give yourself some thinking time. Eye contact will reassure the questioner that you are working on an answer. Bill McKeachie recommends writing atypical questions on the board to remove the necessity of answering the question right away. It also provides an opportunity to assess whether it is a genuine question or the chance for a heckler to do some grandstanding.

Clarify the question. The questioner may not have thought about their question in any detail and made the question harder by asking it in a convoluted way. Asking to have the question repeated usually results in a simpler version of the question.

Rephrase the question in your own words. Check with the questioner that you have understood the question correctly. You may want to use this opportunity to narrow the focus of the question to something you feel equipped to answer.

Answer gradually. The risk of thinking aloud is you'll answer the question with too much or too little information. Take the part of the question you can answer most confidently and limit your answer to one point with one piece of supporting information. If you can throw in some facts it will give your answer all the more credibility.

Summarise your response. Wrap up the answer with a short summary and resist the urge to add more information.

Practice answers to potential questions. You can normally predict the kinds of difficult questions you will be asked. Brainstorm some tough questions on the topic and rehearse your responses by clarifying the focus of the question, identifying a point that addresses that focus and summarising your answer.

References

Nilson, L. (1998). *Teaching at its best.* (pp. 100–102) Bolton, MA: Anker Publishing.

McKeachie, W. J. (1994). Teaching Tips. (pp. 213–216) Lexington, MA: D.C. Heath & Company.

Van Reyk, D. (2009). Teaching Matters: Lecture in Human Biology. [DVD] Sydney: Institute for Interactive Media and Learning.

You can comment on this article at http://herdsanews.wordpress.com/

HOW TO… is a series that looks at the contemporary challenges in academic practice facing university teachers. Each issue presents a new dilemma in higher education and explores the prevailing attitudes of HERDSA members looking for solutions to these new problems. You can suggest a modern dilemma of academic practice for this series by emailing ***Peter.Kandlbinder@uts.edu.au*** and outlining an incident or situation you have come across.

Higher Education in the Headlines. March 2011

By Peter Kandlbinder

A summary of the main stories on higher education from the last 4 months of the *Australian Higher Education (AHE), Times Higher Education (THE)* and the *Chronicle of Higher Education (CHE)* found issues of international students and the introduction of student fees in the UK dominated the higher education press. In Australia, the release of the Excellence in Research for Australia report swamped the closure of the Australian Learning and Teaching Council. Other themes included: university funding cutbacks, quality, research assessment, community outreach, staff issues, student graduation rates and US Army Reserve programs.

International Students

In November the Australian Higher Education reported that the points system for skilled migrants is about to be abolished and incentives will be offered to redesign courses so international students graduate with a professional level of English. At the same time the Chronicle of Higher Education reported an increase in the enrolment of Chinese students at American colleges. In December the Australian Higher Education reported visa changes that will advantage higher education providers over vocational colleges and growing signs of a downturn in Chinese students coming to Australia with the decline in Chinese students likely to continue for at least two years. In January the Australian Higher Education reported that visa changes had left 150,000 students in a dead end and in February blamed government changes to visas for the drop in Chinese student numbers. Also in February the Times Higher Education reported UK universities were branching out into overseas campuses.

Student Fees in the UK

In November the Times Higher Education reported students launching a "consumer revolution" against a sector that is unprepared for the consequences of marketisation and high fees. In December it reported that the Government may be forced to regulate if too many institutions charge the top student fees and the cuts to student places were likely to push tuition fee levels towards the top rate. In January the introduction of fees was making taught postgraduate degrees the preserve of the overseas and wealthy home students while the fees shift could leave UK universities losing cash to students from European Union nations. In February it was reported that the government has threatened to legislate to allow it to intervene in the undergraduate tuition fee levels set by individual universities until it found that the Office for Fair Access had no legal powers to impose different tuition fee levels on universities.

University Funding Cutbacks

In December the Times Higher Education reported flaws in the changes to funding reforms. In November Chronicle of Higher Education discusses similarities with an earlier U.S. election that also promised spending cuts for education and in December it reported that the bans on earmarks would cost colleges dearly. In January the Chronicle of Higher Education reported colleges facing deep cutbacks in state budgets and a blurring of the boundaries separating for-profit and non-profit colleges and universities in the U.S. Also in January The Australian Higher Education reported Australian universities had spent about $200 million of their own money enrolling unfunded domestic students.

