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Teaching excellence : an illusive goal in higher education teaching and learning

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**TEACHING EXCELLENCE: AN ILLUSIVE GOAL IN HIGHER
EDUCATION TEACHING AND LEARNING**

**A portfolio submitted in partial fulfilment for the award of Doctor of
Education**

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March 2013

I certify that this portfolio does not, to the best of my knowledge and belief:

(i) incorporate without acknowledgment any material previously submitted for a degree or diploma in any institution of higher education; or

(2) contain any material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the text of this

Heather Ilma Sparrow

March 28th 2013

Abstract

In the last decades of the 20th Century, and through the first decade of the 21st Century, both the natural world and human society have experienced dramatic change. Contemporary society world-wide has high expectations of the contribution that universities can make in helping people learn to live with change, to lead change, to manage change, and to support improvement in all spheres of life. The global community seeks 'excellence' across all higher education roles: community engagement and leadership, research and innovation, and teaching and learning. However, universities are not always regarded as effective in fulfilling the needs of students, business or communities well.

This portfolio takes excellence in teaching and learning as its central theme. It presents a framework of seven lenses, through which the concept of excellence is analyzed and evaluated; and provides a series of eight papers, reporting on six research projects that investigate different aspects of teaching excellence. The portfolio includes selected examples from a body of work that was undertaken across a ten-year period, within a single university. All the projects were conducted as authentic workplace activities, guided by two primary intentions. Firstly to develop better understandings of the local context, so as to support enhanced decision-making about improving teaching and learning; and secondly, to make positive and practical changes that actively improve the quality of experience and outcomes for all stakeholders.

A variety of research techniques have been used across different studies, however, the overall approach is qualitative, with a focus on rich data collection, analysis and interpretation that respects diverse voices and perspectives. The research approach aims to achieve mutual benefits for participants, researchers, the institution and the wider teaching and learning community. As is appropriate to workplace research, collaboration with administrators and executive leaders, teaching colleagues, research partners and students is a key feature of every study, with the doctoral candidate taking different roles and responsibilities within project teams.

In simplistic terms 'teaching excellence' typically implies agreement from a range of stakeholders that the university has relevant, strong programs; good resources and facilities; positive learning and employment environments; competent, highly effective teachers and learners; and perhaps most significantly that it achieves positive desirable outcomes. However, excellence is a problematic and contested concept. Stakeholders have quite

different priorities, values and expectations. The needs and preferences of students, employers, the disciplines and professions, academics, and communities, can often act in direct opposition. This can create significant difficulties in defining purpose and goals, and agreeing appropriate investment and resource levels, teaching approaches, and student outcomes. Our knowledge and understanding of effective strategies for teaching, learning and assessment has expanded greatly in recent times; however, universities face many challenges in creating, sustaining and demonstrating teaching excellence. The projects in this portfolio do not offer neat and easy solutions, however they provide extremely valuable evidence: firstly as new knowledge to support local improvement; and secondly to contribute rich, deep insight to affirm, extend and challenge scholarship of teaching and learning in the wider academic community.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to begin my acknowledgments with a dedication that I have held in my mind since the start of my studies, and has acted to drive me forward when I sometimes thought the journey too hard to continue. In keeping with my research value for narrative and for heuristics, I will tell it in a very personal voice, in story form:

I grew up in post-war England in an era of binary education. Towards the end of my primary schooling, I took the 11 plus examination, along with all others in my cohort. I was judged not to have the intellectual and academic capacity to attend grammar school, and subsequently spent the next 5 years at the local 11-15 girls secondary modern school. The building was Victorian, old, shabby, uncomfortable; the curriculum was limited, and there were few facilities for science, music or modern languages. Even the sports field was a forty-minute walk from school. But, I was indeed privileged in my education. Firstly, by living in the company of peers who were bright, capable, interesting, companionable and utterly resilient, often in the face of quite challenging lives. Secondly, by finding myself taught by a group of teachers who, despite the limited resources and provisions, were creative, ingenious, and quite determined to offer students the very best opportunities and support they could. And perhaps even more significantly believed always in our worth and potential.

At 16, I, along with several peers, transferred to the grammar school, to complete school studies. There was a warm and friendly welcome from many, but others doubted our academic abilities. At a career guidance meeting, I was asked by a senior staff member what I was planning to do: "I'm, thinking of going to university", I said. There was a slight hesitation, then a cold, hard voice replied, "People like you don't go to university". I have battled the sense of failure rooted in these early judgments throughout my life. But it seems that 'people like me' do go to university after all: And I dedicate this portfolio to the teachers who believed in us, and to all my school peers, in gratitude for giving me the determination to prove 'them' wrong.

Since that time, I have encountered many inspirational teachers. I have worked alongside the very best of colleagues who have collaborated with me, sharing enthusiasm, expertise, and thinking. I have enjoyed learning alongside many students, who consistently challenged me to try new things and see the world in different ways. I have wonderful friends, who have put out their hands to help me up and push me along. And, I have been supported by a family who have been unstinting in their encouragement and practical help. I acknowledge you all. You make it possible for 'people like me', not only to go, but to succeed at university.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION TO THE PORTFOLIO

This chapter is intended to provide a simple introduction to the portfolio. It includes: an overview of the Portfolio; background information about the context of teaching and learning in Australian higher education relevant to the portfolio projects; and, an analysis of the distinctive nature, purpose and potential value of this education doctorate.

Overview

This portfolio presents a series of research and development projects based around the theme of teaching excellence. The projects were conducted over a 8-year period between 2002 and 2010. They each have a research orientation, but the primary intent was to actively improve teaching and learning in the local context. In each project, decisions about the aims, intentions, methodology, implementation and dissemination of project findings and outcomes, have been made through mindful balancing of a set of five research purposes, which were to:

1. contribute to improving teaching and learning in the local context (a new Australian university);
2. contribute to academic and professional knowledge (higher education teaching and learning) through scholarship;
3. demonstrate value and respect for university teachers;
4. act ethically and for the mutual benefit of all stakeholders, participants, and self as the doctoral candidate; and,
5. develop personally, professionally and academically.

As is appropriate to practice-based, improvement-focused research, there is a strong emphasis on collaboration through team approaches and participatory action-research. As a doctoral candidate, I play different roles within and across the portfolio projects: researcher, professional colleague, participant, and/or friend. Commitment to the ethic of mutual benefit in research means that there is also always an intention to respect and respond to the needs and preferences of stakeholders. Power and control in the research activities is therefore distributed, with the doctoral candidate playing a central role in some projects, and a peripheral role in others.

The concept of teaching excellence is both complex and contested. Chapter Two uses seven different lenses to illustrate and explore a diversity of definitions and perspectives. The chapter draws on a wide range of literature to highlight significant debates, issues and dilemmas, but with a focus on Australian higher education across the last 30 years. The

theme of teaching excellence adopts a set of key questions that provide a coherent framework linking the series of projects:

- What is teaching excellence?
- Why does teaching excellence matter?
- How might we achieve teaching excellence?

Each project in the portfolio addresses these generic questions from three perspectives:

- Firstly, from a professional work-place perspective, that asks: What should we (the teachers and educational leaders) do right now to improve teaching and learning in our university?
- Secondly, from an academic-research perspective that asks: How can we (higher education researchers, scholars and practitioners) develop our understanding of teaching excellence, and in what ways can we most effectively contribute to improving teaching and learning in all universities?
- Thirdly, from a personal perspective, I ask: what can I learn, what can I do, to become a more effective researcher, teacher, leader and a better person?

In addition, the projects respond to more specific questions both pre-determined and emergent, which are relevant to the particular investigations.

My approach to research across the projects is that of a 'bricoleur' (Hammersley, 2008; Kincheloe, 2001; West, 2001). I have taken aspects of different methodologies and techniques that align coherently with the particular goals, questions, context, and resources of each project. Because the focus of this body of work is complex human behaviours and understandings, qualitative methods have been used extensively (Delamont, 2012). The philosophy and tools of many different qualitative research traditions have been influential in these studies. Chapter Three provides insights into the 'bricolage', with a particular emphasis on issues relevant to action research and insider-research conducted in a university setting.

In Chapter Four, each of the projects is presented as an independent study in a form of a refereed journal article, conference papers, or unpublished manuscripts. They report on work accomplished at different stages in the study period. Each project is contextualized through a commentary written at the end of the study period. The commentaries:

- demonstrate the relationship of the project to the overall theme;
- clarify the specific contribution of the doctoral student in the project;

- provide updates on any relevant post publication developments;
- provide reflections on the research process, the findings and the outcomes; and,
- identify significant questions for future consideration and research.

A final chapter reflects on the doctoral process, the research approach, and the theme of teaching excellence, drawing together insights, issues, dilemmas and questions arising from the whole body of work.

Projects

The projects in this portfolio include:

1) Rewarding teaching excellence: This is a development project, including the design and implementation of a Teaching Activity Index (TAI) adapted from a Research Activity Index (RAI), to acknowledge and reward excellence in teaching, particularly in large undergraduate classes. The project is presented in the form of a sole author, unpublished conference paper, presented at a regional conference (Sparrow, 2004).

2) High jumps, hurdles, carrots and sticks: This project is a study of middle managers' perspectives on the impact and effectiveness of teaching and learning improvement strategies. The report is in the form of a sole author refereed conference paper, presented at an international conference (Sparrow, 2005).

3) Award-winning teachers: This project is a longitudinal study of the perspectives and experiences of award winning teachers. Three papers are presented that draw on the data.

3A) Teaching awards: Rhetoric and realities: This paper investigates the experience and perceptions of award winners about the process of applying for awards and the match between the intentions of the awards and their actual impact on teachers and teaching. The report is in the form of a sole author unpublished manuscript (Sparrow, 2010).

3B) Teaching awards and their impact on university teachers' sense of self-worth: This paper reports on one of the many themes emerging from the longitudinal study: the strong relationship between award winning teachers' beliefs about the quality and impact of their teaching, to their overall sense of worth. The work is presented in the form of a sole author refereed conference paper, (Sparrow, 2008).

•3C) **Surviving and sustaining teaching excellence: A narrative of ‘entrapment’:** This paper offers a conceptual discussion of ‘sustainability’ in the context of teaching excellence. It draws on research data collected from across several of the projects in the Portfolio. It is presented in the form of a sole-author, refereed conference paper (Sparrow, 2009).

4) **Valuing higher education teachers:** This collaborative project responded to concerns about the well-being of sessional teachers and the effectiveness of faculty practices in managing and supporting them. It is presented in the form of an international refereed conference paper (Sparrow & Cullity, 2008).

5) **Student feedback and teacher evaluation:** This is an action research project conducted by a group of academics who taught together in a teacher education program. It investigates student perspectives and reflections on the meaning and legitimacy for student feedback on teaching quality, as collected through a formal student evaluation survey. It is presented in the form of a collaborative published journal article (Wren, Sparrow, Northcote, & Sharp, 2009).

6) **Student goals, persistence and success:** This is a research paper written from data collected and analyzed, as part of a collaborative Australian Learning and Teaching Council (ALTC) funded project investigating student success. It is included in the portfolio to emphasize the inter-dependence between teaching excellence and student learning. The refereed paper was presented at an international conference in Liverpool, UK (Sparrow, Kinnear, Boyce, Middleton, Cullity, (2008).

In all cases collaborating researchers, co-authors, conference organizers and publishers have consented to the works being included in this portfolio and have agreed the statements of contribution embedded in individual project commentaries.

The contemporary higher education context

The contemporary world environment is indeed quite extraordinary. In the last decades of the 20th Century, and through the first decade of the 21st Century, both the natural world and human society have experienced dramatic change. Significant contributors to change include an exponential increase in the human population, its distribution and the associated impact of people on the environment; rapidly accelerating advances in technology; and, the development of trans-national relationships and interactions in every sphere of life, often referred to as ‘globalization’.

Education has a pivotal role to play in the changing global environment. It is charged with the responsibility of helping people learn to live with change, to lead change, manage change, and to support improvement in all spheres of life through change. Society has particularly high expectations of the contribution that universities can make and a generalized belief in their power and value. Daxner, for example claimed universities are:

... the key social institution within civil society for not only addressing society's capital needs but also effecting social change and shaping the political socialization of the next generation of leaders in business, government and society. Neither religious institutions, media, arts, nor the complex administration of the modern state can reach people's minds and consciousness with comparable depth and impact. (Daxner, 2003, p8)

Despite continuing generalized support for the value of higher education, and a substantial world-wide increase in the number of people seeking to access higher education, universities are not always regarded as effective in fulfilling the needs of students, business or communities well. They are sometimes described as outmoded institutions; they are often criticized for their failure to embrace and lead change or even respond to it or manage it well; and their capacity to effectively support students in achieving their goals is seriously questioned. Harsh criticisms of universities have a long tradition (Bok, 1992; Eells, 1934), but became increasingly influential towards the end of the twentieth century (CQAHE1994; Dearing, 1997; West, 1998; Williams, 2012). Whilst some negative judgments made about the capacities of the sector as a whole may be unjustified or unfair, there is certainly evidence that the global community has high expectations of education and that stakeholders aspirations are not always met.

From a university perspective, the task of meeting high community expectations is quite challenging. Universities are themselves sites of change and are subject to complex global forces, for example:

- increasingly complex demands from diverse stakeholders who have differing aims and purposes for higher education (Shah, Nair, & Wilson, 2011);
- dramatic increases in the number and diversity of students, and accompanying rise in staff to student ratios (ACER, 2011; AVCC, 2008; Universities Australia, 2010);
- economic and market forces leading to instability and decreases in funding, and changes in student demand (Marginson 2012; Marks, 2007; Raciti, 2010);

- technological advances that demand new skills and different ways of learning and working (Herrington, Reeves, & Oliver, 2007); and,
- governance that creates a quite new managerial and accountability environment (Salmi, 2009).

In this context, the role of the academic has become increasingly demanding. Workplace demands on academics have increased. They must demonstrate achievement across multiple roles in research, community service and teaching. They are required to show great flexibility, diverse skills, and complex knowledge. At the same time, many authorities argue that the conditions of employment for many academics have become increasingly less favourable. There is evidence, for example, of a loss of public esteem and status; loss of professional autonomy and influence; lowering of comparative salaries; high levels of casual employment; inadequate resources and support; and, long working hours and high levels of stress (Lazarsfeld Jensen, & Morgan, 2009).

Whilst the challenges universities face impact across all academic roles, the position of university teaching and learning has been highlighted as particularly demanding and problematic. Dramatic changes in the student population and profile are significant, for example:

- Student numbers have increased and have not been matched by increases in the number of teachers. Classes are often much larger, and teachers' workloads have increased through the demand for more classes, more student interactions and heavier marking loads (AVCC, 2008).
- Students are increasingly diverse. They have different goals, expectations and needs (Kinnear, Boyce, Sparrow, Middleton, & Cullity, 2008; Shaw, 2009). Teachers need to cater for difference, and this can be complex, demanding a deep knowledge base about teaching and learning and sophisticated planning, organization, and delivery skills (Haig, 2002).
- Students have more complex lives, and many are juggling paid work, demanding domestic lives and study (Salamonson, Everett, Koch, Andrew, & Davidson, 2012). They want study experiences that fit in with their lives. They are often time poor and want (need) well organized, readily available materials, flexible timetables, multiple delivery modes and instant access to personalized support from teachers. This demands teachers make more elaborate preparation, create more explicit materials, provide more resources using of different media, demonstrate capability across diverse modes of delivery including large lectures, tutorial and seminar groups, online

teaching, and are flexible about when and how they interact with students (Brown, & Adam, 2010).

- Students come from diverse backgrounds. They exhibit a wide range of cultural and linguistic differences; many come from non-traditional academic backgrounds, for example they may be the first person in their family to access university, or access university through non-academic pathways (Kinnear, Boyce, Sparrow, Middleton, & Cullity, 2008). Whilst these students have many abilities and great potential they often need a high level of support through their transition into university and in developing the skills they need to be successful (Kift, Nelson, & Clarke, 2010; Nelson, Clarke, & Kift, 2011). Few teachers have the knowledge, skills, resources or time to provide the level of assistance needed by some students.
- students want diverse outcomes from their study, and these often include practical, employment outcomes that have not traditionally been the focus of many university courses (Bridgstock, 2009; Støren, & Aamodt, 2010). This demands that teachers become expert in designing new kinds of course and provide a much wider range of learning opportunities that include community and workplace learning (Boud, & Solomon, 2001).

Universities' finances have altered. In Australia, as in much of the developed world this has meant a significant reduction in secure government funding, and increasing dependence on student fees and diverse commercial enterprise (Marginson, 2012; Teece, 2012). In this market economy, universities are dependent on maintaining healthy enrolments, so they actively compete for students. They must attract students, retain them and graduate them with capabilities that are seen to be worthwhile. The contemporary university needs to provide the kind of tertiary education that students want and in the way they want it. Good teaching matters, and the community expects excellence from a university.

Teaching excellence is a problematic and contested concept, but typically implies agreement from a range of stakeholders that the university has relevant, strong programs; good resources and facilities; positive learning environments; and excellent teachers. Definitions of excellence in teachers are equally complex, although there are many well-acknowledged articulations about the nature of 'good teaching'. National excellence award schemes from all countries around the world, for example, are quite consistent in their selection criteria: Good teachers engage and motivate students effectively; design and implement relevant interesting curriculum through active tasks and fair, valid assessments; communicate effectively; care for and respect students, and are scholarly in their approach to teaching. As a higher education practitioner-researcher, I take the position that a capacity and willingness

to actively engage with change, so as to achieve positive improvement outcomes is a critical feature in contemporary teaching and learning contexts. However, I also acknowledge that there are many different perspectives that influence judgments and that all notions of good teaching are context dependent and will vary across time and place.

Whilst there is strong advocacy for high quality education, achieving excellence in teaching and learning is not easy. As argued above, expectations are high, goals are diverse and changing, the task is complex, and resources are limited. In addition, the human resources for teaching can be problematic:

- Academics are often unqualified as teachers. Whilst university teachers are usually gifted, talented people with very high-level discipline and professional expertise, they are seldom trained and qualified as teachers, and rarely have sufficient time to invest in their own learning and development (Knight, Tait, & Yorke, 2006). Universities do not always have a sufficiently knowledgeable and skilful teaching force.
- Academics are often researchers rather than teachers. Many academics are employed for their research expertise rather than interest in teaching. Whilst some are quite outstanding teachers, others are neither interested or skilled in teaching: Universities do not always have enough people who are sufficiently interested and committed to teaching or willing to take on leadership roles in teaching and learning (Åkerlind, 2007).
- Many university courses require academics to have professional expertise and currency as well as academic credibility. In the fast changing world it is difficult for individuals to maintain professional expertise and experience whilst also conducting an academic career (Gibbs, & Coffey, 2004).
- Teaching is often done by casual staff. Some universities are very dependent on casual staff, particularly in undergraduate teaching. This makes organizational learning and capacity building difficult (Brown, 2008; Percy, et al. 2008).
- Teachers tend to be mature-aged. The age profile of university teachers is skewed towards people over 45. They have excellent experience and expertise, but need to work hard to ensure their knowledge and skills do not become out of date. Learning, adapting, updating and changing is a constant requirement for most staff (Hugo, & Morriss, 2010).

External agencies such as governments, professional bodies and discipline experts, and institutionally based university leaders are adopting a wide range of strategies intended to improve teaching and learning. Examples include:

- introduction of strong policy frameworks and guidelines;
- formalizing of performance standards;
- quality assurance and auditing of teaching and learning including external reviews with public reporting;
- provision of teaching awards to encourage, recognize and reward good teaching;
- provision of grants to support research and development in teaching and learning;
- provision of support services to teachers through instructional designers and technologists, information specialists, academic skills advisors;
- increasing support (and requirements) for training, mentoring, professional development and qualifications in teaching;
- formalized processes of performance management to identify strengths and weaknesses and plan for improvement;
- student evaluation and feedback, with public feedback on teachers' performance as judged by students; and,
- flexible employment conditions, and promotions strategies that recognize diverse contributions.

In some cases these strategies are being applied quite assertively both internally and externally through institutional legal, resource and governance controls. Whilst many of the strategies are well received, others are less popular. In particular, some people articulate frustration about unrealistic expectations, heavy workloads, extensive and unnecessary paperwork and heavy-handed bureaucracy that does not respect the knowledge, skills and expertise of the teachers.

Whilst the description of context given above is limited in its scope, it reflects an understanding of university teaching and learning that is alluded to in almost all recent research and development reports (for examples see: Bradley, Noonan, Nugent, & Scales, 2008; Chalmers, 2010; UK Higher Education Academy, 2011). It is clear that contemporary society has very high expectations of the role universities can play in building a 'better' world. The context for higher education is complex and challenging, and there is evidence that universities are not always successful in fulfilling their missions. The need to develop ever-deeper understandings about teaching and learning, and more effective ways to working to achieve the goals of higher education, has never been greater.

The nature, purpose and potential value of this education doctorate

Research practice is quite diverse, and in the context of doctoral studies the definitions of what counts as 'good' research and notions of doctoral quality are highly contested (Malfroy, 2005) and vary in place and time (Loxley & Seery, 2012). There is considerable diversity within and between doctoral programs, however, some broad trends and patterns are evident that suggest a rising interest in applied research relevant to the 'knowledge economy' (Boud & Tennant, 2006; Maxwell, 2003; Seddon, 2000; Scott, Brown, Lunt, & Thorne, 2004). Lester, (2004) points to a change in emphasis from Mode One knowledge ("...apparently objective knowledge that is generated by researchers about practice, and applied to it", p. 578), to Mode Two knowledge ("created and used by practitioners in the context of their practice", p. 578). This shift has been accompanied by a changing relationship between the academy, funding agencies (including government), the professions, and the workplace that gives greater authority to stakeholders outside of universities to set the agenda for what is needed (and funded), and what should be valued (Gibbons, 2000; Scott, 2002; Shah, Nair, & Wilson, 2012; Lee, Brennan & Green, 2009).

This research portfolio is a higher degree professional education doctorate, undertaken across the first decade of the 21st Century, and situated in a new university in Australia. It includes both Mode One and Mode Two research, but is firmly focused on improving teaching and learning in practice. In this context, the decisions made about the selection (or rejection) of research topics, questions, data collection, analysis and interpretation, and the approach to reporting, are derived from a quite complex interplay between:

- the formal requirements of the academic doctoral program;
- the needs, perspectives and demands of the workplace which is the site of study;
- the intentions, aspirations and preferences of the individual researcher;
- overarching purposes, aims and intentions of the research undertaken; and,
- the changing values, attitudes and practices of the global research community.

Maxwell (2003) identified concerns arising from research in workplace settings that needed serious consideration, for example, "... intellectual property ownership, liability and confidentiality" (p. 281), and confusion about the choice of appropriate writing styles for academic and workplace audiences. Malfroy (2005), describes some difficulties arising from the exploratory nature of the research environment, with implications for continuing negotiation about what constitutes quality research:

Both supervisors and students struggled with uncertainty and confusion, partly due to disjunction in expectations, the creative tension of doctoral research and the relatively new research territory of the programs. (p. 177)

The contested nature of professional doctorates (McAlpine & Norton, 2006) meant that at the commencement of this series of portfolio studies, there was no consistent agreement within the global academic community about the nature, purpose and value of doctoral research; nor common practice across universities or between countries. Whilst the environment was therefore somewhat uncertain, this invited creativity and provided opportunities for innovation in doctoral research. My portfolio is a collection of loosely connected work-based studies that take up the challenge of a different frame for doctoral studies. This is exemplified for example in the:

- strong use of a personal voice;
- open and honest sharing of the research journey;
- integration of professional work and reflective practice and academic study; including selection and implementation of authentic research and development projects;
- valuing of breadth and diversity of investigations; and,
- inclusion of collective research work.

Across the decade of my studies, there has been a very active debate about research methodology, and some significant developments in philosophy, practice and particularly in tools for analysis. This has continually opened up new possibilities and opportunities. As a doctoral studies research-practitioner, I found myself in a “messy lowland”, (Schon, 1995, p. 28) at the intersection of competing purposes, values and goals. Research decisions throughout the period of study were confronted with multiple and changing perspectives and opportunities of academia, workplace and self. Some research decisions reflect responses to differing priorities and authorities, which were at times in conflict. A unified, coherent and consistent approach to research was neither appropriate nor pragmatically possible in the face of such competing agendas. Rather, an eclectic approach evolved incorporating multiple methodologies as judged to best juggle and satisfy the goals and purposes of different stakeholders (academia, institutional, workplace, researcher). Further, as these were always in a state of flux, so too the approach to research in this portfolio was varied, adapted and changed over time.

The formal requirements of the academic doctoral program

It is important to acknowledge the dynamic research influences arising from global, national and local debates about thinking about professional doctorates and the interests of different stakeholder groups. However, the perspectives of the specific institutional award program also played a very direct role in shaping research activities and methodologies. Much of the research presented in this portfolio commenced in 2002, although the writing of this portfolio responds to the guidelines provided in the Portfolio Handbook of May 2004. These guidelines conceptualize research as the exploration of, "...a theme via critical review and reflection, inquiry-based work and reporting and disseminating activities" (ECU Portfolio Handbook May 2004 p. 4). The guidelines identify the key purpose of the work as, "...making an original contribution to professional knowledge/and/or policy and/or practice in the workplace/professional context, through inquiry work that will involve data collection and analysis" (p. 4).

These requirements provided a broad framework, with a quite specific directive towards research with a workplace orientation, thus exerting a strong influence on the kinds of topics, issues, problems and consequently questions selected for research. In addition, the program outlines a set of Doctor of Education Competencies (ECU Portfolio Handbook May 2004, p. 18) that candidates must demonstrate. The need to actively manage the development of these competencies, and to demonstrate them through assessed and examined work also influenced the choice of research problem(s) the research questions, the methodology and reporting strategies. Some examples of the influence of the formal requirements include my decision to:

- prioritize collaborative research to enhance my capacity for team work and leadership;
- present early findings at conferences and colloquia to refine my research-orientated communication skills; and,
- explore the use of NVivo to increase my professional skills in relationship to technology.

The needs, perspectives and demands of the workplace

As argued above, the needs, perspectives and demands of the workplace have progressively influenced the conceptualization of research in doctoral programs. Using the workplace as the site of research creates a range of both limitations, constraints, expectations and opportunities. In the my own workplace, the specific management and institutional concerns

of the time set priorities for certain topics to be explored, and certain significant problems to be addressed. Examples of 'hot topics' emerging during the decade included:

- responding to changing government funding for teaching and learning (Marginson, 2012; Teece, 2012; Williams, 2012);
- meeting the challenges of the higher education quality agenda (Brown, 2012; Findlow, 2008; Kleijnen, Dolmans, Willems, & van Hout, 2011; Shah, Nair, & Wilson, 2011; TEQSA, 2012);
- managing the increased use of sessional and casual staff in teaching (Brown, Goodman, & Yasukawa, 2008; Percy, et al. 2008; Ryan, 2008);
- enhancing the use of technology in learning (Herrington, Herrington, Mantei, Olney, & Ferry, 2009; Kim, & Reeves, 2007); and,
- addressing the needs of large numbers of diverse students (Burdett, & Crossman, 2012; Kinnear, Boyce, Sparrow, Middleton, & Cullity, 2008; Shaw, 2009).

These topics influenced the choice of investigations pursued and the formulation of specific research questions (See Chapter Four: Projects). My role as an academic also changed over the 10-year period, creating different opportunities and focusing attention different priorities. For example, I assumed a responsibility for supporting staff applying for teaching awards, which directed my attention to the connection between teaching awards and improvements in teaching and learning; and, inspired curiosity in the experiences of award winning teachers. The problems, priorities and interests of the workplace, and the roles and responsibilities of the researcher-practitioner as an employee, not only influenced the research goals, topics and questions selected, but also had a significant impact on data collection and analysis. For example:

- University managers often wanted to develop their understandings of particular situations, people or phenomena, and exerted influence on the specific questions they wished to be pursued and sometimes the way it should be collected with pre-determined preferences for data display (both raw data and analysis).
- Collaboration with working teams required that data collection and analysis meet the perceived needs and interests of all team members (not just the doctoral candidate).
- The selection of participants and the timing of data collection and reflections on analysis depended upon their availability (typically needing to be aligned with teaching and research responsibilities; conference leave). Convenience was related to annual cycles of work as well as short-term commitments and capacities.

Planning for the dissemination of research findings was also influenced by workplace considerations impacting on the audience, purpose and subsequent style and timing of reporting. For example:

- The University's concern to raise the level of publications amongst academic staff led to pressure to publish work as journal articles.
- Management interest in evidence to support decision-making and for 'encouraging', tracking and measuring particular teaching behaviours and outcomes led to the need for Faculty and Institutional Reports, and particularly executive summaries with recommendations for action.
- Sensitivity about intellectual property, and professional and institutional information, meant some reporting of relevant investigations needed to be kept strictly confidential, whilst others needed to be shared with selected audiences, but not the wider academic and professional community. The highly competitive nature of universities in Australia exerted a pressure to avoid publishing anything that might attract negative media attention.

The intentions, aspirations and preferences of the individual researcher

As a doctoral student, my engagement with research was underpinned by a diversity of motivations, some quite specific goals and a set of pre-existing values, beliefs and preferences. Each played a part in the selection of methodology. I wanted to:

- select projects that I thought would have a positive impact on improving tertiary teaching and learning; and would contribute to improving teachers' lives and the way that teachers were valued;
- satisfy my intellectual curiosity about good teaching and answer the many questions I have about what it means to be a 'good teacher';
- work in ways that were, collaborative, collegial, respectful and ethical; and,
- use the research knowledge I already possessed, as well as explore new methodologies and improve my research skills through practical, hands on experience with data collection and analysis strategies.

As a research-practitioner, I saw that I had many different stakeholders to satisfy and therefore multiple roles to fulfill. Three roles in particular influenced my selection of methodologies:

a) **The independent researcher role:** In this role, I needed to make my own decisions about research goals and the selection of research methodologies to both develop and demonstrate my capacities as a researcher. I saw myself as learner, but also a research designer and leader. From this perspective, I envisaged participants as people I could learn from (they all had content and research knowledge relevant to my development as an independent researcher) but also as co-constructors of new knowledge.

b) **The research collaborator role:** In this role, I worked in authentic research partnerships with others, sharing decisions with them about research topics and questions, methodologies and dissemination of findings.

c) **The workplace professional role:** In this role, decisions about the research goals and methodology were negotiated with workplace managers and aimed at product/process development and innovation using research as evidence base.

Fulfilling multiple roles, inevitably demands shifts in interest, emphasis and priorities. Rigid adherence to a pre-conceived research plan could not allow the flexibility needed either to move between roles, or respond to changing circumstances, so a more fluid approach was essential. The connections between the projects presented in this portfolio are similarly fluid. However, they share the common purpose of seeking improving teaching and learning: aspiring to excellence across all the people and activities that contribute to better experiences and outcomes. The next chapter, will explore the concept of teaching excellence in greater depth, to reveal a few of the many meanings, assumptions and complications embodied in the term.

CHAPTER TWO

UNPACKING THE CONCEPT OF TEACHING EXCELLENCE

Introduction

This chapter grapples with the concept of teaching excellence: the theme of the portfolio. It presents selected theories, research and philosophies from the literature; identifies significant issues, dilemmas, controversies and gaps; and provides a teaching excellence web that both underpins and connects each portfolio project.

The concept of teaching excellence is complex, contested and dynamic. There is almost no aspect of teaching and learning that could not be included in any discussion about excellence. To create some meaningful boundaries to guide the discussion of the concept, I have structured the chapter around seven conceptual lenses:

- Teaching Excellence as VIRTUE
- Teaching Excellence as QUALITY
- Teaching Excellence as GOOD TEACHING
- Teaching Excellence as SCHOLARSHIP
- Teaching Excellence as STUDENT LEARNING
- Teaching Excellence as ELITE PERFORMANCE
- Teaching Excellence as a WHOLE OF SYSTEM COMMUNITY ENTERPRISE.

I believe these lenses serve to illustrate appropriately the great diversity of ways that people think about teaching excellence. They also highlight some of the most significant tensions, complications, impacts, outcomes and consequences relevant to the portfolio projects. Whilst I may refer in passing to the global context, and to ideas that have had a powerful influence on education at all levels throughout history, my focus is on teaching excellence in Australian higher education over the last three decades. Further discussion of literature that has specific relevance to individual projects presented in this portfolio is also provided later in the reports, papers and articles (Chapter 4). Wherever possible, I have tried to limit repetition, although some is necessary to sustain coherent arguments within and across the different components of the portfolio.

The seven different conceptualizations of teaching excellence are highly interdependent and the boundaries between them are fuzzy. I have chosen them as convenient tags to aid the organization and communication of complex ideas. The overlaps and relationships between each component are important. I will argue that each interpretation has relevance, but only proffers a limited perspective. It is the interweaving of all components that provides the most comprehensive mapping of the concept.

Teaching Excellence as VIRTUE

...it is well to have a cultivated intellect, a delicate taste, a candid, equitable, dispassionate mind, a noble and courteous bearing in the conduct of life; – these are the connatural qualities of a large knowledge; they are the objects of a University. (Newman, 1862, p. 110)

Anninos (2007 p. 308-310) provides a sound semasiological analysis of the term 'excellence', based on the writings of ancient Hellenes philosophers. He argues that *aristeia* (excellence in Hellenic) "...can be described as a situation/state of nature in which its compromising factors (for example, harmony, good, and knowledge) exist in their absolute and exceptionally good expression/form" (p. 308). His reading of the ancient texts tell us that for Homer, excellence was associated with noble birth, men (in thinking of the time) who were braver, mightier, and better than others. Socrates, Aristotle and Plato all saw excellence as the exemplification of ethical virtues, justice and beauty, attributes that might either be intrinsic to the individual from birth or learnt through experience, education, training and habituation (good actions). Further, they envisaged excellence as a fundamental element of prosperity, for both individual and society through the "harmonic combination of knowledge, power and desire" (p. 308). This notion of excellence has three hypostases: (1) A good person, (2) a good citizen, and (3) one who seeks both knowledge and truth. The understanding of Excellence as Virtue is echoed in many more recent philosophical writings that reflect on the purpose of a university and upon 'academic values' wherein teaching excellence is defined by the effective development of the particular human qualities of intellect, character and actions that we value as 'good', and 'honourable' (Daxner, 2003)

The 'civilizing' purposes of a university education are evident in government policy statements of many countries. For example, in Australia, the purposes of higher education as described in the Higher Education Report for the 2003-2005 Triennium (Commonwealth Department of Education Science & Training, 2002) include to: "inspire and enable individuals to develop their capabilities to the highest potential throughout their lives for

personal growth and fulfillment”... and to... “enable individuals to contribute to a democratic, civilised society and promote the tolerance and debate that underpins it” (p. 1).

The values we hold about virtue, and ultimately therefore about the purpose of higher education are, however, contested. The notion of a ‘good’ person, a ‘good’ citizen and the value placed on the ‘pursuit of truth’ varies with time, place and perspective. Democracy has a high value in some cultures, science and logic in others, whilst others prioritize obedience to authority, or individual responsibility or religious observance or physical strength and aesthetic beauty in others. In recent decades, there has been a significant and well-documented shift in many countries towards economic values where the university graduate is re-imagined as a contributor and leader in the highly competitive workplace; and the university as an engine for national economic advantage (Bok, 2003; Marginson, 2006). The Australian government’s most recent reforms articulate a clear affirmation that the economy is the priority for higher education (Commonwealth of Australia, 2009).

... The investments and reforms being made will drive improvements in productivity and create a smarter, cleaner and more competitive economic future for Australia. By putting students clearly at the centre of its reforms, the Government has signaled its commitment to the expansion of a high quality university sector, to educate the graduates needed by an economy based on knowledge, skills and innovation (p. 5).

Graduate characteristics of virtue in this framework tend towards work-specific knowledge, skills and attitudes as described by business, industry and the professions. A ‘good’ person is one who is seen as productive in the paid-work-environment. Teaching excellence from this perspective might be thought of most assertively in terms of curriculum content (what graduates should learn) and competence standards (how well graduates perform). ‘Graduate Attributes’ and generic skills that support flexibility, adaptability and entrepreneurial effectiveness in a changing globalized world have been prioritized by modern universities world-wide (Bridgstock, 2009; Moir, 2012).

Whilst it would be rare for anyone to suggest that a contemporary university education should not address the economic needs of either individuals or the wider community, there is significant disquiet amongst many people about the appropriate balance between economic and other purposes. Brookfield (2005), warns of the danger that a curriculum led by economic and work-related concerns can easily subvert concern for the development of the full range of human potential and diversity and risks subjugating human values of compassion and creativity (Brookfield, 2002). Many academics articulate concern that the

fundamental concepts, knowledge, intrinsic values and indeed the beauty of the disciplines, that have been established over generations will be lost where more generic work-based 'subjects' replace traditional fields of study: So mathematics may be replaced by business statistics, sociology by social work, English literature by theatre management or film production (Aronowitz, 2000). Halfont and Boyd (1997) jest about the fears some people express about the commercialization of education, which they refer to as 'MacDonaldisation'. But there are many critics of contemporary education who see it as becoming increasingly superficial and oversimplified; losing its focus on theory, critical inquiry and thinking; abandoning knowledge that is uncomfortable or disagreeable to business and industry in any way (Giroux, & Giroux Searls, 2004; Giroux, 2009). Further, as learning is commodified to the marketplace, it is argued that students themselves may increasingly come to see their own value and potential only in terms of high status paid employment. This has implications for the survival of diversity through individuality, class, race, gender; as well as risking that the inherent inequities that are embedded in the capitalist economy will be perpetuated and strengthened through the evolution of an economically- dominated culturally-blinkered educated class (De Lossovoy, 2008; Gillborn & Youdell, 2000). Critical theorists suggest that higher education should play an important role in developing workers who can challenge workplace inequalities, rather than submit to it, but even more importantly, imagine different futures for themselves and for others (Giroux, & Giroux Searls, 2004).

Advocates for the centrality of 'employability' as a leading component of contemporary graduate virtue often point to the value of critical thinking, creativity, ethics, and aesthetics in work-related learning (Apple, 2006; Knight & Yorke, 2004). But the reality is that in an overcrowded curriculum these dimensions are easily neglected. McArthur (2011), identifies the narrowing of purpose as a significant problem:

...Some critics charge that universities have rather over-enthusiastically responded to this economic imperative and thus acted to re-design themselves as businesses and re-brand and market themselves as franchises (Williams, 2001). There are fears that knowledge itself is being commodified so that it can be exchanged or 'transferred' for economic gain, that relationships and roles are redefined in corporate terms (customers and service providers) and that courses are run according to business plans. (p. 738)

The issue is not one of either including or excluding work-orientations in higher education, but of ensuring that utilitarian goals do not come to dominate all other aims. Barnett (2007; 2013), argues convincingly that even to prepare student for the economy requires a return to education of the 'whole' person, because the future is so complex and work needs so

unknowable, that it is intrinsic human character and dispositions that are valuable rather than known skills. His focus is not on neat, easily measured work-skills, but what it means to be human. Barnett calls the academic community to account, demanding that we re-envision our students most essentially as a human, rather than just as workers, and re-invigorate higher education's purpose as being the encouragement of positive dispositions: resilience, persistence, integrity, care, courage, resilience, self-discipline, restraint, respect, openness and above all, a willingness to engage, learn and act.

Graham (2005) similarly observes that while pragmatic and utilitarian values have a place in higher education, concern for wealth creation should include not just knowledge, skills and pathways to achieving wealth, but also critique about values we place on material prosperity, and the societal implications of the way that we access, distribute, utilize and manage wealth. Excellence in these terms becomes the pursuit of wisdom. This positions the university as a site of values clarification, and charges students with the task of interrogating the notions of 'good', as well becoming 'good':

Instead of giving priority to the search for knowledge, academia needs to devote itself to seeking and promoting wisdom by rational means, wisdom being the capacity to realize what is of value in life, for oneself and others, wisdom thus including knowledge but much else besides. A basic task ought to be to help humanity learn how to create a better world Maxwell (2007, p. 377).

My conception of Teaching Excellence as Virtue implies not only that 'good' be 'interrogated', discovered and achieved as a desirable graduate outcome, but also that the university as a learning context should itself be virtuous: fair, just, ethical, responsible, reflective of our highest citizenship values. Most stakeholders expect universities to act in virtuous ways and increasingly hold them accountable for delivering educational services that meet their expectations of the university as a 'civil' organization. There are many examples of both institutional and national policies, guidelines and codes of practice to assist universities in meeting evolving 'civic' standards (for example in the management of international students, AVCC, 2002). However, there is also evidence of community ambivalence to the civic role. This is expressed in resistance to the idea of the university as a legitimate site of societal challenge with a role to play in leading global change that is often exemplified in neoliberal political education agendas and in media coverage of higher education (Giroux, & Giroux Searl, 2004).

So in summary, Teaching Excellence as Virtue calls attention to the need to address the values of civilized society through the goals higher education pursues and in the way that

universities conduct themselves. Virtue is a complex idea, which changes with time and perspective. Virtue may be problematic to analyze and understand, it may be difficult to find agreement across different vested interests, but there is good reason to see it as critical that as a community we continually engaging in the debate and foreground it as a foundational component of teaching excellence. Further discussion of virtue is embedded throughout the projects included in this portfolio, and is revealed in project aims, in the conduct of research as well as in the findings and outcomes.

Teaching Excellence as QUALITY

To say that teaching excellence is about quality, is at first glance self-evident. Few would argue that we should be content with low quality, or that we should not aspire to high quality in teaching and learning. Public debate is full of affirming rhetoric about the importance of education and politicians of all persuasions espouse commitment to excellence in the tertiary sector: “Higher education continues to be a cornerstone of our legal, economic, social and cultural institutions and it lies at the heart of Australia’s research and innovation system”, (Bradley, et al., 2008,p.xi). However, there is also a prevailing community sense that Australian universities are failing. The Bradley Review (2008) findings conclude, for example:

- Australia is falling behind other countries in tertiary enrolments: “Australia is losing ground. Within the OECD we are now 9th out of 30 in the proportion of our population aged 25 to 34 year olds with such qualification, down from 7th a decade ago” (p. xi).
- Universities have not succeeded in moving from an elite to a mass tertiary sector and are not providing well for contemporary students: “There are now clear signs that the quality of educational experience is declining” (p. xii).
- There are serious problems in regional provisions and in encouraging participation from Indigenous students (p. xii).
- The tertiary education has not keeping up well with the demands of modern life and particularly the workplace: “We need to turn the rhetoric of lifelong learning into a reality” (p. xii).

The lens of Teaching Excellence as Quality acknowledges the high expectations placed on higher education and focuses on improvement as a core value. Quality is a term that rose to prominence as a tag for a worldwide movement seeking to raise standards in business and industry. Definitions of quality in this context links products and services (including education) to the requirements of customers, so ‘good quality’ (excellence), is a question of meeting or

exceeding the customers' expectations (Hellsten, & Klesfsjo, 2000). Although different industries have adopted varied approaches and models that change with time, the core components of contemporary business models of quality typically include:

- Establishing clear product goals, which match the needs, preferences and desires of the customers (Drucker, 1984; Spiller, 2000).
- Articulating and agreeing standards for the product that will meet or exceed the customer expectations (Deeming, 1986).
- Provision of adequate, accurate information that allows the customer to make choices about the product (Redmond, Curtis, Noone, & Keenan, 2008).
- Consistently delivering a product that meets the required standards (Burgess, 1999).
- Developing, articulating and improving all business processes that contribute in any way to the design, development and delivery of the product. This is often referred to as Total Quality Management (TQM) and is "focused on improving all organisational processes through the people who used them" (Shah, Nair, & Wilson, 2012, p. 475).
- The application of diverse management and thinking tools, and wide-ranging business and product information to guide business decisions and practice (Hackman & Wageman, 1995; Hoogervorst, van der Flier, & Koopman, 2005).
- An assumption that the world will always be in change, the pursuit of excellence will be an on-going process of improvement (Jones, & Seraphim, 2008).
- A belief that senior management(ers) should assume both the power and responsibility to authorize, lead and control the quality process (Lakshman, 2006).

Interestingly, Edwards Deming, often referred to as the 'Father of Quality', also placed a very high value on the wellbeing of employees and their experience of work. He saw pride and joy as serious goals in any business enterprise (Dobyns, & Crawford-Mason, 1991). More recently management theorists and practitioners have shown increasing concern for the triple bottom line, wherein business practices aspire not only to be self-sustaining and profitable but are ethical in all matters, and act responsibly in respect of the natural environment and the common social good (Elkington, 1994; Savitz, 2006). This perspective aligns closely with the core values of Excellence as Virtue.

Universities that aspire to teaching excellence have taken up many quality practices for themselves, seeing them as strategies for improvement, change and even survival. However, the adoption of quality approaches has also been... "reinforced by a competitive university

market... fuelled by an agenda of reform, greater university self-regulation, university reputation building and accountability in public spending” (Burdett & Crossman, 2012, p. 53).

National governments are significant stakeholders and in countries such as the USA, UK, Canada, New Zealand and Australia, they have all progressively taken up, developed and enforced a quality agenda in higher education. In a review of higher education quality models, Chalmers (2007) observes: “A pervasive trend across all of the countries reviewed is the establishment of national systems of accreditation, quality processes and audit and requirements to provide information on performance indicators”. (p.7)

Quality agenda trends in higher education are evident around the world. This includes the development of frameworks that define what the government regards as quality educational provisions and outcomes, and make recommendations to the sector about the purpose of universities, the outcomes they should achieve and the ways they should operate (see for example: AVCC, 2002; Commonwealth of Australia, 2009). The introduction of qualification frameworks that seek to create national standards for all post secondary qualifications (for example: Australian Qualifications Framework Council, 2013) is also wide spread. Many countries have strengthened their requirements for accreditation of courses. This includes the acceptance of formal roles for certain professions in controlling curriculum, standards and outcomes, for example: Accountancy, Teaching, Nursing, Pharmacy, Physiotherapy, Psychology, and Medicine. There is also evidence of increasing external monitoring and auditing of institutional practices and outcomes, with published reports made public (for example: Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency, 2012); accompanied by increasing use of performance data to determine funding to institutions, through incentives, additional competitive and/or discretionary funds, and even through the re-distribution of strategic core-business funding (for example, Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, 2009).

It is beyond the scope of this conceptual analysis to detail all the Australian government quality initiatives impacting on teaching excellence, however illustrative examples include the introduction of a National Code of Practice for Registration Authorities and Providers of Education and Training to Overseas to set standards and monitor education services for overseas students (2000; updated 2006/7); the introduction of the Teaching and Learning Performance fund to reward good university teaching (Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, 2009); and the establishment of the Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA) (superseding AUQA) to monitor university missions, provisions and outcomes so as consistent high quality across all Australian higher education providers (TEQSA, 2009).

Many benefits are said to come from the introduction of both internal and external quality initiatives. Shah and Nair (2012) suggest that external audits have “fostered and promoted a quality culture”, (p, 479). Similarly others argue that engagement with self-review has supported the development of organisational thinking (Adams, 2008; Ewan, 2009). The Australian government has insisted that more public information be made freely available to support students’ decision making and choice (see: <http://myuniversity.gov.au/>). Certainly, institutional and national surveys are giving a stronger voice to stakeholders (particularly students), allowing them to participate in the quality process by providing feedback. In general the formal surveys are conducted with integrity and provide transparent data, (Anderson, 2006; Barrie, Ginns, & Symons, 2008; McCormack, 2005). It seems that at the very least that quality audits have focused institutional attention on teaching and learning, and triggered positive changes (Balzer, 2010).

However, there are also concerns, issues and complications that suggest quality approaches are not always accepted, appropriate or easy to implement in universities, nor as effective in achieving improvements as hoped. There are frequently conflicts between the interests, aspirations and values of different stakeholder groups, which make it difficult to establish clear goals that are acceptable and meaningful to all (Tsinidou, Georgiannis, & Fitsilis, 2010). Whilst some quality approaches are seen to have value, many business concepts do not translate easily in educational contexts, so seem quite inappropriate or even counter-productive (Chalmers, 2008b; Duque, & Weeks, 2010; Eagle, & Brennan, 2007; Vidovich, 2002). Houston (2008), expresses concern that the sheer volume and formal nature of measures currently required, places an overemphasis on accountability. This has the effect of distracting attention and effort away from improvement.

To be effective, quality approaches need to have widespread support and to be enacted throughout an organization. However, there is an apparent lack of commitment and/or resistance in some academic communities (Anderson, 2006a; Anderson, 2008c; Jiang, & Carpenter, 2013; Quinn, 2012; Winslett, 2010); and a failure of leadership to engage staff in the collective sense-making that needs to precede improvement approaches (Berwick, 2008). Barrie, Ginns and Symons (2008), were commissioned to review the use and validity of student surveys in Australian universities. They argue strongly in favour of the use of student feedback as evidence to use in judging quality in education and supporting decision-making. However, they also acknowledge that there are many potential problems with the collection and interpretation of student surveys, and advise caution in relying on them as the sole evidence.

Overall, perhaps the most significant concern is that although many things have changed (and for the better), evaluations of higher education in Australia as in UK and USA show that theoretically persuasive quality practices have also led to unintended negative outcomes and/or simply failed to deliver expected improvements, particularly in terms of student learning outcomes (Chalmers, 2010; Chalmers, Lee, & Walker, 2008; Ewell, 2010; Ramsden, 2012). Whilst student feedback about their experiences, expectations, preferences and aspirations are important, they need to be considered critically and balanced against other considerations, such as the available resources, the authority of experts, and academic standards and integrity. One area for potential conflict arises through students' vested interest in passing their courses. There is evidence of rising incidents of students plagiarizing and cheating to present work at a higher level than they can or did achieve themselves (Ainsworth-Vincze, 2006; Jones, 2011). This partly reflects the availability of modern information and communication technologies that makes academic dishonesty such as plagiarism so easy, but also changing attitudes towards academic values, that are often influenced by the repositioning of students as customers, who may view their education as a commodity to be bought rather than earned through effort, engagement and achievement (Ball, 2004; Marginson, 2012). Even academics who are deeply committed to students are uneasy about the uncritical use of student feedback (Barrie, Ginns, & Symons, 2008), and shifts of power that prioritize a novice learners' view of worthwhile knowledge above those of experienced highly qualified discipline experts and professionals (Lomas, 2007).

Where quality from a student perspective means 'passing', this can lead to pressure on teachers to lower the academic content demand of courses and assessment so more students pass and gain high grades; or increase flexibility and lenience around borderline grades so students can 'get over the line' (Sadler, 2009). There is evidence of serious academic concern about eroded standards, where academics feel they do not have the power and authority to make appropriate judgments about performance of students (Bollag, 2007).

If teachers are over-dependent on student feedback to support their employment security or career promotion they may be tempted to manipulate survey data or teach in ways that please students rather than assures good learning. As Darwin (2012) suggests:

... the paradox of student feedback in an ever more consumerist environment of high education is that... student feedback-based evaluation necessarily vacillates between the conflicting discourses of consumerist quality assurance (what students want to receive) and academic quality enhancement (what students need to effectively learn) (p. 734)

Powerful groups, both internal and external can exert undue, counter-productive influences on quality. They can often overwhelm and silence other perspectives, this can lead to the unthinking adoption of 'fads' in management, in quality or in teaching that rarely lead to sustained improvement (Temple, 2005). The self-interested actions of those in power, can exclude others and deflect challenge, and encourage the persistence of gendered, ethnic, class and cultural disadvantage. Where the priorities of the most powerful groups come to dominate, this also tends to encourage conformity rather than the rich diversity needed to suit the broad needs of society:

We need to be aware of the homogenizing effects of productivity driven policies, their impact on the narrowing of university goals and the detrimental consequences on the social responsibilities of the university. In the face of this hegemonic understanding of what constitutes a successful university in contemporary society, the challenge for peripheral universities is the preservation of diversity of traditions and responsibilities through a broad commitment to society. (Ordorika, p.10, cited in Meek, Teichler, & Kearney, 2009, p. 44)

Competitive rewards for quality do not always encourage improvement quality approaches particularly for groups or individuals with little hope of reward. The Teaching and Learning Performance Fund, for example, rewards in a small proportion of institutions, according to a number of performance indicators that are very difficult to change. The evidence to date indicates that neither high scoring nor low scoring institutions have little to gain from improvements, it is only those on the borderline who can affect change and therefore have motivation to reform (Walshe, 2008). Similarly, the Australian teaching awards have some benefits but have not inspired significant system-wide improvements (Chalmers, 2010; Israel, 2011).

In summary, Teaching Excellence as Quality focuses the use of quality assurance and management tools and practices with a view to stimulating improvements. Whilst there is optimism that some quality processes can support improvements, there are a range of concerns suggesting that quality is not always implemented well, and does not always lead to the expected and hoped for improvements. Issues of Teaching Excellence as Quality are addressed in each and every project in this portfolio.

Teaching Excellence as SCHOLARSHIP

The discussion of Teaching Excellence as Quality highlights the intrinsic complexity of the concept, the difficulty of mediating between the different needs and interests of diverse stakeholders, and the potential for good intentions to lead to unintended and sometimes adverse outcomes. A rational deduction would be that teaching excellence demands rigorous and continuing intellectual debate, and development through research and innovation to help us to clarify arguments, to negotiate and agree aims and goals, to identify problems and solutions and ensure that teaching practice evidence-based; that we actually teach in ways that are effective. Thus, my third conceptualization of excellence is Teaching Excellence as Scholarship.

The specific term 'Scholarship of Teaching' was coined by Boyer in his seminal work: *Scholarship reconsidered: Priorities of the Professoriate* (1990). Building on survey data that investigated the values, beliefs, experiences and practices of North American academics about their work, Boyer developed a new framework for considering academic work. He identified four different, but overlapping scholarships: the scholarship of discovery; scholarship of integration; scholarship of application; and, the scholarship of teaching.

Education can be thought of as a discipline in its own right: There are traditions of educational thinking dating back to earliest civilizations, and the names and ideas of philosophers, theorists, and innovators are familiar to many: Socrates, Dewey, Piaget, Bruner, Vygotsky, Hurst and Peters, Montessori, to name but a few. Historically, the aims, values and practices of universities have been in a continuous evolution. As illustrated by previous discussions, continuing philosophical debate is critical to our capacity to make decisions about the purpose of higher education. If we cannot define agreed goals for tertiary education, the pathway to 'excellence' is unlikely to be clear, and we will have great difficulty in knowing if we are succeeding or not. Although the current dominance of economic imperatives easily leads to dismissal of alternative perspectives, critical voices challenging the university sector to question, review, revise and justify their missions and practices are still evident in the academic literature (Giroux, 2009; Giroux, Castells, Flesha, Freire, Macedo, & Willis; 1999; Marginson, 2008; McArthur, 2011; McLaren, 1994); and also in the broader media and popular press (Moodie, 2005). Teaching Excellence as Scholarship demands that the higher education community provides leadership in facilitating debate, prompting challenge to the status quo, ensuring there is a place for the voices of all people, and encouraging the highest level of critical thinking in pursuit of teaching excellence. This implies a role for educational scholarship as academic research, as foundational knowledge

for teaching staff, as an intrinsic part of the curriculum for students and as an outcome for all graduates. It requires that the university is protected and preserved as a site of contested values (Hackney, 1999).

Scholarship of teaching and learning

The literature of the scholarship of teaching and learning (SoTL) provides a lively heritage of debate about appropriate and useful definitions of SoTL (Boshier, 2009; Cranton, 2011; Hutchings, 2007; Kreber, 2001; Prosser, 2008). Andresen (2000) suggests that the use of the term scholarship in relation to teaching had become so widespread in the rhetoric of university documentation as to be almost meaningless. However, he proposes three “quintessential scholarly attributes” (p.140):

- critical reflectivity as a sensibility, a habit of mind;
- scrutiny by peers, which is what publication permits, as *modus operandi*; and,
- inquiry, as a motivation or drive.

These criteria have wide spread support amongst teaching and learning expert scholars (Brew & Ginns, 2008; Chalmers, 2011; Huber & Hutchings, 2005; Mårtensson, Roxå, & Olsson, 2011; Prosser, 2008; Shreeve, 2011).

Lee Shulman, former President of the influential Carnegie Foundation, makes a useful distinction between the practice of teaching, and thinking about teaching (Shulman, 1999). A good teacher (as practitioner) might help students learn through their knowledge of the subject, their ability to communicate, motivate, and to provide appropriate contexts for learning. These are qualities that could result from the teacher’s tacit knowledge, experience, values, beliefs, commitment, time effort and personal qualities and skills. Scholarship in teaching, (elsewhere called scholarly teaching) Shulman argues, is an approach that implies serious and intentional study in the field, higher order thinking, critical reflection upon teaching events, active experimentation and the documentation of this work with an intent to improve. This kind of engagement in teaching is often referred to as reflective practice. “Competent practitioners usually know more than they can say. They exhibit a kind of knowing-in-practice, most of which is tacit” (Schon, 1983 p. viii), but through a process of careful evidence-based observations of their context and deep analysis of what happens and how their own action impacts to support or impede the achievement of their goals, they not only come to understand the dynamics at work, but have the capacity to make positive changes which they can articulate about. By making their theories clear, practitioners are

empowered to become more successful, since they can actively manipulate their own behaviors in positive ways.

An extensive literature on reflective practice has been established in the context of professional learning teaching in schools (for example: McGregor, & Cartwright, 2011; Paige-Smith, & Craft, 2008). It is increasingly used in teacher education programs (Mansvelder-Longayroux, Beijaard, & Verloop, 2007; Kyburz-Graber, 2006; Skipton, 2010); in nurse education programs (Bulman, & Schutz, 2004; Taylor, 2006); in social work (Knott & Scragg, 2010) and in management (Pavlovich, Collins, & Jones, 2009). In the context of university teachers themselves, Jan and Tony Herrington (2002), identify an increasing interest in reflection, and recommend designing programs in the online environment, which enhance students' ability to learn through reflection. The literature seems to indicate that 'expert opinion' regards critical reflection as a basic criterion for scholarship. Scholarly work and thereby excellence in higher education (Consolo, Elrick & Middleton 1996; Fook, & Askeland, 2006; Hickson, 2011). Reynolds (2011) suggests that despite a long history of advocacy for reflective practice its, ... "introduction into further and higher education represents a fundamental change in emphasis in thinking about how people learn" (p. 6). However, growing evidence of more formal valuing and encouragement of reflective practice is positively demonstrated in the criteria for promotions and teaching awards (See also Teaching Excellence as Elite Performance).

