

Teaching Matters

a newsletter from the Teaching and Learning Unit

Issue 2, 2007

<http://tlu.ecom.unimelb.edu.au>

The Teaching and Learning Unit is pleased to forward the second issue of Teaching Matters. You will find in this issue information about some of the new projects initiated within the TLU and a list of new teaching resources available at the TLU website. Also included, for debate and discussion, is a precis of some of the ideas surrounding the theory of Conceptions of Teaching.

News from the TLU

Since the release of the first issue in Semester One the TLU has welcomed a new Director, Associate Professor Kim Watty. Prior to joining the TLU, Kim was the Director of Teaching Quality in the School of Accounting and Law at RMIT University. With a discipline background in accounting, she has a keen research interest in assessment design, quality in higher education and an emerging interest in threshold concepts.

Maintaining Teaching Quality in a Changing Environment

Diverse student cohorts, increasing class sizes and funding for learning and teaching based on attrition rates and students' perceptions of their university experience, are just some of the current challenges for academics teaching in universities today.

On paper, these issues may appear to be mutually exclusive, and addressed in the normal cycle of teaching, research, administrative and leadership activities. In reality, they are closely related and challenge our traditional methods of learning and teaching.

Improving the quality of teaching is a forerunner for improving student learning outcomes. Yet learning outcomes are influenced, not only by the quality of instruction, but by a number of other variables. These include, but are not limited to our students' previous educational experience; cultural backgrounds; orientations to study; preferred learning styles; outside work commitments; perceptions of the learning environment; and importantly, expectations about their role and the role of academics in 'higher' education.

Many of the variables listed above are outside the scope of academic influence and as such, are not controlled in the context of learning; however, teaching, curriculum and assessment are areas that academics do influence, and as such, is an important focus for enhancement of university teaching.

Through a variety of programs and activities, and our understanding and contributions to the ongoing discourse in the higher education literature, the TLU is collaborating with staff to work towards this enhancement. As we continue this work, your comments and input are highly valued and most welcome.

Associate Professor Kim Watty

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Conceptions of Teaching

Much of the early work on conceptions of teaching was formulated by higher education researchers Keith Trigwell and Michael Prosser. The theories have been tested in various teaching settings and have been recently developed into more refined theories of teaching by Lynne McAlpine et al.

Put simply, conceptions of teaching are the meanings attached to university teaching which are claimed to influence or shape a teacher's view of their teaching and in turn to mediate their teaching practice.

The work on conceptions of teaching has interest for teachers who wish to reflect on their practice or consider how their teaching practice is related to learning. It may appear self evident that teachers' conceptions of learning inform their approaches to teaching. Trigwell and Prosser find, for example, that "those teachers who conceive of learning as information accumulation to meet external demands also conceive of teaching as transmitting information to students and approach their teaching in terms of teacher-focused strategies" (Trigwell and Prosser 1996, p. 281).

The authors list six categories of Conceptions of Teaching:

- Teaching as transmitting concepts of the syllabus
- Teaching as transmitting the teachers' knowledge
- Teaching as helping students to acquire concepts of the syllabus
- Teaching as helping students to acquire teachers' knowledge
- Teaching as helping students to develop conceptions
- Teaching as helping students to change conceptions

(Trigwell and Prosser 1996, p. 277)

These conceptions can be simplified into two broad categories:

1. Teacher-centred/content oriented
2. Student-centred/learning oriented

(Kember 1997)

The argument in favour of considering conceptions of teaching when reflecting on teaching for the purposes of developing and improving one's practice is the assumption that a student-centred approach to learning facilitates better learning outcomes. This assumption is grounded in research (Entwistle and Ramsden 1983; Trigwell and Prosser 1991).

However, recent work (see for example Devlin 2006) has challenged some of the assumptions upon which notions of conceptions of teaching are based. Some of the questions raised by Devlin include:

- whether there are causal relationships between conceptions of teaching, teaching practice and student learning; and
- whether improvement of teaching is dependent upon a student-centred conception of teaching.

More recently, McAlpine et al have reconceptualised teacher thinking in terms of 'zones'. This research recognises that teaching is situated in particular contexts and this range of contexts (temporal, social and physical) means that there is variety in the ways in which teachers reflect and act.

A brief summary of the four zones are as follows:

- The conceptual zone: the overarching beliefs and values about teaching and learning.
- The strategic zone: the instructional design that links beliefs and values with planning for instruction.
- The tactical zone: operationalising the strategic in the specific plans for teaching.
- The enactive zone: the action that occurs within the context of instruction.

