

University Teaching: some considerations¹
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Preliminary comments

Before seeking to offer some answers to the three questions I have been asked to address, I would note that teaching in universities is a broad ranging activity which one descriptor will not adequately cover. Think for a moment about teaching large undergraduate classes, taking small tutorial groups with or without student presentations, teaching smaller doctoral classes, supervising laboratory work, supervising practical work, and supervising higher degree students and their research work. In my view all of these come under the rubric of university teaching and should be considered when discussing appropriate policies and practices about it. Furthermore, there are different delivery modes possible for each, including the usage of information technologies. Martin Trow (1993) distinguished between delivery, challenge, scholarly exploration and creation modes of delivery when talking about university teaching. All of these need to be thought of as teaching or pedagogy. There is thus a **definitional issue** here. What are we talking about when we are discussing university teaching? We need to keep these matters to the forefront throughout our discussions on university teaching. We should also be thinking about quality in relation to all of these.

I would also note, following the theoretical work of the British sociologist of education Basil Bernstein (1971, 1996) that we also need to see teaching or pedagogy as one of three intimately interrelated message systems of educational institutions and their purposes, namely, **curriculum, pedagogy and assessment**. Good pedagogy includes good assessment practices, including the useful distinction made in Scottish school education between assessment *as, of and for* learning. This is the distinction between summative and formative assessment, with the latter also central to effective pedagogy. The research evidence would suggest that good educational practices require the **alignment between curriculum, pedagogy and assessment**. This means that we cannot dissociate or uncouple considerations of pedagogy from assessment practices, both formative and summative, nor can we uncouple teaching from curriculum or discipline orientation and questions relating to curriculum development.

In respect of the pedagogy/curriculum relationship, there is also research literature which argues the need for consideration of teaching/pedagogy and its relationship with content knowledge and the specific characteristics of a given discipline. Lee Shulman, the President of the US based Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, calls this **pedagogical content knowledge** (Shulman and Sparks, 1992). Pedagogical content knowledge is not the same thing as discipline knowledge, but good discipline knowledge is important to pedagogical content knowledge. There is also some research literature on schools which has demonstrated that threshold knowledge about a discipline or field of knowledge is necessary to effective teaching (Darlin-Hammond, 2000). But, what is pedagogical content knowledge? Shulman argues that that it involves knowing how to choose examples and representations of key disciplinary concepts for use in the pedagogical

¹ Professor Carolin Kreber, University of Edinburgh, Dr Merrilyn Goos and Dr Gloria Dall'alba from the University of Queensland commented on this talk and also informed me of recent developments in the field. I thank them sincerely for their assistance. Any errors of fact or judgement are, of course, are mine!

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encounter to make the discipline and its concepts accessible to students. This then is not the same thing as content knowledge. Pedagogical content knowledge is also about making disciplinary concepts and knowledge accessible to students. The other side of pedagogical content knowledge as a requirement of good pedagogy is knowing and understanding how students learn and why they might have some difficulties with some concepts. The evidence would suggest that while university academics have excellent disciplinary knowledge, they do not have much pedagogical content knowledge. This raises the question of whether a **generic model of pedagogy** can be applied across the disciplines, that is whether, good teaching is good teaching wherever its disciplinary location. My view is that we need generic models of good pedagogy, as well as those located within specific pedagogical content knowledge.

Having considered some definitional issues and the need to think of teaching or pedagogy in relation to assessment and curriculum, we also need to think of the place of teaching in definitions of the work of university academics. In Australian universities (and I would suggest throughout the globe) academic work is usually seen to consist of three activities in varying combinations. These activities are usually classified as **research**, **teaching** and **service**, with the latter defined in terms of the role of the good academic citizen through a contribution to university management and administration and more broadly to the discipline and/or profession and to the broader community. Since the abolition of the binary system of higher education in Australia in the late 1980s/early 1990s, there has been some variation in the balance of these three activities in the definition of academic work both within, but also very much between institutions. There has also been some movement to talk of **scholarship** in addition to research to refer to knowledge of a field and its research as opposed to involvement as an active researcher. Within the older, established institutions, research still retains the highest status, while in some of the newer universities scholarship defined as deep knowledge about research in a field and of the field has accompanied a widening definition of research to include scholarship defined in this way.

