About Synergy

Synergy is a scholarly forum for the discussion and debate of higher education teaching and learning at The University of Sydney. Produced by the Institute for Teaching and Learning (ITL), Synergy is published twice per year – usually May and October – and is circulated to staff through academic and research departments. Synergy is edited by Dr Tai Peseta in consultation with the Director and staff of the ITL.

Contributions to Synergy

Synergy’s purpose is threefold. Firstly, it is intended to showcase the variation in learning and teaching initiatives taking place across the university. Secondly, it is a forum where staff (particularly those new to researching and writing about teaching and student learning) can publish their innovations in a scholarly manner. Thirdly, Synergy acts as a vehicle for critical and public discussion of key learning and teaching issues.

The Editor welcomes contributions from the university community all year round. Synergy particularly welcomes contributions written collaboratively by staff and students that:

• report on, or are critical reflections of an aspect of teaching or students’ learning;
• report on a teaching, learning or curriculum initiative designed to engage students in active learning or inquiry;
• use disciplinary research/concepts to develop ideas about teaching and student learning;
• report on curriculum initiatives designed to bring teaching and research together to improve student learning;
• draw on research and scholarship to comment critically and thoughtfully on an aspect of teaching and learning in the university;
• theorise or problematise the contribution of teaching, learning and pedagogy to the nature of higher education

Scholarly and research-based contributions to Synergy attract points on the University’s Scholarship Index. Further information about the Index is available at http://www.usyd.edu.au/learning/quality/si.shtml. On occasion, the Editor will invite contributions to Synergy in accordance with the focus of the Issue.

Synergy publishes contributions of varying word lengths–anywhere up to 5000 words. We strongly encourage contributors to read through previous issues of Synergy http://www.itl.usyd.edu.au/synergy/backIssues.cfm. The Editor encourages all potential contributors to make contact before the submission of an article. We welcome the addition of graphics and visual images to enhance your contribution.

Referencing standards

Contributions to Synergy should be formatted using the American Psychological Association (APA) guidelines. Further information can be found at http://www.apastyle.org/.

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I’ve been quite taken with this particular idea of Gadamer’s again as a result of a paper Sarah Golsby-Smith gave in the ITL in April just passed. Sarah raised it in the context of her work as an English teacher of secondary students and the challenge of helping learners to find their questions and the responsibility of teachers to nurture their curiosities. A student with an inquiring sensibility is something of a gift for teachers, and talk of questions always reminds me to reflect on the sort of questions that academics ask about university teaching and learning too — the topics and challenges emanating from their practice which guide their curiosities. I am like most university teachers — I harbour a desire for those who learn with me to ask good, intelligent and informed questions — questions that show they have considered the evidence and thought on a possible response. And questions of the sort that invite others into generous conversation. So, what are the important questions to ask of higher education, and university teaching and learning as it continues to change around us? What is our responsibility to keep the ethic of questioning alive in spite of the contexts and practices that often render us silent?

In this issue of Synergy, the three feature articles ask both typical and unusual questions of the university teaching and learning enterprise. Diane Collins, the Associate Dean (Teaching and Learning) at the Sydney Conservatorium of Music (SCM) invites us into a dialogue about how a faculty organises its professional development for university teachers. What works? What doesn’t? What issues resonate? What is the appropriate mix of general versus disciplinary specific teaching and learning ideas?

How should ‘outsiders’ to the faculty figure on such days? How specific does a focus on university policy need to be? What roles do, and should students play? For anyone with similar institutional responsibilities, Diane’s observations carry both weight and wisdom. In writing about the 2008 SCM Teaching Day, Diane generously shares her experience for others to mine and consider.

The second piece — Reflections on Dasein-mit: the Scholarship of Teaching through Community Engagement by Evelyn Howe, Associate Dean of Students and Head of Personal & Professional Development in the Faculty of Dentistry, owes its heritage to the best traditions of both Greek and German philosophy. Evelyn offers a spirited rationale as to why learning about the practice and profession of dentistry ought to be connected with Angela Brew’s model of inclusive scholarly knowledge-building communities where scholarship is extended to developing students’ inquiring capacities. Like so many pieces featured in Synergy, Evelyn’s ideas were re-awakened during her studies in the Graduate Certificate in Educational Studies (Higher Education) in 2007.

I have alluded already to the tenor of the third piece — This Thing We Have Done Together: The New Rhetoric in the Classroom by Sarah Golsby-Smith — a moving appeal that returns ethics, language and curiosity to the classroom through literature. Although she writes as a teacher of literature & English, there seems to me, a universality underlying her appeal — for students together, to read, write, think, practise, engage and transcend — which may perhaps be the true outcome of higher education. My
advice to readers of this piece: let the words, ideas and entreaties creep up on you slowly but purposefully.

And for those readers already familiar with *Synergy*, you’ll find all the regular highlights. One of these is a conversation with four tutors from the Faculty of Arts, as part of our ‘Talking Series’. These tutors – all women – completed a professional development module with me (Peer Observation of Teaching) as part of the Tutors’ Development Program. Collectively, their insights are sometimes troubling because in part, they point to how much work still needs doing in developing cultures and contexts for teaching and learning to flourish – and yet, their learning offers much hope for a care for the student experience – even as they work to balance their teaching with the completion of their doctorates.

Our ‘Profile’ for this issue is Jane Gavan, Associate Dean (Teaching and Learning) at the Sydney College of the Arts. In a month where the work of photographer and visual artist Bill Henson has been subject to public scrutiny and moral speculation, I want now to ask Jane whether a focus on the student learning experience (a focus that signals her commitment in this role) can teach us anything about the proper responsibility of an artist. How do we educate our students and design learning experiences so that they can engage with rigour and care in these public debates?

And then there are the usual tidbits too. Keith Trigwell and Simon Barrie – both of the ITL – outline the changed nature of central support for teaching and learning across the university. In T&L Snapshots, colleagues located in a range of health sciences disciplines describe the work on Interprofessional Learning; there’s a review of the 3rd edition of *Teaching for Quality Learning at University* (Biggs & Tang) and notification of higher education conferences of the usual kind – venues for you to consider presenting your teaching and learning efforts, reflections and innovations.

This is to be my last issue as Editor of *Synergy* – a job I have enjoyed thoroughly for the last 5 years. Inevitably, a few thanks are in order. My sincere thanks to all those who contributed their ideas and scholarship to this issue, and to my colleagues in the ITL, particularly James and Rachel who have always, in their good-humoured ways, kept me to task. Please continue to offer us your feedback and comments as *Synergy* changes editorial hands by email synergy@usyd.edu.au or visit us at the website: http://www.itl.usyd.edu.au/synergy.

Tai Peseta, Editor
*Institute for Teaching and Learning*

**References**


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What is our responsibility to keep the ethic of questioning alive in spite of the contexts and practices that often render us silent?
The roles of student and teacher seem obvious to us when we think of our experience as students and teachers. However, we tend to forget how intertwined they are, that as teachers we learn so much from our students even while we are teaching them (Brew, 2006). As researchers we have similar interlinked roles - an instrumental role similar to teaching and a learning or discovery role that approximates the student experience. In writing this reflection, I am a student but I am also teaching you about myself, about who I am as a teacher and what I have learned as a student of the scholarship of teaching. So in this exercise, as in all teaching really, I see that we are collaborators sharing our roles. It is in this spirit of shared roles that I have included stories and metaphors to engage you in learning about my learning, and to add depth and enjoyment to your task in reflecting upon and understanding my reflection.

Many years ago, after training as a clinical psychologist, my interest in health psychology led me to undertake a PhD in Dentistry, a very new interface at the time. I am now teaching in the Faculty of Dentistry and am completing a Master of Education degree to broaden my understanding of higher education in a rapidly changing global environment. The fluid model of teaching, learning, research and scholarship described by Brew (2006) and from which the subject headings below are drawn, creates a vision of what is possible to achieve in higher education where individual differences, forms of knowledge and social contexts are respected and valued. It is the link to community at all levels (students, teachers, Faculties, Universities, cities, nations and global networks) that is necessary in constructive alignment of the Dentistry curriculum if we are to achieve our vision for the profession.

Scholarship

The experience of learning about the scholarship of teaching has been both humbling and enlightening. In many ways, I have been like a dying muse caught in a time warp with little hope of renewal until given a new means to see and express myself. This is why this reflective practice is so important – it facilitates the "unconcealment of the knowledge of the learner" (Gibbs and Angelides, 2004: 334) so that our way of "being in the world", the concept of Dasein described by Heidegger (1966), becomes apparent to others and is shared by them (Dasein-mit). Being in the world includes "being with" – a nuance of Dasein that implies togetherness and care. In exploring and expressing our own identity as scholars we become a resource for our peers and student colleagues. Through Dasein we explore what is authentically ourselves, thus Dasein-mit as teaching, can be seen as a deeply moral enterprise where, in

There was a red rose on the mantelpiece
Amongst the lifeless dust and cigarette butts
And the bits of screwed up paper.
In a vase all chipped around the edge,
It drooped, full-blown.

Enlightenment (2003)
Photographer: Penelope Bayl
Reproduced with permission.
revealing ourselves, we assist others to achieve their own forms of self-manifestation. This uncovering of knowledge cannot be acquired through instruction but rather can be “only delicately elicited by like-minded people in a climate of mutual respect and trust” (Collier, 1988:25). For Heidegger, this disclosure, or state of being “not hidden” is alethia (truth in the sense both of fact and sincerity) that causes us to appear “lit up”, both enlightened and enlightening. It is related both to the authenticity of who we are (Dasein) and who we are to, with or for others (Dasein-mit).

In considering Collier’s (1988) process of delicate elicitation, I have become fascinated by writers linking current philosophy of teaching scholarship to phronesis, the Greek concept of practical wisdom described by Aristotle (350BC) that is more than a collection of wise thinking, scientific knowledge, skills or intuition. Rather it is an overarching concept that is inclusive of all intellectual virtues. It relates both to self-actualisation and engagement with the world (a process of becoming good by doing good things) that defines a good life (eudaemonia) and is achieved, in Heideggerian terms, by a process of revelation of truth and authenticity (alethia).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phronesis – what’s that?</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>It’s one of Aristotle’s (350BC) intellectual virtues:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sophia wisdom (how to think well about the nature of the world)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>techne craftsmanship (technical competencies)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>episteme knowledge (scientific understanding)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>nous intuition (emotional intelligence, ‘street smarts’)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>phronesis practical goodness (how to judge when and where to put skill or knowledge into action)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The ultimate goal of pursuits informed by these virtues is:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>eudaemonia human flourishing (more than happiness – the kind of happiness that promotes growth, well-being and goodness)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>alethia truth, authenticity, disclosure or revelation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phronesis – what’s that?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The work of Clark (2005), Birmingham (2002) and Gibbs and Angelides (2004) are examples of a recent emergence of virtue ethics applied to educational enterprise that suggest that the gaining of wisdom is more than can be described by the acquisition of scientific knowledge or technical skill. In engaging with the community of Dentistry, it is clear that despite major public health measures such as the discovery of nitrous oxide anaesthesia or fluoridation of the public water supply, the main focus of current dental education remains on techne – learning the skills of oral reconstruction to combat the ravages of disease in a community of dental patients (the community of people who adopt a patient role to receive treatment for disease). There is a right way and a wrong way to cut restorations, insert implants or craft crowns. My own course in communication skills involves deconstructing the communication process in order to teach core competencies for interpersonal interaction and in doing so, I too am focusing on techne.

Although the dental curriculum includes themes of community dentistry and professional development, teachers in these themes have difficulty in realising their objectives because of a lack of alignment within the cultures of practice where dental students learn. Public hospitals have two-year waiting lists. Patients may receive emergency treatment but less pressing needs are not met. Although the most prevalent dental disease, dental caries (or tooth decay) can be stopped, reversed and prevented, this message has not been received by patients, nor are students being encouraged in a passion for its realisation (Evans, Pakdamen, Dennison and Howe, 2006). It is as if we do not know it to be so.

There has been very little research into ways of engagement of dental students in informing the wider community about dental disease, either in terms of episteme or techne. There is a huge and growing unmet need for dental treatment which has left Dental Faculties trapped by the necessity of developing...
competency in restoration, the traditional skills of dentistry, with less emphasis on the vision of what dentistry could be if the knowledge obtained from research into prevention were disseminated well within the broader community. Because skills are lacking, despite verbalisation of the belief in prevention, there is limited understanding of how dentists can really make a difference in the community. A current endeavour in dentistry (Evans, Pakdaman, Dennison and Howe, in press) has begun to address this issue (see below), but is still in its early stages.

Research

Research is the practical underpinning of scholarship. It enables us to manifest wisdom through developing the strengths of love of learning, curiosity, judgment, ingenuity, intelligence and perspective (Seligman, Steen, Park & Petersen, 2005). Problems arise, however, when research is seen as a commodity to be exchanged for money in global trade (Hussey & Smith, 2002). It means that in formulating research questions, we feel pressure to be alert to what is saleable, what the University (in this sense as a business institution serving the community) sees as marketable and thus worth supporting. This is hardly likely to produce the “lighting up” in uncovering alethia described by Heidegger (1966).

