Elaborating on the importance of a university's reputation, the article emphasizes how it opens doors to opportunities, attracting students, benefactors, and commercial partners. It suggests that a high reputation is essential in a globally competitive market, where universities need to strive for excellence.

Issues of student well-being and engagement are also highlighted. The article mentions that only 53% of first-year students thought the staff were enthusiastic about the subjects they were teaching, while barely half found their subjects interesting. This indicates a need for improvements in the teaching environment.

The University of Sydney itself has been making efforts to enhance the first-year experience. The article notes that the university currently leads the way in First Year Engineering, as described by Dr. Andrew Ruyts in a section of the article. It also mentions the first-time learner perspective, as discussed by Lindsay Chappell, and the importance of a positive attitude towards learning among fellow students.

Feedback and contributions are also sought, with readers invited to respond to this issue of Synergy with comments and suggestions in the form of a short feedback note. The editorial team encourages a platform for informed critical debate on teaching and learning at the University of Sydney, and welcomes contributions from all members of academic staff.

The Institute for Teaching and Learning, Carslaw Building, F07 University of Sydney NSW 2006 Australia Fax (02) 9351 4351. You can join a local email discussion list on teaching and learning at the University of Sydney by sending a brief registration message to synergy@ctl.usyd.edu.au

In a globally competitive market, the importance of a university’s reputation can hardly be exaggerated. A high reputation opens the door to opportunity, attracting students, benefactors, commercial partners and top personnel.

Fundamentally, a university’s reputation is based on excellence. However, Michael Shattock of Warwick University has reminded us that excellence nowadays has to be broadly defined. It is no longer enough to focus on the quality of academic staff or the achievement levels of entering students. Excellence must include the responsiveness of administration, the maintenance of infrastructure, the effectiveness of internal communication, the service quality we provide for students and the learning climate they experience.

It is a disturbing fact that Australian universities, including academically excellent ones, have not always treated their first-year students well. A national survey of first-year students, published in 1995, reported that:

- Barely half the students found their subjects interesting.
- Only 53% per cent thought the staff were enthusiastic about the subjects they were teaching.
- Less than half said that their teachers were good at explaining things.
- Only 41% per cent thought there was a positive attitude towards learning amongst their fellow students.
- Well over a quarter worked in isolation from their peers and were not interested in extra-curricular activities.
- About 60% per cent were negative enough during the first semester to seriously consider deferring.

Every student who defers, drops out or repeats a subject is a wasted opportunity and a loss of resources. Even more important, every student complaint to parents or friends about the quality of first-year teaching, support or facilities has the capacity to damage a university’s reputation, no matter how excellent it may be in other respects. Nowhere is it more important for students to have confidence in an institution’s commitment to their well being than in the first year of study.

As part of the University’s teaching and learning plan, a major project to enhance the first-year experience at Sydney and communicate the results to the community has begun. Coordinated by the Chair of Academic Board, the project will address all aspects of the first-year experience, including developing a sense of belonging as well as addressing issues related to teaching, intellectual challenge, and feedback on student progress. It will bring together the best of existing work at Sydney — including the successful programs organised by the Faculties of Science, Engineering and Agriculture — with some strategies that have been cultivated elsewhere, such as the University of Melbourne’s first-year project.

The VCs Forum on the first-year experience will provide opportunities to display our initiatives and to take practical steps to consolidate the University’s reputation for supporting its first-year students. We see ourselves as a community of learners in which staff and students are partners in the experience of learning. We must match our doctrine with effective implementation.

References:
- Craig McInnis et al. 1995, First Year on Campus, A Commissioned Report of the Committee for the Advancement of University Teaching.
The University of Sydney

A small team associated with First Year Teaching within the School of Physics has initiated many changes to the teaching program to meet the challenge of a student population that is becoming more diverse. The changes have occurred in an evolutionary way so that there is now a greater emphasis placed upon student-centred learning while at the same time enhancing the quality of the educational experience.

The first major step in our evolutionary path was the re-structuring of the Junior Physics program in 1995. An increasing number of students were entering first year for students with little or no formal training in Physics who need extra help in coping with university level Physics. It was envisaged that at the end of the first semester, students could then choose a Physics course based upon their interests. In second semester, students are offered... for those interested in the environment and/or medicine. In the re-structuring it was hoped that Fundamentals students would be "brought-up-to-speed" so that in second semester they would integrate with students who had a better school background. Our hopes have been realized and it has been found that the Fundamentals students have performed well in the second semester subject of their choice.