The emphasis on the communication of inquiry and validation by external parties comes from the discovery research tradition. Reflective practice has great potential for developing expertise and improving teaching and learning in the local context, within the practitioner's own sphere of influence. However, to maximize the benefits of research and reflection findings also need to be challenged, verified, and shared.

Scholarship and effective teaching practice

In Australia, key professional organizations such as the Higher Education Research and Development Society of Australasia (HERDSA), Australian Society for Computers in Learning in Tertiary Education (ASCILITE), Australian Association for Research In Education (AARE) have nurtured the development of an active academic culture committed to scholarly work in teaching and learning and is developing a cannon of published literature. University educators and managers have benefited from the outstanding contributions of inspirational Australian-based scholars such as: Paul Ramsden (2003; 2008), John Biggs (1999; 2003; 2007), Marcia Devine, John Bowden (2005), Elaine Martin (2000), Angela Brew (2008), David Boud (2006a; 2006b), Richard James (2009), Kerri-lee Krause (2008), Marginson

(2002; 2007; 2012), Philip Candy (2000), Keith Trigwell (2012), Jan Herrington (2009; 2010), and many others; as well as learning from overseas educators such as Pat Hutchings (2011) and Mary Huber (2005; 2011), Carolin Kreber (2002; 2006; 2010), Terry Bates (2011), Noel Entwistle (2009), and Mick Healey (2000; Healey, Bradford, Roberts, & Knight, 2013). However, reform in education is often disappointingly slow: and seldom responds with speed or sensitivity to rapid changes evident in the world or the changing demands of university stakeholders. Anthony Bryk, Louis Gomez, Alice Grunow (2011), point to enduring problems in schools and colleges that seem resistant to improvement, despite considerable public attention and anxiety and a significant relevant research and development activity:

An all too well-known sample of these problems includes: ethnically based gaps in academic achievement, too many adolescents dropping out of high school, too few children learning to read proficiently, and very low student success rates in our community colleges. ...Despite this [research] activity, most assessments conclude that the R&D enterprise has not helped as much to date as one might hope and expect (p. 3).

The practice of teaching and learning sometime appears to be quite 'deaf' to the published literature. Many university teachers show reluctance or even aggressive resistance to engaging with educational research literature (Anderson, 2008; Boshier, 2009; Chalmers, 2011; Quinn, 2012; Vardi, 2011). The reasons for this lack of engagement are complex, but include:

- Widely held and persistent beliefs that SOTL is not valued as highly as discipline based research, and will inhibit academic employment, career development and promotions.
- A wide spread belief that teaching is easy, and that good teachers are born, they do not need to acquire a deep knowledge of the discipline to perform well.
- Limited formal requirements on university teachers to undertake extended preparation courses for teaching or hold teaching qualifications or to maintain professional learning as a condition of continued accreditation and employment; this signals a low value on formalized knowledge of teaching and learning, and therefore, is not of interest to career minded academics.
- The sheer volume, range and diversity of higher education research across many different contexts and issues, renders much of the research as overwhelming or confusing; therefore it is a difficult body of knowledge to master.

- Educationally relevant research is conducted within different communities and communicated through disparate literatures. Academic and practice-based communities that do not always communicate readily with each other. Teaching academics may access or contribute to research in their own discipline field, but not consider cross-disciplinary issues.
- The complex human processes of teaching and learning are difficult to research. They are not easily understood through simple scientific testing of single hypothesis. It requires extensive, time consuming, and therefore expensive, multi-dimensional investigations using advanced qualitative and quantitative methods. Relatively few university teachers have educational research expertise, their research being in disciplines or professional areas.
- Investment in SOTL has typically been quite restricted, so opportunities for people to become engaged in researching teaching and learning, or to sustain research careers in education have been limited.
- Professional developers find it hard to engage time-poor academics to attend teaching oriented events and meetings if they prioritize research over teaching. The catch cry of many teaching enthusiasts, researchers and educational developers who gather at teaching and learning conferences is that they are always “preaching to the converted... the academics who need to learn about teaching and learning are just not there” (personal anecdote).

The higher education literature consistently alerts us to endemic problems that the sector has in using scholarship effectively to make positive and assertive change. Two issues in particular stand out as particularly problematic in the trying to achieve excellence in practice through scholarship. Firstly, each and every educational setting is unique in its complex mix of places, times, resources as well as people with different attitudes, knowledge, skills, and priorities. This means the issues, problems and solutions relevant in one context, will never perfectly align with circumstances in another. The experience and research of others may be useful but can seldom be applied universally without considerable selection and adaption. Action research approaches are designed to address local concerns and circumstances, but of course, are likely to be enhanced when they both draw on and contribute to community scholarship (McIntyre-Mills, Goff, & Hillier, 2011). Secondly, implementation depends upon practitioners being willingly to take on new ideas, to understand them, and trust them enough to try them. Moving from the known to the unknown can be a high-risk activity particularly in an environment where students are reluctant to embrace change and are quick to criticize and blame; and where staff have insecure employment or promotion linked to traditional

performance indicators. Scholarship that is undertaken by teachers themselves, within and about their local contexts and circumstances, and under their own determination and control, is quite different to the application of external 'expert' knowledge and has a powerful potential to overcome resistance and align more neatly with individual insights, needs and preferences.

The scholarship of individuals may have merit, but when it is shared through collaborative ventures and teamwork, the scope and influence of outcomes is likely to be stronger (See also Teaching Excellence as Whole of System Community Enterprise). In 'action learning' (McGill & Beaty, 2001; Revans, 2011); and 'action research' (Fox, Green & Martin, 2007; Kemmis, 2009; 2010; McNiff & Whitehead, 2009; Reason, & Bradbury, 2006), reflective practice is structured into cycles of reflection and action embedded into professional work. Teams of colleagues collaborate together to advance their practice: problem behaviours or issues are selected for attention, and a quite deliberate approach is taken to articulating beliefs, seeking alternatives and exploring different ways of doing things. Teaching is adapted in the light of what works best in practice. New knowledge be sought or may emerge (as in discovery research) but in action learning the focus is on improving practice. The principles of action learning and research are very consistent with quality improvement cycles advocated in industry and business. The basis promise is the same: improvement is likely to occur, when the 'actors' are consciously and intentionally focused on understanding their world and acting to change it to achieve better outcomes, with the resources and the people they actually have, at that particular time.

Raising the value and status of teaching through scholarship

Boyer's (1990) original intention in distinguishing SOTL from other forms of research and development, was to stimulate debate about good teaching, to raise the status of teaching and to encourage institutions to recognize and reward teaching more appropriately. Boyer's work with the Carnegie Foundation has been seminal in articulating serious problems in the research-teaching nexus, that have meant teachers and the act of teaching, have been persistently undervalued in universities. This is evidenced in a history of low pay, low status, limited opportunities for professional development or security of employment or promotion for academics who commit to teaching (Brown, 2008; Bryson, 2004; Greene, O'Connor, Good, Ledford, Peel, & Zhang 2008; Percy, & Beaumont, 2008; Percy, Scoufis, Parry, Goody, Hicks, Macdonald, et al. 2008; Seldin, 1990; Soliman, I., & Soliman, H. 1997); and the high status and rewards accorded to research orientated universities compared to those who prioritize teaching (Coaldrake, & Stedman, 1999; Fairweather, 2002; 2005; Marginson, 2000; Chalmers, 2011). The term scholarship of teaching (now adapted to SoTL) has become a call to arms,

used to promote the cause of teachers and good teaching. The recognition of the importance of scholarship through national awards and grants and acknowledged in Australian university criteria for promotions to the level of Associate Professor and Professor (Chalmers, 2010) is to be applauded, however there remain quite serious concerns about the value placed on teacher, teaching and scholarship (Hornibrook, 2012; Houston, Meyer, & Paewai, 2006; Vardi, 2011; Vardi & Quin, 2011).

In summary, teaching excellence as scholarship points to the importance of different forms of research in supporting improvements in our understanding and practice of university teaching and learning. We need discovery, integrated and applied research to support our capacity to understand and make decisions about the purpose of higher education, and to investigate effective ways of achieving desired learning outcomes. We need to further improve our capacity to share knowledge about teaching and learning and act on the evidence emerging from scholarship. The literature strongly advocates engaging all teachers in critical reflection, constantly challenging their goals and seeking evidence for the effectiveness of their practice in the local context. But it also indicates that academic engagement with SoTL is problematic and does not always lead to appropriate benefits for teaching staff. The projects presented in this portfolio represent a variety of scholarships. Findings generally reflect the literature highlighting both the value scholarship, and its intrinsically problematic position in higher education.

Teaching Excellence as GOOD TEACHING

Despite diverse contexts and perspectives, scholarships of all kinds have contributed towards the establishment of an educational canon of approaches, strategies and practices that are widely recognized as characteristic of good teaching. The canon is published in:

- professional texts written specifically to guide new academics taking on teaching roles;
- the policies and recommendations of higher education government bodies;
- the many and varied policy statements and guidelines for teaching provided by institutions to their teaching staff;
- the curriculum of professional development and study courses for higher education teachers;
- the criteria for national teaching awards;

- the policy statements, guidelines and publications of higher education discipline groups and teaching and learning organizations; and,
- philosophical discussions and reports of research, development and innovations in higher education journals.

The information available in text, online, through conferences and forums, professional development, courses of study, and the media, is vast. Some of the literature is well-researched, evidence-based and incorporates philosophically coherent argument. But there is also much that is highly context specific, that lacks sound philosophical underpinnings, that is untested in practice, that makes assumptions that are false, or dated or inappropriate in new or different settings, or is simply unrealistic in its aspirations given the resources and capabilities of most teachers. The sheer volume of information, the number of different topics and perspectives, and the sometimes contradictory nature of advice, creates a huge challenge for experienced educators and leaders, as well as new university teachers.

Within the academic world, and indeed the wider community, teaching is often regarded as a low status profession, and there is a general assumption that it is not difficult. This is evidenced in the simple fact that higher education teachers in most developed countries are appointed on the basis of their research expertise or professional knowledge. They can often commence teaching with no prior experience, no formal qualifications, and minimal induction support (Ramsden, 2003). New teachers typically rely on tacit knowledge, memories of their own teaching and learning experiences as students, and the direction and examples set by their institutions and colleagues. Once launched into this new career, in many countries including Australia, they are given heavy work loads with high performance expectations in research and administration as well as teaching, so have very little time to commit to thinking about their approach to teaching (Alhijaa, & Freskob, 2010; Houston, Meyer, & Paewai, 2006). McInnis, 2000; Winter & Sarros, 2002). Whilst there is evidence of recent change (Bates, 2011) teachers' formal knowledge of good teaching remains limited.

Reviews of the literature of higher education teaching and learning certainly do highlight differences in the ways people characterize 'good teaching', but over a 30-year period there are also some quite consistent opinions. In the early 1990s, Paul Ramsden (1995) led an expert team in reviewing the literature to identify criteria of good teaching to be used in evaluating teachers applying for the first Australian national teaching awards. Their guidelines were widely accepted by the Australian university teaching community as relevant, although they reflected rather conservative philosophies, theories and contexts which were towards 20 years old, and under-represented future-thinking. It is claimed that they were

compiled on the basis of research, although the guidelines themselves are not referenced in a way that allows insight into, and scrutiny of, the links between research and recommendations. Over time, adjustments have been made to the criteria for Australian Teaching Awards and to the range and diversity of information officially presented (Chalmers, 2007; Chalmers, 2011; Chalmers, Lee, & Walker, 2008). Internationally changes across the last 20 years (Huggett, et al., 2012; Lang, 2012; Little, Locke, Parker, & Richardson, 2007; Shephard, Harlanda, Sarah, & Tidswella, 2010; Skelton, 2007; Van Note Chism, 2006), tend to reflect:

- an increasing awareness of the potential and significance of technology in teaching and learning (implying good teachers use technology effectively);
- demands for course design and delivery in flexible modes (implying good teaching includes certain elements of course design, as well as delivery modes with multi-media presentation, online communications, and 24/7/360 availability);
- attention to individual student needs (implying that good teachers are able and willing to provide individualized student support);
- effective management of culturally and academically diverse students including international students both on-shore and off-shore, and students from non-traditional backgrounds;
- assessment practices that are transparent, fair, contribute to learning, rigorous and maintain standards (to meet the expectations of employers, professions and discipline) but that also satisfy diverse student groups;
- acknowledgement of the value of collaborative team approaches; and,
- recognition of the significance of scholarship and leadership in teaching and learning.

The current Australian University Awards scheme includes five programs recognizing teaching excellence and outstanding contributions to student learning: Nominees for Teaching Excellence Awards are assessed on the evidence they provide in relation to five criteria:

- approaches to teaching that influence, motivate and inspire students to learn;
- development of curricula and resources that reflect a command of the field;
- approaches to assessment and feedback that foster independent learning;
- respect and support for the development of students as individuals; and,
- scholarly activities that have influenced and enhanced learning and teaching.

(Office of Teaching and Learning, 2013)

Supporting documentation provides illustrative information about the kinds of interpretations and claims that might be made against each of the criteria. The Office of Learning and Teaching (OLT) award criteria create a very strong set of generic assumptions and expectations about the purpose of higher education and the role of teaching. Even though the evaluation of applications does allow for diversity in responses, a coherent (and some would say narrow) perspective is being actively and powerfully reinforced through the success of certain individuals, the media reporting of teaching excellence and the increasing the alignment of institutional policies, practices and support systems. On one hand, if one accepts the criteria as valid, this suggests a very positive trend in encouraging teaching excellence. On the other hand, there is some concern (particularly amongst critical theorists) that the domination of any defined set of criteria (enforced through reward or punishment) restricts creativity, encourages regression to the mean, and resists alternative approaches to teaching and learning. Tightly established criteria can act to limit critical reflection *on* and *in* practice by assuming we know what teaching excellence means.

In 2008, the Labour government was poised to cut funding to the Australian Learning and Teaching Council (and thus funding for research, innovation, development and awards). This decision was premised on their changing economic priorities, as they needed to divert resources to support Queensland in responding to disastrous floods. I suggest that this proposal indicated a very limited conception of good teaching: that is simple, can be defined and implemented without difficulty. The presumption was that support for higher education teaching and learning was no longer critically important, all the problems solved, we knew what to do and how to do it. Assertive highly critical political action from universities and the community eventually persuaded Prime Minister Gillard and her ministers that perhaps this was a false economy and that there was still work to be done.

The Office of Learning and Teaching replaced the Australian Learning and Teaching Council, and is currently continuing to provide leadership and funding to investigate, identify, promote and disseminate good teaching. One significant project in this respect, is the development of performance indicators for good teaching. Denise Chalmers has led an extensive review of Australian and international practice, research and thinking. It represents the most recent and comprehensive attempt to define the territory of teaching excellence as good teaching. The Final Report (Chalmers, 2010) is very clear about the complexity of teaching and learning; the difficulties of intelligently defining good teaching and finding practical, meaningful, reliable, fair measures. It proposes a framework that incorporates:

... four dimensions: Institutional climate and systems, Diversity, Engagement, and Assessment, under four types of indicators: Input, Process, Output and Outcome and at four organisational levels: Institution, Faculty, Department, Teacher. (p. 13)

Illustrative indicators have been proposed for each dimension across all four indicator types and at every level. These offer a well-research reflection of current values and beliefs about good teaching. The array of indicators affirms the need to distinguish between good teaching, good teachers, and good institutions; and recognizes that there are many interacting components that comprise teaching excellence (see also Teaching Excellence as Whole of System Community Enterprise). Further, the indicators call attention to the difference between good student experiences, and good learning outcomes (see also Teaching Excellence as Student Learning).

In summary, in the conception of Teaching Excellence as Good Teaching, a teacher who can demonstrate the implementation of goals and strategies that have been accorded status and recognition by significant formal bodies (such as the OLT/ALTC), or are recommended by experts in the field and preserved in the canon of excellent teaching practice. Likewise a course that exemplifies such practices might be judged to be an excellent course and university an institution of teaching excellence. A fundamental problem with many interpretations of Teaching Excellence as Good Teaching is that they focus strongly on teachers and institutional behaviours, but remain relatively silent on the part played by students themselves: The OLT framework (Chalmers, 2008) is a notable exception in foregrounding the student experience and outcomes. A teacher or institution might choose approved aims and apply a wide repertoire of good teaching and assessment techniques, but still have students who do not engage effectively, or learn well, or achieve their expected goals through study. It is the focus on students as active agents in their learning that is captured in the next conceptualization: Teaching Excellence as Student Learning.

Teaching Excellence as STUDENT LEARNING

One significant outcome of scholarship in teaching and learning in the 1990s was the identification of student learning as the primary goal of teaching, and therefore the ultimate measure of teaching excellence. Constructivist learning theories emerging over 50 years (Herrington, T. & Herrington, J. 2007; Jonassen, 2003; Laurillard, 1979; Lueddeke, 1999; Tobias, & Duffy, 2009) affirm that it is always and only the student who can do the learning:

It is the student who must change in the process of learning. Research into student learning behaviours provides strong evidence that the way students approach learning influences their outcomes (Biggs & Tang, 2007). In particular, the strength of their interest and engagement predicts success (Kuh, 2008; Lui, 2012). In the conceptualization of Teaching Excellence as Student Learning, the teacher's responsibility is to structure the environment, resources and activities in ways that encourage the kinds of student behaviours known to secure the best chance of meaningful and worthwhile advancement towards desired goals. In the common parlance of higher education, this shift in emphasis changes the role of the teacher from, '*Sage on the Stage: to the Guide on the Side*'.

Seminal work in the 1970s (Saljo, & Marton, 1976; Saljo, 1979) revealed persistent differences in the conceptions students held about learning and demonstrated that students' beliefs about learning will colour their expectations and judgments about good teaching as well as their behaviours as learners. Where their conceptions are aligned with the goals, demands and actions of their teachers they are likely to respond positively and confidently. If a student understands learning as the acquisition of facts, they will expect to access plenty of factual information, and be assessed on their knowledge of facts: Thus, an excellent teacher is one who provides factual information and assesses factual knowledge accurately. Where there is dissonance, students are likely to experience discomfort and frustration, not understanding what is wanted, and not seeing the point of what they are asked to do. The student who understands learning as the acquisition of facts may struggle with a teacher who is focused on transformation (Cliff, 1998; Marton, Beattie, & Dall'Alba, 1993; Purdie, Hattie, & Douglas, 1996; Van Rossum, Deijkers, & Hamer, 1985).

John Biggs and his colleagues (1999, 2003, 2007) distinguished three categories broad descriptions of the strategies and motivations that students apply to their learning (Biggs, 1999). In simplified terms:

- A 'surface learner' has limited interest in the subject/topic, wishes to do the minimum work required 'pass' and focuses mostly on re-presenting simple information.
- A 'deep learner', is excited by the subject/topic, and is highly motivated to explore widely ideas, often going beyond what is required to pursue intrinsic interest.
- A 'strategic learner' is motivated by achievement, wants to score highly and will focus on pursuing learning that best meets the assessment criteria.

Surface learning is usually associated with low levels of academic achievement (Hockings, Cooke, Yamashita, McGinty, & Bowl, 2008). In comparison, both deep and strategic learning approaches lead to academic success, although the intrinsic interest of deep learners may

lead then to wander away from set topics and invest time studying issues that are not assessed.

The conceptions of learning categories have been subjected to critique as being underdeveloped and lacking supporting evidence, with ... “imprecise conceptualisation, ambiguous language, circularity, and a lack of definition of the underlying structure of deep and surface approaches to learning” (Howie & Bagnall, 2012, p. 1). Nevertheless, this theoretical position as promoted by Ference Marton, John Biggs, Noel Entwistle and others has been a huge influence in higher education, encouraging research and reflection from the point of view of student as a learner.

Similarly, teachers’ beliefs shape the way teachers approach teaching, the learning activities they provide and the kinds of assessments they use to evaluate learning (Prosser & Trigwell, 1999; Samuelowicz, & Bain, 2001). Some teaching styles encourage surface learning, for example: a focus on information and facts, un-realistic workloads, multi-choice assessment tasks. Other styles encourage deeper learning, for example: a focus on critical thinking, problem-solving, complex tasks and higher-order assessments. Entwistle et al. (2000) draw on the research and thinking of people such as Kember (1997), Prosser and Trigwell (1999), and Samuelowicz (1999), to identify a contrast between, “teaching as teacher-centred and content-oriented (presenting syllabus content to be remembered), and teaching as student-centred and learning-orientated (stimulating students to think about the subject)” (p. 6).

Judgments about the excellence of either approach to teaching, depends very much upon the educational purpose and values one holds. The teacher-centred conception would emphasis the transmission of knowledge, and imparting information. Within this conception the good teacher would expect to have great personal expertise and to control the syllabus and learning activities tightly, so as to ensure students learn a particular pre-determined set of attitudes, skills and knowledge. Teaching excellence would consist of providing relevant information, structuring activities and supporting the student in various ways to acquire and reproduce knowledge. Awards criteria for teaching excellence often include many examples relevant to a transmission model such as good presentation skills, and command of discipline knowledge (OLT, 2013). Student feedback in the CEQ consistently suggests that students appreciate clarity, structure, high levels of support and direction (See, for example Graduate Course Experience Reports available at <http://www.graduatecareers.com.au/Research/ResearchReports/GraduateCourseExperience>

Educators who value transformative purposes and goals may position themselves quite differently. Advocates for authentic learning, for example, challenge the usefulness of

learning that is overly structured, arguing that the real world is not neat and clear and ordered, but messy dis-organised and conflicted (Herrington, J., Oliver, Herrington, T. & Sparrow; 2000; Herrington, Reeves, & Oliver, 2007). For teachers who hold similar values, excellence in teaching means encouraging and supporting the student to work out what is needed for themselves. In this paradigm, the act of clarification belongs to the student not just the teacher. So, good learners are those who can embrace complexity, deal with confused and conflicted information, and select and organize appropriate approaches to solving problems for themselves; and excellence in teaching relates to effectiveness in achieving this quality of learning in students, regardless of context or medium.

Regardless of the ultimate goals of higher education, there is convincing evidence that engagement is an absolute pre-requisite for learning. There are a growing number of texts that provide advice and guidance in how to achieve better engagement (Barkley, 2009; Brew, & Ginns, 2008; Coates, 2007; Crosling, Heagney, & Thomas, 2009; Harper, & Quaye, 2009). And many educational scholars and theorists are illuminating connections between engagement and findings from psychological and social research. Nick Zepke and Linda Leach (2010), for example note the linkage between motivation, self-determination, autonomy and competence, with implications for creating positive conditions for engagement:

Self-determination is enhanced where supportive social-contextual conditions exist to promote feelings of competence or self-efficacy. Such feelings in turn encourage the exercise of choice and self-direction, leading to a greater feeling of autonomy. Ryan and Deci (2000a, 2000b) refer to strong links between motivation and autonomy and competence. They also suggest that relatedness, at least in a distal sense, is important in motivation, particularly intrinsic motivation. (p. 170)

Recent research is beginning to provide evidence that some teaching approaches and techniques are more powerful than others in encouraging engagement. George Kuh (2008) was commissioned in 2005 to conduct a review of teaching practices that were most effective in enhancing student engagement. His list of high impact activities includes:

- first-year seminars and experiences;
- common intellectual experiences;
- learning communities;
- writing-intensive courses;
- collaborative assignments and
- undergraduate research;
- global learning/diversity;
- service learning, community-based learning;
- internships; and,

projects;

- capstone courses and projects.

...when I am asked, what one thing we can do to enhance student engagement and increase student success? I now have an answer: make it possible for every student to participate in at least two high-impact activities during his or her undergraduate program, one in the first year, and one taken later in relation to the major field (Kuh, 2008, p. 8)

Whilst individual teachers may be able to adapt their approaches to encompass some of Kuh's high impact practices (HIPs), many depend on significant changes to the design and implementation of whole courses; and radical adjustments to funding and resourcing models. Barriers to the adoption of Kuh's HIPs, for example include the casualization of teaching staff and reduction of teaching contact hours which limits staff student interaction: Such problems are outside the sphere of influence of individual teachers: they require faculty-wide change, and commitment at institutional level (See also Teaching Excellence as a Whole of System Enterprise).

In summary, there appears to be a general consensus in recent literature that good teaching should be defined as teaching that supports students to achieve good learning outcomes, even where we cannot easily agree what the outcomes should be (Ballantyne, Bain & Packer, 1997; Biggs, 1999; Chalmers 2010; Ramsden, 1992). There is strong evidence to indicate that the way a student approaches learning will influence their outcomes. Positive achievements are associated with high levels of engagement, intrinsic interest, strong motivation and commitment to higher-order thinking and transformation as goals of education. Whilst academically successful students often exhibit these behaviours naturally, other students can learn to approach their studies in more positive ways. Teaching Excellence as Student Learning implies that good teachers and excellent institutions will act together to provide the kinds environment, resources and activities that encourage all students to apply successful study behaviours, and so become more effective students as well as potentially more autonomous, empowered and better people.

Teaching Excellence as ELITE PERFORMANCE

So far, I have argued that the concept of teaching excellence includes:

- **Virtue:** wherein the goal of higher education is to become a better person and a good citizen;

- **quality:** quality assurance and quality management that affirms and achieves goals and purposes, practices, standards, assessment and outcomes to a level, that is agreed, valued and funded by relevant stakeholders;
- **scholarship:** that guides our understanding of teaching and learning through researching, evaluating, and challenging theory and practice; and developing and testing improved ways to achieve agreed higher education goals;
- **good teaching:** the canon of philosophies, approaches, strategies and techniques held by 'experts' to be significant and/or effective; and,
- **student learning:** which judges effective teaching in relation to the quality of student learning it achieves.

Definitions of excellence, however, usually include some notion of a performance level that is in some way distinctive or notable. As Carolin Kreber (2002) suggests ... "excellence in teaching is usually identified on the basis of judgment made about performance" (p. 9). Quality approaches, scholarship, reflective practice good teaching techniques can be done well or poorly. Student learning is highly differentiated. Each component and all teachers and learners sit on a continuum from highly engaged, active and effective, to minimalist, tokenist or even counter-productive. Teaching excellence can be recognised in comparative terms: That in some way it is exceptional, of the highest standard or better in some way.

The identification and analysis of public acknowledgements, accolades, awards and professional rewards is one way to identify what is regarded as elite teaching performance: Who are identified as the excellent teachers? Who is most rewarded, for what, by whom? From an academics' point of view, job security and promotion are regarded as a significant rewards for excellence (Hardre & Cox, 2008; Higher Education Academy, 2009; O'Meara, 2006; Young, 2006). However, in higher education there is a long history of commitment to teaching causing career disadvantage to academics (Chalmers, 2011; Diamond, 1993; Fairweather, 2005; Huber, 2004; Rice, 2000; Turner & Gosling, 2012). Career re-numeration is typically lower and tenure harder to win for excellence in teaching than in research. Indeed, it is acknowledged that the most of the undergraduate teaching in many Australian universities is undertaken by part-time, casual or short-term contract teachers, with extremely insecure, fragile and limited employment conditions (Abbas, & McLean, 2001; Brown, 2008; Kimber, 2003; Percy & Beaumont, 2008; Percy, Scoufis, Parry, Goody, Hicks, Macdonald, et al. 2008; Probert, 2005; Sherridan, 2008; Sutherland, 2009)

One recent positive improvement strategy has been creation of positions such as Faculty or Departmental Dean of Teaching and Learning and the appointment of Senior Executive staff

with university-wide responsibility for teaching and learning. Career pathways for people who prioritize teaching commitment and expertise are increasingly evident in Australian universities and includes professorial positions. Iris Vardi and Robyn Quinn (2009; 2011) provide a thoughtful analysis of the development of teaching-related promotion criteria in one Australian university. On one hand, they claim the existence of a pathway provides some optimism that teaching is to be more highly valued and they regard the inclusion of SoTL as relevant and legitimate. However, elite performance is portrayed as a hierarchy that values scope, impact and influence in scholarship most highly, and this is usually demonstrated through leadership in grants and publication (Trigwell, Martin, Benjaminin, & Prosser, 2000). The model implies superiority of research-orientated scholarship over engagement through scholarly teaching.

As previously mentioned (See Teaching Excellence as Good Teaching), many countries have prestigious teaching award schemes. Awards schemes in US, Canada, UK and Australia all seek to recognize and reward excellence; promote tertiary teaching positively to the community; and to encourage improvements in teaching practice (Chalmers, 2011; Chalmers & Thomson, 2008; El-Khawas, 1996; Gosling, 2004; Jackson, 2006; Skelton, 2004). The degree to which awards achieve these goals, or are fair and valid evaluations of elite performance, however, remains contentious (Chalmers, 2011; Frame, Johnson & Rosie, 2006; Mangers 1996; Skelton, 2004; 2007; Young 2006). This issue is debated at some length in the report on Project Three: Award Winning Teachers.

The OLT illustrative indicators for teaching quality recognize performance at many levels, individual, departmental, institutional and national, in relationship to extensive lists of illustrative inputs, outputs, outcomes and process (Chalmers, 2008). One conceptualization of Teaching Excellence as Elite Performance might envisage high scores on particular indicators, as affirming excellence. So, for example, excellence becomes the teacher who receives the highest student evaluation scores; the scholar with the highest levels of scholarship; the department with the highest retention rate; the institution with the most highly qualified or awarded teaching staff. The evaluation of performance on the basis of single items is, however, inappropriate for complex situations like university teaching and learning. High scores on one indicator need not mean high scores in another. Indeed criticisms of both awards and promotions schemes for teachers highlight instances where success is achieved by individuals despite perceived poor performance areas in some areas: the irony, for example, of a teaching award going to someone who has very poor communication skills, and little empathy with students, but has won significant national grants to investigate teaching issues. Indeed, there is evidence that quality indicators can work in

conflict with each other (see also Teaching Excellence as Quality). So for example, at the institutional level, the Bradley Review (2008) reported that:

- student satisfaction fell, as teaching productivity measures (an institutional/national indicator of excellence) rose; and,
- positive scores for diverse enrolments including non-traditional students can be associated with low rate of retention.

An alternative to using single items as proxies for elite performance, is to evaluate across a number of items. High stakes evaluations of excellence, such as promotions, awards and competitive institutional funding based on indicators, often do take account of a variety of evidence. The Learning and Teaching Performance Fund was one of a series of reforms introduced by the Australian Commonwealth Government to recognize and reward excellence at institutional level. It used seven metrics (employment, progression to further study, generic skills, good teaching, overall satisfaction, progress, retention), with adjustments made to try to create a level playing field (Walshe, 2008). In addition, to criticism on philosophical grounds (that it is inequitable to reward and advantage some institutions above others) there is continuing debate about the adequacy, sufficiency, reliability and validity of measures used (Barrett & Milbourne, 2012; Moodie, 2005). Schwartz, (2007), for example, conducted an analytical comparison between Australian university outcomes according to criteria and rankings used in the Teaching and Learning Performance Fund with research outcomes from the ERA. His work revealed curiosities such as the size of a university having a significant impact on student perceptions, students in Go8 universities giving low scores to teaching concurrently with high overall satisfaction scores.

Indicators sometimes have cause and effect relationships that reflect variables that are not accounted for by the indicators, such as regional location, or Median ATAR score of students. Some factors are beyond the influence of the university. So for example, graduate employment rates may reflect the quality of the student intake, the relevance of particular courses to labour demand or the circumstances of the employing industry at the time; but have little relationship to teaching excellence as represented by student satisfaction with teaching or measures of graduate learning. Few teaching quality indicators provide helpful insights into the quality of student learning, they are proxies for learning not direct measures (See also Teaching Excellence as Student Learning; and Quality). Further the notion of value-added is important if judgment is to be made about the impact of teaching on the student, and this is difficult to measure as inputs, outputs and processes are different in each institution invalidating any simple comparisons, and different value-added models yield dissimilar results even for the same institution (Steedle, 2012). Although the LTPF made

some attempts to manage data evaluation to accommodate such problem cynicism remains about the legitimacy of the scheme. The point is, that it is difficult to draw legitimate conclusions about elite performance in complex systems (Chalmers, 2010). The use of elite performance scores to inform improvement has many potential benefits, however, where they are used in an overly simplistic way to make decisions about institutional funding or the allocation of resources to programs or the employment, promotion or rewarding of staff there is significant potential for inaccuracy in judgment and inequity and injustice in practice.

In summary, Teaching Excellence as Elite Performance includes a diversity of teaching achievements at a variety of levels (individual teacher, department, institution). Some people are philosophically opposed to the idea of identifying as rewarding a small elite, viewing the process as unhealthy in creating winners and losers, and turning teaching quality into a game of demonstrating achievements rather than a serious commitment to improving the experience and outcomes of students. Some higher education skeptics see the processes associated with the selection and reward of an elite, either as individuals or institutions as flawed. In all cases, although there are many benefits claimed for an elite, neo-liberal, competitive environment in education, there remains considerable doubt as to the overall benefits of competitive rewards in supporting widespread enhancement of teaching and learning. The research presented in this portfolio draws substantially on the experience and contributions of award winning (elite) teachers, and findings across all the studies are highly reflective of the current literature.

Teaching Excellence as A WHOLE OF SYSTEM COMMUNITY ENTERPRISE

There is a significant problem with any definition of teaching excellence as an elite performance that is exceptional rather than common-place. The Australian community expects universities to offer high quality services to all students. We might admire the achievements of a top-scoring graduate, a brilliant teacher, an outstanding program or even extraordinarily fine institution. However, as a country we aspire to ensure there are high standards for everyone. We want all students to achieve worthwhile goals, all teachers and all courses to be effective, and all tertiary institutions to be excellent.

One of the biggest tensions in contemporary higher education is the competitive nature of so many aspects of university life. The literature provides many examples of the negative consequences of competition, market forces and rewarding only the best, such as:

- Dishonesty in academic work (by students), in the chase to get top-grades; and by academic staff, (to maintain positive student evaluations, retain students in courses, and advance their career opportunities) (Bollag, 2007; Sadler, 2009).
- Teaching awards that are designed to recognize reward and encourage good teachers, but impact on those who do not win (most of whom will be committed hard working, highly gifted and knowledgeable people), making them feel undervalued or overwhelmed.
- Promotions approaches and criteria that set individual teachers against each other in the 'race' to secure employment and career advancement, can lead to isolation, poor relationships and a breakdown of collegial support and sharing. Academics may enjoy network communities and collegial approaches, particularly generation Xers, but employment conditions are tough and many struggle to progress their careers without individual achievements of note. The academic world as a workplace exhibits many tensions between collaboration and competition (Kezar, 2005; Mullen & Forbes, 2000).
- Inequitable rewards supporting privileged and successful institutions over others, continually reaffirming divisions between the top institutions and the rest (Marginson, 2012; Raciti, 2010).

An opposing perspective places the very highest value on collaboration, team-work, mutual respect and sharing both as a goal of education in the pursuit of a functional, fair, just, healthy and happy society, and as a methodology; the most effective way to advance teaching excellence. Cooperative philosophies and mutually supportive and beneficial approaches have relevance at all levels of higher education: for students and student learning; for teachers and researchers; for institutions; and, for regional, national and global communities.

Community as a student outcome

Teaching Excellence as Virtue argues for the development of self as a good person, and as good citizen. This implies understanding and critiquing community(ies), and recognizing and engaging with the significant issues confronting society. It suggests graduates should know how to establish and maintain healthy relationships and work effectively in different human groups; with partners, families, colleagues, neighbours, in the world of work in the community, and across international and cultural boundaries. Where personal development and citizenship are accepted as desired outcomes, this implies:

- that university missions and values will express commitment to community;
- that university curricula and experiences will be designed to develop skills, knowledge, attitudes and values that support not just effective membership of social groups, but also leadership within the community;
- that university resources will support a 'community' orientation;
- that university assessments will evaluate relevant student performance as team-players, people, citizens and community leaders; and,
- that tertiary awards will be trustworthy and transparent in affirming graduate standards and capacities.

The pursuit of personal and citizenship goals suggests teaching and learning approaches that engage students in social activities and interactions. Learning through experiential programs such as in volunteering locally and abroad, and community action, for example, is claimed to enhance students' awareness of and commitment to personal morality and social justice issues (Goldberg, McCormick Richburg, & Wood, 2006; Tiessens, 2012; Zlotkowski, & Duffy 2010). However, there is also a high level of support for the idea that the most powerful learning usually comes through working with others, regardless of the required outcomes. Many elements in the cannon of effective teaching and learning practice (See also Teaching Excellence as Good Teaching) reflect theories emerging over the last century that foreground the social, linguistic and cultural dimensions of learning, for example: social constructivism (Bruner, 2005; Vygotsky, 1978); emergent literacies (Wells, 2001) situated cognition (Brown, Collins, & Duguid, 1989), group reflection (Boud, Cressey, & Docherty, 2006; Boud & Walker, 1998; Kemmis, 1987); networked learning and connectivism (Siemens, 2006; Siemens, & Conole, 2011); enculturation (Der-Thanq, Hung, & Wang, 2007); authentic learning (Herrington, Reeves, & Oliver, 2010); socially engaged learning (Hanson, & Sinclair, 2008; Lane, 2008); and, peer and expert coaching scaffolding (McLellan, 1994). The contemporary collective expert view assumes that significant learning occurs as a result of situated observation, activity, analysis, research and reflection on real world experiences and first-hand interactions (or virtual simulations and abstractions) with phenomena, mediated through social interactions.

University engagement with community

Traditional work in Australia universities has included teaching, research and community service. Australian government encouragement for community engagement is evidenced in the inclusion of universities' community and regional engagement responsibilities in reporting

by the Australian Universities Quality Agency (AUQA) (Garlick, & Langworthy, 2008). However, there appears to be little practical assistance (funding) to support community engagement goals beyond the sectors existing resources. The pressure of declining funding has sharpened the focus on research and teaching, but the relationships between universities and their local communities remains significant. Individual universities show interest in forging community connections. Charles Sturt University (Australian Government, MyUniversity, nd), for example states it: "...has a strong focus on its regions, and aims to produce graduates with the skills to meet regional workforce needs". Edith Cowan University articulates a regional purpose: "To further develop valued citizens for the benefit of Western Australia and beyond through teaching and research inspired by engagement and partnerships" (Edith Cowan University, nd).

The Australian Universities Community Engagement Alliance (AUCEA) (Cited in Garlick, & Langworthy, 2008, p. 2), sees community engagement by universities is underpinned by two factors: "First, some portion of academic goals is best achieved through collaborative knowledge-based relationships with the local and regional community in which they are located. Second, ... to ethically contribute to the public good".

Commitment to the community can include providing courses thought to suit local people and needs; the development of partnerships that work together for mutual benefit (Holland, 2006); the sharing of resources and facilities between community and university: curricular and learning opportunities that encourage community service, civic values, attitudes and the development of the self as a citizen. Community engagement, civic enhancement and service learning is commonly accepted as core to higher education in the USA (Colby, Ehrlich, Beaumont, & Stephens, 2003; Ehrlich, 2000; Kezar, Chambers, & Burkhart, 2005). In Australian universities there is a diversity of related practices, which in part reflects government social policy concern for community welfare, particularly in regional rural areas (Nelson, 2002); in part an effort on the part of institutions to stabilize their funding through shared local enterprise; and in part commitment to development of graduates as well informed, culturally open citizens (Winter, 2012). There is evidence of some successful interactions and collaborations between universities and communities achieving mutual benefit and in some cases positive reform, particularly in professional spheres such as teacher education, nursing, social work, engineering. This can include research partnerships that influence students indirectly (Cherednichenko et al. 1999) and experiential learning that engages students directly and intensely (Cherednichenko, Jay, & Moss, 2009).

The learning potential and power of authentic, first-hand experiences through immersion in 'other worlds' is widely accepted, and is exemplified in the rapid expansion of work-based

learning in tertiary education (Boud & Solomon, 2001). Regardless of the potential of experiential learning, it is not always easy to provide (at quality) at the required scale, without a deep commitment from all stakeholders. Dempsey (2010), suggests university-community engagement can mark, "...a welcome movement toward applying university resources to vital social problems" (p. 381). But she also proffers concerns that the power relationships between the two entities are not well understood, and thoughtful critique is needed to avoid replicating or further aggravating social inequities. Community actions need to be done with care, sensitivity, respect and genuine sharing of power and control.

Communities of practice

Lave and Wenger (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998 & 2004), are credited with popularizing the idea of communities of practices (CoP) in both higher education and the workplace as an effective, efficient and sustainable way to support whole of group achievement. Management and education literature frequently claims highly positive outcomes from collaborative learning (Dunlap & Grabinger, 1996; Qin, Johnson, & Johnson, 1995; Slavin, 1996), and advocates for the development of participatory cultures (APQC, 2002, cited in Coakes, & Clarke; Jenkins, Clinton, Purushotma, Robison, & Weigel, (nd); 2007). Reports on first-year retention, for example, credit improvements to the creation of a sense of community amongst students, particularly for those who are most socially distanced from the university academic culture, such as students from non-traditional backgrounds, second language users, migrant and trans-national students, first in family, low-socio-economic) (Ashwin, 2003; Benske, Brown, & Whittaker, 2011; Brown & Adam; 2010; Cook, Rushton, McCormick, & Southall, 2005; Kift, Nelson, & Clarke, 2010; Krause & Coates, 2008; Nelson, Clarke, & Kift, 2011).

Contemporary approaches to educational design point to the power and practicality of digital media and modern information and communications technologies (ICT) in supporting social constructivist approaches by providing virtual worlds, simulated events and cognitive tools including highly interactive communications applications (Brown, Collins, & Duguid, 1989; Herrington, J., Herrington, A., Mantei, Olney, & Ferry, 2009; Jonassen, 2006). Higher education participation is dominated now by the net-generations, who are adept in the use of collaborative online tools, and expect to work in networked ways (Siemens, & Conole, 2011). Community connection and learning is implicit in the digital world, with open source resources and information increasingly available, and formal and informal interactions possible between interest groups of all sizes and types. Tapscott and Williams (2006) note tensions between 'experts and authorities', the wisdom of the crowd, and the cult of the amateur, but the reality is that mobile phones, facebook, text messaging, google groups are

part of the natural landscape for the 21st Century learner (Herrington, J., Herrington, A., Mantei, Olney, & Ferry, 2009): we are a technology-savvy, global learning community.

A sense of community has also been recognized as important to academic staff. This is seen in the value placed on collegial work (Hull, 2006; Beaumont, Stirling, & Percy, 2009), allegiance to research, discipline groups and professional communities (Becher, 1989; Healey, Bradford, Roberts, & Knight, 2013), and to building communities of learners with their students (Janson, Howard, & Schoenberger-Orgad, 2004; Macheski, Lowney, Buhrmann, & Bush, 2008). The groupings that academics belong to, act to shape their identity, reinforcing or re-forming their expertise, and interest (Wenger, 1989; 2004; Wenger, McDermott, & Snyder, 2002). Educational foundations, professional organizations and research groups with an interest in higher education (such as Carnegie Foundation, HERDSA, ASCILITE) also tend to operate as communities of learning, developing good practice through hosting conferences, forums and discussion groups, and establishing repositories of shared, open-source materials. The development of Creative Commons copyright (Huber, & Hutchings, 2005; Huber, & Hutchings, 2006) is a good example of the commitment of academics and others to sharing knowledge, expertise and resources for community benefit.

Social constructivist and community of practice principles are widely advocated as an effective approach to professional learning and support for higher education teachers. Collaborative learning is a popular approach to the induction of novice tertiary teachers (Viskovic, 2006), and is often used to encourage reflective practice (Boud, Cressey, & Docherty, 2006). CoPs, both face-to-face and online, have also been identified as an effective solution to the training and support of sessional tutors and post-graduate tutors (Beaumont, Stirling, & Percy, 2009; Blackwell, Channell, & Williams, 2001; Lefoe & Parish, 2008; Sutherland, 2009). Communities of practices within universities (course teams, faculties, schools and academic departments) are powerful influences promoting, resisting or assisting reform (Henkel, 2000; 2005), and there is evidence that both formal and in-formal collegial practices and social dialogue can act as key contributors in achieving systematic, sustained change (Schleicher, 2011). Peter Knight, Jo Tait and Manze Yorke (2006), acknowledge that formal professional development for academics is often neither attractive or effective in improving teaching and learning. However, they suggest that positive informal learning is encouraged by workplaces that evoke learning: When asked the question "...why do professionals learn?... the answer leads us to think about the development of 'learning departments' and 'learning teams'". (p. 330).

Educational theorists, practitioners and researchers often acknowledge that teaching excellence does not only depend on people who interact with students directly as teacher or tutors. The university is an inter-connected, organic institution with the 'teaching and learning enterprise' contingent upon support from a whole range of people who provide library and information service, IT services, career and counseling advice, and administrative support. Increasingly academics also work with educational developers in designing and developing courses and learning experiences. Institutional and national COPs that include all staff who contribute to teaching and learning can be very powerful in achieving coherence, consistency and depth in excellence.

Communities of practice are not always successful, and they do not just happen, they need to be created, nurtured and sustained:

Successful communities maintain a clear purpose and active leadership (McDermott, 2004), and support innovation and staff creativity through collaboration and collective solutions. CoPs also provide members with the ability to self-start and search for information and support as required (Heald, 2004), including extended expertise, that is, expertise outside their immediate work environment. (Coates & Clarke 2006, p32)

There is a significant disconnect between espoused political beliefs and actions in regards to collaboration. On one hand, recent Australian governments of all political parties promote employability goals that demand students can work in teams, and set in place policies to encourage collaboration between institutions. On the other hand, they consistently look mainly to market forces and competitive resourcing structures to improve quality. Commonwealth incentive schemes like the Australian Learning and Teaching Performance Fund, can easily set university against university. Terry Walshe (2008) argues that the successful universities move into a cycle of continual improvement, and some institutions who are on the borderline of recognition and reward may be motivated to lift their performance, but others who cannot compete are likely to sink into a cycle of ever-reducing reputation and resources. Individual universities may be winners, but overall the scheme does not promote system wide improvement.

Universities and the global community

Beyond teaching excellence within a university community and across national institutions and communities, we can also recognised that we live in a global community, and one that continues to struggle with injustice, inequity, poverty, ill-health and conflict. There remains a

great divide between rich and poor people; and between highly educated, affluent, well-developed countries and countries that struggle to sustain well-being for their people. Higher education can work to help solve such problems; but it can also function in ways that simply create barriers to progress. Excellence, however it is defined, that is achieved through competition or other actions that disadvantage, restrict or lessen the potential of others, may serve the needs and aspirations of certain individuals or groups, but it is not consistent with a world-view of education as the means to a better world for all. Universal education is one of eight UNESCO Millenium Development Goals (UNESCO, nd): the others being ending poverty and hunger, gender equality, child health, maternal health, combating HIV/AIDS, environmental sustainability, and global partnerships.

Universities have the opportunity to lead the world in addressing these issues, through their research programs, the content of their courses and the contributions of their graduates. However, the focus on private rather than public benefits and on serving national economic advantage tends to act against altruism and consideration of others. The capacity of 'super-universities' to attract and retain academic talent can create difficulties for countries struggling to develop their national intellectual, research and development capacity. For example, US Universities provide excellent study and research facilities and financial support to exceptionally talented overseas students. This advantages the host economy, but perpetuates the domination of the English language, Western values and knowledge. Off-shore study opportunities can benefit individuals but at the same time limit the learning 'flow' opportunities of countries with impoverished universities (Kahanec & Králiková, 2011; Kearney, 2009). In 2004/05 the American doctoral sector enrolled 102,084 foreign doctoral students, many of whom never return to their birth-countries. For some countries the outflow of academics and trained, qualified workers is an economic and social disaster: For example, it is estimated that, "...50 per cent of Colombia's science Ph.Ds. are abroad... and an estimated 47 per cent of Ghanaian doctors' work in other countries. The dangers of this trend are evident and must be countered for at all costs." (Meek, cited in UNESCO, 2011, p. 310).

Where Teaching Excellence as a Whole of Community Enterprise, envisages the community as being global rather than either local or regional, all actions and decisions will actively seek transnational benefits, with particular attention to the needs of the most venerable and fragile groups. It also demands that the sector be sensitive to the potential negative impact of their behaviours, and takes explicit action to avoid damaging or limiting others. From this perspective teaching excellence might include:

- the development of an internationalized curriculum for all students that ensures graduates are well informed about world issues, understand the consequences and

opportunities of their professional and personal actions to help or hinder world-wide well-being ;

- the provision of educational opportunities to capable students from all backgrounds, who cannot easily access tertiary education due to disadvantageous life circumstances;
- development and use of educational technologies to open opportunities to a wider range of people;
- commitment to non-exploitative, cross-cultural and international mutually beneficial partnering that supports and encourages the expansion and improvement of university provisions ;
- educational research and innovation that supports evidence based, future-focused policy development, and teaching practices;
- policy development and quality approaches that embed a global 'triple- bottom line';
- fostering and protecting the open-sharing of knowledge ;
- management of knowledge institutions and workers with due respect for interaction and adaptation and for specific cultural and ethical values (UNESCO, 2005; Marginson, 2008); and,
- Management of educational costs to support and encourage participation of non-affluent people.

In summary, the lens of Teaching Excellence as Community throws a critical light on educational purpose, methodologies and approaches, and outcomes. It highlights global well-being and community benefit as an educational goal, community engagement as a way of being, and collaboration as an effective approach to learning for teacher and students. The significance of community in teaching excellence is evident across all the projects included in this portfolio.

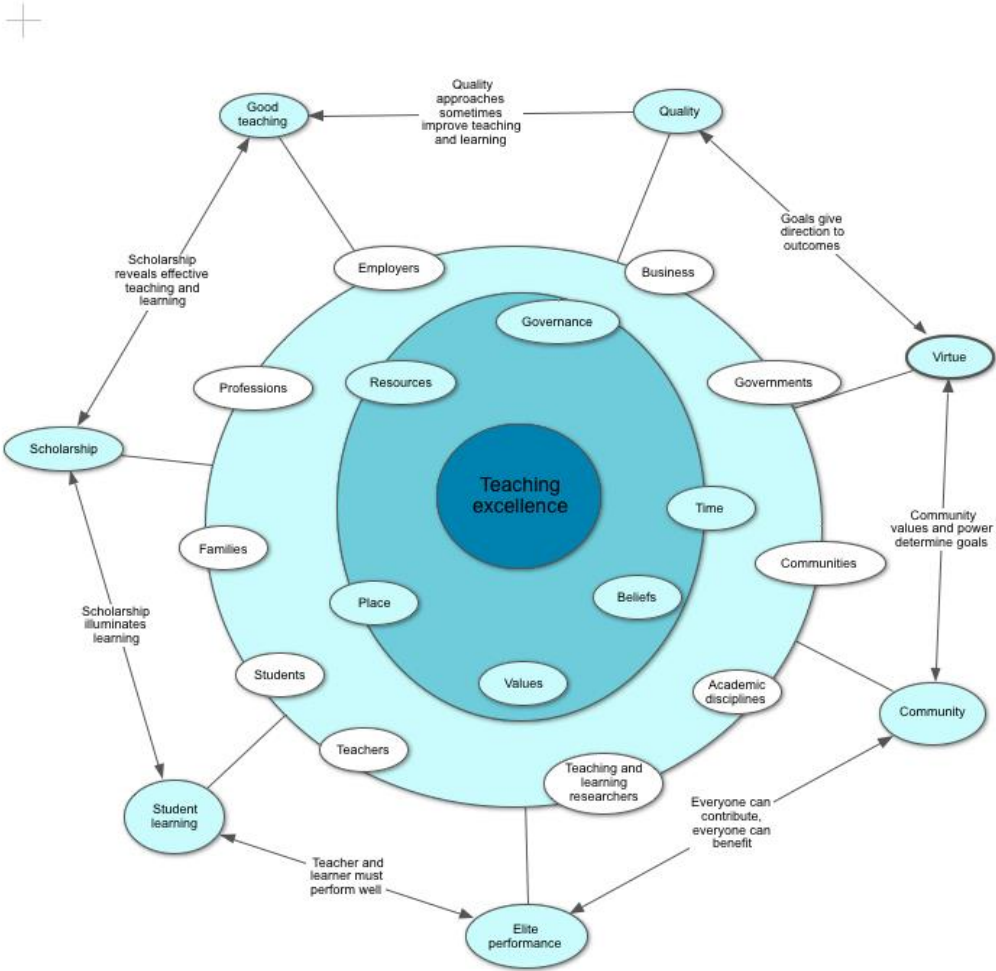
Web of teaching excellence

The seven lens I have presented are highly interactive, with fuzzy boundaries and significant overlaps. Whilst they are to a degree a very personal tool for unpacking and understanding the complex concept of teaching excellence, each lens has resonance with the developing academic literature as well as with expressions of interest, values and beliefs represented in government and professional policies, and through participatory culture (Jenkins, nd).

Teaching excellence is a multilayered concept. Each lens shines through an infinite number

of filters, created by the diverse perspectives, values and beliefs, interests, and indeed actions of individuals and stakeholder groups. Teaching excellence is also a dynamic concept, it changes continually as the interests and priorities of people and communities alter, and in accordance with shifts in the balance of power between different stakeholder groups. Notions of excellence respond to many influences, opportunities and constraints of circumstance. Teaching excellence can only be understood in the context of place, time, resources, governance, culture, values and beliefs. All these elements are in a continual and rapid state of flux (Barnett, 2010). I envisage them most easily as a web of infinite possibilities and connections (see Figure One below).

Figure One: Teaching excellence conceptual web



The lenses combine to offer a tool, that can be used follow different pathways through the conceptual ‘quagmire’, allowing a more sophisticated and dynamic consideration of multiple perspectives, intentions and aspirations. In the search for a clearer and more meaningful understanding of teaching excellence, application of the different lenses encourages a

deeper, more inclusive and comprehensive view of excellence. Further, it implies a set of questions to raise the level of debate, discussion and decision-making about and around teaching excellence:

- What do we mean by excellence (which lens are we using)?
- Whose perspectives and interests are we considering?
- What are the influences impacting on our proposed actions?
- In what ways does (should) our context shape our thinking, and influence our decisions?
- What will be the consequences and outcomes of our actions for different stakeholders?
- Is there integrity and coherence between our aspirations and our actions, from all perspectives?

The concept of teaching excellence may be complex and therefore 'illusive', but, I propose, it is the quality of the questions we can ask about it, that is likely to determine the quality of our decision-making and our actions; and thus contribute most positively to improving teaching and learning.

This chapter has focused on unpacking the concept of teaching excellence. The following chapter changes direction to consider some of the many issues associated with researching teaching excellence in higher education.

CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The research journey represented in this portfolio extends across more than 10 years, and includes multiple applied research activities undertaken across a series of thematically related projects. Some of the portfolio projects were conducted and concluded within specific and relatively short timeframes. Other projects were long-term, with research engaging the same participants over an eight-year period. In all cases, there are underpinning shared questions relevant to the theme of teaching excellence. Data from each project was revisited and redeveloped across time, with insights from successive research experiences and findings used to inspire, inform and often re-direct subsequent work. The work represented in this portfolio is mostly qualitative, but it draws on many philosophies, traditions and practices. Particular influences include: action research, insider participant research, phenomenology, heuristics, narrative, grounded theory and feminist research practice. As suggested in Chapter One, the selection and application of research methods to individual projects, and the particular role I have undertaken in each, varies not only according context and purpose, but also in response to:

- the pragmatic demands of both the workplace (as site of the research);
- the academic requirements of the doctoral study program (which set specific research topics); and,
- my own life experiences, priorities and my changing thinking, aims and intentions as an individual, a member of a family and community, a professional, and a researcher.

I have exploited ideas, approaches and techniques from many sources, but always with a deliberate intent to match research practice to purpose, finding the most effective, ethical and practical balance between the sometimes conflicting agendas, needs and preferences of academia, workplace, profession and self. The term 'researcher as bricoleur', as coined by William West (2001), provides an excellent metaphor for my eclectic approach within the qualitative paradigm. To maintain honesty and transparency, integrity demands that this chapter not only addresses some of the traditional doctoral concerns of research methodology (data collection, analysis and interpretation, implications and actions, communication of findings and insights), but also provides insights into my learning journey as a researcher. I have included reflections on the way that learning about research along

the way has influenced the themes, the choices and decisions made, and the implementation and outcomes of the research. This chapter will:

- present a description and justification for the overall research approach taken to the studies;
- identify the influence of significant qualitative methodologies: with a focus on heuristics, action-research, participatory research and insider-research;
- discuss issues of work-place research, in particular ethical concerns and the relationship between participants and an insider researcher;
- demonstrate the alignment between the research aims, purposes and values, and the choices made about research methods; and,
- show how the approach to research evolved during the study period.

Some elaboration of these ideas and issues can also be located in Chapter Four (Projects) in the context of individual projects. Discussion about specific research questions, participants, data collection and analysis techniques are found in the individual project reports.

Description and justification for the overall research approach and its relationship to contemporary research in higher education

Whilst this portfolio includes a range of different projects each with specific purposes, audiences and a bricolage of methodologies, the overall approach to research is both coherent and consistent. It reflects integration of four primary concerns:

- Concern to find approaches that will drive practical improvements in teaching and learning within one university, and support enhanced practice across the sector.
- Concern to further develop the researcher's skills and knowledge in relevant methodologies.
- Concern to conduct ethical research that prioritizes the well-being and mutual advantage of all participants.
- Concern to use tools that are effective, efficient and well-matched to purpose.

The overall approach is qualitative, with a practical workplace orientation. Qualitative research methods can be thought of as a cluster of related approaches that share some common goals, characteristics, and values. They have developed progressively over the last century applying distinctive tools that complement quantitative scientific methods to facilitate the investigation of complex human contexts in rigorous and systematic ways. Qualitative

research methods are designed to help us understand reality through the perspectives, insights, values and beliefs and experiences of people. They help document the detail and diversity intrinsic to human social phenomena, and expose the not observable intentions, reasoning, beliefs and expectations that often underpin the conflicting and contradictory actions, reactions, emotions, interpretations and opinions of individuals and social groups. The capacity of qualitative methods to systematically collect, analyze, and evaluate data in order to understand complex human behaviour has led to their widespread adoption particularly in education, health and the social sciences. Interest in qualitative methods responds particularly well to public and professional concerns for understanding of the self, of social groups, and of social issues such as power, class, equity, gender, sexual orientation.

Typical data collection methods in qualitative research include in-depth interviews, focus groups, reflective journals and participant observation. Data are recorded through video, audio or verbatim notes to ensure detail is preserved, and field notes maintained to allow for analysis and reflection on the potential insights from, and influences upon the researchers and participants. Although the data collected in qualitative studies may suggest patterns of human behaviour that can be generalized across similar populations, the focus of study is deep understanding of individuals and groups in context specific situations (Delamont, 2012; Denzin & Lincoln, 2008; Flick, 2007; Freebody, 2003; Patton, 2002).

