Connecting to Country  Reflections on Teaching for Excellence in International Journalism  T&L Snapshots

A Discussion with Arts Undergraduate Students  ITL Focus on New Staff  Professional Experience and WebCT
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 June and November – and is circulated to staff through academic and research departments. Synergy is edited by Dr Susan Thomas 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 joined the ITL in February (on secondment from the Faculty of Arts) as Teaching Development Coordinator for the Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences faculty cluster. As former Associate Dean of the Faculty of Arts, I was no stranger to its teaching and learning practices, but over the past eight months I have had the wonderful opportunity to step outside my home faculty into new spaces and engage with teaching and learning scholarship, leadership and initiatives across the other three faculties in the cluster. It has been my privilege to take part in the many emerging projects and developments, and to get to know the individuals driving these innovations. I have learned so much from these intrepid scholar teachers that I asked several of them to share their experiences in this issue of Synergy, which focuses on learning spaces: where does learning happen? How do we learn? How do our students learn? How do we measure and assess learning, and what we do with these outcomes?

In the feature article, Uncomfortable Learning: Connecting to Country, Alyson Simpson and Jane Moore, both from the Faculty of Education and Social Work, recount the learning journey recently undertaken by staff from the Faculty of Education and Social Work. These staff members were literally taken from their comfort zones and challenged on their preconceived ideas about learning, with each person taking their own lessons from the day and recognising the limits of their ways of knowing. The article invites us to reflect on our own learning processes and perhaps see them in a new light.

In Investigate the shouting!: Reflections on teaching for excellence in international journalism, Penny O’Donnell argues for a more global approach to teaching journalism students. I met Penny recently in the July Principles and Practice of University Teaching program, where she did her microteaching exercise on an analysis of mainstream newspapers and their representations of the world. Her piece is an extension of this theme, as it explores the shortcomings of outdated, mainstream approaches to teaching journalism and advocates for a fresher, student-centred methodology.

Any genuine teaching will result, if successful, in someone’s knowing how to bring about a better condition of things than existed earlier. – John Dewey

While WebCT is often discussed as a useful vehicle for enhancing traditional units of study, Jennifer Rowley and Sharon Tindall-Ford, in Professional Experience and WebCT at the Sydney Conservatorium of Music, explore its capabilities for supporting pre-service teachers on Professional Experience. They discuss how Web CT enables pre-service teachers, once isolated from university lecturers and peers, to interact and collaborate with peers and academics anywhere and at any time—via the many opportunities for asynchronous communication offered online.

And for those readers already familiar with Synergy, you’ll
find all the regular highlights, one being a conversation with three students from the Faculty of Arts, as part of the ‘Talking’ Series. These students – a third-year student, a second-year student, and a mature-age first-year student – generously agreed to field questions on student responses to the USE questionnaire. This interview was conducted as the student research component of a TIES large grant project being conducted by myself and Dr Brigid Rooney (Associate Dean, Teaching and Learning, Faculty of Arts). Our project, *Systematising Quality Enhancement and Assurance Processes to better support student learning*, aims to clarify the USE process and provide a set of recommendations for maximising the benefits of the USE process for both students and staff—and for closing the feedback loop so that students understand how their comments are being used. The students were lively and engaging and, as we had hoped, stimulated our thinking by raising issues that we had not yet considered.

The ‘Profile’ for this issue is Fran Waugh, Associate Dean (Teaching and Learning) in the Faculty of Education and Social Work. At a time when the work of Associate Deans is becoming increasingly important in terms of policy implementation and faculty reporting processes, it seemed worthwhile to learn more about what an Associate Dean brings to the job from past experiences and how this work informs her theories of teaching and learning. Fran shares the rationale behind her faculty’s three teaching and learning priorities, each with a sharp focus on improving the student experience.

And then there are the usual features. In ITL Focus, we welcome two new staff members: Kathryn Bartimote-Aufflick and Cynthia Nelson. In T&L Snapshots, we congratulate our 2008 Teaching Award, Citation, Grant and Fellowship winners—and announce a new University teaching and learning award (and its inaugural winner), sponsored by the Co-Op Bookshop. Finally, in ‘Bookshelf’, Cynthia Nelson reviews *Thesis and dissertation writing in a second language: A handbook for supervisors* (Routledge, 2007) by Brian Paltridge and Sue Starfield.

It was with some trepidation that I agreed to edit this issue of *Synergy*, since the bar had been set so high by the previous editor. Tai Peseta served *Synergy* faithfully for five years, working tirelessly to raise awareness of teaching and learning research and initiatives at the University and throughout Australia. On behalf of my colleagues in the ITL, I would like to thank Tai for her dedication to *Synergy* and for her great commitment to teaching and learning development at the University of Sydney. She will be deeply missed in these pages—and by all of us who had the good fortune to know her and learn from her.

I must also thank our IT guru and photographer extraordinaire, James Tracy, who not only put in the long hours of layout and design, but showed me the ropes of the publication process, offering valuable advice at every turn.

Please continue to offer us your feedback and comments by email at synergy@usyd.edu.au, or visit us at the website: http://www.itl.usyd.edu.au/synergy

Dr Susan Thomas, Issue Editor
Institute for Teaching and Learning

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*Education consists mainly of what we have unlearned.*

— Mark Twain

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*Teaching is the highest form of understanding.*

— Aristotle
"We need to work towards … a future based on mutual respect, mutual resolve and mutual responsibility"
Kevin Rudd 13.2.08 (Pearling, 2008)

Introduction
Currently in the media there are discussions topics such as the drive for a National curriculum, the importance of transparent report cards, school ranking and A-E evaluation. What key social values are implied in such debates? The common principles of learning that underpin much of schooling today recommend that learning is best achieved through socio-cultural processes in community (Barton & Tusting, 2005; Gee, 2004). By contrast, the media debates direct attention towards advancement of the individual that sort children according to ability. Our paper is set in this context as we describe the learning journey that some academics from the Faculty of Education and Social Work recently took, called Connecting to Country. It was a journey of some 100 kilometres that raised physical, educational and spiritual challenges for all the participants. We were literally taken from our comfort zones and shown different ways of thinking and learning. It was a time of uncomfortable learning as our preconceived ideas about the ‘right’ way to learn were challenged. As a result, each person took their own lessons from the day but all were led to recognise the limits of their ways of knowing.

Some key principles of education theory that underpin teaching today are interspersed within this paper. They provide samples of some philosophical approaches that informed the experience of attendees. Some elements from the theories are also shown in learning circles to metaphorically represent the principles of learning rediscovered during the day of Indigenous teaching.

The aim of this paper is to allow those who may not take the same physical journey the chance to face the same learning challenges. It is illustrated by a photograph taken during the day as well as original artwork designed by Jane Moore, an Indigenous Special Projects Officer working with Faculty of Education and Social Work. She is one of the authors; the other author is Alyson Simpson, a senior lecturer from the Faculty of Education and Social Work. Because of their different cultural backgrounds the authors of the paper give two contrasting but complementary perspectives on the day.
Uncomfortable learning on Darninjung Country (Jane)
The team of eleven members of the Faculty of Education and Social work have risen early and travelled eighty kilometres by mini bus to the Ourimbah truck stop. It is early February and we plan to spend the day with Darninjung elder Oomera Edwards learning about Indigenous country. The day is wet. A deluge of rain has interrupted plans, slowed traffic and made it slippery underfoot. Windows fog up, the day is grey and mist swirls around the landscape outside. We get out of the bus after a two hour journey and Oomera is waiting for us. She welcomes us to her country, Darninjung Country.

We take shelter from the drumming rain and spend the morning absorbed in the teachings of a painting. We learn about symbols and we are shown how to recognise trees, mountains, water holes, food sources, men and women, animals, and ancestral spirits. She speaks to each member of the group about her country. She shares the stories that she knows. She shares the learnings that she has pieced together about the old ways. Oomera increases our understandings of land. She speaks about ‘being in country’ and explains that Indigenous knowledge is land based and relates to a particular country. She relays that some learnings are specific to a certain land and a certain people. In this way knowledge is local. An Indigenous person only has the right to talk about their own country. We learn that knowledge is specific and people cannot know everything. She challenges the notion of an individual’s right to knowledge. Not every piece of information is available to all ages and all genders. She teaches us that some knowledge is adult knowledge. We learn that some knowledge is for children. Oomera gives the example of the young boy who in a traditional Indigenous family group is responsible for caring for fire. She speaks of the intense responsibility that this job symbolises within the clan and the importance of his position. Other children are not instructed on how to care for fire. It is his job. It is his knowledge. Not everyone has the right to this awareness. These learnings sit uncomfortably with a more traditional, western view that knowledge can be acquired and is open to all. It contradicts the concept that to gain knowledge all you have to do is to read to inquire and seek it out. Oomera instructs us on respectful communication in an Indigenous setting. She asks us to learn through our observations. She encourages us to keep silent. She asks us to curb our wish to speak and not let our own needs map our learning and trace our stories. She guides us to focus and resist the temptation to interrupt the learning of others. She speaks firmly about the necessity of keeping personal learnings private and out of the public space. She tells of the importance of understanding the responsibilities of learning in this way. Rather than showing interest in the information presented through asking questions and discussing the information within the group setting we are asked to remain silent and absorb the messages quietly and in our own space. Respect is shown in this way and deep learnings emerge from this morning session. I observe the group. Each individual has much knowledge and is accustomed to discussing and reflecting on and debating information. These practises have no place here. Not in this place. Not on this country. I observe them practising silence. The group learns restraint and develops respect for slow paced learning. A different energy permeates the room. I reflect on how different this way of approaching the acquisition of knowledge feels. I observe their struggles with the silence.