Since the creation of a quasi-market in Australian higher education in relation to both national and international students, rankings on research output have become a significant factor in these quasi-markets, particularly in attracting high quality students and particularly at the postgraduate level. Australia is in the process of introducing a new Research Quality Framework (RQF), which purports to measure the quality of research output in all of the disciplines across all of the universities and is in some ways akin to the Research Assessment Exercise (RAE) in the UK, though with more emphasis given to impact of research than in the UK, and comparable in some ways with the Excellence Initiative, as I understand it, in Germany. Australian universities are working assiduously towards ensuring they do as well as possible on this exercise. It remains to be seen what the impact will be in relation to relationships between research and teaching and learning within universities.

While research is in many ways the *sine qua non* of universities and academic work in them, perhaps more of the day to day functioning is focused on teaching. A number of policy factors has enhanced both a policy and institutional focus on university teaching in Australia over the last twenty years or so. Quasi-marketisation, the introduction of student fees, new forms of accountability and quality assurance have together precipitated a renewed and institutionalised/more formalised focus on the quality of teaching as well. Certainly students with more of a consumer perspective growing out of fee payments are demanding good teaching and learning.

In Australia, there have been some recent and significant national policy initiatives aimed at raising the status of university teaching and enhancing the quality of student learning (Dearn, 2006, p. 39). These can also be seen as located within federal government policy initiatives on quality. The first is the establishment of the Carrick Institute for Learning and Teaching in Higher Education in 2004 (see www.carrickinstitute.edu.au/carrick/go/home.) The Carrick Institute functions through various programs, including the Carrick Awards for Australian University Teaching, national teaching fellowships, a Grants Scheme and so on. A current major project of Carrick is focused on developing indicators at individual and institutional levels for measuring quality teaching. It is also interesting that in its stated objectives the Carrick Institute recognises that the 'enhancement of learning and teaching' includes a need

to focus on curriculum development and assessment. The Teaching awards, one of the central responsibilities of the Carrick Institute, are in five categories across disciplinary groupings, for early career, Indigenous education, and in priority areas determined by the Institute. In 2006 and 2007 the priority was team teaching. There has been a recent expansion of the number of national Australian awards for University Teaching (250 annual teaching awards).

The federal government has also recently established a Learning and Teaching Performance Fund worth about \$250 million over three years aimed at rewarding universities differentially in terms of their demonstrated excellence in respect of teaching and learning. Eligibility for application for this funding required that universities met certain criteria, including having a current institutional teaching and learning strategy, evidence of support for professional development for all academic staff in relation to teaching and learning, evidence that university probation and promotion procedures require evidence on quality of teaching, and 'evidence of systematic student evaluation of teaching and subjects' required for probation and promotion. These eligibility requirements had the policy effect of instantiating in universities formal structures, policies and practices with an explicit focus on quality of teaching and learning.

Let me turn to the specific example of the place of teaching and learning at the University of Queensland, for example, where I worked for 16 years (in the last years as Professor and Head of School), where we can see institutional commitments to teaching and learning, as well as the effects of some of these national Policy developments. Probation/tenure and promotion applications require that staff portfolios include formal student evaluations of all teaching, carried out independently by the University's Teaching and Educational Development Institute (TEDI). These data provide comparative mean scores (across all teaching evaluations in the university) for the academic in relation to evaluations of the course of study and evaluations of the teaching. The evaluation consists of a questionnaire constructed by the academic from a bank of items created by TEDI with some options for additional items to be added at the discretion of the academic. This process is conducted independently by TEDI. Other evidence of quality and innovative teaching is also desirable for these applications, including teaching portfolios. Scholarship of teaching has become another possible element in these processes as well.

At The University of Queensland, promotion to professor on the basis of scholarship of teaching has now also been introduced, while some job descriptions are defined as having such a focus, as opposed to a research focus. This seems to be a genuine and legitimate step to demonstrate that quality of teaching is central to the work of the university. Inside the institution itself, this has precipitated debate about whether or not this is simply a career track for non-researchers. This has not been the intention of central administration. Nonetheless, such debate and these developments demonstrate the issue of the status and standing of research and teaching *vis a vis* each other, both within and between universities.