Initially, there was a great deal of debate about the usefulness of qualitative methods, with many eminent scientists from quantitative. Qualitative researchers have responded to such challenges through both philosophical argument, and the development of new ways of satisfying the scientific demand for adequate assurances about the trustworthiness of data, its analysis and interpretation, and the inferences and conclusions drawn from qualitative studies. It is generally accepted now that both qualitative and quantitative research methods have a contribution to make to scientific research, but they serve different purposes, they are appropriately used to solve different problems, and require different measures of trustworthiness (Krathwohl, 2009; Lopez-Fernandez, & Molina-Azorin, 2011)

I chose qualitative methodologies as the most appropriate broad approach because they:

- have the capacity to fulfill the overall purpose and goals of the studies: To improve university teaching and learning by:
 - increasing knowledge about the lived experiences of university teachers;

- supporting the development of evidence-based higher education practice; and,
- demonstrating valuing of university teachers.
- are most likely to be effective in stimulating, supporting and sustaining long-term change;
- are appropriate to the context and particular site of study;
- are suitable to the practical considerations of research resources (time, expertise, access); and,
- are sufficiently flexible to respond to the needs, preferences and requirements of relevant stakeholder groups.

Each project has a unique research methodology, however, they all:

- fall within the broad family of participant action research;
- take an insider-participant approach;
- are informed by heuristics, developmental phenomenology, grounded theory, feminist ethics, and narrative research traditions;
- include opportunities for interpretive methodologies as well as the explorations of pre-determined constructs;
- collect rich descriptive data from participants through interviews and focus groups and occasionally through survey tools;
- adopt a rigorous approach to analysis and interpretation; and
- share insights with relevant stakeholders within and beyond the workplace.

As a 'bricoleur' I have 'taken' ideas from many different sources. I have 'picked and mixed' and adapted them to suit my different research activities and purposes. I exploited my prior experience and expertise, incorporated the thoughts, suggestions and critique of colleagues, and have drawn particularly on the rich and informative literature of research in education that is now readily available. All the projects are collaborative, and therefore research approaches have been the subject of negotiation with research partners and participants, as well as colleagues and university executives with responsibility for teaching and learning.

The following chapter sections provide a commentary on some of the research approaches that have had a significant influence on the selection and application of research approaches, tools and techniques, and modes of reporting used in the projects presented in

this portfolio. In particular, I have chosen to focus on heuristics, action research, participatory research and insider research, because of their relevance to workplace research and to the distinctive aims and values of an educational doctorate.

Heuristics

Kahakalua (2004) suggests that:

...heuristic research requires that the investigator have a “direct, personal encounter with the phenomenon being investigated and [be] present throughout the process” (Moustakas, 1990, p. 14). Only through continuous self-search, self-dialogue, and self-discovery, and an unwavering belief that knowledge grows out of direct human experience and can be discovered and explicated through self-inquiry, can an environment be created that allows the research question and the methodology to flow out of inner awareness, meaning, and inspiration (Douglas & Moustakas, 1985; Maslow, 1966). This involvement of the researcher in the process distinguishes heuristics from other phenomenological methodologies. (p. 22)

My engagement in educational research had always been intense, personal and passionate. It has always been about trying to understand the phenomena that I encountered in my various professional roles as teacher, academic, instructional designer, and professional developer. It has always been about finding ways of improving life for everyone, but it was also driven both consciously and unconsciously from the self, and the search for my own understanding, doing and being. At the commencement of my doctoral studies, I was quite unaware of heuristics as an espoused approach to research, with an established literature and well-developed theoretical frameworks. It is only quite recently that I have come to appreciate the theoretical perspective that perhaps best describes much of distinctive flavour of my ‘research-brocolage’

The research undertaken in this portfolio is coloured by a very personal experience of life as a teacher. From the beginning of my doctoral studies, I was conscious of the richness of my own insights into the teacher’s world (I had 30 years experience as a teacher and worked extensively with teachers in both schools and universities improving teaching and learning). I felt a strong emotional connection to the issues under investigation, and had a well-established philosophy with relevant and deeply held values and beliefs. I was acutely aware that my own work-life experience would have a powerful influence my choices of topic, research methodology, style of implementation and consequent actions. However, I was

equally alert to warnings from the mainstream Western research community not to allow personal experiences, values and perceptions to 'pollute' my work as a researcher. The scientific, logical perspectives that dominated my early research training prioritized approaches that achieved neutrality (Patton, 1986, 2002). My reading about phenomenological approaches suggested that the priority should be to see phenomena from the perspective of the participants in my studies rather than my own ideas as researcher. And even though qualitative methods have gained increasing respect, many research authorities remain antagonistic to inclusion of personal values, beliefs and agendas. The potential value of a personal experience and voice is typically disregarded, and good research design is often perceived to be achieved only when personal biases are tightly controlled, distanced or preferably eliminated.

In the early days of my doctoral education as a researcher, consideration of ways to manage bias were dominant, however, my concern for the well-being participants, my own curiosity, the strength of my own experience, values and beliefs, led me to develop an interview technique that frequently included the sharing of my own views, experiences, insights. Intuition led me to respond this way, and when I reflected on my technique I judged it to be a natural and respectful way to behave with colleagues. The reciprocity of sharing related experiences with acknowledgement of the emotional dimensions and personal values, was always well-received and not only created trust, but allowed for affirmation of the other's life-world.

I experienced a continuing unease about the balancing of conflicting goals of researcher distance, with the value and place of my own voice and story. But as I became more experienced as a researcher, I grew more confident about the potential of personal stories and connections to contribute to knowledge building. I came to see myself as a participant in the generation of data, a collaborator in meaning-making not simply a collector of other teachers' narratives. And a critical incident half-way through my studies convinced me that I should place a much higher value on my own story and my own learning; and that as long as I was transparent about my role I could be an authentic and honest participant, in addition to my role as researcher. As the portfolio includes a series of interlinked works, sections were completed along the way and I shared my results with others through conversations, forums, conferences and seminars. At one invited presentation, I interwove my own story as a teacher, with findings from one of my studies that highlighted the dilemmas many award winning teachers experienced in finding work life-balance. My own narrative was a device to engage the audience in a way that was honest, and direct but allowed for emotion. I wanted

to share my insights about the challenges of teaching well, without it coming to dominate life entirely.

The story telling was in part cathartic, releasing some of the tensions I experienced myself in trying to balance (usually unsuccessfully), the work demands of trying to be a good teacher, colleague and leader, with my personal, family and domestic life. I invited the audience to share their own related stories with each other. Whilst clearly the audience attending came because they were interested in the topic and perhaps represented a sample group for whom work life balance was already a significant problem, the response was quite astonishing. There were tears, choked voices, assertive verbal expressions of affirmation, and vigorous nods of agreement; all suggesting that the stories I told, and the findings I shared, resonated meaningfully. One academic shared the following story:

You know that's so true [over-working- to the detriment of family life]. I've worked through every Xmas break in the last five years. We had all these students doing summer school and wanting help, I had to be there. This year I said to my wife, "Goodness that's another year I haven't had a holiday". "No", she said, "and neither have I, and neither have our children – probably too late now, they'll be too old next year to want to bother with us"

The room was silenced by the poignancy of his narrative. It was impossible not to *sense* the reality of the problem of excessive workloads, and the conflicts and dilemmas created by a commitment to students that demands attention above and beyond the needs of personal and family life. It was clear from the audience response that there was a quite different dynamic in the room to a usual research seminar, and that there was a mixing of emotion, experience and insight that flowed across audience, researcher and research participants to create a whole new depth of shared understanding. It was satisfying to feel that the research I was undertaking was documenting the reality of teachers' lives accurately, and that it was highlighting issues that really mattered to academics. However, what struck me most forcefully was the idea that in this one room there were so many people, including myself, who were knowledgeable, intelligent, and capable, who recognised serious problems in their work-life balance that they did not like, yet it seemed they did not take action to change. In that moment, I moved to a qualitatively different understanding about the nature of knowledge, and the relationship of researcher to learning.

I had always maintained a rhetoric that the only true value of education was that it made life better, that it improved the world in some way. I had always envisaged my research as worthwhile because it might contribute to improving teaching and learning at university, and

to improving teachers' lives. I was committed to the idea of action research and participatory research (as described below) because I believed that it might encourage positive change for others. But suddenly, the significance of achieving change myself through involvement as a researcher 'dawned upon' me. The experience had the quality of a 'revelation'. I began to feel there was a much stronger argument to be made about the role of the personal in researching and a legitimate place for involving the self, not distancing the self, as part of the research process to explore phenomena. The solution to appeared to be to celebrate and use the insights that come from the researcher as an insider, but to use them in a more deliberate and systematic way.

The following week a colleague who had been at my presentation caught up with me. We fell into conversation about place of tacit knowledge, perception, intuition, and sensing as research tools and the potential advantages or dilemmas arising from a researcher's intimate and emotional connection with the on-going experience under investigation. "Ah", she said with a twinkle in her eye, " I think I should introduce you to 'heuristics". The next day a pile of journal articles appeared at my door, opening up a whole new research perspective on personal voice and its legitimate place in the search for truth and meaning.

My involvement as an active participant was already established through my commitment as a professional to reflective practice, and through the choice of action research as a primary approach. I was quite clear about my role as an insider-researcher (see below). Now I saw a way to integrate self into the learning: to use tacit knowledge more effectively, and to incorporate personal development as a fully legitimate goal.

Heuristics is closely aligned to phenomenology (also an influence in my bricolage), but it positions the researchers' autobiographical experience directly and explicitly throughout all aspects of the research project. Clark Moustakas, is widely acknowledged as inspiring interested in heuristic approaches. In the introduction to his seminal text *Heuristic research: design, methodology and application*, he describes heuristics as:

... a process of internal search through which one discovers the nature and meaning of experience and develops methods and procedures for further investigation and analysis. The self of the researcher is present throughout the process and, while understanding the phenomenon with increasing depth, the researcher also experiences growing self-awareness and self-knowledge. Heuristics processes incorporate creative self-processes and self discoveries. (Moustakas, 1990, p. 9)

Of all the family of qualitative methods, heuristic research is perhaps the most extreme in its distance from traditional quantitative methodologies. Investigations that treat the researcher's understanding of self, and personal development as legitimate research goals; and the documentation and reflection on their own human life experience as meaningful source material for analysis and interpretation is quite contrary to the typical Western view of scientific method.

Distinctive features of the approach as explained by Moustakas (1990) include:

- selecting questions that are challenging to the researcher personally, because of their own life experience and the questions they have about themselves and their world;
- exploring the interface between one's own 'self-inquiry' and the thoughts and experiences of others as a means of revealing the underlying meanings of significant human experiences;
- Making tacit knowledge explicit;
- Allowing extended time for deep immersion and internal reflection on key questions and puzzles;
- Using the tools of tacit knowledge in an organised and disciplined way to reveal the common ground that underlies unique experiences:
- self-dialogue: describing experience in many ways and articulating core themes and essences (Salk 1983, in Moustakas);
- intuition: noticing and drawing on instinctual understandings; sensing and articulating patterns and linkages from observations and experiences;
- applying an internal frame of reference: to make sense of behaviours that do not appear to follow logic and reason (Salk 1983 in Moustakas);
- speculation: a willingness to guess (intuit or sense) at meanings (Polanyi, 1964 in Moustakas);
- reading physiognomy: reading moods from engagements with others even where it can not always be explained (Polanyi, 1964 in Moustakas);
- feeling your way: a willingness to use the imagination to try ideas, "grope in the dark" (Polanyi, 1964 in Moustakas p. 22); and,
- integrating subsidiary (obvious) and focal (implicit, obscured) features of tacit knowledge (Polanyi, 1964 in Moustakas).

The use of these kinds of approaches has become accepted as a worthwhile and indeed a rigorous way to advance knowledge (Berg, 2007). This approach is deeply responsive and respectful to the people involved who are the subjects of inquiry, and for whom the knowledge implies opportunities for positive change. It is an approach that therefore resonates particularly well with many feminists thinkers seeking research approaches that place a value on feminine ways of thinking. The methodology has also been taken on and developed particularly by and for Indigenous peoples (Tuhiwai Smith, 1999; Kahakalau, 2004)

Moustakas (1990) identifies six phases to heuristic research: initial engagement; immersion into the topic; incubation; illumination; explication; creative synthesis. Reflecting on my research experience I was able to identify resonances with each. Moustakas presents these stages as progressive, with each building on the other, and he implies that the stages will be systematically and deliberately applied in sequence.

Whilst I had made no deliberate intent on my part to use heuristics as a specific approach, I recognised elements from each of the stages in my research. In my intuitive use of the process, my application of phases had not been sequential but often ran parallel to each other; and typically they were cyclic in that I went through repeated cycles, revisiting phases and elaborating or changing direction or emphasis slightly. In part this is intrinsic to any reflective practice, but it is also a natural consequence of a longitudinal study that contains discreet but interrelated elements. In the decade of my studies, professional doctorates were still an evolving mode of knowledge production. Now I began to appreciate more fully that the struggle to find, justify and apply a coherent methodology balancing academic, professional workplace and personal needs and aspirations was a critical component of the research role.

The influence of heuristics on my approach to research

Accepting that I was not aware of heuristics until my studies were well advanced, I can acknowledge both intuitive influences (prior to reading about heuristics) and explicit influences, where I made conscious decisions to incorporate ideas from heuristics into my approach. These influences impact on methodology through goals, research questions, participant selection, data collection, analysis and interpretation as well as in dissemination and reporting. Significant examples of the influence of heuristics (initially intuitive and later more deliberate) in the portfolio projects include:

- Goals that are extended to include self knowledge, self development, and the actions of researcher to change through engagement with research as well as in response to findings;

- questions adapted to reveal the 'essence' of the phenomenon that goes beyond planned questions in response to intuition and sensing on the part of the researcher;
- open-ended questions affirmed as critical, with a high value placed on alertness to emergent data;
- The inclusion of the researcher as a full participant (an intrinsic part of the data source) not simply as an observer-researcher who is also a member of the professional workplace teams, collaborating in change actions;
- the researcher's own stories, journals and self reflections are included and actively valued in data analysis;
- tacit knowledge is identified and exploited in analysis and interpretation (thoughts, emotions, intuitions, sensing) to clarify and explain the topic; and early data re-visited to reflect on the researcher's personal journey more thoroughly;
- explicit plans made to manage the risks associated with opening up personal traumas or distress, and the sometimes unsettling or even distressing consequences of transformation;
- interview technique includes extended and repeated interviews with time to allow free-flowing discussion, pause for thought and reconsideration of ideas;
- personal narratives are included in dissemination and reporting where appropriate to the audience; and
- the evaluation of the outcomes of research includes personal learning, growth and change.

Heuristics encourages confidence in my role as researcher to embrace the passion and the personal that is an intrinsic part of my being. And this, for me, provides for a more authentic, honest and ultimately more humane approach to research.

Participant action research

Whilst acknowledging that many influences arise from my personal life experience, values and beliefs, the workplace as the site of my research, is quite clearly the most significant factor impacting on research methodology. Participant action research is the dominant approach, chosen for its strength as a model for change. And by definition my role as researcher in all the projects must be one of an insider.

Each study in the portfolio falls within the broad family of participant action research. The term action research (AR) is accredited to Kurt Lewin (Bargal, 2008; Mills, 2007). Although there is much diversity within the AR family (Cassell & Johnson, 2006), participant action research is distinguished by an intention to go beyond the collection, analysis and interpretation of data and the articulation of informed theory, to achieve positive and practical change in social, professional and workplace contexts (Somekh, 2006). It is the effectiveness of action research as a tool to improve the workplace and professional services such as education, that aligns this approach well with the aims and intentions of an educational doctoral study located in a university setting with the improvement of teaching and learning as a primary goal.

Key characteristics of action research include:

- it is conducted by, for, and with people who share common goals, and purposes;
- it is typically located in a specific context such as a workplace;
- it addresses identified concerns and dilemmas relevant to the participants;
- it involves group members in the collection of evidence to support the development of a plan of action that will lead to improvements;
- it assumes a cycle of on-going problem identification, clarification and evidence seeking, problem-solving, and, action for improvement; and,
- it seeks to build the capacity of the participants as much as contributing to the solution of the specific identified problems and dilemmas.

Glanz (2003) identifies significant advantages in action research approaches for supporting change in educational settings including:

- effective engagement of people in the processes of improvement that increases understanding and commitment;
- the creation of a positive, climate with shared goals and shared decision-making; and,
- promotion of a critical stance towards innovation and change, and to reflective practice.

Advocates of action research in education consistently argue that it has an unusual capacity to stimulate change in... “practitioners’ practices, their understandings of their practices, and the conditions in which they practise” (Kemmis, 2009, p. 463). Effective change and positive improvement, is a primary goal for all my work.

Because action research is designed and applied by practitioners in their own settings, they have a high level of control over what is done, how it is done and when it is done. This ensures that the research is ... "tailored to what can be achieved without disrupting practice" (Krathwohl, 2009, p. 557). It also provides for an open-ended framework that can be used continually to both focus and re-direct interest according to emerging and changing priorities. The work environment in which these studies took place was characterised by radical change, including challenging and diversifying teaching contexts, insecure employment, increased scrutiny of teaching performance, and high workloads. Any research perceived as irrelevant or creating disruption or additional work, or posing risks to the achievement of teachers' goals and targets would be likely to be resisted. By keeping the control over what is done, when and how, with the practitioners, the research can be undertaken in a way that maximises benefits whilst minimising potential problems for participants.

The shift of power from external researchers to internal groups of professionals also helps to ameliorate tensions that might exist between academic researchers and practitioners in some settings:

The tension between academe and field is endemic; academics, with the responsibility, time and resources to continually work at improving practice, believe they should always be ahead of the field. To the practitioner, however, their ideas are often impractical, unrealistic and overly complex; worst of all despite their confident demeanor, experts are not always right. Action research, controlled and done by practitioners, redistributes the balance of power.

(Krathwohl, 2009)

In most studies undertaken in this portfolio, the participants in the action research are themselves academics teaching in a university setting. This might suggest that tensions arising from the differences world-views, purposes and perceptions power between researches and practitioners would be limited. University teachers might be expected to be familiar and comfortable in the research world. However, this might not in fact be the case. Many teaching staff in universities are not experienced researchers themselves, particularly in the professional programs that rely heavily on practical experience in the field such as teacher education, nurse education, accountancy. They may not necessarily understand and trust research or researchers investigating their work or feel empowered as equal partners.

The differentials in power between university executives, academic managers and teaching academics are also highly relevant. Many teaching academics during the period of study,

were acutely aware of changing power relations in higher education, noting the rise of managerialism and the pressure to conform to internal and external views and controls (Deem & Brehony, 2005; Marginson & van der Wende, 2007). The global debate about the quality of university teaching is lively, public and continuing, as is the world-wide demand for institutional improvement and reform in higher education (King, 2011). This presents many challenges to university teachers, including, for many, a “crisis of academic identity” (Marginson, 2002, p. 412); a sense that they are losing their professional power, autonomy and voice. In response, some academics can become resistant to change and to the strategies adopted by managers to control or re-direct work energy and interest (Teelken, 2012). This is one likely reason for the persistent difficulty of achieving and sustaining systemic improvement in education (Angus, 1998; Hargreaves, 1994; Hargreaves, 2009; Quinn, 2012).

An action research approach places the research in the hands of the participants, and therefore gives them some sense of power and control over the investigations and any judgments or change actions that might arise from findings. The inclusivity offered in an action research approach therefore has the potential to help bridge the gap between executives, managers and teachers, to show value for the expertise, experience, knowledge and opinions of the teachers, and to rebuild trust across different organisational roles and levels through collaborative work. The collaboration in the participant approach at the heart of action research is seen by many to be a rare and critical element in progress towards effective institutional reform (Gallego, Hollingsworth, & Whitenack, 2001; Hargreaves, 1996; Hargreaves & Bascia, 2000).

In practice, action research approaches can be quite diverse:

Action research is not a single method. Action research is a strategic approach to knowledge production, integrating a broad array of methods and methodological approaches in specific ways to create new understanding for participants and researchers through solving practical and pertinent problems and supporting problem-owners’ democratic control over their own situation. As an approach to knowledge, action research expands outside the existing borders of discipline-based conventional social science. (Greenwood 2007, p. 249)

Although action research can include different practices, its core distinguishing characteristic as an iterative process that includes cycles of practitioner problem-solving activity has remained quite stable over time (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008; Fox, Green, & Martin, 2007; Hui &

Grossman, 2008; Kemmis, Weeks, & Atweh, 1998). Cycles typically include sequential, though inter-related stages:

- identifying a problem to be solved or an improvement that is needed (this forms the basis of the underpinning research question);
- investigating the problem through the collection and analysis data of relevant data (this could include researching the literature as well as primary data);
- developing improvement plans on the basis of the data;
- implementing the plans;
- reflecting on the process and evaluate outcomes;
- restating the problem (incorporating new issues arising and/or identifying the things that have not succeeded; and,
- repeating the cycle.

The university site for all the projects in the portfolio introduced a 'Plan, Do, Review' cycle approach to quality improvement in the late 1990s. Academic managers were supportive of any activity that would promote quality improvement and most academic staff were practiced in the use of improvement cycles, even where they were not familiar with action research. Most participants were able to align their annual work plans easily with their involvement in the studies, and take benefit from it. As an academic employed in the university, it was part of my formal responsibilities to be an active participant in improvement cycles, and to provide leadership in designing and implementing project that would enhance teaching and learning. The application of on-going cycles of research and improvement was also an attractive option of the strength of interaction it created between doctoral studies and normal workplace practice. Research initiated in study could easily be further developed, embedded and continued with a life of its own, and leadership passed to other professionals. Similarly improvement activities already in action within the workplace could be enhanced by a contribution from a doctoral study.

The alignment with research rather than simply with the management of development or improvement cycles, brings potential for a more rigorous approach with a higher standard of evidence used to support each stage of the cycle. The research orientation is identified in the degree to which there is intentional commitment to:

- locate ownership for the knowledge and decision-making with the work team;
- work in a systematic (research oriented) way;

- collect and use local evidence to support decision-making;
- document evidence, decisions and processes in an open and transparent way; and,
- share findings within the workplace and on some occasions with a wider community of practice.

Lisa Abrams (in McMillan & Schumacher, 2010, p. 446) points to differences she sees between traditional research and action research in terms of:

- the people who conduct the research (practitioners rather than professional researchers);
- the goals (locally relevant knowledge rather than knowledge that can be generalized);
- the selection and application of research tools and instruments (prioritizing ease and convenience rather than technical adequacy);
- data analysis (simply descriptive rather than both descriptive and inferential); and,
- dissemination (local rather than to the wider community).

In reality, as with any research approach, there can be a significant variation in the particular way the topic is investigated, and the differences Abrams identifies may not always be clear and distinctive. At first glance Abrams distinctions may seem to imply that action research is less rigorous than traditional research. Rigour in research is always an issue, and quality is as important in action research as in any other approach. Ethical considerations are important, as are issues of reliability, validity, dependability, credibility, transferability (Abrams, 2010; Blair, 2010). However, whilst some aspects of quality need adaption, many elements of the action cycle reflect and incorporate quite traditional research standards. Marti and Villasante (2009) note how some researchers have replaced the core value of validity with new concepts, for example trustworthiness, authenticity, quality; whilst others preserve the term validity, but choose to redefine it.

My position is that action research should not simply try to replicate the values of traditional research but seek to meet standards relevant to its own paradigm. Indeed, evaluation of quality needs to be aligned with the specific model and purpose of action research as well as accommodating the perspectives of the participants which may be quite diverse (Elliott, 2007; Marti & Villasante, 2009). The particular strength and usefulness of action research

comes directly from its contextual relevance, from inclusion of practitioners, and from the use of tools that are available and quick and easy to apply. Mindful actions and practical applications to resolve real world problems in the short term, often take priority over the formation of new theory and knowledge. Different measures of quality are required that address action and change more directly.

There is a growing research literature that debates the evaluation of action research. Since action research itself is complex and diverse, so too are notions of good action research. The literature provides a variety of ideas, frameworks and recommendations for understanding and managing quality across different components of the action research cycle, however, there is no definitive set of criteria. Instead there seems to be a general affirmation that quality should be sensitive to both context and purpose, and will therefore always be diverse. Small and Uttal (2005, pp. 943-944), offer the useful analogy of “trade offs”, in pointing to the need for action researchers to consciously and continuously make decisions that balance the priorities of researchers with those of practitioners. For example:

- academic rigor through accuracy and control in research with relevance immediacy and utility;
- depth (narrow topics with great detail acknowledging complexity) with breadth and selection of issues that seem most pragmatically focused on change;
- complexity and intrusiveness;
- time for detailed planning and full exploration of issues against expediency and the practical relevance of change (it may only have value in the immediate); and,
- weighing of available resources (funding, time, expertise) what is available against what would be ideal.

Decisions about the selection of criteria for quality, planning for quality and evaluating quality can be seen as intrinsic to the process, and essentially a task for the participants and stakeholders on a case-by-case basis. I accept the proposition that quality criteria need to be agreed (by stakeholders) in context of a real investigation, and should be inclusive of ethics, and pragmatics as well as epistemology (Altrichter, 1999, p. 3).

Strategies in Action Research

Much of the literature on action research focuses on describing the underpinning philosophies, the primacy of purpose, action and participant control; and effective and ethical ways of managing the cycles of problem identification, investigation and observation, reflection and change. There is a broad assumption that action researchers will select and

use a wide range of research tools (both qualitative and quantitative) and strategies in accordance with their beliefs about purpose and the practicalities of time, resources and expertise. Practicing action researchers do however, share specific strategies they have found helpful, and I have incorporated some of these into my own research toolkit: for example, journal writing; accessing external expertise and distributed leadership.

Journal writing

Krathwohl (p. 557) identifies journals as a complimentary strategy to identify issues and reflections. In action research this means ideas are documented and can be shared. Journals can be used by individuals, but also kept in the form of meeting notes to ensure decisions and reasons for decisions are clear within the group.

External expertise

The urgency of solving real problems in a busy workplace means that there is little time for participants to invest in exploring and researching ideas in depth. Expediency is important. In order to progress quickly to actions, participants need to trust that their judgment, expertise and capability is good enough. The repeating cycles of action research allow for continual refinement, with small simple improvements in either outcomes or insights being a sufficient achievement to justify action. On the other hand, even cursory reading about the ways other people are tackling similar problems may reveal significant insights to the research group; and calling in experts to provide specialist knowledge or skills or contribute to the debate is an appropriate pragmatic. As action research is a shared enterprise, dividing up the work of uncovering existing relevant knowledge is an appropriate and pragmatic strategy (Krathwohl, 2009).

Distributed leadership

Whilst it can be helpful to identify a single leadership role, to ensure that an action research project runs smoothly, distributed leadership models are more appropriate to my overall philosophy and goals. An inclusive practice that accords leadership to all team members benefits from diverse skills can ensure that each team member enjoys opportunities to develop their skills and knowledge and be recognised and rewarded for their work.

In summary, action research is an ideal approach for practitioners seeking to improve their practice. Project Five: *Higher Education students' perceptions of assessment*, adopts the action research cycle including the key steps of problem identification, clarification, investigation, planning for improvement, implementation of improvements plans and

continuing the cycle. It also exemplifies key aspects of action research that I have incorporated into my bricolage and used across other projects:

- inclusive, collaborative team approach where practitioners (and participants) can learn, and lead improvement, through evidence-based practical trialing of intelligent solutions;
- flexibility in approach (throughout process) with application of qualitative and quantitative techniques to support investigation as appropriate;
- adoption of research questions focused on local specific problems;
- priority to the pragmatics of the workplace (speed, context and resource-sensitivity); a willingness to engage with improvement and progress by small steps through continuing cycle;
- sharing of learning with others through communications appropriate to practitioners as well as academia; and,
- extensive use of quality questioning (see illustrative questions above) at all stages of research to enhance the value, authenticity and trustworthiness of each project.

Peter Reason and Hilary Bradbury (2006), identify a strand in the action research tradition that emphasises community participation and research collaboration as a mechanism of empowerment and social change. Paulo Freire (1994, chapter 3), is well known for his advocacy of thematic investigation, as research that has the purpose of active change: research with the people, and for the benefit of the people not just research about the people. According to Budd L. Hall (2005), the specific term participatory research (PR) was originally applied in Tanzania, in the early 1970s, to approaches that involved communities in the 'creation of knowledge' (p. 5). The first meeting of the International Network of Participatory Research in 1977 articulated a set of definitions as follows:

- 1) PR involves a whole range of powerless groups of people- exploited, the poor, the oppressed and the marginal.
- 2) It involves the full and active participation if the community in the entire research process.
- 3) The subject of the research originated in the community itself and the problem is defined, analysed and solved by the community.

4) The ultimate goal is the radical transformation of social reality and the improvement of lives of the people themselves. The beneficiaries of the research are the members of the community.

5) The process of participatory research can create a greater awareness in people of their own resources and mobilize them for self-reliant development.

6) It is a more scientific method of research in that the participation of them in the research process facilitates a more accurate and authentic analysis of social reality.

7) The researcher is a committed participant and learner in the process of research, i.e. a militant rather than detached observer.

(Hall, 1978, p. 5, cited in Hall 2005)

The concept of active engagement of people in research for their own benefit and to support activism in the improvement of their lives has been widely taken up by social movements, as well as universities, around the world. Whilst this portfolio does not confront extremes of poverty, marginalization or political disenfranchisement, it does have an explicit intent to contribute positively to the well-being of teachers. A university does act as a community, and the original stimulus for the research included concerns that all was not well for teachers in that community. Australian university teachers would not normally be regarded as 'the exploited' or the marginalised in the global context of poverty and oppression, nevertheless their voices are often less well heard in the local community, often they feel their views are trivialized, silenced or ignored, and certainly there is evidence to support legitimate concern about their health and well-being (as revealed in the literature review and in studies within this portfolio). Teaching work in universities is often undertaken by un-tenured staff: sessional staff, staff with short-term or fixed term contracts.

This means that even highly experienced and well-qualified teachers often have very poor employment conditions. They are typically employed in low status positions, with low pay, limited hours of work, poor security, restricted opportunities for professional development and advancement. This in turn means it is difficult for them to participate in academic discussion and debate or have much influence on developing policy and practice (Lefoe, Parrish, Malfroy, McKenzie, & Ryan, 2011). For many education observers this situates teachers as powerless in their profession (Hilferty, 2008).

Teaching in universities has become increasingly feminised. In Australia, as in most developed countries, women hold a significant percentage of teaching roles, and are over represented in low status, low paid and casual positions. The negative impacts of the changing higher education environment are therefore experienced in a highly gendered manner (Bagilhole & White, 2011; Davies & Thomas, 2002). Since the 1960s, feminist critique has challenged research methodology as being gendered, and proposed alternative approaches not just as part of a debate about finding the best research methods, but also to offer a narrative:

...which is about the relations between the social and scientific divisions of labour, the cultural production of masculinities and femininities, and the processes used to establish an understanding of the social and material world. (Oakely, 1998, p. 707).

I came to my doctoral studies with a work-life history and a set of pre-existing values and beliefs that had been strongly influenced by feminism (Wadsworth, 2001; Nagy Hess-Biber, 2008). I understood feminism as a subset of the larger debate about equity and social justice and was deeply committed to always living and working in ways that would challenge prejudice and discrimination, and support development towards a fairer more equitable world. In a general sense, this position is entirely consistent with participatory action research, however, my reading and reflections on feminist influences in research have provided a more nuanced approach, that acknowledges the particular position and experience of female teachers, and explicitly pays attention to the motivations and pre-dispositions that arise from my own life experience as a woman.

Implications of participatory research for the portfolio projects

The portfolio studies draw on the underlying themes of participatory research by providing opportunities not only for the achievement of improved knowledge and understanding about good teaching and improved educational practice, but also for individual and collective change. Each project in the portfolio provides intentional opportunities for participants to develop enhanced self-awareness, particularly about the nature and value of their work, through engagement in the research. Students and teaching academics have been invited to participate in ways that acknowledge and celebrate their expertise and explicitly seek to provide them with experiences and insights that may stimulate self-directed change. There are also opportunities for local academic managers to be sensitised to the work lives of teachers in their particular university both through engagement in the process and through reading reports that include the research outcomes; as well as generalized insights being

shared through the wider community of academic managers through conference papers and presentations.

As an individual, I support the philosophical arguments of participatory research, and this imparts a moral responsibility to ensure that in my role as a researcher, I will:

- ensure that I include participants from less powerful groups and under-represented groups and do everything I can to act in ways that honour and respect them;
- provide the best possible environment to allow honest data collection and a truthful voice to participants; and ensure that I provide opportunities for participants to review and amend data and interpretations to be more accurate and authentic to their experience and perspectives;
- be inclusive throughout all my research practice;
- ensure that as much as is possible, the influence of power differentials are considered, discussed and equalized; and,
- take action to share significant findings in ways that challenge wrongs.

I also acknowledge that my feminist perspective has influenced my world-view and I have tried to take account of this through self-awareness and transparency across all aspect of the planning, execution and reporting of projects. I am conscious of adjusting my approach in the light of feminist perspectives and a number of ways:

- involving women as researchers, and offering opportunities for them to benefit from the research;
- engaging women as participants; whilst acknowledging men also have valid experiences and may have issues that require voicing for the benefit of all;
- actively opening up gendered issues for reflection; and revealing 'invisible' gender issues in interview conversations and through the sharing of findings;
- observing the implications for men of working in a feminized profession, of prioritizing teaching or of adopting feminine ways of behaving in the workplace;
- including questions that invite comment on the role of gender in experience;
- inviting participants to share intuition/feelings about things, and trusting the value of noting and exploring my own (feminine) intuition;
- including analysis by gender to reveal gendered patterns;

- welcoming narrative as a way to share experiences and to convey meaning; and,
- using of participants' own words extensively in reporting (letting them speak for themselves).

Insider participant approaches

The choice of one's own workplace as the site of research has significant implications for every aspect of a study. It will influence the identification of purpose(s) and the research focus, the selection of participants, the nature and conduct of data collection and analysis, the presentation of findings and recommendations, and the instigation of actions in response to findings. It will impact on the researcher, the participants and the audience for research in diverse ways. Workplace research must deal with the interests of the organisation, participants, the individual researcher, as well as the wider concerns of the community. These interests will sometimes be complementary, and at other times in conflict. Insider research is inherently complex, political and problematic, and raises interesting challenges and dilemmas across personal, professional and research domains (Coghlan & Brannick, 2001; Coghlan & Brannick, 2005; Coghlan & Holian, 2007; Moore, 2007; Perriton, 2000).

There has been a rapid increase in postgraduate studies that include researchers' own workplaces, communities or families in the research. Doctoral studies such as professional doctorates, for example, have become increasingly popular (Kemp, 2004; Lee, Brennan, & Green, 2009; Loxley & Seery, 2012). As is the case in this study, the people engaged in professional doctorates are usually experienced and expert professionals. Such candidates typically maintain full-time work throughout their study, so research sites that are easily accessible are critical to success. The primary purpose of most professional doctorates is to have a local, personal and positive impact in the workplace, so the focus of study is most often located in the immediate environment. Interestingly, despite the rising numbers of people formally researching their workplaces, the literature provides only limited inquiry-based evidence about the effectiveness of methodologies and the impact of outcomes in studies conducted by the workers themselves: "...traditional textbooks on research methodology, in education generally, and in educational leadership, more specifically, tend to gloss over the intricacies of insider" (Mercer, 2006, p. 2).

On the other hand, there is a long-standing and reasonably well-documented debate around the characteristics, influence and relative advantages and disadvantages of research by people who share a close relationship or common experiences with their participants. Relevant literature can be found particularly in the social sciences, in management and education theory, in feminist writing and critical theory; and within discussions amongst the

research community particularly concerned with the nature and value of objectivity in research. In traditional positivist research paradigms of scientific objectivity (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000), an assumption is made is that an external observer is likely to have a clear, objective perspective and the capacity to document reality with great accuracy (Mercer, 2006b). Counter-positivists however, hold that objectivity is an illusion, and researchers' bias will always interfere with the trustworthiness of data and the validity of research findings to some degree. The assumed objectivity of a socially and culturally distant researcher has been challenged and in many cases is found to be false. The seminal work of Margaret Mead in describing life in Samoa for example, was challenged on the grounds that it was distorted by lies, exaggerations and misrepresentations. Freeman (1983; 1997), claimed that information given in interviews was too easily believed, as the researcher had too little knowledge of local culture to recognize or suspect falsehoods. Fascinatingly, Paul Shankman (2010) published a recent attack on the validity and reliability of Freeman's conclusions on the grounds that Freeman's informant (Fa'apua'a - who was one of Margaret Mead's original interviewees) was not a reliable witness. Shankman used transcripts released after Freeman's death to show that Fa'apua'a's recollections (at age 87 and 92 years) were not lucid as Freeman claimed, but confused, conflicted and at times simply wrong. The significant of this contested research story is in alerting me to:

- the potential for my own misinterpretation of data, and thus the need to be alert to this danger and always maintain tentativeness in my assumptions;
- the need to adopt research protocols that attempt to secure authenticity;
- the need be clear and transparent about my methodologies and articulate about the justifications for the trustworthiness of my work, as well as identifying any known problems, conflicts, dilemmas or alternative explanations in my findings and interpretations; and,
- the need to review and evaluate the work of others critically.

Potential advantages of Insider-research

Merton (1972), popularized the terms 'insider' and 'outsider' to identify the differing distances possible between researchers and the researched. Supporters of an 'insider' approach highlight a range of advantages across all stages and aspects including the identification of worthwhile research topics/problems; ease of access and willingness of participants; efficiency and effectiveness in data collection methods; rich deep quality data collection; and, insightfulness and accuracy in analysis and generation of findings.

Identification and selection of worthwhile research topics/problems

David Coghlan and Teresa Brannick (2005; 2007), highlight the great value of 'pre-understandings' available to the insider-researcher. This includes insights into real problems and dilemmas evident in the workplace that are worthy of investigation (Miskovic & Hoop, 2006). 'Hot issues' are well-known to insiders (Roth, Shani, & Leary, 2007) and are usually intrinsically interesting because of the high level of immediate personal and professional relevance. Deep local knowledge and organisational familiarity also makes it easy to predict what is logistically possible to research, especially in the context of limited resources. This is important as professional doctorates are rarely supported by either institutional or research funding and are therefore reliant on free-to-use and minimum cost methodologies. Insiders are well-positioned to generate creative inquiry approaches that are likely to be successful in the particular context. Further, the insider can select problems within their own sphere of influence, increasing the likelihood that they will be able to act on findings or promote change on the basis of findings.

Ease of access, efficiency and effectiveness in data collection

Pre-understandings position the researcher well to identify relevant participants and where positive prior relationships exist, it can be quite easy to make initial contact with them. An insider is likely to understand and take account of issues that may discourage participation, and can often manage any discomfort in a positive manner (Roland & Wicks, 2009). Insiders often fore-see the benefits that may come to participants and can use them to encourage people to take part. Researchers who know the context can often work easily within the specific organisational culture and structures. Their own immersion in the culture limits 'culture shock' (Hockey 1993, cited in Rolands, 2009), and facilitates natural interactions and effective communications. Problems can be readily predicted and often avoided (Ravitch & Wirth, 2007), and hierarchical and political barriers managed with subtlety and sensitivity (Roland & Wicks, 2009). Insiders can usually identify and access relevant people with the authority to promote and support the research initiative, and work effectively with or around the subtle routines, events and culture of the group. Familiarity facilitates easy organisation and management of meetings, with ready access to appropriate locations and settings for interviews and great flexibility to adapt to meet the preferences of participants. Workplace research is usually very efficient in terms of time and expense. There is great flexibility to fit interviews and focus groups between work activities to suit both the interviewer and the participants, and reduce time lost moving between sites. There are few additional travel costs or charges for the use of facilities.

Rich deep quality data collection

It can be argued that shared workplace histories, deep immersion in the culture of the workplace, and prior relationships privilege the researcher in the collection of rich data (Ashworth, 1995; Hewitt-Taylor, 2002). An insider has the advantage of shared experiences, previous discussions and well-established common understandings. This shared knowledge makes it easier for participants to express their ideas, as they have common reference points and can make reasonable guesses about what can be assumed and does not need to be explained.

Insiders can use their own experience to make quick and easy judgments about areas of relevance that are overlooked or avoided by participants, as well as about the accuracy of what is said. Such insight enables an interviewer to probe for additional information, and seek elaborations, clarifications and affirmations during data collection. The insider may be able to read between the lines of what is said and see connections that can also be probed for accuracy, significance and relevance, this has potential to yield deeper meanings (Hewitt-Taylor, 2002; Mercer, 2006).

Trust is a key issue in the conduct of successful interviews and focus groups, and where this already exists it may encourage fast progress towards deep engagement (Roland, & Wicks, 2009). Further, insights into the subtleties of the 'conversations' (Roth, Shani, & Leary, 2007), also allow the researcher to manage and often alleviate tensions that may arise (Rabbitt, 2003). Following this logic it is often claimed that the closer the life experience of researcher is to the participant, the better the quality of data likely to emerge (DeVault, 1996; Mercer, 2006). Positive opportunities highlighted in the literature include:

- empathy may be easily demonstrated through affirmation of understandings about shared experiences and values;
- prior inter-personal and situational knowledge also means that 'less disclosure' is required between researcher and participant to established reciprocity (Harrison, MacGibbon, & Morton, 2001);
- known and trusted connections are positively recognised and acknowledged between researcher and participant (Deutsch, 2004);
- off the record conversations, where intimate details or strong opinions can be expressed in an informal way, and then re-constructed for formal reporting; and,
- the interview process easily becomes one of co-construction, a collaboration between researcher and participant in probing and shaping ideas together.

Insightfulness and accuracy in analysis and generation of findings

In addition to the use of prior knowledge to collect rich information, the insider may also benefit from the use of intuition in the analysis of data and evaluation of authenticity, and this connects insider-research closely with a feminist approach (Roland, & Wicks, 2009; Strauss, & Corbin, 1998; van Heugten, 2004). Deep insider knowledge also allows for a nuanced reading of the data (De Shone 1996, cited in Roland, & Wicks, 2009). The richness of data and depth of analysis that emerges in insider research is claimed as a real strength that enhances validity (Coghlan & Holian, 2007; Coghlan, 2009; 2012; Rabbitt, 2003; Rooney, 2005). Pauline Rooney (2005) explains that, “from an anti-positivist perspective therefore, insider research has the potential to increase validity due to the added richness, honesty, fidelity and authenticity of the information acquired” (p. 1).

Complexity, problems and dilemmas in insider research

Whilst there is potential for there to be many advantages in insider research, the literature warns that these are not guaranteed, each case is individual and the success of an inquiry will vary depending on the particular circumstances and the manner in which the research is conducted. Further, there are also many problems and dilemmas inherent to the workplace that can confound and complicate research, for example: Familiarity can encourage dependency on assumptions that are not tested sufficiently; relationships can compromise, subvert, divert or otherwise influence researcher or participants; and there can be difficulties for researcher in managing multiple roles.

Familiarity can encourage dependency on assumptions that are not tested sufficiently

Whilst many argue that an insider is better positioned as a researcher because of his/her knowledge of the relevant patterns of social interaction required for gaining access and making meaning', Shah (cited in Mercer, 2004, p. 556), others warn that the insider may be overly-influenced by the customs of his or her group, who remains ignorant, parochially mistaking error for truth (Mercer, 2004; Merton, 1972). Thus, an outsider is the only one who can achieve enough distance to see reality (Merton, 1972). It is the stranger who is able, “to survey conditions with less prejudice” (Simmel, 1950, p. 405), who can, “stand back and abstract material from the research experience” (Burgess, 1984, p. 23).

Shared assumptions may be effectively exploited for ease of communication and speed in identifying key ideas, however, familiarity can blind as well as illuminate. Assumptions can equally lead to data insensitivity and inaccuracy. Insiders may make assumptions that are in fact not valid and fail to probe, or question the things they assume they already know and understand. There is a danger that some ideas are so well known to everyone that they are

not seen as worthy of comment and everyday knowledge is therefore overlooked as possible areas of interest and relevance (Hockey, 1993 cited in Mercer, 2004; Hewitt-Taylor, 2002). Pre-conceptions can lead the researcher to assume the views and opinions of participants. Similarly, participants may assume the researcher knows things that in fact they do not (Hewitt-Taylor, 2002; Rabbitt, 2003). In each case this can distort the accuracy of information through omission, inadequate description or mis-information and inaccurate interpretations.

Relationships can compromise, subvert, divert or otherwise influence researcher, participants and others

Relationships between researcher and participant are inevitable in any qualitative study, but these can become particularly complex in the workplace. Relationships in the workplace are coloured by both social and power differentials, that extend beyond the immediate reciprocal researcher–participants relationship to include many others: Line managers, team-members, people with the power to promote, advantage or disadvantage. Such influence may be conscious or unconscious and is capable of changing both the information given the analysis and interpretation of data. Issues arising in the literature include:

- familiarity between people may also encourage ‘ethics slippage’ (Wiles, Charles, Crow, & Heath, 2006). with trust leading to an over-casual approach;
- participants may wish to influence, please or challenge the researcher or present themselves or others in a particular light to the researcher (Wiles, Charles, Crow, & Heath, 2006); and,
- both researcher and participants have vested interests in the organisation and may seek to exert particular perspectives either consciously or unknowingly.

Difficulties for researcher of managing multiple roles

A further complication in insider research is the potential for multiple roles to exist. The researcher and participants will have both formal and informal relationships that precede the research; and may give rise to unintended and unpredictable consequences across professional, personal and political domains. Examples from the literature include:

- changes in knowledge, insights, attitudes and expectations for both researcher and participants can lead to the breakdown of relationships (Taylor, 2011), and changes in attitude towards a work-role making it impossible to continue in the company (Coghlan, 2007);
- workplace roles can influence the purpose of research. Cooklin (cited in Coghlan & Holian, 2007), for example, identifies some workplace researchers as

'irreverent saboteurs', intent on disrupting the organisation in some way. Meyerson (2001), sees potential for 'tempered radicals' to use research initiatives to actively challenge workplace practices;

- alignment with subgroups and factions or employment roles that imply power or influence in the past, current or future can generate difficulties and sometimes conflicts for both researcher and participants (Coghlan & Brannick, 2005);
- unanticipated impacts on their associates, friend and their families. The point of workplace research to stimulate change, it is intended to force re-thinking (re-seeing) of self, people and the organisation. The findings will inevitably have personal relevance and insights gained will not always be comfortable (Moore, 2007).

Managing workplace research

The difficulties of insider research cannot be avoided, they are inherent in the approach, however, they can be acknowledged and managed. The concept of 'trustworthiness' is significant in the literature, and advocates for qualitative approaches that seek ways to improve trust in the quality of research at every stage of the process. Examples of strategies thought to enhance trustworthiness include:

- adopting critical perspectives (Fenwick, 2005);
- analysing self and context for potential bias (Rabbitt, 2003);
- critical self-reflection;
- measuring data and findings against the wider literature;
- use of triangulation;
- adopting grounded theory approaches that systematically and rigorously analyses data eliminating interpretations that cannot be backed by specific statements from interviews (Strauss & Corbin, 1998);
- using multiple participants and looking for saturation in the data to maximise the range of issues and ideas collected (Bowen, 2008);
- prolonged engagement (Padgett, 1998) Longitudinal study – revisiting over time
- honesty in review (Roland & Wicks, 2009);
- Team approaches to ensure alternative perspectives and 'fresh eyes' (Roland & Wicks, 2009; Strauss & Corbin, 1998), and collaboration in data analysis;

- accuracy checks at every stage, for example, member checking; and,
- application of academic integrity.

Summary of most significant implications of insider research on the portfolio projects

The nature and requirements of a professional doctorate provide no option but to engage with insider research. The point of a professional doctorate is to investigate the local workplace with a view to improvement: the researcher is therefore an insider, by definition. What the literature provides is useful insights into potential benefits that can from this approach, and useful cautions regarding some intrinsic problems. As ‘bricoleur’, I believe I should endeavour to learn from the experience of others, and select strategies and approaches that will maximise the benefits of my insider role whilst managing every aspect of the research process so as to minimize potential problems.

One further complication exists in the decision making about how much should be revealed about the complications and messiness of insider research. Some writers caution the doctoral student to avoid offering any commentary that might risk readers judging the research unfavourably (Paechter, 1996; Walford, 1998). I take an opposing view. I acknowledge that the application of ethical principles may be complex for the inside-researcher, and particularly in the context of doctoral studies under scrutiny by external readers charged with making judgments about the quality of the research. It will always be difficult to balance the responsibility to protect the interests of informants and employers and self. However, I believe that honesty in research is an ethical absolute. I therefore make a commitment to being alert to potential problems, mindful of managing the complications as best I can, and writing in a way that is fully transparent about methodology and any problems I encounter along the way. I believe this is best achieved by:

- Clearly declaring my insider position, articulating my expectations about how this will influence research, and engaging others in my reflections, discussions and debates (at all stages of the research) to reveal ‘blind spots’ (van Heugten, 2004).
- Providing a commentary on my research journey, describing the problems and dilemmas I faced and explaining decisions, omissions, errors and limitations.
- Demonstrating a willingness to seek, accept and present multiple ‘truths’, and alternative perspectives and meanings.
- Being alert to the complexities of relationships and responsibilities, planning with potential benefits and problems in mind, reflecting on all aspects of research, and ensuring flexibility to adapt if appropriate.

- Ensuring analysis accommodates and reflects different perspectives and alternative meanings and interpretations.
- Maintaining tentativeness in all stages of the research process and particularly in writing conclusions, or recommendations that emerge from the research.
- Providing sufficient rich data in sharing, reporting and presenting findings to allow the reader to draw insights and conclusions for themselves (beyond my own).
- Providing reporting that matches different audience and purpose.
- Acknowledging, respecting and actively working with the multiple stakeholders in the workplace and their differing perspective. This involves balancing the interests of stakeholders, negotiating all research matters openly and transparently, and seeking validity of analysis, synthesis and meaning-making by reference to different stakeholders.
- Sharing reflections on insider researcher experience.

The number of people engaged in insider-research is growing, particularly in the context of professional doctoral studies, and yet despite its complexities, many aspects remain under-researched (Mercer, 2006a, p. 2; Taylor, 2011). In documenting my reflections on my experience as an insider-researcher and I hope also to contribute to research methods scholarship. I invite my readers to respect and support honesty as an indicator of quality in research; and to share in the learning that comes from an authentic research journey.

The Bricolage (Research decision–making framework)

This portfolio includes a set of inter-linked studies conducted over a 10-year period, in a new Australian university. The central theme of my studies is teaching excellence, and all my work is designed to meet five over-arching intentions:

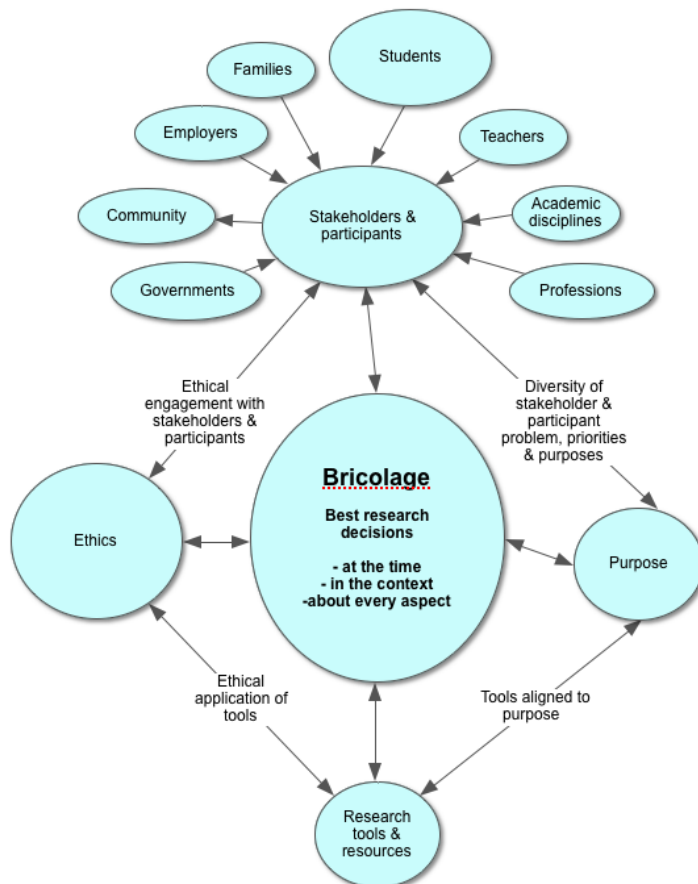
- contribute to improving teaching and learning in the local context;
- contribute to academic and professional knowledge through scholarship;
- demonstrate value and respect for university teachers;
- develop personally, professionally and academically; and,
- act ethically and for the mutual benefit of all stakeholders and participants.

These intentions provide a guiding framework to all my decisions and action relevant to the research and development activities presented in the portfolio. I have taken the metaphor of

researcher as bricoleur: This represents a deliberate choice to apply diverse approaches, methodologies and techniques. A bricoleur does not select in a random or ad hoc way, but approaches each research opportunity with openness and flexibility. Quality for me, as bricoleur, is making the best possible decision at the particular time, and in the particular circumstances. It is about careful choices to achieve the closest alignment between my research purpose and desired outcomes; the participants and stakeholders; the context; and, my commitment to academic, professional and personal values.

The specific selection of approaches, methodologies and techniques varies across studies not only to suit the unique conditions of individual investigations, but also in response to the dynamics of a rapidly changing context (the workplace, the people, the study environment, the academic world); and growth and development in my skills, knowledge and understandings as a researcher. Whilst acknowledging diversity and change, I have developed a framework to broadly describe my decision-making as a bricoleur.

Figure Two: Research framework for decision-making as bricoleur



It foregrounds the critical interaction between four elements: purposes, participants and stakeholders, the context and ethics. As bricoleur, the key question I ask myself continually is: “ What is the most effective, efficient and ethical action/decision/choice I can make about any step in the research process, to achieve my goals with this set of people in this time, place, context and with the resources available to me?”

Given the complexity of each element in the framework, and the difficulty of balancing the conflicts that inevitably arises when one works against another, it is unreasonable to expect perfect alignment in each and every decision. As bricoleur, I therefore aspire to simply making the best possible decisions at the time, accepting that they will rarely be perfect. A continuing cycle of improvement is the overall goal of research rather than single solutions to simple questions. This assumes that research and development will be ongoing, taken forward in the local workplace by myself and my colleagues, and built upon and further advanced by the community of higher education teachers, academics and professionals to meet the new and changing challenges and priorities.

CHAPTER FOUR

PROJECTS

Overview

This chapter presents a series of eight papers describing selected research and development projects relevant to the portfolio theme of Teaching Excellence. The articles were written for academic publication or conference presentation between 2003 and 2010. They are presented in their original formats. During the period of my doctoral studies, I was engaged in many research and development projects. Due to the nature of my work as a teacher, researcher and Quality Improvement Manager, all my work is relevant to my theme of Teaching Excellence: the papers selected for inclusion in this portfolio are illustrative rather than comprehensive. I have chosen papers that:

- are representative of my work across the study period;
- that align strongly with different aspects of my teaching excellence web;
- that illustrate different roles I have taken, different work-groups and academic communities I have worked with, and my varying levels of involvement, leadership and influence; and,
- that demonstrate ways I believe that I have met the ECU Doctor of Education competencies.

My understanding of the distinctive nature of a professional doctorate is that it is learning embedded in authentic workplace contexts, that brings together research and professional practice: and thus I place a particularly high value on team projects. All the papers are to a degree collaborative: I believe that this is appropriate to an educational workplace doctorate. In the work that underpins the first four papers, I have been the research leader, taking almost all of the responsibility for the conceptualization, design, implementation, analysis and interpretation and communication of findings. Participants and work colleagues have contributed through discussion about the need for projects and of aspects of the design and implementation; and particularly through shared knowledge construction in the interpretation of data and decision-making about actions that the findings suggest for workplace improvement. In the latter four projects, I was one of several research-team members. I have

included these latter papers not only because I believe they are pertinent to my theme, but also to demonstrate my commitment to collaborative work.

A brief introduction is provided for each article that:

- establishes the context for the paper;
- briefly describes its relevance to the portfolio theme, to justify its inclusion in the portfolio;
- clarifies my role as a doctoral candidate in the research and writing of the article;
- provides relevant post-script information.

In the interests of brevity, I have restricted my introductions to key points only.

Project One

Rewarding teaching excellence: The development of an innovative index to reward teaching activity in higher education

Context for the paper

This paper reports on the early stages of a workplace development project (2002-4) to develop a scheme to recognize and reward teaching excellence. It was organized, managed and implemented within working hours, as a collaborative venture led by the Faculty Teaching and Learning Office, embedded in the Faculty's Annual Teaching and Learning Plan. I undertook to lead the project, as part of my normal workload and agreed role as Quality Improvement Manager in the Teaching and Learning Office.

Relevance to the portfolio

The project addressed an authentic problem: the imbalance of recognition and rewards for teaching compared to research within the faculty. This difference is well documented in the literature as a widespread issue that impacts negatively on teachers and on the advancement of good teaching (See Chapter Two). The aim of the project was to explore academic faculty perspectives about teaching excellence, and use that data to support the development of a Teaching Activity Index (TAI) to reward Teaching Excellence. The project addresses the issues of teaching excellence in a very direct way, by seeking to:

- define teaching excellence, from the point of view of teaching and learning leaders, and teaching academics in one faculty of one university;
- identify indicators of teaching excellence;
- design, develop and implement a scheme to identify and reward teaching excellence; and,
- demonstrate and communicate valuing of teaching and teachers.

Role of the doctoral candidate in the research, project development, and writing of the article

Inspiration for the project arose from discussions between the Faculty Executive and the Office for Teaching and Learning, where I was employed at the time as a Quality Improvement Manager. As in many collaborative ventures, it is hard to quantify who generated which ideas, particularly in the early stages, but the project was conceived through

a three-way discussion between myself, the Associate Dean Teaching and Learning, and the Head of Faculty. During the development of the TAI my responsibilities included:

- serving as executive officer to the working party (this included leading, coordinating and administering the project, drafting all TAI reports, and drafting the pilot TAI);
- undertaking the relevant research: I conducted all the focus groups; designed and implemented questionnaires; collated and analyzed, and interpreted data; and prepared reports on the findings;
- authoring the paper presented in this portfolio: *Rewarding teaching excellence: The development of an innovative index to reward teaching activity in higher education*

This paper was circulated within the Faculty to interested parties, and with the local higher education teaching and learning community through a WA HERDSA presentation.