In a phone conversation earlier in the year, Oomera told me ‘that you can’t teach country in a classroom’ and she doesn’t try to. She suggests lunch in the bush. The rain had brought leeches, twitching and inching towards exposed flesh. Leeches present uncomfortable learnings. We observe how to flick the leeches off our bodies and share the knowledge with each other. Calmly flicking and interrupting their hungry search, we begin to deepen our connection to and understandings of this country. Indeed, in this place, in this time, the weather, the smells, the sounds, it is the land that drives our learning. We walk further into the scrub.
Oomera asks us to cup our ears and listen. She asks us what we hear. ‘Listen to country’ she whispers. She speaks of country in an active sense. She tells us that country can be sick and needs to be nurtured. She teaches us that an Indigenous notion of country is a lived in and resonant space. Oomera suggests that the ‘land beneath us is alive’. She alerts us that this country is a space that is criss-crossed and tracked by animals, humans and ancestral beings. She describes Indigenous country as multi dimensional and speaks about how land can vibrate and sing below the buildings and roads and bridges that are built upon it. The group learns to imagine the land beneath.

We are told that the land is named and has stories that place it and songs about it, and is looked after by groups of people who belong to it. She explains that the songs are there for people who know how to hear them. She tells us that the land can speak.

Single file, we track through the bush. Already we are learning about working together – holding branches back for each other so that the wet limbs do not unload their drips and drench the person behind. It is the last stop before we begin our journey home. On the way out of the bus one of group loses her footing on the slippery steps. It is an awkward start that begins our journey through the scrub to the sacred site. There are no sign posts here. We learn to see the carvings, the ceremonial rock space. Oomera shows us how to read the signs. We come upon the place where the animals are carved in to stone. Oomera has opened our understandings to the ceremonies that would have taken place here. She has explained that the sacred site is a protected space, which is nourished by the rituals conducted on it. No fishing, hunting or burning can take place on the land. She explains that the people who belong to this country know how it should be managed. She explains that caring for country in this way is an important aspect of nourishing the land. She tells us that a relationship with country is full of responsibility. We learn to approach the site with reverence. We leave our questions behind. We approach the place with fresh eyes.

One group member wrote in her evaluation that ‘It is almost a week after the day and I am still reflecting on the experience.’ Indeed, after I dropped each of the eleven group members off at the university in the drizzle that evening I wondered if any of the participants had returned to their daily lives a little changed. I still wonder now, six months after the Connecting to Country Day whether in the daily rush of their classes and meetings they pause to listen to the country beneath them. Do they listen to the country around their home? Do they imagine the ceremonies that were held there? Do they ponder the tracks of the animals over that land and listen to the water that once ran beneath? Do they pause and think of the flannel flower, perfectly formed and perched there on the sacred ground?

There are no handouts to take away, no pieces of paper to file away in a filing cabinet back at university. We take away our stories – memories – snapshots featuring hooded figures grinning in the rain. I ask a colleague to reflect on her time on country and she replies that ‘one of the things that is strongest in my memory is the sense of still, quiet peace in the ceremonial ground, and yet the fact that it seemed to be waiting.’ We take away our learnings – our uncomfortable learnings of wisdom gained through taking a journey; sharing a crowded bus- walking through mist and drizzle and steady rain. We take away our learnings about land and we bring them back to each other and ourselves in our own
separate ways. Yet I long to return to Oomera’s country. I long to cup my ear to the ancient land and listen for its signs, its songs, its stories. I long to visit the site where the creatures are carved deep in to the rocks. I long to wonder at the beauty of the flannel flower deep in Darnjinjung Country and continue my learning from the land. I see the country. I hear it. I am connected to it and it waits for my return.

“Indigenous education research often does not clearly distinguish between theories and principles that are of relevance and broad applicability to all students and those that are unique to Indigenous students…. An examination of what are considered the important factors contributing to educational success for Australian students provides the necessary background and perspective for considering the circumstances of Indigenous Australian students” (Mellor & Corrigan, 2004, p. 25).

My place in it all:
Uncomfortable learning recontextualised (Alyson)
Starting the day comfortable in my collection of knowledge, the journey to Ourimbah challenged both my understanding of the world and the underlying principles of education that I had learned to accept. Listening to an elder speak of connection to country and the principles of community that were related to the physical survival of a group of individuals and the maintenance of complex social and spiritual relationships, I realised how most of the teaching I was involved in was decontextualised and individualised. Even though the illustrated principles of learning espouse connection to authentic contexts the knowledge taught usually relates to advancement through artificial ranks of measurement in school systems. Learning is often competitive, designed to advance the individual rather than non-competitive, designed to support the community.

Metacognition/Schema Theory:
Learning is supported through discussion, active thinking in authentic contexts where connections are made to mental representations of systems of knowledge through direct or mediated experience (as simulations or representations).
(Sandoval & Reiser, 2004)

“Unexpected Gifts I, II & III” By Jane Moore
effective teaching (Louden et al 2005). These qualities could be seen in situations that also provided ‘just in time’ support that was matched to ability and placed significant responsibility on the student to learn and apply new skills in an authentic context (Biggs, 1999). The context of the young child being taught how to carry fire from one camp to another was a particularly clear example of connectedness (EQ, 2002). Research that examines learning as a cultural process supports the importance of such learning through action and talk with others in the context of application (Gee, 2004). Instead of packaging learning into discrete and disconnected facts, this kind of learning in an out-of-school context is deep and highly significant (Claxton, 2007; Luke, 2003; Street, 1995).

Where do I stand now in terms of building my version of mutual respect? Is there room for community in the middle of a context that depends on the institutionalised ranking of individual learning achievement? The answer of course is yes. My hope is that by examining the values embedded in each other’s teaching we may recognise the commonality in our different stories. Listening to each other we could form a holistic approach to learning that depends on deep understanding and connection not just to country but also to each other.

Conclusion:

The shared path

Uncomfortable learnings began as a journey of individuals who shared an experience that led to mutual insights. What began as a journey progressed to a conversation, a yarning that has opened the experience to others. We have written together, sharing our personal learnings to encourage the readers to re-examine their own approaches to learning. As academics, as teachers, as researchers, as students we need to revisit our place within this story and challenge our comfort zones. Mutual respect can be discovered through difficult journeys. Uncomfortable learning is a part of that process.

NB: The second Connecting To Country faculty learning team ventured on to Darninjung country on the first day of spring, September 2008. The learning continues.

Biography:

Dr Alyson Simpson is a senior lecturer of English for preservice primary teachers in the Faculty of Education and Social Work. She is currently the Director of the Primary BEd program and coordinates units of study in the undergraduate and post graduate programs. She is working on a TIES project to investigate the integration of literacy across KLA and a Quality Teaching project with a school to improve literacy outcomes K-12. Her research interests include the use of online discussions in both higher education units of study and in primary schools.

Jane Moore

Jane Moore is the Research Academic employed on the ‘Embedding Diversity: Towards A Culturally Inclusive Pedagogy’ curriculum development project. The project focuses on developing professional learning experiences for staff and embedding Indigenous perspectives in the programs offered within the faculty of Education and Social Work. Jane has worked as a teacher and an artist and musician in a variety of different school and community settings. She is currently working on her PHD on Reconciliation through Music. It is an ethnographic case study comparing student perspectives on reconciliation in an urban primary school and a remote primary school.

You can contact Alyson on a.simpson@edfac.usyd.edu.au and Jane on jane.moore@edfac.usyd.edu.au
Quality teaching:

Learning is improved if it is built on dimensions of intellectual quality, quality learning environment, and significance. Elements include: engagement, substantive communication, higher order thinking, problematic knowledge, narrative, metalanguage, social support, explicit quality criteria, connectedness, cultural knowledge, and knowledge integration (The State of Queensland (Department of Education), 2002).

Bibliography


“On sacred ground” - Photo by Nigel Bagnall
Kathryn Bartimote-Aufflick

I joined the ITL full-time in July 2008 after 18 months in the Pharmacy Education Unit following 7 years teaching, consulting and researching applied statistics in Agriculture. In the area of applied statistics my research work has been developing methodology for analysing longitudinal ratings data.

In addition to my applied statistics qualifications I have completed a Graduate Diploma in Educational Studies and am currently undertaking a PhD in educational psychology with a focus on the university setting. My particular interest is metacognitive learning – of students and their teachers. Complementing this line of research is my involvement in and leadership of a 3 year action-research project (funded by TIES) on developing student motivation and interest at the University of Sydney along with colleagues from 10 disciplines.

A premise of my academic development work is using evidence to focus attention on the main issues; another theme is the use of inquiry or research as a vehicle for professional learning.

Current teaching development projects include a TIES project with Pharmacy colleagues trialling unit of study coordinators peer reviewing each others assessment strategies and implementation; and providing advice and support on a University-wide initiative on sessional teaching staff development that has recently commenced.

Formal teaching duties within the ITL programs have so far included the Principles and Practice of University Teaching and Learning course (including coordination of the November course), and I anticipate being in the Graduate Certificate of Educational Studies (Higher Education) teaching team in 2009.

I currently serve on the Executive Committee of the Higher Education Research & Development Society of Australasia (HERDSA) as Treasurer.

I am very pleased to have the opportunity to continue to work with colleagues across the University through my work at the ITL.
Cynthia Nelson

Having joined the ITL in July 2008 as a Senior Lecturer, I will be working on two main projects. One is the Development Program for Research Supervision, which I will be streamlining and revising in light of the 2007 review of the ITL’s academic programs as well as consultations held this semester with the Dean of Graduate Studies, the Associate Deans (Research), and current participants. Nearly 100 participants plan to complete the program in December by taking part in a Research Supervision Forum, which replaces the written case study that used to be required.

My other main project is the Promoting Excellence Initiative, which involves working with various ‘communities of inquiry’ across the University to enhance teaching quality and student learning. As part of this Initiative, I offer advice to those preparing Australian Learning and Teaching Council (ALTC) award and grant applications or using ALTC resources.