Research questions of this type are rather like the “soft presents” described below by my son, utilitarian and disappointing, the antithesis of phronesis. Or sometimes even of nous.

Soft presents

One Christmas Eve, my five-year old son was sitting under the Christmas tree, picking up the presents with his name on them one by one and feeling them. As he did this he became progressively more and more dejected. Tears filled his eyes and his bottom lip trembled. “What’s wrong?” I asked him. He looked up at me mournfully and said “There are not enough hard presents.”

He was right. Most of the presents were soft. There was a notable lack of fire-engines, trucks and play-stations. We had given him what we thought he needed, not what he wanted.

Personally, however, with changes to the curriculum planned this year I have been given what I wanted, I have become “lit up.” Within the Dental Faculty a plan to develop a clinic in cariology is under consideration. In this clinic, my contribution will be the development of motivational interviewing programs for behaviour change in oral health. This will enable alignment of the first two years of the dental program, where core communication skills are taught, and the two senior years of the degree, where communication skills are actually practiced with dental patients. This community of patients, however, is only a small part of the community of the nation. In attempting to promote engagement with this wider community, I have introduced students to media liaison and oral health promotion and created action learning projects for assessment of these parts of the course. Although there has been enthusiasm, there has also been resistance where students felt this focus detracted from time needed for learning clinical skills (Howe, 2007).
The process of working interprofessionally has rekindled a passion in teaching for me that has been recognised by my students. This year honours students have sought to collaborate with me in projects in professionalism and communication skills. This is not a change in the course. It can only be a change in me, my Dasein-mit. Personally, this has involved breaking down barriers of anxiety and loneliness – which Cole (1997) argues are impediments to reflective teaching – and opening myself up to a vision of what is possible for research in professional development and the humanities in Dentistry.

Topics my students have chosen for research include:

- Evaluation of a K-3 lesson plan for oral health education in schools
- The relationship between Islam and Dentistry in health practice
- Public perceptions of oral health and illness
- Evaluation of the effectiveness of written media for instruction in post-operative oral care

This is a breakthrough in Dentistry. In the past, the fourth year student focus has been largely on mastering the techne of clinical competence. These research topics suggest that students are seeing a bigger picture: I wonder if they too are construing dental practice in terms of the broader concept of being in the world, of Dasein-mit?

**Scholarly communities**

In my view, the progressive and accelerating specialisation of knowledge and the vast explosion in quantity of information associated with technological development has led to an isolation of academics within disciplines. This has occurred despite the opportunities afforded for global communication. Generalist knowledge is difficult to achieve in such a situation. The bridging of interfaces between disciplines has become a pressing need (Interprofessional Learning Research and Development Unit, 2008). We need to forge links so that we can share knowledge and expertise for specific purposes. We need to be inspired to search for links between our disciplines. This search has been most evident in health sciences where teamwork is part of professional practice in the community. However, interprofessional learning with authentic engagement with the wider community along the lines of the work described by Humphris (2006) is rare. Exploration of unusual interfaces is not the norm, and yet where it has occurred, has been amazingly enriching (witness the recently developing field of medical humanities). Dental humanities, however, remains largely an empty slate.

The Graduate Certificate in Educational Studies (Higher Education) program provided me with my first real experience of engagement with the University in its original conception as a community of scholars (de Merton W, 1264). I now belong not only to my own discipline (Psychology) or as an oddity attached to another (Dentistry) but am part of a University community. It is this opening up together, this Dasein-mit, that has led to amazing opportunities for interprofessional collaborative research, all of which began in 2007. An interprofessional project is currently underway where Dentistry and Design/Architecture students collaborate to develop oral health media promotions for the Australian community. The students will bring together skills in graphic design and dentistry aligning our programs with the University objectives of interprofessional learning and development of e-learning programs.

This has led me to recognise the importance of scholarly communities but also inclusivity as a concept for the purpose of generativity – beautifully illustrated as a concept for the purpose of generativity – beautifully illustrated in Daniel Kim’s portrayal of hands – an artwork eliciting metaphors for collaboration and caring.

*Hands is a watercolour painting created by Daniel Kim (2008). Daniel works as an artist with Studio Artes Northside Inc (http://www.studioartes.com.au), a community initiative providing recreation, employment skills development and training for people with disabilities. Reprinted with permission.*
Inclusivity

Inclusivity – the broadening of the academic research endeavour to encompass all stakeholders in an egalitarian and creative way – involves a vision for education that seeks contributions from many different perspectives. Hussey and Smith’s (2002) critical argument that an emphasis on perceived learning outcomes can suffocate potentially rewarding emergent learning outcomes is worth noting here. There must be room for the unexpected. To be inclusive of the prior experience that all stakeholders bring to the learning situation and to respect what students seek to learn, may sometimes be achieved independently of the teacher’s intentions, the course objectives or prescribed learning outcomes. Although supporting students to adopt deep approaches to learning is now widely accepted, it is important that this is aligned with a vision for professional practice that is more than simply pragmatic. There must be *phronesis* and there must be engagement with the wider community. In a dental curriculum and in the dental profession, where the predominant focus is “treat” rather than “beat”, it is easy to see why students limit their engagement to the community of dental patients rather than extending their vision of practice to the community at large.

An unequal power situation— in the sense of “power to impose meanings and exhort submission” (Brew, 2006:35) – can have a strong influence on students. The messages conveyed through the hidden curriculum is likely to be transmitted to students through their exposure to successful visiting practitioners with treatment-based philosophies of practice, and staff who are specialised within one discipline and have a limited view of the wider applications of Dentistry in the world. Evans (2007) in an attempt to combat outdated methods of conceptualising caries management has created a vision for practice that stretches beyond *techne*. If we are inspired to adopt this model of practice, it will be necessary to align teaching, research and the community at all levels of the curriculum. Our action learning projects, in fostering student engagement with the community, the profession and the health care services, must be informed by this vision. To support it, assessment of clinical practice must include health promotion. To achieve this will require involvement of all stakeholders in oral health.

In relation to this vision, dental students are engaged in a project each year that brings together their emerging dental knowledge and research with practice of communication skills within the wider community. Their brief is simply to make a difference in the world.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year/Course</th>
<th>Project</th>
<th>Community</th>
<th>Stakeholders</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>BDent 1</td>
<td>Develop a community oral health promotion package including poster, brochure, educator booklet and presentation media</td>
<td>A community group is chosen for each year, eg mothers, teenagers etc</td>
<td>Australian Dental Association, Area Health Services, specialist community health groups</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BOral Health 1</td>
<td>Develop a motivational tool for use at chairside as part of an oral health education program for the community</td>
<td>A community group is chosen for each year eg mothers, teenagers etc</td>
<td>Australian Dental Association, Faculty of Dentistry, Area Health Service clinics, parents and children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BDent 2</td>
<td>Develop a brochure or information sheet explaining a dental procedure in ways the community can understand</td>
<td>A topic is chosen each year (eg post-operative wound care) relevant to a treatment community</td>
<td>Dental hospitals and clinics, private dental practitioners</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BDent 3 and BOral Health 2</td>
<td>Develop and deliver an interactive lesson on oral health in a community facility</td>
<td>Pre-school infants school children and their parents and teachers</td>
<td>Schools and community of parents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BDent 3</td>
<td>Write and publish an article in the media about an oral health topic</td>
<td>Target community groups – published in Oral Health Week</td>
<td>Australian Dental Association, Area Health Services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BDent 4</td>
<td>Make a contribution to the local community in your extra mural placement using skills developed in the last 3 years</td>
<td>Liaison with the host community (rural, justice health etc)</td>
<td>Host community</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Knowledge-building

Although knowledge of techniques for prevention of dental disease is far from recent, knowledge of how to engage communities in promoting oral health is limited. It is here that the greatest need for research arises.

- How do dental academics construe preventive practice?
- How do students see it?
- What does the community think?
- Is it seen differently in relation to private and public sector dentistry?
- If we teach our students in a context of provision of emergency restorative care, will they retain a vision that dental practice may be more than restoration?
- What ways can we devise to assist our students to engage with the community and feel comfortable and competent outside the four walls of a dental surgery?

The problem of the lack of alignment between what Dentistry knows and what it does has been clearly expressed by Evans (2007). It appears that this problem may be an unrecognised and poorly understood example of differences in espoused theory and theory in use described by Argyris (1994). Further research into theory of change management may assist us in resolving this dilemma, perhaps along the lines described by Rowe and Boyle (2007) in their study of constraints to organizational learning at a mental health facility. In the development of practical wisdom (phronesis) we need to engage first with the constraints to our learning imposed by discrepant beliefs and actions within the professional and academic communities.

Teaching and learning

Prior to undertaking the Graduate Certificate, I had a workable understanding of alignment but a poor knowledge of how this might be constructed. I understood teaching as a craft in much the same way as an actor understands the role of lazzi in Commedia del Arte. I had expected the Graduate Certificate to provide me with more “tricks of the trade”. In this sense I was understanding knowledge predominantly as techne with a dash of episteme. I never expected to become fascinated with sophia and to begin reading voraciously in the philosophy of education nor to commence work rebuilding my entire course around the concept of phronesis.

Lazzis?

Lazzi is a piece of well-rehearsed comic action. During improvised performances a lazzi may be used to fill time or to ensure a certain frequency of laughs in a show. For practical purposes a lazzi may be any bit of business that may be easily recalled and performed in another situation, somewhat like a catch phrase. In any given troupe, the senior player could have well over one hundred lazzi at his/her disposal. The performer would not only have these well-rehearsed but also pass them on to future generations within the troupe.

(Extract from Wikimedia Foundation, 2007)
As part of my lived experience, knowledge has always been seen as explicit or declarative. I have also seen academic research in this way although, interestingly, have never treated my patients according to a single rule book or body of theory. I had an epiphany on reading Gibbs and Angelides (2004:339).

“...knowing-how or embodied knowledge is characteristic of the expert who acts, makes judgements, and so forth without explicitly reflecting on the principles or rules involved... Knowing-that by contrast, involves consciously accessible knowledge that can be articulated and is characteristic of a person learning a skill through explicit instruction...While such declarative knowledge may be needed for the acquisition of skills, it no longer becomes necessary for the practice of those skills once the novice becomes an expert in exercising them, and indeed it does seem to be the case that,... when we acquire a skill, we acquire a corresponding understanding that defies articulation.”

It was this that inspired my interest in phenomenography – exploring the understanding, the constructions of meaning, a deeper and more satisfying experience than extending my collection of lazis. In constructive alignment of the Personal and Professional Development (PPD) theme to reflect my new understanding of dental education as phronetic praxis, I have experienced an excitement in teaching unsurpassed in my professional life. The teaching program makes sense to me. I understand how it fits together, how all parts of the program (student selection, teaching, assessment, disciplinary action, reflection and research) are aligned to achieve the goals of creating a “good” dentist (a dental phronimos). This has led to collaboration with Medicine to achieve reconstruction of the PPD program. Grounding questions and professional values now inform the PPD theme and are to be taught through a variety of modalities including dental humanities in application to the broad themes of dental endeavour: Life Sciences, Total Patient Care and Community Dentistry. It is by aligning our vision of practice with our teaching through community engagement that we will achieve the gratification of Dasein-mit. We will be, together. We will manifest our existence in a broader, more inclusive world, the University community, the student community, the professional community and the community at large, both national and global.

Dr Evelyn Howe is a Senior Lecturer in the Faculty of Dentistry. She is Associate Dean of Students and Head of Personal and Professional Development in the Faculty. Contact Evelyn at evelyn.howe@usyd.edu.au

Notes
1Written in 1965, this extract speaks more about my life now than it did then.
2I am indebted to Dr Susan Ainsworth for her insight in our discussion that opened this field of inquiry to me.
3I am indebted to Dr Paul Heinrich in the Faculty of Medicine, University of Sydney who first drew my attention to these concepts in a memorable conversation in 2005.

Meditate.
Live purely. Be quiet.
Do your work with mastery.
Like the moon, come out from behind the clouds!
Shine
Buddha
References


From the Director

It is the role of agencies such as the Institute for Teaching and Learning (ITL) and Learning Solutions to support the University of Sydney in meeting its professional development responsibilities, and it is important that this provision both informs, and is aligned with, institutional needs. The ITL contributes to this process through, for example, development programs for staff new to teaching, surveys providing staff with information from students on their teaching, and support for staff applying for teaching awards and grants.

In addition to professional development of staff, units such as ITL also support, and in some instances lead, the planning for and carrying out of educational development. These activities include work on faculty-based projects such as course development or assessment redesign, on University-wide working groups and committees such as the Learning and Teaching Committee of Academic Board, and in the provision of research literature and data to support educational decision-making.

In 2007, the ITL began a process of shifting the focus of its role in supporting professional and educational development more towards a discipline-based approach. In doing so, it is acknowledging the advances in knowledge about the pedagogies of the disciplines and how this might be used to meet the needs of individual faculties. The main changes in ITL have been in three areas: in the structural systems through which ITL work is conducted, in the resources needed by ITL to implement such an approach, and in the academic development programs that provide the means for individual professional development in teaching.