Ensuring a quality experience for first year Physics students

Ian Cooper, Rosemary Millar and Manju Sharma, School of Physics

At the heart of this University is a determination to be excellent in teaching as well as in research and in the linking of these together in a scholarly way. The Institute for Teaching & Learning reflects that orientation. It has been established to provide support to the University in making teaching excellent.

The major priority for the Institute is to assist the University in meeting its strategic teaching and learning needs. In line with the University's draft teaching and learning operational plan, staff of the Institute are currently working to identify problems in the first year student experience and provide staff development activities to share best practice. There is much to do in supporting the introduction of performance indicators for teaching and the new course monitoring system. The Institute is currently collecting information on the quality of undergraduate programs and planning support for staff in using this information.

Providing resources and staff development in the principles and practice of flexible learning is another University priority the Institute is supporting. This includes provision for Information Technology Committee projects. Two other priorities identified for next year include staff development and sharing best practice on integrating generic attributes into University curricula and encouraging the linking of research and teaching.

The Institute for Teaching and Learning intends to respond appropriately and creatively to the needs for academic development identified by the colleges, faculties, departments and individuals. This includes working with deans and heads of departments and involves membership on teaching committees and course and curriculum committees. The Institute is continuing the practice established by the CTL of offering accredited programs in university teaching and staff development support at different stages of academics' careers. Following the success of the Postgraduate Supervisors' Development Program in providing a flexible range of options for staff, the Institute will increasingly use new technologies in the provision of staff development opportunities for academics. An on-line, program in flexible learning and one on assessment, are to be launched shortly.

Synergy was established in the CTL as a forum for discussion of teaching and learning issues. It too now reflects the strategic focus of the new Institute for Teaching and Learning. This issue, by focusing primarily on the transition to university study provides, together with the Vice Chancellor's Forum and the workshops in November, a tangible start to the Institute's work on the first year experience initiative.

The Institute of Teaching and Learning

Angela Brew, Institute for Teaching and Learning

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The foundation for all of the Institute's activities is the policy related research and development carried out by its staff. Institute staff will investigate aspects of the teaching and learning experience and disseminate findings widely in different publications and forums.

The CTL has, since 1982, been responsible for supporting individuals in teaching developments. The Centre also was responsible for raising awareness of teaching and learning issues in its many workshops where academics came together from a range of departments. Now the University and faculties are driving the changes. Many workshops, teaching retreats and other forums are being offered within faculties and departments and many of the innovating individuals are now taking major roles in their faculties to drive strategic initiatives in what is a very different climate for teaching and learning in higher education. This is referred to in Paul Ramsden's editorial. The importance of teaching excellence as a major strategic priority for the University is affecting us all.

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Traditionaly, Physics lab classes have been a stand-alone component and were not linked to lectures. Because of the special needs of Fundamentals students, a new laboratory course has evolved in which lecture material is supported by experiments in the lab. This has noticeably improved student satisfaction with their lab work. At the end of second semester, four weeks of traditional laboratory classes have been replaced by open-ended projects.
Collaborative workplaces for the study of theories of art practice

Ann Elias, Sydney College of the Arts (SCA)

There are real advantages in using the Internet for the location of art objects for exhibitions and essays. As many of the current students at SCA know, some of the most avant-garde contemporary art is only found on the Internet. Examples like Knowbotics Research (http://www.ctheory.com/a38-cyberantartic.html) question the very nature of what it is to exhibit artworks, encouraging the user to interact with the art object itself rather than simply viewing it.

As a core component of first year undergraduate learning at SCA, “Theories of Art Practice” includes art history, the analysis and criticism of art objects, the history of ideas and the theory of design. At this foundation level, students make detailed visual analyses of objects of contemporary art, developing critical awareness as well as innovative and imaginative thinking in their own theoretical work. Whether verbalising or writing about their own studio work, or about works of art encountered in exhibitions and reproductions, students are required to justify their ideas in both the making of objects and in the analysis and critique of art works and texts.