My work on these projects will be informed by my extensive experience teaching academic and research literacies, and designing research development programs for students and staff. Most recently, I was a Senior Lecturer and Research Coordinator at a centralised development unit at the University of Technology, Sydney, where for over a decade I created customised programs for Honours students, research postgraduates, and academic colleagues in numerous disciplinary areas (including business, education, engineering, humanities, information technology, international studies, nursing and midwifery, and social sciences).

I have a PhD in Applied Linguistics from Macquarie University, as well as an MA in Teaching (ESL) and a BA in English (cum laude) from the University of Washington. I have taught at both these universities and have also been an invited guest lecturer at the University of New Hampshire’s Center for Humanities and Temple University Japan’s Distinguished Lecturer Series, among others. I have been a co-recipient of a UTS Excellence in Teaching Award and have assessed Discovery grants for the Australian Research Council as an ‘Expert of International Standing’.

My own research publications and presentations to date have focused on three main areas: research writing and research education and development, with a particular interest in crafting knowledge at the academy/industry interface; teaching practices that engage productively with social and linguistic diversity within increasingly globalised education contexts; and creative ways of writing research to engage generalist as well as specialist audiences. My most recent publication is Sexual identities in English language education: Classroom conversations (Routledge, 2009).

My teaching and research interests have emerged from my 20-year trajectory as an educator: from teaching English to migrants, refugees and international students in workplaces and in further- and higher-education contexts in the US; to teaching academic literacies to both local and international students in Australian universities; to developing the research writing expertise of doctoral candidates and other postgraduates; to advising academic colleagues on their own research publications and grant applications, and on research supervision; and to my current role as an academic developer at the ITL. I look forward to working with my new colleagues here at the University of Sydney.
While ‘Freshman Composition’ or ‘First-Year Writing’ as it is now known, has long been a staple of the undergraduate ‘core’ curriculum in North American universities, such units of study have been much slower to catch on in Australia. However, as evidenced by recent public debates on literacy, both at the secondary and tertiary level, the times are a-changing, ushering in a new focus on developing students’ academic writing and public speaking abilities as essential graduate attributes.

The Faculty of Arts has responded to this educational shift by establishing two new units of study at the undergraduate level, WRIT1001 and WRIT1002, which mark a departure from ordinary ‘English for Academic Purposes’ units. The WRIT units will focus on writing across the curriculum or more specifically, writing in the disciplines, making them relevant for all university students. And while these units will feature an oral communication component, a third unit dedicated solely to academic speaking and presentation is in the works.

WRIT1001, coordinated by the Department of Linguistics, emphasizes the English language as a communicative code in contact with languages with very different discourse strategies. It will focus on fundamental differences and similarities between academic English and academic registers of other languages, making it highly appropriate for both native and non-native speakers of English. WRIT1002, coordinated by the Department of English, is a more advanced unit and focuses on effective argumentation and essay writing across disciplines, using classical rhetoric as its theoretical base. It is recommended for those who already possess a strong command of the English language but wish to improve their writing. WRIT 1001 is not a prerequisite for WRIT 1002, but the units are designed to complement each other, with each focusing on different aspects of academic language, writing, and presentation.

Recent research on academic writing indicates that effective writing is much more than a skill to be mastered. Mark Richardson, Professor of Writing and Linguistics at Georgia Southern University, identifies eight truths that dispel the notion of writing instruction as a mere skill-building exercise:

- Students who do one kind of writing well will not automatically do other kinds of writing well.
- The conventions of thought and expression in disciplines differ, enough so that what one learns in order to write in one discipline might have to be unlearned to write in another.
- Writing is not the expression of thought; it is thought itself. Papers are not containers for ideas, containers that need only to be well formed for those ideas to emerge clearly. Papers are the working out of ideas. The thought and the container take shape simultaneously (and develop slowly, with revision).
- When students are faced with an unfamiliar writing challenge, their apparent ability to write will falter across a broad range of “skills”. For example, a student who handles grammatical usage, mechanics, organization, and tone competently in an explanation of the effects of global warming on coral reefs might look like a much weaker writer when she tries her hand at a chemistry-lab report for the first time.
- Teaching students grammar and mechanics through drills often does not work.
- Patterns of language usage, tangled up in complex issues like personal and group identities, are not easy to change.
- Rhetorical considerations like ethos, purpose, audience, and occasion are crucial to even such seemingly small considerations as word choice and word order.
- Writing involves abilities we develop over our lifetimes. Some students are more advanced in them when they come to [university] than are others. Those who are less advanced will not develop to a level comparable to
Richardson’s observations are in keeping with recent approaches to academic writing at top-flight universities such as Stanford and the University of California at Davis, which offer ‘stand-alone’ writing units as well as workshops for embedding effective writing instruction in existing units of study across disciplines. Stanford’s Program in Writing and Rhetoric and UC Davis’s University Writing Program advocate writing as a discipline-specific enterprise, reliant upon the expertise and cooperation of participating faculties. Both programs feature thriving writing centres, where the various units are coordinated and supported.

The Faculty of Arts, in partnership with Stanford and UC Davis, aims to expand the existing academic writing program through collaboration with other faculties across the university via the Writing Program Hub, which will be operational in Semester One 2009. The Hub will offer support for staff in designing effective writing assignments, support for WRIT students, and writing programs for secondary teachers and students.

The Faculty of Arts Academic Writing initiative is part of a broader approach toward achieving Graduate Attributes, as represented in the Faculty of Arts Teaching and Learning Network, established in January 2007. The Network, funded by the Learning and Teaching Performance Fund, is comprised of four portfolios: Student Success, Staff Support and Development, E-Learning, and Academic Writing, with a dedicated director for each.

The WRIT units will build on other successful academic writing initiatives in Arts, including the WRITE SITE, the employment of a dedicated postgraduate writing adviser, a new postgraduate academic writing and communication unit (ARTS7000), and academic writing partnerships with local high schools, funded by large grants from The Department of Education and Training’s Quality Teaching/Action Learning (QTAL) Program.

Dr Susan Thomas, Institute for Teaching and Learning

Enquiries about these initiatives may be directed as follows:
WRIT1001: Professor Bill Foley
WRIT1002: Dr Rebecca Johinke
The Academic Writing Portfolio and QTAL: Dr Susan Thomas
The WRITE SITE: Dr Nerida Jarkey
ARTS7000: Dr Louise Katz
Arts Postgraduate Writing Advising: Dr Bronwen Dyson

Reference
Professional Experience & WebCT at the Sydney Conservatorium of Music

Dr Jennifer Rowley & Dr Sharon Tindall-Ford
Sydney Conservatorium of Music

Introduction

There is a continuing need to discover ways to better support pre-service teachers on Professional Experience (PE) as teacher education programs are faced with financial constraints while struggling with large enrolments and students who are geographically isolated from the university, their peers and university supervising lecturers. As PE (practice teaching/practicum/placement) is a mandatory component of pre-service teacher education programs (Whitton, Sinclair, Barker, Nanlohy & Nosworthy, 2004), and acknowledged as a critical component of pre-service teachers’ professional training, it is one that presents unique challenges and stresses (Ferfolja, 2008; Murray-Harvey, 1999) and therefore, requires better support for pre-service teachers on PE. It is well documented that pre-service teachers have concerns with, amongst other issues, behaviour management, lesson planning and curriculum design (Barry & King, 1998; Groundwater-Smith, Ewing and Le Cornu, 2007; Whitton et al., 2004). Providing additional support for pre-service teachers on PE is a challenge for all teacher educators, and online technology has become increasingly popular in addressing some of the challenges in the preparation and support of both pre-service and in-service teachers (Ferfolja, 2008; Holstrom, Ruiz & Weller, 2007; Schuck 2003a). Teacher training programs are utilising internet based technologies (such as WebCT) to enhance pre-service teacher learning when on PE to enhance students’ learning experiences. No longer is the pre-service teacher isolated from university lecturers and peers as the technology enables learning and communication to occur asynchronously, enabling the pre-service teachers to interact and collaborate with peers and academics anywhere and at anytime (Garrison & Anderson, 2003).
This article reports on three WebCT sites that were developed at the Sydney Conservatorium of Music (SCM) to support and enhance music students’ PE Units of Study (UoS). At SCM pre-service music education students enrolled in a four year Bachelor of Music (Music Education) degree are required to complete for their three PE UoS; 10 single days and a two week block in second year at a primary school and seven weeks of PE in both third and fourth year at a secondary high school. Within this PE program, pre-service music teachers are expected to develop effective lesson plans; implement a continuous program of lessons; apply classroom management skills; evaluate the success of classroom learning experiences and to understand the role and responsibility of music teachers within school and the wider community. In Semester 2, 2006, all Music Education students enrolled in the PE UoS (MUED 2005, 3002 and 4003) were asked to complete a pre-questionnaire as part of the UoS evaluation before placement and a post-questionnaire at the conclusion of their PE placement. The pre and post-questionnaire examined previous experiences of students using technology, the Internet and WebCT. It explored students’ perceptions of how WebCT might influence their learning and asked students for inclusions on what they would like to see on the WebCT site for the PE UoS. The comparisons between pre and post-questionnaire are presented as changes in students’ perceptions towards using WebCT. As students were asked about anxiety and stress in using WebCT these changes are also noted in the post-questionnaire. The intention was to measure students’ adaptability and acceptance of the introduction of WebCT into the UoS and whether the online support was enhancing their learning environment and impacting its significance. As most of the PE is spent without face-to-face lecturer involvement it was also necessary to measure the students’ past experience with WebCT and whether the WebCT support alleviated stress and anxiety during the placement. WebCT sites were developed based on the data collected from the re-questionnaire and the sites were monitored and further developed during PE. Data collected served to inform SCM academics of the needs of SCM pre-service music teachers, the usefulness of PE UoS and WebCT sites and an understanding of how to better prepare pre-service music teachers for their future careers.

