

provocations



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*Canonical, Mystificatory
and Elitist?*

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Let's consider this possibility. What if Australian cultural studies—rather than being the lively, critical, 'undisciplined' beast we like to think it is—has wound up generating teaching programs that look very like those of the traditional disciplines it was developed to renovate and displace? What if, having gained institutional security, career paths, and a level of sectoral credibility, cultural studies has become lazy, unimaginative, and overly deferential to the established canon of cultural studies theorists and authors—at the same time as it has lost interest in the cultures and experiences of its students? How would we know that? Who could tell us? Where would we talk about it? And what could we do about it? In what follows, I want to make a series of observations about these questions, with the hope of initiating such a conversation.

This essay emerges from my experience of organising a panel on the teaching of cultural studies at the annual conference of the Cultural Studies Association of Australasia (CSAA) in Adelaide in December 2007. The discussion of teaching has become something of a novelty in Australian cultural studies conferences of recent times and that alone made it worth doing, in my view. There were a number of other issues, however, that made it seem important for those working in cultural studies to turn their attention to a fundamental concern: to ask what has happened to the teaching of cultural studies and to cultural studies as itself a form of pedagogy.

At a personal level, there were a couple of provocations for raising this issue. The more minor one first: what appears to me an increasing subordination of the teaching 'mission' (forgive me, but that really does cover it) of our profession in favour of the development of

a research career. Once, and it is easy to forget this, the teaching dimension of our profession would have been regarded as the more attractive, even the slightly glamorous, component of the job (think of all those campus novels and movies, romanticising the authority of the teacher as well as the affective potential of the teacher–student relation). Today it would be more common to encounter the idea that the most important, if perhaps not yet glamorous, area of activity for a cultural studies scholar is research.

Despite having come late and reluctantly to the medicalised model of research that has been progressively installed across the Australian higher education sector over the last decade and a half, cultural studies has found it a congenial model. Indeed, after some early teething problems—such as a self-defeating penchant, on the one hand, for writing perversely impenetrable prose in grant applications and, on the other hand, for writing the kind of grandstanding assessors' reports that are aimed at obstructing careers rather than developing the field—Australian cultural studies has thrived in the Australian Research Council (ARC) context. It is a star performer in the industry-focused Linkages program, and has used its international cachet as a route to success in the Discovery, or basic research, program as well. Given the importance Australian universities must now place on research earnings—where once teaching funds were used to subsidise research, for many years now it has been the other way round—it is little wonder that some in cultural studies have come to see research as the only game in town. In such a situation, teaching is reduced to the role of an annoying and demanding requirement that has to be managed or, if possible, avoided entirely.

What concerns me most, and this possibly reflects the particularities of my own recent experience, is the fact that such a view is so widely held by so many newcomers to the profession—recent PhD graduates, newly appointed lecturers or early career researchers. This, despite the fact that few would contest the proposition that among the most valuable things an early career researcher can do is to teach. The value of teaching is both personal and developmental. In her contribution to the CSAA panel, Mandy Treagus reminded us of the personal satisfactions to come from teaching: when one of her students tells her that s/he now sees the world differently as a result of what s/he has learnt in her cultural studies class, Mandy said, that achievement still makes her job worthwhile. Perhaps because of its classic familiarity, we are in danger of carelessly underestimating the value of this kind of achievement.

The other issue, however, is the developmental dimension of the early experience of teaching. There is no better way to understand one's field than to try to teach it to a bright group of undergraduates empowered to question and to challenge the ideas they are being offered. Dealing with that seems to me one of the most important formative experiences of the university intellectual; not to have experienced it at all seems to me to constitute a significant disadvantage.