Yet, it has been perceived that even senior and postgraduate students in the visual arts are not as confident with visual analysis as might be expected. Visual inquiry is a form of research distinct from other primarily text-based research, or from the application of discourse to the object. Students lack confidence in the process of reading and interpreting objects. Assignments asking for visual analysis of specific objects show that they often miss the point of the exercise and do not trust their own readings of art works but rather opt for re-presentation of research-based material and the authority of others. Even when students are told that they will be assessed on how closely their ideas relate to the specific object, and the extent to which they demonstrate self-reflexivity in making meanings from those objects, they consistently assume that if their work can be shown to illustrate a theory it must be meaningful.

To overcome the tendency to avoid close inspection of art works and the inability to clearly justify ideas in terms of evidence taken from the artwork, next year’s Theories of Art Practice adopts a new approach to teaching visual literacy. For the first time tutorial groups will be asked to work together to visually analyse artwork for which no complex philosophy or theory yet exists. Throughout the semester they will collaborate in designing their own exhibition on contemporary artwork for the Internet, complete with curatorial rationale and explanations of the nature of each work in the exhibition. Students may be able to find historical and theoretical material relevant to a contextualisation of their exhibition from the Internet, however the emphasis will be placed on visual analysis and what it means to be a maker of objects, and what it means to be a spectator or reader of objects.

To allow for great flexibility, and for students within groups to work on the complex documents at the same time, SCA has licensed WebCT, creating an on-line learning environment including email, discussion forums and students’ exhibition areas. Students can add images, text and links to their homepage without knowing any HTML at all. WebCT also allows for student management and the tracking of student progress. Students will publish their designed exhibitions and accompanying essays on-line, and these will then undergo peer assessment by all groups, using an on-line journal for exhibition review.

There is overwhelming support for the educational rationale of looking closely at what the art object can say. For students looking for a useful model, the visual analysis of Kathy Acker is a revelation for the originality and uniqueness in her approach to the object of analysis. Students also respond well to the writing of Barbara Svedoff who argues in “The Art Object” that it is time to stop thinking of art as something that discourse is projected onto and to speak about it as the generator of quite a unique communication.

The advantages of this method of teaching and learning is that every student will be engaged with every others’ assignment, which means a positive variation on the communication process of lectures and tutorials. The process of learning is flexible and is ongoing throughout the semester which results in a positive variation on the time-line of learning through structured sessions. The published exhibitions and essays are available to every other student for consideration and the students’ projects will make the delivery and content of this unit of study more contemporary.

References

Dr Ann Elias is the Coordinator of Theories of Art Practice at the Sydney College of the Arts.
In the second year, there were four new projects, two of which have led to patents:

1. The dolphin propulsor (Mechanical Engineering), a unique wind-powered dolphin-tail propulsion system for a yacht featuring a huge black spinning wing, evoking visions of our America’s cup winged keel, proving once again that there is such a thing as a free lunch. This led to a patent.

2. The SPAPOPHSPIEL (Electrical Engineering), an amazing non-tactile musical instrument (based on the Theremin premise) that plays music, with the pitch and timbre controlled by the proximity of the hands to sensor banks.

3. The solar powered plane (Aeronautical Engineering), a large model plane powered by solar cells on its wings. Although hampered by a lack of co-operation with the University of New South Wales centre for solar-cell research, a French solar company ultimately saved the day.

4. The hand-powered vehicle (Mechanical Engineering), an ergonomically efficient vehicle that enables paraplegics to attain the speed and efficiency of a bicycle (this was my project group). This project led to a patent. Involvement in the 2000 Disabled Olympics is now under consideration.

The standard of the projects was extremely high, comparable to a fourth year honours project. This was due to a number of positives: the fact that all students had proven outstanding academic ability (a UAI of 98 or higher) are offered the opportunity to defer physics and mathematics for Semester 1 and instead work in a supervised design group of about 6 first year students to develop a premise into a working prototype. In the first year the following projects were hosted by various departments within the faculty of engineering:

1. Solar-powered esky (Chemical Engineering), to prove that there is such a thing as a free cold beer.

2. Digital canary (Aeronautical Engineering), a video-controlled model plane, with onboard gas sensors for flying into mineshafts and checking air quality.

3. Intelligent car (Civil and Electrical Engineering), a small electric-powered car guided by embedded magnets in a simulated road network – the shape of things to come in mass transit.

4. Elliptical-powered pedal car (Mechanical Engineering), a more efficient approach to low-emission transportation (I supervised this project group).

All four projects were a big success. The solar-powered esky was reported in the UK as a “typical Aussie invention”, Dr Karl Kruszelnicki raced in the elliptical pedal car against the intelligent car around the main quad. The digital canary flew indoors, inside the university gymnasium with video monitor for amazed onlookers.