Following a review in early 2007 of the three main academic development programs offered by ITL (Principles and Practice of University Teaching and Learning, Graduate Certificate in Educational Studies (Higher Education) and Research Higher Degree Supervision Development Program) the form in which those programs are to be offered from late 2008 has changed. They will include more flexibility for participants in what they choose as the focus of their development work, and more discipline-based elements in that choice. Further details of these changes are provided on pages 14 and 15.

In the six years prior to 2007, five or six Strategic Working Groups in areas such as the first year student experience and research-enhanced learning and teaching, running in parallel, were the main structural systems though which ITL work with faculties was conducted. Each group contained a nominee of the Dean and met 4-5 times a year to grapple with the issues related to effective faculty implementation of that particular university strategic initiative. While much was achieved through this structure, the outcomes from the groups differed in quality, and even in the more effective Working Groups, the changes achieved were not experienced evenly across the faculties.

During 2007, a new structure was developed that involved a closer working relationship between the Associate Deans (Learning and Teaching) in each faculty and the ITL. Meeting monthly with the ITL and the Deputy Provost, the Associate Deans have continued to engage with the strategic issues identified by the University, but in addition, are developing specific action points from their own faculty teaching and learning plans aimed at improving student learning. Each action plan has been developed to meet the needs of each faculty, and is being endorsed by the Dean of the faculty. The ITL will discuss the plans with each Associate Dean, and where feasible contribute resources.

To support the achievement of the targets set for each faculty action point and in order to develop the new discipline focus of the restructured academic development programs, changes have been made to the expertise of the academic development support in the ITL. A previous focus on generic development expertise is being replaced by discipline expertise. Four new senior academic development staff, each with experience in...
teaching, and in leading teaching and learning development, in one or more of the University faculties, will be appointed to ITL in 2008. One will work with each of a group of four or five faculties (clusters).

Now, in mid 2008 this process of change in ITL is largely complete. Two members of academic staff (Angela Brew and Kim McShane) left the Institute early in 2008, and Tai Peseta will leave at the end of this semester (this is last issue of Synergy that she will edit – thank you Tai). Three new members of academic staff have either arrived or are about to arrive (Susan Thomas has joined as a Senior Lecturer and Teaching Development Co-ordinator for the Arts/Social Sciences Cluster and Kath Aufflick and Cynthia Nelson will join us in July as academic development Lecturer and Senior Lecturer respectively). While three of the cluster co-ordinator positions remain unfilled, the planning of the work with the faculties that they will be involved with, has begun.

The changes are anticipated to have significant effects on the ITL and on the way it works. In addition to the outcomes expected through the network of Associate Deans, relations between ITL and the faculties are expected to be improved, and the needs of the faculties are more likely to be met. While the research conducted in ITL is expected to continue to be internationally competitive, the changes could mean that the research topics and themes are likely to be more discipline-based or have more of a local ‘flavour’.

While 2007 was a difficult year for ITL, the restructuring is now largely complete, and a unique opportunity exists for it to make a major contribution to professional and educational development at the University of Sydney.

Professor Keith Trigwell
Director, ITL

2008 ALTC (Carrick) Fellowship Award

Dr Christine Asmar, Senior Lecturer at the ITL, has been awarded a 2008 Associate Fellowship by the newly-named Australian Learning and Teaching Council (ALTC) – formerly the Carrick Institute. The Fellowship has a value of $90,000 and will support Christine in carrying out a project in 2009 titled: ‘Indigenous Teaching and Learning in NSW Universities: Developing Research-based Guidelines for Good Practice’.

In collaboration with Indigenous colleagues at a number of NSW universities, Christine aims to develop a set of resources and guidelines for more effective practice in the field of Indigenous teaching – which she defines in broad terms as involving both Indigenous and non-Indigenous teachers. After reviewing good practice in this field (and the evidence for it) she will identify examples or case studies across NSW, then arrange for them to be showcased at a Forum to be sponsored by the University of Sydney at the end of 2009. The set of research-based guidelines and examples resulting from these processes, Christine hopes, will then be published and disseminated nationally. She welcomes suggestions – just email her at c.asmar@usyd.edu.au

Welcome to Dr Susan Thomas

I joined the ITL in February 2008 on a five-year secondment as Senior Lecturer and Teaching Development Coordinator for the Arts and Social Sciences faculty cluster. I have a PhD in English, with a concentration in Rhetoric and Composition, from Georgia State University. I was initially appointed in 2004 as a Lecturer in the English Department, where I served as Coordinator of Academic Writing, Director of the Bachelor of Arts and Sciences Degree Program and Associate Dean Teaching and Learning for the Faculty of Arts. I remain active in my home faculty as Director of Academic Writing in the new Arts Teaching and Learning Network, which I helped to design. My teaching and research have focused primarily on theories and practices of academic writing, grounded in Ancient Rhetoric, but I am also interested in American Civil War Rhetoric, the learning and teaching theories of Fred Newton Scott, student learning gaps in the transition from high school to university, and academic teaching and learning development.

I am currently working on two Large TIES projects, one on streamlining USE practices in the Faculty of Arts (with Brigid Rooney and Simon Barrie) and the other on developing a model for a Virtual Exchange program (with Rebecca Johinke). I am also working with colleagues at Stanford University and institutions around the world to develop a Centre for Cross-Cultural Rhetoric, and I am the Academic Partner for Concord High School’s Quality Teaching/Action Learning Program, funded by a national Department of Education grant.

I am a member of the executive board of the Council of Writing Program Administrators (USA) and I serve on the editorial board of the Young Scholars in Writing journal, which showcases undergraduate research. I am the editor of What is the New Rhetoric? (Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2007) and am currently completing my first monograph, Teaching Writing Beyond US Borders: the Risks of Assuming.

Dr Susan Thomas
Academic Development Programs Review

In 2007 the ITL undertook a review of its contributions across four of the university’s academic development programs:

- Sessional staff development programs
- The Principles and Practice of University Teaching and Learning program (P&P)
- The four units of the Graduate Certificate in Educational Studies (Higher Education)
- The Research Higher Degree Supervision Development Program

In addition to the considerable existing evaluation data on these programs, the review considered anonymous submissions from past and current individual participants in the programs through online surveys, and data collected in interviews with Associate Deans L&T in which they reported on their internal faculty consultations in relation to these programs. These submissions and contributions were invaluable and I would like to thank everybody who took the time to share their ideas and experiences.

The review was a very positive experience for the ITL and provided us with the opportunity to explore new ideas for the renewal of the programs. In 2008 we will be working with the university community to begin implementing some of these ideas. The planned changes will bring these academic development programs into alignment with the new structure of the ITL as well as with the University’s new overarching teaching and learning management structures and strategies.

Broad Directions

While there are some specific strategies related to particular programs, there are some general features which the 2008 renewal of the programs will incorporate.

Firstly, we will be seeking to provide greater flexibility across all the programs. This flexibility relates to broadening the choice of learning experiences that make up these programs; broadening the teaching contributions to these programs – especially in terms of faculty input; broadening the entry pathways (RPL); ensuring better articulation with diverse disciplinary pedagogies and faculty cultures, and better linking with faculty academic development programs.

This year we are also looking to broaden the ownership and engagement with these programs in some faculties. In part, this will be achieved through increased ITL-faculty collaboration and shared responsibility for aspects of the programs. We will also be working with faculty leaders to get a better match of individuals with identified development needs (for instance through PMD or faculty teaching QA systems) to the most appropriate program or alternative development strategy. This will also involve better alignment of academic development programs and strategies with the needs of different stages of the academic career (ranging from sessional staff to L&T leadership development) and emerging views of the academic role at Sydney.

We will also be working to develop a university strategy for recording teaching and learning academic development achievements of staff in relation to other development functions such as PMD, and to facilitate articulation with subsequent academic development programs.

Some changes for 2008

Two areas where you will see changes in 2008 are in the second semester of the Graduate Certificate and the introductory Principles and Practice (P&P) program. In the Principles and Practice program (P&P) we will be introducing some faculty-based academic development activities instead of the third day of the program. This is designed to recognise the fact that these activities already exist in many faculties and that new staff need an orientation to the contextual factors influencing teaching in their discipline or faculty. Each faculty will decide what is most suitable for their staff, however some of the activities that will begin to be available as part of P&P will include:

- Faculty-based peer observation of teaching
- Participation in faculty teaching & learning events
- Participation in faculty teaching mentoring programs
- Participation in faculty teaching development projects
- Contributing to scholarship of teaching activities in the faculty

The development and implementation of these faculty-based activities will be supported by the ITL, especially through the Cluster Coordinators as they are appointed. As part of the June P&P program, participants from the faculties which comprise the Arts and Social Sciences Cluster will be able to engage in...
faculty-based activities developed collaboratively by the ITL Arts Cluster coordinator (Susan Thomas), together with the A/Deans from other faculties in the Cluster. The ITL will continue to offer a central program as the third day of P&P for participants from other faculties while we work with those faculties to identify and introduce suitable activities over the next year.

The teaching of the second semester of the Graduate Certificate will also be changing this year to give a greater emphasis to personally relevant and authentic learning. Participants will be able to work with their cluster colleagues on a greater variety of discipline based projects under the guidance of mentors in their faculties. The ITL is working with colleagues in each faculty to help identify potential projects for this year’s Graduate Certificate participants, but these will typically include the chance for participants to elect to contribute to existing faculty TIES projects or curriculum development activities; to undertake or plan faculty inquiry projects; to contribute to a teaching development activity; or to implement and evaluate a curriculum innovation in their discipline. The other change this year will be the introduction of a larger range of authentic tasks for participants to choose from as the basis for the reflective professional development portfolio. This year participants will be able to draw on activities such as completing a portfolio to support a teaching award or Fellowship application, a promotion application or to support their PMD. The focus on authentic tasks and discipline-based projects recognises the variation in needs of participants from different faculties and also, the teaching and learning expertise that resides in the faculties – especially amongst the 200 alumni of the Graduate Certificate. For these past graduates, contributing to the mentoring of these new faculty-based projects will, we hope, provide ongoing professional development opportunities.

In second semester 2008, we will also be opening up a revised ITL Research & Scholarship seminar series to complement the Graduate Certificate seminars. While these are designed in part for Graduate Certificate participants, the seminar series is open to all interested members of the university community and will be one way of sharing the scholarship expertise that exists across the academic community. These seminars will be advertised on the ITL website.

What else is changing?
There are other changes we will be working on in the coming year in relation to the Grad Cert and P&P as well as the other academic development programs. If you want to read more about the various ways we are seeking to contribute to the renewal of these academic development programs, the ITL 2007 Review of Academic Development Programs document on the ITL website provides a summary. For example – one area we will be contributing to is the next phase of development of the Research Higher Degree Supervision Development Program to make the pathways to accreditation more flexible and relevant to faculty supervision contexts and development needs. Another area we will be working on in coming months is in supporting the university to develop a comprehensive sessional staff development strategy which draws on the excellent programs already provided in many faculties. We hope to include reports on these activities and perspectives from participants on these updated programs in future editions of Synergy.

Diversity and Internationalisation News
The ITL announces some useful resources:


Associate Professor Simon Barrie
Associate Director, ITL
Many events inevitably structure a faculty's ritual year: the succession of committee meetings, the start of teaching, the examination period. Teaching Days do not yet belong in the indispensable category. The practice of designating a specific annual date for discussions and presentations of issues surrounding pedagogy began at the Conservatorium in the late 1990s, the brainchild of the then Associate Dean of Learning and Teaching, Dr. Ross Gilbert. When I became Associate Dean in 2004, the mantle fell to me. I have now organized five Teaching Days and the event seems likely to remain an on-going part of the faculty calendar. So it’s useful to take stock. What follows is a personal reflection on Teaching Days as a concept, faculty experience and organizational challenge.

**Rationales**

Teaching Days sound like a good idea. Within a faculty, the routine round of staff meetings, common room conversations and corridor encounters offer little opportunity for broad-based, collective discussions of pedagogy. A larger university culture that values research much more than teaching only reinforces the sparse attention likely to be paid to pedagogy for its own sake. Learning and Teaching Committees do constitute a more direct and even muscular engagement with the intricacies of faculty educational environments but they also represent a referral of responsibility by the larger teaching community to the few. Anyone sitting on such a Committee knows the challenges in transforming an agenda item on learning and teaching into an enduring aspect of life and culture within a faculty.

In two important ways, Teaching Days respond to these shortcomings in the tertiary education workplace. Most obviously, a Teaching Day creates a specific, structured occasion for public conversations about what is still, for many, a core business of the university. This is an emotional as much as an intellectual opportunity, since Teaching Days celebrate successful and creative teaching but just as legitimately also anatomise frustration or failure. This emotional elasticity gives Teaching Days a potentially special resonance.