Quality

In November the Times Higher Education reported that the UK government wants more input into the exam process by universities. The Australian Higher Education reported that the new Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency will be using auditors of the same standard employed by the Australian Universities Quality Agency and the federal government is convening consultations with the higher education sector to get agreement on the contentious new national tertiary education regulator. In December the Chronicle of Higher Education reported US States were seeking ways to define the skills and knowledge that are involved in achieving an academic degree in the U.S. In January the Australian Higher Education reported that there is likely to be a body to rank university rankings while in February it reported a differential quality framework based on the risk was being proposed to the sector.

Research Assessment

In November the Times Higher Education reported the intention to reduce the impact weighting in the research excellence framework but apply it more widely as well as a shift in research funding to reduce the availability of small grants for individuals in favour of concentrating cash on larger projects. In December it reported that the Research Council achieved its goal of fewer grant bids and higher success rates, and in January a number of top research departments performed unexpectedly poorly in the first official attempt to measure the impact of academics' research. In February The Australian Higher Education reported Excellence in Research for Australia shows mainly pockets of excellence across the sector.

Community Outreach

In November the Chronicle of Higher Education reported that U.S. professors regarded personality traits useful in their position as representatives of their institutions and that Ireland was looking to universities to re-ignite its economy. In January the Chronicle of Higher Education reported a computer scientist is working on data mining computer technology to prevent the spread of malaria to humans while the Australian Higher Education reported an army of helpers descending on

University of Queensland for the clean-up following widespread flooding.

Staff Issues

In January the Times Higher Education reported a powerful Leftist group plans a leadership challenge the control of the University and College Union following a split over support for student protests and in February it reported universities are increasingly demanding that new academics hold doctorates.

Student Graduation Rates

In December the Chronicle of Higher Education reported graduation rates are falling at one-third of 4-Year Colleges due to underprepared students and in February the Australian Higher Education reported overwhelming red tape associated with boosting participation among disadvantaged students.

US Army Reserve Programs

In January the Chronicle of Higher Education reported the repeal of "don't ask, don't tell" policy will make it possible to reintroduce military cadet programs to Ivy League universities.

Contact: Peter.Kandlbinder@uts.edu.au

HERDSA Branch News

New Zealand

Chair: Tony Harland

Tony reports that university colleagues in Christchurch are safe however all New Zealand HERDSA members know people who have been badly affected by the recent earthquake. The quake happened in the middle of a HERDSA meeting where members were connected on-line via the Universities access grid. HERDSA NZ has donated money to the Christchurch Earthquake Red Cross fund.

A new Research Development symposium is planned for this year and the dates are set for the HERDSA-TERNZ conference. This is New Zealand's national higher education conference and will take place on 23rd to 25th November in Wellington at Victoria University.

Contact Tony Harland:
tony.harland@stonebow.otago.ac.nz

Hong Kong

Chair: Anna Siu Fong KWAN

To understand the most recent development of using ePortfolio in Hong Kong higher education, HERDSA (Hong Kong) conducted a Dinner Dialogue on ePortfolio Developments in March. Speakers at the dinner dialogue included: Ms Hokling Cheung (The Office of Education Development and General Education, City University of Hong Kong), Ms Rufina Wong (Student Affairs Office, The Hong Kong University of Science and Technology), Professor Paul Lam (Centre for Learning Enhancement And Research, The Chinese University of Hong Kong) and Ms Judy Lo (Information Technology Centre, The Chinese University of Hong Kong). This Dinner Dialogue was a great success. Participants shared and compared different stages of e-portfolio utilisation. Colleagues were enthusiastic in discussing solving problems and the conditions for success. Valuable insights for planning and implementating e-portfolios was gained by participants and speakers.

HERDSA Hong Kong branch dinner dialogue participants

Future plans include an Executive Committee Meeting on 4 April 2011 and a one-day symposium Engaging Undergraduates in Research and Inquiry: A Scholarly Dialogue on 20 May 2011 (co-organised with Centre of Enhanced learning and Teaching, The Hong Kong University of Science and Technology).

Hong Kong branch invites HERDSA members working in Hong Kong to connect with up and join in the coming activities. For details, please visit the HERDSA Hong Kong website.