The centre in which I work (the Centre for Critical and Cultural Studies at the University of Queensland) is staffed entirely by fulltime researchers on fixed-term contracts. They are exceptional young academics, having won their funding through the ARC Australian Post-doctoral (APD) program where the success rate is usually less than 20 per cent, or by picking up one of only two research fellowships regularly offered in the Arts Faculty at the University of Queensland each year—at a success rate of around 10 per cent. Every year, highly promising applicants are passed over for these UQ awards. In my centre alone, we would have at least two unsuccessful applicants a year who possess, in my judgment, the intellectual and personal capacities to successfully prosecute a research career in cultural studies. Despite these odds, I routinely find that when presenting talks on ARC grants applications, post-doctoral fellowship applications and professional development in general, most of those who attend these seminars take the view that they are entitled to entertain ambitions of a fulltime research career. On the one hand, you might say, ‘Good for them! Why *not* set that goal?’ On the other hand, it is hard not to feel that it is also important for them to recognise that, notwithstanding the dramatic expansion of such career possibilities over the last ten years, a research-only career remains an unrealistic ambition for 90 per cent of the academics working in cultural studies in Australia. In my own case, for example, the last eight years of research-only employment has only come after decades of fulltime teaching.

In this first area of concern, then, the simple pragmatics of the situation worry me. Just what kinds of expectations are being sold to completing doctoral students and to early career researchers by their supervisors or their university research offices? Of course, it is in the interests of these research offices to encourage their staff to apply for ARC postdoctoral fellowships and the like; the fact that so few will succeed ultimately does not bother them much. It should bother us. What is the consequence of filling our teaching programs with disappointed researchers who regard a conventional T&R appointment as the consolation prize? It increases the possibility that those who are currently teaching cultural studies in our universities do not feel that the satisfactions teaching generates will play a fundamental role in sustaining them, personally or professionally.

I think these questions should be addressed; they are, though, based on highly partial observation and so maybe I am overstating the problem. The second issue which motivated the organisation of the CSAA panel, however, is hedged with none of the qualifications that I would acknowledge in relation to my first point. While I am prepared to be convinced (indeed, I would be heartened to find) that my observations of the shift in preference towards a research career are not representative of the field as whole, I have no such reservations about the legitimacy of my observations about what has happened to the practice of cultural studies teaching in Australia. In recent years, I have travelled around Australia a lot, reviewing academic programs, serving on selection committees, advisory boards and so on. I have seen

a substantial sample of the teaching programs and teaching practices in our area. Some of what I have been seeing lately has begun to worry me.

In some institutions, such as my own university, the numbers enrolled in cultural studies undergraduate and graduate programs are in significant decline. Students interested in things that once drew them towards cultural studies are now enrolling in media studies, journalism studies, creative industries, sociology—or just leaving the university altogether. There is evidence that this is happening elsewhere as well. There are all kinds of reasons for this, of course, many of them institution-specific and thus not perhaps a matter of general concern. What is of general concern, however, is what I have observed as a shift in the kind of teaching taking place in cultural studies and its reflection of what seems, on the face of it, to be a declining interest in pedagogy. Among the factors which mark this shift are the following:

- A concentration on teaching the discipline through a canonical selection of theorists or cultural studies authors
- A corresponding shift away from teaching the foundational ideas of cultural studies as conceptual formations developed in response to particular problems; this shift is usually marked by a dependence on set theoretical readings rather than what I would describe as 'taught' material (that is, where the concepts are explained by way of pedagogic strategies)
- A consequent tendency towards an exegetical mode of teaching, explaining difficult texts to students ill-equipped to read them without assistance
- A highly contingent (that is, contingent upon the person designing the course) focus upon a menu of ideas, issues, and political concerns that may or may not be at the core of teaching the discipline (but are at the core of the interests of the individual academic)

There are (at least) two effects that proceed from this trend which go directly to the usefulness and attractiveness of cultural studies to its students. Such teaching practices do not encourage the integration of students' own cultural capital into the classes, and thus may be responsible for what presents itself as a reduced capacity to generate students' excitement about what cultural studies can do. It is hard for such teaching strategies not to generate an elitist and, I would argue, ultimately mystificatory approach to the teaching of cultural studies theory that privileges the authority of the knowing teacher rather than enables the curious student.