Using WebCT within existing Units of Study to create a collaborative learning environment

The initial rationale for introducing e-learning (in the form of WebCT) into the music education degree at SCM was to enhance students’ tertiary education learning experiences whilst engaging in technology. The goal for e-learning, therefore, was to encourage active learning for students as well as introducing students to technology.
through meaningful collaborative learning environments. The collaborative learning environment for the three PE WebCT sites involved SCM pre-service music teachers, SCM lecturers, PE supervisors and in school supervising teachers. It was envisaged that as pre-service music teachers develop skills as teachers during PE that it would be essential that they assimilate their teaching and learning theory into practice (Barry and King, 1998; Groundwater-Smith et al., 2007). With pre-service music teachers, SCM academics and PE supervisors being actively involved in WebCT discussion boards it was hoped that there would be opportunities for the potential "gap" between theory and practice to be integrated through online discussions. As a part of the development of an online collaborative community it was important to recognize the commitment that SCM has to the ongoing improvement of graduate attributes through the students' interaction with and use of technology through e-learning. The blended learning environment was, as stated previously, a mechanism to further develop university lecturers' understanding of the concerns of music education students on PE and to evaluate WebCT as a medium of instruction and contact. To develop competence in students as e-learners it was vital to create opportunities for e-learning to be integrated into existing UoS and it was thought that WebCT sites would be useful in addressing the development of graduate attributes through the pre-service music teachers' interaction with and use of technology. The graduate attributes identified by SCM and supported through this project were a commitment to independent learning, critical thinking and analysis skills and appreciation of computer based activities as a part of the learning environment.

Development of WebCT Sites
The three WebCT sites were developed initially according to the following structure: Professional Experience Handbook; contact information for all SCM supervisors; information for the secondary music teacher (for example, the New South Wales Creative Arts Syllabus); Music Teachers Resource Site (including links to internet sites such as The Pure Drop: An Exploration & Celebration of World Music; lesson plan information including template for lesson plans and a Year 7 music lesson plan exemplar on Aboriginal Music; three online discussion forums for students to communicate with their peers and lecturers. One discussion forum was dedicated solely to behaviour management issues, while another was dedicated to general discussion, and the remaining discussion forum was titled 'Problems to Discuss with Lecturer'. The online asynchronistic discussion provision involved pre-service music teachers accessing an online noticeboard where they could ask questions, voice concerns, write about an incident or issue and register ongoing responses to other students, academics or supervisor postings throughout the PE. SCM academics and supervisors monitored the postings and provided ongoing advice, support and feedback when required. These ‘virtual’ discussions did not take place in real time, but were developed through students and academics contributions to the noticeboard at a time that was convenient for them.
Summary of Pre and Post-questionnaire Evaluation

The pre-questionnaire investigated students’ experiences with computers, including both use and ability levels, the internet, online learning environments (WebCT) and their perceived needs for e-learning when on Professional Experience. The questionnaire was administered to 2nd, 3rd and 4th year music education students (n=43) as part of the course evaluation of the three PE UoS prior to placement. Secondly, students were asked to engage in the online learning component (WebCT) for the duration of the placement as part of their assessment. Finally, a post-questionnaire examined students’ (n=77) self-rating of

behaviour management, resources and ideas for lessons. Included in the identified needs was also links to other sites that would give them ‘hints and tips’ for lessons. Comments also included: links to useful websites, music and readings; discussion boards for trouble shooting and problem solving; announcements and news of happenings back on campus; assignment results; and photos and video of PE students teaching real classes. There was also an identified need for lecture notes (although four of the seven education units of study already had WebCT sites with lecture notes available to students). This identified the need for the Music Education UoS in the degree program to have lecture notes available to students on WebCT. Rudimentary information such as contact details for University PE supervisors and handouts regarding the mechanics of PE were also noted.

Critical to the results were the data extracted from these open-ended questions and comments by the students. When asked, “how you think WebCT can ENHANCE your professional experience”, comments from pre and post WebCT use included:

1. help navigating the technology;
2. some counselling on dealing with children and adolescents;
3. more supervising teacher and university supervisor input into discussions;
4. better methods to share resources – songs, sound files;
5. more reassurance from supervising teacher, university supervisor and fellow students.

The rating of students’ feelings and concerns about perceived issues in PE identified students’ feelings of isolation, lack of professional and personal support and concerns with classroom management. The post-questionnaire (n=77) indicated that students, who had the necessary technology skills to access the WebCT sites or were willing to engage in new technology, found that WebCT helped in alleviating anxiety, was useful for developing lesson plan ideas and provided critical support in dealing with discipline issues.

Discussions sites and their use during PE

The two designers of the PE WebCT sites, who were also SCM lecturers and PE supervisors, monitored the discussion sites over the period of PE. The supervisors provided advice to the pre-service teachers throughout the period of placement and updated the three WebCT sites with new materials when required, by including links to additional music websites and supplementary advice on creating interesting and innovative music lessons. The discussion board was used for two distinct purposes. Firstly, to seek advice from peers and SCM supervisors and, secondly, as

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a mechanism to gain support, encouragement and express emotions in what appeared to be viewed by students as a supportive and safe environment. The advice sought by pre-service teachers was in the categories of classroom discipline, technical support, music content for lessons and issues with school music teachers supervision and support. Examples of the postings demonstrating a selection of the categories are provided in Table 4 below.

Examples from the WebCT discussion board:

1. CATEGORY: School Music Teacher’s Supervision
EXAMPLE: Saturday August 26th, 2006.
Does anyone else have a teacher supervising them, that after looking at your lesson plans which you know are not complete just says “good” and does not tell you what’s needed.”

2. CATEGORY: Classroom Discipline
EXAMPLE: Wednesday, August 23, 2006. 1:49pm
My lesson went pretty good, but I found it difficult to curb their excitement after singing “Ah-de-doodah”. The school didn’t really have a policy and I’m still experimenting what works best for me. Any ideas crazy cats? By the way watch out for seven-year-old girls squeezing your legs.

3. CATEGORY: Technical Support
EXAMPLE: Tuesday August 22nd, 2006
Student Response to ipod question. “At my school they have a cable where they can plug the ipod into the speakers, this means the kids can listen to ‘their’ music and it can be incorporated into the lesson.”

4. CATEGORY: Music Content
EXAMPLE: Monday August 21st, 2006
Anyone out there knows a way to teach guitar chords to year 7. I have no idea!

A Student Response:
“….. I reckon I can help. To teach guitar chords, be prepared to take heaps of time on certain aspects of reading guitar tabs and what everything means – you may have to spend 2 lessons. The easiest way is to start of with either a riff or a drone note for them to play in groups, and then build the notes up until they get the chord. Alternatively you can draw a basic guitar chord diagram (provided by student) and then you put the finger numbers on the specific frets. If you do use this make sure you play it for them first and then explain/ show the fingering slowly!”

“Students’ indicated that the PE WebCT sites enhanced their experiences in schools by primarily providing a supportive network to share ideas, knowledge and problems and to seek advice from peers and SCM Supervisors. For most, it was an invaluable tool to receive feedback from their peers and supervisors when it was not readily available at their placement school.”

Just a quick heads up to everyone and hope all is going well. On the issue of discipline and general behaviour in classrooms, I’ve been amazed at the power of humour. Just a small comment here and there both makes the whole room positive and also gets everyone’s attention back to you. I’ve found it especially works with the junior years when the ‘problem’ students start to disrupt the class.

EXAMPLE: Friday, September 29, 2006. 1:27pm
I think you did the right thing. I had the exact same problem on Monday where my usual class teacher was away and we had a casual teacher, so the class was misbehaving. Come my lesson, the class was being silly and I didn’t get through all my lesson because I had to keep disciplining the children. But at the end of my lesson I gave them a talk and told them the exact same thing you told your class. If they can’t be well behaved and participate in a sensible manner then I will stop giving them fun music activities. I think our little “talk” will have shown the class we mean business and next lesson will hopefully run more smoothly with not so many interruptions!

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board, demonstrated that they found the discussions to be a very useful tool. Comments made by all three cohorts included that the discussion board helped to keep in touch with other students, to discuss issues during professional experience and seek advice from lecturers during professional experience regarding a specific classroom issue/situation. It was hoped that the fourth year students would act as mentors for the third years and that third years would act as mentors for the second year students, but the students seemed to remain in the discussion with their own cohort.

Summary
After using WebCT the results indicate a general trend of improvement in students’ rating of skill, confidence and usefulness of WebCT. The students also indicated that the WebCT sites met needs reasonably or very well. The results showed that two-thirds of students rated the PE WebCT sites as reasonable, very or extremely useful. It was apparent from the responses that the students felt isolated on their PE and the results may indicate a need to introduce more scaffolding into the music education and teacher preparation UoS so as to allow students to feel more prepared for the solo flight that is a component of PE.

Students indicated that the PE WebCT sites enhanced their experiences in schools by primarily providing a supportive network to share ideas, knowledge and problems and to seek advice from peers and SCM Supervisors. For most, it was an invaluable tool to receive feedback from their peers and supervisors when it was not readily available at their placement school. For some, particularly the third year students on their first secondary placement, it reduced the sense of isolation they felt from being away from SCM and peers. Students from all three cohorts found it reassuring to know that many of their peers were experiencing the same problems as they were and found it interesting to hear about other schools, students and situations that were very different from their own experiences. The ability to communicate easily with others and the flexibility in terms of being able to log on at home at night to seek help and support was also seen as a benefit. Suggestions for further improvement included more online presence from music educators from the SCM, more musical material provided on line and a virtual space to upload and share lesson plans with colleagues. Some fourth years indicated the need for pre-training in this technology. In order for students to obtain the most support and information from online delivery it is essential that the students have an understanding of the technology and access to the facility; this appeared to be the main drawback to the success of the WebCT sites, in particular for the fourth year pre-service teachers.