Contact Anna Kwan:
akwan@ouhk.edu.hk

HERDSA HK website: http://herdsahk.edublogs.org/2010/09/

South Australia

Chair: Dale Wache

A workshop with Dr Tracy Aspland on the topic of her ALTC project was cancelled due to unforseen circumstances. A Conference Preview is planned for June 1st to enable presenters to practise for the HERDSA 2011 Conference. On August 2nd a HERDSA Conference Review is planned to show Highlights of HERDSA 2011 conference.

Contact Dale Wache:
Dale.Wache@unisa.edu.au

Victoria Branch

Chair: Dianne (Di) Waddell

The topic that was identified as having the highest importance for HERDSA and VEAD members from a survey conducted following the La Trobe inaugural event held last year was the focus of an exciting April event. The event was initiated by VEAD (Victorian Educational and Academic Developers, formerly MEAD) at Deakin University's Burwood campus. Deakin University's Vice Chancellor, Professor Jane den Hollander formally opened the event with lunch provided courtesy of the HERDSA Vic. Discussion was facilitated by academic development staff from across Victorian Universities on the topic Transition to Teaching and early career foundations for career development.

The Executive of the Victorian branch continues to facilitate networking opportunities for all members as well as offering opportunities to discuss the various challenges that are facing our institutions.

Contact Di Waddell:
Dianne.waddell@deakin.edu.au

West Australia

Chair: Rashmi Watson

HERDSA WA held its first event for 2011 in January, a Teaching & Learning Forum. The forum topic was: Knowing Australia and Being Australian: Reconciliation, Rights and Respect for Australia's First Peoples run by Professor Colleen Hayward, Head, Kurongkurl Katitjin Centre for Indigenous Australian Education and Research, ECU and Professor Brenda Cherednichenko, Pro-Vice-Chancellor, Engagement, Equity and Indigenous and Executive Dean, Faculty of Education and Arts, ECU. There were approximately 20 participants who all rated the forum as excellent as it was interactive and informative. Both Colleen and Brenda kept the group entertained throughout the half-day format.

The HERDSA WA branch AGM was held during the Teaching & Learning Forum and a new committee was elected. The committee has outlined events for the coming year ahead. Members of the new 2011 committee are:

Rashmi Watson (continuing as) President, The University of Notre Dame

Brenda Hamlett Vice President & (continuing as) Secretary, Edith Cowan University

Lee Partridge & Sally Male, The University of Western Australia

Melissa Davis & Sue Bolt, Curtin University

Rob Phillips & Sally Paulin, Murdoch University

Alison Kirkman, The University of Notre Dame

Catherine Moore, Edith Cowan University

The first seminar for 2011 was held in April. HERDSA WA is planning on being even more active in the local community in 2011 by running "special event" workshops, HERDSA Scholarship Profiled seminars and HERDSA Rekindled. The fantastic HERDSA WA membership currently stands at 102!

Contact Rashmi Watson:
rwatson1@nd.edu.au

WA branch website at http://www.tlc.murdoch.edu.au/asd/herdsa.html

New South Wales

In NSW a small dedicated group has taken steps to relaunch the branch. The re-launch was sponsored by HERDSA and the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences UNSW. Guest speaker was Dr Carol Nicoll, PSM, Chief Executive Officer of the Australian Learning and Teaching Council. All NSW HERDSA members are invited to join NSW branch activities this year.

Contact Shirley Scott:
S.Scott@unsw.edu.au

ACT

Chair: Robert Kennelly

The HERDSA Branch of the ACT region has 3 small active TATAL (Talking about Teaching and learning) groups in operation and these meet monthly to reflect on their teaching and learning.

Three presentations of HERDSA 2010 conference papers were made and some trialled for the HERDSA 2011 conference. A symposium of celebration was held with ALTC award winners, ALTC project leaders and HERDSA Fellows and 28 participants. In the meantime TATAL 2008 is writing a HERDSA Guide on Story Telling in Teaching.

Contact Robert Kennelly:
Robert.Kennelly@canberra.edu.au

HERDSA members at the ACT event - Back row: Craig Savage, John Dearn (chair and life member), McComas Taylor. Front row: Thea Vanagas, Robyn Prior.