But the opportunity to reflect on pedagogy is only part of the value of Teaching Days. Teaching Days also operate as counters (perhaps antidotes is better) to the corrosive disciplinary and administrative fragmentation that characterises faculties as institutions. By drawing together a cross section of staff – full and part-time, tutors and lecturers, administrators as well as teachers – Teaching Days initiate personal connections and knowledge transfers that do not arise from day-to-day patterns of encounter and exchange. Especially through linking a faculty's disparate communities of practice, Teaching Days can produce new group projects, fresher or more confident individual approaches to pedagogy and, ultimately, deeper understandings of what constitutes the elusive concept of faculty identity. In the balkanised corridors of any university, and especially in remote campuses like the Conservatorium, the value of this cannot be underestimated.

**Timing**

However appealing Teaching Day is as an idea, organizing the event can be hair-pullingly difficult. Not the least obstacle is fixing on a date. At the Sydney Conservatorium of Music (SCM), Teaching Day takes place in late February, one week before teaching resumes. There is much to recommend
this time of year. At the end of the long break staff are as refreshed as they are ever likely to be and still free of timetabled teaching commitments. For the organiser, this means increased leverage in persuading staff to present as well as attend. But, for some faculties, the event may be better located in either a mid semester or mid year teaching break.

Ensuring Attendance
The date is one hurdle. The effectiveness of any teaching day then depends on its capacity to not only generate attendance from numerous staff but also river participants to their seats throughout the proceedings. From some faculties come stories of Teaching Days where curious onlookers arrived for the first session and then promptly disappeared. The event is thus abandoned to the stalwart few who long before experienced a Damascus moment in relation to the value of teaching. This scenario haunts the organiser of such events.

At the Conservatorium, about 60 staff participated in the 2008 Teaching Day. In a relatively small faculty this is an achievement. To attract a satisfactory turnout, I urge at least some of the following strategies:

- **Pay casual staff to attend.** With mass teaching increasingly the province of part-time teachers, this is an essential recognition of the indispensable contribution of this group within most faculties.

- **Shameless publicity.** Frequent, weakly humourous reminders seem to have an impact, as does outright grovelling. As the day approaches I’ve resorted to emails such as ‘Be still your beating heart, the Conservatorium’s 2008 Teaching program is now available’, ‘Two sleeps to go’ and, one day before:

  You thought it would never come. The 2008 TEACHING DAY starts promptly at 9.30am, tomorrow, Recital Hall West. Information, ideas, music, movies, passion... for years to come you can tell the world: I was there!

- **Plan for less, not more.** Given the time demands on continuing and casual academics, a full day listening to discussions of teaching is a large ask. The Conservatorium’s general sessions run from 9 or 9.30am to 1pm. The afternoon provides an opportunity for a small number of specialised sessions aimed at staff with particular incentives to attend.

- **Active support from executive staff.**

- **A good morning tea.** Frugality breeds contempt. As one participant commented after the Conservatorium’s culinary purse strings loosened: ‘The better quality morning tea produced better quality interactions’.

And, of course, success breeds success.

**Only Connect: Content and other Useful Strategies for Engagement**

Such incentives stimulate attendance but, on a number of levels, thoughtfully designed content patently adds to the allure. Topicality, for example, really counts. This doesn’t mean that larger university learning and teaching priorities should dominate the agenda. Rather, presentations work best when they connect directly with issues seen as critical to the particular pedagogic circumstances of a faculty. For all sorts of reasons, universities often promote outcomes-based, homogenising discourses concerning learning and teaching. It is precisely the opportunity to develop more nuanced and differentiated approaches to educational challenges that constitutes much of the enduring appeal of Teaching Days.

A provocative treatment of at least some topics also helps. To achieve this, avoid conceiving learning and teaching too narrowly. Well-intentioned discussions of such issues as assessment, feedback, IT and curriculum reform are important items on any Teaching Day program. But encompassing the more frankly political aspects of these and other teaching issues is also desirable. At the Conservatorium, such approaches can produce memorable and moving sessions. A 2006 forum titled ‘Casual Teachers and the Conservatorium: Can You be Casual and Belong?’ is the best example. Strategically designed to
increase part-time teacher attendance, this session also acknowledged one of the then most striking aspects of the Conservatorium’s educational workplace: nearly 70% casualisation. Not only did many part-time staff participate but the opportunity to publicly voice the casual experience resonated almost equally with full-time staff, some of whom spoke with galvanising eloquence. On a slightly different tangent, just asking casual staff to present can also produce unexpectedly positive results. After sitting on a Teaching Day panel one such staff member remarked, “this was the only time I ever really felt part of the Conservatorium”.

With specificity and controversy, sensitivity to diverse needs and interests is the most crucial consideration in constructing content. More than anything, variety can stimulate genuine engagement. This is certainly true in a highly compartmentalised faculty like the Conservatorium where teaching bifurcates into performance and academic areas and these fundamental divisions fragment, in turn, into instrument-based units, genres (like jazz), and the discipline divisions represented by composition, musicology, music education and general studies. Supporting this mix are teaching mediums that include lectures, tutorials, workshops, master classes, orchestras, small ensembles and one to one tuition.

There is also the spatial challenge of units taught in Macquarie Street and main campus.

Catering for this multiplicity is not, however, for the fainthearted. Teaching Days need to move across a lot of different areas but in such a way that the various sections of the audience can draw from each session different but productive inspiration. This also means that presentations intended primarily to inform need the balance of deliberately controversial sessions, generic issues require leavening with much more specialized insights.

In packaging the latter, one of the more rewarding approaches is to reveal hidden areas of practice. Superficially simple sessions outlining what a particular teaching unit does or the aims, processes and tensions within specific programs can generate high levels of interest. The Conservatorium’s 2008 Teaching Day is an example of the attempt to interweave diverse perspectives. The program included sessions on: ‘21st Century Pedagogy or Innovation at the Conservatorium: Opportunity, Threat or Irrelevancy’ (a forum with 5 presenters); ‘Skills Education at the Conservatorium’ (a deliberately provocative session that questioned a number of faculty and university shibboleths); ‘The Secret Life of Units: Ensemble Laid Bare’ (another group presentation from members of a somewhat mysterious Conservatorium department) and ‘How Much Difference Can Culture Make to Teaching and Learning’ (a mix of autobiography and professional insight from three presenters).

As this program indicates, diversity extends to modes of delivery, excepting that ‘crisp and concise’ presentations should be a constant. No individual presenter should talk for more than 15 minutes. Otherwise, Teaching Days also benefit from the formulas drawn on by generations of conference organizers: attention to pacing, a mix of individual commentators and panels, a limited resort to discussion in small groups and a judiciously structured succession of multimedia moments. At the Conservatorium, for example, short film presentations (and an occasional PowerPoint) help sustain audience attention. Film also has one other value.
The Elephant in the Room: Representing Students

While there is considerable virtue in at least one annual gathering of faculty teachers for a bout of collective navel-gazing, teachers are only half of any learning equation. Yet integrating students isn’t always easy, especially in a small faculty like the Conservatorium where every student experiences the rare intimacy of a 1:1 teaching relationship.

To ask our students to critique their learning experiences before an audience of their teachers is to ask a lot. When a flesh and blood encounter is too difficult to organize, a film can work well. Several years ago, I began filming interviews with students to screen at Teaching Day. One film asked the retiring Head of the Conservatorium Students Association to look back honestly on her experience at the Con; another interviewed students on the role of imagination in learning, another asked an international student about life and learning in Australia. Films work best if they give staff candid glimpses of the ways in which they are perceived and valued by students. It is significant that these interviews are often nominated as the best aspect of the program. Beware, however, of simply imaging what staff already know.

What to Avoid

While there are no hard and fast rules, evaluations of the Conservatorium’s Teaching Days reveal certain shared aversions which probably have applicability to other faculties. In general, Conservatorium staff prefer to avoid:

- **Outsiders.** Motivational speakers in particular. There is a strong desire by faculty members to own the event. As such gatherings are infrequent and of relatively limited duration it is much more important for faculty colleagues to reveal themselves as teachers than to be harangued, however charmingly, by experts.

- **Spin.** Staff welcomed philosophical and theoretical reflections but eschewed the sanguine, rhetorical window-dressing that sometimes flourishes in today’s corporate universities.

- **Policy detail.** This is seen as better left to committees or for individuals to pursue through documents on the net.

- **Long sessions from individual speakers and speaker over-runs.**

In Conclusion

Most years I evaluate Teaching Day. In the responses are phrases such as ‘worthwhile and fascinating’, ‘collegial and productive’, ‘innovative and inspirational’. One participant summed up: ‘Good mix: policy issues, practical information and encouragement, and something to reflect on’. There can also be harsh comments—usually in relation to emphasis, program omissions, overlong sessions or softly spoken presenters. But of all reactions, the clearest is the pleasure staff take in the act of connection with one another and with other, little known areas of the faculty.

In assessing value or benefit, perhaps the best guide at the Conservatorium is the universally expressed desire that Teaching Days continue. Personally, I would like to do more to maintain the interest and energy which is, at least some of the time, released. Organizing two successful events a year is problematic and too much to fit in with other, little known areas of the faculty. In a world in which reporting upwards on learning and teaching can seem more important than the activities themselves, it is easy to lose a sense of the visceral transfer of passion and enchantment that is involved in transmitting knowledges and skills. And also the sheer element of risk integral to committed and creative teaching.

At their best, Teaching Days celebrate this while offering a meditation on the crucial role that individual institutional contexts play in constructing and then reconstructing the experiences of both learners and their teachers.

Dr Diane Collins is Associate Dean (Learning and Teaching) at the Sydney Conservatorium of Music. Contact Diane at diane.collins@sydney.edu.au.
Continuing the tradition of our ‘Talking’ series, this issue reports a conversation with four tutors – all working in the Faculty of Arts. I came to meet these women following their participation in the Faculty of Arts Tutors’ Development Program (TDP–http://www.arts.usyd.edu.au/tdp) – a collaboration between the Institute for Teaching and Learning (ITL) and the Faculty. The program is designed to help new (and experienced) tutors feel prepared for their first tutorial; to focus on teaching for student learning; and to engage in strategies for evaluating and reflecting on their teaching in order to improve it. Each of these women went on to complete an extension module with me focused on the Peer Observation of Teaching (PoT).

In April, over coffee and biscuits, we sat around a table and chatted about their experiences as tutors, their learning about teaching, the departmental and disciplinary contexts they work in, and the challenges facing them as they work to become better, more effective tutors while completing their PhDs. I am grateful to each of them for their valuable insights, their generosity and for giving up their time.

**Introducing the tutors**

Thushara Dibley is currently teaching in the unit *Social Activism in South East Asia* and is in her first year of a PhD in the Department of Indonesian Studies. She is researching how local non-government organisations in Aceh and East Timor engage in the peace building process.

Helen Fewster and Barbara Baumann both research and tutor in the Department of Anthropology. Helen is completing a PhD focused on research in Papua New Guinea and this is her second semester of tutoring. Barbara is working on a thesis about the relationship between the Australian state and Aboriginal organisations, and has been tutoring for only a year.

Jacinta van den Berg is a third year doctoral student in the Department of English. Her research is focused on representations of maternity and the Australian writer Brian Castro. Although she has declined the opportunity to tutor this semester, she has in the past taught on unit such as *Fiction, Film & Power*, and *Narratives of Romance & Adventure*. 
I wonder if I might start off by asking each of you to talk a little about some of the things you learned as a result of participating in the Tutors’ Development Program (TDP) - the experience of actually learning about teaching.

JACINTA: I guess I didn’t feel like a confident or experienced tutor until I actually had the feedback from the Peer Observation of Teaching (PoT) module. And because I was being observed by someone who I’d gone through the initial training with, to be able to get that feedback from her which was ‘yes, you’ve succeeded’, made me feel like I could think of myself as a teacher. I felt confident that I could pick up other work outside the university as well. And I enjoy teaching and actually feel like I have some skills there. So I do think of myself as a teacher now. Because the whole career thing after the PhD is shaky, I am seriously thinking about going into teaching rather than research.

THUSHARA: Compared to last semester, I feel much more confident as a teacher. I would attribute a lot of that to having gone through the process of teaching - having had such a big load last semester. But I’ve also picked a lot up from the TDP and like Jacinta, it was getting some feedback from another tutor, someone who I had observed and thought was quite good, saying that I’d done a good job as well. That made me feel: “Ok, I can do this”. I’ve also had the opportunity to do a few lectures this semester for various subjects. That’s been terrifying but at the same time, really good because it’s pushed me to teach in a way that I haven’t taught before and I’ve had good feedback so that’s been great – really affirming.

HELEN: My experience of tutoring last semester was my first experience of tutoring at university. I was a high school teacher many years ago and I think tutoring at university level is somewhat different. I have found it very rewarding because it also helps you clarify your ideas and thoughts – which you don’t necessarily do when you are working on your PhD. You actually have to explain the concepts to your students so you need to think more deeply about the issues involved. I found that the TDP course did help. One of the problems is getting students to talk which can be quite hard to overcome. I tutored four classes last semester in the same unit – one was incredible. The students just talked and talked and ideas just bounced from one student to another which was fantastic. One of the other tutorials wasn’t nearly as dynamic and it was very difficult to get any responses from the students. Sometimes, I would end up talking most of the time which then ends up coming out in the evaluations: as “you talk too much”.