This manner of teaching cultural studies breaks with a foundational tradition that I would suggest was among the factors responsible for the particular character and success of cultural studies in Australia. Whereas cultural studies in the United Kingdom and the United States were established primarily as research or postgraduate fields, and although the early days of Australian cultural studies were also marked by a strong critical and theoretical

tradition of independent academic publication, cultural studies in Australia largely began as a teaching area. Its first iterations were in programs of cultural, communications or media studies in the (then) Colleges of Advanced Education, the new interdisciplinary universities (especially Griffith and Murdoch) and the Institutes (later, universities) of Technology that began appearing from the mid-1970s onwards. Cultural studies' penetration beyond the interdisciplinary, applied and vocational side of the old binary system was slow—the sandstones gradually began to come on board from the late 1980s (the University of Queensland was the first) with the most recent (Sydney) only explicitly signing up in 2006!—but the success of these programs was often fundamental to the survival of the arts and humanities faculties in their institutions. Seen as more contemporary and less ivory-towered than traditional arts programs and usually focused in the first instance on various forms of media, taught in ways that catered to the particular needs and cultural capacities of their student cohort (their class and educational backgrounds were not those of the traditional university student), cultural studies programs' appeal to university administrators lay primarily in their demonstrable ability to generate strong student demand in an expanding, but competitive, sector.

Most people developing these programs recognised this attribute and used student demand as a key argument when seeking support from their own institutions. The source of that demand did have its local particularities and contingencies, but underlying all the institution-specific considerations was a number of common factors. Necessarily as well as in principle, these early cultural studies programs were taught in ways that explicitly and deliberately built on their students' own popular cultural capital; their focus upon the media and popular culture enabled students to immediately engage in a conversation with the discipline. As a result, the best of the teaching was both empowering and enlightening. Significantly, too, because cultural studies was usually articulated to vocational programs such as journalism or film and television production (at a time when these sectors of the media were growing both through commercial development and through supportive policy settings), there was the pragmatic argument that this kind of study could lead to employment. While that certainly helped attract students, it also helped to ground cultural studies programs in some kind of material formation: there was always an industry to address, not only an abstracted notion of culture.

My own undergraduate background was in English literature, where there was, at that time, no acknowledgment that the student might have any useful knowledge at all. When I was an undergraduate, the discipline of English was taught in ways that were unashamedly elitist (not all students, it was noted, were possessed of the appropriate sensibilities), mystificatory (literature was not theorised, instead its ineffability was offered up as one of its constitutive qualities) and canonical (there was an hierarchised body of materials students

would study and respect, but not fundamentally challenge). I found, of course, that cultural studies was not like that. Indeed, for me and for many others who came to it from English, cultural studies provided a welcome corrective to the critical methods provided through English because it was not elitist, it was not mystificatory, and it taught concepts rather than a canon. As a result, students quickly acquired confidence in their capacity to understand its modes of knowledge and to apply them directly to material forms and practices.

If we return to the present, some of what I see now in contemporary cultural studies programs reminds me more of my undergraduate experience studying English than of my early experience teaching cultural studies. Let me give you a sense of what I am talking about, but without getting into the complications of citing an actual example. What I have in mind can be typified by a particular version of the generic first year introductory class, let's call it Cultural Studies 101 (CS101), organised around a menu of standard conceptual topics—identity, representation and so on. These concepts will be taught through a combination of lecture and tutorial, and supporting readings will be set for each week. In what I am calling CS101, these readings are notable for their improbably high level of theoretical sophistication: the reading will be from Judith Butler, say, or Stuart Hall. This, despite the fact that the chosen readings are clearly aimed at problematising established theoretical positions that the students have yet to understand. Such readings are not at all concerned, nor should they be, with introducing these positions to the neophyte. Their function in CS101, then, cannot be pedagogic; rather, they serve to signify the sophistication of those who designed the course. Faced with such material, the student is ill-equipped to do what their tutors expect them to do: to analyse, discuss, and argue with the set reading. Before any of that can happen, the reading has to be explained to them and so the class turns into an exegetical performance in which the knowledge of the teacher dominates. While that might satisfy the teacher, it only demonstrates to the students their own inadequacy in dealing with this subject matter unassisted. Rather than finding CS101 engaging, empowering and enlightening, they could be forgiven for seeing it pretty much the way I saw English 1 at the University of Sydney back in the 1960s—as an elitist and mystificatory domain.