The University of Queensland has created the position of ProVice Chancellor Teaching and Learning (reporting to Deputy Vice Chancellor Academic) to oversee teaching policy and performance inside the university. Indeed, the creation in universities across Australia of a senior management position of either Deputy Vice-Chancellor Teaching and Learning or Pro Vice Chancellor Teaching and Learning also reflects the strengthened national and institutional focus on matters of teaching.

Whatever the specificities of these particular developments, my position is that **research and teaching** are both important in the work of the university and that the formalised focus on teaching in Australian universities is a very good thing. Certainly, it appears to be the case that the introduction of fees and quasi-markets in Australian higher education, along with national policy developments and related institutional concerns for good teaching and assessment practices, has seen an institutional focus on teaching quality and a demand for it from students themselves. I would also note that for most undergraduate students the teaching and assessment practices, along with curriculum content, are what they see as the university. Perhaps what distinguishes university teaching from that in schools here is its **underpinning in research and scholarship in a field, including (potentially at least) a**

scholarship of teaching, of assessment practices, and of curriculum development.

Schools are involved in the reproduction of knowledge, while universities are involved in the **production and reproduction of knowledge**, as well as its dissemination. The University of Edinburgh where I currently work states : 'The University's fundamental mission is the advancement and dissemination of knowledge and understanding', which implies the centrality of both **research and teaching** to the work of contemporary universities and of academics.

I will now turn to addressing the three questions I have been asked to focus on.

1. How can we teach teachers to teach?

The first observation I would make in relation to this question is that there are academic specialists around the world in this field and that we need to draw upon their expertise. Teacher education faculties in universities also have teaching neophyte teachers to teach as their specific professional focus and that maybe we also should look there to see what we can learn. There is also a research and professional literature about these questions. Furthermore, in other policy contexts there has been a specific focus in policy and research terms on university teaching, eg in Australia, there is the work of the Carrick Institute, in the UK there is the work of the Higher Education Academy and in the USA there is the work of the Carnegie Foundation. (See here the special number of *New Directions for Higher Education*, Number 133, Spring 2006 edited by my University of Edinburgh colleague, Professor Carolin Kreber, entitled, 'International Policy Perspectives on Improving Learning with Limited Resources'.) I would suggest that we go back to the original motivation for the creation of comparative education (now comparative and international education), which was that detailed and formalised study of other systems would allow for reflection on our own practices and that we could also learn from other systems. However, I would see this as **policy learning** rather than a simplistic **policy borrowing**, for despite globalization there remains a vernacular character to our institutions and practices, including universities which in their Enlightenment manifestation seek knowledge which has universalistic aspirations.

Given my earlier comments about the intimate relationship between curriculum, pedagogy and assessment, we need to acknowledge that the curriculum of teaching teachers in universities how to teach needs to cover **curriculum development** set against **curriculum theory, scholarship about teaching in universities, and scholarship about assessment practices**, while all of these need to be located within a consideration of the philosophy of university education. These form what we might see as the **knowledge base** for university teaching or pedagogy. In terms of pedagogical content knowledge, we can assume that university teachers know their disciplines and the research and scholarship in the field, but need to be assisted in the development of the related pedagogical content knowledge.

This is the knowledge base but we need to recognise that teaching /pedagogy is a **practice**. Thus, scholarship and research on teaching in relation to teaching as a practice need to be taken into consideration. Here observations of teaching, student feedback and evaluations, and apprenticeships within professional learning communities become important.

All of this could be done formally through teaching diplomas required by an institutional or national policy decision for all new university teachers to do a teaching qualification. Such non-compulsory diplomas are offered in most Australian universities now. These diplomas focus on the scholarship of teaching as defined above (including scholarship of assessment and curriculum development), but also have a very practice based focus in terms of their assessment. One way to teach university teachers to teach then is through required and formalised Diploma programs. Another is through institutional focus on matters of teaching and support for developmental work, for example through the creation of teacher professional learning communities, and through support for innovation, including the use of the new technologies. Another is through professional development programs and university policy development. However, I would stress again the practical side to university teaching and note the implementation gaps between policies around teaching and the actual practice of teaching.