TAI: Yes, I think we all know that feeling. The dreaded silent classroom and the need to fill it!

HELEN: Nonetheless, I think that tutoring is a very rewarding and invaluable experience for any PhD student and it really should almost be a part of doing your PhD because if you are thinking of going and doing anything later in academia or teaching certainly, you need that experience beforehand. To go in there without that experience having got your PhD would be a lot less valuable. So I think it’s a very worthwhile experience.

TAI: Yes, you raise a good question about what should constitute a PhD - whether teaching and research might be experienced in a more integrated way so that both count as part of the doctoral experience. There are some ideas floating around amongst researchers and scholars of doctoral education about a doctoral curriculum so that there are some structures to the PhD. For instance, teaching could be part of it, getting some experience of research grant writing, making a contribution to the journal editing – all those kinds of things are integrated so that the doctoral graduate would have a more complete experience of academic life – and not just a thesis. It’s a very controversial idea though!

HELEN: Yes, it’s hard because whilst you’re tutoring and
Institute for Teaching and Learning

marking, you’re virtually not doing your PhD. Tutoring takes up a huge amount of your time and it’s not to be ventured into lightly because if you want to complete your PhD on time, you have to be careful that you don’t do too much tutoring.

BARBARA: Last semester was the first time I tutored and it was a very good experience. I still have a few insecurities with the English language so I was very nervous standing in front of a class - but this semester, I’m getting more confident. It takes a lot of time to prepare the tutorials and it also distracts me to a certain extent from my research. Last semester I had 5 tutes and I have 5 tutes again this semester. Although I initially intended to take on fewer tutorials, I’m happy for the opportunity because I am definitely aiming to work as a lecturer in the near future. Apart from that, management of my time input into tutoring is becoming more effective. I thought the TDP was very useful in preparing me for the teaching situation. Actually, there should be more emphasis on training to be a lecturer. Just because you’re a good scholar doesn’t necessarily mean you’re a good teacher and you are able to bring your knowledge across to students. I think there has to be some compulsory sessions for people who actually are starting to become tutors and have no teaching experience. I was a little surprised when I started tutoring last semester because there was no “official” induction process. If I hadn’t completed the TDP, I’m pretty sure some of my insecurities – especially with self-confidence – would have continued. I think it should be a compulsory module for the “newcomers”.

TAI: It’s interesting that question – whether teacher/tutor training should be compulsory – whether academics should be required to do it. Let me ask you now about preparation, marking and feedback – widely acknowledged as the activities which take up the most time. How’re you finding those things?

BARBARA: In my case, because I’m not as competent with the language, I put quite a lot of time into preparing my tutorials – I tend to be very organized in general (there is of course always the danger of “over-preparing”). Apart from the time factor, I really enjoy the preparation process and I try to use various sources to give students an “introduction” into the topic and put the unit readings into a wider context. According to the feedback sheets I hand out mid semester, students find this really useful and it helps to make “dry theory” more interesting and accessible.

JACINTA: I always felt that I would spend more time on the preparation if I hadn’t had those initial TDP classes because they just made so much of a difference.

BARBARA: The teaching is actually very enjoyable – just the marking has been a draining experience for me. I guess everybody is feeling similar – the essay feedback takes most of the time and in marking weeks, I have actually no opportunity to get other work done.

JACINTA: It takes so much time to put together feedback.

TAI: And yet we know from the literature that the quality of feedback, and the dynamics around feedback, is what students cite as being one of the most important ways of gauging how they’re learning. There’s some research from the UK which suggests that what we need to do as teachers is find some way of getting students to engage with the feedback we provide them as part of their experience of learning – particularly if that’s where we spend most of our efforts as teachers.

HELEN: Some lecturers feel that students don’t take a lot of notice of the feedback. However, I remember as a student being really keen to get my feedback. Students also wrote to me telling me that they were looking forward to reading my comments. So, it may be that some students give it a cursory glance but not every student. Maybe one problem is connected with the return of the assignments in that the major assignment is often returned at the end of the tutorial period so students
are unable to consult with their marker about the feedback. It would probably be a more worthwhile experience for students if they were able to discuss the comments with their tutor.

TAI: Then there are other questions about how tutors are involved in the construction of assessment – or even, whether they can be. Since tutors are responsible for most of the marking and feedback, helping them understand the rationale for assessment tasks seems to be really important – especially if they’re the first point of call for students.

THUSHARA: I’ve had a different experience because the subject I’ve been teaching is a new one and it only started last semester. The person who’s teaching it is my supervisor so I spend a lot of time with her. She was a teacher before she became an academic so she’s very supportive of anything that will improve the experience for the students. So I was always saying “how do you want me to do this exactly?” and “I don’t really know this and that” and she was really kind and helped me out. So with assessments and things, she’s always open to the feedback that I can give her. If we’re talking about suggestions for how departments can better support tutors, I think it’s about getting tutors more involved throughout the process and maybe getting lecturers to spend time with the tutors. For example, having a feedback session at the end of semester would be really helpful – not only for the tutors but also for the people running the course and for the students.

HELEN: I was so impressed with that article in Synergy – in Geopolitics – the organised approach to tutoring they took. All the tutors on this course got together with the lecturer before the semester started and I think each one took a lecture in the course. They were all involved with the planning of the course and they all wrote feedback after each tutorial. Their approach was exciting and innovative; so well planned and thought out. It would be great if something like that could be replicated in our department.

JACINTA: That would be fantastic in English as well - that would make the greatest single difference.

HELEN: It would be so fantastic to actually be part of the process, to have your ideas consulted and to be part of an ongoing discussion. Even if you had to write up a reflection about each tutorial, it would be worth it to be part of a more coherent process rather than one that’s ad hoc.

THUSHARA: But it could be organised amongst the tutors themselves couldn’t it? I don’t know what the culture is like in other departments but I know that there are a whole group of research assistants and tutors in the Indonesian department and I’m sure that if all of us sat down together, I’m sure it would have an impact.

HELEN: I believe that the lecturers tried to be helpful and supportive and I really appreciated the help that was given with the marking. Barbara and I also tried to support each other. We would meet each week and pool our ideas but when we were seen doing it, sometimes we received mixed messages – such as don’t get too involved or stress out– it will be fine.

TAI: I don’t think the experience you’ve just described is uncommon in this university – part of it is about academic workload and part of it is about having a more organised and strategic approach to teaching and learning so that it’s valued as a professional, intellectual and evidence-based activity. In a lot of places – those values are often contested.

THUSHARA: Just seeing how my supervisor works – I don’t know a lot about how other academics operate - there is a lot on their plates. It seems the problem is not so much that they don’t have an interest in teaching but that there is no structural incentive to prioritise teaching – at least not in the same way that something like promotions depend on how many publications you’re producing, not how many hours you put

I would really embrace the idea of working together with another tutor in Anthropology in order to find out if the information/content I want to bring across is too dense or at an appropriate level. I am very enthusiastic as an anthropologist. I sometimes worry that I perhaps challenge the students too much. Barbara
into your teaching. That I think might change things.

TAI: Some of that is changing. The promotions guidelines are focusing people’s attention on teaching and learning in some new ways – for eg, emphasising teaching and learning leadership or the scholarship of teaching – but there is still more work to do. I wonder if we can change tack again. Could you each describe how you’re going managing a teaching load with making progress on your PhD?

THUSHARA: I’m only doing one tute a week and it seems manageable. It is challenging. I can’t imagine how I could do very much more. But it’s sort of a funny little battle that goes on in my mind – on the one hand I think “well, if I want to become an academic this is the sort of juggling that I’ll be doing for the rest of my life”. On the other hand, “well, do I really want to accept that this is how it is”. What are the consequences not only for my teaching and my research but for my personal life as well – particularly, if you’re trying to do well at your teaching and your research and then also have a weekend. So it’s not just those two but then how that fits into the context of me being a whole human being and continuing to be a good friend and a good family member and a good partner and all those sorts of things. I feel it’s manageable now but I can see that the pressure will become greater as my PhD goes on and also if it becomes my profession and it’s my livelihood.

JACINTA: Where I am now – I’m not tutoring because I couldn’t get any meaningful work done on my thesis. I actually didn’t really realise how much work I wasn’t getting done until I’d finished that year of teaching. I’m effectively treating that year as basically a break even though I was still on the scholarship. I’m wondering whether the scholarship could be re-arranged so you could have a break that was factored into what else is going on for you that year. So, you could have a break from the scholarship if you were tutoring. To me, it just didn’t work at all to be tutoring at the same time. I mean, I managed to get conference papers done because I could have those small goals but in terms of the sort of deep thought that you need for a PhD, it’s just a non event.

THUSHARA: I was just thinking listening to you that that might be something that the TDP might consider looking at - having a session particularly for people doing research and teaching because a lot of people would be talking about how to keep that balance.

TAI: I’ll pass on the feedback to the folks in the Faculty. That issue of balancing research and teaching comes up all the time and I don’t really have an answer for it. It’s a structural issue about how academic work is organised so that they’re not pulling in opposite and contradictory directions. And notice, we haven’t even mentioned ‘service’– the poor and neglected cousin of the three dimensions of academic work. Again, some of these are strategic issues but it’s worth putting on the agenda the challenge of how universities support the professional development of their doctoral students. The evidence from the Student Research Experience Questionnaire (SREQ) is that it’s uneven and patchy across the university. What sort of strategies do you think might help that?

HELEN: I think that increasing the importance of having meetings between lecturers and tutors would probably be a good start.

JACINTA: Just knowing that people cared enough to start doing something about it would be meaningful.

THUSHARA: Really small things I reckon, like just a meeting at the beginning of the semester and a meeting at the end of semester.

BARBARA: We have markers’ meetings but we should probably have them earlier in the semester to ensure some kind of consistency and we should agree on one set of marking
criteria. I have the feeling that every lecturer organizes these matters differently. I would appreciate if this could be clarified in the very first tutors meeting with the lecturer. I would also be happy to take on more responsibility in the planning and organization process.

JACINTA: Maybe too, if there was an effort to match your areas of expertise to your teaching that would be just, so fantastic. Don't get me wrong, I enjoy teaching things that are out of my area – the courses I taught were really interesting and I enjoyed teaching but I can only imagine that teaching in my own area would only make the experience so much better, for everyone involved. This is a dream life than I’m living, being able to teach in my own area.

THUSHARA: I think getting organised and having concrete things to suggest to academics about helping to improve teaching, in my experience, is really helpful because I know they're really busy. So being really clear from our perspective about what we want is a good starting point. And manageable for them too.

TAI: What about the idea of writing about your tutoring for publication or, applying for an award? Are they incentives for you at the moment? I ask because there's a move towards what's called the scholarship of teaching, and making sure that excellent teachers are recognised and rewarded. Have any of you thought about that sort of thing?

JACINTA: No time.

HELEN: It’s a huge task and I’m not sure what the incentive would be. I started writing something about my experience of giving interactive tutorials but I had to go off and do some fieldwork and came back quite sick and then teaching started – it’s still on my computer.

JACINTA: I think I would feel fraudulent applying for an award when I’ve lacked that sort of feedback from everyone except my direct peer. Without any feedback from the course coordinator and that sort of thing, I’d feel like, I don’t know: I think I was great but hey!

TAI: So there’s an issue about getting feedback from the academics responsible for the unit. Are there other things you’d like to raise more generally?

JACINTA: Can I, just as one little thing, I would really appreciate some clearer boundaries about what work is and isn’t appropriate for someone to be doing as a tutor. I worry that there’s a whole lot of work that tutors do that is unpaid after the contract comes to an end – like hunting down marks, or assignments that students hadn’t handed in and that sort of thing. Often, there are no guidelines to help tutors understand their rights and responsibilities – when they can say ‘no’.

THUSHARA: I want to add something to setting limitations. One thing which worked well for me was, just at the beginning of this year I was putting together a time table of how much time I was going to do research. I showed it to my supervisor just to get some feedback and because she’s lecturing for the course that I’m tutoring, she just directly gave me feedback saying “look, I don’t want you spending that much time on your teaching and you’ve had enough experience now I feel like you should be right with just spending three hours on preparing”. It was good just to know what the expectation was and also it kind of pushed me to not to get so caught up in the details. Having done a semester of teaching now, it was just a good little boundary setting exercise that was helpful.

JACINTA: So incredibly organised, I’m impressed.

* * * * *

This conversation was facilitated by Tai Peseta, Institute for Teaching and Learning (ITL). For further information about the Faculty of Arts Tutors’ Development Program (TDP), visit the website at http://www.arts.usyd.edu.au/tdp/ or email: tdp@arts.usyd.edu.au.