In my opinion, there are a lot of courses like CS101 in which cultural studies has become a domain where theoretical material is foregrounded for its own sake rather than for what it might enable students to do or understand, where the student's own cultural capital is given lip-service but implicitly undermined by the use of inaccessible materials as introductory readings, and where students are increasingly registering their alienation from the subject matter as well as from the manner in which it is taught.

At this point, I need to acknowledge that I no longer play a role in designing and delivering undergraduate teaching programs in my university.¹ My position is a research-only one and

although I do turn up to present the occasional guest lecture, teaching has not been at the centre of my activities for some years now. Therefore, I served only as the chair for the CSAA panel; the speakers were all cultural studies scholars with fulltime teaching loads: Angi Buettner (Victoria University, Wellington), Chris Healy (Melbourne) and Mandy Treagus (Adelaide). I won't present a summary of each of their presentations here, as my current interest lies in reflecting upon the occasion rather than relaying what was said, and in any case I am sure they would each wish to speak for themselves.

It was clear, however, that the concerns the panel raised did resonate with those present. A number of people asked why there had not been more focus upon the teaching of cultural studies in our conferences in recent years. It was hard, they agreed, to remember a time when such a topic had been given a prominent position. While the formal discussion period, as always, turned out not to be as lengthy as we would have liked, there was considerable discussion after the session and in emails and blogs subsequently. A number of people approached me to suggest that there should be a more focused workshop in subsequent conferences which actually dealt in a detailed manner with pedagogy—allowing members of the CSAA to compare and share their teaching strategies and approaches. Chris Healy's presentation was a particularly positive provocation to this end because it provided a dramatic contrast to the situation I have been describing as CS101. He demonstrated what could be done by a teacher with imagination and skill, showing slides from his teaching program's website which focused on particular material objects as sites of analysis from which theoretical lessons might be learnt but in which the initial attraction was the lively interrogation of an intrinsically interesting and familiar component of popular culture (a pair of sneakers, in this case). Indeed, a particularly useful effect of the presentations made by Chris Healy and by Mandy Treagus, both of them very experienced teachers, was that they represented models of teaching that were very different to those I have been criticising above.

Nonetheless, it was evident that people recognised CS101. Postgraduate students in particular attested to its widespread influence, and some spoke of their discomfort in teaching it. Working as sessional tutors, often in more than one university at a time and thus dealing with multiple bureaucracies, demographics and institutional expectations, creates particular difficulties which a number of postgraduates at the conference, and in emails subsequently, outlined. They reminded me that their situation as teachers was among the most exposed and the least empowered: they were overwhelmingly charged with the responsibility of teaching large, often compulsory, subjects which they had played no part in designing and about which some expressed serious misgivings; they had to deal with what seemed legitimate student complaints without having any power to recommend a response, let alone implement change; and the sophisticated character of the subject readings tested their abilities to

the limit because of the high degree of exegetical performance they required for the tutorials. Judging from their comments, it seems likely that the problems in course design I have been describing are impacting disproportionately on sessional and inexperienced teachers.

Now, I am sure there are a lot of reasons for this situation that are external to the field; clearly, it should be acknowledged that there have been enormous changes to the educational marketplace in which cultural studies must now make its pitch. Some of what cultural studies once offered as important new insights has been integrated into the common language of the media and of public debate. It is not surprising, then, that what we have to say doesn't always generate quite the spectacular reaction it used to. Nonetheless, such a situation does point to cultural studies' considerable success in insinuating its way into the discursive repertoire of our public culture. In particular, and again this is something we may have noted but does not get talked about much outside the staff common room, cultural studies has achieved extraordinary success at infiltrating secondary school curricula around the country—in English, media studies, and film and television studies. This directly affects student demand as well as their expectations of our courses when they come to the university.