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UPCOMING LUNCH AND WORKSHOP: Tuesday 4 December, 12:30 in Room 407, Babel.

The 'Zones' of teacher thinking is a way of reconceptualising teaching in higher education, outlined in recent research by McAlpine et al. It provides a useful way of reflecting upon teaching.

This workshop will offer teaching staff in the Faculty of Economics and Commerce an interesting way of discussing their own approaches to teaching and how these approaches inform practice.

PRESENTED BY ANNA JONES

References

- Devlin, M. (2006) Challenging Accepted Wisdom about Conceptions of Teaching in Academic Development, *International Journal of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education*, Vol 18 (2): 112-117.
- Entwistle N. and Ramsden P. (1983) *Understanding Student Learning*, London and Canberra: Croom Helm
- Kember, D. (1997). A reconceptualisation of the research into university academics' conceptions of teaching. *Learning and Instruction*, Vol 7 (3): 255-275.
- McAlpine, L., Weston, C., Timmermans, J., Berthiaume D. and Fairbank-Roch, G. (2006) Zones: Reconceptualizing teacher thinking in relation to action, *Studies in Higher Education*, Vol. 31 (5): 601-615.
- Trigwell, K. and Prosser, M. (1991) Improving the Quality of Student Learning: the influence of learning context and student approaches to learning on learning outcomes, *Higher Education*, Vol 22 (3): 251-266.
- Trigwell, K. and Prosser, M (1996) Changing Approaches to Teaching: A relational perspective, *Society for Research into Higher Education*, Vol 21 (3): 275-284.

The Carrick Institute Grants Scheme

Important Dates for 2008

27 March:

Competitive Grants Program - Expressions of Interest and Full Proposals

10 April:

Leadership for Excellence in Learning and Teaching Program - Expressions of Interest and Full Proposals

23 April:

Priority Projects Program - Expressions of Interest and Full Proposals

26 June:

Grants Scheme Competitive Grants Program - Full Proposals (Requested from first round applications)

10 July:

Priority Projects Program - Full Proposals (Requested from first round applications)

18 July:

Leadership for Excellence in Learning and Teaching Program - Full Proposals (Requested from first round applications)

website:

<http://www.carrickinstitute.edu.au/carrick/go/home/grants>

The Grants Scheme has three programs:

Leadership for Excellence in Learning and Teaching Program supports systematic, structured and sustainable models of academic leadership in higher education.

Priority Projects Program addresses, in the first instance, priorities emanating from the Institute's designated responsibilities (including benchmarking, assessment, standards and related aspects of good practice in learning and teaching). Priority Projects may also focus on good practice in higher education in terms of creative and effective use of teaching and learning spaces, and collaborative, cross-institutional projects which examine the role of peer review in the enhancement of learning and teaching in higher education.

The **Competitive Grants Program** supports: Research and development focussing on issues of emerging and continuing importance; Strategic approaches to learning and teaching that address the increasing diversity of the student body; Development of robust methods of identifying and rewarding excellence in teaching (excluding awards schemes); and Innovation in learning and teaching, including in relation to the role of new technologies.

2008 Quantitative Analysis of Teaching and Learning Forum

Now in its fourth year, the Forum is a joint initiative of the TLU and the Department of Economics. At the 2008 Forum Dr Les Coleman, Dr Sean Pinder and Dr Jessica Curtis from our own Department of Finance will present. This is in addition to 10 other interesting papers given by academics from around the country.

2008 Forum paper titles:

- Successful Outcomes for Students at Risk
- What can be Done to Improve Student Success in First Year Statistics?
- Improving Student Skills in Essay Writing and Oral Presentations
- Developing Collaboration Skills in First Year Undergraduate Business Students
- Teaching Survey Evaluations as a Performance Evaluation Tool: How Much of a Good Teaching Score is beyond a Lecturer's Control
- It's Not as Bad as they Thought: Student Preferences for Teaching Format across Subjects and over Time
- Coping with Transition: International Students in Australia
- Differential Item Functioning between Domestic and International Students in an Introductory Finance Unit: A Bayesian Analysis
- Does Regular Online Testing Enhance Student Learning?: Evidence from a Large First-Year Quantitative Methods Course
- The Role of Error Matrices in Facilitating Constructive Alignment in Online Multiple Choice Tests: The CSU Experience
- *FinanceNow!*: An Empirical Analysis of the Usage Impact of Real-Time Information in Finance Education

A record number of abstracts were received this year, evidence of the growing profile of the Forum; one of the few national forums for quantitative research in teaching and learning.

The Forum will be held on 8th February 2008.