Notes
3Further information about the Student Research Experience Questionnaire at http://www.itl.usyd.edu.au/sreq/
Evidence indicating that interprofessional collaboration and teamwork are important contributors to positive health outcomes, has prompted health and education organisations worldwide to review how professionals learn to work together effectively. One strategy being adopted by the University is through incorporation of interprofessional learning (IPL) into curricula, as stated in its Learning and Teaching Plan (2007-2010): “identify and promote opportunities for interdisciplinary and interprofessional learning”. IPL is defined as when ‘one or more professions learn with, from and about each other to improve collaboration and the quality of care’. As the definition infers, interaction is an essential component of successful interprofessional learning.

Health and social care faculties within the University of Sydney are committed to preparing their graduating health professionals with capabilities required to practice healthcare within a patient or client centred collaborative interprofessional team. In October 2007, the IPL Curriculum Framework Project Group was formed to put this into action. The Framework Group comprises of Associate Deans Learning and Teaching (or equivalent) from the Faculties of Health, Education and Social Work, Science (Human Nutrition Unit), and the Institute of Learning and Teaching. In conjunction with the IPL Research & Development Unit, the IPL Curriculum Framework Project Group has released an IPL curriculum framework to serve as the central guiding document for IPL curriculum development within health and social care faculties. It is centred around three key components of interprofessional learning: (i) team functioning and leadership within multidisciplinary healthcare teams; (ii) understanding of professional roles and their interdependencies; and (iii) communication between health professionals. Each of these components is considered fundamental to fostering a patient-centred collaborative approach to care, and developing respect and cooperation between professions.

Faculties have commenced incorporating the framework into core curriculum, including some of the following examples in 2008:

- Introduction of a “Contemporary Interprofessional Practice” module (Health Sciences)
- Inclusion of the “Teamwork in Health” module (Pharmacy; Education and Social Work; Health Sciences)
- Integration of interprofessional practice into selected “case of the week” (Medicine & Dentistry)
- Incorporation of IPL activities as an assessment item in core units of study (Nursing & Midwifery, & Science (Nutrition))
- Emphasis of an interprofessional practice theme in PPD & Field placements requirements (Multiple faculties).

A further phased curriculum integration approach is planned in 2009/2010.

The IPL Research & Development Unit helped ensure that Interprofessional learning got off to flying start in 2008, with an IPL session added to orientation programs for several faculties. The orientation sessions provided an introduction to the concepts of interprofessional learning and practice, opportunities to socialise with other student and staff health professionals and, in some sessions, an opportunity to engage in an interactive teamwork activity. IPL initiatives within the university include a developing suite of capstone IPL experiences designed to provide students with an opportunity to extend, integrate and enhance their IPL activity and capabilities. These experience provide not only a critical learning experience, but in some cases, an opportunity to perform a valued community service. As these placements expand and develop into 2009/2010 they will provide students with diversity and choice in IPL experience.

For further information about IPL initiatives and the IPL Curriculum Framework, please visit the Interprofessional Learning pages under the Faculties of Health web site: http://www.foh.usyd.edu.au/ipl/about/index.php or email: iplproject@usyd.edu.au.

Notes

1Centre for the Advancement of Interprofessional Education, 2002
The challenge of how to coherently and effectively embed the development of generic attributes has been recognised as a priority by many sectors of the higher education community. However, meaningful solutions have proved elusive and there remains a ‘national gap’ between the rhetoric of generic attributes and the reality of the student learning experience. This ‘gap’ exists despite the best intentions of university policy makers and some outstanding generic attributes curriculum innovations by the many individual teachers who have championed the generic attributes ‘cause’ over the years.

Recent empirical research into the conceptual basis for generic attributes has gone a long way towards explaining the reasons for this gap (eg. Barrie 2004, 2006, 2007, Kember & Leung 2007, Jones 2006). What this work has shown is that the way individual teachers (or policy makers or faculty leaders) think about generic attributes shapes the sort of teaching and curriculum approach they think is appropriate. And the research has also shown that some of these approaches have some major limitations – especially if, as in the case of some understandings of generic attributes – the logical conclusion is that such things have no place in university education or, as is even more common, an understanding of such attributes as having nothing to do with the ‘content knowledge’ of the discipline.

While these understandings (or conceptions as educational researchers refer to them) help explain why individuals are likely to approach embedding of GGA in a particular way – whether as teachers or as policy makers – there are other factors that shape the teaching and learning of generic attributes in universities.

The project takes what is already known about the influence of how individuals think about generic attributes and asks questions about how institutional teaching and learning practices and cultures can help or hinder effective embedding and assessment of graduate attributes.

The National Graduate Attributes Project (GAP) with colleagues Dr Clair Hughes from the University of Queensland and Dr Calvin Smith from Griffith University.

The first phase of the project has drawn on published educational research, AUQA reports and a network of international experts to identify the key issues relevant to these questions at an institutional level. These institutional issues relate to seven key themes and the project team is currently developing an issues paper on each of these: conceptualization, curriculum approach, assessment, stakeholder representation, implementation strategy, quality assurance, and staff development.

The second phase is currently exploring the detail of these issues in the context of current institutional practice through interviews with a nominated representative from each Australian university. Not only do these interviews gather data on current practice, but they will also be the first step in engaging these nominated university contacts as the initial members of a new national learning network with expertise in relation to embedding graduate attributes. The other element of the project considers how the issues might be resolved by looking at the level of discipline, and the context of particular curricula and support strategies. In doing this, the project will bring together the leaders of various teams who have been working on other ALTC projects relevant to these issues. For instance, the leaders from projects on generic attributes in Engineering; on assessment of generic attributes in Economics; the project on Work Integrated Learning; and the project on Career Development Learning.

The National GAP is already exciting interest internationally as seen in a recent invitation to visit and discuss the project with the Scottish Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education. It is hoped the new generic attributes learning network will help other Australian universities and other ALTC projects to connect with the project findings as they emerge. Enquiries about the project are welcomed by the team and can be directed to any of the team members or the Project Manager Dr Darryl Dymock (D.Dymock@griffith.edu.au).
One of the most brilliant, intellectually deft students I have ever taught in my capacity as a high school teacher studies here today, on full scholarship. She was dedicated, to be sure, excruciatingly thorough. What set this girl apart, though, was her flair. This girl seemed to be able to respond to whatever I threw her with grace, ease, and an unexpected intellectual flexibility. She could ask questions that illuminated an answer before the answering. More than this, she could write about her questions, and under her pen, her thirteen year old questions would evolve into arguments befitting a first year university student. She was a joy to teach.

One day, I asked her how her senior studies had gone, and I was deeply moved and alarmed by her answer. I asked her how she had done so well in her later years at school, and she replied, “well, you’ve got to know what’s in the syllabus”. I went home to dwell on this. How had the discipline of asking searing, searching questions in early years transmogrified into “know(ing) what’s in the syllabus”? I don’t mean to say that this girl had somehow sold out. She is a far cleverer girl than that. What she told me is that she had discovered, in the halls of education, a game at work. She had discovered that learning the rules of this game was more important than, say, the real questions she wanted to ask. Her savvy, in other words, had become more important than her flair. I went home with my ideals fairly deflated. How had we let this happen? Is there any other way of teaching, I asked myself, that could take better care of the kind of flair I had seen in my student? Knowing that this girl, and many others like her, still walk the halls of universities like this one, I want to pursue the possibility of another way of teaching that doesn’t uphold the game at the expense of the inquiring student.

My questions led to my research on questions as an alternative pedagogy – a pedagogy that is willing to take the kinds of risks necessary to permit serendipitous questions, and then flexible enough to pursue those questions. What I discovered was a way of teaching, a way that I heard recently described as a “posture” that provides possibilities for all levels of education, and for the plethora of subjects that we educators offer.

Toni Morrison, in her Nobel lecture in 1993, tells the story of a blind, old woman who is known and venerated throughout her community for her wisdom. A group of young people, so Morrison tells the story, go to this old woman’s house, and to our young people when we encourage them to ask a question that presumes its answer?

"This Thing We Have Done Together: The New Rhetoric in the Classroom"

Sarah Golsby-Smith

“What happens to our society and to our young people when we encourage them to ask a question that presumes its answer?”
“bent on disproving her clairvoyance and showing her up for the fraud they believe she is” (Morrison, 1993). They arrive and ask this blind woman a question that she cannot answer: “Is the bird I am holding living or dead”? This is not the end of Morrison’s story, or even the beginning of her exposition on what this story could mean for us, but I want to stop here, and simply remark that these young people are not asking this woman a question. They know the answer – and a question that knows its answer is not, after all, a question. They know that the woman cannot answer it. And so the stage is set for what follows before they have even set foot in the old woman’s door. The question is not designed to prise open dialogue, to find out what we did not know before, it is a statement that draws the old woman and anything she might say back into the realm of what the young people already “knew”. Now I want to wonder out loud: what happens when we encourage students to ask these sorts of questions? What happens to our society and to our young people when we encourage them to ask a question that presumes its answer?

I’d like to tell a story of my own now, about another young person and another question. In 2005, in my capacity as a high school teacher, I was teaching Shakespeare’s play The Tempest to my year 12 class. If you don’t know the play, it is both comic and profound in its investigation into power and its moral deployment. There are three distinct groups of characters, all hemmed in by an island, and all three groups, interdependently and independently, develop and reflect on the question of the moral use of power. Now, because I had been directed to get my kids to reflect on Imaginative Journeys as an architectonic rubric, I had consciously neglected the notion of power to segue into a discussion with my students on The Tempest. I was, I admit, a bit half-hearted about this “imaginative journeys” business, so I left our reading quite open to interpretation. I had my class up on their feet, partly in a bid to stave off the lethargy of the final hour of school on a Thursday afternoon, and partly because I believe in bodies making theatre mean something. Three of the boys in my class were enjoying being well and truly shivered as the comic trio, Trinculo, Caliban

“The problem with much of the education that I’ve been instructed and paid to deliver is that it inadvertently undermines the civic capability in my students.”
and Stephano. Amidst talk of “lick(ing) they shoes” and “servant monsters”, one of the boys, Alex, suddenly stepped out of role. “Miss,” he asked, “is it just me or is this play all about patterns of power?” Alex’s question, I want to argue today, is a very different question to the one that Morrison’s young people ask. Alex’s question revealed two things: firstly, that he did not fully know the answer to this question in the midst of reading it, and most certainly did not know it prior to the reading of the text, and secondly, that he had begun to notice a pattern in the play for himself. The text had impressed him – in the sense of indenting him – with something other than Alex. And based on that otherness, Alex’s authentic inquiry had begun. 

At this instant, in the stuffy fog of that stuffy classroom on that Thursday afternoon, I realised that I had a choice. In that moment, in what Donald Schön (1983) calls my “reflection in action” – my awareness that this serendipitous question is not only critical to Alex and to his classmates but also to the form that this play takes in my classroom – at this point, I realised that I had a choice. I could either attenuate Alex’s question to the demands before me as an educator to conform to the prescribed thematic outcomes, or I could reject that pressure, and give Alex’s question structural, critical and hermeneutical priority. I could hand over the lines of inquiry to Alex’s question. I could suggest to the class, “Well, everybody, what do you think? Is this play about power, or is it not”? Behind this initial choice, I want to argue today, is a larger choice that has ramifications for education as an ethical force.

I want to propose that the future of English in the classroom – and I hazard a guess that my proposal might extend beyond the secondary classroom and beyond the discipline of English – that the future of education, shall we say, should be informed by these kinds of questions; questions that provoke true dialogue between text and students, that allow and pursue serendipitous questions from Jack and Alex up the back who never say “boo”, that we work out, in our curricula and in our examination systems, ways to ensure that a student’s question engages with the questions that our texts themselves pose in such a way that both the text and the students are changed by the encounter.

In my thinking about this art of questioning the text, I’ve come across what is termed “the new rhetoric”, flourishing mostly in America. I’ve been interested in its incarnation in the discipline of English, of course, but I found that rhetoric seems to have something to say to almost any discipline you care to read up on. The reason for this, I suspect, is in the formulation of truth that rhetoric proposes. The new rhetoric proposes that “social truth” – which is most certainly the kind of truth we’re dealing with in the English classroom; the kind of truth that is provisional, and asks “Is the death penalty wise?”; “What shall we do about power?” – can only be created via social means, within society. That is, within and through dialogue. Aristotle, whom many consider the father of the new rhetoric, argues that this truth is “a state concerned with making, involving a true course of reasoning” (1941, p. 1139). At this point, rhetoric becomes more than a theory of reading, and becomes a theory of pedagogy. As one anonymous source so perfectly describes it, “rhetoric is not just ‘the art of removing misunderstanding;’ it is the art of pursuing new truth”. Ancient rhetoric evolved from citizens and philosophers in Ancient Greece, rigourously pursuing communal truth because the very fabric of their society and sometimes their lives depended upon it. Indeed this is where the roots of our democracy come from (Conley, 1990). As Cicero says, “the one point in which we have our very greatest advantage over the brute creation is that we hold converse with one another … (we) lead it out of its brutish existence in the wilderness up to our present condition of civilisation as men and citizens … to give shape to laws, tribunals and civic rights” (Cicero, 1996).

Interestingly, I think this is something that the teenagers I have taught have always intuitively grasped. They know when their education matters. My last year 12 class were a

“The texts we choose do not have to be confined to any canon, whether traditional or avant garde. They simply need to foster the kind of conversation that never ends.”