Recommendations
This UoS evaluation suggests that providing online support through WebCT is an important tool to enhance pre-service music teachers experience on PE. While WebCT provided a valuable support for pre-service music teachers, discussion boards supplied an important insight to SCM lecturers on the concerns and issues faced by pre-service music teachers on PE. Success of the WebCT sites relied on academic and pre-service teacher involvement, students’ willingness to go online, learn about the WebCT sites and read postings by peers and post messages. This was essential to student learning, integrating theory with practice, and developing
the graduate attributes stated previously and the relevance of the sites. Academics needed to monitor and regulate the asynchronistic discussion forums and continually update information e.g. posting websites, lesson plans, and support materials. Research suggests that supervisors’ presence on line is critical for the success of asynchronistic discussion forums (Sing & Stollof, 2007).

These new understandings were used to re-model education and PE UOS for 2007 and 2008. An important initiative that was incorporated for 2007 PE WebCT sites was a lecture and tutorial devoted to student orientation and training in WebCT. Other initiatives for 2007 PE WebCT sites included: providing a PowerPoint and supplementary information on how to successfully prepare for placement; providing narrated PowerPoints of education subjects summarising how theory learnt in these UoS should inform music teaching practice; streamlining discussion forums so there were not multiple areas for student interaction and organising threads within the one discussion board to support student navigation; providing information on ownership of material posted online and confidentiality for all users of discussion forums and; providing all part-time PE Supervisors with access and training to the sites.

The development of the online community as a culture change for SCM pre-service pre-service music teachers and SCM academics was a desired outcome of this evaluation. To achieve this, academics needed to respond to any teaching and learning concerns of the pre-service music teachers and to enable students to share their experiences with their fellow music education students. The online community, therefore, was thought of as ‘the activities people perform together in their group and not physically where they perform such activities’ (Graff, 2006:127). This design of the blended learning environment was also viewed as a mechanism to further develop university lecturers’ understanding of the concerns of music education students when on PE and evaluating WebCT as a medium of instruction and contact. Research supports the importance of building a community and Wang (2001, as cited in Graff, 2006) argues that the ‘community can also result from shared knowledge among learners in an online environment’ (p127). Therefore, active independent learning is a vital contribution to a collaborative learning community, which this evaluation sought to measure through WebCT discussion boards. It was important to develop competence in students as e-learners in this process with the rationale being to provide relatively immediate support for students during their PE. Therefore, assessing their computing, Internet and WebCT skills, experiences and anxiety prior to embarking on placement opened a window to the climate and potential of the online community of student teachers.

Conclusions

There are definite challenges with providing relevant online delivery to pre-service teachers when on PE. The three sites were created rapidly with limited instruction and support to site designers. It was, therefore, imperative that an evaluation of these three UoS be undertaken so that the needs and
concerns of pre-service teachers were better understood and addressed in 2007 and 2008. This evaluation provided important insights in understanding pre-service music teachers’ technical competence, fears and anxieties about technology, WebCT and PE. Developing mentoring between year groups needs to be carefully considered and nurtured, as it does not simply occur by providing the vehicle for student interaction. This evaluation showed that success of PE WebCT sites relies on commitment by academics and PE supervisors, pre-placement WebCT training of pre-service teachers and continual updating of information on WebCT sites.

The site designers were successful in applying for a Sydney e-learning grant in 2007 and 2008 and sites were re-designed in line with students’ evaluation of the UoS and WebCT feedback. The re-design of the sites included results of this evaluation so that the students experience an authenticity of e-learning. The authors would like to thank the Sydney eLearning team who have provided invaluable support and advice.

References

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On 17 October, Dr Brigid Rooney (Associate Dean Teaching and Learning, Arts) and Dr Susan Thomas (Teaching Development Coordinator for Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences, ITL), interviewed three Arts students on their experiences of the USE feedback process. Stanley (Stan) Green is a first-year, mature-age student majoring in History; Briannon McLoughlin is a second-year student majoring in Indonesian and Philosophy, and Rebecca (Bec) Santos is a third-year English major. Drs Rooney and Thomas were awarded a Large TIES grant to investigate current processes of collecting, analysing and disseminating USE feedback and to make recommendations for streamlining the process and closing the feedback loop. The following is an excerpt from the 17 October discussion.

BRIGID: What have you experienced when filling out a Unit of Study Evaluation (USE)—what was your perception of the purpose of the exercise—and how did you find the experience?

STAN: Yes, well I did that at the end of the first semester. And I understood that it was intended for the department concerned to see that they were providing the right sort of material, the right sort of information, to see if there were any criticisms and basically to improve the Unit of Study (UoS). It would be nice to see the results, transmitted into something tangible.

BRIANNON: This is my fourth semester at the university, so I suppose so far that I have done about a dozen USEs, and I have had a lot of positive and negative experiences with it. I think that sometimes in subjects where I have felt it was a really great subject, I’ve used it as a way to compliment the things that I thought were really well done. And then in other subjects I’ve had lecturers or tutors who’ve made USE a very rushed experience, and have sort of given the impression that it’s less than important. I know that I filled one out last week – we just finished our subject in week 10 – and the lecturer said “we’ve got 10 minutes left, I’ve got some surveys here, and if you want to fill them out you can. And if not, you can go”. I was watching to see how many people left. And at least a quarter of the people packed their bags and went out, and a couple went and did...
the ticks in the number boxes, and then there were maybe a dozen of us left, actually writing in the spaces to extend our response. So um, yeah I think I’ve had a bit of both worlds. But on the flipside of that, I’ve had heaps of lecturers who have been really positive and even funny about it. They’ve said “I’m going to leave the room… don’t feel pressured… you can tell the truth.” I think in smaller classes it’s a much more expressive form of response. In the large classes, your response is seen as less important I think.

BEC: Yeah, I’m always one of the people who stay towards the end. It feels really awful to say, but if ever throughout a semester a tutor or lecturer transgressed in my opinion, I’d think, “oh yeah, I’m saving that up for the unit of study evaluation.” But by the time I’d get there, I’d forget all the discrepancies I’d had with my tutor or lecturer. It’s difficult for me to treat the unit of study evaluations with any degree of seriousness, which they obviously deserve, because it’s never explicitly outlined how your answers will be translated into new policy or new ways of going about the subject, or even really where the unit of study evaluations go once you put them in the little envelope. If they’re ever going to be used for something more substantial than vitriolic outpourings from unsatisfied students or laudatory comments from satisfied students, I think students need to know how their comments will be translated as some sort of pragmatic outcome. The explanation process has been lacking.

BRIGID: Do all lecturers explain it the same way in your experience? Or have you got that similar diversity of experience that Briannon has talked about?

BEC: It’s not really explained in my experience. By that time of semester, people are generally exhausted, and there’s a big drop off towards the end of lectures, because there’s no more content to be covered, just concluding comments.

BRIANNON: I think that’s very true.

SUSAN: Would it make a difference in the way in which you filled out the form, or the way in which you approached
the exercise, if someone told you how they were going to use the data?

BEC: Yes.

BRIANNON: I absolutely agree.

BEC: It’s hard to engage with a process when you don’t actually understand what the process is for, and also it seems really vague and a bit fake as well. Inevitably it won’t influence my experience of the UoS. So, while I think it’s good to get overall feedback, I’m not comfortable with the idea that feedback is only solicited in this hyper formalised way, at the end of semester. I think it should be continual.

STAN: I have little or no faith in that format of evaluation, either pre-uni or currently. I think that if one wants to be relevant and helpful, then you can do it in a small group, like we are here. Lecturers and tutors have to be responsible for acknowledging and obtaining feedback, and implementing the results, rather than just being responsible for some paperwork at the end of semester.

BEC: I don’t necessarily agree that you can replace USE surveys with a focus group, or that focus groups would achieve the same sort of aims, because the survey at the end is good for getting a large sample, and also being able to extrapolate from that, broader trends that might happen across the discipline, or happen across the faculty. But I think what you’re saying was really useful because I don’t think that needs to be as formalised as focus groups, but I think that opportunities during tutorials for example, maybe midway through semester, there could be a 10 minute chat about how people think the UoS is going. And I think that would help institute a culture of open communication within the particular unit of study, because it’s not this little process at the end where you fill out boxes but don’t know where the paper goes.

STAN: But it could be a mixture of both, because with both, you might get some sort of correlation, which gives you more concrete direction.

BRIGID: I’m getting the strong impression from listening to you, that you’ve never experienced any other form of feedback in your units of study, other than this formal survey instrument.

ALL: That is correct.

BRIANNON: That brings us back to Susan’s question before about if we knew more about where the process was going, it would make it a better process from the students’ point of view.

STAN: I’m very impressed with the Academic Writing (ENGL1000) system of postings – the discussion board. I think that that’s absolutely perfect. It’s wonderful to read what students write to one another, because not everyone feels comfortable communicating in tutorials.

SUSAN: Would you feel differently toward the USE, or would you be more motivated to take it seriously if it were only one component of a feedback structure that you saw in the UoS from the very beginning?

STAN: Anything more than the end of semester pink sheets of paper has got to be an improvement.

BEC: I really agree. The USE forms occupy a very privileged space, because they are purely about feedback, as opposed to merely anecdotal ‘how do you think you’re going’ corridor chats. So I would say that if it was part of a broader strategy, then that’s an intrinsically good thing, but
I think at the end of the day all you really need to know is what it is, what it's used for, where it's going, and how students will be able to check up on the results. That kind of discussion, if pitched in that kind of way, hopefully wouldn't be polarizing or make people take it less or more seriously.

Rebecca Santos
somewhere special in those special envelopes…

SUSAN: Just for the record, the UoS coordinator sees every word you write, so your comments are not disappearing into a vacuum.

STAN: But we need another level, another tier to back it up.

BRIGID: So what kind of information are you given when the surveys are handed out? What do lecturers typically say to you before handing out the survey? What do you know already about the process?

BRIANNON: I think they have something to read out. I’m recalling someone holding a piece of paper, reading out all the things that need to be done.

SUSAN: The procedure…

BRIANNON: The procedure paper, that’s it. And I know I’ve heard that a few times, but I think it’s something a lot of people tune out because it’s not particularly interesting.