To register for the Forum, visit: http://tlu.ecom.unimelb.edu.au/contact_us/register.html

NOTE: There is a \$50 registration fee for the Forum and another (optional) \$50 fee to cover the dinner.

Paper titles are listed on the Forum website:

http://tlu.ecom.unimelb.edu.au/teaching_staff/forum/

Previous paper titles can be viewed here and copies of proceedings can be purchased for \$30.

There are no parallel sessions at the Forum and normally around 100+ people attend from 38 universities nationwide.

Further information:

Dr Martin Davies (on behalf of the Forum Committee)
8344-5727 or wmdavies@unimelb.edu.au

New Resources for Academic Staff

The Teaching and Learning Unit has compiled a collection of journals related to education issues within each of the Economics and Commerce disciplines. Links to these journals, together with a summary of each publication's Aims and Scope, are available at the website: http://tlu.ecom.unimelb.edu.au/teaching_staff/resources/journals.html

Accounting Business Information Systems

Accounting Education: An International Journal
Issues in Accounting Education
Journal of Accounting Education

Economics

Journal of Economic Education
Australasian Journal of Economics Education
International Review of Economics Education
Computers in Higher Education Economics Review

Finance

Journal of Education Finance
Journal of Economics and Finance Education

Marketing and Management

Journal of Management Education
Academy of Management Learning and Education

Resources Designed for Tutors

In addition to material prepared for lecturing staff there is a large quantity of material prepared for tutors. Each booklet is available at: http://tlu.ecom.unimelb.edu.au/teaching_staff/resources/

'Encouraging Student Participation in Tutorials'

This booklet reviews the strategies that tutors use to encourage active participation in class. The tutor's role is outlined and a ten-point plan of practical tips for facilitating participation is included. The plan includes a set of exercises tutors can use to orientate students to learning and a range of activities that can promote participation in class.

'Tutorial Questioning Technique'

Good questions generate good discussion. This booklet describes the planning required to set up a cooperative environment in class and some suggestions for improving questioning technique. Types of questions, such as the hypothetical question, the diagnostic question and the connective question are described. Strategies for presenting the question and managing student responses are discussed.

'Evaluating Your Tutoring'

Ongoing evaluation of teaching improves teaching skills as well as the learning experience for students. This booklet lists techniques for self-evaluation and getting (constructive!) student feedback. The value of peer observation is also discussed; including some ground rules for this potentially confronting type of evaluation.

Additional online resources include:

[How to Start the First Tutorial](#)

[How to Structure and Teach a Tutorial](#)

[Tutor Roles and Responsibilities](#)

[Teaching International Students in Tutorials](#)

[Activities to Use in Tutorials](#)

'PASS'

Peer-Assisted Study Scheme

The Peer Assisted Study Scheme (PASS) is a program of supplementary instruction. The PASS program, when implemented in a subject, offers weekly, hour-long revision sessions to students who are enrolled in that subject.

PASS seeks to promote engaged, questioning, reflective learning. Participation in the PASS program helps to satisfy two conditions that are known to promote effective learning: the provision of timely and constructive feedback on academic performance and progress, and opportunities to study collaboratively in a peer learning setting.

A **PASS session** is student-run, for students. The leader is a senior student who has achieved excellent academic results in the subject and has received training for the role as leader. Each group usually includes between 5-15 students. Students work together with their leader to review the subject material and develop academic skills.

Importantly, **PASS leaders** are not tutors. The leader's role is to facilitate learning, to allow students to ask questions, clarify and discuss ideas, work through problems, help students to develop learning strategies and to work together collaboratively. The leaders do not teach the subject content or provide students with answers, but enable students to develop the skills to find the answers themselves.

"What PASS offers that makes it unique is a strong focus on a *collaborative* learning environment where everyone can feel comfortable to share their ideas, knowledge, and ask questions...It's one thing to have a certain understanding of a topic, but to have to explain it to someone else in a way they can understand takes certain degree of skill."
Aaron, PASS leader 2007

PASS is currently offered in the following subjects:

- 333-201 Business Finance
- 333-302 Corporate Finance
- 333-301 Investments
- 306-202 Intermediate Financial Accounting
- 333-101 Finance 1

The **TLU role** includes the recruitment and training of leaders, ongoing support of leaders through provision of written materials, observations and feedback. The TLU promotes the PASS program to students and administers enrolments and final program evaluations.

If you would like to read more about the PASS program or how it can be implemented in your subject please contact Mr Rod Beecham (rbeecham@unimelb.edu.au) or for more information about PASS please visit: <http://tlu.ecom.unimelb.edu.au/students/undergraduate/PASSoverview.html>

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