In hard academic terms, a number of significant skills were taught to the students, including: ideation and conceptualisation, leadership, teamwork, project management, presenting professional seminars, patent searching, online data retrieval and the literature survey process, and practical hands-on construction skills. Also, in each project, specific engineering skills were taught at a tutorial level by the supervising academic.

Each project required the students to develop theoretical and practical skills in one or more of the following areas: aerodynamics, rheology, software engineering, engineering design, materials engineering, thermodynamics, process control, statics, and dynamics.

In early 1998, there were criticisms that the students may suffer some disadvantage from deferring physics and mathematics. Happily, this was not the case. In 1998, all but one ENG1001 student was in the Deans List (distinction average). A similarly successful result is anticipated in 1999. The concept is now proven, and it is timely to reflect upon the first two years of the program and I was privileged to be involved in this initiative from the early planning stages in early 1998 right through to the completion of the second successful year of the program in mid 1999, and so I have watched this program grow from inception to fruition.

Recollecting my experiences as a first year engineering student in the mid 1980’s, I strongly endorse the need for a concept like the Advanced Engineering project. Sydney University has led the way in this innovative new approach. It is early days yet, but who knows where it may lead, for Sydney University and perhaps in other Australian Universities who see a new strategy for attracting students to engineering. Perhaps also, in time, the concept can be further evolved to the point where a sea-change in the philosophy underlying first year engineering may take place in Australia.

Dr Andrew Ruys is a Research Fellow in the Centre for Advanced Materials.
It was only a short time after finishing my time at the Institute for Teaching and Learning that I had an experience that will change my approach to teaching forever. Although at the time it was very humbling, it is one experience that I will never forget.

I had been thinking for a long time that I wanted to be a triathlete. I was realistic enough to know that this was not going to be easy. I had the number of a... name and address after the beep asking them to send me out some information. The next day I received a brochure in the mail.

I nearly fell over as I read about the training service’s view of what makes a good triathlete. The similarities between their characteristics of good triathletes and my own learning. The three main points outlined in this brochure could have come directly from my resource, or visa versa.

The motto of the training service printed boldly on the brochure was “We don’t just want to make you a triathlete, we want you to know how to be a triathlete”. They explained they develop this knowledge through:

1. Knowing yourself - Being aware of the characteristics you bring to any situation so you can understand your own performance, as well as set realistic goals for yourself; characteristics such as your own abilities, skills, motivation, confidence and knowledge.

2. Understanding different approaches - There are many different ways that a person can take in any situation. Realistically only some of them bring about results. You need to be familiar with the different approaches, and the results they bring.

3. Taking control - Once you know yourself and the different approaches, you need to take control of yourself. The end goal is that you can manage your own performance in such a way that ensures success and continued improvement.

I had initially expected that all I needed to become a triathlete was someone to help me get fit. Yet the idea of developing my knowledge and understanding did sound very attractive. I laughed. I was already getting to know some of my own characteristics.

I waited patiently outside the swimming pool to meet my trainer. It wasn’t long before a car arrived. Out stepped a man eating McDonalds. I turned to wait for another car as the fact he was very overweight left me with no...

Research suggests that recognition of culture is important to Indigenous students (McIntyre, et al, 1996). While this may seem like common sense, how that recognition occurs can be problematic. One student’s experience illustrates both this complexity and the reason we feel that a workshop like ours can be useful. The student, the only Indigenous person in a class, was asked, by the teacher without prior arrangement, to explain a particular facet of traditional Aboriginal society. The student knew little about traditional society and was consequently quite distressed by the inability to explain. Through such inadvertent circumstances learning environments can be detrimentally affected. Whilst there are no absolute rules, an exploration of current research and discussion can enable teachers to contribute to positive learning environments for Indigenous students.
It is widely recognised that many students experience difficulties in making the transition into higher education. Studies of the first year experience in Australia discuss the importance of the early experience that establishes attitudes, outlook and approaches to learning, focusing on the extent to which students adapt to university and their levels of satisfaction (Watkins, 1982, Williams, 1982, Williams and Pepe, 1983) other important issues are how students adjust to the large social setting (Mitchell, 1990); and issues of transition form school to university; especially approaches to learning (Elsworth, et al; Ramadan, 1982). Performance indicators and the direct measurement of student evaluation of the quality of teaching are also mentioned (Linke, 1991).