BRIGID: Like flight information…. You know, buckle up, and put your head in the brace position…

STAN: There is no consistency. Some lecturers leave the room, and some don’t. Some explain it, and some just say here’s a bit of paper, fill it in. There is no “this is the way that it should be done. Please don’t deviate from it”.

SUSAN: The issue of student fatigue is discussed quite often in relation to USE. Are you too tired to fill out these forms or a bit bewildered by the lack of transparency surrounding the process? Is it worth making a distinction between these two things?

BEC: I think that student fatigue is twofold: Firstly, it’s that time of semester when people just stop turning up to class because it’s not content-based anymore, so for the really important survey procedure to happen at that particular time, it’s fatigue in a very real sense in that everyone’s too tired and bored at this time of semester. But it is also student fatigue in the sense that it’s just another form that you have to fill out. It’s the same kind of format that you get for market research and people stopping you in a shopping centre, and people on Eastern Avenue trying to get you to sign petitions. The USE form doesn’t demarcate itself effectively from all the other kind of crap – can I say “crap”? – that you have to do on a daily basis.

BRIGID: I’m wondering if you’ve ever been in a UoS where someone has actually explicitly said to you – a teacher, a lecturer, a co-ordinator – how past evaluations have helped them to think about the unit and design it differently or change a few things?

BEC: No

BRIANNON: Yes, I have actually.

STAN: Twice actually.

BRIANNON: I’ve been studying Indonesian since I first started at the university, and in my opinion, compared to all the other subjects that I’ve done, in all the other departments, the Indonesian department has a particularly good feedback structure, and I’ve always felt like I could give feedback directly during class and converse about it outside class. Half way through each semester, we are given an informal written evaluation form to fill out, a few questions, and it’s very casual. We talk about it, we fill it out. And our lecturer will come in the next week and say: “I noticed you wrote this”, and we talk about how we can
improve what we're doing, and what we liked and what we didn't like. And maybe that's enabled by the small class size. But also it's just that constant, and we expect that soon we're going to be able to tell them what we think. And at the beginning of semester, we talk about what happened at the end of last semester with our USEs. Our lecturer would come and say "I noticed that some of you didn't really like this, so let's think if there's a better way to do that". So I know that I always feel particularly good about that subject.

BRIGID: Do you think that that's had any effect on how you have approached the USE forms? Or have you noticed how other students are approaching it?

BRIANNON: Given that it's a small class, I really do think that that has a lot to do with it – there are only 10 of us studying it this semester. As a whole, I think that we all think that if we all write something, something will happen. Because we can discuss and say "oh yeah, I agree" or "Oh! I forgot about that" and we really expand on our answers. And I noticed that in some of my larger classes, people don't expand on their answers at all – they write one or two lines, and leave it at that. Whereas we see it as an opportunity to really let them know everything that we're thinking. Because we can see that they want to know more.

STAN: Well I haven't had as detailed an experience as that. But there are at least two occasions when we were given the impression by the head of the unit that they were very enthusiastic about knowing how they were going and how their structure was, and how their lectures were going. And in other cases, it never really came up at all. So I think that you definitely get a very good impression, and you get encouraged, if you see your unit head making enquiries. So far for me, it's really limited.

BEC: Even though it's quite obviously not explicitly discussed, do lecturers actually make adjustments to their own teaching styles according to the comments made by students?

BRIGID: Before I respond directly to that, what I want to notice there is that you're seeing the USE as being something that would affect someone's teaching style. And it's interesting, because it's also about the UoS itself. It's design and delivery. I'm wondering when you fill it in, whether you're thinking more about individual teachers or more about the UoS design overall.

BEC: There has only been one UoS where I've loved the lecturer, but disliked the content. So that's the only time when I've shifted my mind frame from individual lecturers and their teaching styles to something that's purely focused on the UoS make up. Particularly in English, you choose a UoS because you love the content, so you know that the unit of study is going to be more or less good. The only variable in all of that is how well the UoS is packaged, or how well it's given to you and that's why that sort of thing sticks out to be commented on, versus other possible things.

BRIANNON: I agree. I think that we know that feeling of not being happy with what we've been taught, but having really enjoyed being there all the same. And I'm interested in what you said about looking at it as an evaluation of the UoS. I imagine that most people would see it more of an analysis of what they've done – so the experience that they've had with their lecturer and their tutor. And that would differ greatly…

BRIGID: Of the person rather than the whole package?

BRIANNON: Yeah, of the individual. I'm not sure I've ever seen it as a package deal so much. Because that would take a much more prepared thought process. I'd have to think

Would it make a difference in the way in which you filled out the form, or the way in which you approached the exercise, if someone told you how they were going to use the data?

Dr Susan Thomas
about that before I wrote. And given that it’s a quick, fill out this form sort of process, I don’t really have a lot of time to sit back and think “What do I think about this UoS”, in an articulate, holistic way.

**BRIGID:** Do you ever find the questions themselves frustrating to answer? Do you wish that you were asked different sorts of questions to the ones that are posed to you?

**BRIANNON:** They’re so generic.

**STAN:** Can I just touch on one thing: I don’t think that there are such things as bad subjects, or bad lecturers. I think that if you get a good lecturer, an enthusiastic lecturer, or an enthusiastic tutor, it doesn’t matter. They can inspire people to participate and they can bring the best out of what the material is.

**BRIGID:** Would the rest of you agree with that?

**BRIANNON:** Yeah, I think that Stan articulated it better than I did.

**SUSAN:** What about team-taught UoS, where you may like one of the lecturers very much, and their teaching seems relevant. But then you’ve got others who aren’t as effective—or you may feel that the material is out of sequence. On one hand, it is an issue about the lecturer, but on the other, it’s about something the coordinator could do to improve the delivery of the UoS.

**BRIANNON:** In one of my first year units, they have a situation where they try and touch on a whole lot of different areas, under six different brackets, and they break it up into the two courses. In the first semester you do three different areas and you have three different lecturers doing three different things. And I would certainly say that it’s a situation where I would critique the structure of the UoS rather than the individuals themselves.

**SUSAN:** So that’s a UoS issue, not a teaching performance issue.

**BRIANNON:** It is. And I hadn’t really thought about it before, and you’re quite right.

**STAN:** This illustrates why there needs to be instructions by the lecturer, or tutor, before pen goes to paper, so that everyone is clear on the purpose of USE.

**BRIGID:** But could too many instructions skew the responses?

**BRIANNON:** Do you mean that perhaps students wouldn’t want their lecturer to get into trouble?

**BRIGID:** That kind of thing. There might be a loyalty factor… I’m just thinking it through a little bit.

**BRIANNON:** It’s important. I’m not sure what to think.

**BEC:** I don’t feel equipped to give a sociological analysis that those kinds of questions necessitate, but I think at the end of the day all you really need to know is what it is, what it’s used for, where it’s going, and how students will be able to check up on the results. That kind of discussion, if pitched in that kind of way, hopefully wouldn’t be polarizing or make people take it less or more seriously. It’s just to explain what it is and the original problem is that no one really knows what it is.

**STAN:** I’m going to bring a donkey’s tail to the next filling out of forms, and stick it on.
2008 was a banner year for recognition of excellence in teaching at the University of Sydney. The long and distinguished honour roll includes five Vice Chancellor’s Awards, one Australian Learning and Teaching Council (ALTC, formerly Carrick) award for programs that enhance learning, six ALTC citations, three ALTC grants, one ALTC Senior Fellowship and one ALTC Associate Fellowship. The University also introduced a new award, sponsored by the Co-op Bookshop, which recognises teaching excellence with a community focus. These awards add to the many faculty-based awards recognising excellence in teaching and learning.
THE RECIPIENTS OF THE 2008
VICE-CHANCELLOR’S AWARDS ARE AS FOLLOWS:

For Support of the Student Experience:
First Year Chemistry Teaching Fellow Team—Dr Adam Bridgewater, Professor Trevor Hambley and Professor Scott Kable, for supporting the professional development of teaching fellows through the pursuit of research and teaching excellence and developing new teaching practices and approaches with enhanced student support, feedback and employment.

For Outstanding Teaching:
Associate Professor Anthony Masters, Faculty of Science, for his commitment to enhancing student learning through thoughtful and innovative teaching practice.
Associate Professor Paul McGreevy, Faculty of Veterinary Science, for demonstrating a passion for teaching through the development of innovative, internationally-recognized teaching curricula.
Dr Michael Anderson, Faculty of Education and Social Work (Early Career Category), for encouraging scholarly debate, student engagement, and reflection on learning outcomes.

For Excellence in Higher Degree Research Supervision:
Professor Rick Shine, Faculty of Science, for his ongoing commitment to postgraduate students.

THE RECIPIENT OF THE ALTC AWARD FOR PROGRAMS THAT ENHANCE LEARNING is
Associate Professor Michelle Lincoln, Faculty of Health Sciences, for the COMPASS Project, a new national competency-based assessment tool for speech pathology students. This is the second University of Sydney award in this category in as many years.

THE RECIPIENTS OF ALTC CITATIONS FOR OUTSTANDING CONTRIBUTIONS TO STUDENT LEARNING INCLUDE:
Associate Professor Rick Benitez, Faculty of Arts, for modelling philosophical processes and teaching practices in and beyond the classroom, which lead to positive transformations in learners’ experience of their subject and themselves.
Associate Professor Paul McGreevy, Faculty of Veterinary Science, for developing resources that support authentic, relevant and inquiry-led learning activities, which ignite passion, foster high standards and nurture critical skills in veterinary undergraduates.
Dr John O’Byrne, Dr Manjula Sharma and Dr Joe Khachan, Faculty of Science, for ongoing development and implementation of collaborative and interactive modes of learning in large first year physics classes.
Mr Giuseppe Carabella, Faculty of Economics and Business, for excellence in promoting experiential teaching in first year commercial law courses.
Ms Kellie Morrison, Faculty of Economics and Business, for excellence in leadership, design and implementation of a faculty-wide peer learning program that enhances students’ learning, engagement and the quality of their overall experience.