The problem with much of the education that I’ve been instructed and paid to deliver is that it inadvertently undermines the civic capability in my students. The problem with the syllabus that I’ve been teaching, and I suspect many of the curricula and outcome-laden documents in institutions across our country, is that it tells students what to think and say, giving the students the task of evidencing the a priori claims made by the syllabus itself. It reads texts for our young people, and then tells them to discover evidence to confirm the case made, not in our classrooms, but outside of them. What I faced that day was taking the interpretative task away from Alex, making his task akin to some kind of clerical, administrative support for the headline act that is the syllabus.

The inquiry that Alex wanted to conduct was fundamentally dialectical, based on a conversation with the text and with the rest of Alex’s class. Toni Morrison’s story does not end with the young people’s question about the bird to the old, blind woman; Morrison suggests that the question the young people ask was a rhetorical device designed to prompt discussion with the woman, to get her to speak and answer for her generation and its neglect of those younger than herself. The question turns out to be a true one in the sense that it really does want an answer, just a very different kind of answer. Fittingly, Morrison has the old woman respond, after the youngsters have finished explaining their motive for asking such a question, “I trust you now. I trust you with the bird that is not in your hands because you have truly caught it. Look. How lovely it is, this thing we have done – together”.

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Interestingly, I think this is something that the teenagers I have taught have always intuitively grasped. They know when their education matters. My last year 12 class were a
wonderful group; not the top class but just bursting with intelligence, passion, and compassion. I asked them what they thought about English and education:

**SGS:** So, can we have a conversation now about the last 18 months? I want to ask you a question … well, two, really. What do you enjoy about English, and why do you think we should do this thing called English?

**Alastair:** English lets you think in ways that other subjects just don’t.

**SGS:** Say more. Anyone?

**Rosie:** The thing with English is that you can explore thoughts and worlds outside of the subject English. It makes you flexible.

**Emma:** It lets you explore things you couldn’t otherwise: experiences that others have had that you’ll never be able to have by yourself, and thoughts you wouldn’t have thought otherwise.

**SGS:** So, is it opening other worlds? Is that what you are saying?

**Emma:** Yeah.

**SGS:** OK, so tell me what your favourite thing is about English.

**All (almost in unison!):** Class discussion!

**SGS:** Why? What is so important about this?

**Caitlin:** Because it’s about what I think, but then with each other, we build something great and new as the thoughts come. Something happens in class discussion.

**SGS:** Do you mean that your thoughts sharpen each other?

**Caitlin:** Yeah.

What are these extraordinary, ordinary young people picking up on here? I think they are at the heart of what the new rhetoric is. They have understood that truth is created in up on here? I think they are at the heart of what the new rhetoric is. They have understood that truth is created in

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The first place to start, of course, is to read in community. Notice that Alex instinctively appealed to his reading community: “Miss, is it just me?” When I taught *The Tempest*, then, there were two conversations operating in that moment. The first was Alex’s conversation with the text, prompted by the text’s otherness, and the second conversation was conducted between what Wayne C. Booth describes as Alex’s “co-doctors” (1988, p. 72) – those that read with and alongside Alex. Indeed, Booth suggests that one of the most important questions while reading critically is “how does my conduction compare with yours?” In this sense, we nurture a community within and through the community of text and reader.

Given that we’ve established that reading habits can engender strong habits of dialogue, of listening and of questioning, which are crucial to a functioning, compassionate, just democracy, I think I need to explain a bit more about how reading – an intensely private act – can be an equally political and public act. Indeed, this helps us to see how the classroom – which can also be intensely private – can be political and public. Martha Nussbaum, a philosopher and literary critic from Chicago, says that literature – and that is her term, not mine – that literature allows us to explore the condition of human beings in all the moral quandaries and quagmires that we find ourselves in (Nussbaum, 1990, and 1995). She explains that literature helps us to “grasp the uniqueness of the new particular”, that it takes us on “excursions of sympathy” (p. 142) such that when we are confronted, say with a murderer, we are a little more reluctant to send him to the gallows if we’ve followed and felt empathy for Raskalnikov, Dostoyevski’s murderer in *Crime and Punishment*. Nussbaum’s point is that ethical problems and social justice will always take human form, and it is in that human form that we encounter these quandaries in literature – in character, in verse, in style. ‘So, according to Nussbaum, to read aesthetically is to read politically. As she says, “if our moral lives are ‘stories’ in which mystery and risk play a central and a valuable role, then it may well seem that the ‘intelligent report’ of those lives requires the abilities and techniques of the teller of stories … only in that form could (the author) fully and fittingly express it” (1990, p. 142).

As I talk about this, I’m reminded of my first senior class, a Standard class, studying John Misto’s beautiful, poignant play, *The Shoe Horn Sonata*. Mistó’s play, if you don’t know it, is an indictment of the ways in which power is wedded to imperialism, and invariably, to men and a patriarchal history. Now, imagine, if you will, my first year 11 class. They were mostly eighteen, and mostly boys. Many of them struggled to write a full A4 page, and were more interested in playing soccer and basketball than they were in just about anything else. Can you imagine what they might have done if I had given them a feminist manifesto, say, with that sentence I’ve just given you, word for word?
“An indictment of the ways in which power is wedded to imperialism, and invariably, to men and a patriarchal history”. The matter doesn’t need too much imagination; they would have howled it down. Or even, say, if I’d given them a brief heads up that we were investigating – to return to Alex’s question – patterns of power and how women are frequently suppressed by it? Misto’s play is impossible to make into a manifesto, though. The play is essentially about two characters, Sheila and Bridie, who are prisoners of war under the Japanese army in World War Two, held in Malaysia. Much of the play’s action is dialogue. But in the background, Misto employs powerful dramatic effect: while Sheila and Bridie discuss their ordeal – the central incident being where Sheila prostitutes herself for a tablet that will save Bridie, who is suffering from cerebral malaria – while the two women talk, Misto has ‘Rule Britannia’ playing in the background, with enormous pictures of Stalin, Hitler, Churchill and Roosevelt dwarfing the diminutive women on stage. Bearing in mind that more than one boy on more than one occasion had announced that English was “difficult”, “boring”, “hard”, and “pointless”, I was astounded one day when one my students, Sam, announced seriously that he would like to set up a petition to the Prime Minister, to demand that these women be remembered with a memorial in Canberra. Misto’s play had become an ethical voice, moving these boys to adopt what might otherwise have been called a feminist position – although I’m almost certain they would be horrified to hear me say that – in resistance to the patriarchal history that had indeed quashed the women’s story. The form of the play shoe-horned the boys into Bridie and Sheila’s lives, and all of a sudden, the interaction between men, women, justice and history seemed to matter to them; in the sense that their compassion was aroused and in the sense that feminism, so to speak, took form. It mattered. As Nussbaum says, “only in that form could be fully and fittingly express it”. Critically, what my students showed me is that reading aesthetically and reading politically is one and the same act. If I can form Sam’s idea into the question it really is – “Mr. Prime Minister, why aren’t these women remembered in our history books?” – we can see how this aesthetic reading of the play mobilized these boys into advocates for social justice, for compassion and ultimately for a richer democracy.

Now, the question becomes: what texts shall we choose? If the moral development of our children can be shaped by what they read, then does it follow that we have a case of censorship on our hands? And, to ask another loaded question, does it have to be – capital L – “Literature”? Rhetoric defines all texts as communication between human beings. And that is true. What I want to propose, though, along with Wayne Booth, Martha Nussbaum, and others, is that some texts promote richer and broader conversation than others for our students. To take the new rhetoric to heart is to make conversation our hermeneutical starting point, to make conversation between student and text, student and student, and finally the student and the world, our aim. If that is the case, then the texts we choose do not have to be confined to any canon, whether traditional or avant garde. They simply need to foster the kind of conversation that never ends. As one of my year 12s last year put it so eloquently: “Talking about (Gwen Harwood’s poetry) never ends. You can analyse a thing to death, you know, but the more we studied Harwood, the deeper the bottom got”.

Having dug myself out of one hole, I find myself in yet another one. Does reading aesthetically – reading with the text, listening to it as an “other” and so on – does this mean that we should never question the text or reject it as violating precisely those conventions that protect pluralism and conversation in our society? Wayne Booth is very helpful with this question. He suggests that a conversation with a text, a reading that listens to what he calls “the total act of discourse” might begin to distrust and resist the invitation offered by the author. Let’s have a look at this excerpt as a whole:

What we seek, once again, will not be words or propositions in isolation, or even overall “themes,” but the total pattern of desires and rewards that the author commits us to … (the author) cannot be blamed for an act of injustice unless we have some reason to believe that his word as a whole – the complete imaginative offering, the total pattern of desire and fulfillment that we enjoy – is vulnerable to the charge. In short, ideological criticism depends on discovering not the ideology in the form but the ideology of the form (Booth, 1988, p. 396).

“We need to invite students into the process of creating ethical values, rather than give them the job of finding the answers implicit in the questions that we teachers and educators ask, and of finding the evidence for ethics that we decree.”

Wayne Booth talks about Rabelais’s bawdy short stories, and he addresses the charge that Rabelais’s stories are sexist, that his stories are funny at the expense of women. I’m going to take one more quotation from Wayne Booth, in which says that “propositions about women can tell us nothing, then, until we ask, Who utters them? In what circumstances? In what tone? With what qualifications by other utterances? And, most important of all, What is the quality of our emotional response, point by point and overall” (p. 399)?

This list of questions is interesting to me, because it is essentially what we might call an “aesthetic” list – these questions relate to formal aspects of the text. This is what he means by “discourse” as a “total act”. This “total act of discourse” requires us to listen, as well as we can, to the form of the text to tell us where the text is politically placed, rather than to isolated parts of the text, which may yield a very different response. Booth finds, in the end, that Rabelais’s complete imaginative offering is indeed sexist, but he arrives at that conclusion by taking in the “total act of discourse.” Booth shows us here how one might ask questions of a text that attend more to the shape of the text, rather than to shapes within the text, and yield a critical reading. And it is these kinds of judicious questions – like the one Alex
asked about The Tempest – that I want to encourage and foster in our students. After all, it is these kinds of questions that listen to “the other” that is the text, but are still able to choose wisely what we will finally appropriate and what we will finally reject.

The philosopher Hans-Georg Gadamer (1989) suggests that true, incisive questions are what drive the dialectical conversation, and finally, they are what drive the potential for true understanding between two people. Gadamer says that “discourse that is intended to reveal something requires that that thing be broken open by the question” (p. 363) and I cannot help but think that Gadamer would have been impressed by Alex’s deft question, or by Sam’s question to the prime minister, or the countless incisive demands for answers that I have heard from teenagers over my teaching career. Shakespeare’s reputation among teenagers for being impenetrable was indeed “broken open” by Alex’s question that day. How do we teach our students to ask these kinds of questions, then? Well, Gadamer is both helpful and profoundly unhelpful on this point. He says that “there is no such thing as a method of learning to ask questions, of learning to see what is questionable … the important thing is the knowledge that one does not know … a particular lack of knowledge leads to a particular question” (p. 365-366). So, for me as Alex’s teacher, I cannot pre-empt what he might ask, I can only lead him to what he might not “know.” Indeed, to pre-empt Alex’s question would be to hamstring his ability to ask that question. Gadamer seems to leave room for the mystery that is the catalyst for dialectical democracy. How does a conversation start? Well, with a question. How does the question arise? From the void that The Tempest created for Alex. The only thing that we as educators can know ahead of time is that if we do not leave room for these serendipitous, searing questions, then we cut our students out of the conversation that forms the ethical shape of our classrooms and our nation. The only thing we can know is the moral imperative to allow students to partake in knowledge, to surrender the subject matter that we love and, indeed, ourselves, to the motion of conversation in the classroom. Indeed, as Gadamer says, the product of conversation is a “fusion” where we become “bound to one another in a new community … transformed into a communion in which we do not remain what we were” (p. 379).

I want to conclude by suggesting that what makes a rhetorical approach so different from many of the theoretical readings that have gone before is the fact that these conclusions, these decisions to reject or accept texts on ethical grounds, are arrived at by social means. And importantly, these decisions are arrived at in real time; that is, they are not simulated. Conversation – whether it be the conversation between student and text or between a student and other students – means that we can say two things about the critical discoveries arrived at in the classroom: one; that they are both rigorous and provisional, and two, that the conversation process itself is the basis of democratic truth. We need to ensure that ethics arise out of conversation in the classroom, rather than give students an ethic that is decided upon before they enter the classroom and is embedded in a syllabus. The reason that this is so important is because ethics themselves are essentially social. We need to invite students into the process of creating ethical values, rather than give them the job of finding the answers implicit in the questions that we teachers and educators ask, and of finding the evidence for ethics that we decree. Rhetoric is committed to asking true questions, the kind of question that does not know its answer from the outset. And if we can create the kind of classroom where I could respond to Alex’s question with “Well, what do you think,” then we have created the kind of classroom that Toni Morrison describes in her story, when the old woman says, “How lovely it is. This thing we have done – together.”