- presenting the paper at the 2004 Teaching and Learning Forum WA, Murdoch University, (note, it was not submitted for publication).

Postscript

The TAI ran for three years. Towards the end of the trial period, the university restructured the faculties. A new grouping of discipline areas was brought together under a new leadership team. This team had to manage through difficult economic circumstances, and were looking for ways to cut the budget. They did not see the TAI as appropriate to the new faculty structure, and TAI was abandoned: the final evaluation was not instigated. The process and tool were shared with other universities through conference presentations, and local teaching and learning gatherings. At least one other institution sought permission to use the TAI as a foundation to building their own schemes. To my knowledge it is still in use in at least one other Australian institution.

The TAI was highly innovative in its time, and the development of performance measures has been increasingly recognized as an important issue. A significant project, led by Denise Chalmers (2010), for example, was funded by the ALTC (now OLT) to investigate and develop indicators for Australian Higher Education. A range of relevant reports are now available from: <http://www.olt.gov.au/resource-rewarding-and-recognising-quality-teaching>

Rewarding teaching excellence: The development of an innovative index to reward teaching activity in higher education

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Abstract

In the contemporary world context, tertiary institutions and academic staff are constantly required to demonstrate their excellence. There is evidence to suggest that excellence in research is rewarded more highly than excellence in teaching: Researchers are perceived to have higher status and better career advancement opportunities. In Australia, successful research activity is rewarded directly at a national level through performance based funding. Within institutions individuals are rewarded through the application of a Research Activity Index (RAI), which provides funds that may be used by academics to support their work. This paper reports on the early stages of a new initiative in one university, to develop a parallel and complimentary Teaching Activity Index (TAI), to acknowledge excellence in teaching. It describes the conduct of a small scale research project exploring relevant perceptions and beliefs of academic staff, for example: The value of a TAI, the principles that should underpin a TAI; the kinds of teaching activities and qualities they would like to see rewarded. The insights gained through the study have supported the development and implementation of a pilot TAI.

Key words: Teaching Activity Index; teaching excellence; rewarding good teaching

The context of teaching excellence

In recent decades tertiary education in almost every country of the world has experienced great change. The global trend to move from a small-scale elite university system, to mass higher education and now towards universal access has dramatically increased the numbers and diversity of students (Elias & Purcell, 2003; Martin, 1999; Wolf, 2002). Massification may be desirable, but it has created serious funding stress, leaving the sector “in crisis around the world” (World Bank, 1994:2). Changes in government attitudes towards funding for tertiary study is resulting in falling public financial support for university teaching, and increasing student fees (Marginson, 2002), with economic interests dominating education policy and practice (Apple, 2000; Daun, 2001; Sidhu, 2003). Together with the rise of trans-national study this is contributing to the re-conceptualization of education as a commercial

product, rather than a public good (Allport, 1999; McInnis, 2000; Mok, 1999; Coaldrake & Stedman, 1999).

In Australia, the nature of the student body has been influenced by a change from a binary system of universities and colleges of advanced education to a unified university system; and the speed of change has proven challenging to the sector (Sharpham, 1993). The interests and interventions of governments, business and the community have reshaped the aims, activities, financing and governance of universities (Anderson 1990; Baldwin & James, Marginson, 1999; Meek & Wood, 1997; Scott 1998). Emerging technologies have also opened up new possibilities and demands, that are exciting to some academics, but confronting for others (Bates, 1997; Duderstadt, 2000; Paulson, 2002; Reeves, 2002). Universities are being challenged to demonstrate the quality of their work, to meet the increasing public demand for accountability; and to attract students and funding in a highly competitive education market (Aylett & Gregory, 1996; CQAHE, 1994; West, 1998). Against this background of dynamic change, the nature of academic work is under constant scrutiny, and the debate about what it might mean to be *an excellent academic* has become increasingly vigorous (Entwhistle, Skinner, Entwhistle & Orr, 2000; Ramsden 1998 & 2003; Reeves, 2002; Rhoades & Slaughter, 1997; Vidovich & Currie, 1998). One of many important issues in the debate about academic work and excellence, is the nexus between teaching and research, and differences in the way that these activities are rewarded, both at individual and institutional levels.

There is significant evidence to suggest that academic staff in many countries believe that excellence in teaching is less valued and rewarded than excellence in research. Seminal work by Ernest Boyer and his colleagues at the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching (Boyer 1990) highlighted the inconsistency between the importance of teaching that academics reported in their work, and the rewards and recognition it attracted compared with published research. His research showed that in most US institutions promotion and tenure is usually tied to achievements in research, and that commitment to teaching was not well rewarded. These findings are consistent with evidence coming from other research and writing of the time, and have been confirmed by more recent Australian studies (Marginson, 2000; Ramsden, Margetson, Martin & Clarke, 1995; Ramsden & Martin, 1996; Martin, 1999). Craig McInnis, (1998), similarly found that there were substantial differences between academics in the balance of their research and teaching preferences and workloads. The trend was for staff with research orientations to have higher status and rewards.

Whilst some of the difference in rewards may relate to differing status of research as compared to teaching, another factor is the comparative difficulty of measuring excellence in teaching. The typical measures of research quality are quantitative rather than qualitative: funding through successful grants, publication achievements, realization of commercial, professional or knowledge outcomes from research activity. These may sometimes be regarded as crude measures, but they tend to be simple to define, collect, compare and judge. The definition, identification and evaluation of teaching excellence, however, is much more complex. Excellence in teaching is constantly being redefined. Although the literature does promote certain teaching qualities with some consistency, for example there appears to be a general consensus that good teaching can be defined as teaching that supports students to achieve good learning outcomes, (Ramsden 1998; Ballantyne, Bain & Packer, 1997; Biggs, 1999). Nevertheless there is a huge range and diversity of factors contributing

to good teaching, most of which are difficult and expensive to measure (Campbell, Kyriakides, Muijs, & Robinson (2003); Fairweather, 2002; MacAlpine, 2001). In many countries student evaluations of teaching have been used increasingly as proxies for good teaching. In Australia, the government has encouraged students to evaluate their courses through a non-compulsory Course Evaluation Questionnaire. This is a well-regarded instrument, that is theoretically based on sound understandings of approaches that promote student learning (Wilson, Lizzio, & Ramsden, 1997). However, student evaluations remain a contentious measure of teaching quality. They are not always trustworthy, or implemented and interpreted appropriately; and there is a high level of academic scepticism about their reliability and validity (DeBerg & Wilson 1990; Dooris, 1997; Emery, Kramer, & Tian, 2003; (Marsh, 1991; McKeachie, 1997; Wolfer & Johnson, 2003). Perhaps the most serious critique is that student evaluations are of perceptions only and do not offer valid information about the actual learning achievements of students.

The last decade has seen the growth of national and institutional schemes to reward good university teachers (Kahn, 1996; Brown, 2000; Ramsden, Margetson, Martin, & Clarke, 1995). They tend to use very similar criteria, however, they reward only a small number of teachers, on a highly competitive basis, using criteria that require the judgement of qualitative data, which is time consuming for both applicants and assessors. Similarly promotional criteria related to teaching tends to depend on applications and portfolios which take time to produce and assess. A few researchers are actively investigating reliable, valid methods of evaluation and assessment identifying excellence in teaching, particularly in relation to the use of technology (Taylor, 2001a & 2001b; Taylor & Richardson 2001; Herrington, Oliver, Herrington & Sparrow, 2000), however the tools available to universities remain limited and problematic (Cabrera, Colbeck, & Terenzini, 2001; Clerehan, Chanock, Moore, & Prince, 2003; Marsh 1995; Marsh & Roche, 2000; Pascarella, 2001).

Introduction to the research project

Edith Cowan University (ECU) in Peth WA, like many Australian universities, is actively seeking new strategies to encourage and reward good teaching. The university recognised that one example of differential treatment of research compared to teaching was the lack of a teaching rewards system to parallel the University Research Index (RAI) which awards fund to staff on the basis of successful research activity (publishing, grants and doctoral completions). One faculty decided to use some available funds to focus rewards on good teaching, through the development of a Teaching Activity Index (TAI). A working party was convened to develop a draft TAI. Their approach included:

- a review of other university reward schemes
- a review of existing rewards schemes within the university
- articulation of the perspectives of people in teaching and learning leadership positions (Faculty Executive group, and the Faculty Teaching and Learning and Learning Committee)

- an investigation of the perceptions, values, beliefs, attitudes and recommendations of faculty teaching staff.

This paper is concerned particularly with the third and fourth strands, and reports on a small-scale study investigation of the perceptions, values, beliefs, attitudes and recommendation of faculty teaching staff relevant to the development of a TAI. The study was designed to:

- to describe the current thinking of the academic staff and canvas the degree of support for a TAI
- identify perspectives that need to be accommodated in the development of a TAI, if it is to be accepted as a worthwhile reward scheme
- reveal the range of activities that executive staff and teaching staff identify as essential components of teaching that should be rewarded.

Data collection and analysis

Data collection and analysis included four inter-related and iterative steps. The perspectives and requirements of a Faculty Leadership Team were explored through the formation of a Delphi group including all members of the Faculty Executive (n=7), and through the formal discussion and decision-making processes of the associated Faculty Teaching and Learning Committee (a group of elected and positional appointments, charged with leading, monitoring and evaluating teaching and learning within the faculty, n=<20). The views of teaching and teaching-related were investigated initially through small focus groups and subsequently through faculty wide feedback on proposed the aims, design principles and instrument items. During the first year's implementation of a pilot TAI, formal and informal evaluation and feedback was undertaken with the intention of refining both the instrument and process in action.

The research design was guided by participatory action learning principles (Kemmis, Weeks, & Atweh, 1998); McCutcheon & Jung, 1990; McTaggart, 1991; Wadsworth, 1998). In addition to revealing useful information through the expertise and insights of faculty staff to improve the quality of the instrument design, the conduct of the research was explicitly intended to engage staff so that they would feel that their experience and perspectives were being valued, and so that they would have a sense of ownership of the scheme. Throughout the process, a priority was given to 'hearing the voices' of staff, providing all staff with genuine opportunities to be included, and ensuring their judgments respected and decisions were transparent. Reports were provided to all stakeholders throughout the process, and iterative improvements cycles invited and responded to critique. Participants were positioned as co-constructors of the research process and its outcomes as new knowledge and the practical design of the instrument. Advice from the staff 'collective' affirmed the choice of qualitative methods (focus groups and Delphi groups) as appropriate to accessing rich and diverse perspectives; and the use of a simple questionnaire to extend opportunities for inclusion of the wider community effectively and efficiently. Data analysis included coding emergent themes from meaningful chunks in transcripts, tallies of responses against significant categories, (Bazeley, & Richards, 2000; Silverman, 2000; Strauss, & Corbin, 1998) and the use of researcher observations of emotional energy around responses as a guide to the strength of feeling attached to data (Kleinman, 1993).

1) Faculty leadership team perspectives

Executive staff formed a 'Delfi group' (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2000; Hasson, Keeney, & McKenna, 2000) to work together to agree a vision, justification and specific requirements. They met initially to outline their thinking, and subsequently revisited the project across a full academic year, to receive and respond to faculty feedback and working party recommendations. Their discussions were facilitated and documented by an insider-researcher (acting as Executive Officer to the group). The Executive Group and the Teaching and Learning Committee provided reports on their thinking to the faculty for comment at each stage of development, and in turn received and responded to the feedback from the faculty teaching staff. Advice and directions from all sources were considered and where judged to be appropriate they were incorporated into the TAI instrument and accompanying guidelines. The Executive Group and the Teaching and Learning Committee held responsibility for all final decisions about the instrument and its implementation.

2) Teaching team focus group

A focus group was selected as the preferred approach to investigating the topic with teaching staff in the initial stages of the project. It provided a quick, convenient, effective way of revealing group norms. A focus group approach also offered potential for encouraging the sharing of ideas, negotiation of alternatives, and developing a sense of ownership and partnership through the research (Barbour & Kitzinger, 1999; Kitzinger, 1995). A small group of teacher educators (n=13) from one faculty teaching team, was selected as a sample group, on the basis of their interest, willingness to participate and self-identification as a collaborative group, who were particularly committed to teaching and felt disadvantaged by their limited time for research. They were also a convenience group as they were co-located with the researcher, who was also member of their team. The focus group included only full-time teaching staff and there was limited age range (45+), although it did include a gender mix, and both contract and casual appointments. Whilst clearly this was a bias group (by discipline and role), all faculty staff had opportunities to contribute during the development process, allowing for alternative ideas to be heard, valued, considered and included. Issues related to the potential benefits and problems of insider-research (Coghlan, 2001; Hewitt-Taylor, 2002; Perriton, 2000), were discussed with the group, and shared decisions taken about the management of the process so as to limit potential problems and maximise mutual benefits.

The focus group was conducted as a collegial discussion, facilitated by the researcher. The perspectives of the Faculty Executive Team were presented to the group (aims and suggested principles), so management intentions and views were transparent and openly shared prior to the focus group discussion. Key questions were used to lead the discussion as follows:

- Do you support the introduction of a Teaching Activity Index as proposed by the Faculty Executive?
- What do you consider to be the essential components of teaching work? (How do you distinguish teaching activity from other academic work?)
- What aspects of academic work should a Teaching Activity Index reward?

The researcher taped and transcribed the discussion, analysed the contributions for relevant statements and themes (: and returned the data and interpretation to the group to be checked for accuracy and completeness.

3) Faculty-wide staff feedback

Feedback from the wider academic staff was invited at every stage of the development project:

Feedback on focus group data

Data from the focus group discussion were collated and analysed and presented to the full teaching team (from which the focus group participants were drawn). Comments and elaborations were used to affirm a set of key statements (See Appendix One: *Focus group statements*) that were then made available to all faculty teaching staff. The faculty teaching staff were invited to respond either by indicating the strength of their agreement/disagreement with each of the focus group statement using a 1-5 Likert scale in writing (on printed form)- with comments; or, sending feedback through course representatives to the Teaching and Learning Committee.

Feedback on Delphi group proposed aims and outcomes

Executive reports were produced and circulated to all staff through a series of normal faculty teaching and learning communications strategies: newsletters; Committee for Teaching and Learning agendas and discussions; course team meetings. Feedback was invited and channelled through the project researcher/Executive Officer, senior leaders and course representatives to the Teaching and Learning Committee.

Feedback on Pilot TAI

Executive perspectives and faculty responses were acknowledged in the development of a draft TAI instrument (along with data emerging from a review of existing local, national and international university schemes). A pilot TAI instrument was circulated to all staff for comment. Following a series of iterative revisions, a pilot scheme was submitted to the Faculty Teaching and Learning Committee to be approved before it was implemented on a 3-year trial basis. During the first year of implementation, feedback was invited and received on an informal basis; at the end of the first cycle, participants were invited to provide feedback on their experience and to make recommendations for improvements.

Results

Faculty Executive outcomes: The Delphi Executive group shared their expertise in terms of the nature of the “problem of lack of teaching rewards”, affirmed commitment to a set of aims for the TAI, and agreed a framework for the development and funding of the project. Their agreements were reported in the form of a draft project proposal that was made available to the focus group and to all faculty staff. The Executive group identified several key issues. They wanted to established a system that would be effective in promoting good teaching and stimulating change and improvement. They wanted to acknowledged the particular issues of large class teaching, and ensure teachers with large classes benefited from the scheme, this was a group of teachers they felt were most disadvantaged through heavy workloads, and roles that were under recognised and rewarded. By focusing attention on quality improvement processes and measures they hoped to implement

new strategies effectively (responding to student evaluation of teaching; course review; improvement measurement and data collection; management of performance). This included commitment to encouraging staff to fully engage with student evaluation (national Course Evaluation Questionnaire (CEQ) and the university's student evaluation tool: University Teaching Evaluation Instrument (UTEI). Delphi discussions noted the potential for the proposed scheme to prompt unintended, disruptive or negative outcomes, and increase administrative work for staff. They wished to avoid such problems through intelligent design and process.

The Executive proposed a set of aims, and a set of design principles to frame the scheme:

- **Aims of the scheme:**
 - improve the overall quality of teaching and learning in the faculty, particularly in undergraduate courses with large enrolments
 - provide incentives and rewards for efforts made to improve the quality of instruction, resources and learning environments within the faculty and the achievement of excellence in teaching and learning
 - raise the public and external profile of the faculty, so it would be seen as a faculty renowned for effective teaching
 - stimulate and reward activities that would raise scores on the University Teaching Evaluation Instrument (UTEI) and the national Course Evaluation Questionnaire (CEQ).

- **Design principles:**

The scheme will be modelled on the existing Research Activity Index (RAI) and be designed to be as simple as possible. It will:

 - use a small number of measures, that are simple and unarguable
 - use measures that can be expected to drive significant improvements
 - avoid measure that require complex judgements
 - use data that is already available where possible
 - not be implemented in a way that reduces Research Activity Index scores for staff
 - acknowledge that measuring good teaching is complex and that the TAI indicators will require continued evaluation and improvement.

Focus Group Outcomes: Data from the staff focus group discussion was collated and analysed in terms of affirmation for the proposed aims and principles; and items to be rewarded. In principle support for the development of a TAI was universal. A large number of statements were generated. The statements made and agreed by the focus group seemed to fall into five categories. Categories included the identification of the components of teaching as academic work (with differentiation between core and desirable but non-essential work); elements of 'good teaching'; teaching activities that make teaching enjoyable (self-rewarding to teachers); principles that the staff would like to underpin the TAI; and, items the group believe should appear on the TAI (See also Appendix One: *Focus group statements*).

Core activities were seen as those essential to running a program to the minimum acceptable level. There was complete agreement on these items within the focus group. Core activities included:

- conceptualization, development and articulation of a course philosophy, including alignment with the university, market and professional requirements
- devising and developing the course and all its components (content, processes, activities, environment, and resources)
- revising and re-developing the course and all its components, to maintain, sustain and improve
- implementing the program (all teaching and coordination of supporting roles contributing different academic components) across all styles and modes
- assessing students
- evaluation the program.

There was extensive discussion about the significance of collaboration in good teaching and the importance of building and sustaining relationships. Discussion about the research- teaching nexus occurred naturally, and in this case it was both tentative and exploratory in nature. Different types of research were identified as having different roles, contributions and values. Acknowledgement was made of the fact that a wide range of staff conducted teaching and that the expectations of part-time and sessional staff might be different in respect to the teaching research nexus. There was a broad consensus that research particularly action research, scholarship and reflection was an essential component of good teaching where it:

- contributed to the teachers' own knowledge-base (discipline)
- contributed to the teachers' pedagogical knowledge
- was necessary to preparation for core teaching activity
- provided role models to students, inducting them into the research community of their discipline
- stimulating and motivating teachers so they had stories, interests and passions to share with their students
- led to the development and maintenance of relationships with a relevant community of practice.

Participants instigated some discussion about the role of administrative tasks in teaching. This work was considered essential where it related directly to planning, evaluation and decision-making about teaching and learning processes; the development of significant relationships; or related to core activities in a way that required discipline or pedagogical knowledge. The focus group noted that much of their administrative work did not in fact fall within this framework, but was conducted simply because there was not enough support staff to do the work. Whilst the staff believed that the TAI should not reward such routine work, there was an acknowledgement that without the work, none of the programs could run effectively. Further there was strong agreement that some staff bore a greater burden of this work, to the extent that it interfered with their ability to undertake more meaningful work that would be rewarded by promotion or other means. Here, there was a real sense of injustice about workload, and a belief the effort should be recognised or rewarded in some other way, or better provisions made to equalize to work academic work so all staff enjoyed more equitable opportunities and enjoyed more equal rewards.

The focus group participants were very explicit and united in their belief that teaching and learning contexts and philosophies are different, and they held that definitions of good teaching would vary accordingly. This led to the inclusion of an 'other' category to ensure diversity of approaches could be valued. The researcher did not probe the

groups' definitions of 'good teaching' in detail. However, collective ownership was referred to frequently as important, so too was using strategies that match the course philosophy; and inspiring, enthusing and interesting students as well as helping them to be better learners.

One unexpected outcome of the focus group discussion was the number of statements made that talked about the academics feelings about their work, motivations for work and the elements that were significant to them in making teaching an intrinsically rewarding activity. The group identified the following things as being important to their work satisfaction:

- collective ownership (of the course, its philosophy and processes)
- interaction with likeminded people
- research activity linked to teaching
- having confidence in one's own knowledge
- working in a style that is consistent with one's philosophy
- working within a community of practice.

It was evident from the way the focus group spoke about their work, that they felt passionate and very emotionally engaged with teaching. The focus group participants expressed support for all kinds of research activity, but were acutely aware of the dominance of research as an aspect of academic work that was more 'valued' and rewarded than teaching, and they revealed anger and frustration about this situation. They were very positive about the potential of the scheme to acknowledge them as teachers, however, their greatest articulated need was not for 'material rewards' but for:

- 'affirmation' and 'valuing'
- work security and promotion opportunities
- an encouraging, supportive and collegial work environment.

Discussion about the principles was quite animated, and whilst the executive principles were accepted as reasonable and valid, the focus group strongly advocated extending the principles, particularly in terms of transparency, fairness, and acknowledging diversity and collaboration.

Faculty-wide staff feedback

Initial faculty-wide feedback (pre-pilot) indicated broad support for the implementation of the proposed TAI scheme. No objections were received, although it should be noted that the number of responses from people not actively involved as participants was quite small. Positive affirmation was offered for the underpinning statements (as emerged from the focus group). Only minor changes were suggested about the details of the draft proposal. The general sense of feedback suggested that most faculty staff appreciated that recognition and rewarding teachers was important, but that it was a very complex area. As a community, staff accepted that no scheme was likely to be entirely satisfactory, but they favoured the development of 'rough and ready' tool, to be trialled and improved in practice, over waiting for more sophisticated tool that might require a long development period before it could be implemented: "... let's just get on with it, we have had nothing to compare with the RAI before, so anything will be a step forward... its never going to be possible to get

it right, but we can at least have a 'best effort'", (academic's feedback to Teaching and Learning Committee).

The TAI pilot tool

A pilot TAI was developed incorporating the aims, values and perspectives of Faculty staff and the Faculty Executive. The pilot included eight areas for rewards, allowing for both individual and teaching-team based claims:

- Mean **teacher/tutor** scores on the UTEI above +60 (about one third of staff score in the range +60-100)
- Mean **unit** scores on the UTEI above +60 (about one third of staff score in the range +60-100)
- High course scores on the national Course Evaluation Survey (CEQ)
- Engagement with Course review, evaluation and benchmarking activities
- Development of (and success in) applications for teaching awards
- Curriculum and/or resources development and innovation
- Scholarship in teaching and learning
- Other: An open category allowing individuals to make a case for other activities.

(see Appendix Two: Items included in the first year pilot of the TAI (Individual) for further details).

Faculty-wide staff feedback (during and post-pilot)

The TAI has been allocated funding for three years, and has only run for one year. Evaluations of the aims, process and outcomes have been limited, and early findings should be treated extremely tentatively as indicative only. Feedback received during and at the end of the first cycle was collated, and provided to the Faculty Teaching and Learning Committee with recommendations for refinements. Generally, the feedback on the first year of implementation was positive. For many teachers it was the first time they had ever felt that their teaching had been noticed and responded to (they felt validated); indeed several teachers became quite emotional when providing feedback: *" you know, I love my teaching and I don't mind all the extra hours, all I really want is just sometimes that someone says, well done that was good work... I couldn't believe this, I just felt so affirmed, at last someone noticed I was doing something right"*.

Teachers often commented that it was the first time they had received discretionary funds allowing them to attend a conference or buy resources they thought would assist their teaching (conference attendance was highly regarded as a reward). This was particularly significant to teachers on the lower levels of promotions scales, new academics and teachers with short-term or casual contracts. The evaluation of teaching was widely held to be difficult, and the TAI provided an official measure of 'good' teaching that could be used to support tenure and/or promotion applications. Several staff reported that their TAI results stimulated teaching-related discussions at Management of Performance interviews, and this they noted was rare. Teachers of large classes were particularly enthusiastic about the excessive workloads associated with big cohorts being acknowledged, there were extremely alert to the fact that their

teaching was 'time-hungry' and prevented them from engaging in the kinds of research activity they believed would be rewarded through promotion.

Course team leaders and managers reported a significant rise in the number of teachers accessing UTEI data, asking questions about it, and actively responding to students' feedback. They also appreciated having a new focus for discussing teaching in management of performance interviews. They valued finding out, "*about some amazing things going on that I just knew nothing about*" (Course Coordinator), and having indicators that allowed for some comparison (bench-marking) across teaching disciplines and teams, which highlighted areas of strength and weakness that were not always known previously for further investigation.

Many staff encountered problems completing the TAI application forms. They were not confident they understood requirements, and experienced difficulties accessing the data needed to complete application forms. Time was clearly a pressing concern for many staff, and the time that application form took to complete and submit deterred staff. Distinguishing clearly and honestly between individual and collaborative work was problematic for some staff.

Whilst staff who received benefits from the scheme were very pleased, some staff disappointment that experienced that their particular teaching work was not highly rewarded (their workload limited their opportunity for scoring highly). This included or example: teachers with small classes, and teachers with higher degree supervision responsibilities. Interestingly the only consistently negative feedback came from staff who had high RAI scores arising from research publication and doctoral supervision, who felt they were disadvantaged in not receiving TAI points as well.

Some disquiet was expressed about the legitimacy of rewarding teachers on the basis of student evaluation scores (UTEI). Staff questioned if the scores were measures of 'good teaching' or simply 'popularity'; if the TAI encouraged staff to manipulate scores to their advantage; if the blunt lines of cut off scores were reliable and valid. Such comments were received from both staff who benefitted and from staff missed out because their scores were not high. It was notable though that the debate about student evaluation was vigorous, and it was evident that many staff were questioning the role and significance of student feedback seriously for the first time.

Reports on the progress of the pilot were included in formal reports to the university senior management group, and positive encouragement was received from the Vice-Chancellor's Executive in several public forums and in the Faculty Review.

Amendments were be made to respond to some of this feedback and the instrument will be review again after the second year of implementation.

Discussion

This paper intends only to share the intentions and initial stages of the development of a TAI. Early feedback is of interest but needs to be regarded tentatively. A full evaluation will be conducted in due course. However, some observations may be useful to others considering a similar approach. Firstly, the adoption of an inclusive approach to work-based research to underpin and guide the development of the TAI

appears to contribute positively. The high level of affirmation for the aims and principles is a positive outcome of the development project: it helped to create a shared vision as well as an appreciation of different perspectives across academic managers, the faculty leadership team, and teaching staff. Free and open discussions helped all parties acknowledge the changing nature of teaching and learning in the university and the many challenges that impact on academic work. In the course of the research, the importance of rewarding teaching and teachers' work was clearly and frequently articulated: this in itself affirming to people who commit to teaching focussed roles. The discussions around the TAI generated widespread recognition of the genuine difficulties associated with evaluating teaching, and this understanding led to a general acceptance that whatever model TAI was adopted it was unlikely to work perfectly, but was nevertheless worth pursuing. Reform in higher education is notoriously difficult (Farrell, 2000), so a shared commitment to explore change is a positive outcome.

The initial indications are positive that the TAI it is having an impact in achieving some significant aims. It appears to be offering explicit rewards for teaching; and this is appreciated (significant numbers of staff responded to receiving acknowledgement and money very enthusiastically). It has stimulated discussion about the University Teaching Evaluation Instrument (UTEI) and the national Course Evaluation Questionnaire (CEQ): Many course teams debated evaluation results and ways to improve them (and acknowledged the TAI had raised their interest). And, the instrument has been effective in focussing attention on large class teaching (the multiplier for numbers of respondents was noted in feedback as a positive by staff teaching large classes).

Feedback affirms that teaching staff feel time-stressed. There is significant evidence in the literature about work stress for academic staff (Winefield, Gillespie, Stough, Dua, & Hapuararchchi, 2002), and that time is a significant factor in stress (Dey, 1994; Gmelch & Wilke, 1991; Sorcinelli, 1992). As the TAI clearly risks increasing workload, this is significant institutional feedback for the effective re-design of the process mechanisms of the scheme. It suggests a need for practical improvements, such as using technology more effectively to reduce manual work. Many of the problems raised about the application process are essentially administrative and can be addressed by developing smoother, stronger processes, increasing support, and developing technological solutions that provide data more easily to staff. Whatever its intentions, the TAI will not be experienced positively if it creates more work for teachers. At a macro level, this raises important questions about academic work. Considerations of workload are rarely taken seriously in academic reform, and in a period of high challenge and rapid change, yet better management of academic time is critical to optimising efficiency and effectiveness (Slaughter & Leslie, 1997). Effective deployment of academic time is an issue of significance to the whole higher education community as we confront 'challenging times' (Coaldrake & Stedman, 1998 & 1999; Marginson, 2001 & 2002). Further is worth while noting the value of insider research in revealing institutional insights that might otherwise be invisible.

Concerns about the reliability and validity of the university student evaluation instrument (UTEI) are significant, and not unexpected. The evaluation of teaching is a "hot topic". The literature on student evaluation is complex and contradictory. Some researchers have found that student evaluations are trustworthy in that they do

represent students' perspectives on their learning and experience, but many challenges are also acknowledged. (Marsh, 1991; 1995; 1997). The University UTEI, was developed to align with the national Course Evaluation Survey (CEQ) which is well regarded as reasonably reliable and valid (Ramsden, 1991; Richardson, 1994; Wilson, Liszzio, & Ramsden, 1995). However, the CEQ is a measure of the students reported experience of a course of study, not of student outcomes or of an individual teacher or unit of study. The TAI feedback suggests that the institutional instrument may need further attention to meet specific uses and applications. As an academic community, we also need a better understanding of what student feedback really means. Demands for accountability in higher education are likely to increase interest in student evaluation (Leckey, & Neill, 2001). If our university teachers do not trust the instrument (or the uses made of it) fully, and this has implications for the effective use of the evaluation for all parties. This implies a serious need to research evaluation tools further, and to develop better indicators of teaching quality. As a sector we need to ensure that evaluation instruments are not only valid and reliable as tools, but used effectively in ways that will achieve positive outcomes.

Conclusions

The primary focus of this project was the practical development of an institutional TAI that would go some way to redressing local inequities between the rewards for research and for teaching, as well as acting assertively to encourage desired improvements in teaching and learning. These are critical issues for all universities facing the multiples challenges described in the introduction to this paper. The TAI project is at an early stage of development, though, on-going evaluation will be undertaken to assess the usefulness of the aims and principles in the light of the changing higher education teaching and learning landscape; and to judge the effectiveness of the TAI as a strategy for rewarding teaching, improving teaching and learning, and supporting innovation and change. Our experience has shown that it is possible to identify items that academics agree are reasonable proxies for good teaching (as long as they are not relied upon as absolute or sole measures); that an index can be devised and implemented within quite limited institutional resources; and that indications are positive that a TAI can have a positive impact. Beyond the criteria used in teaching awards, and the items used in the CEQ, there are few indicators for teaching quality and excellence available nationally. This project demonstrates not only a need for reward strategies, but the potential for establishing criteria for teaching quality that might be acceptable to teachers as well as productive in encouraging improvement. Further research and development is, however, required.

Significant questions arise from the project for the institution, particularly in regards to local understanding of student feedback; to academic teaching workloads and to the effective valuing and rewarding of good teaching. These questions are relevant to the global higher education community and are easily recognised as important themes in the current literature and tertiary teaching and learning research. The project supports the value of inclusive, institutional research as a basis for reform; but suggests that there is much still to be learnt by university practitioners, administrators and leaders; and that a collaboration in shared initiative relevant to the whole sector would be of benefit.

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Appendix One: Focus group statements

<p>Statements about the principles that should guide the development of the Teaching Activity Index</p>

The TAI should acknowledge that not all situations are the same
The TAI should acknowledge that what counts as teaching will vary in different programs
The TAI should encourage team work as well as individual teaching
All items must be evidence based (items that can be can clearly demonstrate
The TAI should require self-assessments
The TAI should use multiple sources for evaluation
The TAI process must be fair, open reasonable, simple
The TAI system must be able to be applied in all contexts
Teaching activities and outcomes must be open to public scrutiny
It is better to have a rough and ready system soon, than to wait for the perfect system
The process should not allow double dipping (i.e. items cannot be claimed on both TAI and RAI)
Must include items that can be claimed, and are achievable every year

Statements about items that should be included in the Teaching Activity Index
Student satisfaction (UEI/TEI, CEQ) above average
Peer reviewed self-assessment
Administration where it impacts positively on teaching (evidenced through peer review/course change/student outcomes & satisfaction)
Components of teaching portfolio should be rewarded
T & L grants should be rewarded (they use peer review)
Teaching performance evidenced by peer evaluation/review
Articulated course philosophy (peer reviewed)
Course design /redevelopments/innovations (peer reviewed)
Teaching innovations (peer reviewed)
Development of course resources/artefacts
Demonstrated improvements in student outcomes
Demonstrated reflection and improvement actions
Scholarship in teaching (evidenced through public presenting, publishing and peer review)

Scholarship in teaching (evidenced through development of peer reviewed artefacts)
Discipline scholarship (evidenced through publishing, public presenting and peer review)
Discipline scholarship (evidenced through development of peer reviewed artefacts)

Appendix Two: Items included in the first year pilot of the TAI (Team & Individual)

High teacher/tutor scores on the University Teaching Evaluation Instrument (UTEI):

- Mean score* +60-69 (Student overall satisfaction) has a multiplier of 1.0 x number of student responses= TAI points
- Mean score +70-79 (Student overall satisfaction) has a multiplier of 1.5 x number of student responses= TAI points
- Mean score +80-89 (Student overall satisfaction) has a multiplier of 2.0 x number of student responses= TAI points
- Mean score +90-100 (Student overall satisfaction) has a multiplier of 3.0 x number of student responses= TAI points

*UTEI score are on range from+100 to -100 (approx 30% of staff achieve means above +60).

NB: Individual teaching scores are claimed against overall student satisfaction scores for a **named teacher / tutor in a specific semester**.

High unit scores on the University Teaching Evaluation Instrument (UTEI):

- Mean score* <+80 (Student overall satisfaction) where class size is above 75 = 75 TAI points
- Mean score +60-79 (Student overall satisfaction) where class size is above 75 = 30 TAI points
- Mean score <+80 (Student overall satisfaction) where class size is 50-74 = 50 TAI points
- Mean score +60-79 (Student overall satisfaction) where class size is 50-74 = 20 TAI points
- Mean score <+80 (Student overall satisfaction) where class size is 15-49 = 20 TAI points
- Mean score +60-79 (Student overall satisfaction) where class size is 15-49 = 10 TAI points

*UTEI score are on range from+100 to -100 (approx 30% of units achieve means above +60).

NB: Team points are claimed against overall student satisfaction score of the **unit**- and must be claimed by the course coordinator on behalf of the team.

High CEQ (National) scores:

- CEQ overall satisfaction score in top quartile =200 TAI points
- CEQ overall satisfaction score in top quartile =100 TAI points

NB: CEQ points are awarded to the course team- not individuals, and must be claimed by the course coordinator on behalf of the team.

Course review, unit review & benchmarking activities:

- Unit review by external stakeholder(s) or relevant reviewer= 10 TAI points
- Course Review by external stakeholder(s) or relevant reviewer= 200 TAI points
- Conduct of unit review (outside own School)= 10 TAI points
- Conduct of course review (outside own School)= 30 TAI points
- Conduct of unit review (outside institution)= 10 TAI points
- Conduct of course review (outside institution)= 50 TAI points
- Conduct of course/program benchmarking activity (Setting course standards, comparing processes) = 50 TAI points.
- NB: Course review & benchmarking activities points should be claimed by the course coordinator on behalf of the team; unit activities may be claimed by individuals or teams as appropriate.

Applications for Teaching Awards:

- Submission of an application for a Faculty Teaching and Learning Award =20 TAI points
- Successful submission of an application for a Faculty Teaching and Learning Award 50 TAI points
- Submission of application for a University Teaching and Learning Award =50 TAI points
- Successful submission of an application for a University Teaching and Learning Award=100 TAI points
- Submission of an application for a National Teaching Award=100 TAI points
- Successful submission of an application for a National Teaching Award=500 TAI points.

NB: In the case of a team award, points will be given for each named member of the team (points go to the teaching team account, not individual accounts).

Curriculum development and course/unit resources

- External scholarly publication of curriculum/course related text =50 TAI points

- One or more chapters in external publication of curriculum/course related text=15 TAI points
- Scholarly course/curriculum materials published by an external publisher =30 TAI points
- Scholarly course/curriculum materials published online (DEST Level B) =30 TAI points
- Scholarly course/curriculum materials published online (DEST Level C) =30 TAI points
- Scholarly course/curriculum materials published internally (Print) =30 TAI points
- Scholarly course/curriculum materials published internally (CDROM) =30 TAI points
- Scholarly course/curriculum materials: Audio –visual media/multi-media/computer software =30 TAI points.

Scholarship in teaching and learning

- Presentation at institutional or local conference/forum with direct relevance to higher education in the applicants area(s) of teaching & learning responsibility =10 TAI points
- Presentation at national conference/forum with direct relevance to higher education in the applicants area(s) of teaching & learning responsibility =30 TAI points
- Presentation at international conference/forum with direct relevance to higher education in the applicants area(s) of teaching & learning responsibility =50 TAI points
- Non-refereed works of scholarship (relevant to teaching and learning and/or curriculum) published in scholarly or professional journals =20 TAI points
- Editorship of scholarly or professional journals/publications or conference proceeding (relevant to HE T & L) 20 = TAI points
- Submission for an institutional teaching and learning small grant = 20 TAI points
- Successful submission for an institutional teaching and learning small grant = 50 TAI
- Completion of study program relevant to HE teaching and learning = 100 TAI
- Conduct of substantial action –learning project to improve teaching and learning, with report to the unit/cluster /course team = 50 TAI

Other

Individual makes a case for other activities, and agrees acceptance and points with the Course Director and/or Head of School

Notes:

- 1) Evidence of achievements must be presented with the claim
- 2) All claims will be agreed by the Course Director and or Head of School. Disputes or disagreements will be resolved by the Head of School.
- 3) Any points for refereed papers or other research activity acceptable in the Research Activity Index (RAI) should be claimed in the RAI, not the TAI)
- 4) Points will converted to a dollar value (to be declared at end of the year as per RAI: in 2004 the value was \$3 per point) payable to an individual TAI account that will automatically be set up by the School Administrator on applicants behalf

Project Two: High jumps, hurdles, carrots and sticks: Response to government initiatives to improve teaching and learning

Context for the paper

In 2004, the Australian government was implementing a series of funding policies designed to promote excellence in university teaching and learning (Schwartz, Milbourne, & Harris, 2007). In my university, like many others, there was a very active debate not only about improving the quality of our teaching and learning, but also ensuring that we would be able to demonstrate its effectiveness to external bodies. The Faculty Teaching and Learning Office, in which I was employed as a Quality Improvement Manager, was keen to promote good practice and support teaching. This project was designed to address these issues by:

- ensuring that people in teaching and learning leadership positions such as course coordinators and program directors, were fully engaged in the debates about teaching excellence;
- understanding more about our teaching leaders' beliefs about effective strategies for achieving teaching improvements, and using their knowledge to make more informed decisions about the best ways to provide support to teaching teams in meeting the challenges of teaching and learning; and,
- demonstrating valuing of our teachers at a time when they were increasingly feeling the pressure of external authorities in their work, by actively seeking their advice, guidance and opinions.

Relevance to the portfolio

As highlighted in Chapter Two, the literature on teaching excellence in higher education teaching and learning includes some vigorous debate about excellence as a measure of quality (meeting and exceeding the expectations of stakeholders including governments); and excellence as engagement with improvement to continually meet the changing demands of society. This study brought together authentic workplace concerns about quality, with issues of governance raised in my doctoral course work.

Role of the doctoral candidate in the research, project development, and writing of the article

In my professional role as Faculty Quality Improvement Manager, I provided leadership in improving teaching and learning. My roles in the research project included:

- Proposing the research as a strategy to:
 - reveal local knowledge and understanding about the perspectives of middle managers;
 - demonstrate value for teaching and teachers knowledge; and
 - provide insights that might support better faculty decision-making about more effective and efficient ways to maintain or improve quality whilst actively responding to the many external pressures of the time.
- As sole researcher, I designed and conducted all the interviews, collated and analyzed data and prepared reports on the findings.
- As an institutional leader, I instigated, gained approval for, and led the project, and provided reports to the Associate Dean Teaching and Learning, and to the Faculty Teaching and Learning Committee
- As an academic leader I authored the paper: *High-jumps, hurdles, carrots and sticks: Responses of university leaders to government initiative to improve teaching and learning*.

This paper was circulated within the Faculty to interested parties; presented at the 2005 International Learning Conference, Granada, Spain; and accepted for publication by the International Journal of Learning, (volume 12). Unfortunately due to some technical problems with final permissions to publish the article did not appear in the journal.

High-jumps, Hurdles, Carrots and Sticks: Responses of University Leaders to Government Initiatives to Improve Teaching and Learning

Abstract

This paper is concerned with the nature, intent, implications and outcomes of government interventions designed to improve higher education teaching and learning, in the context of a complex and changing world. It uses the Australian approach to higher education as an illustrative case-study. The paper reports on a subset of the findings of the early stages of a research project in one Australian University, investigating academic staff awareness of, and perceptions about, and responses to, the influence of government initiatives on teaching and learning in their own university. In particular, it describes the observations and reflections of staff with middle-management responsibilities for teaching and learning in relation to: Performance-based funding, the development and implementation of policies and guidelines, teaching innovation grants, teaching awards professional development and certification for tertiary teaching, student evaluation and teaching and learning review processes.

Course leaders typically identified activities that support critical reflection and collaborative practice as the most significant agents for improvement. Where they identified merit in a range of university practices that closely mirror government initiatives and directives, it was in relation to the extent to which the particular application of the strategy engaged staff in the development of a shared philosophy, or analysis of evidence and constructive discussion of their practical work. The specific way a strategy was used was seen to be critical to its effectiveness. Further, in many cases, strategies were identified as generating negative outcomes where application was insensitive to staff needs and contexts, or inappropriate implemented.

Keywords

Management of Change
Leadership in Teaching and Learning
Government Influence in Teaching and Learning

Introduction and context

It is clear we live in a world of dynamic transformation and ‘supercomplexity’ (Barnett, 2000). The global context for higher education has changed, and commentators identify population growth, the reach and sophistication of technology, the forces of globalisation in economics, politics, culture and social life and the dominant neo-liberal ideology of power groups as contributing factors (Bangemann, 1994; Castells, 1996; World Bank, 2002; Angus, 2004). There are now, large numbers of students with diverse goals, motivations, approaches, skills and experiences, and commitments. The expectations of learning outcomes of university have changed, with a stronger focus on work relevance, professional training, technology and generic skills that support learning for an unknown future. Education is seen a solution to individual, community, and world problems. A high proportion of the world’s population is seeking higher education as a means to secure and enhance employment and achieve a better quality of life (Taylor & Rizvi, 2001; Larsen 2002; Daxner, 2003; Altbach 2004). Most countries of the world are struggling to provide adequate resources to support mass tertiary education, and although student numbers are rising, resources for teaching and learning are not increasing to match (Marginson, 2002; Wolf, 2002; Daniels, 2003). The teaching approaches common in universities of the 20th century are no longer sufficient for the needs of the 21st century, and higher education teachers around the world are being challenged by new, and constantly changing, demands and expectations of society (Barnett, 2000; Biggs, 2003; Duderstadt, 2000; McInnis, 1999; Reeves, 2002).

Amongst many stakeholders, governments can be seen as a particularly significant force, since they are in a powerful position to manipulate, influence and directly control the aims, goals, activities and outcomes of these institutions, for their own ends and to fulfil the perceived needs of their electorates. Although public funding has consistently fallen, government intervention around the world has increased, along with the demand for transparency, accountability for the quality of services and outcomes, and compliance to centralised perspectives. There are differences of approach between governments, but trends show remarkable similarity. The Australian government approach provides a useful micro case-study and forms the specific contextual background to the small scale qualitative research reported in this paper.

Australian Government interventions in teaching and learning in higher education

Recent national debate about the role, management and funding of universities in Australia, has been led aggressively by the Minister for Education, Brendon Nelson (Nelson, 2002a; Commonwealth Department of Education, 2002). The outcome is a collection of policies and reforms under the umbrella title of, *Our Universities: Backing Australia’s Future* (Nelson, 2004b), underpinned by the

2004 Higher Education Support Act (HESA). This package is quite explicit in demanding improvements in teaching and learning outcomes, and in placing a significant emphasis on accountability (Kniest, 2004). It affirms core Liberal objectives for Higher Education, establishes a federal vision for Australian higher education, and lays out a framework for reform (Nelson, 2004a)

The Higher Education Support Act, identifies two main strategies for promoting excellence in teaching and learning: The Commonwealth Learning and Teaching Performance fund; and the establishment of a National Institute for Learning and Teaching in Higher Education. It also assumes the continuance of quality reviews of universities through the Australian University Quality Agency (AUQA) (Kemp, 1999).

From 2006, a Teaching and Learning Fund will direct significant funds to teaching and learning. The broad recognition of the importance of university teaching, and the need to raise its status through improved funding, rewards and incentives can be seen as a very positive outcome. However, in line with current neo-liberal ideology, the funding will be competitive and allocated to a small number of institutions, according to specified performance measures.

In the first funding round (2006) money is contingent on institutional compliance with a set of defined strategic commitments that can be easily assessed through self-reporting:

- Current institutional teaching and learning plan/strategy
- Systematic support for professional development in teaching and learning for both sessional and full-time staff
- Probation and promotion practices and policies that take account of teaching effectiveness and use systematic student evaluation to inform decisions
- Publication of the results of student evaluation strategies, policies and results.

The government acknowledges that judging excellence may not prove an easy task (DEST, 2004b). Excellence in teaching and learning is notoriously difficult area to evaluate: Learning is complex and ill-defined, outcomes are diverse and contested, and there are so many variables such as student and discipline differences. Nevertheless, at this point in time, negotiations about the 2007 funding suggests the adoption of a very limited, simplistic set of measures, that will not reflect the complexity of university context or the diversity of their achievements (this has yet to be confirmed).

The Carrick Institute for Learning and Teaching was established in August 2004, with a brief to, “ provide a national focus for the enhancement of learning and teaching in Australian higher education” (DEST, 2004a). It will receive funding of \$22 million from 2006, and build on the expertise of the Australian

Universities Teaching Committee (AUTC). Its role will include a range of liaison, discussion and development activities all focussed on providing leadership in improving university teaching and learning, as well as management of national teaching awards and competitive grants for innovation.

Taken together, these initiatives identify a set of strategies that the government believes will drive improvements in teaching and learning:

- Performance-based funding for teaching and learning
- Funding of teaching and learning innovation initiatives
- Use of awards to recognise and reward excellence in teaching
- Enhancement of professional development including initial training and sessional staff opportunities
- Systematic use of student evaluations: for appointment and promotion; and for public information
- Required processes of quality review, audit and reporting, including use of performance indicators to determine performance, and public reporting of results.

Improvement practices in Australian Universities

The practices described above are already wide-spread in most Australian universities, and it is self-evident that all institutions will be actively reviewing their practices to ensure they maximise the opportunity to benefit from recent higher education reforms. Public funding tied to the reforms acts both as a carrot, enticing universities to conform, and a stick, enforcing punishing resource limits on institutions already struggling to provide quality education within meagre budgets. However, there are no guarantees that implementation of the strategies will be effective or that quality outcomes will be easily achieved throughout each organization. The implementation of change across large organizations is a somewhat 'messy affair' (Trowler, 2002), and the history of education change suggests that it is often painfully slow and difficult (Angus, 1998).

It is hard to predict the responses of teachers to changes in strategy; to foresee unplanned consequences; and to avoid losing sight of strategies not highlighted explicitly in the government funding and rewards model, but which may be equally or more effective in achieving desired outcomes. In seeking to comply with government demands to secure funds, there is a very real danger that universities will 'jump through the hoops and over the hurdles and high-jumps', rather than critically evaluate the particular needs and priorities of their own institutions. Organizations need detailed understandings about local contexts, and of the perceptions, values and responses of the 'actors', in order to mediate their plans with sensitivity to the reality of their particular situation, and to ensure the application of strategies really does enhance the quality of teaching and learning.

The Project

The investigation reported here forms part of a small-scale qualitative research project investigating the effectiveness of improvement strategies used in one Faculty of an Australian university. The overall study seeks to provide rich data to support meaningful decision-making about the best ways to improve teaching and learning within the Faculty. This part of the investigation had the more specific purpose of exploring the beliefs of academic staff with direct responsibility for the quality of teaching in units and courses, to identify the improvement strategies they knowingly use and believe to be effective, and the assumptions they have about the efficacy of specific strategies currently promoted through the implementation of the Australian Higher Education Support Act: Teaching performance rewards, teaching innovation grants, teaching excellence awards, professional development and training (including sessional staff), review, audit and reporting processes, and student evaluations.

The Study Methodology

The study uses an insider participant approach (Bowden & Walsh, 2000) informed by developmental phenomenology, and the feminist ethics research traditions. This qualitative approach was selected in part for convenience, however, it also represents an appropriate methodology for exploring complex issues with known individuals and contexts, applying principles of respect for the values, preferences, and needs of participants (Bennett, Foreman-Peck, & Higgins, 1996, p4). Taped interviewed were conducted with ten academic staff (course-leaders or unit co-ordinators). They were asked to give examples of strategies they used to improve teaching and learning, and reflect on the relative values of their approaches. Towards the end of the interviews more direct questions were posed about specific strategies, if they had not previously been raised and explored.

Findings

In relation to personal approaches, there were several very strong themes echoed across all participants: Engagement in professional discussion and critical reflection; collaboration and teamwork; development and application of shared philosophies, goals, pedagogies and practices; and genuine attention to student evaluations and feedback. All participants were emphatic that critical reflection was the single most important factor in securing improvements, and most other strategies and approaches could be related to this belief. Professional dialogue and interaction in various forms was identified as highly relevant in supporting critical reflections, particularly collaborative work, teaching and learning forums, conferences and review activities.

Belief in the power of collaborative team work to facilitate improvement was expressed many times, and this included a commitment to discussion, sharing of

ideas and resources, valuing the contributions of all, and the creation of a sense of trust to encourage open and honest exchanges that were capable of managing difference. Collaboration was described as having a very particular purpose: the development of shared understandings. This included understandings about implicit and explicit goals of the course; the desired (and required) learning outcomes; philosophical underpinnings and principles; and “developing a shared awareness of what ‘good’ teaching is”:

I have to mediate between the professional knowledge, expertise and interests of individuals on the team and the outcomes that we really want. Its about shifting the focus to why we are doing this rather than how.

Shared understandings developed through discussion and negotiation generated a “sense of ownership” of the teaching and learning process, and this was seen as an important factor in encouraging people to engage in serious critical debate and reflection about teaching and learning.

The nature of relationships within the teams seemed to be important, and participants spoke convincingly about their commitment to creating a climate of trust and respect, that honoured the professional skills and abilities of all staff. This was achieved through deliberately involving team members in decision-making (including casual and sessional staff); regular meetings and communications through email; promoting collegiality through social events; celebrating achievements; and taking the time to notice and thank people for contributions.

I try to build a team, manage the personalities and build relationships. You have to work hard to achieve three things, communication, relationships and a good team...you have to have trust in the team and facilitate risk-taking if you want anything to change. That's how I go about it.

Trusting relationships were identified as crucial in a range of activities used within course teams to help staff learn from each other. For example, mentoring, team and buddy teaching, peer observation and feedback, and all forms of review and moderation activities. Teaching was seen as potentially an isolated experience, and opportunities to actually visit other teachers at work, were particularly highly valued. This included visits within teams, across the wider university and across institutions.

Identification and commitment to powerful pedagogies, was another valued outcome of collaboration, and most participants spoke of the importance of all teachers, in all units, adopting specific teaching approaches believed to be effective. Although a range of approaches were discussed, most fell within the constructivist paradigm, and prioritised understanding the student perspective and keeping student learning as the central focus. Detailed observations of students,

their approaches to learning and responses to teaching, and analysis of their outcomes were all seen as helpful ways to understand students and design better teaching to facilitate their learning. The participants certainly had students as a focus, and it was their learning that was the teachers core concern.

Participants were universal in their valuing of student evaluations and feedback as a support for improvement. The importance of giving students a “voice” and “taking their feedback seriously”, “treating them as co-constructors”, was stressed throughout the interviews. Most participants articulated explicit strategies they used to conduct an on-going dialogue with the students about their experience of the course, and to involve them in decisions about how to improve learning within the limited resources (of both the students and the institution).

Only two participants referred specifically to the formal student evaluation processes used within the university prior to specific probes about their value. This suggests that the informal, self-controlled strategies were more highly valued than institutional processes. When probed about their response to the university’s compulsory formal student evaluation system, participants all identified some positive benefits. It was seen as supporting critical thinking, it provided a “prod to do it, as we can all get lazy about it”, and compulsion was seen a necessary for those staff who would not otherwise engage in evaluation activities. In addition the stability of a measure used over time was appreciated as a way of judging improvements:

I found it [formal evaluation tool] useful...when we compared year to year to year, because we could demonstrate that the students were looking more positively at the unit, which showed we were improving it.

However, all participants also recognised potential problems in the inappropriate use of the university evaluation tool (which was regarded as useful but not fully valid or reliable). Over-reliance on any single formal measures to make simplistic judgments about quality was seen as inappropriate:

Student evaluations I see as essential...they should be used for feedback for improvement...but they [Formal student evaluations] shouldn't be used to evaluate teaching quality... You should be taking feedback from the field and graduates and the student's work as well.

Support for the efficacy of review processes, both internal and external (AUQA) was universal, and this was clearly linked to belief in the power and importance of critical reflection. Aside from a few comments about the potential for timings to be difficult and workloads to become stretched due to the demands of the review (particularly external reviews), staff were fully committed to the process of reviewing all aspects of teaching and learning, and expected that this would secure improvements. Most participants referred to both formal and

informal review processes in the initial stage of the interview, suggesting it was indeed a personally significant strategy for improvement. Support for reviews extended across all levels from the unit and course, through to School, Faculty and External University reviews such as AUQA.

..I also think another really useful thing we do is the unit review and the course review...the process of having to review your unit from a different framework is very useful in terms of my own reflection. Its important to continue to do things like that that make us sit down and think about it.

The Faculty provides small grants (up to \$3000) on a competitive basis to support teaching initiatives. Three participants referred to the value of these small grants in supporting innovations they wanted to make in their courses and units, in the first phase of the interviews. In particular they commented on the value of time release to focus attention on new ways of working; on the importance of their own learning resulting from involvement in innovative work; and on the importance of formal support for risk-taking. Whilst all participants felt innovation grants were potentially “helpful”, the overall response to grants was muted. Even grant winners regarded them as fringe benefits, and although they retained very positive tones in talking about their grants, they were clearly concerned about the time pressures they faced in teaching, so that any extra work coming from grants was problematic:

It was nice to have a bit of money to do something, and good to have some recognition that you were trying things, but we would have done it anyways. Its not that important. Its just one thing that happened for us, and seriously if we hadn't have won it, it wouldn't have mattered. It just added to it.

Most of the participants had never considered applying for external grants, and they generally felt that applying for such grants (if they were offered through the new Carrick Institute for Learning and Teaching) would be just another task they would not have time to do.

Well its great to win one... but if you are successful then you've got a whole heap more work to do, and just no-one has time these days.

Time or rather the lack of time, was a constant theme in participants' responses. It seemed to represent a significant barrier, which inhibited improvement and led to generalized dissatisfaction. In broad terms staff saw the government as having direct responsibility for this problem, because of the limitations of resources to universities.

The importance of teachers as learners was a strong underlying theme, illustrated by the high valuing of collaborative work, conference attendance, and all forms of professional dialogue. However, responses to more formal

professional development provisions were mixed. Surprisingly, the importance of the scholarship of teaching and learning was not raised as a significant issue, even though five of the six participants had completed postgraduate study in teaching, or were actively working on doctorates with an explicit focus on teaching and learning at university. Perhaps this was taken for granted as a part of the normal work of academics and therefore not consciously identified as a specific strategy for improvement.

Where professional development was highly targeted and perceived as matched to individual or team needs and personal timeframes, there was considerable appreciation of the learning opportunities. Positive examples were provided of technology support; opportunities to further specific content knowledge relevant to teaching; and support for scholarship in teaching and learning. Investment in meaningful staff learning was seen as a powerful way to support improvement. Participants were aware of many generic professional development opportunities provided by the university, but generally felt that their time was so precious they could not risk wasting it:

...there's all those professional development courses, I see them constantly advertised... I encourage the team to go, especially the sessional staff..but I just don't think they are for me. I just don't have time to go in for 3hours and maybe there's only ten minutes that for me.

Although sound induction programs and initial teacher training opportunities for new university teachers were seen as important, reactions to compulsory training were mixed, and the need for a balanced, pragmatic approach was recognised.

...obviously people should be qualified [to teach], but you have to be pragmatic, it needs to be reasonable, in proportion to resources. And of course there only a net amount of teachers in a community.

Although the sample was too small for valid patterns to emerge, it seemed that the more qualified the participant was as a teacher, the more willing they were to support the necessity of formal programs of training, and to consider accreditation as a valid step forward. It appeared that appreciation of the inherent complexity of good teaching was consistent with positive support for formal qualifications. Support for the training of sessional staff was unanimous, but while generic training was thought to be of some potential merit, it was course specific learning through attendance at meetings, in shared teaching experiences and involvement in decision-making that was expected to lead to most improvement.