There are a number of issues that students face in making a transition from secondary schooling to tertiary education. These factors vary as much as does the increasingly diverse population of students themselves. These factors may relate to the institution, faculties, teaching staff and, of course, the students. Increasing diversity in the higher education sector makes addressing these issues more difficult from an institutional perspective, yet increasingly important. In the research to date some salient issues have emerged.

These include internal student-focused issues such as academic ability, identity, sense of purpose and commitment, student expectations, social and academic integration into the university community and maturity. There are also external student-focused issues such as familial, cultural and socio-economic background as well as type of school attended. Factors relating to the institution include teaching, curriculum development and prerequisite or assumed knowledge, as well as the nature and availability of support offered to students.

There is a widely-reported gap between staff expectations of assumed knowledge and student ability and knowledge (McInnis and James 1995) (Green and Latham 1997) (Evans 1999). Students often arrive at university without many of the generic skills and attributes required for successfully navigating many first year courses (Beder 1998) (Green and Latham 1997). Indeed, significant numbers of students cite poor study skills and a lack of prerequisite knowledge (Evans 1999) as their reason for discontinuing university study.

Sense of purpose is an important factor in student deferment within the first year of study (McInnis and James 1999). This is somewhat alarming, further to the 1995 findings of McInnis and James that students were found to have a sense of purpose, but often not a clear sense of direction in their studies. Students who did not seem to be clear about their reasons for coming to university or felt that they had to choose their course were also more likely to indicate dissatisfaction with the course that they were enrolled in.

Alternatively, more successful students were more likely to know the type of occupation they would inevitably have a perfect physique. Someone tapped me on the shoulder and suddenly my thoughts were interrupted.

"Are you here for the triathlon lesson?" the voice from behind asked. I turned to see the man with his McDonalds.

"Yeah, are you here for a lesson too" I replied.

"No, I am your trainer" he said.

I couldn't believe it. This guy was going to help me to know myself, learn the different approaches to training and competition, and how to take control of myself. It didn't look like he practised what he preached.

Faced with this credibility gap there was no way I was going to fork out good money to train with this guy. Not wishing a confrontation I started to explain that I had several thoughts about becoming a triathlete and I had simple come to tell him I was no longer interested. This got the man quite angry. He started getting very abusive, yelling things about getting up early in the morning for nothing and saying I had to pay anyway. When I said that I didn't think that was fair, he started with even more abuse. He went on and on about how I was too much of a weed to be a triathlete anyway. Cooly and calmly I pointed out that he shouldn't criticise me. I told him that it didn't look like he followed the three steps to being a good triathlete. His reply surprised me.

"No I don't follow the three steps, but I can teach them. At the end of the day it doesn't matter what I do, you are the one who is here to learn".

Without a response, I gave him some money and left. As I drove off in the car his words were ringing in my ears. Could it be he was right? The next day as I prepared for my first student I started to question whether I followed the three steps in my own teaching. If I didn't, then wasn't I just like the trainer who encouraged others to do something he wasn't able to himself? Did I constantly look at my characteristics as a learner to help me understand my performance and set goals? Did I know the different approaches I could take to learning and the results they would bring? Did I take control of my own learning? The answer I was beginning to see, if I was to be truthful with myself, was no.

Whilst the trainer's ability to do what he taught held little consequence for his teaching, for me it made a great difference. I firmly believed that to be a good teacher I myself had to always be learning (i.e. a life-long learner). As I thought more about it, I may have known enough about the three steps to learning to develop a resource for my students, yet I didn't constantly follow these steps in my own actions.

From that day on I realised that I always had to embody the characteristics of a life-long learner. Knowing I would most likely forget this new goal a few days down the track, I decided I needed a reminder on my desk. Something that would help keep me accountable and determined to strive towards being a life-long learner. So far it has worked wonders for me. So much so I have encouraged others to think of something that can remind them of the goals they are working towards. What is it that keeps me striving to put my learning principles in practice? I hear you ask. It is a photo of me, eating McDonalds. This is enough to remind me to keep questioning my own learning.

Lindsay Chappell is a Clinical Educator in the School of Communication Sciences and Disorders. He developed a resource which used stories to develop students' understanding of and reflection on learning for a Teaching Development Grant with the Institute for Teaching and Learning.