Turning on the bells and whistles in early cultural studies courses was, in retrospect, a piece of cake. Students were interested in popular cultural forms but, at that time, unused to being allowed to study them; they were delighted to find that their own interests and knowledge actually counted in cultural studies (they never had at school!). Suddenly, culture became a process that was open to analysis; it was neither a given nor a mystery. As teachers, charged with demonstrating how culture could be analysed, we were especially fortunate because we had a handy party piece available to us. When we introduced our students to semiotics as a simple technique of textual analysis we could cruise over a wide range of popular cultural texts, demonstrating the kinds of information this analytical tool could generate. Teaching semiotics at the same time as we investigated what it could tell us about contemporary popular culture had the dual benefit of making us appear both knowledgeable and cool. Better still, it was not long before students could do it too, and so our knowledge was attainable rather than elite.

As time has gone by, however, our success in disseminating and popularising cultural studies approaches has led to the loss of this party piece (and some others as well). High school English, film and television, and media studies curricula picked up semiotics years ago. These days, most Australian high school students will encounter some version of semiotics before they even get into their senior years. Not only has this robbed us of some of our most successful teaching content, but the way the secondary schools in most states taught semiotics killed it stone dead. So, too, with some other cultural studies approaches to textual analysis intended to deal with the politics of the text—with issues of representation and power. From the mid-1980s onwards, all kinds of cultural, critical and literary

theory that had once been the exclusive preserve of the university migrated into senior school curricula where, largely, it got turned into restrictive templates and formulations in order to enable students at all levels of ability to make a fist of using it.

This is a long story which I go into in much more appropriate detail somewhere else,² but I argue that eventually what was left of this mutated body of cultural and critical theory got reprocessed into a crude form of critical discourse analysis that turned all texts into encoded forms of politics—privileging meaning at the expense of pleasure while reducing the processes of analysis and interpretation to a ritualistic game of naming ‘the discourse’. Everything, from the most idiosyncratic to the most formulaic of texts, got put through what came to be called the approaches of ‘critical literacy’ to find the discourses within which the text’s politics were embedded. Along the way, I would also argue, this particular version of the critical literacies approach messed up another useful pedagogic tool for us—the notion of discourse. I’m generalising here (although I can certainly defend this view), but in most Australian states the version of ‘discourse’ taught in the secondary school was such a crude distortion of the idea we teach (in most places, it became synonymous with what we would have once called a ‘theme’) that it was almost useless to us and had to be retaught. (Not a good thing—if there is one thing a first year undergrad does not want to hear is that they must forget everything they were taught in school!)

Suddenly, then, the exciting new things we had to tell our students were no longer news. Not only that, but some of these approaches had been so mercilessly flogged at school that they had become, as it were, ‘bad’ news.

Foremost among the bad news was anything to do with the politics of texts. Most of our students have heard nothing but lectures on the politics of texts since they were fifteen! What might once have been a startling and productive notion has been transformed into such a weary and formalised routine in senior English that, for the best of our students, it had come to signify the essence of dullness. In such a context, it is not hard to understand why many cultural studies university teachers have felt the need to raise the bar in terms of the sophistication of what they present to their students as a means of differentiating between the high school and the university experience.

Of course, we had always set out to have this kind of influence and so we can hardly whine about it having occurred. What I suspect, though, is that we have not paid much attention to the effects of our intervention as the years have gone by. Or, to put it another way, we have not been as ready to accept an ongoing responsibility for monitoring how cultural studies concepts have been employed and modified in secondary school curricula as we were to engage in the debates which resulted in these concepts being taken up in the first place. As cultural studies has become more established, as its institutional locations have become more secure, and as each successive generation of cultural studies teachers has found

fewer obstacles between them and their capacity to teach the material they want to teach, perhaps a level of complacency has developed which generates an unfounded confidence in the intrinsic attraction of what we have to offer. There is plenty of evidence that many of those who prepare first year programs for cultural studies undergraduates have not paid sufficient attention to the preparation their students receive in high school.³ Consequently, it is not surprising that they might therefore overlook the urgent necessity of continually coming up with new ways to make undergraduate cultural studies exciting.