None of the participants referred to teaching excellence awards in the first part of the interview, which suggests that they did not think about them as an important strategy for improving teaching and learning. Direct questions about

their potential to support improvements generated mixed responses. All participants thought that explicit valuing of teaching and teachers was important, and that acknowledging teachers, and “spotlighting and sharing” examples of effective teaching was important. Many staff felt they were really too busy with more important things to give awards much attention. Others had serious concerns about awards, seeing them as undermining collaboration by creating unproductive competition. Competition was positioned as the antithesis of their educational philosophies, and counter to their principles of education:

I don't think teaching awards are very useful, they are divisive when they are from a elitist competitive model, it's the very opposite of what we are trying to do. It would be different if it was just recognition and valuing, without the winners and losers

Policies, guidelines, recommendations, rules, regulations and formal statement of goals, intent or good practice were not mentioned by any of the participants in the first part of the interviews. When questioned about the importance of these formal frameworks, the participants had a remarkably consistent response. They tended to accept that policy frameworks were probably important, but too distant from the day-to-day management of teaching to be a priority for consideration. They felt overwhelmed by the number and variety of policies, and the many potential layers of governance (government, university, professional bodies), and were too busy to pay much attention to them:

I can't keep up with them to be honest. I do try conscientiously to read them, but the top down stuff is mostly irrelevant... it's just not actually critical to what I'm doing.

Participants relied on senior management to identify important issues and take responsibility for enforcing compliance with priorities. Participants recognised and valued the work commitment and effort of Program Directors, Heads of School, Associate Deans of Teaching and Learning, and the mediating roles of senior administrative and academic staff. The participants expected and trusted that the University Executive would be responsible for managing relationships with the government. They constructed the university as a team, with each layer fulfilling a well-defined role. They seemed to feel confident that their own role was to focus on student interactions, and that they could trust others to keep an eye on the ‘big picture’. Having said this, as indicated earlier there was a very strong commitment to shared course philosophies, principles, and pedagogies, and in essence these are a synthesis of big picture missions, strategic plans and approaches, interpreted at the course level: And which are (at least in theory) well aligned to university policies through the implementation of rigorous approval and review processes. Confidence in capable leadership seems to be a factor in freeing teachers to work within reasonable parameters. It may also explain the perceived correlation between collaboration and improvement: Team activities

that ensure teachers continually renew, refine and adapt their shared understandings about course principles, philosophies and approaches are the critical link between micro and macro viewpoints, and are means of effectively achieving “good teaching” consistent with university, national and even global perspectives.

Government funding was seen to impact on teaching and learning mainly through limiting resources, and the current high staff–student ratios were identified as a particular barrier to improving the quality of learning.

If you are talking about university structures, there's a limit of funding for a unit. And workshops of 30 for practical class are just too big... if you have big numbers it just seems to end up with two and three hour lectures, and we know that's not the way to do it.

The university has introduced a component of teaching performance funding to the allocation of resources to Faculties, based on student evaluations. However, the staff interviewed did not appear to understand how the funding worked, and generally had no direct control of resources. Recently the Faculty has instigated performance rewards for high performing teachers, through a Teaching Activity Index (including student evaluations). Participants were surprised and delighted that any financial rewards should be given for teaching (being very aware that rewards were previously given for research but not teaching). However, they were sceptical about the reliability and validity of measures, unsure about the negative impact on people who were not rewarded, and concerned that the ‘carrots’ might lead to the adoption practices to achieve rewards, instead of practices that address genuine improvement in learning. The concerns expressed within the Faculty mirror the wider concerns for competitive government funding between institutions. The national and institutional schemes are very new, but both clearly need to acknowledge and manage such concerns, and find ways to evaluate the overall benefit accurately.

In summary participants were generally supportive of any government and institutional initiatives that had potential to improve teaching and learning, although this was always subject to appropriate, balanced and reasonable implementation. However, they were generally antagonistic about the use of competitive strategies that created winners and losers.

Reflection on findings

The importance that teaching staff attach to critical thinking, reflective practice, and inclusive, collaborative team approaches is significant. Participants attributed improvement most directly to opportunities of various kinds that support reflection. Reflection is widely accepted as an essential component of ‘good teaching’ (Dewey, 1906; Hatton & Smith, 1995; Schon, 1987), and is

considered to be the basis of the kind of scholarly approach to teaching and learning expected in universities, not only for teachers but also for students (Consolo, Elrick, Middleton, & Roy, 1996; Kreber, 2002; Schulman, 1999). Many of the initiatives discussed have the potential to both stimulate and support reflection positively. However, reports on university life also highlight the academic workplace as becoming increasingly stressed, with chronic work overloads, a loss of collegial work, increased isolation of many teachers (particularly casual and sessional staff) and the lack of time for reflective practice (Martin, 1999; McInnis, 1999; Winefield & Gillespie, 2002). It cannot be assumed that well-intentioned initiatives will automatically provide high quality interactions: the quality needs to be nurtured and sustained deliberately within teams.

One interesting and unexpected outcome of the analysis is the conception of the whole university as a collaborative team. The 1990s were in many ways turbulent times. There were many anecdotal reports of a lack of empathy or active acrimony between different layers of the university. Participants in this study, however, acknowledged and appreciated the current people in executive and leadership roles, and trusted that senior staff would provide an appropriate framework for teaching and learning that frees them to concentrate on their work with students. Although the reasons for this change were not fully explored, there was a sense that the university had come together in the face of counter-educational external pressures, and the government was the most significant of these negative forces. The university executive have to manage difficult external threats and take up external opportunities on behalf of the staff, and this positions them as part of the team, rather than part of the problem. If team building and collaboration are as important as the data suggests, this change in relationship is indeed to be celebrated: It makes very positive feedback of senior managers. Further, the data affirms the value of management positions such as Associate Dean Teaching and Learning, and of Teaching and Learning Committees, in providing leadership that assists others to work effectively.

The literature on the value of projects and teaching awards as ways of improving teaching and learning suggests that while the particular individuals and small groups involved may benefit, it is hard to demonstrate either strategy helps improvements throughout either organizations or systems. This appears to be true in many countries:

For two decades attempts in the UK to improve university teaching largely focussed on individual teachers. By the 1990's it had become clear that no amount of innovation by individual teachers was capable of sufficient, or sufficiently rapid, change in response to reduced resource, more and more diverse students, new technology and government agendas concerning the employability of students... Substantial government investment in project-led initiatives had made little impact.

(Gibbs, 2003, p1)

Catherine Robinson, a doctoral student who studied the outcomes of teaching awards in Hong Kong, found there was scant evidence to support awards as drivers for improving practice:

My research showed that, although the universities claimed that the awards promoted good teaching, there were no systems in place to enable winners to disseminate their excellent practices. Further, none of the participants, including panel members were aware of theories of excellence developed through studies of past winners.

http://www.lime.ki.se/uploads/images/323/Injudan_C_Robinson.pdf
Accessed: May 20, 2003

The muted response to the value of teaching excellence awards and innovation grants resonates with the literature quite strongly. The essence of the problem for the participants, appears to be negative views of competition and its potential for harm, and practical concerns about the time commitment needed to apply for such awards and grants. The data suggests more creative ways of increasing assistance and emphasising collaboration need to be investigated. The structure of the applications and criteria for success need to be revisited, to simplify the process, as much as possible, and find ways of reducing the consequences of the competitive elements that create winners and losers. Attention also needs to be paid to ensuring that both processes are conducted in ways that maximise the potential for collaboration, community learning, and real improvement in practice beyond individuals. Again, creative solutions need to be generated to address the problem, but the insights are helpful in shaping significant goals.

Conclusions

The interactions between government actions, university initiatives and improvement in teaching and learning are complex, and rich ground for further research. The high-jumps, hurdles, carrots and sticks, of government and institutional strategies to improve teaching, may have some value and may encourage positive change in some situations. However, the evidence of this project suggests that academic staff believe it is the way you engage with such initiatives that really makes the difference to the quality and experience of learning. In particular the degree to which they encourage:

- Engagement in professional discussion and critical reflection
- Genuine attention to student evaluations and feedback
- Collaboration and teamwork
- Development and application of shared philosophies, goals, pedagogies and practices.

The evidence of this project also suggests a real need to continue to investigate practice, to maintain vigorous challenge to the assumptions of political rhetoric, and apply ever greater academic rigor to analysing and evaluating the actual effectiveness of strategies and initiatives promoted by governments and institutions as valuable pathways to improvement. As professionals we need to interrogate a depth of evidence to make intelligent decisions about effective strategies for improvement, and to recognise the potential benefits, opportunities, threats and dangers in the “carrots and sticks” applied by governments to our universities.

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Project Three: Award Winning Teachers

Context for the papers

Since the early 1990s, Australia has implemented a national higher education teaching awards scheme. Our university, like most others, developed a matching scheme, which provided institutional level awards, and encouraged and supported excellent teachers in making national applications. In my position as Quality Improvement Manager, I took on the role in managing a faculty awards scheme and in helping some of our outstanding teachers to develop applications for university and national awards. In working with these outstanding teachers, I felt privileged to learn from and with them. I became increasingly curious about the distinctive ways they approached their work, how they were similar or different to other teachers, what they believed about good teaching, how they felt about their work, the impact that their work had on them, and ways that others might benefit from their insights, expertise and role-modeling. I initiated a study of nine award-winning teachers to pursue my curiosity in a more formal way. The study extended to become an 8 year longitudinal research project that included extensive interviews with 29 award winning teachers. The rich data collected was exploited in a variety of ways to support planning, decision-making, and the development of support for teaching and learning in the Faculty Teaching and Learning Office; and was also used as source material for a number of different articles, three of which are included in this Portfolio:

- *Teaching awards: Rhetoric, myths and realities* (Project Three A) investigates the experience and perceptions of award winners about the process of applying for awards and the match between the intentions of the awards and their actual impact on teachers and teaching.
- *Teaching awards and their impact on university teachers' sense of self-worth* (Project Three B) reports on one of the many themes emerging from the data.
- *Surviving and sustaining teaching excellence: A narrative of 'entrapment'* (Project Three C) uses data from both the award winning teacher study and the study of middle managers to explore the concept of sustainability in teaching.

Relevance to the portfolio

One way to conceptualize Teaching Excellence is through analysis and understanding of the people who are nominated for awards; and the criteria used to affirm them as outstanding teachers (See Chapter Two). Teaching awards are one way that excellent teachers are identified. Analysis of the values, beliefs, actions and the outcomes of award-winning

teachers achieve is another way to describe and define excellence. Award winning teachers were significant participants in most of the research presented in this portfolio. This 8-year study yielded extensive and extremely rich data, which has relevance to every dimension of my teaching excellence web.

Role of the doctoral candidate in the research, project development, and writing of the article

My work with award winning teachers was collaborative in the sense that they role worked with me in the analysis and interpretation of data. However, I was responsible for:

- Conceiving the research and developing the principles and broad approaches;
- conducting and transcribing all the interviews;
- undertaking initial data analysis and interpretation;
- reviewing my interpretations with participants and incorporating recommendations/suggestions/elaborations and amendments;
- writing and presenting conference papers from the research included in this portfolio:

Sparrow, H. (2008). *Teaching awards: Rhetoric, myths and realities*.
(unpublished paper)

Work from this paper has been presented at institutional and local teaching and learning forums between 2004-2010;

Sparrow, H. (2008, December). *Teaching awards and their impact on university teachers' sense of self-worth*. Paper presented at Valuing Higher Education, SRHE Annual Conference, Liverpool UK.

Sparrow, H. (2009). *Surviving and sustaining teaching excellence: A narrative of 'entrapment'*. E-Culture, ECU forum e-publication. Retrieved from:
<http://ro.ecu.edu.au/eculture/vol2/iss1/18>.

The paper was also presented at the 2010 WA Teaching and Learning Forum, Edith Cowan University, Perth WA. Abstract retrieved:
http://otl.curtin.edu.au/professional_development/conferences/tlf/tlf2010/contents-all.html

Postscript

Since commencing the study in 2003, the organizing body for the national awards has changed, the range of awards and their criteria have also been adapted several times. Award winning teachers have increasingly become a focus of attention for researchers and the literature around award winners and the process and outcomes of awards is expanding.

Mark Israel was commissioned by the ALTC to undertake a Fellowship study of national award winners. I met with him at the start of his Fellowship and shared my work with him. His Report (Israel, 2011) demonstrates a high level of consistency with my own findings.

In 2010, I gave up my role of supporting award applicants. The process of award application, and the values attached to the scheme were noticeably in change at that time. Further research is needed to understand and evaluate the awards, and their effectiveness both as rewards and as tools for improvement.

Project Three A

Teaching awards: Rhetoric, myths and realities

Teaching excellence awards: Rhetoric and realities

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Across the last three decades, many countries of the world have introduced a variety of schemes to identify and reward excellence in teaching. The motivations of national governments and educational institutions driving the development of Teaching Excellence Award schemes are typically justified by a rhetoric that claims they can make a significant contribution to (1) improving the value and status of teachers, (2) be rewarding to individuals and teams of outstanding excellence, (3) encourage and support improvements in tertiary teaching and learning. Alternative critical readings of such schemes might see awards as a management tool used to declare interest and action in support for teaching and teachers, without significant investment in solving the real problems and challenges of mass higher education in a competitive world environment. This positions the awards as a token gesture, a cost effective way to appease teachers' need for recognition, and/or a limited response to concern for educational quality and standards and the demand for accountability.

This paper considers the reality of the impact of teaching excellence awards against two claims: that they will indeed be experienced as rewarding 'winners'; and that they can contribute to improving teaching and learning in universities. The paper reports on findings drawn from a longitudinal study insider-research study of thirty award-winning teachers, in one Australian University. Evidence from this group of award-winning teachers supports a growing body of evaluation literature that suggests awards can be of benefit, however, they are in many ways flawed as instruments of improvement, and are certainly insufficient to fulfil the espoused rhetoric of valuing teaching, rewarding teachers, and improving teaching and learning.

Intended Audience: University teachers and leaders; institutional and government awards administrators and managers; higher education researchers

Keywords: teaching excellence awards; good teaching; teaching improvement

Author biography

Heather Sparrow is an Adjunct Senior Lecturer at Edith Cowan University. Her career has included work as an early years and primary school teacher, teacher-educator, instructional designer, academic developer, professional developer, quality improvement manager, grants and awards consultant. Her current research interests include: student diversity and success; effective teaching and learning in higher education, organizational change and professional learning, and respectful uses of Australian Indigenous art in education.

Teaching excellence awards: Rhetoric and realities

Across the last three decades, many countries of the world have introduced a variety of schemes to identify and reward excellence in teaching. The motivations of national governments and educational institutions driving the development of Teaching Excellence Award schemes are typically justified by a rhetoric that claims they can make a significant contribution to (1) improving the value and status of teachers, (2) be rewarding to individuals and teams of outstanding excellence, (3) encourage and support improvements in tertiary teaching and learning. Alternative critical readings of such schemes might see awards as a management tool used to declare interest and action in support for teaching and teachers, without significant investment in solving the real problems and challenges of mass higher education in a competitive world environment. This positions the awards as a token gesture, a cost effective way to appease teachers' need for recognition, and/or a limited response to concern for educational quality and standards and the demand for accountability.

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Introduction

The last quarter century has seen the proliferation of teaching excellence schemes. Early schemes seemed to focus on identifying and rewarding individual teachers in the school sector (MacKenzie, 2007) with a later pattern of interest in university teaching (Ramsden 1995; Dunkin 1995). Schemes are variously initiatives of governments, institutions, academic societies, foundations and benefactors, or they are sponsored by the business and corporate world. Graham Gibbs (2008), provides a thoughtful analysis of the different conceptions underpinning teaching awards. His study of relevant literature and the documentation of 100 higher education award schemes revealed 24 distinguishable conceptions, and further:

... most teaching award schemes were found to embody multiple and often confusing and contradictory conceptions of teaching excellence and with contradictions between stated purposes, criteria and the roles award winners were expected to fulfil (p. 2)

Gibbs suggests that the lack of clarity about conceptualizations of teaching excellence means that applicants will have difficulty in the preparation of arguments and evidence to support their claims for teaching excellence, judging panels will find it difficult to evaluate applications consistently, fairly and with transparency, and that schemes will fail to offer

much help in, "... orienting teaching behaviour in any particular direction... most schemes appear incapable of exercising leverage because they had no clear direction" (p. 22). This paper does not seek to offer a further critique of award schemes on the basis of conceptions of teaching and learning, and competing notions of teaching excellence, but rather to understand the experience and perspectives of award winning teachers and the degree to which one particular scheme meets its espoused intentions.

In Australia, national higher education teaching awards have offered since the early 1990s. Over time they have been coordinated by a series of government sponsored organizations including most recently the Australian Learning and Teaching Council (ALTC) and currently Office of Learning and Teaching (OLT). The range and diversity of the awards has varied over time, along with changing criteria, however, the rhetoric associated with them has remained largely consistent. In 2003, the declared intentions were:

- "To further enhance teacher's careers and to develop support materials for their teaching activities
- To act as inspiration for teachers and institution to strive for excellence in their work
- To rewards and celebrate innovation in exceptional service delivery and outstanding tertiary teaching"

(<http://www.autc.gov.au/aw/aw.htm>, accessed July 2003)

The 2012 Australian Awards for University Teaching state they are:

...designed to recognise quality teaching practice and outstanding contributions to student learning. It is intended that recipients, with the support of their institutions, will contribute to systemic change in learning and teaching through ongoing knowledge sharing and dissemination, for example, presentations within the learning and teaching community, collegial mentoring, pairing and networking, and involvement in university and higher education committees.

(full details available at: <http://www.olt.gov.au/system/files/2012AAUTNominationInfo1.pdf>)

In 2012, a report commissioned by the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (Johns, 2012) on the achievements of the ALTC, noted a specific objective of the awards was: "...to raise the profile and encourage recognition of the fundamental importance of teaching in higher education institutions and in the general community, and foster and acknowledge excellent teaching in higher education" (p. 15).

The report found that there was considerable support in the community for continuation of an awards scheme, with anecdotal evidence suggesting that the scheme was effective in improving teaching effectiveness. However, the report also suggested that a, "better evidence base is needed to establish the impact of recognition programs"(p.16). The research on which this paper is based precedes the Johns Report, but its purpose was to contribute to the development of a relevant evidence base.

The study

Between 2003 and 2010 a longitudinal study of award-winning teachers in one Australia university was undertaken. This institution, like all Australian universities, had developed a local award scheme, with intentions and criteria that directly mirrored the national scheme. The overall intent of the research project was to investigate award-winning teachers' perspectives to inform the institution about more effective ways to improve teaching and learning. The impact of teaching awards on teachers and teaching was one theme questioned within this broader context.

Participants

Participants (n=29) were all teaching academics within the university, who had won either an institutional award or a national award, and in many cases both. A core group (A) of 10 award-winning teachers (AWTs) were interviewed initially in 2003, and again in 2008. A second group (B) of 19 teachers was interviewed between 2008-2010. Data collected from Group B was used to affirm, contradict or elaborate on findings from Group A. The full group included representatives from all faculties within the university, although 10 participants came from the School of Education. The over-representation of School of Education participants reflected the interest and success of this School in the early days of the scheme, as well as sample convenience due to their willingness to participate. The teachers included in the study had diverse ages (30-60), experience (2yrs-25yrs) and held positions from a Level A sessional, through levels B, C, Associate Professor to full Professors. Participants were based across the three main university campuses and many taught in programs that required off-shore and/or online teaching, as well as more traditional face to face teaching. There were 14 females and 15 males, although it is interesting to note that in the core Group A, only two of the nine were female. The figures reflect the gender balance of total award winners quite well, so this implies that there was a change in the gender balance over the period of the study. All known award winners from the previous 6 years (1998-2003) were invited to participate. Participants were all volunteers, and most were well-known to the researcher. Their willingness to participate reflected interest in contributing to a study they thought was significant, as well as collegial support responding to the researcher's call for assistance.

Methodology

A qualitative, insider-participant approach ((Brannick & Coghlan, 2007; Cockburn, 2005; Coghlan & Brannick, 2005; Hewitt-Taylor, 2002; Roth, Shani, & Leary, 2007) was used. informed by participatory action research methods, feminist research, heuristics, narrative, grounded theory, developmental phenomenology. Significant ideas underpinning the research approach included:

- from participant action research methods: respecting the needs and interests of the workplace and prioritizing improvement in policy and practice as a research goal; engaging participants in ways that allow them to have some control over all aspects of the research process and to find value and benefit for themselves as individuals as well as for their own workplace learning and development through participation (Armstrong & Moore, 2004; Ax, Ponte, & Brouwer, 2008; Kemmis, 2009; Marti & Villansante, 2009; Cherry & Bowden, 1999; McIntyre-Mills, Goff, & Hillier, 2011).

- from heuristics: placing significance on the researcher's own experience and valuing and incorporating their expertise and understandings of the impact of teaching awards as part of the data (Douglass & Moustakas, 1985; West, 2001; van Heugten, 2004)
- from narrative theory: exploiting the natural flow of storying as a way of collecting data; and the use of the participants' stories as a way of communicating in research reporting (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Elliott, 2005)
- from developmental phenomenology: collection of rich data and categorization of emergent themes (Bennett, Foreman-Peck, & Higgins, 1996; Bowden & Walsh, 2000)
- grounded theory: interviewing style and data analysis that encourages data to 'fall out', in unpredicted ways (Cresswell, 1998; Charmaz & Bryant, 2008; Corbin, 2008; Denzin & Lincoln, 2005)
- feminist research: adoption of processes that value people's emotional experience, methodologies that are inclusive, alertness to gender as a potential influence and in yielding differential experiences and outcomes (Acker, 2000; Deutsch, 2004; Ghorashi, 2005; Kleinman, 2007; Oakely 1998; Wadsworth, 2001).

Key questions

Whilst the overall intention of the research approach was to invite participants' perspectives through open questioning, allowing them to determine what they thought were the important questions, issues, dilemmas and problems, related to broader teaching and learning issues, the interviewer had several specific questions in mind that are pertinent to this paper:

- What is your experience of teaching awards: positives, negatives for yourself and for others (feelings about it; outcomes of it)?
- In what way do (or could) the awards contribute to improving teaching and learning?
- What is the potential for awards to contribute to the enrichment of academic life?
- How could teaching awards achieve better outcomes?

Interviews

Group A 2003

These participants were invited to talk in their own time and in their own way about their experience of the teaching awards process: "*I'm interested in your feelings, opinions and experience of teaching awards*" (interviewer opening question). This open approach was intended to ensure that participants had appropriate opportunities to shape the discussions in ways that were beneficial and meaningful to them (Connelly & Clandinin, 2007)), and to feel that they had the control firmly in their own hands. It also allowed for ideas that were priorities for individuals to come to the surface without undue influence from the interviewer's questions. Issues that appeared to be most significant to participants were probed in some depth, and more direct questions were raised towards the end of the interviews where underpinning key questions had not arisen naturally in the conversation. For the most part, the interviews were conducted in the style of a mutually beneficial professional conversation, with diversions into many areas of personal or professional interest following the participants' lead. Some of this dialogue remains appropriately private, although it influenced the researcher's interpretation of the data that was formally used for analysis. With the permission of the participants all interviews were audio-taped, and the interviewer kept field notes during the discussions:

- Firstly, to document observations of tone of voice, facial expression and gestures that might carry meaning
- secondly, to note comments of interest to probe at a natural break point in the discussion
- thirdly, to check if issues of interest to the interviewer had been covered in the natural flow of discussion, and if not to allow for more direct questioning towards the end of the interview.

Full transcripts were made of these interviews, which were returned to the participants for affirmation of accuracy and to allow them to make adjustments they felt would make their contribution stronger, more relevant or more detailed. An initial analysis of the data was also provided to participants for their commentary. Primary source data was not shared with anyone other than the participant: but permission was sought to use specific quotations in reporting the findings. No attributions have been made in reporting, as even minimal information would typically identify people from such a small cohort of known award winners.

Group A 2008

In 2008, the original transcripts and findings from 2003 were returned to participants. This time they were invited to:

- reflect on their career paths since 2003
- comment on any changes in their feeling, opinions or experience
- provide advice to the university about issues relevant to the future conduct of teaching awards, and the improvement of teaching and learning across the institution.

Two interviews were conducted by telephone as participants had moved locations. One participant from the original group was not available for interview. All interviews were audio-taped, field notes maintained, and full transcripts were again written and returned to participants for affirmation, adaption or elaboration.

Group B 2008

Group B interviews were conducted as much as possible in the style indicated above. Interviews typically lasted from 40-90 mins and were structured in two phases:

- firstly, the opening question from the 2003 interviews was posed, and participants encouraged to lead discussions in any direction they thought relevant and significant
- secondly, participants were asked to respond to the findings from Group A (2003 & 8) (an Executive Summary was provided to them several days in advance for their consideration).

Partial transcripts (quotations around key points) were written for Group B.

Analysis

Throughout the research process, a variety of analysis techniques were used. Grounded theory approaches as exemplified in the work of Strauss and Corbin (1998) and Bryant and Charmez (2008), were chosen to elicit new and nuanced meanings though coding directly from transcripts, into categories and concepts that, 'fell out'. In the classic grounded theory the

researcher would try to maintain openness to the discovery of unknown and unexpected, and would actively avoid the contamination of prior theory (Glazer, 1998). However, since the topic, relevant literature and participants were well known to the researcher, it was not possible to conduct analysis without the influence of pre-existing insights and interpretations. This is acknowledged as a limitation (Bruce, 2007), however, a position of 'pure induction' is neither possible nor strategic (Kelle, 2007). Rather than reject the possibility of working in an area of expertise or acting as a 'theoretical virgin (Clarke 2005, in Thornberg, 2012 p. 244), the intention to search for new and emergent themes was retained, and strategies to manage prior knowledge were introduced. Wherever possible data was analysed in three ways. During the interviews themselves, both themes emerging in situ and pre-identified themes were memoed by the researcher and often reflected back to the participants for comment. The conceptualization of the participants as co-constructors of meaning ensured meanings were continually critiqued (Charmaz, 2006). Pre-existing ideas were made transparent as key concepts, terms and potential categories and hypotheses. These were documented and acknowledged as influences, but then used explicitly as 'heuristic tools' (Kelle, 2007), to identify anything falling outside the 'known' or contrary to expectations. Open coding was also used creatively to reveal novel ideas. Moving backwards and forwards across these different approaches, provides a sound way to test interpretations (Schurz, 2008).

Group A 2003

Transcripts were initially segmented into small, meaningful chunks (Cresswell, 2008), and then analysed two ways. Firstly, by emergent themes (those ideas arising naturally in the interview), and secondly, coding in relation to the interviewer's underlying questions (either in response to probes and questions or as they arose naturally). This analysis was initially done manually using digital tables in Word. The researcher's inside knowledge is acknowledged as an influence on the analysis, as was the available literature of the time. The emotional tone of participants' contributions was quite also important in evaluating the significance of the points they made and the stories they chose to share. In 2008, the new data was added to the 2003 data, and this time the analysis was conducted electronically using with Nvivo. Emergent themes were re-identified and these were used along with key concepts found in the literature, to code and re-code data (Moghaddam, 2006). Findings were tabulated to facilitate rigor in comparisons across time and individuals (Richards, 2005; Siccama & Penna, 2008). Themes, codes and summaries of analysis-in-progress were shared with participants and independent experts to support or challenge accuracy and confidence in interpretation. Any changes in experience, or thinking were noted. Recommendations for the effective management of awards to enhance the award winning teachers' experience, and to enhance learning were also identified, and provided to the Faculty Executive to support their planning and decision-making.

Group B 2008-10

Partial transcripts were made for Group B. Repeated audio analysis was used to identify sections judged to be sufficiently relevant to be worth transcribing. Relevance related firstly to identifying the degree to which individuals in Group B either agreed or disagreed with the Group A findings, and secondly, to discovering any new themes, additional elaborations or alternative ideas.

Findings

Although the testimonies of the participants did reveal diversity in experience, responses and outcomes, the predominant pattern was of similarity: the stories they told, the feelings they shared and the opinions they offered, showed a very high level of consistency. This was true

across time, and across individuals. Two common characteristics of the award winners were the elevated passion they had for teaching, and the emotional commitment they expressed to their students and to student learning. This had a strong influence on the way they perceived the awards process, purpose and outcomes: through reference to the ways that it impacted on their relationships with students or their capacity to be better teachers.

Group A 2008

Upon analysis, the 2003 data fell into seven broad categories, and all participants in interviewed in 2008-10, affirmed that they recognized these categories as legitimate and relevant, even where their own experience was different. The 2008 interview data, added detail and interesting variations on themes, but very little was added that was new, although there was a consistent expression, mostly of an anecdotal nature, suggesting that participants felt the process was in change. An additional category was added to encompass this thinking. The categories are as follows:

1) Awards can be rewarding to winners in terms of financial benefits, recognition, acknowledgement, professional affirmation, a sense of pride and personal satisfaction

Financial benefits

All participants saw the financial rewards attached to the awards as significant, and for many this was a key motivator for applying. Their interest in money was focused exclusively on an expressed need to find additional resources to support their teaching and their professional development and engagement: So they could be better teachers. They typically had very clear and serious purposes in mind for spending money, and there was a unanimous sense that teaching was under resourced and that funds were more procurable from research activity than teaching. Few participants felt they had easy access to funding to support their own teaching related priorities from institutional sources. Participants believed that additional resources that they could direct to the things they saw as important could have a positive impact the quality of their teaching:

The flexibility that the money gives you is very important to me. \$5000 is not easy to come by, and you can do a lot of things with that to make your teaching better

(note participants are not identified in any way to assure confidentiality)

Exceptions to this were staff in the most senior positions, and here access to flexible funding was almost exclusively related to their research performance or to budgets they managed as part of their positional roles, for example as a Head of Department, or Head of Research.

Several participants spoke about the way that a lack of basic resources limited their teaching. New, young academics (including some on sessional contracts) were often on quite low salaries, trying to pay off their debts from student loans and establish themselves in homes with young families. They found it difficult to subsidize university resources themselves, whilst typically assuming that this was an expectation in the teaching profession:

I was a new member of staff ... and it [*the award*] had with it \$20000. I didn't have any money to do things. I wanted the money to be able to do things from home, so in the end with the money I bought a computer to work on my stuff from home. I bought a printer which allowed me to print material from home. And that enhanced both my teaching and my research.

Professional Development through travel and conference attendance and networking with colleagues was very highly valued, particularly in the context of the local geographical isolation of the institution:

I think unless you go to a couple of conferences a year you probably aren't doing your job properly. I think it's really important in terms of being an academic in Perth, because it's such a closed community... I think it is a really important, vital, even obligatory part of academic life and continued academic life has to be financed in some way. Well it ain't going to be financed from teaching and learning.

It was common for participants to observe that their commitment to teaching limited the time they gave to research, and thus they felt disadvantaged in gaining discretionary funding. Although the financial incentives attached to teaching awards were perceived to be motivating and rewarding, participants frequently referred to the more advantageous financial rewards for research. Research and publication were seen as having more lucrative opportunities. Further participants also noted that teaching awards were limited in number, difficult to win, available only to certain people within specified time limits (often restricted to once only applications) and seldom yielded high amounts. As a consequence, teaching was perceived to be a low priority for anyone with financial ambitions. Thus several participants indicated that they had made strategic decisions to prioritize research over teaching:

The reality is there is no capping on the number of papers you can write and get points for but there are definitely, by definition, only a few people who can score teaching and learning awards... And the VC's Award comes with \$5000 which is very nice indeed, but there's only a couple of those kicking around. And there's any number of research grants and papers you can write and you are not in a lottery for two awards out of 6000 people. If you want to count the numbers up for winning money then you won't try and go for teaching awards. I'll be honest, I minimize teaching in order to maximize the research.

This was however, a rare response, usually expressed by people who felt they had been treated unfairly in promotion or tenure compared to colleagues who focused on research. Most participants remained fully committed to teaching as their priority, even where they realized that it limited promotion aspirations.

In the 2008-10 interviews, several participants mentioned the introduction of a Teaching Activity Index (TAI) in their faculty, that rewarded teaching excellence with points matched to a dollar value that replicated the institutional Research Index (RI). The TAI allocated points for teaching award applications and successes, and the funding from this source was greatly appreciated and for some of these participants it was the first and only discretionary funding they had ever received prior to winning an award. The TAI was regarded as more effective than teaching awards in impacting positively on large numbers of staff, where awards only influenced a few.

Recognition, acknowledgement, professional affirmation

Recognition, acknowledgement and professional affirmation appeared to be important to all participants. Without exception, award winners stated that it was rare to receive professional acknowledgement and affirmation other than from a few close colleagues, and sometimes

from their students. One award winner who was also a line manager commented that despite good intentions they had received feedback from their teams saying that they themselves did not provide acknowledgement:

In normal run of things people don't do much about positive feedback
I had a person come and say I never said there were doing a good job – in my head I thought I did- People don't do much praising- Maybe I haven't done enough, I think we just forget, get tied up. And its really good to say thanks, you are doing a good job

Middle managers and line managers were identified as particularly reluctant, negligent or forgetful about offering recognition for good teaching, including congratulating award winners on their achievements.

I don't experience it not even in Management of Performance –its just, oh yes you got good UTEIs [*the student evaluation survey*] and then we talk about research. Maybe other Schools do more about affirmation. We could have had a culture where if wasn't part of it – there can be culture.

Indeed, participants reported that there was very little interaction ever with line-managers that investigated the quality of teaching with a specific intention of improvement: *Direct colleagues give support, but not others. I've never had anyone –in line management – ever see me teaching- you do feel a little isolated.* The lack of attention given to discussion about teaching excellence in Management of Performance was a particularly significant local finding. The system is specifically designed to provide feedback and encourage positive development in all academic work, but without exception award winners reported that the process rarely dwelt on teaching. Several commented that the opportunity the award application process gave them to talk with others who were interested in their teaching was in itself a rewarding experience: “Having someone want to work with me on my things- very rewarding- it's a comment on isolation of my teaching- Have rarely time to share about the ideas and the things we do.”

Positive recognition from students was most highly regarded form of affirmation. All participants talked about the importance they placed on student responses to their teaching, and the emotional ‘buzz’ they experienced from positive feedback and success in promoting learning effectively:

Its nice getting an award, but really it's the students that matter to me, I get a real buzz when I see them ‘get’ something, and when they tell you your teaching mattered to them.

All participants found it rewarding to receive an award that recognized their effort, commitment and expertise:

Teachers are generally satisfied with a pat on the back, a verbal reward, acceptance, praise. Psychologically we have a tendency for, need, and want, to be loved generally. So you find that when I first started participating in the awards, it was because of the need to satisfy that particular part of my life/career. To be accepted as a person who is good, capable, who is an expert in the field.

I was actually deeply shocked when the time came for the award- I was so willing to accept ...it was a genuine recognition- it felt like the icing on the cake for 17 years of teaching- it just felt like a crown being placed in my head.

But in many cases an initial burst of excitement was later replaced by disillusionment, if they found that in fact the award did not lead to any change in their employment, their role or the respect they felt was paid to them:

My first teaching award, I was euphoric-to get recognition of what I've done-it was a fantastic feeling... but you need to be continuously supporting your good teachers and that's not happening in a continuous constructive way. We don't have strong strategies for encouraging teaching... Now I think that teaching awards mean well, but really they are not that rewarding.

In several cases there was an implied belief that expertise in research confers automatic status in a way that expertise in teaching does not. It was not simply a case of seeking personal affirmation, but recognition for teaching itself:

I wanted to prove myself, cut the mustard, I didn't want to be a second-class lecturer, and at the time I didn't have a PhD, so that's how I felt. I wanted what I knew I was good at to be valued and I wanted teaching to be seen as really important.

A sense of pride and personal satisfaction

For many teachers there seemed to be very few opportunities to receive positive feedback on their teaching, or to feel valued other than directly by students. They identified recognition as a good feeling: it made them feel that their work and the extra effort they felt they were giving teaching was worthwhile. Several participants spoke of the sense of pride resulting from the awards, and again this was not simply pride in themselves, but pride in teaching as a profession:

I think I had always been a hard worker at the university. I had always thought, along with other women, that I hadn't got the recognition that perhaps I should have had... I went into it [*the award process*] because I, because there was no other way of being valued.

I was very proud to have received the awards. I don't generally display awards and things that I have. But I actually put my awards in frames... I was very proud to receive them.

Balanced against this was an underlying but consistent theme of discomfort in putting themselves forward for awards, which meant that many award winners had delayed or avoided applying; and kept quite quiet about their achievement in winning an award. Winning a research grant was not seen to be self-promoting, whereas winning a teaching award was often perceived to be socially or professionally unacceptable: "You do realize you have to fly your own flag [people in my discipline area] don't do it without prompting ... I was not wanting to self-promote... it's a bit tall poppy".

2) Awards can bring career benefits to individuals, but these tends to be limited, very context bound and weak in effect compared to the recognition of excellence in research

Each and every one of the participants introduced the topic of career advancement into the discussion without prompting from the interviewer. Their attitudes and concerns were varied. In a few cases, the award scheme was seen from the beginning as a mechanism to support promotion or enhance job security, but for the majority of participants the potential for career improvement was almost an afterthought:

I actually think when I went for that teaching award I had not considered going for promotion. I honestly think that at the time, I hadn't go a PhD, I wasn't near the PhD. As it happens I decided having copped the VC's Awards for Teaching, that I had now got grants on the research side and that I'd be a fool if I didn't go for promotion. But at the time I honestly think it was just to consolidate in a way that kind of teaching reputation.

Most participants believed that an award was a useful addition to a CV, and was an effective way of providing evidence of good teaching. This was seen as useful since it is relatively difficult to provide evidence of good teaching. Such evidence was seen as particularly important for portability: applying for positions in other institutions where an individual's work may not be known. The work needed to prepare teaching award applications was also perceived to assist in developing promotions applications. Evidence-based career enhancement was positively supported as a way to avoid nepotism believed to have been prominent in the past.

I lived through a generation of women who really did suffer from sexism, and not being able to get promotion, and not being in the boy's club. And this has provided me with an arsenal and weapons to go for promotion.

A few of the participants believed that their awards had actively led to promotions:

...it [*the teaching award*] helps on your CV, and it helps when you go for promotions... I certainly think it helped me get the promotion I finally got last year. I had effectively written three quarters of the promotion application by doing the teaching award.

However, this was not typical. There was a clear view amongst participants that good teaching alone would not secure career advancement. A research profile was seen as critical, and indeed much more powerful than teaching, both for promotion and for obtaining new positions of gaining job security: ...*"it doesn't matter how good a teacher you are, its not going to count unless you have a research record to go with it"*.

Several award winning teachers told how they struggled to maintain or enhance their careers despite their award(s). There were powerful stories that demonstrated that winning awards certainly would not guarantee promotion or position security. There was a sense of frustration and disillusionment arising not only from personal career disappointment, but also at the failure of the system to see teaching as being of sufficient importance that award winners would be rewarded through promotion and job security:

I have a sense that it does help with promotion, but the PhD is still the most important thing. It certainly didn't help with my job security. I basically lost my job, and the awards didn't cut in any way with that, PhD, PhD, PhD...

... I had two teaching awards, and a letter which said that my contract wouldn't be renewed, I think this shows, or showed, how much the university valued excellent teachers.

Promotion on merit is something I've always been strong on, and if teaching is not meritorious, then I don't know what is.

Interestingly participants also called attention to the number of awards that had gone teams teaching in courses that were subsequently closed. There may be many reasons for this, for example a perceived threat to a course, or the end of course lifespan might trigger an application. Nevertheless, it appeared that the institution did not pay much attention to trying to capture and transfer the quality achieved to new courses of study recognized through awards.

3) Awards can enhance individual learning and support the professional development of teachers who choose to engage in the awards process

Most participants believed that they were good teachers well before they considered applying for an award. Many acknowledged that they had learnt from the application process, but they did not see that their learning was shared except where they had collaborated with other teachers in a team application or where they had used their deeper insights within teaching teams who normally adopted a cooperative approach to teaching. They identified a range of ways that awards schemes supported their professional development and learning, for example:

- through the reflection demanded by writing a submission
- through the development or updating of professional documents such as CVs and portfolios and more sophisticated approaches to the collection and analysis of evidence to support their claims
- through the critical feedback they were offered by mentors and evaluation panels
- through the creation of a teaching identity and the opening of new career pathways with a teaching focus
- through professional development opportunities as such as travel, conference attendance and networking that was funded through awards.

Learning through reflection

The awards process requires that applicants explain and justify their teaching practice as well as providing evidence of outcomes. This is time consuming and challenging even for experienced and highly competent teachers. Given the hectic pace of university life, very few academics find time to contemplate their own work and reflect in depth, despite the wealth of research that suggests this is a necessary activity for improving teaching. Most participants found that the written submission took the equivalent of at least two weeks full-time work, and often several years of preparation preceded an application. Being forced to put their

thinking in writing, and find evidence to support their claims, provided the tools and motivation for serious and extended reflection on their practice:

I think its key feature was that it focused your mind on teaching. And it forced me to write down what it was that I was doing and it forced me to think about what I was doing. And that in itself helped me to be a better teacher.

I was then able to think a little more clearly about my philosophy, what I thought was important and actually did I do what I said I did or hoped to do. And where was the evidence for it. So it was good for me to do that... It actually made me think about what I was doing and where the gaps were.

The process of applying really highlighted the need for evidence and it was surprising to me that I made so many assumptions about how things were, without having the hard evidence to support my thinking.

The range of criteria that the applicants had to respond to was valuable in encouraging wider perspectives:

A lot of people stumble over criteria 8 [*in the national awards*] which is the ability to assist students from equity groups. And this is the value of the awards, because it makes people stop and think, "Well, what am I doing for equity and diversity?"

At one point the institution had introduced an additional award criteria to focus attention on 'Engagement', a new focus in the university's mission. Participants applying at the time of the new criteria suggested it was effective in directing applicants' attention towards developing a deeper understanding of the concept and their role, responsibilities, opportunities and achievements in engagement.

Learning through CV and portfolio development

The university had policies in place that demanded written documentation in support of promotions applications and also required teachers to maintain a teaching portfolio, although this was rarely enforced in any formal way. Several participants noted that non-applicants sometimes assumed that the process of documenting teaching and learning was an easy one, and were confronted by the difficulty of the undertaking if ever they needed to write about their work and produce evidence of their achievements. The AWTs found the award process a great advantage in having worked over an extended period of time in producing strong, articulate and evidence-based documentation. The awards acted to motivate stronger actions to collect, analyze and respond to evidence; and it was noticeable that participants tended to focus particularly on gaps in evidence of long-term student learning outcomes, which are notoriously difficult (and often expensive) to evaluate.

Learning from critical feedback

One of the values of the awards scheme is that practicing teachers have a rare opportunity to work with others in preparing their submissions and to receive feedback from critical friends, mentors and evaluating panels themselves:

The feedback I got on the time I failed [*to win an award*] was absolutely wonderful, excellent, very personal, very warm. Hopefully that's the sort of feedback everyone gets, because if so then its huge, huge, huge... I probably learnt more from that than any other feedback I've ever received.

The creation of a teaching identity

In several instances participants identified the awards process as a significant event that influenced their self-identification as a "*teaching and learning person*", and consequently shaped their career pathways towards leadership in teaching and learning. Some staff reported that the award represented credibility and authority as a teacher, providing official confirmation of teaching competence, almost as a pseudo qualification. The status of the award, was however, generally seen to be more powerful outside the institution, particularly in the international arena:

... it was part of what I started to see myself as a teacher. It was kind of my career path. When I say that, I don't mean onwards and upwards necessarily, it was my work identity... other people would see it as a notch in their belt, I've made it my identity.

It certainly gives you credibility. Hence my [*overseas*] experience where they have really taken up an interest in me and my career and wanting me back... I'm still the same person that I was before, why didn't anyone listen to me before?

Professional development opportunities

Many of the participants used their award money to travel, network with colleagues, to pay for conference attendance or support study leave activities. Participants saw these activities as really important professional development opportunities, which were intrinsically rewarding:

I used some of that money to travel to Queensland and watch one of my colleagues, basically shadowed him for a week... That's probably the best professional development I've done in years.

All participants acknowledged that the awards had limited appeal for some academics. They recognized that there were staff who were simply disinterested or focused on other activities. They thought there were many good teachers who would not apply for a variety of reasons. For example, lack of time, lack of sufficient incentives, distaste for self-promotion, and research orientation.

4) Awards theoretically celebrate good teaching, but the celebrations are usually small-scale, short-lived and conducted in closed professional communities

The rhetoric of teaching awards talks of celebrating good teaching and excellent teachers. Although all participants referred positively to rewarding aspects of the scheme, none raised celebration as an intrinsic part of the experience. When questioned directly about the value of the awards as a celebration, one or two mentioned events such as faculty ceremonies or lunching with the Vice Chancellor in positive terms, but generally they were unconvinced. The muted response related to the lack of institutional documentation and public displays about the awards (beyond their use for advertising purposes), and the limited reactions of institutional leaders (few if any Heads of School attended awards event or sent more than a

token email of congratulations, often they did not acknowledge the achievement in any way). Many participants saw this lack of enthusiastic response as symbolic of a fundamental disregard for the value of teaching in the wider community:

The awards provide an opportunity for celebration, but really we don't make much fuss about it, I'm not sure many people know about the faculty one or the national ones for that matter.

[senior executive] turned up but rushed away. Photographs were taken but never displayed. So it appeared that, 'Yes we were talking the talk but not walking the walk'

You have no idea how many weeks and months of harassing and lobbying and hard work it took on the part of *[colleague]* just to get a complete list of winners. It's been lost in the mists of time... Its nowhere on the university website... and certainly wasn't on our faculty website.

5) Awards have little capacity to affect significant institution-wide change and award winners are seldom used systematically to influence improvement in teaching and learning

Although participants identified the potential of the awards to support them as individuals to improve, particularly through reflective practice as shown above, awards were not seen as a powerful driver for change. And there was open cynicism about the capacity of the awards to have a system wide impact, although many participants offered suggestions about ways their expertise could be exploited:

We don't really do much to use our award winners, I'd like to be involved, and I'd like to learn from others too. It would be good to let the award winners to get together to share good practices and have a workload (not completely) to mentor others- this could also link to research and conference presentations. Having a bit of time to do this would be a really good reward I think

Most participants felt that the awards identified and rewarded people who were already interested in teaching and actively seeking better ways to work with students, which included the use of innovative approaches. In this sense, awards were not usually seen to be generating greater or new interesting teaching. None of the participants were able to give explicit examples of the awards stimulating interest in people who were previously disinterested:

I think they have little impact on the quality of teaching and learning in the university other than for the people who put in for them. And if you put in for them, you are already doing a reasonable job. So I don't think they build anything else.

On the other hand, a few comments were made suggesting that the awards were becoming embedded in the mainstream processes of the university, and were increasingly expected as part of an academic's profile for promotions: "it's almost becoming, if you haven't got something like that, you are back in the queue".

The number of academics attracted to apply for awards was generally regarded as small, and they were identified as people who were either unusually committed to teaching and learning, or seeking promotion, job security or alternative employment. The time needed to write and application was identified as a deterrent for many academics, but the structure of the awards and people's perceptions about them was also seen as problematic. The teaching awards were seen to be most easily accessible to established teachers with a pre-existing track record of achievement, a teaching 'elite', and this discouraged anyone who did not feel they could compete at this level. Many excellent teachers were reticent to regard themselves as exceptional, as they saw excellence in others, and they recognized problems, difficulties, and failings in their own teaching. The capacity to be deeply reflective can lead to a loss of confidence as the thoughtful teacher sees gaps between what they aspire to achieve and their capacity to fulfil their vision of excellence. Involvement in the awards process was often positive in highlighting their strengths back to them: "You think the things you do aren't special- then you read another application – and then you see- oh I do that, I do that, I do that".

The difference between awards as a reward mechanism and awards as an educative process, was important in this context. Most participants thought it appropriate that national awards should be highly competitive and an unrealistic goal for all but a few 'outstanding stars', whilst institutional awards should be focused on developmental goals and encourage as many people as possible to take part. These perceptions may be useful in considering ways to adapt the institutional awards to encourage wider participation, and a broader impact:

... there are an awful lot of good teachers, particularly industry-based teachers who are excluded by the criteria. It would be lovely to have excellence in sessional staff... excellence in the first three years. I think there are some exceptional sessional staff and there is just no way of recognizing it and rewarding it. And I think it would be good for sessional staff morale, if they knew there was a sessional staff award and they knew someone would get \$3000 and a certificate. It makes them feel part of the institution rather than excluded from it.

The influence of award winners in teaching and learning

The receipt of an award gave many of the participants confidence in their knowledge and teaching expertise, and some credibility amongst colleagues as teachers. Taking on an identity as a 'good and interested academic teacher' did lead some participants to be regarded as authorities within their local contexts:

... I suppose people do know and do turn to me for that kind of thing within the school. And that's good. Unofficially I do take the role of promoting improved teaching and learning within the school. That's probably been formalized now.

A few of the participants (but not all) had taken up opportunities to talk about their work particularly as part of the WA Teaching and Learning Forum or for the local branch of the Higher Education Research and Development Society of Australasia (HERDSA). Award winners were sometimes invited to lead workshops or present to groups. These events were seen as important in encouraging and supporting good teaching, but insignificant in effecting wide-spread change, as they do not tend to attract anyone who is not already committed to teaching:

I was asked to give a presentation or two on applying for awards. I certainly did for the Faculty Teaching and Learning Forum, and I think I might have done something on one of the things I was doing for the university Teaching and Learning Showcase. In part, though, you are preaching to the converted a little bit, because the people who turn up at those things are the people who are already interested.

Generally there was a sense that an award (particularly at national level) was more likely to be regarded as a mark of expertise outside the university. Within the institution a few winners had been asked to share their insights about the application process, but rarely were they asked to share their expertise in teaching. And, none of the participants felt they had really been used well by the institution to provide input into high level discussion about teaching, teaching related policy or to provide leadership through professional development activities. They felt under-used as a resource:

... they don't come to me and say, 'What do you think about this? Is this a good idea?'

... I can't believe that I haven't been called in [*by university executive*] to discuss what happened to me [*winning award*]... not even just to say, 'How was it? And 'What do you think got you there?'

... I was never asked to do anything or take on any formal roles within the university. And I haven't been to any seminars presented by a teaching fellowship award winner either.

On the other hand, several participants were wary of the danger that they could be over-exploited, and expected to contribute in voluntary ways, which might be interesting and affirming, but would place them under even greater work pressure, and probably without enhancing their careers in meaningful ways. For most participants the expectation was that teaching was something you committed to because of passion for the discipline and care for students, almost as an act of social and community welfare, rather than as a professional role. They didn't expect to be rewarded well, although they believed that teaching should be highly valued and rewarded. In many ways this was a view of teaching reflecting out-dated cultural views of domestic work and parenting: 'done for the love not the money and status'.

6) Teaching is a very complex process, and there are significant difficulties in evaluating good teaching fairly. The judging process can be flawed, or at least appear so to interested observers

The participants were very willing to speak about their views on the nature of good teaching and related conceptions of a 'good teacher'. Individuals had different opinions and emphasis, but across the set there were typical patterns of descriptions. The group variously described 'good teachers' as those who:

- challenge students to develop high level discipline and/or professional knowledge, concepts, skills and attitudes
- support diverse students to learn and to become good learners

- establish and maintain good relationships with students
- show genuine care and concern for students and accommodate students different needs and expectations- without lowering standards
- create positive learning environments, set relevant tasks, and manage the learning experience competently
- stimulate, motivate and excite students
- provide relevant resources for learning.

A number of participants also made specific references to ‘good teachers’ as thinkers, innovators and likely to use technology well. Scholarship in the sense of reading the literature, and researching teaching and learning in one’s own context, was assumed to be important by many but not all participants. Without exception, the participants viewed teaching as complex and challenging, and were highly critical of colleagues who thought of teaching as a ... ‘simple part of academic work that really doesn’t require much effort’. The ‘good teacher’ characteristics emerging from the interviews are all quite consistent with the criteria currently used in the Australian national awards and reflect much recent literature on ‘good teaching’ (Bain, 2012; Biggs & Tang, 2011; Chickering & Gamson, 1999; DeZure, 2000; Huber, 2005; Kember & McNaught, 2007; Kuh, 2008;). Many participants commented that good teachers might have differing profiles of strengths but would have a broad spread of these characteristics, whereas weaker teachers would demonstrate only perhaps one or two strengths. Several of the participants raised concerns that the National award criteria suggested a limited and rather traditional view of teaching, although such comments tended to be in response to older criteria rather than the more recent criteria (post 2008):

Well its [the criteria] very behaviourist, its very traditional, its very much a transmission approach to learning. Its very badly out of date. And you pick that out simply from the words they use, ...”independent learning’, what’s wrong with group learning? ‘Present material’ ... so someone receives it, ‘delivery of content’ ... it’s not all bad but the flavour is old fashioned. It certainly doesn’t talk to me in terms of constructivism, authentic learning, learning in a social environment, guiding, supporting learning

Universally the participants supported the idea of incorporating student evaluation as a way to define good teaching. So placed absolute trust in student feedback:

I’ve always maintained it ought to be the students who nominate. Students only who nominate and students who assess and students who fill in the information and students who anonymously send in the information to the committee. So it shouldn’t be me telling how wonderful I am. If others I’m working with, specifically students, can’t acknowledge that and aren’t prepared to indicate that in writing, then I’m not a good teacher.

This perspective was balanced by some concerns that student opinion might not always be reliable indicators of effective teaching, and that there was a danger that customer satisfaction ratings could become more important than serious evaluations of teaching as measured by the achievement of course-approved learning outcomes:

... there were four students who consistently didn't like what I was doing... they would actually prefer that I went in there and did a lecture, gave them the goods and they could walk out again... *[instead of setting challenging authentic student tasks]*... So its really a quite interesting thing to reflect on... where do I go from here. Because if you are really to be judged by these evaluation instruments to which we are exposed, what do I do with that? Do I start lecturing? Where does that take me?

Participants articulated a strong commitment to notions of quality that went well beyond 'customer satisfaction'. It was clear from participants' espoused philosophies that whilst diversity was seen as legitimate, some approaches were not accepted as valid:

... I think you have to draw the line at some approaches, at least I would argue that if someone came in and was an entertainer and that was the basis of their good evaluations, which they could get, I would find it difficult to know. We were talking about outcomes earlier, whether there was any significant learning outcomes that you gain, even though the student evaluations were great because this guy tells jokes of this woman tells jokes and keeps you entertained for 40 minutes, is that good teaching? I have doubts.

The awards criteria do not provide measures of learning quality; they are embedded and assumed. Judging panels may apply some standards, this is not apparent in the guidelines.

Interesting feedback came from some participants linking negative attitudes and a lack of commitment towards the university professional development and teaching support programs. Younger, and less experienced AWTs often credited the learning they had achieved through formal study of teaching or from working with mentors with advanced knowledge, with their ability to go beyond tacit knowledge and become informed about teaching enough to articulate well. They noted that others were dismissive of the complexity of teaching, and easily excused themselves from the need to think deeply about the nature of learning or to engage in the scholarship of teaching and learning, believing that it was enough to trust their instinctive responses.

7) Award schemes are a good thing in a generalized way, but they have a limited impact, some significant flaws, and are insufficient and inconsequential in leading the reform that is required in higher education

All participants were broadly supportive of the award schemes, identifying them as a small but important step towards recognizing, rewarding and promoting good teaching and demonstrating that teaching is a serious academic activity. However, no-one expected that the awards would, or ever could, solve contemporary problems in teaching in universities, or provide sufficient positive acknowledgement to good teachers. Whilst participants' understandings of contemporary problems were not specifically probed, they did emerge from interview data. Common themes included: the lack of valuing for teaching relative to research, academic work overload; changing diverse student body with high expectations and limited time and commitment to study. Participants repeatedly, and without prompting emphasized the limitations of the awards in affecting significant change and put forward the view that awards may be seen as a cheap token gesture towards valuing teaching:

It's a nice idea, it made me feel good, my bosses were happy and my colleagues generally supportive, but its only one small bit of the jigsaw

I'm sure that the management think that having done that [*provided awards*] *that's* enough. And it isn't.

I strongly believe that it is the context of teaching that is really important, and obviously the awards are part of that context because they provide a structured way of valuing people. But alone they are not going to make it happen. There is no point in having a few stars if everyone else is being stomped on with work overload... it's also about the culture of the university

A further set of limitations identified by participants related to the failure of awards to engage and reward all good teachers; failure to provide appropriately for all kinds and levels of teaching; and problems associated with the small but significant occasions when the award decisions made, fly in the face of other professional judgments, leading to discrediting of the whole process:

I went to listen to one national award winner when I was putting together my application. He was a terrible speaker, almost incoherent- I have no idea how he came to win an award

I'm sure you can justifiably say because you've won an award you're a good teacher. It might be you are a good bullshit artist and you can put in a terrific application.

... so basically I don't think it... necessarily identifies the best teachers. It identifies a subsection of teachers who are willing to spend the time on filling out the form and who have a reasonable expectation that they understand where the assessors would be coming from.

First and foremost they [*awards*] are an indication really of who has got time, who has got commitment to do the work required... and can you deal with the embarrassment if you don't get it? Because again for people with quite fragile egos, it must be hard.

The participants generally saw their own motivations in terms of a need for recognition and acknowledgement, the attractions of financial awards, the need to have evidence to enhance their career opportunities, and the need to (re) affirm their own view of self as good teachers. They did not think that these motivations would be relevant for all good teachers, so the awards were not expected to entice everybody they thought of as 'good':

There are these people who you know are absolutely dedicated and inspirational and passionate and yet ...*[they don't apply]*.

Participants also recognized that there was a skill in writing submissions and the applicants needed to be willing to self-promote, particularly in the context of the more competitive national awards, and this was acknowledged as an uncomfortable position for most academics to take on readily. Indeed almost all participants felt this way:

I feel a bit embarrassed about that [*applying for an award*]. I would have preferred not to have done it. That seems awful. I can tell you why, how I teach,

and what structure I have, and how I try to organize myself, but I didn't have the desire to do that competitively.

You have to produce a 50-page document where you have to self-aggrandize and say why you are good. Now I don't like doing that.

In a few cases, the participants had experience of derogatory comments from colleagues, which were seen as putdowns of themselves, and of the value of teaching awards to celebrate teaching as a skillful and worthwhile activity. They felt they had to either keep quiet about their applications and awards or actively defend them:

I have colleagues who say, 'Oh no, I'll never put in an award, how can you just talk about yourself?'

I have had people say to me, 'Oh, they couldn't get in to that level of self-aggrandizement! That's their language not mine. I wish I could remember the exact phrase. But it's seen as showing off and pushing yourself forward. And when I argued that you are equally doing that when you put in for a research grant, they argue differently.

8) The nature and impact of teaching awards is changing, and so too is quality, motivations and expectations of institutions, and applicants.