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The implication for the institution is clear: students need to be engaged in challenging (but not overwhelming) academic work (McInnis and James 1995) and there needs to be measures taken (whether in course design, foundation programs or additional first semester subjects) that enhance students’ academic abilities. It is also shown that first year students show greater persistence and more positive performance in learning communities rather than large classes (Evans 1999) and moreover, another major discontinuation factor for many students is unearng/uninterested teaching staff. It is interesting to note that McInnis and James (1995) suggest that this was not a serious issue for their cohort.

This does not preclude the fact that students need to take responsibility for their own learning, and organisation (Latham and Green 1997) on the whole students seem happy to do this (McInnis and James 1995). However, it is important to note that student perceptions that staff provide for their personal and social needs positively influences performance (Evans 1999).

Finally, as reported in the McInnis and James study (1995), many students’ only contact with the university is in their lectures and tutorials. There is however, a stronger sense of belongingness for those students who are enrolled in a course with a specific occupational focus. Both McInnis and James (1995) and Bede (1998) argue that social integration is an important, perhaps critical factor in students continuing their studies. Moreover, this is also related to academic integration, which is shown to be a strong predictor of persistence (Evans 1999).

The subject of the first year experience will continue to be a focus on research. Universities will continue to implement programs to manage the process. Research on successful strategies and evaluation is an important direction for future research.


Frank Phillis is a Research Assistant working on the First Year Experience Project.

The experiments in the lab. This has noticeably improved student satisfaction with their lab work. At the end of second semester, four weeks of traditional laboratory classes have been replaced by open-ended projects. The projects actively engage students in the learning process, through research activity. A team of six students function as a cooperative group in selecting a project and preparing an initial proposal at the beginning of the semester. The team with a mentor together work on preparing a more detailed technical proposal. At the end of the semester students spend three lab sessions on their project and in the fourth week they give an oral presentation to students and staff and submit a lengthy written report.

The latest evolutionary development by the First Year Teaching Team is in the creation of a website (http://www.physics.usyd.edu.au /teach_res/ip/physics.htm) specially aimed to provide resources for students to assist them with their Physics studies. The website was assisted by a grant from the Science Faculty to provide course information and links to content material from around the globe, past examination papers (some with detailed solutions). We are at present expanding the use of multiple-choice questions for formative assessment with WEBMCQ.

To maintain and improve the quality of the learning experience available to our students, extensive use is made of student questionnaires to monitor all aspects of our teaching program and regular student-staff liaison meetings are held throughout the year. Within the School of Physics there is the Sydney University Physics Education group (SUPER) that supports the work of the First Year Teaching Team.

Students have responded very favourably to the changes that have been implemented since 1995. We now have a quality first year teaching program that is student-centred and one that meets the needs of a very diverse student population.

Ian Cooper is the Laboratory Coordinator for First Year Physics, Rosemary Millar is Head of First Year Physics and Manju Sharma is the Coordinator for the Workshop Tutorials in the School of Physics.

ITL Bookshelf
Teaching and Learning
The University of Learning: Beyond quality and competence in higher education.
Bowden, J. & Marton, F. (1998)

Reviewing the history of the university, Bowden and Marton determine its defining role as a centre for learning. Research, learning and service, they argue, represent in fact, the same process applied to different aims. Research, they suggest is trying to find out something no-one else has found out. Similarly learning is trying to find out things that are already known. They describe the university of learning as one in which teaching and research are integrated into the two sides of the university’s function. This book demonstrates how the principles discovered through phenomenographic research can be applied to teaching and learning in universities. Bowden and Marton outline the paradox of formal education as using the known to prepare students for the unknown. They present an alternative approach in which learning and research at a university level involve discerning the critical features that define a field. This book describes how this process of discernment can be taught using examples from a number of fields.

Assessment
Beyond Multiple Choice: Evaluating alternatives to traditional testing for selection.
Madwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates

Test scores represent only one dimension of performance-based assessment and this selection of conference papers searches for strategies that go beyond multiple choice tests. Papers in this book respond to the criticism of multiple choice questions that recognising a correct response from a list does not demonstrate students’ ability to construct that response themselves. While selection based on traditional testing satisfies the concept of fairness, the narrowness and appearance of precision in multiple choice questions inhibit other information relevant to decision making. Chapters in this book discuss non-traditional forms of testing such as portfolios, projects and performance tasks. The authors describe a variety of testing media from biodata to computer-based testing. Although focused on testing for selection, the principles discussed would equally apply to student assessment.

