Learning from change: An editorial introduction

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It is generally acknowledged that the higher education sector in Australia and all over the world is in a state of flux. Change is occurring in every facet of the enterprise (Rowley, Lujan & Dolence, 1998; Bates, 2000; Nakamura, 2001). Higher education is becoming an international 'commodity' subject to the pressures of economic rationalism and international markets, and risks losing local and individual perspectives (Coaldrake & Stedman, 1999). In Australia, government policies reduce funding contributions per student while calling for 'sustainability, quality, equity and diversity' in higher education (Nelson, 2003). Policies, regulation and funding are affecting the teaching practices and working conditions of academics (Curzon-Hobson, 2002). Managerial perspectives and calls for accountability compete with more collegial and humanist approaches that many see as essential to good teaching (Zipin & Brennan, 2003).

At the same time, the technological revolution that is bringing change to our every-day lives is also opening new possibilities in the way that learning is delivered to our students (Bates, 2000; Bell, Bush, Nicholson, O'Brien & Tran 2002; Traxler & Kukulska-Hulme 2005). The influence of digital technologies on educational practices is reaching a point where the sociotechnical systems that emerge from responses to the pressures on higher education determine what kinds of learning and teaching are possible, providing both new opportunities and new constraints. Such technologies open new possibilities for teaching, but raise new questions about how students learn effectively in this digital environment and how it affects the roles of the teachers and managers in promoting attainment of quality learning outcomes.

While these pressures make it difficult, it is essential that academics have opportunities to reflect on experiences of change and learn to guide their practice to both take advantage of opportunities and work around or resist constraints. In dealing with the pressures of this changing world, the colleagues that we have most in common with as teachers may not be those teaching in the same discipline area, but those teaching in a similar context at other institutions. We need to have the time for reflection on our individual and collective experiences and also time to share our stories and reflections with each other.

This need to share experiences led to the theme for the 2005 Learning and Teaching Showcase at Central Queensland University—*Telling our stories: Learning from change*. At an operational level, CQU is a complex university

catering to diverse interest groups that include Australian students at five campuses in different cities in regional Queensland, a substantial distance education mode operation, as well as international students at Sydney, Melbourne and Brisbane metropolitan campuses and at off-shore campuses. This regional/metropolitan, multimode, multicultural, multicampus organisation is dependent on a great deal of flexibility and innovation in teaching and administration in order to meet the diverse needs of its students.

The Showcase is an annual event which encourages academic and other staff to focus on current trends in higher education. Dialogue is facilitated by invited speakers from Australia and overseas as well as presentations and activities by CQU staff. The best of these presentations have been gathered in this special issue of Studies in LEID, and a second forthcoming issue. The papers here are an example of the range of concerns that affect higher education at the moment—at a number of levels from the institutional, to the personal.

Ann-Marie Priest and Phillipa Sturgess turn the focus on to teachers as individuals and discuss the relationship between reflective practice and the concept of the scholarship of teaching. They argue that reflective practice, in all its manifestations is the foundation for scholarly practice and they question the institutional trend to define scholarly practice in the narrow terms of quantum of publication.

Sebastian Garde, Matthias Bauch, Martin Haag, Jörn Heid, Sören Huwendiek, Franz Ruderich, Reiner Singer and Franz Leven describe an advanced web-based multimedia system, CAMPUS which provides sophisticated simulations of medical case studies. These simulations are designed to be used as the basis for problem based learning. They show how this use of technology to create authentic, student-centred learning environments can enhance and enable effective learning based on active learning styles.

The use of technology as a teaching tool is also a vehicle for the article by Danielle Helbers, Dolene Rossi and Leone Hinton. They investigate the use of online communication to support student group activities in an undergraduate health communications class. Their analysis of the group transcripts is the basis for a discussion of the communications patterns that emerged.

Patrick Danaher, Jo Luck and Jeanne McConachie also examine the adoption of online technologies into higher education, but they turn their attention to the institutional processes that surround such a movement. Their article considers several documents that were produced as part of organisational decision making processes regarding the adoption of technological systems to support teaching and learning. They suggest that analysis of such documents provides valuable insights not only into the processes of organisational change, but also into the underlying values and beliefs that shape teaching and learning strategies and practice in the institution.

The final article, by Don Bowser, Patrick Danaher and Jay Somasundaram also addresses institutional issues. However, the authors move away from the technological developments to the human world. Their discussion characterises student attrition and retention as complex phenomenon which cannot be understood by simple data collection, measurement and analysis. Their discussion highlights the different ways in which issues and themes surrounding attrition are conceptualised and suggests that these conceptualisations can usefully inform our understanding of the phenomenon of attrition.

From the teacher, to the technology, to the institution, to the student—these articles represent a cross section of the issues that higher education practitioners are grappling with across the sector. We suggest that these articles support the idea that the day of the teacher who lives in the 'ivory tower' in a classroom isolated from the world is long gone and that modern university teachers, administrators and managers must engage with all these issues, and many more, in order to provide quality learning opportunities for our students.

The articles gathered here show some of the ways in which one Australian regional university is responding to this rapidly changing world and we hope that you will find some commonality with the experiences and considerations described. We are all faced with the inevitability of change and "Sharing our stories" is one way to ensure that we all learn from the experience.

Acknowledgements

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