Across all the interviews in both 2003 and 2008-10, there was a high level of coherence and consistency. Group A participants found very little had changed in their thinking or experience of teaching awards between 2003 and 2008; and Group B participants raised very few issues that were substantially new and different. There were, however, some shifts in nuance and emphasis, and some general observations about the way universities are changing in response to government initiatives and student demands. Some of the more significant changes noted across the groups include:

- a slight improvement in the way teaching and learning is valued
- an increase in the demand for evidence in support of claims of good teaching
- changes in the national awards scheme to encourage more collaborative work
- embedding of the teaching awards process in university practice and promotions.

Many comments in 2008-10 interviews also pointed to an increasing awareness of change in the whole university environment arising, for example, from the impact of the quality agenda, increased managerialism and distancing of university executives from the teaching staff; increases in student numbers, their diversity and need for academic support; changes in university funding arrangements leading to a reduction of resources, higher expectations of value for money, and increased workloads and use of sessional staff. Participants in 2008 were still interested and committed to teaching, but most of Group A had taken different pathways with better options career enhancement; and participants in both Group A and B reported that they found teaching increasingly challenging, more frustrating and less enjoyable. The most powerful and emotionally charged comments were connected to issues participants felt made it more and more difficult to provide for good learning experiences and to achieve good learning outcomes with students, for example managing large groups of sessional teachers, and engaging students with different capabilities and expectations:

It's a constant battle- I certainly think over a period of time there's the whole user pays scenario. I'm meeting with [sessional tutor]- her students complained when they had to do something, they said – but we are actually paying to be here – we are paying you to teach us we shouldn't have to be doing all the work...you hear – 'why isn't that assignment back- this is our expectation'. Their expectations are getting higher and higher and also the engaging things that they have around them... all of those interactive things are on demand, they are given what they want, when they want, and in the way they want.

It was clear that the changing higher education landscape meant that even these outstandingly skilled, knowledgeable and committed teachers were finding it difficult to maintain the kinds of quality they aspired to in teaching and learning.

A slight improvement in the way teaching and learning is valued

Whilst the 2008-10 data demonstrated that many participants remained pessimistic about the value placed on teaching, others noted that they had observed small signs of improvement. Where optimism was expressed, however, it was not related directly to positive outcomes of awards, but to changes that coincided or aligned with the awards process. Several participants, for example, commented on changes driven by government performance funding initiatives, particularly the Australian Learning and Teaching Performance Fund (LTPF)(2005-2010). This was seen to have focused attention on some aspects of teaching, such as the implementation of student evaluation. Others reported on shifts in promotional policies that sought to create better employment conditions and career pathways for university teachers.

An increase in the demand for evidence in support of claims of good teaching

Government quality initiatives and promotional criteria, both demand an increased focus on the presentation of evidence for good teaching. Almost all participants commented on the impact of the awards criteria in forcing applicants to reflect on their teaching, articulate about it and then to provide evidence for its excellence. Most participants were committed to students and actively sought to understand and respond to students' needs and accommodate their preferences, however, prior to engaging in the awards process, few had been rigorous in their documentation of evaluation or explored learning outcomes in depth. Developing an award application encouraged many of the participants to strengthen their evaluation practices.

I do think the [awards] criteria are quite challenging- how do you know you are having an impact- has it worked is one thing...we have always done our own evaluation. So we go through that really carefully. We've used that a lot to re-jig what we are doing. You can always get the student voice that doesn't mean anything much – the award asked if we made an impact and now we are going out [into the workplace] and asking – what worked, 2 years out.

Embedding of the teaching awards process in university practice and promotions

The focus on evidence collection not only assisted in responding to the awards criteria, but also supported the development of other articulations of evidence as needed by applications for promotion or meeting quality review and audit requirements. Many of the participants (but not all) believed that the awards had a positive influence on the promotions process. They recognized awards value in enhancing their own capacity to apply for promotion and in the

likelihood of success, whilst still believing that there was more work to be done to achieve equity for teaching work, particularly at the higher levels of Associate Professor and Professor:

I think that the quality of my teaching would have been a factor in those [my recent] promotions- when I filled out the application form the evidence in the teaching and Learning category was there. I can say the quality of my teaching is demonstrated by the fact that I have 1,2,3,4,5 well I think actually 7 teaching awards.

Teaching seems to be more valued than it was when I started. Only research was rewarded with promotions. One big spinoffs of the awards is in promotion, now good teaching is more recognized, for someone like me who just aims to get better at your teaching- I've just become a level C- previously I would never had had a chance... But, no, not a chance even now of getting a D without going more into research. It has improved, but not equal, but better than it was. And a good sessional has no way of being rewarded, except by being re-employed.

Most participants tempered their optimism with comments that suggested they were aware of a changing dynamic in the awards process, with promotion becoming a more significant motivation for people in seeking to win an award. Generally participants were both resentful and cynical about this, seeing examples of people who, they believed, were not committed to teaching, manipulating the system to pick up an award simply to tick the promotion box:

I think the awards is becoming a bit of game playing now, you do what you need to get the award, and then you move on, there's no real commitment to teaching... I've seen a few people get awards, and really if their Heads of Department had been involved in the process they would not have got anywhere near... but you can fiddle the paper work if you want to.

Group B included a more even balance of females to males, and this may account for an increased awareness and critique of gender issues in both the awards and in promotions:

Yes, being a woman, being blonde- the package together- they pat you on the head say she's sweet, now you go and do the graft and I'll get all the accolades. People get in leadership positions and very often it will be a male ... Actually I think it [*the award*] would pee my line manager off because he didn't have any awards- it pees him off every time I get something.

Changes in the national award scheme

Many participants commented on their observation that the national award categories and criteria were changing. There was enthusiastic support for changes that encouraged rewards for diverse contributions:

And the other thing is- that teaching varies so much in different contexts, different departments, teaching in different universities is different. Working in a small university, for example, I have different role. Can't be directly compared

And also team applications, particularly where this worked to enhance collaboration and decrease competition:

Well, our award has been just amazing from beginning to end. We have always worked as team, but the process here really brought us together in a much deeper way. Having to talk things through and work out what we really stood for, and what we value has been quite special. We talked about being and community of practice, but now I feel we really are.

Discussion

The priority in this research was to reveal insights into a local context: to illuminate the effectiveness of teaching awards, from the perspective of award winning teachers. The primary goal was to use the insights to improve the leadership and management of teaching and learning, and improving the awards process within the institution. Reports based on the data were provided to the university management, these offer fine grain highly specific recommendations for changes to policy and practice. This paper has focused on sharing some of those local insights in a rich way, that gives voice to the teachers themselves, allowing a wider community to consider their own experience against those of others and make their own decisions about investigations they may need to undertake and potential improvements they might want to consider. Never-the-less, some limited discussion about the way this deep but small-scale study fits into the wider research picture may be helpful. At the commencement of this study in 2003, there was a limited literature about university teaching awards that mainly identified and communicated about award winners and their achievements, and discussed:

- the need to find effective strategies to recognize and reward good teaching, to improve the status of teachers and teaching (; Boyer, 1990; Diamond, 1993; Gibbs & Openshaw, 1983; Knapper, 1997; Rice, 1991) and attract and retain high quality teachers (Aron, Aucott & Como, 1999)
- the identification of legitimate criteria for judging excellence (Ramsden, Margetson, Martin, & Clarke, 1995; Ramsden & Martin, 1996, 1996) and overcoming difficulties in evaluating teaching (Anwyl & McNaught, 1993)
- descriptions and critiques of existing schemes (Macdonald, 1998; Gibbs & Habeshaw, 2002; McLean, 2001)
- the views and opinions of award winning teachers about good teaching, intended to identify principles of good teaching and inform others about how to teach well (Bain, 1998; Baiocca & DeWalters, 1998; Ballantyne, 1997; Dunkin, 1991; Dunkin 2002; Johnson, 1996; Kreber, 2000).

Very little research was published at that time that probed the outcomes of teaching awards either in terms of the degree to which winners found it a valuable and rewarding experience, or the impact that the schemes had on improving teaching and learning and enhancing learning outcomes. These questions have increasingly been asked, and there is now a small but growing literature that provides a more secure knowledge base describing outcomes, raising challenges, recommending improvements and posing new questions.

Challenges to the effectiveness of the awards have been raised by a number of researchers more recently. The failure of awards schemes to consistently and powerfully change academic

culture towards valuing teaching and teachers (O'Meara, 2006) or affect the low level of respect for the scholarship of teaching and learning (Hardre & Cox, 2008; Henkel, 2005) is disappointing to many observers; and particularly the failure of many awards to translate into the promotion and tenure rewards most academic staff seek (Young, 2006; Higher Education Academy, 2009). Competitive awards schemes all have limitations on the numbers of people who can succeed. This will always risk 'wasted effort', in addition to potential negative feelings of failure (Frame, 2006). There remains also a degree of skepticism about the rigor of decision-making in awards (Badri & Abdulla, 2004), so outcomes are not always trusted or supported. Having reviewed recent literature, Denise Chalmers (2011), concludes that:

while teaching awards have been established with the best of intentions, there is little evidence that these have contributed to any substantial change in the culture and substance of rewarding and recognizing the status of teaching relative to research (p. 29).

Michael Jackson (2006) applied an evaluation framework developed by Ellen Carusetta (2001, in Jackson 2006) to the teaching awards scheme operational in the University of Sydney. This is a very different context to that of the current study, yet, despite differences between the organizations' characters and missions, two findings are very consistent: (1)... "[the] award is supported, even by those who have been unsuccessful in applying for it", and (2)... "that awards alone do not make teaching the equal of research" (p. 261).

Graham Gibbs (2008) reviewed teaching award literature and documentation, as well as twelve teaching awards schemes from UK and mainland Europe. He found that although, "theoretically or empirically based conceptions of teaching excellence are rarely articulated (p. 2)," he could identify 24 different conceptions underlying awards. He suggests that most schemes embodied:

...multiple and often confusing and contradictory conceptions of teaching excellence with contradictions between stated purposes, criteria and the roles awards winners were expected to fulfil... (p2)

This confusion, he argues, can only lead to difficulties for judging panels in terms of comparing and evaluating relevant arguments and evidence. The Australian award scheme is widely recognized as being more sophisticated in design than many others, with a clearer vision of purpose and more defined criteria that acknowledge diversity, yet are quite well aligned with an evidence-based set of understandings about the nature of 'teaching excellence' (Ramsden, 1995; Walshe, 2008). The participants in the research presented in this paper raise similar concerns about some panel judgments (not having full confidence in some decisions), about their own role as institutional leaders in improving teaching (and the lack of their involvement as leaders), and about different conceptions of good teaching implied as valued by the awards criteria and judgments. Participants provided strong evidence of their belief that responding to student feedback, finding and interrogating evidence of learning outcomes together with critical reflection was a key to improving practice, particularly when it was supported by feedback from mentors, colleagues and peers. They credited their reflective practice and scholarship with raising the level of their teaching and saw the awards as a motivating and well structured force in encouraging them to go even deeper in their thinking. Confidence in the value of critical reflection and scholarly approaches has long been supported in the literature (Argyris & Schon, 1974; Brew & Ginnes, 2008; Huber & Hutchings, 2005; Schulman, 2000). Sustained engagement is highlighted in the literature as

contributing to the success of some professional development programs (Postereff, Lindblom-Ylanne, & Nevgi, 2007) but equally there is evidence that few university teachers engage willingly or easily in this way (Ackerlind, 2007; Boud & Walker, 1998). Teaching awards (when linked to promotions) perhaps provide a more attractive hook to draw ‘resisters’ into a more scholarly approach to teaching and learning, but as yet they not working well to spread the impact.

Another emergent issue though, is whether institutional awards should replicate the national award purpose and criteria or should be differentiated. Denise Chalmers and Kate Thomson (2008) report that all Australian universities have established institutional awards that closely reflect the national awards. Alignment is, in many cases, intended to ease the trajectory for applicants from an institutional to a national award, by adopting similar or identical criteria (informed observations of insider-researcher). However, as participants in this research point out, there is a potential conflict of purpose between identifying and rewarding elite “super-stars” at a national level, encouraging the development of teaching excellence across all disciplines and all teachers within an institution. Perhaps the significant issue here is that clarify and transparency of purpose, alignment of strategy and approach to purpose and evaluation of outcomes against intentions are all important components in the effective design and implementation of awards.

Participants in the study reported in this paper were acutely aware of differences in the rewards systems and opportunities available to academics who prioritize teaching over research, particularly in terms of career pathways and promotions. Some participants indicated a belief that their teaching awards had contributed to promotion and that they perceived positive changes in promotions criteria that placed a higher value in good teachers. However, none believed that equity had been achieved. Discrepancies in rewards between research and teaching have been long noted in the literature (Blalock, 1985; Boyer, 1991; Hannan & Silver, 2000; McLean 2001; Rhoades & Mauksch, 2000) and although findings of more recent studies in UK, USA and Australia also provide some evidence of small improvements, they consistently express little optimism for achieving equal value (Attwood, 2009; Vardi & Quin, 2011).

Christine Halse, Elizabeth Dean, Jane Hobson and Gar Jones (2007) undertook a study of the relationship between research, scholarship and award winning teachers which adds further complexity to the research-teaching debate by showing that although most award winners were research active, many were engaged in teaching related research that was not counted in research assessments (for example writing academic texts), so could not gain promotions through their research. Further, they noted that award winners were... *“unlikely to publish about their teaching or improving teaching practice in universities... it was not the norm for the case study sample [award winning teachers] to research their own teaching or to disseminate their expertise as outstanding teachers to the wider academic audience”* (p742): thus affirming the lack of influence that these ‘teaching experts’ potentially have upon the system as a whole. The debate about the research-teaching nexus is clearly on-going. It demands further attention from scholarship and management to assure improvements in fulfilling all missions with effectiveness, equity and integrity.

As the managing body for Australian teaching excellence awards, the Australian Learning and Teaching Council (ALTC) (now OLT) has engaged in a number of research, review and evaluation activities that either directly or indirectly contribute to understanding the impact of awards on both winners and institutions. Denise Chalmers (2010) formerly a Director at the

ALTC led a project to investigate performance indicators for teaching and learning on behalf of the Australian government. This project generated a number of significant reports relevant to defining more tightly an Australian community perspective about teaching quality, excellence and the nature of good teaching. The emerging perspectives are closely aligned with views on good teaching from AWTs in this study, as well as those represented in many current texts sharing the thinking of AWTs around the world (Bain, 2004; Hay, 2011; Kember & McNaught, 2010; Weimer, 2101)

In 2010, Mark Israel (2012) was awarded a fellowship by the ALTC/OLT that was specifically intended to investigate "...the Australian teaching awards and their impact on awardees and their institutions (p. 10)". His methodology was similar to that reported in this paper (he conducted qualitative semi-structured interviews with 30 award winning teachers), but participants came from many different institutions, and the interview data was elaborated and verified through an online survey of a further 119 award recipients. His final report is framed in terms of advice and recommendations to award winners, institutions and the Australian government (Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations-DEEWR). Findings from this study are highly consistent with those reported in this paper thus providing some support for the authenticity and reliability of the local findings. Coherence were particularly evident in some of the limitations he identified, for example:

- **Limitations to the outcomes of a teaching award for individuals:** It may not bring career opportunities and advancement automatically; it may create pressure to perform at an unsustainable level; and to make contribute that lead to work-overload; there may be negative responses to the award from some colleagues;
- **Limitations to the outcomes of a teaching award for institutions:** "Awards are not the only way, are not the most important way, and they are not sufficient in themselves" (p. 7); few institutional benefits will come unless they are explicitly planned and implemented; mis-managed awards can lead to disaffection, for example, if awards don't align with promotion outcomes- this seriously challenges institutional valuing for teaching (creating a negative backwash).

In 2012, the Australian government commissioned a review of the suite of programs offered by the ALTC, including the national university teaching excellence awards (Johns, 2012). Analysis of the feedback from over 200 stakeholders suggested that there was:

...overwhelming support for the continuation of the current suite of teaching and program awards and the citations which were very highly regarded and seen as one of the most significant contributions to the teaching and learning agenda (p1)

The expressed support of the community affirms the findings presented in this paper, for a generalized positive view of the value of the awards, that there is sufficient merit in them to be worthwhile retaining. Changes suggested to the national awards scheme also align with this paper's findings by acknowledging that improvements still need to be made, for example reducing the number of some awards to avoid devaluing them; and also highlighting the need to ensure that award winners are more effectively used to support system-wide improvements:

There was strong endorsement for a more practice-based approach and securing a better return from award-winners in terms of dissemination and follow-up activities. Individual institutions might also take advantage of these leaders by using them to a greater extent as change agents within the organization (p2).

The Higher Education Learning and Teaching Review (Johns, 2012), also recommends that a higher level of systematic evaluation is needed to ensure that the awards (and other programs) actually deliver the required outcomes. Again, this aligns with this paper’s finding that constant evidence-based review is needed to ensure that there is clarity and agreement about purpose and desired outcomes, and that there is appropriate evidence to evaluate whether the scheme implemented works effectively to achieve its goals. The richness of the data revealed through a qualitative approach that probes individual perspectives deeply, also suggests the institutional evaluation needs to go beyond occasional simplistic surveys to ensure that deep insights and understanding of local contexts, inclusive of diversity, are gleaned as a source material for evaluation and thence decision-making.

In the UK, the Higher Education Academy has similar goals to the ALTC/OLT. It has led the innovation in rewarding individuals and institutions for teaching excellence, through the development of Centres of Excellence with the capacity to provide financial and professional rewards to outstanding teachers in a variety of disciplines. An evaluation of this initiative undertaken by Rebecca Turner and David Gosling (2012) again echoes many of this paper’s findings: limited influence of awards on institutional improvement and change; limited evidence of a re-balancing of emphasis from research towards teaching and learning; and ... *the debate continues about the efficacy of strategies to reward and recognize teaching and learning* (p427).

Summary and conclusions

The strength of in-depth qualitative interviews is that they yield rich, detailed and nuanced findings. There are common patterns in participants’ expressed experiences and beliefs, but equally there are variations that mean there are not simple and straight-forward and uniform answers. Teaching and learning is by nature highly complex, so drawing boundaries about what is relevant to key questions is difficult; as is deciding with confidence which of the emergent themes and issues are most significant. As this study was undertaken as workplace research with local improvement goals, the significance of findings relates, in the first instance, to judgments about the value of contributions to the particular institution. So, from this perspective, summary answers to the two key questions need to be linked to actions that the institution might consider to achieve improvements. Tables One and Two below provide a summary of institutionally relevant responses to the two focus questions of this paper:

Question One: Are teaching awards rewarding to award winning teachers in this institution

<i>Opinions of participants</i>	<i>Implications for institutional action</i>
Yes, as one small way to recognize and value teachers and teaching publically	Maintain commitment to teaching awards (as one part of a reward and recognition strategy) Teachers still do not feel that teaching is sufficiently highly valued: Re-consider strategies for communicating the value of good teaching to teachers, students and the wider community (going beyond just using AWTs for media/advertising campaigns)
Yes, in terms of recognition and affirmation, particularly	Teachers seek affirmation, and they do not believe they receive enough, particularly from senior staff and line managers:

from students, and colleagues; and where celebrations and congratulations from peers are genuine	<p>Review all strategies for improving positive feedback to staff, particularly the effectiveness of MoP as a tool for improvement in teaching and learning</p> <p>Review institutional responses to awards to ensure they are sufficient (from perspective of AWT)</p> <p>Review the way AWTs are celebrated (re-consider awards linked to graduations- so students are the focus of excellence acknowledgement)</p> <p>Consider strategies for recognition of AWTs, beyond the short-term awards ceremonies (website references-displays in public places)</p> <p>Support focus on student evaluation (with opportunities for wider range of evaluation activities and positive collaboration in improvement)</p>
Yes, in terms of access to discretionary funding, particularly for conference travel and teaching improvements	Small amounts of discretionary money are significant as rewards to teachers: review current incentives and consider ways to increase impact through improvement targeted funding distribution
Yes, where they feel supported and encouraged in the process	Review and develop support strategies for teachers in the development of applications (but avoid doing the 'work' of thinking and reflection for them- or short cutting the depth of thinking required)
Sometimes, in terms of career developments, opportunities and promotion, but still not equivalent to rewards for research	<p>Review career structures and leadership positions and promotion policies; and re-evaluate outcomes (research promotions v teaching) and be mindful of the possibility of gender (and other) inequities, and the position of sessional teachers.</p> <p>Increase transparency about priorities for leadership and provide staff with outcomes data (to demonstrate equity in values- or progress towards more equal rewards)</p> <p>Develop career opportunities to engage AWTs more fully in institutional leadership and decision-making</p>
No, where there is negative attitudes and limited responses to awards	<p>Review awards process to manage (and counter) the possibility of academics winning teaching awards when they are not respected as such by their peers or by students</p> <p>Improve strategies used by line-managers to assure positive responses to awards (review training/ professional development for line managers in T & L)</p>
No, in the sense that awards are not a sufficient reward for good teaching	Review the range and diversity of institutional strategies for acknowledging and rewarding good teaching: include AWT in evaluating provisions and recommending improvements

Question Two: Do teaching awards lead to improvements in teaching and learning (in the opinion of award winning teachers)

<i>Opinions of participants</i>	<i>Implications for institutional action</i>
Yes, at an individual level, through reflection and evidence collection	Consider ways to support, encourage (require?) all teaching staff in continuing discussion and serious reflection about teaching; and in evidence collection, analysis and response (with particular focus on student learning outcomes- not just

	satisfaction) Review the effectiveness of existing strategies for reflection and review- Management of Performance is not currently achieving quality outcomes re teaching and learning- professional development is not sufficiently encouraged
No, at an institutional level: they don't engage enough staff (only small numbers of the interested ones)	Consider ways to extend the beneficial outcomes of awards to more staff (without devaluing awards) Consider ways to encourage more team applications that engage people working together Review and further develop a wide range of other improvement strategies (awards are not sufficient)
No, at an institutional level: AWT as not sufficiently encouraged to share expertise	Re-consider ways to maximize the positive influence of teaching experts (without overloading them), for example: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Involvement in mentoring • Involvement in professional development • Inclusion on review & evaluation, advisory and decision making bodies • Fellowships to research institutional T & L issues

A disadvantage of local studies is that the findings may not be generalizable. This paper has presented only a proportion of the insights emerging from the study, but has offered some detail to allow the reader to evaluate for themselves which findings are most significant to their own situation. Nevertheless, there is considerable resonance between this paper's findings and an emergent literature, which suggests at the very least there are some strong trends to guide academic thinking in considering the place, value and effectiveness of teaching awards. There is near universal support for the need to demonstrate valuing of teachers and teaching more effectively and to reward them for their commitment and achievements. Teaching awards are widely acknowledged as having some success in contributing to raising awareness and valuing of good teaching, albeit it that it is just one way to do this. Current evidence strongly suggests a need for awards schemes to be designed, implemented and evaluated as part of a broader approach that incorporates policies and provisions such as promotion and tenure, professional training, and intelligent management of teaching and teachers. There are challenges in implementing teaching awards effectively so as to maximize the benefits and minimize to negatives. Whilst general trends may assist institutions in considering their own use of awards schemes, local research is probably needed to ensure accurate insights into the particular context.

Awards are capable of supporting and encouraging improvements in teaching and learning, but currently they seem to be most valuable in supporting change at an individual level rather than institution wide reform. It would appear, again, that advances have been made, but further improvements could be made, particularly through a tighter use of criteria that define good teaching and required change, a better use of the expertise of award winning teachers and greater encouragement for collaboration in applications; and a spread of effective components of the awards process (such as reflection, use of evidence, positive feedback to teachers) across a wider range of teachers.

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Project Three B

**Teaching awards and their impact on university teachers'
sense of self-worth**

Title: Teaching awards and their impact on university teachers' sense of self-worth

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Abstract submission number: 0331

Research domains: Management, leadership and governance: How are teachers valued?

Summary

There is a significant literature that suggests in some cultures and contexts teaching is under-valued, and this has a negative impact on teaching quality, and the experiences and outcomes of learners. In many countries, teaching awards have been introduced at national, state and institution level across all sectors of education with the common goal of raising the status of teachers, and encouraging good teaching through recognising and rewarding excellent teachers. Although it might appear self-evident such award schemes are worthwhile, there is limited evidence to demonstrate their effectiveness. This paper reports on the findings of a qualitative study of 9 award-winning teachers that investigated their experience of an Australian Teaching Excellence Award process and its outcomes. Participants describe their own journeys and provide insights into both the success and failure of their awards in rewarding their work in meaningful ways or improving their sense of value as teachers.

Introduction: What's the problem?

Seminal work conducted by the Carnegie Foundation in the second half of the 20th Century researched and documented the work, attitudes and values of academics in US tertiary institutions. From an analysis of longitudinal survey data, Ernest Boyer and Eugene Rice (Boyer, 1990), noted an inconsistency between the importance that academics reported about their teaching, and the rewards and recognition it attracted compared to research. Teaching was seen to have less professional status, and to lead to fewer and lower level promotions. Since this time a significant literature has developed reporting that university teachers in other countries also feel that their work is under-valued, and raising concerns about the impact of this on teaching quality (Brown 2002; Gibbs, 1995; Martin, 1999; Taylor, 2001).

The recognition and reward of teaching is seen as important from several points of view. Inadequate reward makes the profession less attractive, leading to recruitment and retention difficulties. Teaching is a complex task, which demands a high level of energy and commitment. Students consistently say they want to be taught by enthusiastic, committed, skilled and knowledgeable teachers. However, teachers who feel they are overlooked, unrecognised and poorly rewarded are likely to have low self-esteem, poor morale and become very demotivated (Watters & Weeks, 1999, p. 254). A series of well-respected Australian sources (Coaldrake & Stedman, 1999; Ramsden 1995; Winefield, 2002) have suggested that teachers are working under considerable stress. The potential threat of undervaluing teachers is particularly significant at a time when universities are being challenged by dramatic increases in student numbers, rising expectations to meet the multiple needs of diverse individuals and complex societies, and a reduction in community support and funding.

In response to these concerns, the Australian government initiated an award scheme for university teacher, as one strategy to raise the status of teaching and to directly recognise and reward good teachers (Ramsden, Margetson, Martin & Clarke, 1995). Recently, commitment to teaching awards has been further extended in Australia through increased funding to the Australian Learning and Teaching Council (formerly Carrick Institute) (<http://www.altc.edu.au/carrick/go>). As might be expected, universities are keen to ensure that their teachers are represented amongst the award winners, and certainly in Australia institutions have almost all introduced local schemes that closely mirror the national scheme.

Although it might appear self-evident that such award schemes are worthwhile, there is limited evidence to demonstrate their effectiveness (Robinson, 2003). This paper reports on some of the findings of a longitudinal qualitative study of 9 award-winning teachers that investigated their experience of an Australian Teaching Excellence Award process and its outcomes. Participants in the study described their own journeys, experiences and perspectives in rich detail, but this paper focuses specifically on insights they provided about the impact of the process and award on their sense of worth.

Methodology

The participants were nine institutional awards winners (n=9) from one institution. All participants had won awards between 1994 and 2002, and in seven of nine cases had received more than one award. The group was a convenience sample, initially selected on the basis of their willingness to participate, and their timely availability. A specific effort was made to include representatives from a variety of Faculties and Schools. The gender balance was uneven, having only two females in the group. This happened due to the difficulty of finding other females who were available at the time, however, it did also roughly mirror the comparative numbers of male to female award winners (another phenomenon worthy of investigation in itself).

Participants were well known to the researcher as colleagues. An insider participant approach (Bowden & Walsh, 2000) encourages a trusting and open dialogue; and it made for easy understanding and communication as there were many shared experiences and prior discussions to support the construction of congruent meanings. To counter the potential bias of a sole researcher, the transcripts and analysis were returned to the participants for critique, and also shared with an independent researcher who was encouraged to raise challenges.

Participants shared their stories through semi-structured interviews. Eight of the nine completed a pair of interviews, one in 2003 and a second in 2008. In the first interview, participants were invited to talk broadly about their experiences and opinions of teaching awards. Questions were posed about the way they felt about receiving the award, and the impact it had on their sense of worth, where this did not arise naturally. The second interview invited participants to reflect with the benefit of time, and to identify any ways in which their experiences or thinking had changed.

The first interview tapes were initially transcribed, and analysed manually for relevant themes and issues. Subsequently, the original transcriptions were re-coded in NVivo along with the second interviews. Analysis is not yet completed, however, some common themes have emerged from the first order coding. This paper presents some selected issues that help to illuminate interplay between teaching awards and the value accorded to teaching in universities and award winning teachers' sense of worth.

Findings

Across the interviews, perhaps the strongest overall theme to emerge was the significance of an individual's confidence and beliefs about the quality and impact of their teaching, to their overall sense of worth. The process of applying for an award was both challenging and time-consuming, but being forced to put their thinking in writing, and find evidence to support their claims, provided the means and motivation for serious and extended reflection on their practice. Participants reported that this was valuable in highlighting back to them genuine achievements in teaching that affirmed their value as teachers: they did make a valuable contribution and overall they were good at their jobs.

Professional recognition, acknowledgment and affirmation appeared to be important to all the participants. Most participants aligned their sense of value to their work and the award provided recognition not just for themselves, but for the whole profession:

I wanted to prove myself, cut the mustard, I didn't want to be a second class lecturer, and at that time I didn't have a Phd, so that's how you felt, I wanted what I knew was good at to be valued, and I wanted teaching to be seen as really important

Participants often received recognition from students and this was deeply rewarding: it gave them, 'a *real buzz*'. However, it was rare to receive positive feedback on their teaching, or to feel valued other than through their students.

Most participants conceptualised teaching as a challenging profession. They saw teaching and learning as complex and believed that it was difficult to find fair, valid and reliable evidence of excellence that they trusted themselves as genuine indicators of good work. It was always easy to find fault in their own work: to identify students they had not motivated or excited, or helped to learn; to see things that they could do better; to question the value of the content and outcomes for the changing world. The more sophisticated the participants were in their visions of what was possible, the harder it became for them to be satisfied that their work was "*good enough*". External recognition and affirmation, particularly from expert colleagues has a significant role to play in this context by providing benchmark judgements of quality and professional affirmation of value. The teaching award was an effective mechanism for making judgements and formally accepting evidence of good teaching. Award winners were not overly confident that their awards would lead to promotions, one commented, "*you can't get far in the organization without a PhD... So it doesn't matter how good your teaching is, or how many awards you win.*" However, they did recognise awards as useful indicators that might support their claim for good work:

... its very easy to quantify what you can do in the way of research. But it isn't easy to do in T & L... an external assessor would have little knowledge about your teaching and learning unless you had some award like the VC teaching award.

Surprisingly, despite histories of significant achievements in teaching, participants felt that their line managers rarely commented positively on their work. Even in the context of formal management of performance processes, their teaching was unlikely to be talked about at length: teachers were left wondering if their work was really valued, if their line managers in fact knew anything about their teaching or even had the slightest interest in encouraging them to think about ways to improve it:

... at my MOP meetings they [line managers] would both just wave their hands and say , oh yes, great UTEIs [student evaluations], but not another word. They never said if they really thought was doing something good... they didn't say, 'why don't you go for an award'... they just weren't really interested in talking about it...

The underlying message received by several participants is that good teaching is assumed to be the norm, that it must be easy, it doesn't require any particular effort or talent, it is not worth commenting upon, and teachers don't need to be encouraged to improve. The award winners universally took the opposite stance on all of these points. When teaching was dismissed as not even worthy of discussion, so too was their own value as teachers.

Conversely, recognition and interest from respected colleagues made them feel that their work and the extra effort they felt they gave to teaching was worthwhile. Several participants spoke of a sense of pride resulting from the awards, and again this was not simply pride in themselves, but pride in teaching as a profession:

I was very proud to have received the awards. I don't generally display awards and things that I have. But I actually put my awards in frames.... I was very proud to receive them. I think I had lunch with the Vice Chancellor in the Boardroom, who shook your hand to said well done.

All participants believed that the financial resources and rewards attached to teaching were inadequate. Whilst participants did not present themselves as being highly motivated by money, they were very aware of the implications that low funding levels had for their own worth, for the practical capacity to teach well, and for the professional and public value accorded to teachers and teaching. Each of the

participants introduced the topic of career enhancement into the discussion without prompt from the interviewer. Whilst individuals articulated different achievement goals, promotion was particularly highly prized: "Promotion is what academics look for. They look for the big reward that gives them status". Most participants believed that researchers were more likely than teachers to be rewarded with high status, well-remunerated positions through career promotions. They felt that good teaching was very time consuming and that it was difficult to achieve highly in research with heavy teaching loads. As a consequence, teaching was predicted to become a low priority for anyone with ambition. In choosing to commit energy to teaching, participants felt they sacrificed their own opportunities for career advancement and financial advantage, and lessened the worth that they held as academics. Indeed, despite their belief in the intrinsic value of teaching, several of the participants indicated that they had made strategic decisions to prioritise research over teaching in future.

None of the participants appeared to have easy or direct access to funding their own priorities from institutional sources. Quite lowly paid administrative staff were more likely to control spending than the teachers themselves and this diminished the value accorded to their professional expertise and decision-making, as well as making it difficult to do things that they thought significant. Although none of the participants had been motivated to apply for an award specifically by the money, many spoke about the value of even small amounts in enabling them to work more effectively, and to feel more significant professionally. Typically participants spent their award money on equipment for the classroom or their own professional use, or researching their practice or trying innovative approaches, or engaging in professional development through study leave, travel, conference attendance and networking with colleagues. Interestingly, all participants spoke quite passionately about the significance of professional learning and active involvement in 'academic life'. It seemed that this was perceived as a distinguishing feature of identity for a 'real academic', and one that teachers felt they rarely enjoyed:

I think unless you go to a couple of conference a year you probably aren't doing your job properly. I think that is really important in terms of being an academic in Perth ... because its such a closed community... I think is a really important, vital, even obligatory part of academic life or continued academic life has got to be financed in some way. Well it ain't going to be financed from teaching and learning.

Although all the participants had clearly applied for awards, all expressed some concerns with the process. In part, this related to the 'tall poppy' syndrome. The idea of self-promotion didn't fit well with their professional values: they did not like to raise themselves above others or imply through their award that others were not equally good or even better teachers. In a few cases the participants had experienced derogatory comments from colleagues, which were seen as put-downs both of themselves, and of the value of teaching awards to celebrate teaching as a skilful and worthwhile activity. They felt they had to either keep their applications very quiet, or actively defend them. Again the different perceptions of differential values between teaching to research were noted:

I have had colleagues who say, 'oh no I'll never put an award in, how can you just talk about yourself' I have had people say to me oh they couldn't get into that level of self-grandissment... its seen as showing off and pushing yourself forward. And when I argued that you are equally doing that when you put in for a research grant, they argue differently. They say that's not pushing yourself forward.

Participants spoke extensively about the tension in academia between collaboration and competition. Many placed the very highest value on working collaboratively, yet recognised that rewards such as promotion are based on individual success and achievement. The dissonance created a real discomfort for some, making it difficult to even consider putting themselves in positions where their value as teachers would be paraded in public:

I feel a bit embarrassed about that [self promotion in application] I would have preferred not to have done it. That seems awful. I can tell you why, how I teach and what structures I have and how I try to organise myself, but I didn't have the desire to do that competitively.

For some participants the award also created a real pressure to try to maintain their teaching at a level that was not sustainable. Having won an award, some felt an immediate anxiety about failing. Success it seems simply raised the bar on what counted as "good".

Concluding statements

This paper has presented a few illustrative findings from a study of just nine award-winning teachers. The findings suggest that teachers' sense of worth is very closely aligned to their work. A positive sense of value may come from feedback from students, self-reflection, colleagues (although this is quite rare) and external recognition. Teaching awards provide one opportunity for recognition and award winners can feel affirmed by receiving one. However, the perception that teaching and teachers are not highly valued and rewarded persists, even for teacher whose excellence has been recognised with institutional and national awards.

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**Project Three C: Surviving and sustaining teaching excellence: A
narrative of entrapment**

Surviving and sustaining teaching excellence: A narrative of 'entrapment'

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This paper discusses the key concepts of 'surviving' and 'sustaining' in the context of teaching excellence in contemporary universities, and reports the findings emerging from a work-in-progress study of Award Winning Teachers. It provides strong evidence that teachers recognized for their passion, commitment and expertise in teaching, work well beyond their paid hours to achieve excellence. Most become 'entrapped' in a culture of over-work that can have a negative impact on their lives and well-being. Factors that influence 'teaching sustainability' are presented, to support university teachers, administrators and managers in thinking about ways to improve the teaching and learning environment for teachers as well as for students.

Intended Audience: University teachers; administrators and managers; Higher education researchers

Keywords: sustainability of teaching excellence; management of academic workloads; teacher motivation and stress

NB: It is acknowledged that the term 'entrapment', used in the title, was coined by Associate Professor Adrienne Kinnear, during discussions about the study findings.

Author biography

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Surviving and sustaining teaching excellence: A narrative of ‘entrapment’

This paper discusses the key concepts of ‘surviving’ and ‘sustaining’ in the context of teaching excellence in contemporary universities, and reports the findings emerging from a work-in-progress study of Award Winning Teachers. It provides strong evidence that teachers recognized for their passion, commitment and expertise in teaching, work well beyond their paid hours to achieve excellence. Most become ‘entrapped’ in a culture of over-work that can have a negative impact on their lives and well-being. Factors that influence ‘teaching sustainability’ are presented, to support university teachers, administrators and managers in thinking about ways to improve the teaching and learning environment for teachers as well as for students.

Introduction

‘Surviving’ and *‘sustaining’* are two key concepts featured in the conference title. Whilst the intent of the theme is not articulated, the two inter-linked words carry powerful everyday meanings. Survival implies over-coming life-threatening circumstances and events. Sustaining suggests prolonged effort, but can also imply nurturing, suggesting that ‘sustaining’ includes a very positive and enriching dimension, not just surviving but thriving (Macquarie University, 1999). This paper looks at university teaching through the lens of social sustainability. It argues that teaching is a very complex and challenging role, that the demands for quality in teaching and learning are rising, that resources are reducing; and that even highly motivated, passionate, committed and expertise teachers are finding it difficult to sustain their work at a good enough quality.

Teaching can be imagined as a vocation attracting committed, enthusiastic and highly skilled people, well able to meet these challenges. However, the literature questions this view. Lecturers are finding their work increasing difficult and while most are intrinsically motivated (OECD, 2006), they also want fair and equitable treatment and reasonable rewards for their work (Crosswell, 2006; McInnis, 1999). Sadly, the pay, status and working conditions of university teachers in much of the developed world is falling (American Federation of Teachers, 2009; Lazarsfeld Jensen & Morgan, 2009) and employment has become more insecure, with teaching increasingly undertaken by people on a casual basis (Brown, Goodman, & Yasukawa, 2008; Junor, 2004; Pocock, 2004). The seminal work of Boyer (1990), also highlights the difference in recognition and rewards that excellence in research activity attracts compared to excellence in teaching.

Work-related stress in teaching has been recognised in schools as a serious issue for some time (OECD, 2005; Tennant, 2007; Tremayne, Martin, & Dowson, 2007; Whitehead, Ryba, & O’Driscoll, 2000). Studies of tertiary teachers are less evident, but have been growing in number and significance across the last two decades (American Federation of Teachers, 2009; Asheley, 2007; Benmore, 2002; Fisher, 1994; Martin, 1999; Soliman & Soliman, 1997). Many factors are identified as interacting to create pressure on lecturers and increase their workloads and stress:

- rising (and conflicting) expectations of different stakeholders (Altbach, 2004; Coaldrake & Stedman, 1998; Marginson, 2002)
- lack of resources, and casualization of teaching (OECD, 2008a);
- excessive change, institutional breakdown, reform and restructuring (Asheley, 2007 (Murray & Dollery, 2005)
- increasing student numbers, (OECD, 2008b); and changes in student demography:
- increasing diversity (Devos, 2003; Kinnear, Boyce, Sparrow, Middleton, & Cullity, 2008);
- increasing numbers of students in paid work with little study time, (James, Bexley, Devlin, & Marginson, 2007);
- (re)conceptualization of the student as customer (Longden, 2006);
- technological change and need for teaching with, and for, rapidly changing technologies (Hannon, 2008; Herrington, Herrington, Mantei, Olney, & Ferry, 2009);
- increasing governmental control through the imposition of national protocols, guidelines and extensive accountability and quality measures (Salmi, 2009; Woodhouse, 2003).

Winefield, Gillespie, Stough, Dua, and Hapuararchchi's survey of Australian Universities (2002), revealed serious problems of job satisfaction, morale, and mental health, with the most severe stress and lowest job satisfaction was amongst Level B & C academics working in new universities, particularly in the Arts and Humanities,. The Report concluded:

Australian university staff, particularly academic staff, are highly stressed. Diminishing resources, increased teaching loads and student/staff ratios, pressure to attract external funds, job insecurity, poor management and a lack of recognition and reward are some of the key factors driving the high level of stress. (p8)

The literature also points to institutional problems in achieving and sustaining quality when teachers are exhausted and dissatisfied. It provides evidence that attracting and retaining good staff is becoming problematic (OECD, 2006; Van Ummersen, 2005).

In terms of 'teacher survival' and 'teaching sustainability', these finding are significant. Sustainability principles argue for the well-being of all people, so lecturers need to be nurtured, not exploited within the university community. Further, if the well-being of lecturers is threatened, this in turn will challenge the capacity of institutions to achieve and sustain excellence in teaching and learning into the future. The current literature suggests that although many universities are keen to address environmental sustainability, fewer are taking leadership in managing for internal social sustainability (Hammond & Churchman, 2008).

The study

A qualitative, longitudinal study of Award Winning Teachers (AWTs) was conducted in a West Australian university from 2003 and 2009, with the intent of revealing insights about the value of teaching awards in promoting, valuing and encouraging good teaching. The study took an insider-participant approach, informed by developmental phenomenology (Bennett, Foreman-Peck, & Higgins, 1996; Bowden & Walsh, 2000). Ten participants were interviewed

in 2003 and again in 2008 and a further 18 were interviewed in 2008 only. All interviews were audio-taped and transcripts were analysed manually and electronically (with Nvivo) using an iterative approach. Emergent themes (including sustainability) were identified and these were used along with key concepts found in the literature, to code and re-code data (Moghaddam, 2006). Findings were tabulated to facilitate rigor in comparisons across time and individuals (Richards, 2005; Siccama & Penna, 2008). Themes, codes and summaries of analysis-in-progress were shared with participants and independent experts to support accuracy and confidence in interpretation.

Findings

You can be a good teacher in the context of everybody working 8 hrs a day, but you can't be as good a teacher as you want to be, you are always making compromises, there are just more demands than there are hours available. I work, tend to work a six-day week. I was here [at work starting an exam at six am and then I ended up here until nine last night. But then, as my daughter said to me (she's a fan fiction reader) "Looking at you, you are a workaholic, but if I could get paid for writing or reading sci-fiction I'd probably enjoy myself as much as you enjoy your work". I do love it, BUT...

Whilst diversity was evident, several themes were strongly and consistently voiced. The quote above provides a powerful summary of the 'sustainability entrapment' that characterized their experience. AWTs aspire to teach at a very high level and that takes time. They choose to work long hours because they love their work and get a real 'buzz' from teaching well, despite the impact on their work-life balance (and sometimes health and well-being).

Work-life balance

All participants (100%) stated that they could not deliver the quality of teaching they aspired to, within the hours they were paid for teaching:

Well, I think I could teach in 40hrs a week, if I didn't change anything and just did the dull stuff, but then I'd still be doing the research at the weekend.

They described their work hours as averaging from 45+hrs per week to as high as 80hrs, and for most it included frequent work at weekends, in the evenings and even within their four-week annual leave holidays. Most explained their behaviour in terms of commitment to students and to teaching well:

I don't get paid for a lot of the stuff I do ... absolutely true. But there is no doubt, sitting here at the end of semester that the thing that makes me feel a lot happier is some of the stuff I've got back from the students about a new unit I have just devised and run, and happens to have gone better than any unit I have run before, and I'm really happy about that because I had to do it while I was doing other stuff as well.... And that unit I put a lot into it, I wanted to win those students. I wanted to have it work well. I need good feedback, because I'm putting in extra effort over and above the call of duty....

Almost all participants acknowledged some negative impacts arising from their work commitment, particularly where this caused disruption, conflict or stress to family life;

created exhaustion or ill-health; or disrupted their ability to fulfill other responsibilities, and often concerned about the well-being of colleagues:

Yes well I'm now in counseling to get over being a workaholic- I have a particular problem- I'm trying to do one day a week where I don't do any work and working towards a weekend- I could write the book at the weekend as something I could do- if I wasn't working so hard.

...teaching is really hard work- at the end of the semester I'm thinking oh the marking. The preparing and the dealing with the students can be so tiring, all that inter-personal stuff, so if you are not engaged with it at some level it would be a miserable job.

Many participants revealed they felt overwhelmed by the demands of their work and sometimes quite unable to meet those demands:

... this week it all fell apart, and I just don't know how much longer I can keep doing it. And its not just me, I'm looking down the corridor and they [teaching colleagues] are all right on the edge.

Factors that sustain

Five factors with a positive impact on “survival and sustainability” emerged from the data with particular consistency and strength:

- positive affirmation, recognition and rewarding of teaching;
- positive relationships and connection with others;
- institutional leadership and support;
- recognition and encouragement of diversity;
- professional learning and growth.

Positive affirmation, recognition and rewards

Formal rewards for teaching through awards, pay and promotions were valued by AWTs, and many participants noted a small but positive improvement in their experiences and expectations of such rewards between 2003 and 2008. Improvements in promotions for good teachers were noted, although most still believed: “*Research is still number one*”. Participants spoke enthusiastically about recognition from mentors, colleagues and senior managers, and above all, from students: “*the biggest buzz comes from the students*”. Every participant noted, in some way, the nourishing impact of positive feedback and the importance to their well-being of feeling valued for their teaching.

Positive relationships and connection with others

All AWTs referred to the importance of positive relationships and collegial connections. Professional networks, formal and informal mentoring, shared evaluation, reflection and review, and joint problem-solving activities contributed significantly to their sense of well-being. Symposiums, forums and conferences were highlighted in many interviews as important, and typically regarded as a “treat or reward”. Respectful, and engaged relationships with students were also critically important to most participants.

Institutional leadership and support

There was a general agreement that good leadership, clear direction and communication, clarity about priorities, effective management of resources and assertive management of problems could make a difference. Indeed, it was often the senior managers positive interventions and their ability to “really listen and respond”, which enabled teachers to overcome problems and difficulties that might otherwise have led them to give up or withdraw.

Recognition and encouragement of diversity

Participants placed a high value on acknowledgement of the needs and demands of their particular contexts, students, disciplines, professions; and to their values, beliefs and preferences in approaches to teaching. Although broad institutional directions were accepted, there was a strong belief that localized decisions were needed to maintain quality and to work effectively to achieve the most positive outcomes with the least negative impact on people.

Professional learning and growth

AWTs often described themselves as ‘hyper-active’, ‘over-enthusiastic’ learners, easily engaged (or distracted) by new ideas, research and improvement projects. They seemed to crave discipline/professional, and student-driven intellectual challenges and described them as “nourishing”. However, as there was never actually a time resource these commitments simply added to their ‘entrapment’. AWTs reported valuing professional development opportunities and academic study as sustaining experiences, although interestingly these were often the things that were squeezed out by time constraints.

Factors that challenge sustainability

Challenges identified from the data included: student numbers; students’ capacity, interest and commitment; commitment to improvement; loss of autonomy; lack of rewards and low valuing of teaching; large and diverse work responsibilities. Above all, at the heart of sustainability, from the participants’ point of view was the pressure of time and the stresses arising from continually having too much to do and too little time to do the things that matter to student learning and outcomes well.

Student numbers, capacity, interest and commitment

AWTs generally expressed great empathy, concern, interest and commitment to students, but supporting students who were in difficulties often had a personal cost:

I'll give you an example, I'm dashing home at 5.30, to be with the kids after school, I've been late home every night this week. And a student comes in and they're crying. So you stay to help them, and you think, 'I'll make up the time to the kids, I'll go home early tomorrow'. But you never do because there's always another student tomorrow...

Almost half the group reported frustration with students who did not demonstrate interest and commitment to their studies. Participants typically talked about their own efforts to support learners and they were disappointed when this was not appreciated or reciprocated:

... that subtle changing of attitude ... that it's a service and you are always at the end of a machine and you will answer any questions immediately and be there... That attitude of instant gratification that students seem to come with all the time. Again, not all, one has to be careful about making generalizations. It might have increased, but maybe it's not the majority of them, I don't think it is the majority

While AWTs tended to welcome diversity and actively support the provision of higher education to an ever-widening group of entrants, they found they did not have the time or resources, or sometimes the expertise to provide adequate assistance. In particular, they mentioned the complexities of working with students who had lower than expected entry skills particularly in language (reading, writing and communication skills) and with mixed ability and experience cohorts. They wanted to help, felt pressured by the institution to “*help everyone get over the line*” but did not have the times or resources to achieve the improvement needed. This raised anxiety about graduate standards that again entrapped the AWTs into working harder and harder, to achieve quality outcomes.

AWTs were committed to an ‘ethic of care’ (personal and academic) but large classes intensified workloads and made it difficult to sustain their preferred approach: “*The problem is that we are moving away from good pedagogy to mass production types where student numbers matter- big classes- higher students to staff ratios are accepted these days.... It has got bigger and bigger.*” Entrapment also arose from the paradox that: “*...it takes so much time to help students, but if you don't it takes just as much time to solve all the problems you end up with*”.

Commitment to improvement

Commitment to improving teaching also led to entrapment. “*Making it better*”, usually meant more work: responding to students at night and at weekends, continually updated materials, developing resources, integrating more complex tasks that involve external links. This was particularly true for assessment practices. High expectations for accurate grading, moderation and personalized feedback increased workloads, particularly for those managing teams of casual, sessional and inexperienced markers; and those in working in arts, humanities and professional courses. Some AWTs actually talked about assessment in terms of threats to their survival: “*I sit up marking all night to get it back in time, then I go to work and I think- I'm going to die if I do this any more!*”.

It was rare for this group to view technology negatively per se, but working in multiple modes, learning to use and incorporate constantly changing technologies both complicated work and intensified work. Often it was the sheer number of things that needed to be done, sometimes technical problems (such as computer or learning system failures) added difficulties. But equally trying to do it all at a very high, professional level caused real problems of work-overload. AWTs were entrapped by the convergence of unrealistic institutional, student and personal expectations for quality within the resource.

Loss of autonomy

AWTs were often frustrated by what they saw as increasing institutional demands and a loss of autonomy. They perceived increasing work, devolution of “*admin-trivia*”, decreasing support, and often a disrespect for their expertise and a lack of authority in their “*own work*”.

Institutional demands were particularly strongly resisted where AWTs values and beliefs about good teaching were seen as compromised. A strong perception was articulated about increased centralization that could “take away the sensitivity to actual, real people”, and make it, “harder and harder to teach well”. Simple examples given included the difficulty of accessing discretionary funding for resources (needed immediately to resolve problems or improve teaching) or to cover crisis such as staff absence and issues of insensitive centralized timetabling:

So admin people don't always understand why you request specific classrooms and that can be because a specific layout works for you. When I've had to talk to someone about moving a room five times because they really don't understand that I need a tiered lecture room – and they say but why? Other people like it how it is- I say I don't.

Governance through rules and regulations, distance between teachers and the policy decision-makers, power and authority in the hands of people perceived not to have relevant knowledge and expertise in teaching and learning, all created a sense of frustration by limiting the academics' capacity to respond to local needs flexibly and quickly. Indeed, many AWTs regarded their ability to side-step or manipulate governance as a critical factor in their teaching excellence: “well you have to bend a few rules if you want to do the job properly”.

Lack of rewards and valuing of teaching

AWTs were unanimous in feeling that good teaching was not given a high enough value. Examples of low valuing given included: poor pay, limited promotion opportunities and employment insecurity. Concern was expressed by many AWTs for the employment conditions of casual and sessional staff, as well as their own situations. The limited feedback they received on teaching; lack of interest in discussing teaching in formal management of performance meetings; dismissive, disbelieving or trivializing management responses to their workload problems and teaching challenges; the failure of management to deal effectively with poor teachers were also identified as indicating low value. The priority perceived to be given to research over teaching; and the lack of acknowledgement of the actual time needed for teaching activity in workload formulas, with much work being “invisible” were also raised as signs that teaching did not really matter.

All AWTs actively sought continuous feedback from students, however, a surprising number talked about their vulnerability to negative feedback. Few workers are so constantly and publically evaluated, and for people who are so intrinsically motivated by wanting to teach well, negative feedback can be very demoralizing even where it was unjustified, inaccurate or unreasonable. This was particularly acute for early career teachers.

Juggling workloads and diverse work responsibilities

Many AWTs, found it difficult to juggle their different academic responsibilities: teaching, research, and community engagement. Setting priorities appeared to be very difficult (everything was important). Further, they often believed that their employment and career prospects were dependent on continued performance in all three. Juggling tended not to mean choosing which to leave, but which would be done at night, at weekends or in the holidays. AWTs who managed large courses, complex, new or multiple units, or teams of sessional teachers experienced acute “time-crunch”, and the teaching-research nexus seemed

particularly problematic for them. AWTs reported on huge workloads administering and managing teaching, (such as coordinating staff and students, developing teaching materials and training tutors) that receive little or no recognition in workload models, but made it impossible to fit all teaching related work into the time allocated. Academics are entrapped by conflicting demands for their time. A significant number of participants reported either “*giving up on research*” (and therefore on career progress through promotion) or strategically moving away from teaching.

Time, energy and exhaustion

In almost every interview, time, and the pressure of time, or the lack of time, was a powerful theme. Participants felt there was never enough time to do what needed to be done: not enough time to help students, not enough time to prepare teaching materials or think about good learning and assessment task, not enough time to reflect or meet and talk with colleagues, not enough time to commit to professional development and learning. Several participants commented on the amount and pace of change in their work. The effort required to manage change continually was regarded as a serious workload issue, even where they saw the changes as worthwhile. For most, the effort of trying to fit everything in led to exhaustion.

If ‘survival’ in this study is interpreted as the retention of excellent teachers in teaching, several further observations can be drawn from the data. At the time of writing, half of the 2003 participants, had left the university, and six of the ten took strategic decisions to re-focus their attention on research in order to progress their careers. Across the group there was an explicit awareness and concern for the loss of good teachers:

... I can say I am astonished at how many people who won awards early on are no longer teaching. ... 5 years on we don't see a group of good teachers teaching and getting huge daily satisfaction, but you see them holding professorships and leading research teams and that's an issue...

Discussion and recommendations

The research data analysis and findings need to be considered in the light of a number of limitations. The study is located in a single site, with an atypical group of teacher participants, and sustainability questions were not specifically fore-grounded in the study. Their experiences and perspectives are individual, context specific and cannot be taken as representative of other teachers' views. Nevertheless, strong, coherent, shared themes emerged from the group, and these resonate well with evidence in the literature. Congruence with a more focused work-stress study at the University of Western Sydney is particularly striking (Lazarsfeld Jensen & Morgan, 2009) and suggests some integrity and validity has been achieved.

The data from both the study and the literature affirm that there is a real and significant problem of sustainability and that creativity, effectiveness and the well-being of tertiary teachers and teaching programs are threatened. Teachers appear to be ‘entrapped’ by the demands of ‘hungry’ organizations struggling to meet increasing expectations with inadequate resources; and by their own interests, motivations and desire to serve students well. The study invites the question: does the university definition of sustainability include the well-being of teachers? The highly stressed level B, C, and casual positions are most likely to be held by the least powerful teachers in university and therefore most vulnerable to exploitation: typically over-represented by women and minority groups. Inequities are

incompatible with sustainability goals of social justice (Hammond & Churchman, 2008), however, whilst teachers ‘survive’ in sufficient numbers to meet institutional needs, there is little incentive for management to change, unless they genuinely aspire to act differently.

The study also raises pragmatic problems: do we know how to act to achieve a more sustainable teaching environment? And do we know how to achieve such change? These questions imply an urgent need for research into more resource-effective teaching, professional, organizational learning, and higher education reform: sadly very little funding is allocated to higher education research. Universities need to have accurate measures of the ‘climate’. They need to invest in listening to their teachers, and take their experiences and perceptions seriously: in terms of sustainability this would be seen in actions and changed behaviours. Single-site qualitative studies, such as the one reported here are rare, but particularly valuable in identifying context specific points of tension, providing an evidence base to support local decision-making.

The findings suggest that as individuals and as organizations, we are not good at recognizing and acknowledging the time that many *good teaching practices* take, or managing effective teaching within the resources we have, or setting and working confidently with priorities. Clarifying our university purpose and priorities at institutional, departmental and individual levels is critical. However, we also need to set targets and plan in ways that take account of the actual resources available (particularly teacher time), learn more about how to manage our priorities in the realities of practice, find more efficient (sustainable) ways to achieve quality within our resources.

Since issues of teacher quality, recruitment and retention are of national not just local concern, we also need to find better ways to communicate about sustainability issues in university teaching with governments and policy-makers, and include them in evidence-based problem solving for a better future.

Conclusions

Accepting the limitations of this study, the gaps in research and under-development of conceptual and theoretical frameworks, this work-in-progress still raises important questions for researchers, managers and teachers. The university community has been challenged to commit to sustainability as a global imperative. Teaching and learning in higher education has great potential to support positive change in the world, but faces challenges in meeting community expectations and demands within the resources available. Teachers are perhaps the most critical of all ‘resources’ and there is sound evidence to suggest many of them are finding it difficult to ‘survive’ the demands, even where they are passionately committed and highly skilled. If the higher education sector is to fulfill its sustainability mission, then governments, researchers, managers and teachers all have a part to play in ensuring that the well-being of teachers is acknowledged, understood and addressed. We need to collaborate in finding ways to not just to survive and sustain excellence in university teaching, but to thrive.

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Project Four: Valuing higher education teachers

Context for the paper

From the early 1990s student numbers grew and funding contracted in higher education. One consequence was that in our university, as in many others, reliance upon sessional and casual teachers increased. Whilst these teachers have much to offer, particularly in terms of relevant and current professional expertise, our Teaching and Learning Office was aware range of issues emerging that needed attention. This project was conceived as a workplace initiative to investigate issues from the perspective of the sessional teachers.