Educational Research
Curriculum Action Research: A handbook of methods and resources for the reflective practitioner.
London: Kogan Page.

Action research is not defined by any one research method but uses the appropriate resources to identify, clarify and resolve problematic situations in practice. It involves research by practitioners to take their own problems to improve their professional practice. As a process of social inquiry, action researchers work collaboratively with a host of participants bridging the gap between theory and practice. This book is a guide for practitioners who are researching curriculum problems. It provides a scholarly perspective on both the theory and practice of action research and provides references for further reading. Arranged into three parts, Part 1 sets the context for the development of educational action research. Part 2 surveys the range of action research methodologies and Part 3 looks at the question of analysis of the data that has been collected and teaching action research to others.
1999

GRADUATES FOR THE NEW MILLENNIUM: COLLABORATION & INNOVATION
1-3 December 1999. Manly NSW
Details: tel: 9440 9555 or URL: http://www.gradlink.edu.au/empfrm.htm

7th ANNUAL INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON POST-COMPULSORY EDUCATION AND TRAINING
6-8 December 1999. Surfers Paradise, QLD
Details: D&K Bebstock, email: dbebstock@nullbox.gu.edu.au or URL: http://www.gu.edu.au/centre/clwt/

COMPUTER SUPPORTED COLLABORATIVE LEARNING (CSCL'99)
12-15 December 1999. Stanford California USA
Details: email: csclinfo@forsythe.stanford.edu or URL: http://learninglab.stanford.edu/CSCL99

HIGHER EDUCATION AND ITS COMMUNITIES: SRHE Annual Conference
14-16 December, 1999. Manchester, United Kingdom
Details: email: inconference@cabinet.net.co.uk or URL: http://www.srhe.ac.uk/

LANGUAGE, CURRICULUM AND ASSESSMENT: RESEARCH, PRACTICE AND MANAGEMENT
International Language in Education Conference 1999
17-19 December, 1999. Hong Kong
Details: Secretariat, email: wylaw@calbk.hk or URL: http://www.fed.cuhk.edu.hk/~hkier/seminar/991216/index.htm

2000

IMPROVING CLASSROOM RESEARCH THROUGH INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION
10-13 January, 2000. Taipei Taiwan
Details: Darrell Fisher (08) 9266 3119 or email: dfisher@info.curtin.edu.au

FLEXIBLE FUTURES IN TERTIARY TEACHING
Teaching and Learning Forum, 2000
2-4 February 2000. Perth, WA
Details: Judy Schrap, email: tf2000@ecri.curtin.edu.au or URL: http://aaca.curtin.edu.au/tf2000/

AUSTRALIAN INDIGENOUS EDUCATION CONFERENCE
4-7 April 2000. Fremantle, WA
Details: Deborahs Conferences, email: conference@debrits.com.au or URL: http://www.cowon.edu.au/deb/ind/acc

SUPPORTING THE LEARNER THROUGH OPEN, FLEXIBLE AND DISTANCE STRATEGIES
Distance Education Association of New Zealand (DEANZ) conference
27-29 April 2000. Dunedin, New Zealand
Details: Clare McLachlan-Smith, email: c.mclachlansmith@auckland.ac.nz

FLEXIBLE LEARNING FOR A FLEXIBLE SOCIETY
HERDSA International Conference 2-5 July 2000. University of Southern QLD, Toowoomba campus
Details: John Lidstone, email: johnlidstone@qut.edu.au or herdsa.office@effect.net.au

CREATING FUTURES FOR A NEW MILLENNIUM
4TH Pacific Rim First Year in Higher Education Conference
5-7 July, 2000. Brisbane, QLD
Details: Brett Coates, (07) 3864 5160 or email: bc.coates@qut.edu.au

LIFELONG LEARNING: DEVELOPMENT OF GENERIC SKILLS IN HIGHER EDUCATION
17-19 July 2000. Rockhampton, QLD
Details: email: life-long.learning-conference@qut.edu.au or URL: http://www.library.qut.edu.au/conf/emerence

DISTANCE EDUCATION: AN OPEN QUESTION?
11-13 September 2000. Adelaide, SA
Details: Karen English, email: karen.english@unisa.edu.au or URL: http://www.con.unisa.edu.au/cce/

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