Dr Smita Shah, Faculty of Medicine, for creating an evidence-based education program, which involves medical students in community outreach and integrates this within an inter-professional learning context.

THE RECIPIENTS OF ALTC GRANTS INCLUDE:
Dr Patricia McCabe, Faculty of Health Sciences, for “Communicating effectively with Indigenous people: a resource for health science students to learn culturally safe interviewing practices.” The University of Sydney is the lead institution on this project, working collaboratively with James Cook University
Associate Professor Joseph Davis, School of Information Technologies, for “Curriculum renewal in postgraduate information technology education: a response to growing service sector dominance.” The University of Sydney is the lead institution on this project, working collaboratively with the universities of Queensland, Melbourne and New South Wales.
Dr Sue McAllister, Faculty of Health Sciences, for “Establishing infrastructure and collaborative processes for cross-institutional benchmarking of student clinical performance in speech pathology.” The University of Sydney is the lead institution on this project, working collaboratively with James Cook University, La Trobe University and the Universities of Newcastle and Queensland.

THE RECIPIENT OF AN ALTC SENIOR FELLOWSHIP is Associate Professor Angela Brew, Faculty of Education and Social Work, for “Enhancing undergraduate engagement through research and inquiry.”

THE RECIPIENT OF AN ALTC ASSOCIATE FELLOWSHIP is Dr Christine Asmar, Institute for Teaching and Learning, for “Indigenous Teaching and Learning in NSW Universities.”

ANNOUNCING THE UNIVERSITY CO-OP BOOKSHOP EXCELLENCE IN TEACHING AND COMMUNITY AWARD:
Congratulations to Dr Caitilin de Berigny Wall, Faculty of Architecture, Design and Planning, on winning the inaugural University Co-op Bookshop Excellence in Teaching and Community Award.
Dr Wall won the award for her teaching in Digital Video and Production (DVDP), which teaches students theoretical and philosophical enquiries behind the genre of documentary. Students work with the local Indigenous community to create three-minute digital documentaries.

The Co-op Award was established by the Branch Manager of the Co-op Bookshop, Mr Ben Struthers, and the Office of the Deputy Provost (Learning and Teaching) and Pro Vice-Chancellor to promote, recognise and reward teaching practices that offer a fulfilling and well-rounded student-centred experience, including access to academic and support resources and appreciation of the University of Sydney community. More details about the annual award can be found on the University website at: http://www.usyd.edu.au/learning/quality/co-op_awd.shtml
Journalism education is not what it used to be. Today’s classroom is too diverse — too multicultural, multilingual, multiparty and multimedia — for straightforward lessons on what makes ‘good journalism’. Convergence and citizen journalism require contemporary journalists to be more swift, nimble, intuitive and daring than their predecessors; my argument is that we also need to be more global.

Finding out about good reporting used to mean studying the stories of Walkley winners, and learning the kind of individual and team courage and creativity that attracts prizes for excellence in Australian journalism. Not any more.

Defining excellence is harder when your students come from Brazil, China, Denmark, Korea, Lebanon, Singapore, United Kingdom, USA and Australia. International awards and prizes for journalism are one resource offering cosmopolitan benchmarks (see list on Journalists @ Your Service) but, at the same time, they provide a wildly different picture of what journalists are expected to do in the world today. At this level, the best news reporting aims to maintain political dialogue in the Middle East, contribute to a better understanding of the information society in Africa, end ethnic divisions in South East Europe, raise awareness of human rights and developing countries, combat racism and discrimination, expose corruption, promote tolerance or galvanize social change. It makes you wonder what happens on a slow news day!

The point here is that current debates about the future of journalism could well extend to canvas ways that journalists can make better international connections and join forces to learn from each other. A peep inside today’s journalism classroom reveals this is no easy task.

The toughest part of talking about journalism to students from around the world is to find a common starting point from which to assess worldwide media performance. Stereotypes are universal. The textbooks recommend internationalism as the best antidote for the innate ‘cultural myopia’ that sees us all judge foreign news by our own homegrown standards.

Yet, books on global journalism do not have much to say about diversity in journalistic practices, much less advice on how to put prejudice in its proper context when reporting news in the age of the ‘war on terrorism’. Instead, much of the literature trumpets libertarian free press models, excuses the foibles and excesses of Western journalists, and dismisses all other types of news as propaganda, misguided or just plain bad. The ‘West is best’ message comes across clear and strong and, coupled with high-profile examples like Watergate, proves highly persuasive to some students, as it will to many journalists.

This picture does not ring true for other students. They are looking for more out of journalism than this ‘one-size-fits-all’ mentality, with its false division between ‘us’ and ‘them’. While ideological disagreement is an important point of contention, ignorance is the main classroom complaint. How do they know about our journalism, these students ask, when they don’t speak our language? Frustration, rather than anger, seems to fuel this perspective but there are also hints of more hardheaded thinking: ‘In the past, there was silence between us’, one student tells me, ‘now journalists are shouting at each other. Shouting is better than silence’.

With this kind of cacophony on the rise in global media, the big challenge for journalism educators is not just to teach journalism students to speak up and write well but also to listen to others and find ways to negotiate points of view that are unfamiliar, objectionable or hostile.

This is complex work. My attempts to get students to listen to each other are best described as a ‘work-in-progress’, but I’ll share with you three of my strategies.

First, we investigate the ‘shouting’ using specific examples of news coverage: New Matilda’s piece on China’s repression of online dissidents, an Al-Jazeera article on ‘Fitna’ (a right-wing Dutch politician’s film criticising the Quran), or the anti-CNN.com website set up by Chinese university graduate Jin Rao in the days after the riots in Tibet (and the anti-anti-CNN site that soon followed). These are not the most conventional
news sources but they take us directly to tough questions that make tempers flare: In what ways could the Internet democratise China? Should Dutch television defend free speech and broadcast media content designed to outrage the country’s Muslim minority? Was CNN’s coverage of the riots in Tibet inaccurate and sloppy? The answers are rarely straightforward and it is hard to sidestep blame-games and get to the issues that matter.

Take, for example, the anti-CNN website. Denounced by some as a propaganda stunt, Rao’s site makes specific allegations of bias and lies, using cropped and uncropped photos as well as disputed camera shots, captions and commentary passing itself off as news copy. In response, CNN did not make the obvious point that restricted access hampered foreign reporters; instead, it categorically denied any distortion in its coverage of events. Yet, if you go to Rebecca MacKinnon’s blog on the Tibet information war, Reanimation, you’ll find evidence that CNN was caught out on its photo cropping. A former CNN journalist turned Hong Kong-based journalism educator, MacKinnon concludes, “In the end, you shouldn’t trust any information source—Western or Chinese, professional or amateur, digital or analog—until and unless they have earned your trust”.

How do journalists earn public trust? Transparency and accountability are key concepts here. The second strategy to encourage listening to different points of view is to test out well-known news ‘brands’ and see how they rate on those two counts. We look for what news organisations tell the public to expect from journalists, using a ‘click test’ (how many clicks does it take to find a code of ethics or an editorial policy?). The results are fascinating.

The Australian Broadcasting Corporation, The New York Times, and the London Guardian offer comprehensive editorial policies but they are accessible only by downloading very large files. The People’s Daily (English version) has nothing on editorial policy but provides a copy of the Chinese Constitution within three clicks (!). Mexico’s prestigious newspaper La Reforma demands a subscription from anyone who wants to know more ‘About Us’. CNN is different again; its codes of conduct are found offsite on the Corporate Governance site of parent company, Time Warner.

By way of contrast, Al-Jazeera offers the most direct access to a code of ethics with a global message that we’ve found so far. It says: “Treat our audiences with due respect and address every issue or story with due attention to present a clear, factual and accurate picture while giving full consideration to the feelings of victims of crime, war, persecution and disaster, their relatives and our viewers, and to individual privacy and public decorum”.

Yes, you read correctly, these journalists will respect people’s feelings! Rhetorical flourish aside, this code offers a powerful message to estranged audiences looking for alternatives to the warmongering that has crept into international news since 2001. It also codifies new public expectations of journalists.

Why is it that so much is expected of journalists in the world today? The answer to that question depends, of course, on what you think journalists do. So, our third listening strategy has been to talk about what makes news important in different societies.

That discussion came alive in the hands of one classroom visitor, editor-in-chief of Indonesia’s national newsweekly magazine Tempo, Mr Bambang Harymurti. He described press freedom as his personal jihad, arguing journalism is at the front line of democratisation processes because it is the people’s best resource against authoritarian rule. But, one student asked, how do journalists overcome their fear of freedom? Practice, came the reply. What if we cannot lose our fear, the student insisted? It was a genuine appeal for help, from one professional to another. There is no easy way to gain confidence, Harymurti told him. Right now, Indonesia has the third chance in its modern history to win democracy. We would be foolish not to try.

In some parts of the world, journalism is losing public appeal, struggling to adapt to digital technology and obsessed with making money.

Yet, other stories about journalism emerge when we take a broader, global view. There is more to it than making content. Authentic and meaningful information connects people with each other by making connections for them. Journalists connect soaring global food prices to biofuel subsidies, and riots in Haiti, Cameroon, Indonesia and Egypt. Journalists connect governments to farmers’ unfilled demands for fertiliser, seeds and animal feed. Without journalism, their misery would be silent as well as senseless. The internationalisation of journalism education provides a timely reminder that the oldest and best form of social networking is, in fact, journalism. There’s a lesson in that for all of us.

Dr Penny O’Donnell
Leading up to becoming an Associate Dean

I would describe myself as a lifelong learner who has had many challenges and opportunities through my educational experiences, employment experiences and interactions with peers, colleagues, students, service users, family and friends. As with many of my colleagues I strive to seek a balance in my life so as to fulfill my various roles including teaching and learning, research, and management, with integrity, creativity and enjoyment.