2. Is it possible to distinguish good teaching from bad – within institutions and from the outside, and what fallacies do we meet when we try to do this?

I would argue that it is possible to distinguish good teaching from bad. This implies that we have research based knowledge in respect of effective pedagogies in higher education. I do not know that literature, but suggest that such scholarship of university teaching (including research on effective university teaching) would be a central element of any course for university teachers. This research also needs to underpin policy development.

There are models of school teaching which make a difference in terms of student learning. This research takes at face value goals of curricula to do with higher order intellectual outcomes and this implies the need to align such pedagogies with assessment practices, both formative and summative. I am thinking here of the US work of Fred Neumann and his colleagues (1994) at the University of Wisconsin Centre on the Restructuring of Schools which developed the concept/model of 'authentic pedagogy' based on detailed empirical analyses of classrooms using an observation map informed by earlier research and theory. The dimensions of authentic pedagogy, that is a pedagogy that made a difference in terms of intellectual outcomes, included higher order thinking, depth of knowledge and understanding, substantive conversation, and connectedness to the world beyond the classroom. I would also note research done in Australia on school pedagogies by myself and colleagues which was based upon 1000 observations of teacher classroom practices and which developed beyond the Neumann authentic pedagogy model to take account of social as well as intellectual outcomes (Lingard *et al.* 2003, Hayes *et al.* 2006). This model called 'productive pedagogies' consisted of four dimensions, namely, intellectual demand, connectedness, supportiveness, and working with and valuing differences and subsumed the authentic pedagogy dimensions within its multidimensional model. Such pedagogies were also seen to make a difference in terms of student outcomes. That research also emphasised the need for assessment practices aligned with such pedagogies, that is, to achieve higher order outcomes, assessment tasks had to be intellectually demanding of students (Lingard, Hayes and Mills, 2006). For those studying to be school teachers in Australia at this time, the scholarship of teaching would include coverage of these research models. The Australian research developed an observation manual which was used to map quality of teaching. I would note, though, that the focus here was on the use of such observation manuals and research based knowledge of productive pedagogies within teacher professional learning communities to make pedagogies more public and the focus of substantive professional conversations, rather than for more punitive or accountability purposes. Thus, the expectation was not that the model would be so much implemented as contribute to professional reflection about pedagogies, their alignment with assessment practices and curriculum goals, that is, that the model would be used for developmental purposes rather than accountability ones.

I would acknowledge that good university teaching needs to take account of the principles of adult learning and needs to be research based as well. The school pedagogies research has simply been utilised to suggest that we are able on the basis of research to distinguish between good and bad teaching.

Thus, while we can distinguish good teaching from bad, the purpose for doing this becomes very important. (This can be compared with the distinctions between purposes of assessment in terms of formative and summative forms.) Are these purposes educational and developmental or are they for accountability and ranking of courses, degrees, departments and institutions? How we consider the purposes of distinguishing good from bad teaching will determine our practices inside the institutions. Given that there is a scholarship of university teaching cognate with that of school teaching, I would argue strongly for the use of the scholarship of teaching in these developmental ways. This carries implications for external policy and funding but also for internal university cultures. I would also stress what I see as the important matter of national polices providing support for research on university teaching and for individual institutions to do the same. Such research would need to take account of a broad and inclusive definition of university teaching as indicated at the outset of this paper. Both of my observations here – the need for support for reflective pedagogical practice and

the need for research on university teaching go the heart of the definition of the contemporary university.