Relevance to the portfolio

A professional doctorate is distinguished by its commitment to workplace reform, and to work-embedded research. This project exemplifies these characteristics in action: it addresses an authentic workplace problem; it integrates research, teaching, management and leadership; it applies a multi-dimensional team approach to achieve research-informed improvements. I am particularly keen to include this work, because it presents work-place research conducted in an authentic way, as I believe is appropriate to a professional doctorate. I understand improvement as critically dependent on cooperative and collaborative efforts across different levels and roles. My role, as described below was limited in terms of the applied research (this was undertaken by an experienced and expert research officer), but critical in initiating actions, interpreting data, communicating with leadership teams and managers, and achieving practical change.

Each and every conceptualization of teaching excellence points to the significance of the teachers as critical agents: Their selection, training and inclusion in decisions about the design and delivery of teaching matters; our management of learning in the context of casualization matters; and our treatment and support of sessional teachers matters. My role in the research, project development, and writing of the article included:

- Membership of the three person institutional leadership team that conceived the project and established aims and overall design, I took the lead role in translating our shared aims into action;
- research supervision: I appointed, briefed and over-saw the work of the Research Officer who carried out the interviews; collated the data, undertook the analysis; and drafted reports for the Faculty;

- contributions to the analysis and interpretation of data, through discussion of findings, and shaping of the writing (please note that the main body of work was undertaken by the Research Officer);
- presentation of the findings to the Faculty, and leadership in achieving changes to institutional management of sessional staff, based on the findings;
- drafting and presenting the paper included in this portfolio, drawing on the data and shared interpretations emerging:

Sparrow, H., & Cullity, M. (2008, December). *Management practices and the valuing of sessional staff*. Paper presented at Valuing Higher Education, SRHE Annual Conference, Liverpool UK.

The project was also collaboratively presented through numerous informal institutional and local forums, sharing findings with the academic community.

Postscript

This research was instrumental in underpinning change in management practices within the faculty. It also positioned collaborating staff to contribute to the developing national dialogue on sessional staff. Building on this first research project, I worked with other colleagues within the institution, in other Australian universities, and with the National Tertiary Education Union on related studies, that contributed to a national effort to raise relevant issues and improve the employment circumstances for sessional teachers. For example, invited participation in the symposium:

Theorising multiple positionings of sessionals. Enhancing Higher Education, Theory and Scholarship Proceedings of the 30th HERDSA Annual Conference [CD-ROM] 8-11 July 2007, Adelaide, Australia <http://www.herdsa.org.au/wp-content/uploads/p131.pdf>

Participants in the symposium included:

Kay Martinez James Cook University, Townsville, Australia

Audrey Milton James Cook University, Townsville, Australia

Deanne Gannaway Flinders University of South Australia, Adelaide, Australia

Alison Bunker Edith Cowan University, Perth, Australia

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(Abstract available from: <http://www.herdsa.org.au/wp-content/uploads/p131.pdf>)

The significance of active networking and sharing of knowledge within the community of higher education academics (leaders, teachers and researchers) is that it enhances the possibility that new and evolving knowledge will actually be used in practice to underpin and lead improvements. Research that is distanced from practitioners is often ignored, and thus has no value in improving practice (See Chapter Two: Excellence as Scholarship).

Title: Management practices and the valuing of sessional staff.

Presenter: Heather Sparrow: Edith Cowan University, Perth, Western Australia

Author(s): Heather Sparrow: Edith Cowan University, Perth, Western Australia
Dr Margie Cullity: Edith Cowan University, Perth, Western Australia

Abstract submission number: 0334 Research domain: Management leadership and governance

Summary: Sessional staff are responsible for a significant proportion of the teaching undertaken in Australian Universities. Many are highly valued for their recent and relevant workplace experience, and the wealth of their knowledge and expertise, however, there is extensive evidence to suggest that sessional teachers are not always well rewarded for their contribution or appropriately supported in the workplace. The way they are managed has a significant impact on their effectiveness, their enjoyment of the role and their sense of self-worth. This paper draws on a series of case studies and a needs analysis survey to analyse the practices that either support or hinder them in their work. It presents a framework that illustrates how management practices influence sessional staff notions of worth, their attitudes to work, and how they can enhance or hinder sessional staff work.

Introduction: Context and problem

Over the last decade, evidence from diverse sources has raised concerns about the increasing deployment of sessional teachers in Australian universities, the nature of their contribution and the rewards, benefits and support they receive for their work. The NTEU is actively engaged in a current campaign to improve the position of sessional staff (<http://www.nteu.org.au/campaigns/ouruniversitiesmatter/casuals>). Their contention is that sessional staff are not valued as professional employees, do not receive fair and reasonable rewards for their work and are not treated in a fair and equitable ways. Commentaries from educational observers, researchers and theorists, have also raised concerns over a considerable period. Their concern is typically with the value associated with teaching, the morale of teachers and the impact that low public value, low morale, low self-esteem and a low sense of self-value and worth can have on the quality of teaching delivered to students (Kift, 2002; Moehs 1992; Nicolettou & Flint, 2004; Ramsden & Martin 1996; Robinson, 2004, Watter & Weeks, 1999).

Professional concern at a national level is represented in a significant funded study conducted on behalf of the Australian University Teaching Council (AUTC). This project confirmed a substantial increase in the employment of non-tenured staff and on the basis of a review of literature and a limited survey reported that:

... the availability of sessional teachers offers significant benefits to universities in terms of flexibility, diversity and financial savings, however, there is little in the way of formal, systematic or centralized policies or approaches to their support, training or management at university or organisational level. Indeed, the project team could find no example of a 'whole university approach to the management, support and training of sessional staff. (Chalmers, D., Herbert, D., Hannam, R., Smeal, G., & Whelan, K., 2003, pi)

A subsequent project funded by the Carrick Institute, now Australian Learning and Teaching Council (ALTC) set out to survey Australian universities, to find and disseminate examples of good practice. The project report has just become available (<http://www.cadad.edu.au/sessional/RED>) and whilst it makes sound recommendations, also sadly reports that... *"Despite the passage of four years since the AUTC Report, the 2007 survey found little improvement"* (Ryan, 2008, p16)

Study design and methodology

In response to the 2003 AUTC study and local observations, one faculty in a WA university decided to investigate more fully anecdotal concerns about sessional teachers. The overall purpose of the study was to identify ways to improve management practices to enhance the experience of sessional staff, help them to feel good about working in the Faculty, support them to teach well, and hopefully encourage them to continue to work with us. The study examines the experiences, perspectives and outcomes of sessional staff who teach within the faculty; along with the insights of a small group of tenured staff who worked closely with sessional staff. Data was collected through semi-structured telephone interviews and through a needs analysis survey.

Firstly, semi-structured telephone interviews (Berg, 1989) were held with 34 participants. Program directors, course and unit coordinators and administrative assistants, (n=11) were asked to describe the role they played in working with sessional staff, and to identify the issues they considered to have a significant impact on sessional staff practices and outcomes. Sessional staff (n=34) were asked to describe their motives or undertaking teaching, the strengths they thought they brought to the role, the benefits and challenges of being a sessional teacher, and also to comment on any ways that faculty staff could help to enhance their experience or teaching.

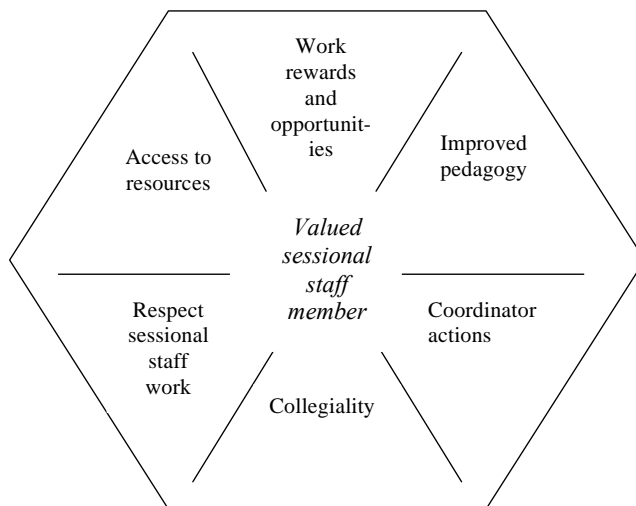
Secondly a needs analysis survey (adapted from Teaching and Educational Development Institutes [TEDI], 2003; Jaeger, 1988), was mailed to 205 sessional staff. The survey cited eight possible areas of concern: policies and guidelines; management and employment matters; training and information issues; teaching and learning support; developing an inclusive culture; matters specific to industry-based opportunities; evaluation of sessional staff; and other area(s) of concern. Respondents were asked to indicate the level of concern they had for each item using a 1-8 scale (1= very high, 8=very low) and to comment on each issue. 42 sessional staff responded, and although this is only a 20% return rate, the data did provide valuable insights into sessional staff priorities and the issues that they believed affected their teaching and outcomes.

Interview and survey data were tabulated and thematically organised (Ezzy, 2002). Findings were interpreted and, then, illustrated by creating, first, a qualitative table of management practices, sessional staff outcomes, and recommendations (Patton, 1990); and, second, a conceptual model of factors that influence sessional staff beliefs about their worth. Case studies relevant to each of the four discipline-based Schools (departments) in the Faculty were constructed (Stake, 1995). This was an effective way to analyse the data to reveal the unique, distinctive and individual School-based i) staff characteristics; and ii) the management practices that aid sessional staff work or require adjusting to further enhance sessional staff outcomes, and also enabled very specific evidence-supported recommendations to be provided. This paper draws on evidence from the survey and examples from across all the case studies to identify, describe and illustrate some of the key issues that emerged as central to sessional staff sense of worth, and their relationship to particular management practices they experienced.

Findings

Analysis of issues that were commonly expressed identified six particularly significant management practices that affect sessional staff notion of their worth. This six-factor framework (Figure One below) is derived from comments from both sessional staff themselves and the tenured staff who work with them and are concerned for their well-being:

Figure 1: Management practices that can affect sessional staff notion of their worth



In each case, practices could be experienced as positive, which increased people's sense of worth, or negative, which conversely made them feel that they were not well regarded and valued.

Work rewards and opportunities

Twenty-nine (69%) sessional staff stressed rewards and opportunities as an area of concern. Whilst the salary paid to both tenured and sessional teachers compared to other professional workers is a matter of contention, the main issues for sessional staff was fair, just and transparent application of pay; and acknowledgement of the difficulties of short – term, short-hours, unreliable, employment, in cases where people were dependent on sessional work for income:

I work over two universities. I have almost a full time teaching load approx 10 hours teaching per week and I end up with \$20,000 per annum. I am on social security to supplement my income. This injustice sticks in my throat. I've been teaching ... for 12 years sessionally. This is my only beef – but it is a big one.

Miscommunication about expectations was a significant problem, particularly around the assumptions of time allocated to preparation and marking.

Marking is extremely time consuming and I like to provide feedback so I take the time to write it, and classes are quite high in numbers which sometimes make me question if the pay is worth it?

There is a lot of extra work that is not included in your pay; for example, answering calls and marking. If this is your only income sessional pay does not make it attractive.

The lack of alignment between hours worked and hours paid either ignored and devalued their contribution, or implied that they were not efficient enough in their work to complete it in the allocated time. From a sessional teacher perspective there seemed to be no easy way to negotiate their pay to match the reality: if marking or preparation took longer than the assumed time, then the staff member worked for free. Similarly, work often spill outside the assumed pay period:

There was no provision at the end of the semester for me to work with students. There was no pay. It was the end of my contract yet students wanted assistance.

Unlike tenured staff, sessional teachers did not have the option of regulating work across quieter periods in the week or between teaching terms; or benefiting from other advantages of the work environment that depend on full-time engagement. Many sessional staff experienced this as a great injustice, it offended their professionalism, and in some it created a deep sense of exploitation: they were trapped by their own wishes to do the job well, so it was not an easy option to reduce their contribution. Not all sessional staff are motivated by financial rewards: Some work out of interest, some out of a desire to contribute, but all want to feel they are treated fairly. Line managers and administrative staff also voiced concerns about pay, but in many cases found the problem difficult to resolve: They seldom managed budgets, and few had access to resources to provide additional rewards; indeed they themselves carried workloads that exceeded the notional hourly pay.

In addition to pay related matters, sessional teachers also were keen to be included in professional and career development opportunities. They felt valued when tenured staff offered mentoring and encouragement; when they received information about employment and professional development opportunities; and when the transition of contracts from one teaching period to the next were managed well, so that they knew early if there would be work or not.

Improved pedagogy

Sessional staff generally took a highly professional approach to their work. For many, the primary motivation to engage with teaching was a genuine wish to contribute to student learning: *“I want to make use of my degree and life experiences and make a contribution to education and learning.”* Many believed that they had knowledge and expertise that was valuable and wanted to share their expertise; their practical knowledge of workplace issues and events provides them with a rich source of information; that is, *“stories to tell to help get the message across”* and *“to give a clear picture of how it [theory] is going to work.”*

Teaching is not always an easy and the study confirmed that sessional staff do experience challenges in their work. Just like many tenured teachers they were concerned about: increasing student numbers; motivating large classes of students; making the subject interesting for students; encouraging independent student learning; dealing with “aggressive” students assisting ESL students to adapt to Australian culture and the rigours of academic study; finding... *“a balance in academically challenging students and not affecting people’s feelings”*; drawing students out so that... *“they are not passengers”* [in the learning process]. In the light of such challenges, they reported feeling valued when they were given opportunities to participate in professional development courses, when there were opportunities to learn from each other and unit coordinators, and when there was good support to help them achieve consistent pedagogy across tutorial groups

Coordinator actions

The relationships with the Coordinators who have overall responsibility for teaching were significant to sessional teachers. Thirty-one of the survey respondents (74%) indicated a high to moderate concern about the value of receiving guidance from their supervisors. Sessional staff noted three specific coordinator practices that made them feel valued:

- participation in an efficient and inclusive teaching program
- providing meaningful feedback on their performance

- ensuring sessional staff know who to approach for assistance.

Working in a well-organised course with channels of good communication contributed to a productive sessional staff experience. Sessional staff wanted to teach well and they believe their pedagogic practice is enhanced when the coordinator: sets and maintains clear expectations of the team; communicates information in advance of a lecture or tutorial; lectures in a coherent manner; and organises materials ahead of time (e.g., books of closed reserve for students, tutorial handouts for staff). A well-planned and structured course makes for “ease of work” and assists the course to “run more smoothly.” Conversely, when supervisors failed to organise unit content and materials it created anxiety and undermined their effectiveness as teachers. In one instance, for example, poor communication led to disorder within tutorial groups and the mishandling of student assignments: *“Organisation of the class/tutorial groups was chaotic. I did not receive a class list/marked assignments from other groups and did not mark my groups as a consequence”*. Most sessional teachers want to be regarded as highly competent, and problems of this nature are very damaging to their professional image, their self-esteem and their sense of worth.

Several sessional staff talked very positively about coordinators who were thoughtful and flexible in organising team events to include them, and adapted their plans and actions in consideration of the way they affected sessional staff work. Such active support by their coordinator encouraged sessional staff to *“feel valued and treated with respect”* and to *“return it [the support] ten fold”* to course organisers. One educator claimed: *“The coordinator makes a difference. I would walk away if the coordinator was not supportive.”*

Evaluation and feedback is important to sessional teachers; they like to feel valued for their teaching capacity, and it helps to have their beliefs about their achievements verified through positive feedback from coordinators. However, they reported very different experiences, which seemed to be dependent on the particular coordinators they work with: some took the time to regularly provide personal feedback, included them in performance management processes, and ensured that the sessional staff understood about and participate fully in formal evaluation processes, whilst others did not:

I was not informed that there was an evaluation review process. The evaluator came into the lecture theatre, assumed I knew what was happening. Told me to leave the room. 20 minutes later left – did not say thank you, kiss my foot, nothing. I have had no feedback from that process. This was a disturbing experience for me. I did not know whether a complaint had been made against me or if it was quality control. The evaluator was nervous, not friendly or courteous. Students were given verbal feedback informally. I am aware of no formal evaluation process as mentioned above.

The achievement of quality in teaching and learning was a goal for both sessional and tenured staff, and management practices that valued the work of sessional teachers was clearly seen as linked to improved teaching. One supervisor claimed, *“Sessional staff are the life of the University [as] the quality of [the university] will be judged on the quality of its staff.”*

Collegiality

Twenty-five of the survey participants (60%) attributed a high to moderate priority in working in an inclusive teaching and learning environment. Sessional staff illustrated how they feel particularly valued and a part of the team when they are included in, and add to, course meetings and evaluations:

My boss keeps us in the picture. She wants to know if we have any ideas. They [supervisors] are open. [They ask:] “What do you think? Could this be improved?” It is a team effort. The opportunity to talk and share is always there. Teaching is about collaborative team work I feel valued as a team member – I cherish that.

However, even where teams wanted to be inclusive, collaborative and collegial it was not always easy:

“We [sessional staff] are part of the Faculty but not the team. We contribute but we are not a part of the team.”

The nature of sessional work can often leave them *“out of the loop”*. Sessional staff understand that sometimes it is the characteristics of sessional work, “not the people,” can limit their opportunity to participate, but all parties were interested in finding ways to increase collegial interactions; Positive suggestions were made about the potential value of Faculty newsletters, general information emails and centralised information websites as strategies to ensure sessional staff would always be *“a part of the information cycle”*. Frequently the actions that made sessional staff feel included and therefore valued were quite small, conversely oversights could have a significant and negative impact:

Faculty made me welcome socially – lunch, outside social functions. However, no information or involvement in staff meetings, overviews or where we are heading with teaching and learning processes – that impacts on the way I could teach... Small gestures, for example, giving sessional staff mailbox with their name on it for the entire year would help

From the perspective of supervisors and managers, involving sessionals in activities beyond immediate teaching responsibilities was critical to valuing and rewarding them, and supporting them to teach well. However, it was also described as problematic, since funding was rarely available to support additional paid engagement.

We have loyal staff/long term staff. They are loyal but not nurtured or considered part of the University. We need to organise pay for them to attend course debriefing meetings. This would also assist in developing collegiality We exploit our sessional staff. We pay them a fraction of what full-time staff receive.

Access to resources

Sessional staff expressed a keen interest in working with good resources, in productive learning environments and with good infrastructure, particularly IT. The underpinning message was again focussed on a desire to be supported to be good teachers: Self-worth was consistently linked primarily to their professional competence and success. Sessional staff reported positively on interactions with support staff who responded to them in a friendly and helpful way, and that they felt valued when they are given ready and reliable access to telecommunications, library, office space, common-rooms and/or mailbox facilities.

Respect for sessional staff work

A strong theme across all the elements in the framework (described above) was a desire to be respected as people and as professionals. Respect was often seen in terms of equity of treatment with tenured teachers. Postgraduates employed as tutors were most likely to report negative differences: for example, exclusion from staff events, and meetings, different access to resources, such as photocopies, telephone, computers, office space. Some reported a sense of being still regarded as 'just students working as tutors'. A few sessional staff were concerned about their status and identity, and were concerned about being identified as teachers or tutors rather than as academics. This seems to imply that some people regard academic work that combines teaching and research, as having a higher intrinsic value and status than 'just teaching' work.

Many sessional staff expressed an interest in sharing information with colleagues and participating in course design. Involvement in the design of teaching and learning demonstrates valuing to sessional staff through the acknowledgement of their skills and knowledge, trusting that they have the capacity to contribute in a meaningful way. This was particularly important to experienced practitioners seeking to provide leadership in their professions through engagement with teaching.

Similarly respect was signalled by the degree of autonomy sessional staff felt in relation to their interaction with students. There was commonly a sense that they did want to be able to have some personal input. Respect meant that coordinators would trust them and allow them to have some control, as one comments: *I enjoy my work and the freedom to manage my units as clientele abilities dictate.*

In conclusion

The findings of this single-site study demonstrate a high level of consistency with significant research and expert commentary reported across the last twenty years in Australia (Baranay, 2006; Coaldrake, 1999. Harvey, Fraser, & Bowles, 2005; Kift, 2002; Ramsden, & Martin, 1996. Ryan, Y., 2008). The study affirms a powerful relationship between the workplace experiences of sessional staff, the ways they perceive they are treated, and their sense of worth. Staff interpretations of value are underpinned particularly by a concern for fair treatment, professional respect and experiences that will help them to be good teachers. Six significant management practices were identified: Work rewards and opportunities; improved pedagogy; coordinator actions; collegiality; access to resources; and, respect for sessional work. And each of these could work either positively or negatively, to demonstrate value. The successful supervision and support of sessional teachers requires Faculty managers to consider the pedagogic, collegial, career, attitudinal and resource needs of sessional educators. But perhaps the most significant learning from this study is that we need to become much more alert to sessional staff perspectives, and across all our dealings ensure we know what these valuable contributors want, and how they experience the workplace, and what we need to do to support them into the future.

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Project Five: Student feedback and teacher evaluation

Context for the paper

In 2007, my work role included teaching in an initial teacher education program. I was a member of a highly collaborative teaching team who undertook an action research project to explore a discrepancy revealed in a formal evaluation survey, between quite high levels of overall student satisfaction and lower levels of satisfaction with assessment practices. The research helped the teaching team to understanding more about the students' perceptions of assessment, and provided a context-specific evidence-base to support decision-making about changes that might improve the experience, effectiveness and satisfaction with assessment processes for all stakeholders.

I was also employed as a Quality Improvement Officer in the Faculty Teaching and Learning Office, and held responsibility for instigating, leading and supporting improvement strategies. The University had introduced a Unit Teaching Evaluation Instrument (UTEI) that required all students to evaluate all teaching and teachers, every semester. Some teachers were not confident that the instrument was reliable, valid or indeed sufficiently helpful in providing them with the information they felt they needed to make improvements in their teaching. It was part of my role to help teaching teams use the evaluation data more effectively for change. The Faculty had identified assessment as an issue needing improvement. Therefore, it was also part of my role to help teaching teams develop more effective assessment practices.

Relevance to the portfolio

One way of defining Teaching Excellence is through students' evaluation of their teachers, their courses, and their own learning experience and outcomes: If students say teaching is excellent, then it is excellent- at least from their perspective. The literature, however, suggests that there are complications in student evaluation processes, and that local insights into the real meaning of feedback is needed to support both judgments about quality and actions for improvement (see Chapter Two).

The project was initiated in response to an authentic workplace problem that required a scholarly research-based response to achieve improvement. The research took place during the period of my doctoral studies and was fully consistent with my declared research purposes and the doctoral requirements as expressed in the ECU Handbook (2004).

Role of the doctoral candidate in the research, project development, and writing of the article

This was a collaborative research project. The particular teaching team was deeply committed to a shared philosophy that placed a high value on collegial relationships and collective action. A group project was therefore the only principled decision that could be envisioned. The idea for the project emerged from discussions with my teaching partner. A research proposal and plan was presented to the team with an open invitation for anyone who was interested to join us. I subsequently shared responsibility with my teaching partner for leading the coordination, development and implementation of a more detailed plan. Many members of the course team made contributions to the project in the generation of ideas and through critical discussions about methodology, findings and actions, but a group of four formed the core research team. I maintained a shared leadership role throughout the project:

- I identified and described the problem with my teaching partner.
- I designed the overall research project with my teaching partner (and used UTEI information from our teaching as source data).
- I worked as a team member in an iterative program of inclusive research development, that invited all teaching team members who wished to contribute to participate in the refinement, elaboration and adaption of the research design; the collection of data; the analysis and interpretation of data.
- I developed the methodology for self-directed focus group data collection introducing an innovative approach using ipods.
- I undertook the lead role in drafting the paper for publication.

Wren, J., Sparrow, H., Northcote, M., & Sharp, S. (2008). Higher education students' perceptions of effective assessment. *International Journal of Learning*, 15. Melbourne, Australia. <http://www.Learning-Journal.com>

I collaborated in the development of a presentation of the project and its findings for a variety of forums, some of which I presented, some of which were presented by others:

Sparrow, H. (presenter), Wren, J., Sharp, S., Haigh, Y., & Northcote, M. (2009). *Collaborative scholarship and participant evaluation: Effective approaches to understanding the complex dynamics of assessment*. Workshop presented at the WA Teaching and Learning Forum, Teaching and learning for global graduates, Curtin University Perth WA.

Postscript

Assessment practices within the teaching team were adapted in line with the project findings. Positive outcomes for team members included further development of research experience and expertise, the achievement of a published Journal article and improved confidence in the purpose, value, application and interpretation of student survey data. The study provided valuable feedback to the institutional evaluation team, and to faculty managers, assisting in refinements to survey processes and interpretation of data. The innovative use of ipods in self-directed student focus groups proved to be highly effective tool. It enhanced the scholarship of the team by providing a means to collect a wide range of qualitative data, on diverse issues that would not be otherwise possible within the resource constraints of teaching programs. This tool was enthusiastically taken up across the institution, and by other teaching-research practitioners.

Higher Education Students' Perceptions of Effective Assessment

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Abstract: This paper shares the voices of two cohorts of pre-service teachers responding to the assessment practices they have encountered in their pre-service teacher education course. It describes an action research project undertaken by a collaborative teaching team to explore a discrepancy revealed in a formal evaluation survey; between quite high levels of overall student satisfaction and lower levels of satisfaction with assessment practices. The paper shares insights into the students' experience, understanding and judgment about assessment gained through self-directed student focus groups, written feedback and online discussions that help to articulate and explain students' perspectives. The research seeks to contribute to improved understandings of students' perceptions of assessment, in a way that supports decision-making about change that improves the experience, effectiveness and satisfaction with assessment processes for all stakeholders. This paper outlines an interesting practice-based model for collecting open and honest student evaluation of assessment and also raises some of the dilemmas faced by a team of reflective practitioners in responding effectively to students' perspectives on assessment practices.

Keywords: Assessment, Students' Beliefs about Assessments, Dilemmas in Assessments, Students' Perceptions about Assessment

Introduction

ASSESSMENT IS A significant and complex issue in teaching and learning. It is defined in differing ways, has many forms, serves diverse purposes and involves a range of stakeholders who may hold quite different positions, expectations and perspectives. Expert commentators in higher education consistently argue that assessment is significant in determining students' engagement with learning, their learning behaviours and experiences, their learning outcomes, and their reported levels of program satisfaction (Angelo & Cross, 2001; Biggs & Tann, 2007; Gibbs, 2005; Gibbs, Simpson & McDonald, 2003; James & Devlin, 2002; Knight & Yorke, 2005; Pickford & Brown, 2006). The specific nature of beliefs and perceptions guides the practical approaches to teaching, learning and assessment that teachers and students adopt (Nasr, Booth, & Gillett, 1996; Rainer, 1999; Taylor, 1996) and exerts a strong influence on the quality of learning. As beliefs and perceptions are context specific it is critical that course teams have access to an intimate knowledge of their students views as well as insights into their own values and assumptions, in order to understand the unique dynamics of their courses, identify problems and take the initiative in seeking effective improvements (Shepard, 2000).

Despite the diversity of positions about the nature, value and purpose of assessment, a strong, shared rhetoric has emerged in higher education about *good practice*. Globally, governments, organisations and institutions are developing policies and guidelines that promote the importance of *good* assessment practices at all levels of education. Analysis of such documents shows that there is much common ground in the characteristics noted as *good*: they typically demand that assessment be reliable, fair, valid, authentic, reasonable, and educative. There is also a very well accepted rhetoric around the need for teachers to ensure assessments are clearly articulated, that assessment criteria are well described and that students are supported in understanding what is required in preparing their responses and that they receive detailed feedback enabling them to understand their grades and how to improve (ANTA, 2006; AVCC, 2005; Curriculum Council, 1998; Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education, 2006).

Increasingly, teachers are held accountable for designing and implementing *good* assessment tasks. Accountability measures such as government funded student surveys have become common. In Australia, for example, all graduates are invited to complete a Course Evaluation Questionnaire (CEQ) that includes questions about their experience of assessment, and institutional results (by field of study) are made publicly available. The public image of a university



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is an important factor in recruitment so student satisfaction can be critical to the health and well-being of institutions and can be a powerful influence on the development or even survival of programs of study. International surveys of student satisfaction suggest assessment is an area of great sensitivity, and typically one where students identify problems (Pickford, 2008). All university educators are faced with the challenge of designing assessments that not only meet rigorous institutional academic standards but also the demands of contemporary students who often have high expectations that their individual needs, preferences and rights will be satisfied. Consequently, most academic staff give great attention to the design and implementation of assessment and are acutely aware of and often somewhat anxious about the feedback students give about assessment through formal evaluations.

Background and Context

In 2004, Edith Cowan University (ECU) in Perth introduced a new teacher education course. Typically, Australian teacher education programs constrain their qualifications to an age range, *Early Childhood Education* (ages 0-8yrs) or *Primary* (ages 5-12yrs). However, there is a high demand in the Australian context, for teachers who can be flexible in moving between age groups, and can work across age groups in small rural and remote schools. The new program was intentionally innovative in providing pre-service education to qualify teachers to work with children from Kindergarten through to year 7. The development of the course brought together a creative team, who had the rare opportunity of completely rethinking the philosophical and conceptual frameworks for educating teachers. This team formed an unusually strong community of practice (Wenger, 1998) committed to developing an innovative program that was well aligned with a clear, strong set of principles (Appendix One) established in partnership with the local school community. These principles underpinned the design of the course, its initial implementation and its continuing development. In line with these principles, team members work collaboratively to design and implement good assessments and expect good outcomes from their time, energy and commitment.

The Problem

From the perspective of the teaching team, assessments were well matched to the learning outcomes of the course. They related well to the practical and authentic roles of teaching in schools with tasks clearly articulated, and marking criteria published. Great care was taken in marking; with extensive moderation and feedback given to all students.

However, it seems that things were not necessarily working as well as the team assumed. Collaborative, reflective practice is a core value, and the teaching team has a commitment to rigorous evaluation, and evidence-driven change. All units in the program are formally evaluated each semester using the University's Unit and Teaching Evaluation Instrument (UTEI). This is a survey that invites students to anonymously respond to a series of questions about the quality of their learning environment and experience using a 5-point Likert scale and with the opportunity for providing qualitative feedback. Analysis of the evaluation feedback suggested that whilst the students were generally highly satisfied with their learning experiences, they were frequently much less satisfied with the quality of assessment and feedback. Students seldom provided accompanying comments to elaborate on their views regarding assessment and feedback. Several team members were curious about the gap between their own assumptions that the assessments in their units were based on sound principles and implemented with rigour and care, and the students' perceptions that there were problems. Acknowledgement of differences in perceptions was the trigger for an action research project to find out more about the students' perspectives, with a view to understanding the nature of their concerns more fully, and hopefully improving practice.

In summary, the primary aims of the project were:

- to describe the experiences, perceptions and beliefs of students about assessment;
- to explain the discrepancy between positive overall student evaluations and less positive evaluation of assessment; and
- identify ways to improve practice that respond to students' need and expectations.

The team also wished to work in a way that would contribute to:

- enhancing the capacities of the teaching team (particularly in educational research methods); and
- further affirming and developing the positive attributes of the team as a learning community.

Methodology

The philosophies, principles and values underpinning our course also underpin our approach to research. Our intention from the start was that it should be collaborative, ethical, empowering and beneficial to all participants. A distinguishing feature of a community of practice as compared to a simple team is the respectful and equitable relationships of trust between members. The quality of relationships within the team allowed individual teachers to feel

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comfortable in openly sharing their practice while working towards a common goal, where individual members willingly share their problems, and contribute in a personal way.

We place a high value on reflective practice and our overall approach to investigating the assessment issue was modelled on an action research/learning cycle. Action research is described and applied differently in the literature, but it commonly features one or more cycles of inquiry that include:

1. study and planning (identifying and describing problems; collecting evidence relevant to understanding the issue; analysing and interpreting the evidence; researching and problem-solving about potential solutions and improvements);
2. taking actions (implement improvements; changing and adapting processes and approaches);
3. evaluation (reviewing and reflecting on effectiveness/impact of actions); and
4. sharing of learning (Dissemination through formal and informal means).

Action research is widely used in educational settings and many writers, theorists and practitioners claim excellent learning experiences and outcomes for this kind of approach (McIntire, 2008; Somekh, 2006; Stringer, 2007; Centre for Action Research, 2008). The research methods adopted were selected for their capacity to collect and interrogate data about students' responses to assessment, and also for the contribution they could make to the learning and development of team members and to the growth and learning of our students. Roles undertaken by participants were planned to provide learning opportunities guided by principles of inclusivity and respect as well as a commitment to experimentation, risk-taking and innovation. We were therefore very keen to adapt our approach to respond to our specific context and to show sensitivity to participant needs and potential benefits.

Reflective practice demands the collection of rich, authentic evidence, but this can typically be difficult, time-consuming and expensive to collect. The teaching team have heavy workloads and little time for additional tasks. Our students lead very busy lives and are often resistant to engaging in evaluation and course feedback activities which they see as extra workload with little personal value. The current climate of accountability means that students are often required to complete formal evaluations of various kinds and this can lead to cynicism and evaluation fatigue. Therefore our data collection methods were quite creative, designed to be intrinsically motivating; to maximise richness, diversity and honesty of data; to add value to student learning; and to minimise additional time commitment.

In addition to analysing pre-existing quantitative and qualitative data, two further data collection strategies were used.

Data Collection One: Integrated Self Directed Student Focus Groups

Students in five 4th year tutorial groups (122 students in total) were invited to participate in self-directed student focus groups. These students represent the course demographics of age, gender, experience, ability, achievements and engagement with study. They undertook participation in this research as a voluntary activity but within scheduled tutorial time. Conducting the focus groups within teaching time was an effective way to tap into the widest possible spread of opinion, including students who might not normally volunteer, and indeed almost all students volunteered to take part. The benefit to the students' learning was in giving them an explicit experience of methodologies that they could use themselves with their own classes; and role modelling collaborative work practices that are genuinely inclusive of diverse stakeholders. The unit of study they were undertaking was preparing them for their final teaching practicum and discussions about evaluation strategies, and ways of working collaboratively were a natural part of the curriculum.

Self-selected groups of 3-5 were given the UTEI results for a unit that all these students had completed the previous semester. These students had been the respondents for these UTEI results. The UTEI report gave the scores for all questions for this unit and also for one of the tutors teaching in the unit (survey tool: http://www.ecu.edu.au/GPPS/qatl/utei_system.html). This particular UTEI result had a discrepancy between the overall positive responses and the less positive responses with regard to assessment and feedback. Each group was asked to examine the UTEI data, explain the student responses, suggest changes the teachers needed to improve scores; and provide any further insights they had into students' thinking about assessment. Each group was given an iPod to record their responses with brief suggestions on ways to ensure the information would be easy to transcribe, and were left to manage the focus group themselves in private for 20 minutes.

Focus groups are frequently used to collect rich data, as they have the benefit of encouraging open and honest discussion. It is less common to use self-directed groups (Barbour, 2007), however, this approach was consistent with course principles in treating students as capable contributors and as genuine partners in the learning enterprise. This approach has been shown to enhance participants' learning about the issues being investigated and increasing self-efficacy (Zorn, Roper, Broadfoot & Weaver, 2006). The recordings were collected and

sent directly to a transcriber, who transcribed text without names. This ensured students' contributions remained anonymous, and also meant that teachers received the information in a clear well presented format that they could efficiently analyse. Feedback from students immediately following the recording sessions suggested that they found this method of data collection to be ethical and effective. They enjoyed the opportunity to use iPods. They reported that they had been more thoughtful, honest and open in their responses than in the UTEI survey. Self-selecting student groups had the advantage of encouraging quite dynamic naturalistic conversations. It enabled students to challenge, elaborate on, and reconsider answers or add alternative explanations. This methodology is not widely reported elsewhere, but certainly is a good outcome of the research in itself.

Students in the focus groups were also invited to complete an individual short written response. This gave opportunity to add ideas or explanations that had not been fully explored in the focus group discussion. 52 students completed a written response.

Data Collection Two: Online Discussion Boards

Third-year students undertaking a unit about assessment were also invited to contribute to this research via an optional un-moderated online discussion about assessment beliefs. This was a voluntary learning opportunity in this unit. Students were asked to describe personal experiences with assessment and feedback. They also discussed feedback they would typically give when asked to evaluate assessment in their units. The benefit to the students was that this activity gave them a structured opportunity to reflect on their tacit knowledge and make connections between their own beliefs and experiences and the theoretical perspectives they needed to understand.

This approach generated rich data, in a pre-written form, quickly and easily. However, just eight students responded out of a potential cohort of over 100. Data collection through voluntary contributions outside teaching time was clearly not as effective as through voluntary contribution within teaching time.

Data Analysis

The qualitative data (transcripts, short written responses and discussion-board printouts) were analysed by bracketing recurrent themes. Participant researchers worked independently to highlight and name each different idea in the texts, and then the group shared interpretations, re-shaping or elaborating where appropriate, but retaining the widest range of interpretations (Richards, 2005). Inter-researcher comparison of meanings and interpretations

strengthens the reliability of the analysis (Flick, 2007) and it also led to significant team discussions around the concepts of reliability, validity and the trustworthiness of the data and the collection methods. This not only deepened the research capacity, knowledge and skills of the group members but also developed shared understandings contributing to an even stronger sense of community (both primary goals of the project). It is acknowledged that thematic coding is a limited first step in critical analysis (Bazley, 2008/9) but it provides description and insights worthy of sharing even at this early stage. This also ensured all relevant themes were acknowledged in a systematic way.

Findings

One excellent outcome of the research was that rich data were collected from a wide range of students in a time efficient way. Results from the three data sources (focus group, written responses and 3rd year online discussion) were treated as a unified source as the online discussion group was too small to provide valid distinctions between year group responses. The data collected is immensely rich: analysis is on-going and only the interpretations made in the first round of analysis are reported here. Across both year groups, the participant researchers identified and agreed on many emergent themes. It is only the most significant of these themes, representing multiple citing by students that are reported in this paper: *fairness; emotion; power; conceptualisation of assessment; feedback; support; relevance and authenticity*. Students expressed diverse opinions, however, as we were not able to identify individuals it was not possible to analyse any particular patterns of response by demographic.

Emergent Themes

Fairness

Students were very concerned with the fairness of assessments. Consistency was a commonly cited issue. Above all, students expected tutors to be consistent in their standards and judgements. There was a high expectation that the assessments set would be closely aligned with the "*taught elements of the course*", although interestingly several students expressed a view that they expected to be assessed on material covered in the tutorial activities but not in lectures or in set and recommended readings.

Clarity in terms of expectations of the assessment was seen as very important and the use of clear rubrics was appreciated. Any "*fudginess*" in the criteria was regarded as unfair. The responsibility for interpreting assessment tasks was typically seen as a critical part of the tutors' role, rather than an intrinsic

part of the students' learning task. Consistency between units in relation to the wording of assessment criteria, particularly with regard to the assessment of graduate attributes was another issue identified.

The assessment instrument and how legitimately it judged the student's abilities was another issue of fairness identified. The weighting of assessments and the number of assessments in a unit were often perceived as unfair. Weightings were often regarded negatively if the time involved in the task was not seen to be acknowledged in the marks assigned.

There was a general recognition by the students that university policy influenced the design of assessment. For example, departmental assessment policy requires two assessment tasks, one of which must demonstrate independent student achievement (most usually achieved through examination). However, many students felt that two assessment items per unit put undue pressure on some students. There was a widespread belief that a number of smaller assessable components would be a fairer method of assessment than one or two high stake assessments. Examinations were generally judged not to adequately assess student abilities effectively. Students expected that assessments would be marked according to legitimate (fair) criteria, but there were different ideas about what this might mean. Comments were made about the amount of effort put into work and many students who put in a large effort felt that they received the same grades as those who made less effort. A significant number of students also rejected the idea that writing skills should be considered in grading assessments particularly in exams. This suggests they are aware of but do not support university policy that generic skills such as writing should be assessed. It is a particularly curious finding as these students will all be required to teach writing themselves as a core part of their future work as K-7 teachers.

Trust in marking procedures, systems and markers were consistent issues raised in relation to fairness. Students frequently highlighted inconsistency between different lecturers' and tutors' understanding and application of academic standards as *"unfair"*. The liberal or strict application of word limits was an example given where students felt lack of consistency in adhering to set standards could advantage or disadvantage students. Several students believed that this lack of consistency of expectations also included differences in expectation about workloads between tutorial groups. The importance of the marker providing fair marks with no bias contingent on knowing the student was a concern raised, and anonymous submission was suggested as a way of limiting bias. Students perceived feedback to be unjust in some cases, not always trusting that the marker had read the assignment carefully. Some

comments regarding assessment fairness included a perception that the tutor did not recognise learning, *"I knew a lot but my marks did not reflect this."* Mostly, students did not appear to know or perhaps believe that tutors engaged in formal moderation processes. Several students who were aware of these moderation practices challenged their peers on this point, but they still thought that current processes were insufficient.

Emotion

The transcripts demonstrated, in a powerful way, that assessment is a highly charged topic that evoked strong emotions in most students. This was reflected in the animated nature of discussions and the powerful language used in describing issues of concern: for example, *"the bell curve sucks"*. Although there were occasional instances where students stated that they were excited by the challenge of assessment and experienced a sense of satisfaction and pleasure in completing assessed tasks, stress and anxiety were more frequently articulated as the emotions related to assessment. Once again the high stakes nature of assessment was identified as causing emotional responses: *"I found myself hating university for the mere fact that assignments are worth so much of the marks and I get so stressed about passing it takes away the enjoyment of the unit"*. Exams were singled out also as causing unnecessary stress. Feedback was also a source of emotional disturbance, and sometimes perceived as harsh criticism and very personalised. Comments relating to not liking feedback, in particular not liking being corrected, judged and compared were common. Significant numbers of students noted their negative emotional responses to low scores or negative comments in tutors' feedback. They used descriptions such as, *"a put down" ... "tutor's remarks or feedback, can cause upset" ... "no one likes being judged for their personal ideas and beliefs and it is hard to accept when you are negatively judged."* Students frequently stated that they were angry and upset when they did not understand what was expected of them and/or they had a bad experience during completing the assessment. For the most part, students saw assessment as a negative experience, using descriptions like, *"Students will never like assessment no matter what they are"*, and *"... assessment is not liked by anybody"*.

Power

Power as a theme emerged particularly in relation to who has control in the assessment process. Assessment was perceived to dominate and control the curriculum, and therefore to dominate workload. Very few students communicated a sense of self-efficacy or empowerment through assessment and ex-

pressed feelings of *'helplessness'* about their involvement. Policy issues were noted, but students did not see them as positively supporting the students' rights to quality processes. Instead they perceived assessment as someone else's agenda that they have to fit in with, that neither staff nor students had much influence over. They reported that staff often shared their dissatisfaction with university rules around assessment and were frustrated by the dictates of *"the university"*.

Conceptualisations of Assessment

The expressed perceptions indicate that students have diverse conceptualisations of the purpose of assessment and different understandings of the process. Comments suggest that they perceive assessment most strongly in terms of learning, marks, structure, processes and usefulness. Students responded particularly positively to the notion of assessment as a tool for learning and were very aware that the course promoted this purpose in relation to their own learning, and in relation to them being future teachers. Several suggested that a different type of assessment would have been better, as well as *"more educative assessments"* and *"richer assessments which actually represent our knowledge"*.

Students generally appeared less aware of the summative purposes of assessment, and less supportive of the inclusion of assessments that judged their performance. The purpose of examinations in particular was questioned, and many expressed a view that *"there should be no exams"*. Examinations were criticised for being insufficiently educative, and focussing too much on theory. Indeed, for a notable number of students theory was seen as having little value or place in any assessed work. Rather they saw practical applications as the only worthwhile measure of student outcomes, with several students being adamant that *"theory should not be included in an art unit"*. Students could not see any relevance in exams and this was particularly true in the context of the art unit, *"Eliminate exams – not 'authentic' assessment of learning... It is far too stressful to be able to think clearly. Assessment should be mostly formative to get a gradual result instead of basing it all on one score at the end... ditch the exam, it's art!"*

For some students the weighting of assessments was seen as problematic especially in relation to effort/time they put into it. Time and commitment was seen as more important to high scores than the demonstration of skill and knowledge from the student perspective. If the student spent a lot of time on the assignment, they expected to be rewarded by high weighting and/or high scores.

The data gave evidence of some interesting but conflicting perceptions about the responsibilities of tutors and students. Students commented repeatedly on the need for tutors to be very clear in describing exactly what was needed in an assessment, to provide detailed rubrics and notes on how students should approach tasks and what they should include or exclude. This implies a view that analysing and interpreting assessment tasks and structuring tasks is the tutors' responsibility rather than part of the learners' role. Similarly, it was seen as the tutors' role to find out what students know, by being insightful about the students' work or setting really explicit simple tasks, rather than the students' responsibility to clearly articulate their knowledge. However, students also believed that excessive *spoon-feeding* is inappropriate, and not compatible with high-level learning in degree courses. The course team recognise that this is an area worthy of further consideration. There is a delicate balance between appropriate support and inappropriate dependence.

Feedback

Feedback received a lot of attention in the comments on assessment. Perceptions in relation to feedback related to most of the themes already discussed. Fairness is indicated in relation to bias, comprehensiveness and consistency between tutors and perceived lack of ability of students to act on feedback. Emotion is indicated in relation to the personalising of feedback. Students dislike negative feedback and feel great ownership of their work. Power was discussed in terms of roles and responsibilities in feedback, a perception that lecturers should *"find out what we know"* when marking. Student conceptualisation of the purpose of feedback was focussed on learning rather justifying and explaining grades.

The timing of feedback was important to students, and certainly the idealised model was for very fast responses: *"I want feedback on that last assignment before exam so I know where I stand"*. However, the motivations for this were varied. In some cases there was an expressed desire for learning from feedback, but in other cases it was more about managing results to minimise the effort required to pass.

It was common for students to say they wanted more feedback than they currently receive. The amount of feedback students received also seemed to vary; some reported receiving more than others. There was a generalised belief that the amount of feedback should be equitable and that tutors should moderate both expectations and marking.

Many students valued the notion of feed-forward, *"Feedback given after assessment is useless, it needs to be before"...* *"Feedback points out what you needed to do but tutors should have told you that*

before hand – it needs to be more explicit”... “Advising students before marking not after what is required”. A demand for feed-forward was also implied in many statements about the need for, “*Clearer expectations of assessment requirements, more elaborate feedback.*” Eleven students commented on the need for more “*explicit expectations with perhaps an explicit rubric*”, even though all units have published rubrics.

Support

Many students were appreciative of support given in helping them to understand or complete assessment tasks. They particularly liked the provision of task examples or sample exam answers offered by some lecturers, valuing model answers that gave them confidence about “*what was expected*”. Several stated that they, “*like assessment if there is structure and support*”, but there were numerous complaints about unit outlines (a formal booklet describing unit outcomes, schedules and assessment tasks) that were not clear enough. A few students also described trying to access further clarification unsuccessfully even when asking for more info it is not given: “*When we asked for help all we got was a regurgitation of the unit outline*”.

Some students indicated that there was too little attention given to meeting individual needs through assessment. They felt there should have been individual support given to students who needed it, “*One on one with students who gain low marks*”; and that the course should cater more effectively for students’ diverse needs and different learning styles. Expectations about teacher availability to support students were very high.

Relevance and Authenticity

Relevance and authenticity of assessment were significant issues for students. Students expected that all assessments would be of direct significance to their own teaching roles, however, both implicit and explicit definitions of relevance and authenticity were quite varied. In some cases relevance was associated with short term needs or with practical activities, rather than engagement with theory or with opportunities to demonstrate the development of skills. For example, a portfolio of teaching tips for classroom teaching was viewed as relevant, but an exam question about assessing a child’s drawing against Rhonda Kellog’s Developmental Framework, or planning an art session for an imagined class was not. Rich tasks were frequently cited as examples of better assessments, but conversely examinations were regarded as lacking relevance. Examinations were a source of particular dissatisfaction and were mostly described as “*not relevant*”. Exam relevance was

highly questioned, and many students challenged the validity of, “*what can be evaluated in a 2 hour exam compared to a 10 week assignment.*”

Interestingly students expected assessments to be authentic in demonstrating alignment with their perceptions of the course principles. They expected that the course team would “*practice what it preached,*” but perception about what this might mean differed. Another interpretation of relevance for some students was the degree of match between learning activities and outcomes, and the exam questions. One student, for example, questioned the value of an excursion (designed to give practical experience of planning and running art experiences in the community) if it was not assessed in the exam.

Student Observations on the UTEI Process

In addition to the emerging themes about students’ perceptions of assessment, the data were quite revealing in terms of the students’ insights into the university’s formal student evaluation tool: the Unit and Teaching Evaluation Instrument (UTEI). Insights were provided about the way students answered assessment specific questions as well as about the reliability and validity of the tool itself.

Student interpretations of the UTEI reports were consistent with staff: students typically described scores as quite positive overall, but they easily identified the phenomenon of lower scores on assessment items in the sample provided. “*More people were satisfied with the unit than not*”... “*Assessment had the lowest mean out of all of them.*” Students did not seem to be surprised by this, and many thought it was inevitable, claiming that, “*students just don’t like assessment*”, and for many assessment is never a positive experience no matter what unit they are studying.

Particular factors cited as influencing the results included: students’ relationship with the actual tutors, and their success or enjoyment of the subject; and their levels of commitment to the course and willingness to contribute. Several problems were identified in the implementation of the evaluation, which pointed to inaccurate or invalid outcomes. For example, the timing of the evaluation event seems to be quite critical: and in most cases it was seen as too early or too close to stressful events such as the examinations.

Many students thought their relationship with their tutor had a big impact on UTEI responses, with factors such as the quality of the tutor – preparation, knowledge, time they arrive (professionalism) being significant. One respondent commented that marks may be awarded on the basis of the tutors personality “*They may like a tutor personally and mark the UTEI*

based on personality rather than on the tutors ability." Several believed that some evaluations were related to the marks given by the tutor and the implication was that tutors giving high scores were more likely to receive good evaluations than those awarding low scores: *"Their [other students] thinking about assessment is influenced by the mark and feedback they got."*

The attitude of students and their commitment and professionalism was identified as significant. *"How much people enjoyed the unit would affect their marks" ... "Students ticking box that most represents feelings towards whole unit – not individual items."* Some students commented on the benefit of UTEI in improving the unit for future students, and their willingness to contribute, *"Because they wanted to give their point of view. They wanted to make a difference to the unit for future"*. Others thought UTEIs are too long so people rush their answers.

Overall comments about the UTEI as an instrument were negative, focusing on its unreliability, bad timing and questions that are not sufficiently specific, *"I think that they say very little about the unit as the questions are not specific to the content."* Several students pointed out the irony that the evaluation was conducted before the students had completed the unit, in advance of the submission of final assessments pieces and the exam and prior to receiving their final results and feedback, *"some people do not take the time to accurately complete the questionnaire as it was timed too early (before the end of the unit)"*. Students suggested that the UTEIs were given at a time of high stress when little care is taken and some could not be bothered or were feeling like they lack confidence while waiting for their marks. They felt that if the UTEI data had been collected after the exam, there may have been a different result.

Some students saw the time factor as causing students to make UTEI judgements in a rushed manner and it was suggested that some students always respond using a set format, *"First give a positive comment, followed by a negative one, finish with a positive... they chose to respond in the middle of the scale which then says very little... Once again the safe choice, they don't disagree or strongly agree but they seem undecided in some way. No one is that agreeable. Its a shame because if you choose the safe choice then the tutors don't know what needs to be fixed"*.

In an effort to make the evaluation process more efficient the university had also moved from paper-based evaluations conducted in class time to online evaluations completed in the student's own time. Many students commented that this led to a reduction in the number of students taking the time to complete the UTEI, and to the likely bias that would be

achieved through the particular types of students contributing. Students advised, *"Do UTEIs in lectures again for more participants"*.

Discussion

As a community of practice, the data collected in this action research is highly significant. It is dense, rich and complex; and has promoted serious critical reflection and questioning of practice. There is much more analysis to be completed. The group have shared several key observations and insights and identified recommendations for change.

Perhaps the most significant observation is about the power of the student voice in supporting reflective practice. The course team has critical reflection as a core value, and this pre-supposes a willingness to seek and listen to feedback. Formal evaluations are conducted regularly and throughout all teaching events, the team observe learners carefully to gauge their reactions, we actively invite critical comment and frequently talk to students about their experiences, preferences and expectations. Nevertheless, the quality, diversity and richness of voice captured particularly through self-directed focus groups and online discussions revealed new insights and in a way that affected the group deeply. Team members recognise there are always improvements that can be made, however, they were surprised at some of the negative experiences students spoke about. For instance, the lack of trust in the tutors' judgments and the perception of potential bias and inequitable treatment in marking, the strength of feeling about perceived differences between tutors' expectations with regard to students' workload and academic standards were all unexpected.

Many issues raised were well known to the staff, such as the anxiety that assessment can cause and the concern for relevance, but there were other issues where the difference between the teachers' assumptions about assessment and the students' perspective was significant. A good example of this is the strength of students' conception of assessment for learning, without the balancing conception of assessment for the purposes of making judgement and accrediting learning. Despite studying the multiple purposes of assessment in their taught classes, students' seems to reject judgement as a legitimate outcome of assessment. Subtle differences in perceptions about the roles and responsibilities of students and teachers were revealed, prompting deep thinking of our position. One example here was the students' repeated calls for clarification about assessment tasks. Whilst the team do usually provide quite detailed marking keys, notes to support understanding about the tasks their purposes and parameters, discussion about assessments in lectures and tutorials, and

make themselves available for questions online and after classes, it seems that this is rarely satisfying students' need. The teaching team also recognised that providing overly explicit details about assessment tasks can develop highly dependent students with naïve epistemological beliefs. While team members support the notion of clarity in task and expectation, they also believe that analysing the task is an intrinsic part of any assessment. Authentic tasks that simulate real world problems and dilemmas must by their nature include elements of ambiguity, choices and flexible interpretation, and it is part of the learners' role to grapple with understanding the task and working to clarify the assessment task for themselves, at least to some extent. Typically the teaching team would plan to provide quite extensive support to first year students who need to learn about university expectations, but would anticipate greater independence amongst 3rd and 4th years. The student voice made us question if we had the balance right, if we needed to provide more (or different) scaffolding and to consider if we needed to encourage greater student independence, and perhaps better understandings about the intrinsic "messiness" of real world problem solving.

The student voice reminded us of significant issues that we care deeply about, think we do well, but are not always achieving in their eyes. Our management of feedback is a good example here. Although we think we work hard to provide detailed and equitable feedback; we believe that we use a diverse range of strategies to help students both learn from their assessments and understand the reasons for their grades; and that we apply rigorous moderation across tutors and student cohorts, this is not the experience from a student point of view.

The feedback also caused us to reconsider the effectiveness of our communication about assessment processes. Whilst we see our student peer and self assessment practices as part of the feedback process, students seem only to recognise direct 1-1 feedback from the teachers as worthwhile. Very few students knew about the quite rigorous moderation practices we used. On reflection, we realised that in fact we had not explicitly articulated this. Likewise, perhaps we are not sufficiently clear about our own intentions in setting different kinds of assessments. This indicates a need to engage students in much more explicit and educative discussions about assessment to develop better shared understandings.

The strength of negative emotion attached to assessment and particularly examinations was a powerful signal for us to reconsider our practices. In the genuine attempt to encourage good practice, national guidelines and university rules have increased in recent years. And in some cases this has led to a loss of control over practice at a course level. The

students' helped us remember our professional expertise and strengthened our resolve to revisit the real needs and purposes of our particular context.

The issues raised by our students are very consistent with the global literature on assessment. And the emergent issues of our study *fairness; emotion; power; conceptualisation of assessment; feedback; support; relevance and authenticity* are evident in contemporary writing, research, and policy recommendations (Angelo & Cross, 2001; Biggs & Tann, 2007; Gibbs, 2005; Gibbs, Simpson & McDonald 2003; James & Devlin, 2002; Knight & Yorke, 2005; Martin, Prosser, Trigwell, Ramsden, & Benjamin, 2000; Pickford & Brown, 2006; Prosser & Trigwell, 1997). Consistency with evidence from the wider research community, lends strength to the reliability and significance of our findings. However, an important insight from our own investigation is also the diversity of student experience and perspective, and the conflict between some staff beliefs about the effectiveness of our teaching and the students' perception of the experience.

The particular beliefs held by university teachers and students about assessment have a significant impact on teaching and learning practice influencing the practical teaching approaches teachers choose and the learning approaches adopted by students (Samuelowicz & Bain, 2002; Shanka, 2000). Beliefs can be tacit or overt (Delandshere, 2001) and this duality can give rise to some difficulties in identifying and analysing beliefs. However, it is in practical approaches to teaching and learning that such beliefs become most evident. A practice-belief cycle forms the basis of much discussion about how and why assessment practices are implemented, perceived and received by university teachers and students respectively. This affirms the importance of exploring context specific beliefs not simply relying on generic findings from research and the significance of teaching teams engaging in research and reflection with their students as partners in learning.

Many educationalists suggest that the traditional instructivist practices are being gradually superseded by an approach which advocates constructivist pedagogy (Fetherston, 1997; Herrington & Standen, 1999). This paradigm change has influenced teachers' beliefs about the value of assessment (Winter, 2003), and subsequently had an impact on the beliefs about assessment held by university students (Donnan, 1996; Hargreaves, 1997). This is certainly true of our practice, but the evidence of the research suggests we have a long way to go in achieving shared, coherent beliefs. The literature is strong in suggesting that, students' perceptions of assessment tasks can influence their beliefs of their entire course of studies and even their motivation to engage in their studies, and this too is born out by our study.

Past studies have demonstrated how university students and teachers alike respond more positively to assessment processes and ideas which are relevant and clearly linked to meaningful outcomes. For example, students have been found to respond positively to assessment tasks which are seen as being authentic, especially if they clearly understand how the assessment task is related to their own practical work and future employment (Herrington & Herrington, 1998). Similarly, teachers are more motivated and satisfied when they also see the relevance of assessment in their work with students (Brown, 2004). Conversely, students who do not understand the purpose or meaning of their university assessment tasks can develop and retain negative beliefs about and perceptions of assessment (Shepard, 2000). Such conflicting and dissonant perceptions have caused the very nature of the purpose of educational assessment and the assumptions on which it is based to come under scrutiny (Delandshere, 2001). Our findings highlight the diversity and complexity of conceptions about assessment held by staff and students even within one program of study, and remind us that relevance may not be understood by everyone in a singular way.