Sarah Goldsby-Smith completed her doctorate through the Department of English, University of Sydney. She has taught English at high school level for five years, and has presented papers on the new rhetoric and conversation in the classroom at the International Conference for the Arts in Edinburgh, at the Roundtable for Australian Literature, and more recently at the ANZSA Conference in New Zealand. A version of this paper was presented at the colloquium hosted by Will Christie, from the Department of English (USyd) on the future of secondary school English. Sarah has also written an article for the TCRecord.

Notes


References


Jane Gavan has a long history of participating in different kinds of visual arts practices. She began as a print-maker, and then came a degree in Fine Arts and another in Visual Arts studying her specialist area Glass. She managed an art glass and specialist crystal store, completed postgraduate study in curatorial management, dabbled in retail, got into photography, won prizes for her beading work and then started her own hand printed tile business. One of her research projects – The Pink Project (fluorescent pink objects and art works) was featured in May this year on ABC1’s The Collectors. Since 2003, Jane’s research has been pushing boundaries – she draws on a constructivist interdisciplinary approach to create new knowledge about the use of glass and colorants and their potential applications. Her thinking and practice is located at the interface of several disciplines: visual art, design, technological history and science. Alongside her art practice, Jane is Associate Dean (Teaching and Learning) at the Sydney College of Arts (SCA) – an institutional role she has held since the beginning of 2007.

The flexible and eclectic route in and out of work is, according to Jane, typical of the career cycle of a practising visual artist. “Most people in my field can have up to six income streams in one year. That’s what I tell my students now. And I have been a model of that, in a way.” Jane’s attention to the student learning experience is what marks her work as Associate Dean. She developed an interest in teaching and learning fairly early in her academic career following a 3-day program in tertiary education at the University of NSW. Following her participation in that program, she then completely redesigned a subject called Studio Theory for glass students. “That subject was sort of running aground without any direction and I wrote a program just off my own bat after this 3-day workshop and presented it to the coordinator of the unit. I said ‘I’ll deliver this 13 week program for you, here’s my curriculum, here’s what students need to learn and this is the way I’m going to do it’. That’s when the SCA took me on for 18 months. That was probably the first time I experienced constructing a learning environment and using everything to hand, including myself, the students, the material, the space, the technology – to really think about teaching and learning.”

In Jane’s own teaching, she is still experimenting and innovating. “I ask my students how they want to be assessed for a certain project or I might say: here is the range of options. You can have my mark, my mark and your mark, or everybody else’s mark. I get the students to write down how they’d like to be assessed and we talk about the experience of it afterwards. And students reveal some very surprising things. Last week I did this with students in Glass and they came up with a perfectly good and respectable model so we did it that way.”

While much of this negotiation and flexibility seems characteristic of the culture of Art Schools, and is embedded in the creativity of art-making, the amalgamation of the SCA with the University of Sydney in the early 1990s continues to be challenging for enhancing teaching and learning. Jane recognises this. “My experience as Associate Dean is that a lot of staff are still trying to get their head around being in a university rather than an Art School. Historically, Art Schools have always been a hotbed of some very radical and creative thinking. I think there is a perception that some of that creativity has been challenged in the move to being part of a university – and especially, that compliance with university rules and policies on teaching and learning feel like an imposition. This can lead to some very difficult discussions. As the teaching and learning portfolio gets bigger and bigger, policy tends to double in number – there’s a lot to wade through for a single academic. At the moment, a large part of this job has
changed. It’s becoming more policy and quality assurance oriented whereas I’m really interested in the hands-on stuff – supporting people and thinking about the deal that students are getting. One of the challenges of the role is a perception of it being overly bureaucratic. But sometimes staff do ask for specific things. For example, some have asked for a unit of study development workshop. And we had a very good teaching development day recently which was a good start”.

Despite her changing role and the inevitable institutional politics that accompany academic change, working to improve the quality of teaching and learning in the SCA is important for Jane because of her concern for students. “It’s actually the students that make me keep worrying about it. That’s the key. Putting students in the middle means that you want to give them the best possible experience for their development as artists.”

Alongside Jane’s focus on student learning, the SCA has been participating in a number of new teaching and learning initiatives. They are one of the pilot faculties for the university’s Balance Scorecard process. Jane elaborates: “we’ve been working with the Strategic Planning Office on a massive strategic planning exercise. They’ve been helping us to map and match our strategic objectives, with a set of initiatives, a set of measures and then to look at the resourcing. What’s great about involving the SCA in the process is that it’s helping us with a coherent approach to strategic planning which is something I’ve not been involved in before. It also provides the faculty with a set of documents that can carry the work forward in a consistent rather haphazard way. Instead of rehashing the plans we had, it was an opportunity to really look at the scales on the Course Experience Questionnaire and look at where we could improve. The planning process is now more consistently aligned to the student feedback system and the resources that we have. With the right team, the right energy, the right governance and leadership, the document will be really useful. It has taken us about six months to do and get agreement on.”

It appears that revisiting the strategic planning process faculty-wide has also generated some positive spin-offs for students too. “We started looking at the sort of students that are coming to our College and organised a whole range of new initiatives. In terms of teaching and learning, this has meant we’re trying to prepare students before they arrive as much as we can. We’re doing portfolio workshops with them, helping them to understand what they’re likely to experience when they get here. Some of the Open Day Talks are much more about generic and graduate attributes than they were before. We send lecturers out into schools; we have artist-in-residency programs so that our students are getting professional development that way as well. As a consequence, we saw a considerable rise in the UAI – and a huge rise in the number of first preferences – which is great.”

The other major initiative is a curriculum review of the Bachelor of Visual Arts (BVA) degree. Jane says: “the BVA is our one and only undergraduate degree and it has been enormously successful but we need more information about students’ experiences of learning and the teaching and curriculum across the board. We need to start to document the things we do well so we can share them with the world. It’s unusual for these practices to be documented and writing it down means that our learning through it becomes a rare resource for visual arts education. I don’t see why we can’t be a centre for learning and teaching excellence in visual arts. Nobody’s really tried to make that their niche before and I think there is a place for the SCA to do just that.”

Jane’s ambitions for rewarding excellent teaching and learning at the SCA are also high on the agenda. Following the completion of the BVA curriculum review, she is planning to pilot a system of teaching excellence awards at the College – a mechanism intended to recognise the scholarly and research-led teaching that is so much a part of arts-based learning.

Jane Gavan is Associate Dean (Teaching and Learning) at the Sydney College of the Arts. She can be contacted at J.Gavan@sca.usyd.edu.au. Jane spoke with Tai Peseta, ITL.
Talk to any academic about the texts they’ve found helpful in expanding the focus of their university teaching practice to include student learning, and this John Biggs text is bound to rear its head. The reasons are obvious enough. In the preface to this third edition (written with Catherine Tang), Biggs himself writes: “google ‘constructive alignment’ and you now get over 24,000 references” (p.xvii). In my own experience of working with and teaching academics in the university, ‘constructive alignment’ is one of a handful of conceptual resources which is the cause of those rare eureka moments. That it has grown beyond the subject/unit and the curriculum towards a framework for institutional quality assurance is testament to its ubiquity and popularity. And given the world-wide focus on university teaching and learning, Biggs’s work continues to provide a common language for academics to engage in critical debate and discussion about the student learning experience. This is precisely what good books should do.

On one level, the text (along with Ramsden, and Prosser & Trigwell) could be conceived as part of the emerging canon of higher education teaching and learning – what Roger Lindsay1 has called ‘educational developmentology’. Yet on another level, the attraction of the Biggs text is in the way it invites dialogue of the teaching and learning encounter – at a range of different and very powerful levels. There is something for everyone invested in the enterprise of teaching and learning quality: the practitioner looking for a quick solution; the teacher-scholar searching for research and evidence to underpin innovative practice; the educational developer wondering how to engage staff in a discussion about curriculum renewal; and the senior manager looking to convince the university community of a focus on teaching and learning at all. Alongside all this, the text continues to speak to veterinary scientists and physicists, as much as it does those in literary theory, musicology or engineering – all those who seek to be challenged by the question of how to improve students’ learning.

This new third edition doesn’t see the authors straying far from the ideas that made the first two editions of the book so compelling and successful. The opening chapter acknowledges the changing higher education scene. Biggs and Tang are cognizant of the encroachment of managerialist agendas and the confusion surrounding outcomes-based learning, yet like most involved in university teaching, they plough on ahead. In chapter 5, learning outcomes have transmogrified into intended learning outcomes and there is the new framework of graduate attributes for our curricula to contend with. Assessment gets the thorough treatment it deserves in chapters 9-11 and the later chapters consider alignment at the institutional level and the challenges of implementation. Some useful resources and practical examples are also provided – and they litter the text as opportunities for reflection.

Biggs and Tang’s appeal is confident and urgent – and in the main, the agenda for improving the quality of university teaching and learning makes a good deal of sense. Student learning ought to feature heavily in our understandings of our practices as teachers – even as we continue to disagree, dispute and question how history has remade their very engagement with university learning.

Tai Peseta

Notes
## Conferences 2008

### JULY

**Higher Education Research and Development Society Australasia (HERDSA) Conference**  
*Engaging Communities*  
1–4 July  
Rotorua, NEW ZEALAND  

**The Teacher: Image, Icon, Identity: International conference exploring representations of ‘The Teacher’ in the Arts & Humanities**  
2–4 July  
University of Glasgow, SCOTLAND  
http://www.gla.ac.uk/events/theteacher/

**33rd International Conference on Improving University Teaching and Learning**  
*Transforming Higher Education Teaching and Learning in the 21st Century*  
29 July–1 August  
University of Strathclyde, Glasgow, SCOTLAND  
http://www.iutconference.org/index.htm

### AUGUST

**International Conference on Learning and Teaching**  
*Enhancing Learning and Teaching in Higher Education*  
4–5 August  
Putrajaya, MALAYSIA  

**EARLI/Northumbria SIG Assessment Conference**  
27–29 August  
Humboldt University, Berlin, GERMANY  
http://www.iqb.hu-berlin.de/aktuell/dateien/Announcement_EN.pdf

**Improving Student Learning Conference**  
*Improving Student Learning through the Curriculum*  
1 – 3 September  
University of Durham, ENGLAND  
http://www.brookes.ac.uk/services/ocsl/di/isl2008/

**EDU-COM 4**  
*Sustainability in Higher Education: Directions for Change*  
19–21 November  
Softtel Raja Orchid Hotel, THAILAND  

### SEPTEMBER

**Staff and Educational Development Association (SEDA) Conference**  
18–19 November  
Birmingham, ENGLAND  
http://www.seda.ac.uk/conf/sedabirm08/birm08.htm

**International Conference on Teaching and Learning in Higher Education**  
*Frontiers in Higher Education*  
5–7 September  
Evolutionary Institute, Long Beach, CALIFORNIA  
http://www.evoinstitute.org/2008/09/05/24-

**Academic Identities in Crisis?**  
4–6 September  
University of Central Lancashire, Preston, ENGLAND  
http://www.uclan.ac.uk/host/academic-crisis/index.htm

### OCTOBER

**National UniServe Science Conference**  
*Visualisation for Concept Development*  
1–3 October  
University of Sydney, AUSTRALIA  

**International Society for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (iSSoTL) Conference**  
*Celebrating Connections: Learning, Teaching & Scholarship*  
16–19 October  
Edmonton, Alberta, CANADA  
http://www.indiana.edu/~issotl08/

**Professional and Organizational Development (POD) Network & National Council for Staff, Program and Organizational Development (NCSPOD)**  
*Weaving Patterns of Practice*  
22–25 October  
Reno, Nevada, USA  
http://www.podnetwork.org/conferences/2008/index.htm

### NOVEMBER

**HEA Engineering Subject Centre Event**  
*Assessment of Learning Outcomes in Engineering Conference*  
27–28 November  
London, ENGLAND  
http://www.aole.ac.uk/index.php/conference-2008/

**Staff and Educational Development Association (SEDA) Conference**  
18–19 November  
Birmingham, ENGLAND  
http://www.seda.ac.uk/conf/sedabirm08/birm08.htm

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*Frontiers in Higher Education*  
3–5 December  
Centre for Development of Teaching and Learning  
National University Singapore, SINGAPORE  
http://www.cdtd.nus.edu.sg/ithe/default.htm

**Australian Society for Computers in Learning Tertiary Education (ASCILITE) Conference**  
*Hello! Where are you in the landscape of educational technology?*  
30 Nov–3 Dec  
Deakin University, Melbourne, AUSTRALIA  
http://www.ascilite.org.au/conferences/melbourne08/

### DECEMBER

**International Conference on Teaching and Learning in Higher Education**  
*Frontiers in Higher Education*  
3–5 December  
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http://www.cdtd.nus.edu.sg/ithe/default.htm

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http://www.ascilite.org.au/conferences/melbourne08/

**Society for Research into Higher Education (SRHE) Conference**  
*Valuing Higher Education*  
9–11 December  
Liverpool, ENGLAND  
http://www.srhe.ac.uk/