In one of the bursts of blogging following the CSAA panel, there was a complaint from John Gunders that the discussion at the conference had been hijacked by 'a decline of cultural studies' discourse, recycling longstanding and familiar anxieties about the standing of the field in the universities and in public.⁴ The unwitting provocation for this may have been Angi Buettner's thoughtful outline of the way that media studies, not cultural studies, has played the leading disciplinary role in New Zealand, where she now works. As we know, cultural studies has never had the critical mass or the influence in New Zealand that it has enjoyed in Australia, and Angi Buettner argued that media studies filled that gap—proving an effective way of making use of cultural studies' theoretical and methodological capacities. The comparison suggested, too, that some of the issues I would connect with CS101 may be avoided by media studies to some extent because of the different disciplinary territories it needs to occupy—political economy, professional practice, media history and so on. (Although, I wouldn't necessarily regard all the New Zealand programs that I have seen in recent years as CS101-free zones.)

Nonetheless, like John Gunders, I would argue that 'a decline of cultural studies' discourse is precisely *not* the one we should be operating here. In my view, what we are seeing is a product of the successful institutionalisation of cultural studies, not its failure. This fundamental question about the way we teach our students and what we think is important to teach our students derives its pertinence from the fact that we are in a position to control both of these factors. If our teaching is failing, or if it has become something in which we have lost interest, then that needs to be addressed directly rather than simply folded into the default (and I would suggest, self-indulgent) cultural studies whinge about being undervalued or in decline. This situation has come about because there is no real danger of losing our institutional location in the immediate future, not because it is under threat. That is not a permanent condition, however. Ironically, it seems to me that the danger represented by a declining interest in pedagogy is that it may, in the long term, undermine the viability and security of that institutional location. If the strength of cultural studies teaching was fundamental to its success in Australia, the failure to maintain the quality of that teaching could prove a fatal weakness.

Here I want to briefly reconnect my discussion of this issue with the first point I raised in this article—the ascendancy of research as the primary professional terrain for today's cultural studies academic. As I noted earlier, the restructuring of university funding mechanisms has driven academics towards research as a necessary response to the under-funding of teaching. When income earned from research performance is used to subsidise core teaching activities—and that is what happens in all Australian universities today—then the imperative to invest, increasingly, in research activities is irresistible. In the context of institutional funding regimes which have effectively devalued teaching, then, the situation I am describing has its structural and institutional determinants. These funding regimes send clear messages about how we should prioritise among our various activities, and it is not surprising that one result seems to be the steady erosion of the time made available for, and I would suggest even the importance accorded to, the development of teaching programs. These pressures are serious contributing factors which reinforce the more discipline-specific tendencies underlying the complex of conditions I am describing here.

All of that said, the widespread prevalence of CS101 can't merely be sheeted home to the workings of external or institutional determinants. More importantly, while I would argue that the danger it represents is serious, we have the power to address it. Of course, I acknowledge the fact that many of those who have developed courses which would fit the description of CS101 have done so in the service of sincerely held and highly committed academic positions. Debates in my own university about how best to frame our cultural studies teaching have exposed genuine, and legitimate, differences of opinion about precisely the kinds of issues I have been discussing here. We all agree on providing students with a strong theoretical background, and a sense of the shape of the discipline; we don't necessarily agree on how that should be done. Consequently, I accept that an argument has to be made which demonstrates the costs of the strategy I have labelled CS101. A short digression might suggest the kinds of concerns such an argument would raise.

A few years ago, I was fortunate to be asked to serve as the external examiner for Meaghan Morris's cultural studies program at Lingnan University in Hong Kong. Among the many interesting opportunities this role provided was the reading of samples of student work each semester. I learnt an enormous amount from these samples: about how cultural studies theories played out in a non-Western context, for a start, but much more dramatically about the students' own popular culture. Hong Kong popular culture is just plain rich, and the students' identification with and investment in Hong Kong cinema in particular was remarkable. At the end of the three years I served in this capacity, I had received a bit of an education myself. What was striking and admirable about the Lingnan program was how closely it worked with the students' own experiences, their own cultural capital and political concerns.