As already noted, at The University of Queensland there is a formalised process for student evaluations of all courses. These are one requirement for consideration in relation to probation/tenure and promotion and have both accountability and developmental purposes. These are important, but I would strongly caution against their use in systemic terms to provide comparative ranking of universities in respect of teaching quality. The institutional location allows for critical interrogation of 'scores' on these evaluations and for the monitoring of other forms of evidence about teaching in a teaching portfolio. Any attempt at a system wide (that is, across all universities) implementation would have potential negative effects in terms of the negation of such critical interrogation, but also would require some process of external moderation with a potentially stultifying effect and push to uniformity across institutions and perhaps encourage a particular transmission model of teaching. Any desire for a system wide focus on university teaching is perhaps best operationalised through support for teaching and research about it, framed and supported by institutional policies and perhaps the instituting of national awards for outstanding teaching, which uses a portfolio approach, including use of internal institutional evaluations by students, but which is a peer-reviewed process. The instigation of such a system wide approach serves the important purpose of demonstrating valuing of teaching within universities and university cultures. University autonomy in respect of these matters seems to be to be the best way to proceed but with broad supportive national policy frameworks.

The introduction of the Australian federal government's Learning and Teaching Performance Fund was mentioned earlier. Note was also made of how eligibility criteria had ensured more formalised institutional focus on teaching and learning within the universities. The distribution of this money to the best performing universities on seven performance indicators has also had an impact on the emphasis given to teaching and learning strategies inside universities. As I understand it, the awards are based on these performance indicators which are surrogate measures of the quality of teaching and learning. There is thus perhaps less likelihood of goal displacement in terms of effects upon institutions, but there is a potential for another ranking of universities in relation to teaching and learning, paralleling but distinct from that in relation to research. What this Fund has done is encourage a strengthened institutional focus on strategies and policies around teaching and learning, which in my view is a good thing. However, in my view this needs to be accompanied by the sorts of developmental processes mentioned earlier in response to this question, resulting in a change in institutional culture in relation to teaching and learning.

3. What (good and bad) comes out of competition in the field of university teaching?

I have some difficulty with the use of the word 'competition' in this question. As I have tried to argue throughout, I think that teaching quality **must** be a concern of university academics and universities and for policy makers. University teaching is central to the purposes of universities in respect of the reproduction and dissemination of knowledge. It should also be central to production of knowledge in terms of research on university teaching, which contributes to the scholarship of teaching, which can form the basis of courses and professional conversations about university teaching. However, my preference would be for broad national systemic frameworks to support a developmental focus inside universities on teaching, including research and innovation. In my view this broad framework approach would also be useful inside universities themselves. The national competition element is best organised around national awards for good, creative and innovative teaching, with nominations based upon a portfolio approach, which would include a wide range of evidence including institutionally managed student evaluations of teaching. In my view the latter are not a suitable basis for system wide institutional rankings. Any valid and legitimate system for ranking universities as with similar approaches with research would have to develop an entire systemic and institutional apparatus and technology and take the focus of academics away from their work in a potential manifestation of goal displacement. Thus my position is in opposition to national competition in the fields of university teaching if this is conceived of as

national system of ranking in a way similar to what occurs now in the UK with the RAE and elsewhere in relation to research.

However, if we read the question as what are the good and bad that come from a more institutionalised and formalised focus on university teaching, both nationally and at individual university level in Australia, then I think this has been a positive. Indeed, I would say that across my thirty-two years as a university academic that one very positive change has been the formalised focus on teaching quality linked to student learning, applied across the many practices of university teaching referred to earlier. Teaching ought to be valued in universities and there are broad policy ways to enhance such valuing. The Australian examples mentioned earlier have done this. This valuing has to work across developmental and accountability purposes, as well as having a strong research focus. Research on university teaching needs to be valued in the ways other research is valued. The scholarship of teaching (including pedagogical content knowledge) needs to be a central element of the knowledge and skills repertoires of all academics. We need to think about how best to achieve this. The question is 'how do we best achieve such outcome?'. In my view national ranking of teaching quality is not the way to achieve this if that is what is implied in the question. At the same time student evaluations provide some comparative data inside universities for accountability and other purposes.

The Australian Learning and Teaching Performance Fund provides substantial funding rewards for universities which do best on a range of performance indicators in respect of teaching and learning, rather akin to quality assurance processes. This sort of process does not appear to suffocate the institutions in compliance demands nor lead to goal displacement, while also serving through its eligibility criteria to signal the important need for universities to be serious at institutional and individual levels about teaching and learning and about both policy and practice. Universities also need to take an ongoing developmental approach around issues of teaching and learning.

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