When students, or teachers, develop especially negative beliefs about assessment, such ideas can impact on the quality of the students' learning experiences. Among others, this is one of the reasons why the study of assessment beliefs is a concern to university teachers. When beliefs about assessment are particularly negative or conflicting, the quality of learning can be adversely affected. Typically, evaluation instruments used to evaluate the quality of university teaching and courses pinpoint issues of assessment as areas associated with low student satisfaction (Pickford, 2006). Furthermore, student's understanding of the purpose of assessment tasks is often low or misdirected (Light & Cox, 2001) which can cause conflicting expectations between lecturers and students. Such negative perceptions of assessment have been reported as being quite widespread across a variety of disciplines. This may be one of the reasons that students' perceptions of assessment tasks, the way they are assessed and their assessment results are so fraught with conflict and misunderstanding.

Perhaps the reason for such concern about assessment can be tracked to the conflicting beliefs associated with implementing assessment practices in university contexts. For example, some students' beliefs about assessment may be focused on issues of reward and punishment which can be associated with behaviourist learning philosophies (Tobin, 1990). Such beliefs can cause students to perceive assessment in a way that is primarily focused on cause and effect—that is, assessment is often viewed as a process of

contributing effort to complete assignments and examinations with an end-point of some reward (such as marks, grades or qualifications) or punishment (such as failure, requirements to repeat courses or low grades). Furthermore, negative perceptions about assessment has also been correlated with students adopting surface approaches to learning which can reduce the quality of their learning (Ramsden, 1997).

These more traditional educational ideas about assessment can clash with more constructivist ideas about teaching, learning and assessment. However, current educational philosophies associated with situated cognition (Herrington & Standen, 1999; Hildebrand, 1999), constructivism (Beck, Czerniak & Lumpe, 2000; Howard, McGee, Schwartz & Purcell, 2000), problem-based learning (Savery & Duffy, 1995) and authentic learning (Berns & Erickson, 2001; Herrington, Sparrow & Herrington, 2000; Wiggins & Grant, 1990), suggest that assessment should be more than an experience dominated by reward and punishment processes. Advocates of the assessment for learning (Wiggins, 1998, 2004) movement, as opposed to simply assessment of learning, would suggest that assessment processes should be educative for students as well as being windows into student learning for teachers (Shepard, 2000). The findings of this study clearly demonstrate that many of our students hold negative perceptions and beliefs about assessment in university contexts, and that some of this reflects problems of effective implementation of good practice but some reflects difference in thinking about the nature and purpose of assessment. Understanding the difference between these two causes of dissatisfaction is critical to the decisions the teaching team will make about how to improve the student learning experience.

Conclusions

Engagement in an action learning project that reveals students' authentic perceptions and beliefs about assessment has been an important experience for the teaching team. The methodologies adopted in this study seem to be robust, effective and efficient. They work well for students, are readily adaptable to many contexts, and provide a useful evaluation model for time-poor teachers and students. The richness and immediacy of data is powerful, and has had a significant impact on staff, which means they cannot easily ignore the student perspective. The clear connections between our own findings and the growing body of educational literature about assessment provide affirmation that certain "big ideas" do indeed have significance. Students are universally concerned about fairness, reliability, validity, authenticity and relevance. However, the subtle array of local differences and the diversity of the context specific student

experience and voice alerts us to the need to listen intently to multiple perspectives, and not to make simple assumptions about the meanings that students place on such concepts. Changes and improvements will be most powerful when they are well-informed, and the evidence needs to be localized. Further work clearly needs to be done to understand the student perspective, and to work towards mutually beneficial outcomes. Perhaps the most important learning has

been about the importance of actually hearing honest and detailed student feedback that represents diverse perspectives; and the value of undertaking evidence-based critical reflection within a community that provides the support, trust and encouragement to accept and respond to feedback that can on occasions challenge the beliefs, perceptions and effectiveness of teachers.

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Appendix 1

Principles of the Kindergarten through Primary Program at Edith Cowan University, Perth, Western Australia

- Enhanced learning for children as the focus of the school-university relationship
- Reflective inquiry that connects practice and theory
- Student teachers, mentor teachers and teacher educators working together as 'learning partners' in the authentic context of schools, to better understand and enhance teaching and learning
- Teaching in all aspects of the course constructed so student teachers become researchers of their own practice
- Opportunities made available for schools mentor teachers and pre-service teachers to pursue collaborative curriculum inquiry, curriculum development and teaching practice investigations.

Learning Principles

- Learning is a dynamic, active process
- Learning is a multi modal process integrating physical, cognitive, social and emotional dimensions
- Learning is a dynamic process of making and constructing meaning
- Learning is an interactive process
- Significant learning contextualises the acquisition of skills and knowledge to explore meaningful questions

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Project Six: Student Goals

Context for the paper

In 2006, I was a member of an institutional research team who won an Australian Learning and Teaching Council (ALTC) grant to investigate the extent to which diverse student cohorts demonstrate commonalities and differences with regard to resilience and effective progression. My involvement in the project was negotiated as part of my role as the Faculty Quality Improvement Manager, and responded to a Faculty imperative to improve student progression and completion rates.

Relevance to the portfolio

Effective student learning is one measure of Teaching Excellence. The literature provides strong evidence that the way students approach study, has an influence on their outcomes (see Chapter Two, Teaching Excellence as Student Learning). One significant finding in this study is the importance of student goals in helping students to persist and succeed despite difficulties they might encounter. An implication from the study is that good teaching (teaching excellence) must attend not only to the development of desired professional/discipline outcomes, but also to helping students to understand themselves, the factors outside the teaching program that impact on their learning, and ways they need to act to maximize their chances of success. The project resonates with each of the conceptualizations of teaching excellence in my teaching excellence web.

Role of the doctoral candidate in the research, project development, and writing of the article

I was one of three people who developed the original research submission to the ALTC for funding. Subsequently, I was a team member throughout the research, contributing through:

- the refinement of the research approach and the development of the survey instrument;
- conducting focus groups and interviews;
- assisting in the analysis and interpretation of data, and the drafting of reports;
- taking the lead role in the drafting of findings about student goals with fellow researchers (See the final report of the project, p. 56-62);

Kinnear, A., Boyce, B., Sparrow, H., Middleton, S., & Cullity, M. (2008). *Diversity: A longitudinal study of how student diversity relates to resilience and successful*

progression in a new generation university. Edith Cowan University, Perth WA, with the ALTC

Available from: <http://www.chs.ecu.edu.au/org/tlo/projects/CG638/index.php>

- taking the lead role in writing and presenting the paper included in this portfolio:

Sparrow, H., Kinnear, A., Boyce, B., Middleton, S., & Cullity, M. (2008). *What's in it for me: The role of personal goals in student persistence and success*. Paper presented at Valuing Higher Education, SRHE Annual Conference, Liverpool UK.

The findings about student goals were also used as source material for a workshop I conducted (sole presenter) at the 2009 WA Teaching and Learning Forum, which was awarded the 'Best Presentation Award':

Sparrow, H., (presenter), Kinnear, A., Boyce, B., Middleton, S., & Cullity, M. (2009). *More similar than different: An exploration of powerful personal goals as a key to the persistence and success of diverse students*. Workshop presented at the WA Teaching and Learning Forum, Teaching and learning for global graduates, Curtin University Perth WA.

http://otl.curtin.edu.au/professional_development/conferences/tlf/tlf2009/contents-all.html

And a further international conference presentation:

Sparrow, H., (presenter), Kinnear, A., Boyce, B., Middleton, S., & Cullity, M. (2008). *Student diversity and the challenge of support for success*. Paper presented at the 31st Annual HERDSA Conference, Engaging Communities 1 - 4 July 2008. Rotorua, New Zealand.

http://conference.hersa.org.au/2008/pdfs/HERDSAProgramme_v8.pdf

Title: What's in it for me: The role of personal goals in student persistence and success

Presenter: Heather Sparrow: Edith Cowan University, Perth Western Australia

Authors: Ms Heather Sparrow: Edith Cowan University, Perth Western Australia
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Abstract Submission number: 0332;

Research domain: Student experience

Summary

Undergraduate access and participation has increased dramatically in the last 15 years, and a wider diversity of students is now undertaking higher education courses. Nonetheless, too many students with academic potential do not thrive, but rather they struggle and often fail, or simply withdraw. There is a growing literature about undergraduate attrition and retention; however, the reasons that some students have the qualities to persist and succeed at university, despite barriers and problems, remain under-researched. This paper discusses a striking initial finding from a 2-year project that investigated the factors contributing to student success: the critical role of students' goals in regard to their resilience, persistence and success, especially their ability to overcome problems and continue with their studies. The project is funded by the Australian Learning and Teaching Council (ALTC)

Context: What's the problem?

The global context for university teaching and learning has changed significantly in recent decades. Within a relatively short period (less than 30 years in many countries) universities have moved from providing advanced research and study opportunities for an elite group of students, to a mass higher education system that aspires to educate an increased number and diverse range of students and offer them life-long learning opportunities. Whilst social justice and equity initiatives, open entry pathways, and study loans for students have increased the number of university places available, there is evidence that not all students find their studies easy or engaging and attrition rates are high (AVCC, 2006; Long, & Hayden, 2000; DEST, 2004; Leathwood & O'Connell, 2003; Scott, 2005).

The importance of undergraduate transition and the first year experience in engaging and helping students succeed is widely acknowledged and there has been a concerted effort to implement programs that support and engage students (Darlestone-Jones, Cohen, Hanouid, Young, & Drew, 2003; Krause, Hartley, James, & McInnis, 2005). However, there is much less attention paid to the successful progression of students through the later years of their studies. Our understanding of the factors contributing to effective student progression is limited (Leach & Zepke, 2003; Robinson, 2004), and we have little knowledge about 'why some students have the resilience and persistence to succeed in their studies despite them experiencing barriers and problems'.

Background to the study

The findings presented in this paper reveal factors contributing to student success in one 'new-generation' university. The main data source is the experiences and perceptions and beliefs of diverse students, as captured through surveys, interviews, and focus groups. The opportunity to learn from the students' voice is a high priority for the research team.

Data collection was conducted in three key stages:

Stage One: A text-based survey conducted with 1200 students in the penultimate and final years of their degrees

Stage Two: Focus groups conducted with volunteers from Stage One to gain broad understandings of the students' experiences of university study and their perceptions and beliefs about successful students ($n < 200$).

Stage Three: Individual interviews and additional focus groups were conducted with smaller sub-sets of student participants from Stage Two ($n = 60$). These interviews explored their learning journeys through their final year of study and into the workforce. Wherever possible these students were interviewed twice, once in 2007 and once in

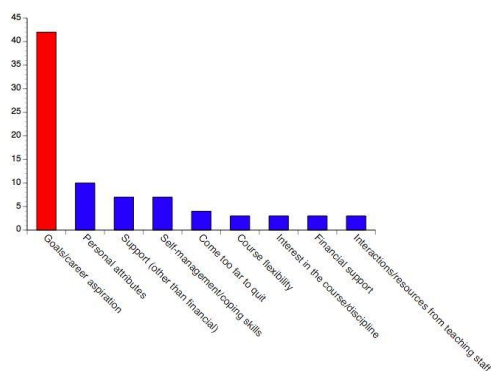
2008. This allowed the students to reflect on changes: across time, from their penultimate to final year of study, and from their final year of study into the workplace.

Student diversity is a particular focus of the study, so particular care was taken to ensure that participants at all three stages included Indigenous and International students; students from low-income families; first-generation students; mature-age students; full-time and part-time students; students from English as second language background and students with disabilities. The participants were also selected to represent different discipline and professional courses across all University faculties.

The initial survey (Stage One) was designed to collect base-line data about student demographics, for example: age, gender, background, entry pathways, course-work grades, and discipline. It also invited the students to:

- 1) reflect on their persistence and identify up to three significant factors they thought contributed to their success.
- 2) note if they had ever considered withdrawing from the course, and if so:
 - give reasons for considering withdrawal
 - give reasons why they had not withdrawn.

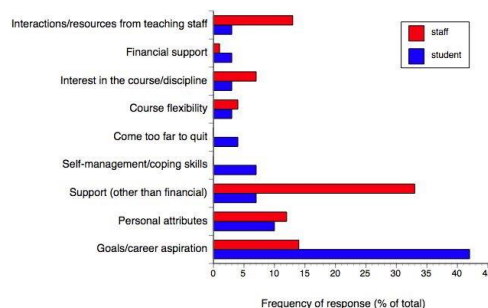
A copy of the survey tool and overall results is available at: <http://www.chs.ecu.edu.au/org/tlo/projects/CG638/>.



A significant survey finding was the critical role that personal goals have in student persistence. Students consistently named their own goals as being responsible for persistence. As shown in Table One (left), the frequency of occurrence was 42% of the total responses to the question *why did you persist when you thought about withdrawing?* The next most cited reason was personal attributes at a frequency of only 10%. The strength of this finding and its consistency across all the diverse student groups was remarkable and surprised the research team.

Subsequent dissemination discussion groups conducted with staff teaching in the participants' study programs revealed a similar response. Staff were more likely to identify the factors of *support* (from staff and/or family and friends), or *interactions and resources from teaching staff* as factors that encouraged persistence.

Table Two (right) shows the dramatic difference between frequency of reasons students gave for persisting, compared to staff predictions about students' reasons.



Analysis of the Stage One survey data was scanned and converted to text by a digital reader. The electronic text required careful manual checking and correction, and all data was entered into SPSS. This meant that the significance of student goals was not realized until after the completion of Stage Two focus groups. However, due to these insights, in the final round of interviews students were specifically asked to reflect on their goals and the relevance of them to their study.

Although the project is incomplete, a vast amount of data has been collected. Seventy interview transcripts have been collated and analysed. A decision was taken to adopt a grounded theory approach to the analysis. As transcripts from Stages Two and Three became available, each of the five members of the research team

contributed to an iterative, collaborative process of coding, analysis and interpretation. The first sets of transcripts were manually coded on an individual basis, and then the team compared their ideas and debated the similarities and differences of data themes. As common understandings were established, the themes were electronically sorted and examined using NVivo 7 data was thematically coded. This allowed us to identify the prevalence of particular themes across all transcripts; and relationships within and between different issues students raised, experiences they reported, and their demographic backgrounds. This analysis is currently ongoing. The findings offered here are tentative as they represent only the first level of analysis and interpretation. However, some valuable insights in relation to student goals are emerging and merit sharing, and they may provide an interesting stimulus for others concerned with understanding and promoting student success.

Emergent findings about goals

The narratives collected from interviews and focus groups confirm our survey data: most students believe their goals have a powerful influence not just on resilience but also over their approach to learning, their reactions to their teachers, and their interaction with the learning environment. Most students were able to articulate their goals, although they rarely used the terms 'goals' or 'aspirations', but rather referred to things they "wanted". Students' beliefs are rooted in the idea that their goals are inextricably linked to their level of motivation and study behaviours and that students with strong, goals are much more likely to manage difficulties and overcome barriers to success. It is remarkable that these beliefs were commonly expressed by students of all discipline and demographic backgrounds.

Observations from our initial analysis suggest that:

- student goals represent a variety of orientations, targets and foci, and the students **want** different things from their study: career or work; personal growth and fulfilment; self-efficacy and control; life-style achievements (economic and social); academic and learning achievements (good grades, course completion), intrinsic interests (in learning, disciplines, professions); personal ambition (to be the best, to become 'someone' who is or does); and/or altruism (to contribute, lead or provide role models)
- student goals are underpinned by different motivations and purposes: the reasons students want particular things are varied
- student goals may have diverse origins; they can be intrinsic or extrinsic; or they may be rooted in self, family, or culture. There is great diversity of goals across the student participants but there are also some indications that particular demographic groups may show common goal-based patterns and tendencies
- student goals work across varied time scales: short term, intermediate, or long term and these often function in different ways
- student goals have varying characteristics: strong (passion) or weak; and/or stable, dynamic and changing
- student goals (what they want & the reasons they want it) influence the way students approach learning, and the way they experience university life
- strong, clear goals assist students in responding positively to learning environments (including those that are not ideal), and provide the motivation to take the actions needed for success, and to solve problems associated with study and overcoming barriers
- students may be driven by a single goal but more often students have multiple goals that have relevance across all dimensions of their lives. Multiple goals interact in different ways, priorities change and the value students place on different goals underpins their decision-making
- Teachers can sometimes have a positive influence on the development and application of goals, through providing opportunities to discover goals, inspiring new goals, and helping students use their goals strategically for success.

A sequence of forthcoming papers will elaborate on these findings in more detail (see <http://www.chs.ecu.edu.au/org/tlo/projects/CG638/> for updates & references). For the purposes of this conference, what follows are some illustrative examples of student narratives, selected to share the spirit and diversity of students' experiences and beliefs.

Students spoke extensively about career goals, but they were often seeking quite different outcomes from their career goals. Careers could be intrinsically interesting because of the nature of the work, or equally because

students believed a career would, for example: y open the door to a better life style, create more enjoyment, provide a better life-balance or better security, or provide an opportunity to contribute to society or join a particular community. It was evident that students with apparently similar work goals might have very different motives and purposes.

Not all students had clear or specific career goals. Some of them were looking for experiences that would please them in the here and now, or satisfy their passions and desires. Despite the apparent dominance of economic goals, the following motives were revealed by the students: the sheer joy of learning, the intrinsic love of a discipline; the satisfaction of deeply felt personal need; or generic goals about self-development and self-efficacy. One or more of these goals were evident in a surprisingly high number of students:

My Uni Degree is not necessarily about working in that field but it's a field that interests me and it was more an interest... it was about extending that knowledge and that learning. I love learning, I absolutely love it.

... money is important, power is important, but my main focus is to become like a host, so my life belongs to me and I can do whatever I want with my life.

Participants were predominately mature-aged females, reflecting both the University demographic and a greater willingness to volunteer. It was evident that mature-aged women, in particular, were often seeking some personal satisfaction and achievement, following years of prioritising the needs of others. On the other hand, goals do often include other non-study priorities, for example, not wanting to compromise their children's education or experiences. For one parent her *priority is my kids*. Mature-aged people and people from groups under-represented in university were frequently driven by the goal of role-modelling success through education. The following comment from a very successful Indigenous student illustrates this point:

It's taken me a while to find out what I wanted to study but I've found something that I like and it makes me want to go to uni to learn what I'm learning... and probably wanting to be a role model in other avenues of sport has helped me as well... Young Indigenous kids in particular, to show them that there are more avenues than just being that top AFL [Australian Football League] player and stuff like that.

For many students, goals expressed a need to prove themselves, sometimes against others, sometimes against themselves, sometimes to prove others judgements of their capacities were wrong. In the words of one student: [my goals] *were very simple. To try to see whether I could do university full-time, and I had no idea whether I am even university material.* Our university is a new generation university where many students are the first in their families to participate in higher education, and they have often achieved entry via alternative pathways. For these students, attending university and achieving some academic success can in itself be regarded as a real achievement against the odds.

The need to demonstrate or improve self-esteem and self-worth clearly underpinned some students' goals. In most cases this was expressed as an aspiration to affirm a positive sense of self, or avoid negatives such as sense of failure. The notion of *'wanting to prove myself'* was stressed by these students as they revealed a desire to prove themselves to *younger students*, to their families, and in one case to herself in spite of her physical disability. One student captures the students' motive 'to prove' themselves academically and the anxiety that has surrounded their decisions to study: *I'm a fear of failure person! I quit uni the first time and when I went back to uni, it was of my own volition, it was my choice and it was something that I'd chosen to do. I'm one of those people, if I decide to do something, I will stick by my guns and do it and so quite frequently the goal was just to get the assignment in, just to get through and pass the exam.*

For some students study goals were clearly aligned with family values, beliefs and aspirations. This was particularly evident in the case of several international students who came from very family oriented cultures or where the parent believed that the student would experience personal and vocational growth from studying overseas, and in this case Australia.

The expression *'I want'*, was often presented with great conviction and passion: *I want to go do this, go do that and I absolutely love it. It's awesome.* Students spoke with emotion about the things they wanted from their

university study and experience. The term 'want' was accompanied by a conviction that they had identified an appropriate goal and a determination to achieve it. Strongly held personal goals keep students motivated and give them the persistence and resilience to work through problems, and overcome difficulties. The students spoke about *sticking it out* (i.e., persisting) as *there is a light at the end of the tunnel* that will lead to attainment of their goals. A student claimed: *having clear goals makes it a whole lot easier to succeed at uni*. The strength of a students' *want*, was important regardless of the type of goal. For example, the simple desire to be a particular kind of person, to retain integrity of character was sufficient to drive some students: *I'm the kind of person who succeeds who doesn't give up*, a student claimed.

Conversely, students observed that people who did not have strong personal goals, and/or who did not know what they wanted, were likely to lack direction and commitment, and that they were unlikely to engage with either their studies or university life. They were, therefore, far more likely to drop out of study or loose time swooping and shifting between courses; losing their direction as one student suggests: *I've got friends even now they're still in their first year of their fourth degree because they don't have any direction*. Finding something they wanted was also a stimulus to reconnect with university after a previous withdrawal, as this student reflection shows:

I came back and I knew that this was what I wanted to do ... yes I changed when I found that human biology was more what I was looking for than sport science but I knew this was where I wanted to be and I knew this was the right thing for me to be doing right now in my life. So I think that's really helped. It's been a definite decision that this is where I wanted to be.

While a lack of goals could contribute to problems of motivation and direction, for some students, particularly school leavers, a primary goal of university could be simply about maturing as an independent person and learner. At this level the students are endeavouring to organise goals and interests, identify a career path, discover like-minded friends and peers, , shape their personal development, and focus their adult lives. They saw university not as directionless and time-wasting but as a valuable time and space for personal growth. Enhancement of self-efficacy, self-determination, and self-knowledge were particularly important goals for students who did not hold strong, tangible targets such as a specific career or providing a role model for others.

Many students were able to clearly articulate the way that goals changed their approach to learning by making a worthwhile effort or sacrifices; by being motivated, stimulated and determined; by adjusting their life to accommodate learning, and by triggering help-seeking behaviours that increase the chances of success. Goal setting, for instance provided a student with a *longer term vision*, a means to overcome the *little pot holes along the way and... keeping the long term goal in mind*. Similarly organising their goals and the attainment of them gave students the knowledge that they are *heading in the right direction*, provided them with a purpose to study, and encouraged them to timetable their social, domestic and study duties. Goals were essential to ecision-making and priority setting. A student stated:

I mean, if it takes an extra whole weekend where you can't go out and you've just got to study, then just do it. You have to sacrifice yourself sometimes. I mean you've got to work less, maybe reduce your social life a tiny bit but you've got to put yourself first because this is for your future in the end. I mean you can't keep slacking off and pretending yeah it's going to happen eventually, you've got to put yourself there first. If you can't do it by yourself then you get a bit of support and this is where the support groups come from and peers and lecturers and everyone helps you.

It was common for students to have multiple goals, and these might combine different types of goals; for example, long term and short term; achievement, mastery or self-improvement oriented. A student might have a long-term career goal, but also want to be a high achiever or prove their worth; for instance to *be a nurse and the proving to myself that I'm actually not too stupid, I can actually do it*; or to complete a degree but with no less than a *High Distinction then it's like I haven't done very well [laughing] in this unit*.

Multiple goals can work together in a common direction, or alternatively in contrast and conflict. A long term career goal might keep a student persisting in the course, even sticking with units of study they did not like but they needed, whilst a goal of getting top marks might encourage them to work strategically on assessments they knew they could do well in, regardless of the contribution it made to their overall career goal. Some students were

quite strategic in using long-term and short-term goals to motivate them. Long-term goals helped one student to *stay* at university and persist with study, whilst the short-term goals assisted the student to take a *step at a time, a step at a time, this assignment, this exam*. The student commented that without short-term goals that long-term goals *can be overwhelming and I think you can lose track of what you have to do this week. It's a whole spectrum of short and long term goals*.

Short term goals in particular were used as a way of organising and managing their learning, breaking it into manageable chunks or setting themselves less complex, achievable goals that helped them work progressively towards longer-term or more difficult goals and *getting through each semester*; one semester at a time.

Goals are dynamic and can change, as they interact with the complex dimensions of a student's own characteristics and the many dimensions of their lives beyond study. For example, a student may be driven to succeed by a need to prove their ability in competition with others, and/or through studying strategically to gaining high grades. But as they feel more confident about themselves, grades may become less important and they may find an intrinsic interest in their discipline or long-term career goal that leads them to them engaging deeply but with far less focus on grades. Priorities clearly shift and change, and the relative power of the things each individual "*wants*" plays a significant role in determining the way the student approaches learning, the way he/she experiences the learning environment and the student's expectations of university study.

Concluding statements: next steps and implications

Data analysis is still at an early stage and the research group recognise that qualitative interpretation needs to go well beyond the simple identification and description of themes and issues (Bazley, 2007; Flick, 2007; Richards, 2005). The data will be scrutinised more deeply to explore the frequency of responses, and investigate the relationships between different individuals and demographics. The emergent themes need to be considered in the light of a rich multi-disciplinary literature available on goals from management, psychology, sociology and educational research and theory (e.g., Fenollar, Roman, & Cuestas, P., 2007; Kember, Hong, & Ho, 2008; Radosevich, Vaidyanathan, Yeo, Radosevich, 2004; Valle, Cababach, Nunez, Gonzalez-Pienda, Rodreiguez, & Pineiro, 2003). Our analysis is ongoing and will be linked to our proposed models and frameworks for student success

Despite the clear need for continued analysis and meaning making, the research team has actively worked to share early insights. One value of collaborative, work-based studies such as this is that the emergent evidence has immediate relevance to the participants. It is impossible to be engaged in qualitative analysis with such relevance to one's own work without wanting to make personalized sense of the information. The voices of the students describing their lives, beliefs and perspectives of what has provided them with the persistence and resilience to succeed academically have a powerful influence on teachers who want to improve their practice. Teaching members of the research team and colleagues with whom the student voices have been shared, have found that the emergent ideas have created a real energy around considering the potential implications of these findings.

As practitioner-teacher-researchers it is clear to us that student goals are significant in defining what students want and expect from higher education; how students experience university; the extent to which they will be satisfied with the university experience; how they will approach learning; and their capacity to persist, overcome difficulties and succeed. We need to understand much more about student goals in order to understand them, accommodate them, and where appropriate exploit them to encourage persistence. This implies a real value for further generic research, but also a need for on-going local context-specific studies that connect teachers with their own students effectively. Goals are complex and dynamic and students have differing profiles, so our work as teachers needs to include time and resources directed at communicating with students and valuing their individual goals. Our teaching programs need to provide opportunities for students to explore their goals, aspirations and learning behaviours. In addition it is important that we help them discover personally meaningful goals and exploit the power of their goals in effective decision-making, and management of their university experience and learning. Our study provides powerful evidence that goals are relevant to academic success and that university students who know *'what's in it for them'*, are likely to persist through the inevitable challenges of life to complete their studies.

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CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUDING REFLECTIONS

Professional doctorates are still an emergent form of higher academic learning and research. Amongst the many challenges an innovative but underdeveloped form such as this presents, is decision-making about alternative communication styles that will respond effectively to the purposes and audiences of a professional education doctorate. In concluding this portfolio, I have chosen to reflect on just a few issues that I feel best align with the spirit and intent of this specific Education Doctorate. My concluding chapter includes reflections on:

- the research journey, and the value and limitations of the research approach and outcomes;
- the nature, value and potential of education doctorates;
- recurrent themes, issues, considerations, tensions, contradictions, and dilemmas emerging relevant to the portfolio topic of teaching excellence; and,
- future directions suggested by the body of work selected for inclusion in the portfolio.

The research journey, and the value and limitations of the research approach, and outcome

Studies included in this portfolio were conducted over an eight-year period, from 2002-2010, the doctoral writing process extended across a further two years. My roles in the research project have been varied, but all have been conducted in collaboration with colleagues, with the intention of sharing expertise and learning, enjoying mutual benefits, and advancing knowledge with a focus on practical implementation. Across the time-span of the portfolio studies, I have enjoyed privileged opportunities to work with a diversity of colleagues who have encouraged, supported, extended and challenged my research understandings and practice. There have also been advances in educational research thinking, techniques and tools to support data collection and analysis. As a researcher, I have experienced the 'messy lowlands' of working in a contested, conflicted and complex area of study, but recognise that I have become a stronger and more competent academic. Whilst there remains much to learn, I am better informed, and have a greater capacity for critical thoughtfulness about higher education research.

Some positive outcomes of the research across the body of work in the portfolio include:

- The identification, design and implementation of research projects that address authentic problems and significant issues, in the under-research areas of: understanding teaching excellence (Sparrow, 2010); rewarding teaching excellence (Sparrow, 2004) understanding tertiary learning and assessment (Wren, Sparrow, Northcote, & Sharp, 2009); understanding contemporary students (Sparrow, Kinnear, Boyce, Middleton & Cullity, 2008); managing the teaching workforce effectively and ethically (Sparrow, 2009; Sparrow & Cullity, 2008);
- the generation of new local insights to provide reliable, clearly sourced data to raise awareness, provide feedback, and to support institutional decision-making about significant teaching and learning issues (all papers);
- collaborative action-research approaches that have succeeded in achieving practical change (Sparrow & Cullity, 2008; Sparrow, Kinnear, Boyce, Middleton & Cullity, 2008; Wren, Sparrow, Northcote, & Sharp, 2009);
- sharing of local insights with the wider higher education community (regional, national and international) through informed conversations, formal presentations and workshops and journal papers (all papers);
- the development of a new research method for focus groups (self-directed ipod groups), that has been shared and taken up by others (Wren, Sparrow, Northcote, & Sharp, 2009);
- the effective implementation of a research approach that has been successful in providing benefits to participants (teachers, students and researchers) (all papers) through:
 - opportunities to engage in deep, meaningful professional reflection;
 - sharing and critical interrogation of personal and published research knowledge, pedagogical knowledge and practical ideas;
 - pathway for making the teachers' 'voices' visible to institutional leaders, managers and administrators through reports and presentations to the university which articulated many things that the award winning teachers wanted to be communicated; and,
 - a very explicit experience of valuing of their work as excellent teachers: the fact that someone was interested in their stories, re-identified their work as exceptional, listened attentively to the issues they thought important, and documented ideas of sharing, which all generated positive feelings (evidenced in feedback on the process).

Whilst there have been many positive experiences and outcomes, I have also encountered most of the problems, difficulties, and dilemmas others experience in the research journey (Lally, 2012; Loxley & Seery, 2012; Walker, Jones, Bueschel, & Hutchings, 2008); and made plenty of mistakes, faux-pas and errors of judgment. I acknowledge limitations in the work undertaken, for example:

- extremely rich data was collected, but only a small portion of it was subject to detailed analysis, leading to data 'wastage';
- several projects were cut short, and failed to fulfill their full potential;
- the quality and depth of long-term evaluation of projects has been limited;
- the transfer of findings and insights for conference presentations and papers to formal publication in journals has been restricted, limiting the opportunities for global sharing of learning;
- the range and diversity of perspectives explored in individual studies has been restricted, for example, ideally the study of award winning teachers would be complemented by comparison with the views of non-award-winning teachers, university leaders, administrators and senior managers; and,
- the use of strategies for preserving institutional research findings across time and through multiple changes in staff, structure, leadership and policy has been weak, so the data and insights are vulnerable to loss.

With the benefit of hindsight, some of these limitations could have been managed more effectively, however, some are simply intrinsic to workplace research. The university environment is in perpetual change, and new problems, issues and opportunities arise continually. Institutional research may be valuable, but it is typically constrained by time, resources and the competing demands of other priorities. Decisions need to be made continually about the relative importance of the problems research might address and the 'value-for money' of the potential outcomes. Guidelines for good decision-making (Rausch, 2003) typically recommend attention to the quality of information and evidence relevant to the issue. In teaching and learning, the number and diversity of issues that would benefit from insider-research is almost infinite. Managing the conflicting agendas and priorities that characterise higher education is a very real challenge. And in the context of unstable, restricted and externally determined resources experienced by most universities, it is a very real dilemma for academic managers, as well as teachers, to allocate time to researching internal teaching matters that are important but non-urgent, at the expense of working to

meet immediate commitments, emerging crisis or externally imposed priorities and deadlines.

Questions about the place and value of scholarship in teaching and learning, and tensions around the teaching-research nexus have emerged in all the studies. There are many potential gains to be made from engaging all teachers in scholarship to understand students and learning, to explore alternative approaches, to assure practice is evidence-based, to support professional learning, and to maintain critical perspectives about higher education. However, there remains confusion about what scholarship in teaching and learning means, tensions arising from the differences in perceived rewards for research work above teaching, and conflicts about the appropriate level and direction of scholarship engagement for different kinds of staff. Participants in all studies were acutely aware of inequities in employment conditions for people who teach in the university, and of the dilemmas they faced themselves in trying to meet requirements and aspirations for both research and teaching, or in making choices between the two. The award winning teachers, for example, moving away from teaching in order to progress their careers is indeed an irony, given the need for teaching excellence and leadership.

Practitioner research is often criticized for being small-scale, context-specific, disconnected from other work in the field and invisible to the broader community (Steirer & Antoniou, 2004; Yorke, 2000). I would argue that a strength of institutional research is its context sensitivity and internal rather than external connection: This is its central purposes. However, institutional learning can also draw on a wider research enterprise and contribute to a shared scholarship in meaningful ways. The projects in this portfolio can certainly be described as small scale, although several included significant numbers, in-depth qualitative interviews, extensive data collection, and longitudinal investigations. The findings have all been shared beyond the institution, and there are documented examples of other academic communities using project findings and outcomes to inform their own understandings and actions. For example, the TAI was taken up by another university; the self-directed focus group approach using ipods has been widely adopted in the region; work on understanding and responding to issues of increased use of sessional staff has contributed to raising national attention and influencing widespread change. The challenges are:

- to recognise what benefits institutional research can offer;
- to invest wisely in who should undertake the research and what the priorities in teaching and learning research should be;
- to find ways to communicate effectively across the sector; and to,

- to engage all teachers in sharing in the benefits and opportunities of teaching and learning research.

Teaching excellence: Recurrent themes, issues, considerations, tensions, contradictions, and dilemmas

A traditional PhD will typically investigate a small number of closely related topic questions in depth. Conclusions in this context are often clear, direct and well-evidenced. This portfolio of work, however, deals with a broad array of more loosely related issues and dilemmas around a complex theme: Teaching Excellence. The work was not designed to provide simple answers to well-defined problems, highly specific questions. The portfolio did, however, adopt a set of key questions that connect the series of projects:

- What is teaching excellence?
- Why does teaching excellence matter?
- How might we achieve teaching excellence?

Chapter Two discusses aspects of these questions in some depth, while each project provides embedded responses to these questions. As would be expected, there are few simple answers and resolutions to such complex and contested questions. However, in concluding the portfolio, I offer a few personal, tentative, summary reflections on the questions, highlighting some of the many curiosities, tensions, considerations and contradictions emerging from the research.

1) What is teaching excellence?

Evidence from the literature and from the projects has been filtered both intentionally and sub-consciously through the 7 lenses of my teaching excellence web. Project participants have affirmed an understanding of teaching excellence as a highly complex and contested concept. However, they were quite consistent in the range of experiences, issues, dilemmas, problems and conflicts they raised, as well as the aspirations and benefits they acknowledge relevant to different lenses. The questions implied by my teaching excellence web, arose naturally and easily in interviews and focus group discussions, and across the projects, different elements and perspectives were explored. The concept was shown to be multifaceted, with participants experiencing the demands of escalating requirements; and, the impact and consequences of different interpretations of excellence: sometimes in quite profound ways. Certainly a need for the sector to expose assumptions, debate and evaluate goals strategies and outcomes in the light of different lenses was demonstrated. A significant observation I made throughout many interviews, was a tendency for academics to engage in

'collusion', in denying problems in the workplace, rather than confronting them honestly and with an expectation of resolving them positively. The award-winning teachers, struggled universally to teach to the standard they believed appropriate, yet seemed never to feel they could challenge workloads (Sparrow, 2009). They reasoned that this was simply 'what academic life is like', and accepted that; or they felt that they were not sufficiently skilled and talented to do their jobs with ease, so assumed they legitimately should work harder to make up for deficiencies; or tried to meet students' needs in ways that went well beyond their resources. Neither human resources systems, nor academic managers, it seemed, took account of resources in their missions and target, or set goals that were unattainable for most teachers even where they worked more than 50 and even 60 hours a week. However, staff were rarely invited to talk about time management and priorities in practical terms, and seldom chastised for perceived 'failures'. It was as if managers knew what they wanted was impossible and that they had few solutions to offer, therefore avoided the discussion. Both parties 'colluded' in unsustainable, unhealthy work. The aspiration for excellence as quality and as elite performance was strong, but honesty in aligning goals and strategies with resource was rare.

The literature defining and exploring the concept of teaching excellence in relation to higher education has expanded significantly in the last decade. Much relevant writing and research has coincided with my own work, and it is possible, only now at the conclusion of the portfolio studies, to clearly see the strength of common patterns emerging across many 'excellence' studies. Alan Skelton (2004; 2005; 2009) has offered a series of thoughtful writings on excellence, both philosophical and research-based. It is validating to find that his position as expressed most recently (2009, p. 109) shows great similarity with my own conceptualization (as presented in Chapter Two). Similar themes, issues and concerns are evident in the Centre for Higher Education's review of excellence literature for the UK Higher Education Academy (Little, Locke, Parker & Richardson, 2007), in many recent reports sponsored by the Carnegie Foundations in US (<http://www.carnegiefoundation.org/>) and the Office of Learning and Teaching (OLT)(formerly ALTC) in Australia (www.olt.gov.au/), and can be found embedded in government reviews and institutional audit reports (<http://www.teqsa.gov.au/>). However, although there is much common ground in the way teaching excellence is defined and problematized in academic papers and reports, in common usage the term is still typically used in a somewhat careless manner, that risks misunderstandings, misinterpretations and mistaken assumptions.

In answering the question, What is excellence? I would like to pay tribute to my mentors, colleagues and to the participants in my studies, whom, I believe, have demonstrated

excellence across all the dimensions of my teaching excellence web. The projects are rich in examples of:

- Teaching Excellence as VIRTUE: through an academic community (teachers, leaders, administrators, researchers, supporters) that works to understand, negotiate and agree worthwhile goals; that values the pursuit of wisdom; and acts in honest and productive ways to develop students as good citizens, professionals, and people;
- Teaching Excellence as QUALITY: through an academic community that recognizes, respects and responds to diverse stakeholders; that is engaged with defining and implementing improvement strategies; that is open to critiquing every aspect of teaching and learning and uses evidence and invites feedback in evaluating and adapting their work;
- Teaching Excellence as GOOD TEACHING: through an academic community that is actively seeking and using strategies that are effective in providing students with good learning environments, relevant tasks and resources, effective feedback and assessment;
- Teaching Excellence as SCHOLARSHIP: through an academic community engaged in all forms of scholarship that supports the development of understandings that can contribute to improvements in teaching and learning
- Teaching Excellence as STUDENT LEARNING: through an academic community that prioritizes and achieves excellent student learning outcomes;
- Teaching Excellence as ELITE PERFORMANCE: through an academic community that demonstrates the highest levels of skills and commitment, and is outstanding in its achievements and contributions;
- Teaching Excellence as a WHOLE OF SYSTEM COMMUNITY ENTERPRISE: through an academic community that acts in generosity and openness across all levels, to share problems and work collaboratively for improvement and for mutual benefit; that is active in critiquing injustice and inequities and enacts global perspectives; and that provides leadership in supporting team approaches and collaborating across all societies.

Qualities of excellence from each definition have been exhibited by people, at all levels, and across all roles.

I conclude that excellence can be seen in many ways, and that each demonstration of excellence makes a worthwhile contribution. Some people, roles, teams even institutions

may be distinguished by one particular kind of excellence, but, in my view, the aspiration for the higher education sector should be to perform well across all dimensions. No one person or group can perform at elite levels in everything. It would seem to me therefore, that excellence for all can only be achieved through collaboration within institutions, across institutions and indeed globally. The neoliberal model of competition may work to stimulate a few, but if we aspire to a universal tertiary education system, then we need to find more ways to support all institutions and individuals to be at least 'good enough'.

My teaching excellence web, highlights 7 lenses. Whilst I conceived them initially as tools to view excellence, I now recognize them defining 'the territory and boundaries' of teaching excellence. Teaching excellence is constituted from the individual parts (virtue, quality, scholarship, good teaching, student learning, elite performance, whole of community systems and enterprise); from the intersections and overlaps between them; and from the combination of elements as a whole system.

2) Why does teaching excellence matter?

Given the confusion of possible meanings and perspectives that render teaching excellence such a complex, and some would say unmanageable concept, it is perhaps tempting to think that the term has no real value, and should simply be replaced by a simpler and more explicit list of related ideas about 'good teaching'. Alan Skelton (2009) reports that a meeting at the 2007 annual conference of the UK Higher Education Academy, a motion was passed that "excellence had become a meaningless concept" (p. 107). He goes on to argue against the motion: firstly because of its value in focusing our attention on "the underlying purposes of teaching in higher education", and secondly because, "it represents potent force to drive us forward in our efforts to understand and improve what we do". My research and reading of the literature leads me to support both positions. I have yet to meet anyone who does not view teaching excellence, as an aspirational goal: In its simplest sense- that 'it' (whatever 'it' is) should be 'done well'. Who would argue against striving to achieve the best possible experiences and outcomes from higher education. However, teaching excellence, is indeed a meaningless concept, unless it is debated, clarified and given meanings. The challenge for all educators and all stakeholders in higher education is to ensure that excellence is continually held up to critique, and that different perspectives are weighted and balanced through diverse lenses, using the best evidence possible and the most advanced tools of reason, argument and evaluation. It is through this debate that we progress our understanding of what university teaching and learning could and should be, and be more informed in choosing the investment we as a society, or as institutions, or individuals, will make to higher education teaching and learning.

Further, I would suggest that in critically debating the concept of teaching excellence, many otherwise hidden issues and dilemmas are revealed. Significant examples have emerged through the portfolio studies, for example:

- the differentials in the power of different groups to advance their interests in and through education;
- accountability and evaluation models that focus attention on what is easily measurable rather than most worthwhile;
- the potential exploitation of teachers as academic labour;
- the continuing devaluing of teaching and easy dismissal of the challenges and difficulties faced by higher education teachers aspiring to teaching excellence; and,
- the disingenuous positioning of goals that are mutually exclusive such as increasing the number and diversity of students in university whilst claiming to retain the same academic standards and outcomes as the now-outdated and elitist systems of the previous century.

None of these issues are simple to resolve, but unless such problems and dilemmas are made visible, they cannot be addressed. I would argue that without these debates at every level, higher education itself is becomes a meaningless concept.

3) How might we achieve teaching excellence? Ways forward?

There is no 'silver bullet' solution to achieving teaching excellence: stakeholders define it differently and hold diverse viewpoints about each and every facet and component, it is multi-layered, complex and changing. There is complexity in our beliefs about what in essence we want from universities, what we regard as worthwhile learning, what counts as university level learning, how we see the roles and responsibilities of students and teachers, how we think tertiary students learn and how they want to engage with learning, who we trust to design and deliver teaching and how we judge both teaching and learning. Metaphors such as herding cats and juggling jelly come easily to mind in trying to make coherent sense of the "messy" reality of teaching excellence—in-action. And yet, looking back across the studies, and the wider literature there are significant patterns and strong ideas that weave in and out, that can be recognised, that can be evidenced and that suggest possible ways forward.

Teaching excellence is too often an assumed concept. It is often misunderstood, or simply left undefined. It requires continuing critique to expose and challenge underlying assumptions, values and beliefs at all levels (national, institutional, course, individual).

Stakeholders (students, teachers, disciplines and professional, employers, community) need to engage in an on-going debate about the nature of teaching excellence, and negotiate and agree relevant meanings in order to establish worthwhile goals. Leadership at all levels, is required to ensure that this dialogue is pursued and conducted through sound argument, based on evidence, with acknowledgement of diverse values, and with careful attention to the possibilities of unintentional outcomes.

Aspirations for excellence need to accommodate flexibility and diversity, but be mediated by realistic judgments of reasonableness: balancing the desire to achieve high quality with the reality of the context and the resources available. Sustainability is a real issue in teaching excellence. The pressures of an academic life are well documented, and the dilemmas of the research-teaching nexus (inequities in rewards; conflicting work demands; differences in skills and competences needed for teaching and research) are well-known, but have not been adequately resolved. The world is changing rapidly and new ways of working are needed. Reform seems difficult in higher education, and again leadership will be critical in visioning different possibilities and creating the conditions for positive change.

Despite a growing interest in teaching excellence, it remains an under-researched area. The quality of teaching and learning achieved in universities is likely to benefit from commitment to further research into the meaning of excellence, strategies to achieve excellence, and tools for evaluating excellence. Research needs to include large-scale studies capable of providing insights with wide application, but also local studies that can demonstrate context-specific sensitivity. Scholarship that encourages collaboration across different stakeholder groups and dialogue between micro and macro levels would be particularly valuable. This is likely to facilitate sensitivity to different perspectives, and address the inherent complexity of teaching more fully.

Strategies currently employed nationally and within institutions to evaluate, promote and reward teaching excellence (for example: teaching awards; professional development, scholarship, student evaluation of experience and learning, competitive funding models) are problematic. There is limited evidence of their effectiveness in improving teaching and learning sector-wide. This suggests the sector (at all levels) needs to develop a stronger evidence base for decisions about how to review, amend and change existing approaches to achieve improvements; as well as investing in finding new strategies to progress and value teaching and learning. Further, the sector needs to manage the potential negative outcomes of reward systems that are misaligned, inequitable, dysfunctional or ineffective.

The world context for higher education is changing as the number and diversity of students increase; resources diminish; learning goals, modes of learning and engagement change; and expectations for teaching excellence continue to soar. Reform and improvement depends on people, and particularly on the teachers who design, deliver and evaluate programs of study. The evidence is strong that teachers in higher education still feel undervalued, under-rewarded, under-resourced and over-worked. Even exceptional teachers feel they cannot sustain quality teaching in the current environment; and look to move into non-teaching roles to advance their careers. Leadership, again, is critical in achieving teaching excellence, and knowledgeable, skillful, expert leaders in teaching and learning need to be identified, developed, supported and fully rewarded. Perhaps as Richard James (2010) suggests, the sector needs to invest more in enhancing leadership through national award winners; or through stronger support for scholarship in teaching and learning. But there is also a need for leadership in the administration and management of the workforce, not only to attract, retain and develop teachers of excellence but to also to secure sustainable, equitable working conditions for teachers and others who contribute to teaching and learning in universities. Excellence requires the whole community to work effectively together to secure shared excellence outcomes. These issues are serious, and need to be addressed more effectively if teaching excellence (however it is defined) is to be maintained or improved.

The nature, value and potential of professional doctorates

Professional doctorates are in a state of evolution, as indeed are all doctoral studies. Many of the conflicting issues and dilemmas of defining, achieving and measuring excellence apparent in undergraduate teaching and learning, are equally evident in postgraduate studies. This includes questions about the relevance of the learning to the needs of different stakeholders, the quality of supporting programs, the distinction between professional doctorates and other doctoral studies, and standards appropriate to the highest degree level in common usage. I chose to undertake a professional doctorate for several reasons, but principally because I wanted my research to be directly and practically applicable to problems in my own workplace; and I wanted to work collaboratively. But, I also wanted to challenge the separation of teaching, scholarship and research, and differential values attached to each. I wanted my expertise in the field (as a scholarly, research-focused teacher) to be recognised and valued, not just for my own affirmation but also for the many professionals who had followed similar career paths to my own and found themselves devalued by their lack of a traditional PhD.

At the time I commenced doctoral studies (in 2002), professional doctorates were said by some to be in rapid expansion, with, "...similar growth patterns in the United states, the UK, and in Australia" (Kot & Hendel, 2012). Programs doubled in number at the beginning of the decade (Maxwell & Shanahan 2001), and enrolments increased dramatically in Australia (McWilliam, Taylor, Thomson, Green, Maxwell, & Wildy, et al. 2002), and in the United Kingdom (Bourner, Bowden & Laing 2001). Others suggest that in fact this impression of growth is deceptive (Evans, Macauley, Pearson & Tregenza, 2005), and that PhD programs are in fact adapting to the needs of professionals and attracting them in preference to professional doctorates. A small but focused literature has developed, describing the different patterns of study emerging, and the issues that program directors, doctoral students and examiners are grappling with in establishing approaches and agreeing values and standards (Maxwell, 2002; Scott, Brown, Lunt, & Thorne, 2004; Seddon, 2000; Usher, 2002). A series of discussion forums, conferences, attest to the interest in the debate, and enthusiasm for the possible opportunities of professional doctorates. But there is also widespread confusion about the distinctive contribution professional doctorates could and should make to both research and to the workplace, and how this could be achieved within the resource limitations of most universities (Brennan, 1998; Helmes, & Pachana, 2005). Criticisms of emergent education doctorates have suggested that they are all too often weak versions of PhDs, that fail to deliver either professional or research outcomes (Levine, 2005). However, there is also considerable support for the potential of such doctorates. Debby Zambo (2011), demonstrates, for example, how an action–research pedagogy can contribute to the development of educational leadership through creating ...” stewards of practice with the knowledge, skills and dispositions they need to identify educational problems, design solutions and lead change” (p. 270).

My own experience as a doctoral candidate reflects many of the tensions evident in the literature. As a doctoral candidate, I chose to locate my studies in the world of work, yet I also wanted to develop my research competence. The roles of researcher and practitioner are complementary but different. Guthrie, (2009) points to the difficulties of attempting to meet exacting modern standards simultaneously across research and practitioner domains. Research skill sets and understandings required take time to develop, they demand, "...immersion in analysis and research to perfect, and are not learned by lecture and from textbooks alone” (Guthrie, 2009, p.4). In the specific context of education doctorates, he further argues that:

No self-respecting doctoral program attuned to the production of modern education researchers can possibly layer multidisciplinary cognate knowledge,

understanding of education institutions, research immersion, data set understanding, comprehension of methods, and mentoring on top of a full professional curriculum and expect to cover the content in less than seven years. It certainly cannot be undertaken in the context of a part-time doctoral program. (p. 6).

In my case, the dual aims of furthering professional practice and research skills, led inevitably to difficulties giving sufficient time to either concern. I attempted to fulfil traditional PhD criteria for expertise and rigor in research methods, depth of investigation and achievement of new knowledge; as well as meeting the expectations of an 'equal but different' professionally orientated program located in a full-time and demanding academic position. In addition, to creating significant work overload, this challenged my professional identity: was I a teacher, a researcher, a professional developer, a policy leader? Which had priority? And, how could I fulfill all these identities at the standard of excellence I thought appropriate, and still maintain quality in my domestic and personal life. My own struggle to achieve highly across so many life-spheres is ironically reflective of the findings of my studies with award winning teachers, all of whom expressed concern about sustaining the standards of excellence they felt were expected and/or set themselves (see Paper 3c: *Surviving and sustaining teaching excellence: A narrative of entrapment*). Identity conflict and workload management is identified by several authors as an endemic problem in professional doctorate studies, particularly those designed to attract mid-career professionals (Fenge, 2010). Whilst I recognise such dilemmas as common to many teaching academics, I am also aware that the issue is gender-coloured: academic women in teaching and learning fields tend to be delayed in their career progression (as I was), and find themselves catching-up with doctoral studies at an older age (as I was), whilst still managing domestic and work responsibilities (as I was) (Currie, Harris, & Thiele, 2000). My lived experience closely matches the literature of women in academia and particularly in teaching and learning roles.

Collaboration is widely promoted as a desirable professional quality (Higher Learning Commission, 2006). It is a fundamental value of my approach to both work and research. I located my collaborative research in the workplace rather than with doctoral peers and have tried to maintain my integrity by producing a portfolio that demonstrates the value and achievements of collaborative approaches as well as clarifying my own contributions. Professional doctorates seek to develop attributes such as team-work, but paradoxically are typically evaluated in terms of individual contribution. Ray Buss, Debby Zambo, Suzanne Painter and David Moore (2013), report on an innovative education doctorate that attempted to work in ways that positively support leadership development through collaborative

learning. They found both faculty staff and doctoral students believed that that learning was enhanced, and change achieved through community interaction, social and professional networks and team approaches. However, this is a challenging and time-consuming way to run a doctoral program, and demands highly skilled and committed faculty leadership. In a resource-stretched university environment this renders many courses unviable.

I was aware at the start of my studies that the status and value accorded to professional doctorates was not high. Colleagues were typically dismissive of educational doctorates, believing them to be inferior to discipline-based PhDs, conceiving them as weak provisions of research training, rather than strong and innovative programs encouraging leadership at the highest level. Whilst the Australian government has professed encouragement for professional doctorates as a way of supporting the knowledge economy and the need for widespread expertise and leadership, their rhetoric has not been supported by actions. Pure research doctorates continue to attract substantial funding and significant benefits for institutions, while professional doctorates receive little financial support and are almost exclusively self-funded through fee-paying students (Brennan, Kenway, Thompson & Zipin, 2002). This implies a low value for professional expertise as worthwhile and useful knowledge compared to research. Similarly, the supervision of PhDs is generally accorded high status and significant rewards compared to leadership in professional doctorate programs. Participants in my studies persistently raised issues about the differential treatment and rewards for teaching they believed existed. The current valuing of professional doctorates can be seen as a further example of such tensions in the research-teaching nexus, which in academic life has led to the advancement and reward of researchers over teachers. For many interested observers, there is serious doubt about the need to maintain distinctive professional doctorates, as they believe PhD programs can and are being adapted effectively to encompass the needs of professional knowledge workers: thus avoiding the legitimacy problem.

I found that balancing the priorities of the workplace with academic research was difficult. The worlds of work and research intersect through the doctoral student, but there is no formal partnership between the parties. Researching a question in depth requires focused attention, persistence and the selection of approaches, analysis, interpretation and reporting strategies that represent best research practice. In the workplace, priorities change rapidly and are often determined by external pressures: the topic of attention is often one of crisis rather than one of a critical but non-urgent nature. Speed of action and decision-making is frequently needed. Practice-based study must acknowledge the complexities of a real world context and be ready to change direction in response to events, directives and evolving

priorities. I found myself balancing depth against breadth in all my studies, and many were cut short to make way for new initiatives that became urgent.

Academic writing, reporting and communicating have different demands, audiences and purposes to those of the workplace: I needed to further my skills and demonstrate achievements in different worlds. Developing an informed and critical stance is (for me) a significant outcome of doctoral studies, and this implies finding a personal voice. Moving rapidly and flexibly between the communication style demands of research and the workplace is quite possible, but it is challenging and time-greedy. It is easier (and therefore sometimes tempting) to follow existing practice, rather than strike out into new territory. In trying to satisfy the expectations of others, particularly in a context of work overload, and work that is accorded low status, the 'self' can become passive rather than assertive: and the capacity for critical thinking and action is easily diminished. Yet, for me, it is the very essence of doctoral level thinking to engage in the arguments about what is 'right' and what is 'worthwhile' (in research topics and approaches, and across all professional challenges), and to be open to change that will respond more appropriately to the dynamic world we live in, to 'unsettle' the status quo, and to be willing to risk new ways to think and to act.

On the basis of my reading of the literature and my own experience, I would argue that the debate about the role, place, quality and future of professional doctorates reflects the 'bigger-picture' research-teaching nexus discussions: What do different stakeholders need from advanced post-graduate studies? What is the relative value of teaching, innovation, and pure and applied research? Which academic staff should contribute to each and in what ways? How do we value and reward the different contributions of expert researchers, and elite knowledge-workers? These are the very questions of teaching excellence that are currently challenging universities across their whole spectrum of work.

The naming of degrees is an important tool for communication between stakeholders, and although titles are assumed to convey some idea of the skills, knowledge and capabilities of the title-holder, the reality is that there is huge diversity. The reputation of the university awarding the degree is often more significant in judging excellence, than the actual level or content of the doctoral students' achievement. I would argue that excellence in doctoral education (just as in undergraduate studies) depends primarily on clarity of thinking; honesty, transparency and agreement about purpose; alignment of intended outcomes and learning activity; and rigorous assessment of achievement. In a complex world, we need to develop many different skills and qualities amongst citizens. I see a significant role for the university to be leading an on-going debate about what our community knowledge priorities are, and how they can best be supported through university engagement or other forms of learning.

End of the journey

My own journey as a doctoral student has truly been a lived experience. I have explored the theme of teaching excellence through literature, through engagement in insider-research, and through intense reflection on self. My title (*Teaching excellence: An illusive goal*) suggests that teaching excellence maybe an illusion. Certainly, its complexity and dynamic nature make it an illusive goal. However, the 7 lenses and the teaching excellence web have provided a structure for thinking about it, in a critical and comprehensive way. Teaching excellence requires sophisticated analysis, but this is far from an impossible task, if comprehensive questions are asked as implied by the web. The web is an appropriate structure for thinking, but along the way, I have considered many images and metaphors for teaching excellence. I have come to think about it in a quite concrete and practical way, as the act of making a community quilt. It is many people coming together in a mutual enterprise, bringing their ideas and resources together, and endlessly working to design and redesign their work, picking and choosing the colours and textures, incorporating stories and images and abstracts, and somehow agreeing how piece will lay by piece to create a pleasing aesthetic that is meaningful and relevant, and acceptable to all concerned. The quilt is never finished- it is simply passed from community to community, and generation and generation, to be picked apart, patched and repaired, new fabrics replacing old, new whims and fancies played out in swirls or geometics. A 'good' quilt respects the memories and sentiments of the makers and the things they hold dear, but is not afraid to move forward always having room for a new idea, or to welcome a new pair of hands or a bag of new materials. The metaphor of the community quilt is powerful in foregrounding diversity, community, communication, problem-solving, the balancing of skills, knowledge and pragmatics, with arts and culture, and human emotion and spirit. The experience of making, is as important as the outcome, and both vary with time, place and individuals, but at the heart of the process is the living out of shared values.

My experience of the portfolio journey has been challenging, but I believe it to be a worthwhile enterprise with clear benefits for myself, many participants, the institution and indeed the wider community. In adopting a critical stance, there can be a tendency to observe the problems and dilemmas, and it is easy to loose sight of the positives. I believe this portfolio shares insights into the amazing achievements of many teachers of excellence, that should to be honored and celebrated. The portfolio presents many challenges, dilemmas and contradictory tensions that characterize teaching and learning in the modern world. Individual studies have already been used in the local workplace, to inform decisions, and to support reform and improvement; and also shared with a wider academic and professional community, contributing to the scholarship available to others. Excellence in teaching and

learning in higher education remains a complex and contested concept, there are many unresolved problems and dilemmas. I hope that this portfolio will provide evidence of the need to continue the debate, and for universities to provide on-going leadership in revealing the issues, providing insights and understanding that supports people at all levels towards excellence (in all its complexity) in teaching and learning.

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