The Lingnan students are very much like the ones I started teaching in the CAE sector back in the 1970s: first generation university students, low levels of class capital, not necessarily academically gifted but passionately engaged by cultural studies' demonstrable capacity to help them understand their own culture. The program certainly didn't soft-pedal the theoretical demands upon their students, but it deliberately and effectively worked on the connection between cultural studies' knowledges and the students' own knowledge about their own popular culture. That this connection was productive was abundantly clear from the things I learned about Hong Kong popular culture from reading their scripts. Unfortunately, I don't think I would learn that much about the students' own culture if I was to take such a role in relation to CS101. This is the element which is lost and something we should regret.

Let's just suppose, then, there is something to this account—how do we talk about it, and what do we do about it? It is certainly possible, within each institution, to learn from the comments of our postgraduates and sessional teachers and to design a more empowered role for those charged with looking after these large and fundamental teaching programs. They should be better mentored as teachers, for a start. Also, they should be involved in intramural discussions about pedagogy and design so that their experiences feed into the mix; clearly, this is not happening in a number of universities—particularly, it seems, the very large metropolitan universities with large cohorts of sessional teachers. Correcting this, once the problem is recognised, is easily within our grasp.

Working across the sector more broadly, though, is far more difficult—but perhaps even more necessary because at least on that dimension we can get beyond what are often highly personalised debates about particular courses and their teachers. Unfortunately, our networks are either intra-institutional or built around our research interests. There are very few opportunities outside the confines of the individual school or department where teaching strategies, course design and so on might be discussed. This may be due to the competitive structure of the sector—where we are directly competing against our colleagues for students and the funding that comes with them. Yet we also compete against our colleagues for research funds—and there is significant cross-institutional collaboration nonetheless, as well as a professional research infrastructure that continually tests our own practice against that of the rest of the profession. There is nothing like that through which we might compare and test our teaching practices. I suspect a factor here is the complacency mentioned above: perhaps there is little discussion about teaching because it is more or less assumed we have that sorted out. We might mentor the junior staff or we might not; we might provide a little bit of advice about course design or the techniques required to teach through the web (say), but, really, pedagogy is not on the radar as a cross-institutional, sector-wide issue that must regularly be addressed.

Regrettably, too, it is not in the interests of individual institutions to foster a national dialogue about such things—although many institutions fund research projects into teaching that are aimed at benefiting their own performance, few would be interested in brokering a national dialogue about the teaching of cultural studies in general. In a competitive higher education system, sector-wide improvements in a particular disciplinary formation cannot be a high priority for the participating institutions. The CSAA or the locally published journals such as *Cultural Studies Review* are among the few places where such a dialogue might be initiated and prosecuted. Hence, the CSAA panel and now this article. Let's discuss this.

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1. I probably should point out, in case I am misunderstood here, that before I finished fulltime teaching in 2000 I had been teaching cultural studies for almost twenty-five years. Over that time I had been wholly engaged with developing undergraduate cultural studies programs in institutions where they did not previously exist. So, the issues I am dealing with in this essay have been at the front of my mind, and of my practice, for a very long time.
 2. See Graeme Turner 'Cultural Literacies, Critical Literacies, and the English School Curriculum in Australia', *International Journal of Cultural Studies*, vol. 10, no. 1, 2007. A revised and expanded version of this is being published as 'Critical Literacy, Cultural Literacy and the English School Curriculum in Australia' in Sue Owen (ed.), *Richard Hoggart and Cultural Studies*, Palgrave, London, 2008.
 3. Cultural studies, of course, is not the only university teaching area to be guilty of this; in recent years, the pages of the *Australian* have been peppered with debates about the consequences of the university discipline of English neglecting to monitor what had happened to the subject English in the schools.
 4. See <<http://thememesofproduction.org/articles/the-end-of-cultural-studies>>.