Prior to my employment at the University of Sydney I had extensive practice experience as a social worker and as a former triple certificate registered nurse. I worked with marginalised service users in community health, family support and child protection, in both health and welfare settings for over 20 years. I was awarded an APA from the University of Sydney in 1994 and completed my PhD on ‘Policy in Action’ which related to NSW statutory child protection workers’ responses to child emotional abuse notifications. I then obtained employment as a researcher on a domestic violence and child protection ARC project for approximately 2 years. These experiences highlighted for me the importance of understanding the wider social and political context and realising that for change to occur in any organisation the processes are just as important as outcomes. I base my teaching in these practice and research experiences which increase my credibility with undergraduate and postgraduate students, academic peers and professional colleagues.

This is my ninth year working as an academic in the Social Work and Policy Studies program in the Faculty of Education and Social Work. As a new academic I had the opportunity to complete the Graduate Certificate in Educational Studies (Higher Education) through the Institute for Teaching and Learning. This not only increased my thirst for providing the best possible learning experiences for undergraduate and postgraduate students but provided me with rich networking opportunities with academics across a number of faculties and ITL. I then continued my association with ITL as a mentor to other academics undertaking the Grad Cert. I also had the opportunity of participating as a project team member in the joint faculty Teaching Improvement Fund project on Leadership in Mentoring with Economics and Business and our faculty. One of the main lessons from this project for me was the importance of supportive faculty cultures where staff are valued and recognised through constructive collaboration with colleagues including faculty leaders.

As our Bachelor of Social Work program adopts an Issue Based Learning approach I have taught across most units of study in the undergraduate program including Field Education. Our program is based on team teaching enabling me to learn a lot from colleagues over the years. We seek feedback from students regularly through a variety of approaches such as our unit of study and course consultative committees, in addition to administrating formal USE. In terms of ‘closing the loop’, we endeavour to communicate back to students how this is used in our review and development of the units of study.

In regards to our postgraduate program I have had the opportunity of coordinating the Social Research unit of study for 7 years. As I have a passion for practice research...
and continue to be engaged in various research projects, (e.g. Safety Planning: Child Protection and Domestic Violence; Dementia and Community Care; Parents and Palliative Care of Children; eLearning) this has enabled me to share my research skills and knowledge with both coursework and higher degree research students. I am always amazed by the commitment and competing demands on students who are often expert practitioners in their various fields. It has been through my ongoing research on practice and teaching, and the dissemination of it at international and national conferences that I have had rich learning, networking and cultural opportunities in countries such as New Zealand, South Africa, Chile, Peru, Canada, South Korea, Japan, Scotland and England.

The key qualities I bring to my student-centred teaching and learning are respect, openness, listening ability, reflective ability, responsiveness, humour, enthusiasm, work planning and organisation. It is these same qualities plus a few more which I endeavour to enact in my current role as Associate Dean Learning and Teaching and in my role as eLearning Academic Convenor for the HASS cluster.

The focus of my attention as Associate Dean Learning and Teaching

I commenced as Associate Dean Learning and Teaching at the beginning of this year after having acted in the position in semester 2, 2007. The wheels were well and truly in motion as I sought to clarify with our faculty’s Learning and Teaching committee members what would be our faculty’s three learning and teaching priorities. These were then ratified by our Faculty Management Committee which was key to ensuring that the necessary resources required to operationalise the priorities would be available. The three priorities are bolded in the diagram which outlines the areas of staff support and systems and processes in our faculty which are in place or being further developed as a means of improving students’ experiences.

In the operationalisation of these three priorities there has been a mixed response by staff. Nevertheless, three questions continually guide my assessment/evaluation of the particular L&T activity or implementation of policies namely:

1. What worked well or not so well?
2. How could it be improved/changed next time?
3. How can I as a leader contribute to a positive way forward?

There are a number of academics in our faculty working hard on a range of TIES projects. Some of these are in collaboration with other faculties such as Enhancing HASS Students’ Experiences Through Blended Learning Opportunities in the faculties of Arts, Law, Conservatorium of Music and our faculty. Another project, Embedding Diversity: Towards a Culturally Inclusive Pedagogy project has provided staff with amazing opportunities which you can read in the article by Alyson Simpson and Jane Moore on page 4. These projects and our other TIES projects aim to enhance students’ learning experiences.

In conclusion, supportive faculty cultures just don’t happen but require resources, systems and hard work on everyone’s part. At this point in time I have come to realise that taking on the role of Associate Dean Learning and Teaching is not for the faint hearted. I am grateful for the ongoing support of my colleagues in the Social Work and Policy Studies program; to colleagues in our faculty’s Learning and Teaching committee including administrative support staff and project managers; to colleagues in the Faculty Management committee; to colleagues in ITL and to the university’s community of Associate Deans Learning and Teaching who provide a listening ear and guidance, to ensure I keep on track in striving to improve students’ experiences in the Faculty of Education and Social Work.
A book that may interest those supervising research postgraduates for whom English is a second (or third) language is *Thesis and dissertation writing in a second language: A handbook for supervisors* (Routledge, 2007). It was written by Professor Brian Paltridge, of the University of Sydney’s Faculty of Education, and Dr Sue Starfield, Director of the Learning Centre at the University of New South Wales and a Visiting Fellow in their Department of Linguistics – each of whom has had considerable experience working with multilingual students writing research in their second or third language.

The first few chapters provide a general overview of some important issues that may need explicit unpacking, such as disciplinary differences. To help students learn to identify typical versus atypical aspects of a thesis in their disciplinary area, for example, it is suggested that supervisors ask their students to use library or online searching to locate three different theses in their area and three outside their area, to examine the table of contents from each, and to analyse the similarities and differences between them.

Other issues discussed in the introductory chapters include distinctions between conserving, critiquing and extending knowledge, ways of increasing one’s cross-cultural sensitivity, and short writing tasks to get students started – such as having them complete these sentences in 25 words: ‘Debate centres on the issue of …’ and ‘There is still work to be done on …’ (p. 48, quoting Murray, 2002, p. 98).

The chapter on research proposals outlines the purpose and key sections that need to be addressed, and the chapter on overall structure draws on Paltridge’s prior research to delineate common organisational patterns at both thesis and chapter level.

The remaining chapters each address a particular section of a thesis – namely, introduction, background, methodology, results, discussions and conclusions, and abstract and acknowledgements. Short extracts from digitally archived PhDs are annotated to illustrate key points from the literature; for example, the chapter on writing introductions shows how an overview section manages to establish a research territory, indicate a gap, extend previous knowledge, and so on (citing Swales & Feak, 1994, and others), while the chapter on methodology lists typical examiner comments on that section, such as the methodology used in a thesis not being sufficiently linked to methodological literature (citing King, 1996).

The final chapter comprises an annotated bibliography of online and in-print resources that can provide additional guidance to supervisors and their students.

Drawing on scholarly literature from applied linguistics (especially English for Academic Purposes) and from research education and development, this book clearly and succinctly outlines key concepts, common pitfalls, and practical activities that may generate helpful supervisor-student discussions about the sorts of issues that students writing research in a second language often find challenging. With internationalisation, more and more supervisors are likely to be working with second-language writers, so this book will remain a useful resource.

**Dr Cynthia Nelson**

Institute for Teaching and Learning

**Notes**

(These references are cited as they appear in the book.)


## Conferences 2009

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<td><strong>International Conference on Management Education and Practice</strong>&lt;br&gt;20 to 22 February&lt;br&gt;Bayombong, Nueva Vizcaya, Philippines&lt;br&gt;&lt;br&gt;Website: <a href="http://www.smu.edu.ph">http://www.smu.edu.ph</a></td>
<td><strong>The SoTL Commons</strong>&lt;br&gt;An International Conference for the Scholarship of Teaching &amp; Learning&lt;br&gt;Home&lt;br&gt;11 to 13 March&lt;br&gt;Statesboro, Georgia (USA), Georgia, United States&lt;br&gt;&lt;br&gt;Website: <a href="http://www.georgiasouthern.edu/ijsotl/conference/2009/index.htm">http://www.georgiasouthern.edu/ijsotl/conference/2009/index.htm</a></td>
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<td><strong>Postgraduate Supervision Research and Practice</strong>&lt;br&gt;27 to 30 April&lt;br&gt;Stellenbosch, Western Cape, South Africa&lt;br&gt;&lt;br&gt;Website: <a href="http://www.postgraduate2009.co.za">http://www.postgraduate2009.co.za</a></td>
<td><strong>LIHE 09 - 2nd International Symposium</strong>&lt;br&gt;Improving Students Learning Outcomes in Higher Education&lt;br&gt;31 May to 4 June&lt;br&gt;Aghia Marina, Aegina Island, Greece&lt;br&gt;&lt;br&gt;Website: <a href="http://www.lihe.wordpress.com">http://www.lihe.wordpress.com</a>&lt;br&gt;&lt;br&gt;Teaching in Higher Education Between the Tides&lt;br&gt;17 to 20 June&lt;br&gt;Fredericton, NB, Canada&lt;br&gt;&lt;br&gt;Website: <a href="http://www.unb.ca/stlhe">http://www.unb.ca/stlhe</a></td>
<td><strong>LIHE 09 - 2nd International Symposium</strong>&lt;br&gt;Improving Students Learning Outcomes in Higher Education&lt;br&gt;31 May to 4 June&lt;br&gt;Aghia Marina, Aegina Island, Greece&lt;br&gt;&lt;br&gt;Website: <a href="http://www.lihe.wordpress.com">http://www.lihe.wordpress.com</a>&lt;br&gt;&lt;br&gt;<strong>HERDSA 2009</strong>&lt;br&gt;The Student Experience&lt;br&gt;6 to 9 July&lt;br&gt;Darwin, Northern Territory, Australia&lt;br&gt;&lt;br&gt;Website: <a href="http://conference.herdsa.org.au/2009/">http://conference.herdsa.org.au/2009/</a></td>
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